

**Exploring the effects of media influence on politician image
and political party policies: An Structural Equation Modeling
(SEM) approach in Thailand**

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Received: 19/09/67 Revised: 27/10/67 Accepted: 27/10/67

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of media influence on politician image and political party policies, with a focus on the mediating role of politician image. Conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, the research involved 300 voters who completed a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS. The findings reveal that media influence significantly and positively affects both the image of politicians and the policies of political parties. Additionally, the image of politicians mediates the relationship between media influence and political party policies. This mediation effect underscores

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the importance of politician image in translating media influence into policy support. These insights contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics between media, political image, and policy perception in the Thai political context. The study highlights the critical role of media in shaping political outcomes and the potential implications for political communication strategies.

Keywords: media influence; politician image; political party policies; Structural Equation Modeling (SEM); Thailand

Introduction

In contemporary politics, media influence is a crucial factor that shapes public perception and political outcomes (Smajlović & Čolakhodžić, 2024). As traditional and digital media platforms continue to proliferate, their role in influencing political landscapes has become increasingly pronounced. Media channels, ranging from newspapers and television to social media and online news websites, serve as the primary sources of information for the public, shaping opinions, attitudes, and ultimately, voting behaviors (Kaur & Verma, 2022; Anas, 2023). The power of the media lies in its ability to frame issues, set agendas, and create

narratives that resonate with the electorate (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The significance of media influence in politics cannot be overstated, particularly in democracies where public opinion plays a critical role in determining electoral outcomes. Media exposure can enhance the visibility of politicians and their parties (Klepka, 2023), highlight specific policy issues, and influence the public's perception of political credibility and effectiveness (Druckman, 2005). This study aims to explore the effects of media influence on politician image and political party policies within the specific context of Thailand. Additionally, it examines the mediating role of politician image in the relationship between media influence and political party policies using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS.

Thailand presents a unique and dynamic political environment where media influence is both pervasive and contentious. Over the past few decades, Thailand has experienced significant political upheaval, including military coups, political protests, and constitutional changes (Connors, 2003). In such a volatile environment, the media's role becomes even more critical as it can sway public opinion and shape political discourse (Ferrara, 2010). Thai media, characterized by a mix of state-controlled and independent outlets, often navigates complex political pressures, which in turn affects how information is disseminated and perceived by the public (Winichakul, 2008).

The concept of politician image is multifaceted, encompassing various attributes such as trustworthiness, competence, charisma, and relatability. Politician image plays a vital role in shaping voter perceptions and can significantly influence electoral success (Guzmán & Sierra, 2009). A positive image can enhance a politician's appeal, foster public trust, and increase the likelihood of electoral support (Popkin, 1991). Conversely, a negative image can damage a politician's reputation and diminish voter confidence. Given the media's ability to amplify both positive and negative aspects of a politician's image, understanding the interplay between media influence and politician image is essential for comprehending the broader political dynamics (Hayes, 2008).

Political party policies, which encompass the proposed plans and actions that a party intends to implement if elected, are another critical aspect of political influence (Wojtasik, 2015). These policies reflect the party's ideological stance, priorities, and solutions to various societal issues. Media coverage can significantly affect public perception of these policies, either by highlighting their strengths and feasibility or by emphasizing their weaknesses and impracticalities (Iyengar, 1994; Chong & Druckman, 2007). Thus, the relationship between media influence, politician image, and political party policies is complex and interdependent.

In the context of Thailand, where political parties often struggle to establish stable and coherent policy platforms amidst a backdrop of

political instability, the media's role becomes even more pronounced (Pye & Schaffar, 2008). Media narratives can either bolster a party's policy agenda or undermine it, depending on the nature of the coverage. This study seeks to unravel these dynamics by focusing on how media influence impacts both politician image and political party policies, and how politician image mediates this relationship.

While numerous studies have explored the role of media in shaping public opinion and political behavior, there is a relative scarcity of research focusing on the specific interplay between media influence, politician image, and political party policies in the Thai context. Most existing studies tend to generalize findings across different political environments, often overlooking the unique socio-political landscape of Thailand (Kuhonta, 2008; McCargo, 2012). Moreover, there is limited empirical evidence on how politician image mediates the relationship between media influence and political party policies, particularly using advanced statistical techniques like Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Joseph et al., 2010).

Additionally, prior research has predominantly concentrated on either media influence on public opinion or the impact of politician image on electoral outcomes, without adequately integrating these elements to understand their combined effect on political party policies. This gap in the literature calls for a comprehensive study that simultaneously examines these interrelated factors to provide a more

holistic understanding of political dynamics (Aalberg & Curran, 2013; Norris & Inglehart, 2009).

Given the identified research gaps, there are several compelling reasons to conduct this study. First, understanding the unique impact of media influence in Thailand's volatile political environment can provide valuable insights for political stakeholders, including policymakers, campaign managers, and media professionals. By elucidating how media shapes politician image and policy perceptions, this research can inform strategies to enhance political communication and public engagement (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Second, the mediating role of politician image in the relationship between media influence and political party policies has significant implications for electoral strategies. Politicians and parties can leverage these insights to improve their public image, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their policy communication and increasing voter support. This is particularly relevant in Thailand, where media narratives can significantly sway public opinion in a politically charged atmosphere (Ferrara, 2010).

Lastly, employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS provides a robust methodological approach to analyze complex relationships between multiple variables. This technique allows for a nuanced examination of both direct and indirect effects, offering a comprehensive understanding of the mediating role of politician image (Joseph et al., 2010). The findings from this study can contribute to the broader academic

discourse on media influence in politics and serve as a reference for future research in similar contexts (Aalberg & Curran, 2012).

In conclusion, this study aims to fill the existing research gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of the effects of media influence on politician image and political party policies in Thailand. By focusing on the mediating role of politician image and employing advanced statistical methods, this research seeks to offer valuable insights that can inform political strategies and contribute to the academic literature on political communication.

Literature review

Media Influence and Politician's Image

The relationship between media influence and the image of politicians has been a significant area of study, particularly with the rise of social media since 2015. Social media platforms help cultivate a less formal and more relatable image of politicians by portraying them in private or behind-the-scenes settings, which helps them appear more approachable to the electorate (Manning et al., 2017). Visual communication strategies on social media are crucial in enhancing politicians' personal images, as seen in the 2015 Swiss National Elections, where self-made visuals were used to connect with voters (Farkas & Bene, 2021). The personal image and

popularity of politicians significantly influence their communication goals, highlighting the importance of maintaining a positive public persona (Barbish et al., 2019). Social media also enhances the visibility of politicians, enabling them to consolidate their public image and stay relevant (Reveilhac & Morselli, 2023). Politicians' perceptions of the media's role are complex, as media coverage, public opinion, and the political climate influence their views (Maurer, 2023). Furthermore, politicians' personality traits, such as charisma and openness, play a role in their media visibility (Amsalem et al., 2020). However, the pervasive nature of social media can negatively impact politicians by fostering a polarized and contentious political environment, leading to stress and burnout (Louis, 2022). Despite these challenges, the quest for symbolic capital drives politicians to be active on social media, even if it sometimes leads to superficial engagement (Johansson, 2019). Overall, media, particularly social media, profoundly impacts the image of politicians by enabling them to present themselves in more relatable ways and engage with a broader audience, although it also brings challenges such as negative publicity and the pressures of maintaining a constant public presence.

H1: Media influence has a positive impact on politician's image.

Media Influence and Party's Policies

The relationship between media influence and party policies is characterized by a complex interplay involving partisan bias, agenda-setting, and significant impacts on party strategies and voter perceptions. Research has shown that media coverage of party messages is influenced by partisan bias, favoring messages from aligned parties (Haselmayer et al., 2017). Established mass and social media profoundly impact politics, affecting trust in politicians and parties (Jacuński et al., 2021). The media agenda is a primary driver in party manifesto elaboration, surpassing public opinion and parliamentary agendas (Belchior, 2020). Media diet and candidate traits significantly affect party reputation, with partisan media increasing divides (Browning & Sweetser, 2020). News reports on issues owned by a politician's party are more likely to prompt action, particularly when published in quality newspapers (Helfer, 2016). Political parallelism indicates that parties and newspapers respond more to issues raised by entities favored by their audience (Van der Pas et al., 2017). Comparative studies show that the media's influence on political agendas varies with political system types, being stronger in single-party governments (Vliegthart et al., 2016). Journalists use party issue emphases to decide which parties to voice in news coverage, affecting party-issue linkages (Merz, 2017). Media messages significantly impact voter perceptions of party positions on both general and specific issues (Somer-Topcu et al., 2020). Additionally, media fragmentation

is linked to partisan-ideological sorting, especially among those highly interested in politics (Davis & Dunaway, 2016). Overall, media not only shapes public perception and sets political agendas but also influences party strategies and voter behavior.

H2: Media influence has a positive impact on party's policies.

Politician's Image and Party's Policies

The relationship between a politician's image and party policies is multifaceted, involving factors like public perception, media influence, and the political environment. Research indicates that public distrust in politicians often stems from their perceived loyalty to party policy over personal conscience, which undermines trust even among party supporters (Bøggild, 2020). Political parties strive to construct positive images of their politicians, particularly female politicians, through various media to emphasize their importance in policy-making (Mardhiah et al., 2022). The power of political image is also evident in how leaders like Justin Trudeau use social media to convey a favorable image that aligns with their party's values, influencing voter perception and policy support (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019). Gender plays a significant role in party leadership dynamics, with women often facing more challenging conditions compared to their male counterparts (O'Brien, 2015). In some regions, political parties' images have deteriorated due to a lack of public trust and the impact of electoral systems, which affects their ability to

function effectively (Prianto & Suharnoko, 2020). Studies have shown that a positive image and reputation significantly enhance a political party's competitiveness, suggesting that continuous image building is crucial for long-term success (Maryani et al., 2020). The media's selective reporting based on politicians' characteristics can emphasize certain policy priorities, thereby reinforcing existing stereotypes and influencing public perception of party policies (Greene & Lühiste, 2018). Moreover, political parties' strategies, as reflected in their public image, can significantly alter public attitudes towards specific policies, demonstrating the critical interplay between image management and policy effectiveness (Carlsson et al., 2015).

H3: Politician's image has a positive influence on party's policies.

Image as Mediator between Media Influence and Party's Policies

The relationship between media influence, politician's image, and party policies is intricate and mutually reinforcing. Media significantly shapes political agendas by highlighting issues and framing the characteristics of political leaders, thereby influencing public perception and acceptance of party policies. Positive media coverage of politicians enhances their credibility and public support for their policies, while negative coverage can undermine these aspects. Studies show that media visibility and the tone of coverage significantly impact voter perceptions of new parties

and their effectiveness, as seen in the case of the Dutch party 50Plus (Van et al., 2019). Politician's image, often constructed through selective media reporting, acts as a crucial mediator in this dynamic. For instance, media portrayal of party leaders can significantly affect electoral support, with positive images boosting and negative images diminishing support, particularly during campaign periods (Aaldering et al., 2017). Social media platforms also play a significant role, where politicians' use of social media to convey their image and policy positions can significantly impact voter perceptions and electoral success (Xi et al., 2019). Moreover, media responsiveness varies among politicians based on their political goals and party positions, with opposition MPs reacting more to media cues to gain visibility and influence (Sevenans et al., 2015). Overall, media coverage, politician's image, and party policies are closely interlinked, with each element reinforcing the others in shaping contemporary political dynamics.

H4: Politician's image mediates the relationship between media influence and party's policies.

Methods

Participants

The study included a total of 1,200 voters in Bangkok. The sample size was determined based on Taro Yamane's (1973) formula, focusing on a population of 1,200 individuals in Bangkok.

A Stratified Sampling method was applied, with participants randomly selected. After data collection, a total of 300 fully completed questionnaires were obtained for analysis. The gender distribution among the participants was as follows: 181 males (60.3%), 109 females (36.3%), and 10 individuals identifying as LGBTQIA+ (3.3%). In terms of educational attainment, 32 participants (10.7%) had less than a High school diploma, 229 participants (76.3%) had a Master's degree, and 39 participants (13.0%) had more than a Master's degree. The average age of the participants was 32.1 years.

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Measures

The variables Media Influence (MI), Politician's Image (PI), and Political Party Policies (PP) were assessed using structured questionnaires to gauge their impact on individuals' political perceptions and behaviors. The MI variable was evaluated using a four-item questionnaire measuring the influence of social media on political information consumption, emotional impact, coverage comprehensiveness, and dissemination of misinformation,

with responses on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.763. Similarly, the PI variable was assessed through a five-item questionnaire evaluating aspects such as credibility, leadership, communication skills, charm, and honesty, also rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.706 indicating reliable measurement. Lastly, the PP variable was measured using a five-item questionnaire that focused on the clarity, relevance, and impact of political party policies on voter support and trust, with each item rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. The scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.720, confirming its reliability. These measures collectively ensure accurate reflection of the perceived influence of media, politician's image, and party policies on political views and voter behavior.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from January to March 2024. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 300 voters in Bangkok, selected using a stratified sampling method to ensure a representative distribution across different academic years. Sampling included online methods, such as Google Forms distributed via Line groups, and face-to-face questionnaires according to the data collection procedure. The questionnaire aimed to assess various factors influencing political popularity, such as

political ideology, social media campaign effectiveness, political leadership, public participation, political alliances, and party policies. To maximize response rates and ensure comprehensive coverage, data were gathered through both online and face-to-face surveys. The collected responses were then coded and analyzed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measures employed in the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS software, selected for its ability to handle complex models and small to medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2014). The analysis began with the evaluation of the measurement model to ensure reliability and validity of the constructs, assessed through Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). After confirming the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to examine relationships between constructs, using path coefficients tested via bootstrapping, R^2 values for explanatory power, effect sizes (f^2) to assess impact, and Stone-Geisser Q^2 values for predictive relevance (Chin, 1998). This comprehensive approach provided a robust evaluation of the relationships

between political ideologies, social media campaign effectiveness, political leadership, public participation, political alliances, and party policies.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to ethical guidelines to protect and respect all participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection, with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were preserved by assigning unique codes to participants and securely storing all data. Potential risks to participants were minimized, and the data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

Results

Assessment of the Smart PLs SEM Outer Model

The measurement model assessments in Table 1 indicate the reliability and validity of the constructs Media Influence (MI), Politician's Image (PI), and Political Party's Policies (PP) in the Smart PLS SEM Outer Model. For MI, the factor loadings range from 0.517 to 0.797, with VIF values between 1.271 and 1.860, a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.743, composite reliability (C.R.) of 0.740, and an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.422.

For PI, the loadings range from 0.588 to 0.763, VIF values from 1.393 to 2.310, α of 0.805, C.R. of 0.807, and AVE of 0.457. For PP, the loadings range from 0.660 to 0.812, VIF values from 1.578 to 2.430, α of 0.851, C.R. of 0.850, and AVE of 0.533. These results suggest that while all constructs exhibit adequate internal consistency reliability (C.R. > 0.70) and convergent validity (AVE > 0.50 for PP), the AVE for MI and PI are slightly below the recommended threshold, indicating room for improvement in these measures (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1. Measurement model assessments

Item	Loadings	VIF	α	C.R.	AVE
Media Influence (MI)			0.743	0.740	0.422
Receive information (MI1)	0.665	1.271			
Social media is reliable (MI2)	0.517	1.333			
Opinions and behavior (MI3)	0.587	1.860			
Experiences (MI4)	0.797	1.715			

Item	Loadings	VIF	α	C.R	AVE
Politician's Image (PI)				0.807	0.457
Credibility and gain public acceptance P11)	0.623	1.977			
Leadership (PI2)	0.686	2.310			
Effective communication (PI3)	0.763	1.846			
Charismatic and can attract attention effectively (PI4)	0.588	1.393			
Sincere and honest influence PI5)	0.705	1.521			
Political Party's Policies (PP)			0.851	0.850	0.533
Clear policies (PP1)	0.719	2.089			
Prioritize the well-being of citizens (PP2)	0.752	2.430			
Clearly articulate a vision PP3	0.812	1.784			
Present solutions to social issues (PP4)	0.660	1.797			
Rights and needs of the public contribute	0.699	1.578			

Table 2 presents the cross-loadings of items on the constructs Media Influence (MI), Politician's Image (PI), and Political Party's Policies (PP). Cross-loadings are used to assess discriminant validity, indicating whether each item loads more highly on its associated construct than on others. For MI items, the loadings on MI (0.517 to 0.797) are consistently higher than on PI (0.353 to 0.610) and PP (0.309 to 0.496), suggesting adequate discriminant validity. Similarly, PI items exhibit higher loadings on PI (0.588 to 0.763) compared to MI (0.361 to 0.539) and PP (0.348 to 0.620). Lastly, PP items show higher loadings on PP (0.660 to 0.812) than on MI (0.400 to 0.464) and PI (0.475 to 0.599). These patterns demonstrate that each item strongly associates with its intended construct, supporting the distinctiveness of MI, PI, and PP in the model (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

Table 2. Cross loadings

	MI	PI	PP
MI1 MI2	0.665	0.363	0.496
MI3 MI4	0.517	0.535	0.309
PI1 PI2	0.587	0.407	0.344
PI3 PI4	0.797	0.610	0.405
PI5	0.539	0.623	0.355

	MI	PI	PP
PP1	0.494	0.686	0.474
PP2	0.438	0.763	0.620
PP3	0.493	0.588	0.348
PP4 PP5	0.361	0.705	0.610
	0.400	0.535	0.719
	0.462	0.540	0.752
	0.464	0.599	0.812
	0.402	0.475	0.660
	0.462	0.486	0.699

Table 3 presents the discriminant validity calculations using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio scores for the constructs Media Influence (MI), Politician's Image (PI), and Political Party's Policies (PP). Discriminant validity assesses whether constructs that are not supposed to be related are actually unrelated. The AVE scores are presented in the upper triangle of the table, with the squared AVE values in bold along the diagonal. These values represent the amount of variance captured by the construct in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error. For MI, PI, and PP, the AVE scores are 0.650, 0.680, and 0.600 respectively, indicating that these constructs capture a

significant portion of variance. The HTMT scores, presented in the lower triangle, are ratios that compare the average correlations between different constructs to the average correlations within the same constructs. Lower HTMT values indicate better discriminant validity. The HTMT scores are 0.681 between MI and PI, 0.713 between PI and PP, and 0.600 between MI and PP. These values suggest that the constructs are distinct from each other, with all HTMT values below the threshold of 0.85, further supporting discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

Table 3. Discriminant validity calculations

	VEs Scores			HTMT Scores		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1-MI	0.650					
2-PI	0.680	0.676		0.681		
3-PP	0.600	0.724	0.730	0.600	0.713	

Note: bold values are squared AVE values.

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Evaluation of the SmartPLS SEM Structural Model

The evaluation of the SmartPLS SEM structural model, as detailed in the provided tables, demonstrates robust model fit and significant explanatory power. The model fit indices, including an SRMR of 0.074, d_{ULS} of 0.582, d_G of 0.301, Chi-square of 434.838, and an NFI of 0.773, indicate a good fit between the model and the observed data. The R-square values for Politician's Image (PI) and Political Party's Policies (PP) are 0.463 and 0.546, respectively, indicating that the model explains 46.3% and 54.6% of the variance in these constructs. The f-square values reveal that Media

Influence (MI) has a large effect on PI (0.862) and a small effect on PP (0.048), while PI has a moderate to large effect on PP (0.408). These results collectively support the model's validity and highlight the substantial impact of Media Influence and Politician's Image on the dependent variables (See Table 4-6 and Figure 1).

Table 4. Model fit

	Saturate model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.074	0.074
d_ULS	0.582	0.582
d-G	0.301	0.301
Chi-square	434.838	434.838
NFI	0.773	0.773

Table 5. R-square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
PI	0.463	0.461
PP	0.546	0.543

Table 6. f-square

	MI	PI	PP
MI PI		0.862	0.048
PP			0.408

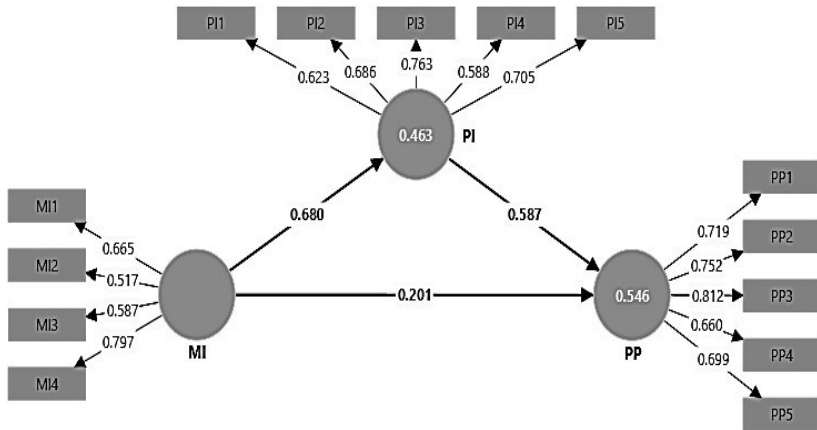


Figure 1. The SEM Model.

Table 7. Relationship between variables and hypothesis testing

Relationship	β	Standard Deviation	t-Statistics	p-Value	Hypothesis
MI \rightarrow PI	0.68	0.060	11.369	0.000	Accepted
MI \rightarrow PP	0	0.127		0.113	Not accepted
PI \rightarrow PP	0.20	0.122	1.586	0.000	Accepted
MI \rightarrow PI \rightarrow PP	0.400	0.099	4.041	0.000	Accepted

Table 7 presents the hypothesis testing results for the relationships between Media Influence (MI), Politician's Image (PI), and Political Party's Policies (PP) within the structural model. The results show that MI significantly impacts PI ($\beta = 0.680$, $t = 11.369$, $p = 0.000$), and PI significantly influences PP ($\beta = 0.587$, $t = 4.825$, $p = 0.000$), leading to the acceptance of these hypotheses. However, the direct effect of MI on PP is not significant ($\beta = 0.201$, $t = 1.586$, $p = 0.113$), resulting in the non-acceptance of this hypothesis. Additionally, the mediating effect of PI in the relationship between MI and PP is significant ($\beta = 0.400$, $t = 4.041$, $p = 0.000$), confirming the indirect influence of MI on PP through PI. These findings highlight the crucial role of Politician's Image as a mediator between Media Influence and Political Party's Policies.

Significance of the Relationship Between Social Media and Politician's Image

The assessment results indicate that social media has an impact on the image of politicians. Communication through these channels can create a strong relationship between the public and politicians, as well as facilitate the communication of political party policies. This interaction may influence public trust and support for politicians. Furthermore, the development of highly reliable measurement instruments will help ensure that future studies are credible and of higher quality.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with previous literature, demonstrating the significant role of media influence on politician's image and, subsequently, on party policies. Consistent with Manning et al. (2017) and Farkas & Bene (2021), the positive impact of media on politician's image highlights how social media platforms enable politicians to cultivate a relatable and engaging persona. This enhanced personal image, as supported by Barbish et al. (2019) and Reveilhac & Morselli (2023), is crucial for maintaining public support and achieving communication goals. Although the direct impact of media influence on party policies was not significant, the mediating role of politician's image suggests that media shapes public perception of politicians, which in turn affects voter perceptions of party policies (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Maryani et al., 2020). This mediation effect underscores the findings of Aldering et al. (2018) and Xi et al. (2020), which emphasize the importance of a positive public image in enhancing policy acceptance. Furthermore, the role of media in reinforcing party strategies and influencing public opinion, as discussed by Belchior (2020) and Somer-Topcu et al. (2020), is evident in the significant indirect effect of media influence on party policies through politician's image. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of the interconnected dynamics between media influence, politician's image, and party policies, reinforcing the critical importance of media in shaping contemporary political landscapes.

Influence of Social Media on Political Image and Party Policies

From the research findings discussed, we can summarize the influence of social media on political image and political party policies as differing in several ways:

1. Influence on Political Image

Credibility and gain public acceptance: Social media allows the public to easily and quickly access information about politicians. This accessibility enables politicians with transparent and clear communication to establish credibility and gain public acceptance. **Image Creation:** Politicians can utilize social media to present their image by sharing content that highlights their successes, participation in public activities, or responses to public needs. This helps foster a sense of closeness and trust between politicians and the public.

2. Influence on Political Party Policies

Clear policies: Social media can be employed to communicate party policies clearly, enabling eligible voters to understand and be more willing to support those parties. Clear policies provide the public with sufficient information for decision-making. **Public Engagement:** Social media serves as a platform for the public to express opinions or provide feedback on various policies, allowing political parties to adjust their policies to better align with public needs.

Moderating Variables Agility of Media: Social media's agility in disseminating information can lead to easier creation of a positive image compared to communicating complex policies. For example, news that positively portrays a politician can spread rapidly, while policies require time and effort to explain. Public Media Literacy: The public's media literacy may impact their perception of a politician's image more than policies, as images can be immediately recognized, whereas policies often necessitate detailed study and analysis. Summary Overall, social media influences political image and party policies differently. The modes of communication and public engagement related to image tend to elicit quicker responses, while policies often require more time and clarity in communication for the public to understand and effectively support them.

Conclusion

This study highlights the intricate relationships between media influence, politician's image, and party policies, demonstrating that while media directly impacts the image of politicians, its influence on party policies is mediated through this image. The findings affirm the crucial role of media, particularly social media, in shaping public perceptions and political dynamics. However, several limitations should be noted: the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, the reliance on self-reported data from voters in Bangkok may introduce bias and limit generalizability, and the study did not account for variables like political ideology and media literacy.

Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches, include diverse contexts, and incorporate additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Practically, politicians and parties should strategically manage their media presence to cultivate a positive image, which can enhance public support for their policies, while media literacy programs for the public can help mitigate the negative effects of biased media coverage.

This study is significant in enhancing our understanding of the relationships between media, the image of politicians, and party policies in Thailand, particularly regarding the varying weight of image creation. It shows that the image of politicians not only affects public perceptions of individuals but also influences public support for and awareness of party policies. In the context of Thai politics, which is complex and rapidly changing, the relationship between media and politicians plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions. Effective communication can help build the necessary trust and support for the development of party policies. In the current political atmosphere in Thailand, characterized by tension and diverse ideological perspectives, creating a positive image can enhance a political party's acceptance and credibility among the public. Strategic media management is essential to prevent political parties from falling victim to potentially biased or inaccurate news coverage. Additionally, the study of image creation and party policies should consider the realities in Thailand, including social culture and public media consumption behavior.

Understanding these dynamics will provide insights into the true impact of Thai media on politics, politicians, and political parties. This comprehension will ultimately contribute to greater public engagement and support the sustainable development of democracy in the country.

Acknowledgement: We thank all participants, research assistants, and staff for their contributions. We are grateful to our colleagues and peer reviewers for their feedback, and to the funding agencies for their support. Lastly, we appreciate the encouragement from our families and friends.

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