

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

6TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**COVID-19 in Asia:
Communication - Nationalism - Technology**

8 - 10 SEPTEMBER 2021
BANGKOK THAILAND



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Introduction

Among many things, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the way people communicate and interact with one another, making the use of technology almost inescapable. Moreover, as rapidly as the pandemic spread around the world – or even more quickly – diverse sorts of fake news and disinformation started spreading. Asia Centre in its 2021 baseline study “‘Infodemic’ and SDGs: Internet Freedoms in Southeast Asia” identified four types of ‘infodemics’ may be characterised: those related to the origin of COVID-19; over- or underestimations of the numbers of cases and deaths; false and sometimes dangerous claims for health treatment or prevention; and misinformation on vaccine efficacy or safety.

Hence, during Asia Centre’s 6th International Conference titled “COVID-19 In Asia: Communication, Nationalism and Technology”, the aim was not only to identify the diverse impacts COVID-19 had on Asian societies, but also to share experiences and push forward best practices on dealing with the “infodemic”.

The event was held in partnership with the Graduate School of Communication Arts and Management Innovation of the National Institute of Development Administration, the Thai Media Fund, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation of Freedom, Thailand. The event was held on the 8th to 10th September 2021. Due to the ongoing travel and health advisories, the event was convened in a fully online format with participants teleconferencing from locations worldwide. Overall, 51 presentations followed one another in 15 panels convened by 8 universities, 5 NGOs and 2 parliamentary networks.

The presentations at this conference focused on themes ranging from the use of new technologies for all levels of education during the COVID-19 era, to the securitization of COVID-19 measures by governments, or the geopolitical dimension of vaccines. The scope of the presentations are national, even local, while others have a more comparative approach or a regional dimension. Not all presentators submitted papers, some presented orally and through the use of powerpoints. However, all presentations can be accessed via Asia Centre’s YouTube channel.

The papers included in this conference proceeding have been reviewed by two external readers and feedback for revisions. Thereafter, the papers were compiled here, as is. The authors are responsible for the accuracy of facts, quotation, data, statements and the quality of the English language in their work. The papers are organised in the order they appeared in the conference program.

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. **Kittikun Khakhai**, “Digital divide during COVID 19: The downfall of Thai citizens”, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) **1**
2. **Punyarat Wanthong**, “Vulnerable Groups and the Stride of Equal Rights Under the COVID-19 Crisis”, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) **19**
3. **Ploy Srisuro**, “Digital Citizenship: The Practice of Educator and Parent During COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand”, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi **35**
4. **Siriwan Saksiriruthai**, “Cyber Frauds and Consumer Decision Making During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Behaviour Analysis”, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University **50**
5. **Yuthapoom Thanakijborisut**, “Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Household Income in Thailand”, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University **73**
6. **Pittaya Klongkratoke**, “Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Business : Consumer Confidence”, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University **84**
7. **Rattaphol Phrommas**, “Micro Influencers and Online Marketing: Small Enterprises' Way to Survive in New Normal”, Chiang Mai University **99**
8. **Jessada Salathong and Upalat Korwatanasakul**, “Challenges in communication during COVID-19 crisis in Japan”, Chulalongkorn University and United Nations University **114**
9. **Yuto Koizumi, Kennosuke Motegi and Eriko Oshima**, “The Records of Remote Education in the Humanities: Teachers’ Efforts During 2020 in Japan”, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tohoku University & Kinjo Gakuin University **130**

10. **Taro Mochizuki, Peter Harteloh, Kasem Phenpinant and Xiaojun Ding**, “The Use of Metaphors in the COVID-19 Crisis: A Comparison of East and West”, Osaka University and Chulalongkorn University and Xi’an Jiaotong University **137**

11. **Dwi Resti Pratiwi**, “Taxation of Digital Economy: A Fiscal Measure in Strengthening The Economy During and After The Covid-19 Pandemic”, The House of Representatives of The Republic of Indonesia (Badan Keahlian DPR RI) **115**

Digital divide during COVID-19: The downfall of Thai citizens

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Abstract

Digital era originated from the evolution of technology. Despite this advancement, the citizens are still unable to have an equality on digital accessibility. As a result, there is a digital divide in Thailand and several countries around the world. The causes of this phenomenon are information infrastructure, individual differences and government policies. In addition, the spread of COVID-19 is also one of the factors that accelerated the digital divide; the Internet network does not cover all areas due to the lack of support from government policies. Hence, low-income citizens are unable to access to the Internet, leading to a lack of health care information or misinformation and citizens with low digital skills tend to be unemployed. Although the government has plans and policies, they still cannot eliminate the digital divide from the country. Therefore, this research proposes approaches to address the digital divide of Thai citizens during COVID-19 pandemic. There are as follows:

1. Have a clear and practical plan on information infrastructure support
2. Instill digital skills to the citizens
3. Make use of community strength
4. Enhance citizens participation which will enable the citizens to access support from the government, survive their lives during the pandemic crisis and achieve sustainable digital equality.

Introduction

The digital era is the progress of technology which allows information to be communicated effortlessly and rapidly. It can be divided into four phases: Digital 1.0, Internet era, there are many aspects for this era such as the beginning of the use of website and e-mail, the change from offline to online, the shift from sending stamped letters to e-mails. Digital 2.0, social media era, people can meet friends in offline to online society and create network

society. Digital 3.0, Application and Big data that came from user behavior in the digital era 1.0 and the digital era 2.0. The big data has many benefits for organizations, they can analyze the big data in order to promote products and services to meet consumers' needs. Lastly, the Digital 4.0, Machine-to-Machine era, technology has been developed to decrease the role of human beings and empowering human beings to transform their thoughts to cross their limits at the same time (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, 2018). The digital era is also the factor that accelerating the transformation in economic, social, cultural, political and other dimensions, as well as increasing the status from a national citizen to a digital citizen. Digital citizen is defined as someone who has skills, knowledge, ability and understanding of digital media usage and able to use digital to develop themselves and society, such as using social media to communicate between colleagues by creating a group of members to increase productivity in workplace, using the application to check their health conditions, shopping online on the e-commerce platforms and discovering knowledge in online platform. They can explore to new knowledge endlessly through Internet data network which is connected to every corner of the world (Charoenmahavit, 2020).

However, the citizens cannot be transformed into digital citizens and take full advantage of digital usage, which creates the digital gap, also known as “Digital Divide” or “Digital Inequality”, the gap between people who have and do not have information. It also includes inequality in computer and Internet access. This considered as multidimensional gap from the individual, household, geography, economic and social and globalization (Aissaoui, 2020; Castells, 2002; Van Dijk, 2005). Digital divide can also be measured in three levels: 1. The accessibility to telecommunication infrastructure 2. The digital usage and skills (digital literacy) 3. The benefits of digital utilization in the offline world (offline outcome) (The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2019). In Thailand, a survey on the use of information and communication technology in the household 2020 by the National Statistical Office (2020) which selected about 63.8 million people aged 6 years and over, the survey found that there were 60.5 million mobile phone users (94.8 percent), 49.7 million Internet users (77.8 percent) and 16.8 million computer users (26.4 percent). Considering the trend of Internet and computer usage during 2016-20 on 5 years period, Thailand has increasing numbers of Internet users from 47.5 percent (29.8 million people) in 2016 to 77.8 percent (49.7 million people) in 2020, while the proportion of computer users tends to decline

in 2016-2019 but in 2020, there is a slight grow of 26.4 percent (16.8 million people) as show in figure 1.

The International Monetary Fund IMF (2018) observed the ASEAN digital divide and found that Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore have a high levels of Internet access but in developing countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia and Lao, 70 percent of citizens are unable to access to the Internet. The research also found that the cost of accessing to high-speed Internet from low to high were Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines and Malaysia respectively.

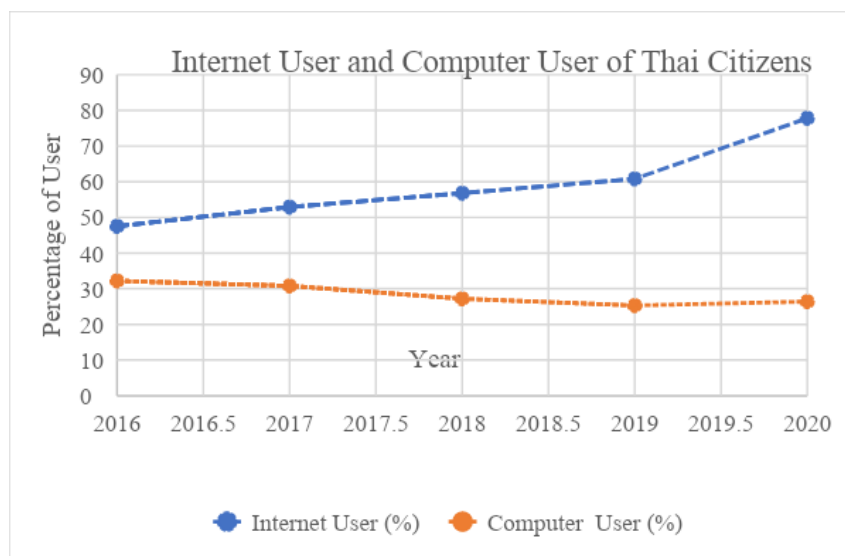


Figure 1 Percent of people aged 6 years and over using the Internet and computers 2016-2020 (National Statistical Office, 2021)

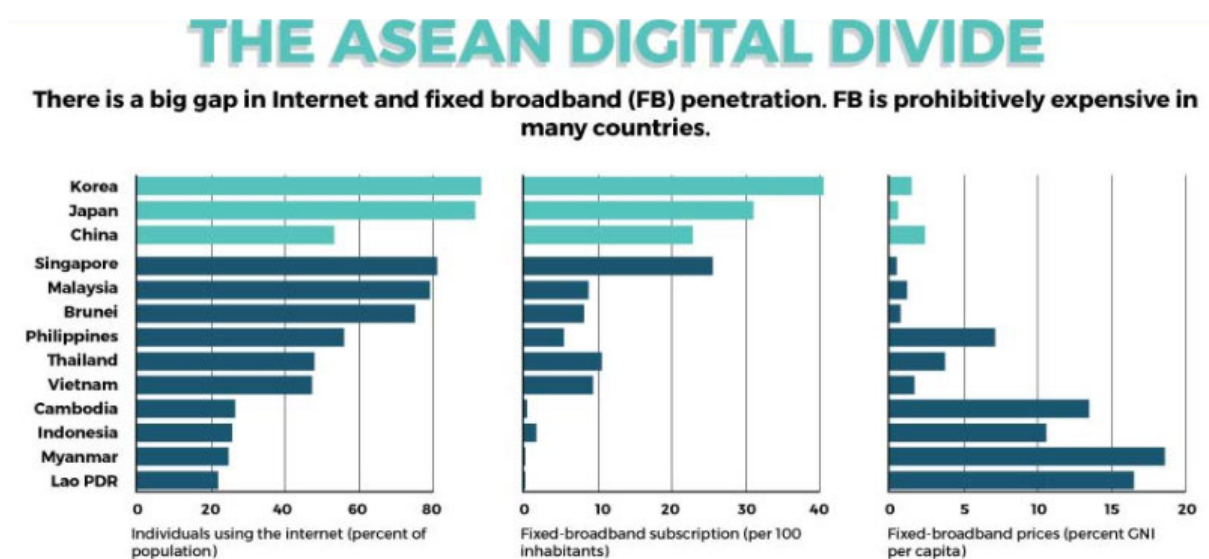


Figure 2 The ASEAN digital divide in 2018 (International Monetary Fund , 2018)

The survey of the use of information and communication technology in the household and digital inequality in ASEAN countries shown that Thailand still has the digital divide and this problem needs to be urgently addressed. And Thailand is very high level of digital divide during pandemic. It was reflected to problem in community such as vulnerable groups in Thailand cannot access the information technology system and obtain government assistance program during COVID-19 outbreak (Nilwatta, 2020), the research of education disparity of Thai citizens with online learning showed that students with low socio-economic, they cannot access to online learning platform and (Pharcharuen, 2021) and the study of Thailand government policies to solve the inequality problems demonstrated that the government slow to building of policy and cannot diminish inequality during pandemic (Saibunyuan, 2021)

The digital divide in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is strongly affected the welfare and safety in the lives of citizens. If no effective action is taken, the country will plunge into disaster. There will be a collapse in all dimensions, economic, social and public health in the country. Therefore, this research provides an overview of digital divide in Thailand by documentary research and suggests the approaches to decrease digital divide in Thailand. It is a guideline to address the epidemic and create digital immunity for citizens and governments in the future.

Cause of digital divide

Digital divide can be explained with 2 theories.

Information/Knowledge gap theory explains that when news from the mass media spreads more into the social system. The segment of the population with high socio-economic status (privileged) tends to receive such information at a faster rate than those of the population with lower socio-economic status (unprivileged) as shown in figure 3 (Tichenor, 1970). According to this theory, it proposed the causes of digital divide as follow:

1. The people with high socio-economic status and high education, they also have communication skill (reading, understanding and analyzing data), which tends to obtain effective and fast information.

2. The group of high socio-economic status and high education have posteriori knowledge from the study in the pass, they can easily get new knowledge.

3. People with higher economic status are more likely to have social relations with other individuals who have specific knowledge. Therefore, discussion and sharing information with other people before media exposure, makes it easier to understand the news.

4. People with high economic status will choose to memorize or interpret certain news or knowledge, such as public issues, social movement and scientific topics.

5. Printed media often selects content that target groups with higher economic status. Therefore, it may not be of interest or do not match the tastes of groups with lower status.

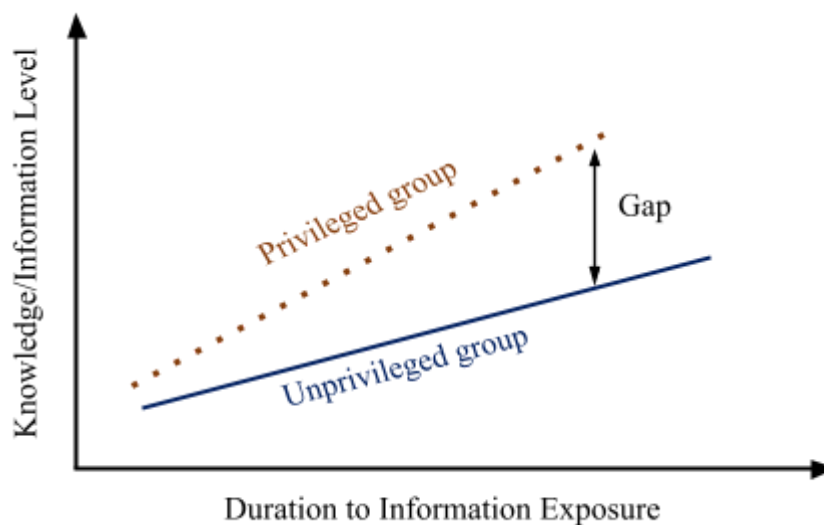


Figure 3 Information/Knowledge gap theory

Resource and appropriation theory explain that the adoption or use of technology will take the form of a process known as “appropriateness”. It consists of 4 steps, starting with the desire (attitude) to use technology, material access, develop skills and usage of technology; furthermore, Individual characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, intelligence, personality and health) and status (Occupation, education, household composition and ethnicity data) which differ according to the available resources (income, social network and

social status) are the reason of unequal 4 steps or the digital divide. The outcome of technological suitability may also lead to greater or less participation and benefit of society that include economic, social, political and cultural dimensions (Van Dijk, 2005).



Figure 4 Resource and appropriation theory (Van Dijk, 2005)

Many researches are related to 2 theories and showed that citizens who can access to information tend to have advantage on applying and utilizing information in their daily lives as well as generating benefits for themselves and society. However, there are some citizens who cannot access to information which leads to digital divide and there are several causes as follows.

1. Information infrastructure was defined by an inequity of opportunity to access to information infrastructure including power system, mobile phone, Internet, computer and satellite system. Most of the time the urban citizens have greater access to information infrastructure than rural citizens (Webber, 2019). For example, in Bangladesh, access to telemedicine during the COVID-19 was unsuccessful because of the lack of telecommunication infrastructure and people in urban and rural areas can access to the Internet at different speed (Chowdhury, & Ahmed, 2020).

2. Individual factors

- 2.1 Age: a survey on the use of information and communication technology in the household 2020 revealed that people who aged over 50 uses computers, mobile phone and the Internet less than other age groups (National Statistics Office, 2021). This group has limited access to information that is useful for them, such as health care information, government welfare benefits, entertainment and tourism, etc. (Amornsiripong, 2019)

- 2.2 Socio-economic status is the factor that best reflects the digital divide. People who are wealthy or at higher economy usually have access to efficient digital technology. Since digital technology is divided into quality and efficiency by price. The

high-performance technology will be expensive as well. For example, online learning in Nigeria illustrated that the difference on socio-economic status of learners significantly affected the ability to access online learning (Azubuiké, Adegboye, & Quadri, 2021),

2.3 Education and digital skills are associated with the digital divide as computer and Internet are widely used in higher education. However, knowledge of language skills, reading and writing skill, English skills are also important because the information and knowledge can be obtained from English websites. In addition, digital skills, media literacy, computer program skills need to be practiced consistently. This is also a cause of digital divide. (Sukkong, Laeheem & Dhammasaccaka, 2020)

2.4 Attitudes is a cause of disparities. For example, wealthy citizens in Italy often use social media to express their skills but poor citizens tend to avoid social media, Internet access in Rwanda is largely ignored by the female population because of their attitude. They must take on household chores and children. Moreover, low-income populations tend to consider technology as expensive, luxurious, complex and too difficult to understand. (Amornsiripong, 2019)

2.5 Physical disabilities:, musculoskeletal disability, neuromusculoskeletal disability are not able to use the Internet as good as healthy person. For this reason, they must have accessibility facilities.

3. The government policy is an important issue in increasing or reducing disparities in information access. This is because the government sets the policy on the provision of digital services, provides competition and plans to develop information infrastructure. The countries that aim to develop the Internet nationwide will ensure that their populations can access to knowledge and will achieve economic growth and high gross domestic product (GDP) (Pradhan, Mallik, & Bagchi, 2018; Edquist, 2018).

Digital divide of Thai citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic

Digital inequality of Thai citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁹ affects many aspects such as the safety, health and lifestyle as follows:

1. Disparities in access to information infrastructure

Thai citizens still do not have access to Internet services due to limited coverage. According to the survey of the use of information and communication technology in the household 2020 by the National Statistical Office (2021) found that people aged 6 years and over (63.8 million people) only 49.7 million or 77.8 percent use Internet. This means that 14 million people did not have Internet access. For this reason, Thai government has the village broadband Internet project (Net Pracharat) that aims to: 1. upgrade the telecommunication infrastructure with high-speed Internet network technology 2. reduce the disparity of people in the target villages for accessing high-speed Internet networks, this is to create opportunities for people to access various government services thoroughly and equitably, it will lead to upgrading the quality of life of the people. 3. increase the economic and social potential of the target villages to develop jobs, generate income, education, public health, agriculture and trade.

However, The State Audit Office of the Kingdom of Thailand showed the result of the assessment of this Internet Project that the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society invested about 13,000 million baht in 2016. The assessment found that project still does not reflect the achievement of its objectives (ThaiPBS, 2020). This is consistent with the study of Nuchapat (2019) who studied the satisfaction of the Net Pracharat Project of the people in NonSung District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The study found that the people were satisfied with the service of the project at a moderate level. For this reason, inequality to access the Internet is preventing people from getting the support from government and cannot receive fast and accurate information.

2. Individual difference

The results of the unemployment survey in 2020 indicated that in December, the amount of unemployment was at 5.90 hundred thousand people or 15 percent of the population and the gap of unemployment increased by 2.23 hundred thousand people when compared with December 2019 (National Statistical Office, 2020). COVID-19 causes citizens to lose their incomes and be more conscious about their expenses as they should purchase only the four basic human needs. This is because of the lack of information infrastructure accessibility, which reflected in poor households. They cannot connect to online learning because the lack of the equipment to access the Internet and vulnerable groups, marginalized population cannot get subvention from government. Moreover, education is one of the factors

contributing to the digital divide in society as some of Thai citizens are unable to read and write. Therefore, it becomes a discourse that shows repetitive problems, no quality of education, expressing feelings about problems and teachers as the defendant of society (Sangkhapinyo, 2019). The groups of illiterates have problem using digital technology thus, they only use traditional media (radio, television, newspaper) to access epidemic information.

3. Inequitable access to information and government benefits

Accessing to information technology especially Internet connection which is different in personal factors, inconvenience of the internet service and shortage of income to purchase the services. For this reason, citizens cannot connect to necessary information and benefits from the government during the COVID-19 outbreak. Chettha (2021) explained that there are two inequalities in access to necessary information as follows:

3.1 Epidemic and health information: the government integrated various departments to provide information about the spread of the disease by establishing Centre for the Administration of the Situation due to the Outbreak of the Communicable Disease Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). The organization has published information, reported the COVID-19 epidemic situation and suggested citizens about health care through television, website of Government Public Relation Department and Facebook. If citizens can connect to Internet; they will receive more effective information than other channels because the epidemiology of COVID-19 in early stage is uncertain thus, citizens need to follow situation and must have access to information about the spread of the virus in their area to adjust their lifestyle or avoid contaminating to the virus. Surfing Internet and searching on social media platform (Facebook) are the convenience channels to receive rapid information and keep up to date.

3.2 Government assistance information: According to the survey of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council in April 2020 on private sector opinions to assess the initial impact of implementing economic mitigation measures, with the target group of 8,929 people from 77 provinces found that 88% had not been helped from government policy. Moreover, during the launch of remedies policy such as "We don't leave each other" and many more, which required to be registered thru the Internet, this reinforces the digital divide. Poor citizens are the ones who need to receive assistance the most but

cannot be accessed due to technological limitations. In addition, citizens who do not connect to digital are also do not receive any supports by the private sector or the public. This is because, the announcement for help such as food distribution and funds raising was mainly announced via Facebook and related applications.

4. The disparity in digital skills

Digital Citizen is the citizen who uses digital and social media. They understand the norms and responsibility for the use of technology, because communication in the digital era is borderless. The members of the online world are anyone who uses the Internet, there is a diversity of nationalities, ages, languages and cultures. For this reason, digital citizens need to be responsible, ethical, compassionate, respectful citizens and focus on fairness in society. Digital Citizen in the digital era also requires 8 critical skills as follow: digital citizen identity, privacy management, critical thinking, digital footprint, digital empathy, cybersecurity management, cyberbullying management and screen time management (Inthanon, 2018). All of these skills will help digital citizens to survive and be able to adapt in daily life. In contrast, the lack of digital skills can be harmful. For example, a lack of critical thinking skills can lead to fake news sharing, misinformation, disinformation and malinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic, these can also cause anxiety, fear and misunderstanding of health care behaviors. During the COVID-19 outbreak people spend more time on screens which cause various diseases including obesity, diabetes, depression and insomnia (Sultana, et al., 2021).

Government programs and policies to eliminate digital divide

Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission approved the Telecommunications Master Plan No. 2 (2019 - 2023). It is consistent with the 20-year national strategy, which related to the high competitiveness strategy through different operations such as developing modern technological infrastructure, enchainment knowledge, support opportunities to access broadband networks in various forms depending on the area and set up a framework for sufficiency of Internet frequency. Furthermore, this telecommunications master plan is also a digital divide reduction map which has its objectives as follow: to have a basic telecommunication network and services covering on spatial and social dimensions and people can have access to quality telecommunication

services at reasonable and fair prices. The elimination of digital divide also appears in the fourth of strategy which is universal basic telecommunication services and social services (The Office of the Broadcasting Commission television business and the National Telecommunications, 2016).

Development of digitality for economy and society act B.E. 2560 (2017) caused to establish; National Commission on Digitality for Economy and Society, Special committee, Digitality for Economy and Society Fund, the National Commission on Digitality for Economy and Society and the Digital Economy Promotion Agency. This act allowed the ministry to provide a national policy and plan on digital economic and social development according to the advice of the National Commission on Digitality for Economy and Society. The vision of policy is to reform Thailand “Digital Thailand 4.0”, means that Thailand can create and achieve full advantage of technology to develop innovative infrastructure, data, human capital and other resources which can drive the economy and society towards stability, prosperity and sustainability.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, the government sector also helps the citizens of Thailand (PrachachaThai, 2021) as follows:

1. Office of the Broadcasting Commission television business and the National Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) approved policies to support citizens for saving telecommunication cost such as increasing the Internet speed for mobile phones by 10 Gigabytes per person and per month for 3 months and increasing broadband Internet speed to 100 Mbps, which Internet service providers must not charge additional fees on users, but the NBTC will arrange the budget from expenses that will be submitting to Broadcasting and Telecommunications Research and Development Fund for Public Interest.

2. Ministry of Digital Economy and Society collaborated with Telecom Public Company Limited (CAT) and TOT Public Company Limited launch “Home Broadband Internet” or broadband internet service with special price, 390 baht/month with the speed of 100/50 Mbps, without installation fees, initial fees and 3 months usage for free from the contract period 12 months.

3. The Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation has issued an announcement requesting cooperation from agencies and higher education institutions under

its jurisdiction to provide measures to help those affected. For example, Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University distributed Internet SIMs to students, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang launched student dormitory refund policy and Chiang Mai University had a policy for tuition and dormitory fees payment period extension. In addition, elementary school students and schools in remote areas with no Internet access, The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) organized distance learning through a television channel from the Foundation for Distance Education via Satellite under the Distance Learning Foundation Under the Royal Patronage (DLTV) which student can learn on digital TV, satellite, the website and the DLTV application, as well as Thailand's cabinet has permitted an additional 23 billion baht to fund COVID-19 relief packages, a handout of 2,000 baht to parents per child, as part of government efforts to ease the pandemic's financial impacts on families in Thailand (National News Bureau of Thailand, 2021).

Recommendations for reducing the digital divide of Thai citizens during COVID-19 pandemic

Despite the government sector had policies to help Thai citizens, digital divide has appeared. Therefore, this research suggests to diminish digital divide of Thai citizens during COVID-19 pandemic base on theory of digital divide and related research as follow:

1. Have a clear and practical plan on information infrastructure support

The government should support free Internet or low-price high-speed Internet services during the period of COVID-19 epidemic, especially for low-income citizens. In order to be successes, the government needs to collaborate with all Internet service providers and offer tax reduction to them. Moreover, the government can integrate the village broadband Internet project (Net Pracharat), Wifi network of Town Municipality, Subdistrict Administrative organization (SAO) which has already been purchased, it can be used as a free public network. For this policy, students can use the Internet to study online in their community area. In the same way, the government should support citizens' access to information technology equipment as much as possible, such as reducing or exempting taxes from mobile phone and computer, giving citizens access to affordable prices, consideration of allocating the purchase or rent or lending of technology tools to low-income people, poor children, the handicapped and the vulnerable groups, as well as WIFI hotspot service that can

be installed on the car and driven to various communities to share the Internet signal to citizens without cost (Widmir, 2021).

However, in order to make a successful information infrastructure system in the long term or reducing the practical inequality after the viral epidemic has stopped, the government must plan for infrastructure development and digital usage plans for citizens. For instance, studying the obstacles and problems of the village broadband Internet project to be able to utilize it effectively and connected to the welfare system of the state (Chettha,2021), allocation of the State Welfare Internet SIM to low-income citizens, developing an opportunity for equal competition in telecommunication service providers and encourage more telecommunication service providers. As a result, citizens will be able to access to information technology at the affordable price with high quality.

2. Instill digital skills to the citizens

Not only the information infrastructure support but also promote digital skills for citizens to be able to adapt and create a career opportunity online. The digital skills can be educated through social media, websites, television, radio and newspapers. The most important digital skill is critical thinking, this digital skill will prevent misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and fake news during pandemic. Moreover, citizens also have to be recommended websites or sources that can check fake news, such as Facebook of CofactThailand and Anti-Fake News Center Thailand for the citizens. This helps citizens to recheck the information before sharing it to others and applying the information for their own health care.

3. Make use of community strength

Those involved in the welfare of citizens within the community are a group of people who have the most access to citizens. Therefore, it is the last mile to reduce digital divide such as village leaders, subdistrict headman, village headmen, village health volunteer (VHV) and primary care. These groups should be involved in solving the problem of the digital divide. For example, they have to go to the area and make sure that people in the community get to register for government's welfare and teach people how to registration the government's welfare or act as a registered intermediary. This process will be more convenient for people who do not have digital access to register at the bank or government

agency, where has a large number of people registering and unable to maintain social distancing. In the same way, they can also pass on their knowledge of digital skills and recommend about detecting fake news, rumors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Enhance citizens participation

Cooperation from the private sector, civic and government sectors has been integrated to address issues during the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries. For instance, Taiwan had application design that distributed masks from manufacturers to pharmacies and agency and this application was designed for transparently data, showing the amount of mask in real time and people were able to purchase face masks at various points of sale (Chin & Wang, 2020). In UK (United Kingdom), they developed citizen health tracking application for preventing the spread of the virus. This application was organized by the National Health Service and the private sector which opened personal information, but the government controlled the information by General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Guinhardt, 2021).

At the same time, Thailand established Digital Government Development Agency (GDA) which oversees information and data in Thailand. The organization can collaborate with citizens and the private sector to eliminate digital divide or exchange information together under the Personal Data Protection Act B.E. 2562 (2019). This collaboration leads to many benefits such as transferring offline data to online, managing the epidemic effectively, allocating masks to cover all area, using application to transport infected patients, primary medical examination by telemedicine and opening information on vaccine allocations to groups of people which would bring the trust between citizens and governments. In addition, the government can imitate other countries where citizen health data are analyzed as well as successfully management of COVID-19 virus outbreak and also applied policies by allowing citizens, governments and all sectors to participation.



Figure 5 Recommendations for reducing the digital divide of Thai citizens during COVID-19 pandemic

Conclusion

Digital divide is still present in Thailand and other countries around the world. The causes are information infrastructure, individual differences and government policy and the spread of the COVID-19 is factor to drive digital divide. Citizens cannot access to government remedial programs, health care information and unemployment because they lack of equipment, Internet and digital skills. Although the government has plans and policies but still cannot eliminate the digital divide. Therefore, this research recommends ways to reduce the digital divide of Thai citizens during COVID-19 pandemic. There are as follows: 1. Have a clear and practical plan on information infrastructure support 2. Instill digital skills to the citizens 3. Make use of community strength 4. Enhance citizens participation, which will enable the citizens to access support from the government. Consequently, they can survive from the pandemic and achieve sustainable digital equality.

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Vulnerable Groups and the Stride of Equal Rights Under the COVID-19 Crisis

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has large effects on the economy and societies, and it exposes violence to people in and outside the country, especially to people in poor households and a vulnerable population whose health insurance and security are less than general people. Although the government sector has attempted to set out remedial and assistance measures for taking care of these people, the severity of the COVID-19 situation continues. As a result, additional measures are needed for them to make a living under the principle of “no one is left behind”. The government should provide special remedial measures for vulnerable groups and these measures should be in various ways apart from financial assistance in coverage of such as in access to different public services, employment, healthcare, and access to IT or digital resources. Every sector should have clear public policies for responding to vulnerable populations in different areas as well as for systematically upgrading health system development with coverage, fairness, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Keywords: crisis, vulnerable population, remedial measures

Introduction

According to the COVID-19 situation in Thailand, people are affected considerably and various measures are set out for solving various crises with problems of public health, economy, and mental health. In addition, social problems are increasingly found especially in vulnerable populations whoever are children, girls, disabilities, elderly people, vagrants, homeless people, and COVID-19 infected people. Many agencies in the government and private sectors have measures for surveillance, prevention, and problem solution to prevent the increase of violence. In the social care dimension, the pandemic control is much more difficult due to stigma and discrimination on people recovery from the COVID-19 infection

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by inhibiting them to return to the communities for normal living. Moreover, the control difficulty is from people who conceal their infection and do not accept virus infection tests. Several agencies run campaigns to educate people and communities about the COVID-19 infection for them to know how to do self-health care and self-prevention. Furthermore, these campaigns attempt to build acceptance and understanding of recovery people and to live together with them. Practical guidelines are set out for prevention and solutions to social stigma problems by raising people's awareness on word uses, physical expression, giving comments. Under these situations, every sector tries to give remedy and assistance to people in terms of encouragement for hopeful living. Such implementation may be in the forms of art, music, and literature performance to comfort people as well as sharing things with poorer people. These activities raise valuable feelings of cooperation to overcome the crises, build confidence between civil and government sectors, and attempt to find solutions for all parties under various conditions to live together without complaints and selfishness. These crises reveal a long accumulation of existing problems which becomes additional problems to the current crises. At the same, social power plays an important role to cope with bad situations. Variation of Covid-19 phenomenon is so challenging to learn more about Thai societies.

Literature Review

According to the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of changes are found in Thai and world societies in every aspect of the economy, society, politics, and ways of life. It is questionable that when the crisis ends; how to change the world does, how the vulnerable population is affected, and how they receive remedies from various measures of the government and related agencies. The author would like to invite the readers to analyze and capture problematic issues and suggestions according to the author's view at the end of this article.

1. Definitions of vulnerable persons: Vulnerable persons refer to people with diminished autonomy to protect their rights and benefit due to their lack of power, education, resources, strengths, and so on. Vulnerable persons also include people who are convinced to participate in research with an expectation to get benefits from such participation whether it is

reasonable or not. This includes people who agree to join the research because they are afraid of bullying from their superiors if they refuse. The examples of vulnerable persons are students, employees, soldiers, prisoners, incurable patients, elderly people in the nursing home, unemployed people, poor people, homeless people, urgent patients, minorities, vagrants, children and youths, and patients with mental sickness. On the other hand, vulnerability refers to a state of a person with diminished autonomy in making decisions about mental and physical illness or in an environment that lacks of the freedom to make a decision. A person in a vulnerable state is regarded as incapable/limited capacity or lack freedom to give or decline consent. According to the office of Research Ethics in Faculty of Medicine Chiang Mai University (2015), a vulnerable person is defined as follows.

- A person with immaturity or incapacity to communicate with understanding such as newborn infants, illiterate people, or people unable to speak Thai.

- A person in the state of mental sicknesses such as coma patients, psychiatric patients, and incurable patients.

- A person in the state of no freedom due to being under the control of the superiors such as prisoners, elderly people in nursing homes, children in orphanages, enlisted soldiers, and students.

- A person in the dependency state may be easily manipulated and exploited such as poor people, homeless people, and vagrants.

The above meaning points out that Vulnerable groups are means to represent those who are not privileged. powerless in social bargaining or have the status of "marginal people" by the Institute for Population and Social Research of Mahidol University (2017, p. 156) describes the factors that make the vulnerable groups as follows:

- 1) Nature and physical health fragility due to the nature of life which may be difficult or unavoidable Among such factors may refer to children. People with disabilities, the elderly, women, or people with gender diversity as well as caused by various situations that affect life such as accidents or illnesses that cause physical and mental disabilities include who infected with certain diseases, such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which can cause a person to be stigmatized and treated as a marginalized person.

- 2) Being a minority of different races, different cultures are different from the majority of the people in society. The population in this definition may refer to hill tribes,

ethnic groups, immigrants from other countries, especially those who fled illegally immigrant fleeing their homeland to Thailand are stateless, stateless, and do not have legal citizenship. These groups are often discriminated against, excluded from unfair discrimination. As a result, they do not receive public services of the same standard as the majority of a country's population.

3) Restriction of freedom or imprisonment which, as well as causing a person to lose their freedom, also some rights and lacking the opportunity to reach the services that were before received like normal people.

4) Poverty is the leading cause of many people's vulnerabilities. Poverty is the cause of many interiorizes. Poor families tend to live in unsanitary homes and environments, poor health, and most children were born in these families receive little education and opportunities, have less income than the educated population, and often become inequality in Thai society that has been a deeply rooted problem for a long time.

5) Unfair social structure, social structure, in this case, can be likened to a support base. Everything in society, if there is no justice, has many effects. One of them is to give certain people an advantageous status. Therefore, the rest of the group became disadvantaged in every way. When the social structure cannot meet the needs of the population, and it becomes a restriction on benefits and deprived access. The unjust will become marginalized and vulnerable which are not treated equally with other groups, whether it is access to educational opportunities, working status, access to health-related factors in Thailand. Vulnerable groups are often limited in their treatment or rarely exercise their rights.

The situations of vulnerable groups and health rights in Thailand are in reference from knowledge synthesis reports and implementation of public policies on the health rights of vulnerable groups (Center for Health Equity Monitoring Foundation, 2017). This study investigated the vulnerable groups in the dimensions of quantity, the violence of vulnerability, and access to health rights of each group. The types and number of vulnerable people in this study are as follows.

- *Vulnerable youth group* consisted of 7.2 million children with economic vulnerability and 380,000 disabled children.

- *Social vulnerable group* was sub-groups of orphans, abandoned children, drug-abusing children, young mothers, and children in detention, not more than 9.6 million.

- *Specific problem group* was not more than 400,000 people.
- *Elderly group* included 880,000 elderly people.
- *Registration status problem group* was about 600,000.
- *Foreign labor group* was divided into 1.5 million legal workers and 20,000 illegal workers.

- *Poor people group* was about 5 million.
- *People in the 3 southern border provinces group* consisted of 20,000 people.
- *Female prisoner group* was about 50,000 people.
- *Vagrant group* was about 3,000 people only in Bangkok. People in this group may be vagrant children, poor children, or children with status problems, etc.

In this article, the author focuses particularly on access to health rights. According to the second issue of Constitution on the National Health System B.E. 2559 (2016) (National Health Commission Office, 2016), health rights is defined as fundamental rights on health for people's entitlement with the highest standard, depending on economic and social readiness without discrimination in all cases. Health rights cover public health services and other factors with effects on health such as access to health information, sufficient clean drinking water and food, and accommodation. Health rights were closely related to other human rights such as rights for food, accommodation, work, education, information access, and participation without discrimination (Center for Health Equity Monitoring Foundation, 2017). Many movements are on health rights for vulnerable elderly people by the government sector and agencies relating to elderly people due to the Act on Elderly B.E. 2546 (2003) effective from 1st January 2003. Therefore, elderly people receive the right protection and promotion in various aspects including health. In addition, an older fund was established in 2003 by the Office of Promotion and Protection of Children, Youth, the Elderly, and Vulnerable Groups in the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (Center for Health Equity Monitoring Foundation, 2017). However, some elderly are still in the system gap and cannot access their eligible health rights. These people are people who live alone elderly, abandoned elderly, poor elderly, and elderly with status problems, etc.

2. Deglobalization: The COVID-19 pandemic cause changes in many aspects. One of them is a rapid change in the world supply chain. It can be seen that many countries increasingly use inward-looking of policy or protectionism policy. Particularly in the United

States during the ex-president Donald Trump, American companies were promoted to produce more domestic products with foreign trade barriers. This matter becomes clearer during the COVID-19 crisis and it emphasizes the belief of the far-rightists and anti-globalization groups that too much dependency on the international production system is dangerous and the country should accelerate the change process of the world supply chain more rapidly. In addition, the governments of different countries may change this crisis into “opportunities” by thinking carefully in which direction the national economic policy should be. They try to diversify economic risks without too much dependency on earning income from particular sectors. For example, instead of dependency only on tourism and exports, consumption and domestic investment can be relied on as the main mechanism (Suwannik, n.d.). These have impacts on production capacity in labor which is a part of the vulnerable population who are inevitably affected by such changes.

3. Research: In the study of Borwornsom Leerapan et al. (2016) on “Concepts and Practices of Community-Based Interventions for Vulnerable Population in Thailand”, the purpose was to synthesize lessons learned from the existing community-based health development for vulnerable populations in Thai contexts. Their qualitative study on the health system was implemented in 8 districts of different provinces in Thailand. In that study, the general vulnerable population referred to weak people with high risks to be manipulated, dominated, and threatened by various risk factors such as life cycle, health, societies, economy, environment, and natural disasters. In addition, these people have limited potentials to cope with emerging risk factors and consequences. They may be people with economic disadvantage, a minority of ethnic groups, people without health insurance, children in poor families, elderly people, homeless vagrants, HIV patients, chronic patients, and psychiatric patients. From a macro perspective, the causes of bad health in this population group are from lack of chances and inaccessibility to main resources. Access to resources of each population group depends on 3 factors as follows.

- 1) Personal social statuses such as ages, genders, races, and ethnicity
- 2) Social capital or relationships in a social network such as family structure, marital status, and having friends or networks.
- 3) Human capital such as education, occupation, income, living status, and safe environment

The Thai social gap has continuously expanded since the start of the first National Economic and Social Development Plan. This gap is apparent from the political crisis in 2007 until the present. “Vulnerable population” becomes a concept that refers to the population group at risk of health problems more than general people and they have limited chances to access health services facilities (Lerapan et al., 2016). Although the universal health coverage insurance in Thailand is hopeful for more accessibility to treatment than ever, the relationship among the above 3 factors of vulnerable people has inter-effects more or less. As a result, with the spread of the COVID-19, vulnerable groups are heavily affected no less than other groups.

According to the international literature review and synthesis of case studies in Thailand, criteria are established for identifying health vulnerable people in Thai contexts with the following 2 out of 3 qualifications. 1) Marginal population who are stigmatized or discriminated from societies in one way or another. They may be poor people, stateless people, a minority of ethnic groups, migrant workers, orphans, transgenders, gays, lesbians, people with sexual reassignment surgery, sex workers, drug addicts, and former prisoners, etc. This group is large so it should be considered how to improve the Thai service system for them with fairness. 2) Population with health needs but with limitations to access health services. They may be people without health insurance, and people in remote areas, etc. And 3) people at risk of abandonment or abuse if their long-term health needs are not responded to. They may be elderly people, physically disabled people, mentally disabled people, stay-at-home patients, and bedridden patients, etc. This group seems not to have risks because we think that they are supported by health service systems. However, if these systems are not well managed, they may receive services of insufficient quality for responding to their long-term health needs (Thitima, 2017).

The research results are summarized on the policy for health system development for responding to Thai vulnerable groups’ problems and needs. Although the universal health coverage insurance system has been established for more than 10 years with the focus on the right coverage, now the important point is whether Thai people can access the rights provided by the government. When they access the rights, do they receive services with quality and fairness, or how much do the services respond to their health problems? For example, people in remote areas have health rights with 30-bath insurance cards but they cannot go to the

hospitals which are far from their houses. Although they have rights, no health service providers are in the areas, no experts or teams are available for responding to their health problems, or no effective referral systems are available. Importantly, the central policy is not clear about what to be done with these issues. At present, there are attempts to reduce inequality of health rights among the 3 main government funds but the focus is not particular on the healthcare system for vulnerable groups who have rights in these 3 funds. This research made clearer about these issues by giving a clear definition of vulnerable groups for suitably designing work systems and resource allocation. The implementation was based on health fairness in terms of access to health services suitable for health problems of vulnerable groups and on quality of health services with clear and continuous follow-up and evaluation (Thitima, 2017).

According to Kittipong Kittayarak, the director of Thailand Institute of Justice (Thai PBS, 2020), it is necessary to pay attention to the vulnerable groups in societies when entering to New Normal. He cites United Nations that economic destroy from the COVID-19 is worth 2 trillion USD. It is estimated that economic recession is severe; “new poor people” will increase up to 11 million; 25 million people will be unemployed; about 1,000 children will be in a risk group not to receive an education. In Thailand, there are 20 million informal works and this number is half of the labor in the country. Importantly, all of them are not in the social security system (Thai PBS, 2020). This becomes an important issue in studies on various measures to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Do the government and related agencies have measures or guidelines for interventions accessible by everyone? Or do they leave anyone behind?

Chakorn Loetnithat and Somchai Jitsuchon (2020) reports on Effects on Societies and Economy from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Coping Mechanism and Assistance Measures. They suggest that the government and societies should take care of vulnerable households, especially the households with multiple vulnerabilities, more than general households. The remedy should be provided thoroughly without missing anyone. For example, income support should be in the form of universal access to reduce mistakes in the identification and registration of eligible people. However, for the measures concerning expenses, the government can use the existing measure to reduce living costs. Mobile medical units or telemedicine should be arranged for vulnerable households which have problems in traveling

to receive medical services such as elderly people, bedridden patients, and disabled people. Vaccination services are given at houses with young children. Chronic patients can get prescribed medicines at nearby drugstores in the communities. Apart from initial remedies, in the next stage of economic recovery, the government should consider the limitations of the vulnerable groups as well. They should be aware that the vulnerable people have life capitals different from non-vulnerable people so the measures should be specific and appropriate for them. No one should be left behind in a difficult time like this.

4. Remedial measures for vulnerable groups by the government and related agencies: According to the studies, the government emphasizes financial remedial measures under the project of “Rao Mai Thing Kan” (We don’t leave anyone behind) by providing 5,000 baht per person in 3 consecutive months in coverage of 6.9 million vulnerable people (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020). Additional budgets are allocated for elderly people, disabled people, and families with young children to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Division of Policy Development and Social Innovation, 2020). In addition, the cabinet’s resolution on 16th June and 30th June 2020 defines the eligible elderly qualification as follows (Department of Older Persons, 2020).

- Be existing elderly people who receive an elderly allowance and who were born before 1 May 1960.
- Never receive compensation from the project of “Rao Mai Thing Kan” (We don’t leave anyone behind) from the Fiscal Policy Office i.e. 5,000 baht per month for 3 months.
- Never receive farmer compensation from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives i.e. 1,500 baht per month for 3 months.
- Never receive social security compensation from the Ministry of Labor.
- Do not have the right of people affected by COVID from the state welfare cards of the Ministry of Finance i.e. 1,500 baht per month for 3 months.

Moreover, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security provides remedial measures for vulnerable people in financial and non-financial forms as follows.

- Compensation is given 1,000 baht per month for 3 months during May – July 2020 for a family with young children, elderly people, and disabled people at the number of 6,781,881 people. The additional budget is allocated directly for the target group through the

existing projects such as compensation for newborn babies, allowance for elderly people, and allowance for disabled people.

- Compensation is given for all disabled people who have identification cards for persons with disabilities i.e. 1,000 baht once by using money from the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. The allowance for disabled people is increased from 800 baht to 1,000 baht per person per month. In addition, disabled people and caregivers are allowed for loan requests used for occupation during the COVID-19 crisis.

- Baby milk powder is provided for families without income, accommodation services and job training are arranged for single mothers, flea markets are set up for organizations in communities, and temporary accommodation is arranged for homeless people.

Moreover, in the article “TDRI’s suggestion on 7 measures for the government” (2021), Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) suggests the government adjust the measures for coping with the COVID-19 with the focus specifically on the vulnerable groups by increasing the compensation in parallel to upgrading the pandemic control. The COVID-19 crisis has had many effects on economic activities in a wide and specific area. For people in millions, employment is canceled or workload is reduced. Social consequences are serious, especially on household debts of general and vulnerable people. In education, teaching and learning are changed to online platforms, and some students dropped out of the study due to their parents’ immediate poverty which may become chronic poverty.

However, informal workers are not under the social protection system, migrant workers are legal and illegal, new graduates are unemployed, and the homeless group likely expands. Elderly and disabled people access medical services with more difficulty although they got compensation from the government last year. These issues are still discussed and argued in terms of sufficiency of help, especially on the vulnerable groups which have short survival strings so they cannot cope with several waves of effects. As a result, TDRI gives suggestions to the government on policies and remedial measures to cover all aspects which are up to date and flexible for quickly adapting to the situations. Consideration should be put particularly on the vulnerable groups with awareness of long-term consequences and preventing various groups of people in societies *from getting hurt*. The suggested measures are as follows (TDRI’s suggestion on 7 measures for the government, 2021).

1. Increase the remedial level for the vulnerable groups following the levels of effects and coping capacity of different groups. Various data types should be collected and the databases should be coordinated by the government sector for all target groups of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security or National Statistical Office. These target groups include people with state welfare cards and people who join different remedial projects. Moreover, the data coordination should be with social organizations which access the vulnerable groups apart from the government sectors in urban and rural areas. The databases should be updated regularly with accuracy checking in a short time to prevent the delay of assistance (TDRI's suggestion on 7 measures for the government, 2021).

2. Increase the remedial dimensions emerging simultaneously with the current high pandemic level including income compensations for the vulnerable groups who are in long quarantine and cannot work. For example, slums and worker camps should be helped with things or financial remedies not less than their existing wages during their quarantines. There should be some mechanism to take care of the infected people's children who have no caregivers. Care should also be given to the families of dead people from the virus pandemic because they are seriously affected in terms of mind, economy, and societies (TDRI's suggestion on 7 measures for the government, 2021).

3. The government should support short-term employment for people affected by the measures of closing business or reducing business levels. For example, temporary employment should be arranged for hotel employees, restaurant employees, and drivers to do cooking or deliver food to volunteers or people in the pandemic areas who are necessarily home quarantined. Temporary employment may be for unemployed people who are ready to be trained for working as caregivers of bedridden patients etc. The above second and third measures help raise the cooperation levels of the pandemic control in parallel to remedies (TDRI's suggestion on 7 measures for the government, 2021).

4. The cabinet should set up a mechanism for budget allocation and disbursement in an automatic or semi-automatic form. Accordingly, assistance criteria and the target groups should be determined clearly at the beginning. The budgeting process should be flexible for the authorities to assist in time without bureaucratic problems and time-consuming paperwork (TDRI's suggestion on 7 measures for the government, 2021).

5. Budget should be allocated for economic and social remedies more than the current allocation. It is estimated that the budget for remedies is about 2.8 hundred million baht. This amount is unlikely enough, especially when the pandemic spreads highly and continuously until herd immunity occurs (TDRI's suggestion on 7 measures for the government, 2021).

According to the above suggestions of TDRI, the author would like to add that many vulnerable groups that cannot access the government's systems and measures and should receive help. The government should give help to people who face problems during the COVID-19 crisis through the existing government databases. For example, students from poor families may be helped through Equitable Education Funds (EEF), or people with debts can be identified from the database of welfare cards for poor people. The government should use the existing databases for helping with financial and material matters to homeless people, elderly people, and new graduates.

Conclusion

From the measures mentioned above, there are still main problems on dropout of the vulnerable groups who cannot access the remedial measures and insufficient of the allocated budgets. These people have some limitations of living and work and they do not have income and insurance on economy and societies. These problems are not sufficiently solved although the government sector attempts to recover, remedy, and upgrade people's quality of life. Accordingly, the government has set up the royal decree for assigning the Ministry of Finance to get loans not more than 1 trillion baht for solving the problems from the COVID-19 crisis. They focus on assistance plans and income compensation to the civil sector, farmers, and entrepreneurs at the amount of 550,000 million baht (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020). Despite that, the above problems remain.

A lot of vulnerable groups in Thailand cannot access assistance from the government. Some are dropped out from the basic screening systems because they do not have citizen identification cards, mobile phones for registration, or bank accounts. These limitations of such vulnerable groups reflect on different challenges to cope with the COVID-19 situation. Every sector should consider these limitations to strengthen the systems with sustainability.

Before the right access, rights should be defined, informed, and accessed before the implementation processes. The existing processes have conflicts from the right definitions. Here, rights are referred to as human rights defined by the United Nations (UN) (1948). “Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.” This means that human rights inherent in all humans without discrimination by race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. UN adds that human rights include rights in life, freedom, brotherhood, freedom of slavery and abuse, freedom to express opinions, freedom to work, freedom to learn, and so on. Everyone can access such rights without discrimination. Therefore, health rights are rights inherited from birth, and the rights of the vulnerable groups are regarded as similar to the rights of other population groups.

Suggestions

The vulnerable groups are risk groups to get a lot of effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. They should be the first group to get help. However, with several limitations, the government’s assistance measures do not cover all people. When the pandemic re-emerges with serious economic effects on a wide range of people, the vulnerable population faces more and more life difficulties. According to the literature review, the author would like to suggest additional measures to relieve and cope with the effects on the vulnerable groups during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain their equal rights to other groups of people in societies.

Providing health services for Thai people is something that government agencies are trying to make services easily accessible, whether it is universal health insurance or the 30 baht all disease program referred to as efforts to create a process of equality. But the state may still be oblivious to accessibility opportunities for disparate populations. For example, the poor in rural areas are unable to receive treatment due to their remoteness from hospitals or hospitals. and lack of resources Travel expenses that the state cannot provide. These costs are often incurred by the above-mentioned vulnerable groups. Therefore, in the process of creating fair access to health services for vulnerable populations in the perspective of the author these measures are

1) to give support on local mechanisms and mechanisms apart from the government sector such as foundations or NGOs which work closely with the vulnerable groups. This includes volunteers to find the target groups, to inform them about information and communication during the crisis, and to solve problems directly.

2) To focus on the vulnerable groups without income or employment is done by helping them get work. For example, the loan process from Older Funds and funds for disabled people should be accelerated for them to use in their career quickly. The funds' debt settlements should be expanded and the payment should be made with reasonable interests without increasing debt burdens.

3) to develop an information system in coverage of the vulnerable groups around the country is done by searching different types of vulnerable groups quickly and accurately to solve the direct problems quickly. This is one of the important strides for equal rights of the vulnerable groups to cope with other future challenges.

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Digital Citizenship: The Practice of Educator and Parent During COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Internet technologies and social media platforms fully dominate as a medium of communication especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. If students spend more time online, it is important that they learn the digital citizenship skills needed to safely identify, review, exchange content, participate in meaningful dialogue with those from diverse backgrounds, and ensure their online engagement is secure, ethical, and legal. This article investigates the online learning situations that Thai students have faced during the time of the pandemic. Furthermore, the paper offers some useful recommendations for how educators and parents may work together to improve digital citizenship skills for students or children in Thailand during the COVID-19 epidemic and in the future.

Keywords: Digital Citizenship, Social Media, Educator, Parent, COVID-19

Digital Citizenship: Skill Set & Abilities

As we enter the age of the knowledge-based society and rapid change in information communication technology, it is critical to equip people, especially the "Digital Citizenship", with the knowledge and skills necessary to maximize the benefits of this rapid change. Digital citizenship is a set of skills for thinking critically, behaving safely, and participating responsibly in the digital world. It includes appropriate, responsible behaviors in areas such as internet safety, privacy, reputation, identity, communication, collaboration, copyright,

creativity, and skills around finding and evaluating trustworthy information online. In addition, digital citizenship includes the deliberate, age-appropriate use of digital tools to have a positive impact on personal, family, school, social, and community life. Digital citizenship goes hand in hand with media literacy education (Common Sense Kids Action, 2017).

International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) (2016) studied the standardization of digital citizenship for students. The result revealed that to be a complete digital citizen, students should hold the following abilities; 1) an ability to cultivate and manage their digital identity and reputation and to be aware of the permanence of their actions in the digital world, 2) an ability to engage with positive, safe, legal, and ethical behaviors when using technology, including online interactions and communicating through networked devices, 3) an ability to demonstrate an understanding of and a respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property, and 4) an ability to manage their personal data to maintain digital privacy and security and to be aware of data-collection technology used to track their navigation online.

In conclusion, digital citizenship refers to the ability to participate actively, objectively, and competently in this digital world, as well as the ability to use digital resources and technology and to evaluate digital tools, content, and impact. As a result, it encompasses effective communication and development skills, as well as social practices and participations that demonstrate a respect for human rights and dignity through responsible technology use.

According to target and indicator #3 of Digital Thailand's reforming agenda, human resources must be built for the digital age, with training for all classes to equip with knowledge and skills appropriate for life and profession in the digital age. The key indicators are: 1) people's capacity to effectively produce and use content, as well as their understanding, experience, and skills for digital literacy; and 2) Thailand's human capital is equipped with international-level digital knowledge, technologies, and expertise. The country's human capital is experienced and capable of using emerging media as a medium to practice and build works (Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2016).

Finally, the notion of digital citizenship entails “proper technology usage” and “making safe, responsible, and respectful online choices.” Digital citizenship has been

translated into curriculum for the following topics: Internet safety, privacy and security, relationships and communication, cyberbullying, digital footprints, reputation, self-image and identity, information literacy, and creative credit and copyright. However, if digital citizenship is to become a new educational emphasis offered to schools, a substantial amount of conceptual and assessment work is required to guarantee that its aims are well-defined and its results are successfully attained.

As we are all facing the global pandemic, the focus here is on digital citizenship in the community of children and young people who are very active internet users and the foundation for the creation of a sustainable democratic society, how COVID-19 affects them, and how educators and parents deal with this situation.

Impact of COVID-19 on Teaching and Learning

COVID-19 has had a direct influence on the education sector due to mitigating measures adopted by the government to limit viral spread, such as school closures and population lockdowns. Many school districts shifted activities online to allow instruction to continue even while schools were closed. According to data from UNESCO, the peak in school closures was registered at the beginning of April 2020, when around 1.6 billion learners were affected across 194 countries, accounting for more than 90 per cent of total enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2020). Due to the abrupt closure of schools, education policymakers, school principals, and instructors were forced to develop alternatives to face-to-face instruction in order to ensure children's right to an education. Many systems have implemented internet teaching (and learning) on a massive scale, sometimes in combination with widely available remote learning materials such as television or radio.

During school closures, online learning has been a vital tool for maintaining skill development. There are some concerns about online learning during COVID-19. The first point of concern is that online learning is only available to children who have access to a broadband connection at home that is fast enough to enable online learning. While network operators have mostly succeeded in maintaining services and efficiently utilizing pre-existing capacity during lockdown phases (OECD, 2020), there are still geographical areas and

population groups that are underserved, particularly in rural and remote areas and among low-income groups.

The second concern for those students who are connected is that some students have not received a sufficient number of hours of education. In the United Kingdom, for example, 71 per cent of public school children got no or fewer than one daily online lesson (Green, 2020), but in Germany, just 6 per cent of students received daily online lessons, with more than half receiving them less than once a week (Woessmann et al., 2020). Some economists predict that as a result of this, students in the United States will start school in the fall of 2020 with approximately 70 per cent of the learning gains relative to a regular school year on average, and that the learning gains in mathematics may be much lower, totaling to only 50 per cent. (Kuhfeld and Tarasawa, 2020).

In addition to a lack of infrastructure, a lack of proper training in schools and among teachers, and, in certain circumstances, a lack of curriculum standards, it is critical for education policymakers to identify which reasons have stopped some children from obtaining adequate instruction. In the United States, for example, more than one-third of children have been totally excluded from online learning, notably in schools with a high proportion of low-income students, whereas wealthy private schools had almost full attendance (Khazan, 2020). Similarly, evidence from England suggests that during the lockdown, children from better-off families spent 30 per cent more time at home learning than those from poorer families, and their parents reported feeling more able to support them than socioeconomically disadvantaged parents, while students from richer schools had access to more individualized resources (such as online tutoring or chats with teachers) (IFS, 2020). Concerns have also been raised about the possibility that the efficacy of online learning has been hindered in certain circumstances by a lack of fundamental digital skills among certain students and teachers, leaving them unprepared to adjust to the new situation so quickly (OECD, 2020).

The same concerns are most likely being raised in Thailand. UNICEF (2020) reported on the input from students, parents, and teachers during the online learning trial period in different categories. To begin, according to the study on access to learning materials, a large per centage of students are unable to access online education owing to a lack of required technology (such as computers, tablets, and so on) at home. In an April 2020 poll sponsored by Thailand's National Statistical Office, 50.8 per cent of respondents stated that they do not

have a computer, laptop, or tablet at home, while 26.3 per cent do not have enough or any internet at home. Informal feedback from small school administrators in distant regions reveals the need for print materials for disconnected students, as well as the direction and finances required to produce these materials.

Second, according to the quality of learning materials, TV education for young children in pre-primary and early primary levels is viewed as poor quality and relies on rote learning techniques. Furthermore, excessive television viewing may not be acceptable for such young children. Many online resources for secondary school students are in English rather than Thai, while resources in Thai frequently employ conventional teaching, with minimal engagement and efficacy. Students have allegedly been unable to connect on to the online OBEC system at all, making access to these materials impossible.

Third, according to teacher readiness, few Thai instructors have received training on utilizing technology to offer remote education, and the rapid shift in teaching medium is highly hard. Finally, many smaller schools, both in urban and rural regions, lack adequate financial, educational, and technical resources to successfully facilitate remote learning.

COVID-19 also has an impact on students. Thai undergraduate students at a university stated that their stress and adversity quotients were high, but their health practices were modest. This finding may imply that students experience stress from staying at home, even after preventative measures have been made. They are still concerned about attending class or traveling, as well as the recurrence of the outbreak in a second or third phase of infection. (Choompunuch et. al, 2021).

Following the pandemic, the challenges of online learning, both for students and educators, include a lack of a gadget or an internet connection, an inadequate number of hours of education, inexperience with online teaching, and the possibility of increased stress during online learning.

Online Threats of Thai Children

In Thailand, it has been observed that online society has primarily occurred in children and young people, as these children who grew up in the modern era are very familiar with computer technology and wireless internet. The computer usage of children has

increased in recent years. According to the Electronic Transactions Development Agency's (ETDA) 2018 survey, Gen Z (those under the age of 17) use the Internet during work and school hours. The average was 5.48 hours per day, which increased to 7.12 hours per day during vacation.

According to an article published by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2018), an online survey of 1,300 Thai children and youth aged 8 to 12 years old was conducted nationwide using the DQ Screen Time Test, which is the same test used for children in other countries and has a total of 37,967 samples. According to a global research on digital citizens released by the World Economic Forum, 60 per cent of Thai children face online threats, compared to 56 per cent globally (compared with neighboring countries Philippines 73 per cent, Indonesia 71 per cent, Vietnam 68 per cent and Singapore 54 per cent). Thai children spend 35 hours a week browsing the internet, which is 3 hours more than the global average, with smartphones accounting for 73 per cent of internet usage.

Thai children, especially secondary school students, spend the majority of their time on digital media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram for entertainment purposes such as following movie stars profiles, chatting, and looking for information. They seldom, however, use digital media for political purposes. In addition, they use digital media more frequently to organize group conversations, search for goods, conduct surveillance, and reveal their identity through social media posts. They recognized the uniqueness of digital media as a platform that provides a public sphere, allows large amounts of information to be disseminated, serves as a user connection, and allows users to create their own content (Kleechaya, 2020).

According to a survey on the status of children hooked to mobile phones in Thailand, it was discovered that roughly 20-30 per cent of children are addicted to mobile phones, and this number is expected to rise in the future. The majority of them spend time on the internet, social media, online games, and porn. Parents play a vital part in helping their children learn how to use their phones to assist them rather than hurt them (ThaiPBS, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there may not be strong proof of online dangers to children learning online. However, when children spend more time online, they should be aware of an online threats which are in four types: 1) cyberbullying with profanity and edited images (49 per cent); 2) links to online pornography and talking about sex with strangers

online (19 per cent); 3) online game addiction (12 per cent); and 4) being tempted to meet strangers (7 per cent). While watching online videos accounts for 73 per cent of Thai children's Internet use, searching for information accounts for 58 per cent, listening to music accounts for 56 per cent, playing games accounts for 52 per cent, and sending and receiving e-mails or chatting via mobile application accounts for 42 per cent (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2018).

As children spend more time online, it is important that they develop skills that enable them to safely identify, analyze, and share information, engage in meaningful dialogue with others from various backgrounds, and ensure that their online engagement is healthy, ethical, and legal.

Practice of Educator During Crisis

In the aftermath of the worldwide pandemic, all educational institutions across the world have been confronted with the same crisis: finding strategies to help students online. At the height of the global crisis, 1.6 billion students, or 91 per cent of all students worldwide, were unable to attend regular classrooms (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020). In many respects, this was the most important platform shift in educational history, as well as the most difficult method for both teachers and parents to deal with this issue.

Depending on the outcome of COVID-19, the Ministry of Education has made plans for onsite, online, or mixed learning in 2020/21. Remote learning facilities are a mix of existing and new digital television (DLTV) programs for preprimary, primary, and lower secondary students. For upper secondary students, these programs are reinforced by online learning resources and teacher interaction via the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) platforms.

There are ways for educators to help students develop their ability to effectively engage in digital communication through in-class activities and activities that bridge student' in-school learning and out-of-school experiences (International Society for Technology in Education, 2016). The educators or teachers should be encouraged and educated during the COVID-19 pandemic so that they are aware of the necessary skills for the development of

digital citizenship. Then, the teachers can better incorporate these topics into their classes to help students appreciate the effects of technology use. Furthermore, experienced teachers should empower students to engage in the digital world and use digital technology for information acquisition, gaming, and networking. The educators can teach all facets of modern technology fairly, including but not limited to content development, web networking, conversations, and message delivery.

Moreover, the instructors must encourage college students, particularly international students, and assist less experienced students in becoming more effective when studying online. When compared to students in other majors or from other class levels, freshmen and Information Technology majors are significantly more engaged online. Students who are not freshmen or majoring in information technology are far less likely to be active e-learning users (Darrin Thomas, 2020).

During COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders and administrators should be aware of the need to prioritizing the production of electronic media for use in online instruction of students. The educators and schools that are well-prepared can transition well to online learning if the platform is stable and familiar, the lessons are well-prepared, the teachers know how to deliver, and the students know how to manage their learning environment and are engaged (Prapatsorn Somsathan & Saiphon Sanjaiprom, 2021).

The important issues of online risks in developing countries should be taught in school, for example, the production of child abuse image, sexting, pornography exposure, grooming, and cyberbullying, according to an exploratory study by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University in Collaboration with UNICEF conducted by Gasser, Maclay, & Palfrey (2010). As a result, a curriculum for digital citizenship must be designed and developed.

The curricula for primary students (grades 1-6) differs from those for older students. The instructional technique for this level is one-way communication. There also are learning tasks and assignments for students to practice. Secondary students (grades 7-12) require more interaction between students and teachers, therefore the teachers should emphasis on a two-way communication strategy (UNESCO Bangkok, 2020).

For the education sector, an action plan is required to develop digital skills for students, beginning with teachers who must be equipped with digital knowledge and

well-prepared, followed by a curriculum that supports digital-related skills and the necessary infrastructure to support students learning online.

Parents and Families: Effective Support to Digital Learning

Students' learning attitudes are shaped by the assistance they get from both teachers and families. PISA 2018 analyses in the OECD Skills Outlook 2021 (OECD, 2020) focused on the critical role of both teacher practices and parental emotional support as significant determinants of attitude development. When students receive greater emotional support from their parents, they develop more favorable attitudes and dispositions toward learning. Parental emotional support is important for most attitudes and has a strong relationship with students' self-efficacy. More precisely, the most effective kinds of emotional support are when parents encourage their children to be confident and when they support their children's educational efforts and successes.

The evidence from OECD (2020) also suggests that parents can play an important role during home schooling, such as ensuring that their children follow the curriculum and emotionally supporting their children to maintain their motivation and ambitious goals in a situation where they may easily be discouraged from learning autonomously, due to a lack of peer effects. Parental engagement during this time might substantially assist children in addressing the major obstacles provided by online learning, therefore encouraging active and autonomous learning.

At home during the COVID-19 pandemic, parents should encourage their children to use digital media in an artistic, safe, and friendly manner, taking responsibility for their words, writing, and actions in digital media. They should also teach their children about digital citizenship and digital literacy. In other terms, they must teach them how to use, comprehend, and build network society. Parents should act as a mediator of their children's digital use. Parents' primary functions are typically to screen content to deter their children from viewing harmful content, to restrict their time on the screen, and to protect and reduce their children's inappropriate habits, such as obscene images and content, gaming, and addiction to digital media.

Furthermore, parents should concentrate on the material, meaning, and interactions provided by various types of media interaction rather than the time. Often, parents should talk to their children about their emotions and thoughts on the rules so that parents have a thorough view of their children's cyberwellbeing and do not need to impose rigid restrictions on new media. Also disappointing online interactions can be turned into constructive learning opportunities in the presence of a stable, trusted relationship.

In order to avoid encountering disinformation, children should be careful of the credibility of the source when searching for information on the Internet. Teaching lateral reading as part of general education courses will better train students for handling today's diverse media world by providing them with a new range of skills (Brodsky et. al, 2021). As a result, lateral reading should be learned both in school and done at home. Parents can teach their children to read like fact-checkers or to read laterally, leaving a site after a quick scan and opening new browser tabs to assess the credibility of the original site. This method is simple enough for dealing with false facts, fake news, and completely misleading and even destructive language. Children will be able to distinguish between opinions and facts, locate critical/relevant statements within them, and assess them without having to read the original text.

Aside from practicing lateral reading at home, parents should also teach their children the concept of scout mindset. Galef (2016) suggests approaches that cultivate curiosity, pleasure, and intrigue. These feelings are connected with considering the processing of new knowledge and the correction of position as virtuous steps toward discovering bigger truths. Galef's defined "scout mindset" is grounded in an understanding of self-worth outside of particular views held by the individual. Parents should encourage their children to be more curious about the facts they discover. Children, like scouts, should be more likely to express joy while acquiring new information or overcoming a problem. Parents must demonstrate to their children that it is exciting to stumble across something that challenges their ideas.

It is critical to establish a link between out-of-school and at-home social media activities, particularly as students or children become more exposed to digital resources such as smartphones, tablets, and social networking applications. There is a strong positive association between the clarity of communications between schools and parents, and parents' confidence that their children would achieve their learning goals (Burns, 2020).

Parental engagement during this time might substantially assist children in addressing the major obstacles provided by online learning. Many difficulties, however, may obstruct parents' effective engagement: for example, they may struggle to engage in their children's schooling while balancing employment obligations or other family obligations - a difficulty that may be especially acute for single parents.

Parents may also believe they are unable to assist children due to a lack of digital skills, knowledge with the subject of their children's education, or unfavorable attitudes about the curriculum. Differences in parental educational levels, for example, may lead to additional inequalities in educational achievement, which should be of considerable concern to policymakers. As a result, it is critical for governments and schools to take early action to address these concerns and encourage parental participation.

Conclusions

In the middle of the COVID-19 outbreak, Thailand's government opted to close all schools. This affected about 20 million pupils ranging from kindergarten to university (Ministry of Education, 2008). Given the peculiarity of the scenario that has caused the majority of the globe to shift to online education, it is important to be concerned about how to perform the digital citizenship skill set. Teachers, in collaboration with families, play a critical role in assisting children in making better use of digital learning in order for them to fully engage in social, professional, and civic life. In today's world, society is confronted with a variety of crises that necessitate a unique approach to management. In addition to behavioral strategies, learning digital citizenship skills teaches children to be aware of and capable of sifting through fake news, as well as to be critical of social life and what is going on in general. Because the future belongs to digital citizens, governmental policy must reduce technical gaps and societal divisions created by age, race, ethnicity, income, and education to achieve more digital participation.

Recommendations

There were some suggestions in this article. This paper solely looked at the data and research findings from secondary sources such as news, articles, and academic journals, and it was interested in the relevance of both families and teachers in promoting students' learning and motivation to gain digital citizenship skills. As a result, it should consider certain additional elements related to the development of digital skills and digital literacy, such as government policies and essential internet infrastructure in the country.

In terms of future study, it would be useful to evaluate not just the quantity of activity that occurs in school and at home, but also the quality of the activity. This might be accomplished, for example, by qualitative interviews. A study that more carefully explores the roles of parents, students, and teachers in the context of online learning would aid in understanding the obstacles that students experience when acquiring digital citizenship skills. A research that looks more deeply at the suitable curriculum utilized in each school type in the country, from kindergarten to higher education.

Notes on Contributors

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Cyber Frauds and Consumer Decision Making during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Behaviour Analysis

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Abstract

The emergence of internet and social media platforms, together with ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, enhances a substantial growth in e-commerce, including online shopping. Online commerce has become a substitute for offline trading channel and provides a lower transaction cost for decision-making. This paper aimed at developing a conceptual framework in individual's decision-making to purchase by using behaviour and transaction costs analysis. The findings declare that factors affecting decision-making is include internal and external stimuli, while cognitive biases distort individuals from optimal decision-making and increases possibility to fall victim to cyber frauds. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns caused consumers increasingly access internet and provide products and services online as well as inducing fraudulent behaviour. Online shopping convenience reduces transaction costs, given the existence of individuals' limitations; bounded rationality and opportunism. Lower transaction costs arising from internet communication are the factors accelerating ineffective decision-making, with a greater possibility to be victimised by fraudsters. The existence of opportunistic behaviour is confirmed by the Fraud Diamond Theory, which explains fraudsters' motivation to commit cyber frauds. To prevent cyber fraud victimisation, individual's ability in rational thinking has to be developed in order to avoid emotional response to illogical offers or rewards. There should be a fraud prevention programme for improving cognitive functioning. Policymaker has to be aware of cyber frauds as a critical issue hindering business growth.

Government supports are also needed in cyber security improvement and solutions, as well as in collaboration with business and private sector to improve security and reduce cyber frauds.

Keywords: Cyber frauds, decision-making, cognitive biases, transaction costs, Fraud Diamond Theory, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

Technological progress and the emergence of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic cause a disruption in consumer shopping behaviour. Many countries experienced the in-practical lockdowns because of the deadly pandemic outbreaks. As the physical channels of commerce were closed as a consequence of the COVID-19 virus spreads, there was a dramatic rise in number of people switched to shop online. As online shopping provides benefits and enjoyments, there are 2.14 billion online shoppers worldwide, accounting for 27.6 percent of global population in 2021 during the pandemic lockdowns (Oberlo, 2021). Those buyers switch to shop online and seemingly feel ignorant to the risk from cheating and any other possible frauds.

The current popularity of e-commerce and cyber shopping attracts not only new digital buyers, but online sellers in this free-entry market. The increasing number of online merchants inevitably causes the rising competition among business firms. For this reason, online merchants launch marketing strategies to target buyers and to urge decision-making to purchase. The sharp increase of digital commerce volume has induced an upsurge in cyber frauds, becoming the risks to both online buyers and sellers. According to the 2020 Internet Crime Report (2021), the declared losses exceed \$4.2 billion. Improving e-commerce, fraudulent risk management becomes a critical issue to discuss. It is also necessary to examine buyer's behaviour in decision making to purchase and fraudster's motivation to commit cyber scams.

This paper mainly focuses on examining consumer decision-making behaviour in online purchase by applying transaction cost economics. Fraud Diamond Theory is used for exploring individuals' behavioural insights, both for online buyers and fraudsters pretending to be online

sellers. Finally, recommendations on how to reduce cyber frauds is made by implementing behaviour analysis.

Cyber Frauds during COVID-19 Pandemic

Frauds, defined in Cambridge Dictionary as the crime of getting money by deceiving people, has been centuries-long included in countries' criminal code. With the emergence of communication technology, from air mail, telephone, computer, internet and social media, as well as the novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak, there is a dramatic growth of online community, followed by higher volumes of e-commerce and social commerce. The increasing popularity in online community networking and the rising number of business transactions inevitably attract fraudsters to deceit unsuspecting victims, leading to a substantial rise in cybercrime and cyber frauds. Cyber fraud is a type of cybercrime, stated when the cybercrime involves financial frauds and identity theft. Because of the COVID-19 outbreak situation, governments in various countries impose social distancing and lockdown measures for cities and communities worldwide. As millions of people have to stay at home or adopt work from home measure in response to COVID-19 surge, e-commerce and social commerce sales volume vividly rise during the pandemic situation.

The enhanced usage of social media has become a channel driving cyber frauds. There are numerous new methods emerging, in response to the changes of network and communication, in order to conduct cyber frauds, e.g., malicious campaigns, phishing emails, fake websites and social media pages (Arshad, Zafar, Fatima, and Khan, 2015; Ma and McKinnon, 2020; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). The higher internet and social media usage is followed by more cases of and losses from cyber frauds.

The greater number of people using internet and social media inevitably facilitates cyber frauds and scams. During the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, retail e-commerce sales rose from 3.35 trillion to 4.28 trillion dollars in the previous year before the pandemic. In 6 years, retail e-commerce sale volume substantially increased for almost 3 trillion dollars, compared to

1.34-trillion-dollars sales in 2014 (Statista, 2021). According to Federal Trade Commission (2021), online shopping frauds have become the second reported phishing activities in 2020, accounted for 246 million US dollars loss. In addition, online shopping scams are frequently followed by identity frauds. It can be seen that the rising of cyber frauds becomes a hinderance of e-commerce market quality and growth in the long-run. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns which force people to purchase products online, reducing cyber shopping victims potentially improves e-commerce and online market.

Conceptual Framework of Consumer Decision-Making: Transaction Cost

Approach

The advancement in communication technology and the emergence of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has caused changes in consumer buying behaviour and triggered a dramatic increase of online shopping, followed by the threat of soaring cyber fraud complaints. Figure 1 portrays the mechanism of consumer decision making to purchase occurring within the consumer's head. Types of transaction costs are also included in order to elaborate costs and limitations confronted by consumers. Decision-making to purchase leads to either a genuine sales contract or to fall victim to a cyber fraud. Transaction costs also factors explaining the process of 'cost-benefit analysis' by individuals. When costs of the product, including transaction costs, are considered lower than marginal benefits received from the product, consumers will make decision to purchase.

Consumer decision-making process starts with the stimuli from external sources, e.g., advertisements, online sales and sales popups. Information processing and evaluation before decision-making are affected by not only those stimuli, but also cognitive biases, which cause individuals' decision to deviate from rationality. Those stimuli significantly impact behavioural responses.

Besides the stimuli above, individuals also consider transaction costs as factors for decision-making. As a result, transaction costs are included in costs paid both directly and

indirectly. According to transaction cost economics, individuals are incapable of constantly rational thought. Instead, consumer's rationality is bounded. Hence, internal and external stimuli affect consumer emotional responses, leading to impulse or nonoptimal decision making. Environmental uncertainties, the unexpected situation that may occur during the exchange, also impact consumer's decision making. Opportunism burdens transaction costs, as reflected in opportunistic behaviour of at least one party. The Fraud Diamond gives an insightful explanation of fraudulent behaviour and decision to commit frauds. Under this environment, consumers, as buyers, may not make decisions on optimal choice, leading to victimisation in online shopping scams or cyber frauds. The behavioural analysis in transaction cost approach is in the following section.

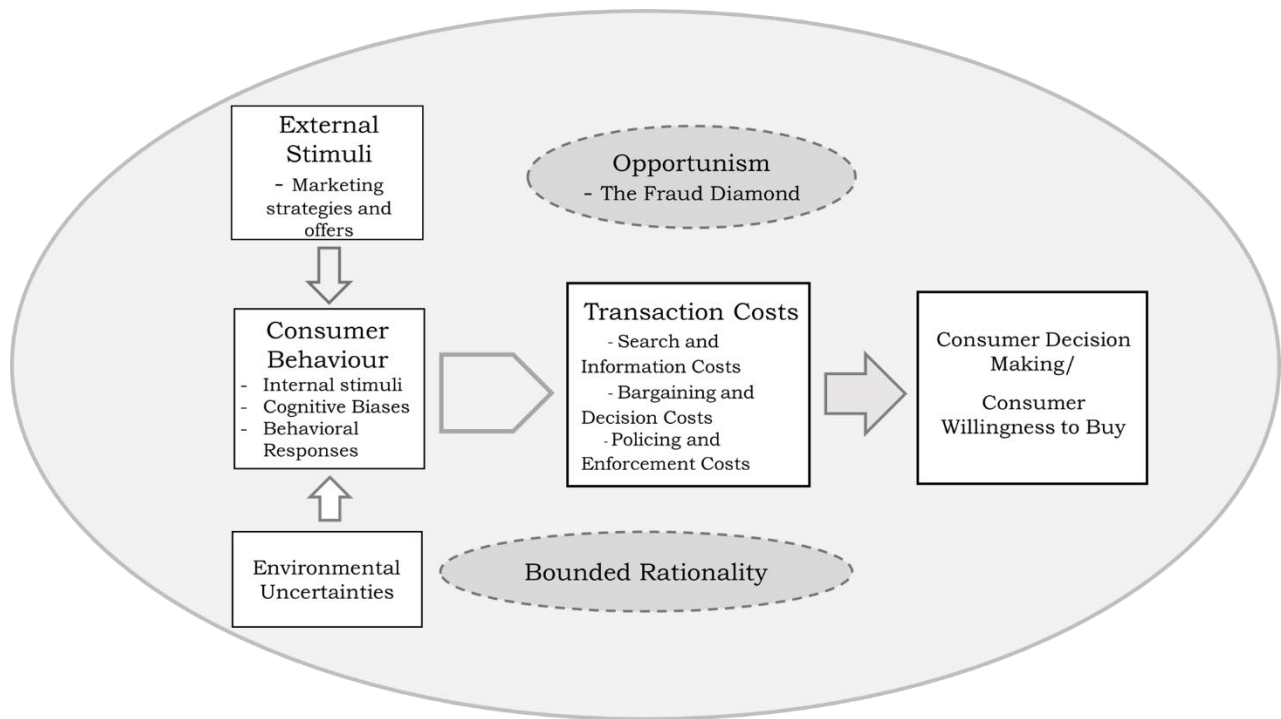


Figure 1: Consumer Decision-Making: Transaction Cost Approach

Cognitive Biases, Cyber Frauds and Decision-Making

The soaring number of cyber fraud cases during COVID-19 pandemic is corresponded to the substantial increase in internet access. The pandemic lockdowns have also stimulated online purchase as a substitute of brick-and-mortar shopping. According to Global Statshot Report, number of world internet users rose from 4.33 billion in July 2019 to 4.8 billion in July 2021 whereas retail e-commerce sales increased from 3.5 trillion in 2019 to 4.2 trillion in 2020 (Statista, 2021). Losses reported from cyber frauds include money, personal identity and financial information thefts for conducting fraud transactions. Besides the significantly larger quantity of e-commerce transactions, scammers strategically attract victims by using “too-good-to-be-true” offers. Cyber fraudsters pretend to be online merchants by using various methods, e.g., creating fake websites, then making them more approachable than the real one does, and launching new sales posts in social media platforms. Therefore, those fake websites, posts or other forms of media for approaching potential cyber victims also affect consumers’ attitudes towards products and impact decision making psychologically.

The influence of online offers, as the external inputs, and emotion on consumer decision-making contradicts rationality assumption in classical economic theory, indicating individual’s limited rationality. The bounded rationality explains individual’s decision-making process in which to satisfice rather than optimize. As rationality is bounded and time for decision-making is limited, individual’s decision-making exposes to cognitive biases.

One of the psychological explanations for cyber shopping victimisation is the comparatively low cognitive ability (Judges, Gallant, Yang and Lee, 2017). Cognitive biases, referring to a systematic or non-random deviation from rational decision-making (Blanco, 2017), distort individual’s critical thinking. These biases also impact human’s memory and attention problems since cognitive biases is a cause of selective perception. Moreover, in all stages of individual’s information seeking, some cognitive biases obviously influence judgement and decision-making, resulting in failure to obtain the right information and misinterpretation (Behimehr and Jamali, 2020). With a variety of product choices and offers in online platform, individuals’ decision-making is influenced by cognitive biases, leading to more possibilities to be victimised to cyber frauds.

Transaction Costs as the Factors Accelerating Cyber Frauds

The recent drastic increase in e-commerce as a result of technological progress and in travel restrictions during COVID-19 pandemic era becomes a main factor inducing cyber fraud cases. The growth in online commerce is explained by the rise of contract establishments between physically unknown parties, and implicit willingness to take risks for being scammed. A key factor explaining this phenomenon is lower transaction costs for both parties in making online contracts. Moreover, transaction costs for victims of cyber frauds to get money back are high while transaction costs of fraudster to successfully earn the money without being arrested are comparatively lower.

Defined as a key factor for decision-making, transaction costs can be categorized as search and information costs, bargaining and decision costs and policing and enforcement costs. These types of costs become lower, so that consumers can obtain information with not only in a lower money cost, but also in a lower opportunity cost because data can be accessed simply using a fingertip.

Search and Information Cost

For online buyers, cost of information of products sold online becomes considerably lower than information acquired by walking through brick-and-mortar stores. With internet communication advancement, people can reduce both costs of observing prices and time cost (Pereira, 2005). As consumers consider time as one of the most influential factors, time saving is a key benefit to increase satisfaction and to bring about decision-making on buying products from online stores (Vasić, Kilibarda and Kaurin; 2019). Likewise, consumers are likely to expose more information for online purchase, and alter price search behaviour. Price dispersion and more price competitiveness signify a higher degree of competitive market environment. Even though target consumers possess different motivations, perceived opportunity costs and benefits,

they enjoy more ability to perceive a better value from online shopping, followed by a higher tendency to make decision on online purchase (Vrânceanu, Țuclea and Tigu; 2020).

However, currently lower search and information costs not only give benefits to consumers to access and enjoy the online commerce channels, but allow cyber fraudsters to access their victims more easily. Those scammers frequently deceive victims by creating fake sales offers and posts in order to obtain money or for identity theft. Lower search and information costs provides both benefits and disadvantages to consumers. On the other hand, online channels expand opportunities for fraudsters to illegally exploit victims for money and personal information cheats.

Bargaining and Decision Costs

E-marketplace provides more efficient exchanges between buyers and sellers, with significantly lower explicit and opportunity costs whereas the internet communication evidently reduces bargaining costs because it allows a variety of communication channels in much more flexible time. Recently, many online retailers are open for price negotiation as costs of bargaining is less than profit margins gained from sales (Jindal and Newberry, 2015). Furthermore, internet network communication plays a key role in minimising barriers to entry for both buy-side and sell-side and facilitating flows of knowledge and information. A higher degree of competition is followed by more substitutes in the market, and pressures sellers to offer more competitive prices. Because customers, as buyers, can access numerous merchants in e-marketplace and at the same time, can share information with other buyers (Levy and Gvili, 2020). Internet and social media communication help online shoppers enjoy those benefits and lower bargaining and decision costs. Therefore, bargaining and decision costs become lower for shopping online.

Policing and Enforcement Costs

As e-commerce is open for all parties, there is not only a recent dramatic rise in business volume, but also a substantial increase in cyber frauds. Fueled by COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and surge of unemployment, online shopping scams have increased sharply. Fake websites or fake ads displayed on the genuine websites and social media applications are frequently launched or posted in order to lure customer victims. According to Federal Trade Commission (2021), there were 1.5 million more, or 45 percent rise of, identity theft and fraud cases in 2020, compared to the previous year. Online shopping fraudsters usually lure victims by applying psychological tricks then motivating customer victims to make decisions to purchase and pay money or make an instant money transfer. Personal identities are often stolen by using the fake online payment process. For this reason, the drive by psychological persuasion outweighs policing and enforcement costs, making consumers more easily to fall victim to cyber frauds.

As scammers can target thousands of victims at the same time and commit cyber frauds remotely, getting those culprits caught and reimburse the victims' money are in a complex legal process. Hence, scammers consider themselves possessing a higher possibility to commit successful cyber frauds and identity thefts. This explains why increasing number of cyber fraud cases contradicts percentage of victims getting money back.

Besides psychological tricks used by scammers causing the underestimation of cyber fraud risks, the long and complicated process of recovering lost money, with merely up to moderate level of possibility to get all cheated money back, is a factor affecting the rising cyber scam cases and losses. The lower possibilities for cyber fraud victims to recover the lost money, the greater opportunities for scammers to enjoy the victims' cheated assets. Even though policing and enforcement costs are not lower, whereas there exists a higher risk of scams, the attractive online stores, with variety of product choices, low search and bargaining costs, obviously outweigh the cyber fraud possibilities, and implicitly bring consumers to make purchases.

Factors Affecting Transaction Costs: Costs of Cyber Fraud Analysis

Transaction costs play the key role in explaining why cyber fraud cases are in an increasing trend. Fraudsters are opportunistic and driven by expected financial gains while some online shoppers potentially fall victim to cyber scams because of bounded rationality.

Online Shoppers' Bounded Rationality and Cyber Frauds

According to behavioural economic theory, human's decision-making capacity is limited because of imperfect information in a limited time. Therefore, human deviate from optimal decision to cognitive biases and bounded rationality. Decision-making is influenced by other factors and surrounding environment. Emotion also plays a crucial role in individual's judgment and choices (e.g., Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003; Lerner, Li, Valdesolo and Kassam, 2015). Businesses can make use of human's cognitive biases by implementing marketing strategies to stimulate consumer needs, boost sales and profits. E-commerce retailers utilize cognitive biases to influence online consumer behaviour and decision making.

With cognitive biases and bounded rationality, cyber shoppers are open for visual stimuli and offers that cause their decision-making change to a more driven choice implicitly created by sellers. Fraudsters also take advantage of the biases in consumer decision making by posting too-good-to-be-true offers, incredibly good deals and high discounts, to attract victims. Scammers often limit time accepting fake business offers in order to urge target victims to make decisions. Hence, bounded rationality is crucial for analysing consumer behaviour and decision-making. As bounded rationality is a source of increasing transaction costs nowadays, it is also widely used to lure target customers and to impact their behaviour. Online buyers have to be aware of human's bounded rationality in order to minimise the cognitive biases for optimal decisions.

Opportunism

Digital technology facilitates business expansion to online platforms, where buyers and sellers are in different physical locations. Likewise, e-commerce is an exchange platform

between online buyers and sellers, who are provided asymmetric information. For these reasons, both parties possess a proper level of motivation to be opportunistic.

Buyer's opportunistic behaviour in online purchase

As product items cannot be seen, handed in and inspected before making decision to purchase, buyers can take advantage by making complaints about the product items and services. These claims are for either compensations, or product returns, both legitimate and illegitimate purposes. Legitimate reasons causing complaints include perceived dissatisfaction, need fulfilment problems, non-competitive price and change mind. Internal drivers determining buyer behaviour in legitimate complaints are, for example, variety seeking, self-monitoring, morality, perceived uniqueness and impulsiveness (Pei and Paswan, 2018). The magnitude of each factor is associated with each person's buying purposes and characteristics.

The online remote commerce also causes the emergence of motivation in opportunistic behaviour. Some internal drivers for opportunistic behaviour on buyer side are similar to those impacting legitimate complaints. Opportunistic behaviour is mainly driven by internal stimuli; immorality and self-monitoring, resulting in deteriorating profits and probably increasing losses, as measured by direct financial costs and opportunity costs for both parties (Pei and Paswan, 2018). Buyer's opportunistic behaviour is different across reference groups and likely to be accelerated by a higher level of Machiavellianism. Mitigation of the opportunistic behaviour and claims is to give reasonable compensation, and to avoid "too much highly" tolerant attitude platform (Liu, Zhou, Yu and Zhao, 2013). Therefore, asymmetric information existing in both parties in the online commerce causes a higher likeliness for opportunistic behaviour on buyers' side.

Seller Opportunism and Cyber Fraud Possibility

As cyber scammers often lure online buyers in various ways, and typically use genuinely existing information; e.g., product pictures, popular brands and social media platforms. Then

online fraudsters mix that information with the fake websites or posts to make them look similar to the genuine ones.

Information asymmetry is also a crucial factor explaining opportunism on seller's side, potentially leading to frauds. Even genuine online sellers can trick customers by displaying information resulting in misinterpretation of products and other offers (Kauffman and Wood, 2000). As cyberspace opens for worldwide communication with a low cost, scammers are motivated for infidelity and opportunism.

The Fraud Diamond for Fraud Behaviour Explanation

Factors explaining how people decide to commit frauds is illustrated by The Fraud Diamond, detection analysis of fraudulent behaviour. The four elements of The Fraud Diamond are incentives, pressures or motivations, opportunity, rationalization and capability to commit frauds (Wolfe and Hermanson, 2004). The Fraud Diamond is illustrated in Figure 2.

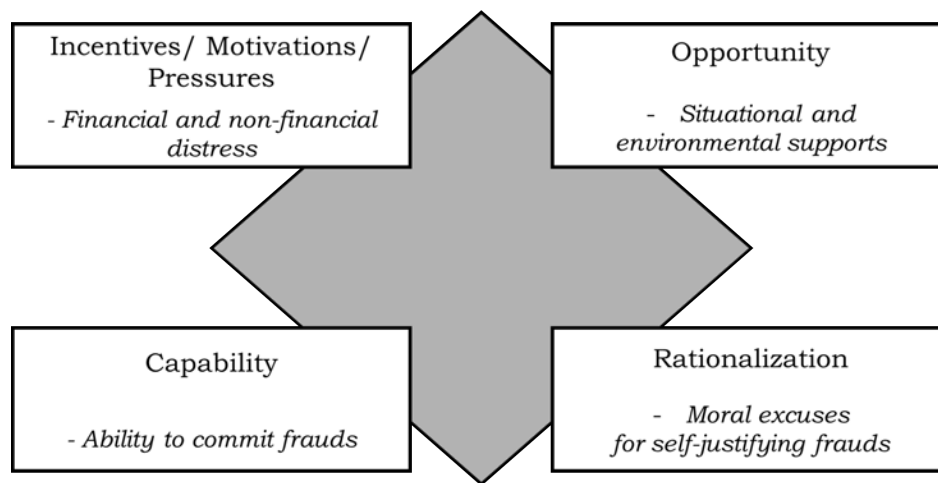


Figure 2: The Fraud Diamond

According to Fraud Diamond Theory, scammers are motivated to take advantage of information asymmetry in the market for benefits, e.g., financial gains and manipulations. The sharp economic slowdown from COVID-19 pandemic pushes people into financial difficulties. With the available gaps, people are likely to commit financial crimes and become fraudsters.

Opportunism can occur without financial distress (Kelly and Hartley, 2010; Imagbe, Abiloro and Saheed, 2019). Those scammers fabricate moral excuses for self-justifying frauds. The rationalization affects culprit's view as they justify themselves honest, even when engaging in immoral conducts. The fraud actions cannot be completed without the essential traits for committing frauds, capacity, the Fraud Diamond's forth element. Capability refers to the ability to commit frauds. Cyber scammers generally use well-planned and sophisticated strategies for deception. Capability is a crucial determinant for committing large-scale and long-term frauds (Albrecht, Williams and Wernz, 1995; Abdullahi and Mansor, 2015). Furthermore, capability is closely related to rationalization and each of these elements' strength influences the other (Wilson, 2004; Abdullahi and Mansor, 2015).

Empirical studies evidently confirmed the influence of the Fraud Diamond in explaining fraudsters' process of thoughts in committing frauds. As mentioned, the drive to commit frauds does not need to involve financial issues. Greed is one of the motivations of committing frauds for individuals. However, indebtedness from various causes; e.g., personal and family financial struggling, gambling, health related problems, still plays a key role in fraud motivation (Abdullahi and Mansor, 2015). Likewise, financial difficulties are still a cause of motivation to fraud commitment. The higher level of debt, the greater motivation to commit frauds (Achmad and Pamungkas, 2018). The key factor driving fraud motivation is the lack of personal ethics (Sorunke, 2020).

Following motivation, perceived opportunity is a crucial element affecting decision making to conduct frauds. Opportunity is defined as a situation that allows frauds to be occurred. A weak control and less monitoring accelerate individual's opportunity and behaviour to commit frauds (Ozili, 2015; Umar, Partahi and Purba, 2020). Perceived opportunity arises when fraudsters observe an opportunity and in a position which they can take advantage from earning trust and are less likely to become a suspect in fraudulent actions (Crassey, 1953; Abdullahi, Mansor, Nuhu, 2015).

Together with a high propensity to rationalize, individuals are driven to commit fraudulent behaviour (Desai, 2020). Individuals' propensity to commit frauds is determined by

ethical value and personal circumstances. People who decide to commit frauds possess a particular mindset for justifying or excusing their fraudulent acts (Hooper and Pornelli, 2010; Abdullahi, Mansor, Nuhu, 2015). Thus, the magnitudes of fraud opportunity and rationalization also depend on individual's ethics.

As mentioned, rationalization is closely associated with capability. Capability to commit frauds includes possessing technical know-how, necessary skills and abilities to perform fraudulent actions. In addition, position of the fraudsters also determines the decision to commit financial crimes. Wolfe and Hermanson (2004) highlighted capability as the factor supporting motivation, opportunity and rationalization of frauds. Without capability, individuals are not able to commit frauds (Abdullahi and Mansor, 2015). It implies that when individuals possess fraud capability, they also commit a greater possibility for fraudulent actions, especially when individuals are immoral and lack of ethical values.

Environmental Uncertainties

There are some types of uncertainties inevitably burdened by online buyers. These buyer uncertainties are derived from information asymmetry faced by online buyers and divided into product uncertainties and seller uncertainties (Dimoka, Hong, Pavlou, 2012). Product uncertainty is defined as buyer's inability to evaluate true physical characteristics or how that product will perform. Because of the popularity and higher frequency of online shopping, consumers make decisions to purchase the products even in more expensive prices. It implies that only online displays and digital information transfers are sufficient for consumer decision-making to purchase (Kim and Krishnan, 2015). For online sellers, clear visual product descriptions, third party assurances, well-designed websites, and customer services can significantly reduce product uncertainties (Kim and Mugwe, 2017).

Seller uncertainties perceived by customers are derived from information asymmetry. These uncertainties come from customer's inability to evaluate sellers because of the misinterpretation of sellers' characteristics, leading to adverse selection, and worriedness in seller opportunism, as defined moral hazard. Furthermore, buyer concerns also include

information privacy and information security (Pavlou, Liang and Xue, 2007; Dimoka, Hong, Pavlou, 2012).

Technological disruption, together with COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, has spurred online commerce activities. This results in people's familiarity with online shopping, followed by a higher level in social presence when buyers perceive more resemblance between purchasing from physical stores and online channels. Social presence is influenced by trust, perceived usefulness, as well as privacy concerns (Pavlou, Liang and Xue, 2007; Botha and Reyneke, 2016). Thus, uncertainties, in consumer buyers' view, are reduced or minimised when they receive sufficient product information displayed on well-made websites. When buyers are attracted by very cheap prices and other offers in fake websites or fake posts in genuine social media channels launched by scammers, those consumers have a tendency to fall victim to cyber scams.

Since environmental uncertainties are mainly caused by asymmetric information, online shoppers are more likely to burden a higher degree of uncertainties in decision-making than those purchasing products from brick-and-mortar stores.

Finding Solution to Cyber Frauds: Rational Decision Making, Cybersecurity and Education

From analysis in previous sections, scammers are motivated to commit frauds because cyberspace facilitates communication to a large number of target victims with a lower cost than to perpetrate frauds using physical channels. The increasingly popular internet use depicts the upward trend in cyber scams. Therefore, it is necessary for consumers, as online shoppers, to minimise the risk of cyber frauds by performing rational decision making. Rational choice should be assessed regarding analytic decision practice (Betsch and Held, 2011). Information search on seller, websites, products and service offers before analytic rational assessment help minimise the risks of scams. Also, individuals have to be aware of possibilities of identity theft

by keeping personal information in secure and not allowing sensitive personal information disclosure to non-accredited sources or agents.

To mitigate cyber scam problems, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, government should consider cyber fraud a critical issue since it hinders e-commerce development. Cyber frauds and identity theft problems require collaboration between related parties; law enforcement units, businesses, individuals and countries. Government should develop and implement intrusion and detection techniques to protect cyber scams (Prasanthi and Ishwarya, 2015). Also, collaboration between government and private sector is necessary for developing up-to-date personal information protection measures as well as training law enforcement agencies regarding cyber scam prevention (Cassim, 2015; Biswal and Pani, 2020). For long-term cyber fraud prevention, government has to educate people, as internet users and online shoppers, in staying vigilant, which is the ways to protect personal information, and methods for detecting cyber frauds in order to avoid the consequent financial losses. Nevertheless, both prevention and detection measures are crucial to minimise risk from cyber frauds and the costs incurred from the losses (Chersan, 2009).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The economic recession, caused by current COVID-19 pandemic, results in people's economic problems, e.g., decrease in income and unemployment, and the surge of cyber frauds. According to behavioural analysis using Transaction cost economics and the Fraud Diamond, scammers are sufficiently motivated to commit fraudulent behaviour because of the expected financial gains, comparing to the costs from the risk incurred. For this reason, individuals, as online shoppers, and policymakers need to undertake both cyber fraud detection and prevention. Consumers, attracted by emotional appealing strategies, possibly fall victim to cyber frauds because of bounded rationality while the opposite party, either genuine sellers or cyber fraudsters, are motivated to be opportunistic. To minimise risk from cyber frauds and identity theft, online shoppers need to apply rational thinking and analysis in considering offers and decision making. Fraud prevention program should be developed in order to improve people's, as

consumers', cognitive functioning. Policymakers need to include cyber scams in an urgent issue for consumer protection and preventing future losses. To reduce fraudulent behaviour in the society, government has to treat cyber frauds as a threat and tackle scams seriously. For long-term development of e-commerce, collaboration between government and private sector is needed, in order to improve cybersecurity and educate people, as the internet users. The collaboration can lead to awareness of cyber frauds, and law enforcement agencies, and cyber fraud prevention.

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Abstract

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Household Income in Thailand

Yuthapoom Thanakijborisut*

This article analyzes the changes in experienced household income associated with the coronavirus pandemic in Thailand. Necessarily, the government must balance the health and social effects by announcing the partial lockdown on a nationwide and restrictions of many economic activities against the economic costs, especially the burdens on household income. In real sectors, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased by 15.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 during the pandemic. Labours are much more strongly affected by losing the job from business in lockdown. Thus, households with high dependence on labour income would experience an enormous real income shock that would clearly risk of household income. The study will be collected the samples from secondary data and analyzes by using an ordinary least square (OLS) to descriptive statistics and regression analysis for estimation. The result shows that the impacts in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic would reduce approximately 13.34 percent on average household income.

Keyword: Household Income, COVID-19 Pandemic, Thailand

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Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Household Income in Thailand

Introduction

Thailand has recently faced social shocks from the COVID-19 pandemic since the first quarter of 2020. The first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in January 2020 from Chinese tourists (The Ministry of Public Health, 2021). Afterward, the number of cases of COVID-19 in Thailand increased continuously. The government announced the state of emergency around the end of March 2020 and the partial lockdown on a nationwide for contained the virus in responding to the spread of the pandemic. For public health measures, the number of confirmed cases had low growth rates and the percentage of deaths was less than 2 percent (United Nations, 2020) that can control the situation properly in the second quarter of 2020. Essentially, public health measures to control the pandemic consist of the nightly curfew across Bangkok and some provinces; restrictions in the mass movement of people between provinces especially on public holidays; restrictions on all international commercial flights; foreigners 14-day quarantine for all travelers entering in Thailand; closing schools and moving to distance learning; ban alcohol sales; encouraging work from home and temporary closure of public venues and establishments during COVID-19 lockdown.

For this reason, economic activities had an impact immediately on both household and business sectors. The most critical economic impact was the reducing revenues of businesses. Many workers were on furloughs and firings that directly affected their income and household income, numerously. For instance, Hu, S. and Zhang, Y. (2021) demonstrated that the business sectors facing uncertainty from the COVID-19 pandemic suffered more in the uncertainty avoidance environment. Ceballos, F., Kannan, S. and Kramer, B. (2020) found that farmers in India also lost their income during lockdown because restricted to sell their products into the market. In contrast, Diao, X. and Mahrt, K. (2020), in Myanmar, household income of non-agricultural in the richest less affected for this pandemic. At the same time, Arndt, C., et al. (2020) discovered that labours with low education affected their regular sources of income by more than about 40 percent. Differ from labours with high education hurt much smaller around 26 percent in South Africa. Figari and Fiorio (2020) tested the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on household income in the poorest decreased around 40 percent in Italy. Similarly, Kansime, K.M., et al. (2021) income of poor households in Kenya were more affected by the pandemic. Beirne, K., et al., (2020) found household income reduced by more than 20 percent in Ireland.

This crisis impacts on the real sectors that effect on the ability of businesses to employ workers losing the job and income. During the COVID-19 pandemic in the second quarter of

2020, economic indicators of Thailand in real sectors decreased considerably, compared to a fall in the first quarter of 2020. For instance,¹ Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased by 15.8 percent with the total value of 2,348,899 million baht in the second quarter of 2020. Private Consumption declined around 4.8 percent with the value of 1,344,041 million baht. Change in exports of goods and services in this quarter reduced approximately 26.3 percent with the value of 1,362,257 million baht. The average wage was around 8,141 baht. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate could not survey from National Statistical Office due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, consumers concerned about economic uncertainty resulted on household spending cautiously. The most impact of reducing consumption² in this crisis, Firstly, Recreation and Entertainment decreased by 53.2 percent with the total values 37,460 million baht because government lottery was suspended to three times. Sports activities, e.g., Thai boxing, football, cockfighting and native activities, were also suspended to prevent the pandemic. Secondly, Transport Services declined around 53.1 percent since compared to a drop in the previous quarter with the total values 35,634 million baht, because a passenger was restricted the travel in accordance with all international and domestic commercial flights in the land, water, and air transports, respectively. As a consequence of restrictions for foreigners travelling to Thailand and disallowance on dining in restaurants, shopping malls and entertainment venues, the spending of Restaurants and Hotels reduced approximately 47.0 percent with the total values 143,636 million baht as the total values of the first quarter were 209,221 million baht. In addition, households were cautious in less consumption such as luxury goods, motor vehicles and clothing. The Purchase of Vehicles and Clothing decreased by 42.9 and 21.6 percent since compared to a fall in the previous quarter with the total values 54,656 and 51,098 million baht, respectively. Lastly, Alcoholic Beverages declined around 16.9 percent with the value of 29,795 million baht. This was attributable to public health measures to control the pandemic to ban alcohol sales throughout the whole nation.

Therefore, government supported household purchasing power on necessary goods by stimulus package following as; Fiscal policy approved for this crisis including; health spending; assistance for agriculturists, workers and entrepreneurs affected by a pandemic; support for individuals and businesses through soft loans and reducing water and electricity bills. Social security contribution, workers who are in Social Security Fund gained a reduction in the rate of contributions for 3 months. Businesses received wage subsidies up to 15,000 per month for nearly 1.2 million workers who are members of the Social Security Office. Education Fund using 2,000 million baht helped the cost of food for students. On the one hand, Monetary policy, the Bank of Thailand (BOT) reduced the policy interest rate to 0.75 percent. Similarly, BOT supported business sectors including soft loans to financial institutions and relaxation of

¹ Source of economic indicators from Moody's Analytics.

² These data are collected from Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council.

repayment conditions for debtors in business and household. In the financial market, BOT established the corporate bond stabilization fund and provided liquidity for mutual funds.

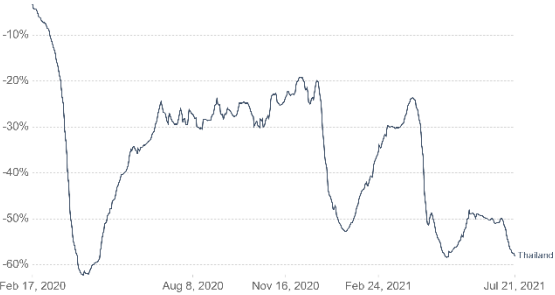
1.1 Change visitors in retail recreation



1.2 Change visitors in grocery stores



1.3 Change visitors in transit



1.4 Change visitors in parks



1.5 Change workplace visitors

1.6 Change residential duration covid

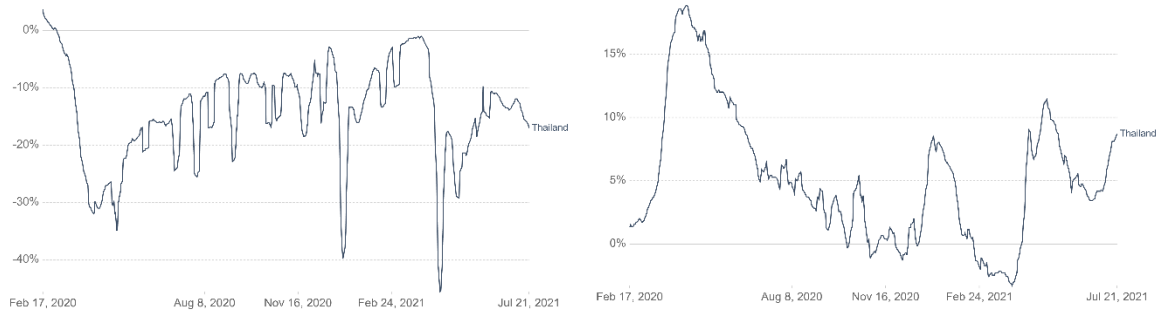


Figure 1. Impact of pandemic in locations into 6 types of places during lockdown in Thailand

The study also uses information³ to investigate the intensity of pandemic disruption. Figure 1. shows the impact of the pandemic in locations into 6 types of places which observe a decrease at all of these locations, except residential duration. Firstly, the number of consumers to places of retail and recreation has changed relative to the period before the pandemic. This includes places such as restaurants, cafes, shopping centers, fitness centers, beauty salons, massage and spa services, museums, libraries and movie theaters. During lockdown in March and April 2020, people in Thailand dropped around 40 percent at places of retail and recreation. A similar finding for the number of consumers to grocery and pharmacy stores has changed by 20 percent decreasingly before the pandemic. These places include grocery markets, farmer markets, specialty food shops, drug stores, and pharmacies. Thirdly, this graph shows that the number of visitors to transit stations consisting of public transport, bus, train stations and airports spent 60 percent less time at transportation. In the same way as the number of visitors to parks and outdoor spaces such as local parks, public gardens, public beaches, amusement parks and zoos decreased more than approximately 50 percent in April. According to government advised that the government officer employees and people should work from home during a pandemic. The number of workers to workplaces reduced around 30 – 35 percent while they spent almost 20 percent more time in residential areas. These were attributable to the government policies to control the pandemic that was restricted in the mass movement of people and disrupted economic activities in Thailand. Addressing this issue, this study analyzes the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on household income. For testing, the COVID-19 is measured in the first wave of the pandemic in Thailand.

³ COVID-19 Community Mobility Report, Google Mobility Trends

Model Framework

This section presents a model for the empirical specification employed in this study. This model is mainly tested the impact of household income which has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand. Specifically, the estimation can be written as a log-linear function as:

$$\log HH_Income_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Covid_t + \beta_n \log X_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (1)$$

where HH_Income_t is the logarithm of an average household income in period t. β_0 is constant term of a function. $Covid_t$ is a key explanatory variable affecting the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand. This estimation measures the COVID-19 pandemic as a dummy variable defined by 1 in the second quarter of 2020 and 0 otherwise. X_t shows a vector of control variables in period t which include the logarithm of average household consumption, consumer price index, labour cost index and value of export. ε_t is the error term in regression. The error term is a random variable with a mean of zero and a constant variance and uncorrelated with each other. In an empirical study, the list of all variables is used for estimates in an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression.

Data Source

This paper uses statistical sources from the Bank of Thailand that samples are collected from the first quarter of 2011 to the first quarter of 2021 including 41 observations. The paper constructs the gross product domestic per number of households in Thailand as a proxy for the average household income as the dependent variable. For the explanatory variables, firstly, Covid is a dummy variable that is defined by 1 that the expected coefficient of the Covid variable decreases on average household income. Secondly, average household consumption is the ratio of the private final consumption expenditure per number of households. This is expected that average household income increases with higher consumption. Next, the consumer price index is reflected the cost of living. The high cost of living will lead to a decline on average household income. Then, labour cost index measures a change in the price of labour services (wage) resulting from labour market. Wage is defined as the wage in cash, received by employees and can be paid on a monthly, weekly, daily or hourly basis. This study expects that the coefficient of the labour cost index increases on average household income. Finally, export is the value of exports of goods and services that are relative importance to production for domestic firms. The rise of export will lead to a high of employment and income of labour. This helps the firms and households that have accumulated wealth and income. The expected coefficient of the export variable increases on average household income.

Table 1. Summary statistics

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Max	Min	Obs.
Average Household Income (<i>HH_INCOME</i>)	115,241.3	7,803.24	130,313.2	101,291.1	41
COVID-19 in the second quarter of 2020 (<i>Covid</i>)	0.02	0.16	1	0	41
Average Household Consumption (<i>HH_CONSUM</i>)	59,940.90	3,073.41	65,858.11	53,065.70	41
Consumer Price Index (<i>CPI</i>)	97.30	2.49	100.36	89.95	41
Labour Cost Index (<i>LCI</i>)	104.62	12.68	127.25	73.94	41
Value of Export (<i>Export</i>)	1,796,402.00	146,229.90	2,047,089.00	1,421,010.00	41

Note: The units of *HH_INCOME* and *HH_CONSUM* variables are shown in units of baht. The unit of *Export* is shown in unit of millions of baht. *CPI* and *LCI* variables are shown in units of index.

Table 1. presents summary statistics of the key variables. For instance, the mean of quarterly household income per capita is approximately 115,241.30 baht or on a monthly 38,413.77 baht. In addition, the maximum and minimum of quarterly household income per capita are 130,313.20 and 101,291.10 baht, respectively. The mean of quarterly household consumption per capita is about 59,940.90 baht or on a monthly 19,980.30 baht. During the study, the average of consumer price index and labour cost index are around 97.30 and 104.63, respectively. Lastly, the value of export is roughly 1,796,402 million baht.

Empirical Results

Table 2. presents the estimated results of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on average household income. Of special interest, this table shows that the estimated effects of the Covid pandemic on average household income are statistically significant and the coefficients decrease for all equations of estimations. Considering the last column of Table 2., the analysis studies a log-linear function following equation (1). The coefficient of Covid is -0.1334 and statistically significant on average household income. This value reduces significantly after a vector of control variables (*X*) are added to estimation. The result shows that the COVID-19 pandemic in the second quarter of 2020 would reduce approximately 13.34 percent on average household income in Thailand. This result is consistent with the range of impact of household

income of other studies e.g., Figari and Fiorio (2020) for Italy, Beirne, K., et al., (2020) for Ireland and Kansime, K.M., et al. (2021) for Kenya. Alternatively, no adding export variable, the coefficient of Covid would decline almost 20 percent on average household income. This implies that if there is no export or the value of decreasing exports, the reduction on average household income will be even more during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. The estimated results of average household income against the COVID-19

<i>Variables</i>	<i>logHH INCOME</i>				
	11.6547**				7.7336**
<i>Constant</i>	*	2.3686	2.1746	9.5101***	*
	(0.0106)	(1.7514)	(1.6932)	(2.6940)	2.5771
			-0.0972	-0.1934**	
<i>Covid</i>	-0.0899	-0.0957*	*	*	-0.1334**
	(0.0680)	(0.0522)	(0.0504)	(0.0536)	(0.0544)
		0.8442**			0.5940**
<i>logHH_CONSUM</i>		*	0.4683*	0.6552***	*
		(0.1592)	(0.2466)	(0.2266)	(0.2107)
<i>logCPI</i>			0.9457*	-1.6201*	-1.9035**
			(0.4852)	(0.8926)	(0.8318)
					0.5187**
<i>logLCI</i>				0.5075***	*
				(0.1546)	(0.1429)
<i>logExport</i>					0.2565**
					(0.0960)
R-squared	0.0429	0.4499	0.5011	0.6161	0.6812
Observations	41	41	41	41	41

Note: Standard errors in parentheses *** P<0.01, ** P<0.05, * P<0.1

In the last column, average household consumption per capita is positive and statistically significant on average household income. The coefficient implies that a 1 percent increase in household consumption would raise 0.59 percent on average household income. The labour cost index and the value of export positively effect on average household income. The result shows that the labour cost index and value of export would increase approximately 0.52 and 0.26 percent on average household income, respectively. On the contrary, the consumer price index negatively effects on average household income. That is, average household income would reduce around 1.90 percent since facing a higher level of the consumer price index.

Table 3. The estimated results of average household income against the second wave of the COVID-19

<i>Variables</i>	<i>logHH Income</i>				
<i>Constant</i>	11.6508 (0.0104)	2.8272 (1.8048)	2.6768 (1.7576)	5.8526** (2.7147)	5.0255** (2.2014)
<i>Covid2</i>	0.0773 (0.0675)	0.0367 (0.0545)	0.0370 (0.0530)	0.0389 (0.0521)	0.0944** (0.0439)
<i>logHH_Consum</i>		0.8021*** (0.1641)	0.4402* (0.2573)	0.5238* (0.2589)	0.4589** (0.2097)
<i>logCPI</i>			0.9026* (0.5031)	-0.217188 (0.8886)	-1.3205* (0.7581)
<i>logLCI</i>				0.2221 (0.1464)	0.3758*** (0.1230)
<i>logExport</i>					0.4082*** (0.0898)
R-squared	0.0318	0.3997	0.4465	0.4790	0.6689
Observations	42	42	42	42	42

Note: Standard errors in parentheses *** P<0.01, ** P<0.05, * P<0.1

Moreover, Table 3 shows of average household income against the second wave of the COVID-19. This estimation measures the COVID-19 pandemic in the second wave as a dummy variable defined by 1 in the first quarter of 2021 and 0 otherwise. The coefficients (*Covid2*) of the Covid pandemic increase for all equations. These results mean that the COVID-19 pandemic in the second wave would raise on average household income in Thailand. The relation of *Covid2* specification did not move in a set direction among average household income. These results suggest that the second wave of the COVID-19 may be less impact on average household income than the first wave. Because the second wave started on December 2020 at the Central Shrimp Market in Samut Sakhon. Among the new cases were almost all migrant workers living in Samut Sakhon and the eastern region. Including, public health measures had effective action to control the COVID-19 and slow down by the end of January. Therefore, the second wave of the Covid-19 does not impact on average household income.

Conclusion

This paper studies the impacts of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic on household income. The study finds that Thailand recently faced the COVID-19 pandemic would reduce approximately 13.34 percent on average household income. However, the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic was not a condition for reducing on average household income. Moreover,

exports of goods and services extremely diminished in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic would decline around 20 percent on average household income. Meanwhile, the intensifying COVID-19 pandemic across the world, several countries have suspended the import with the situation to ensure business operation continuity. Likewise, the Thai economy is substantially dependent on exports and tourism. Hence, this was attributable to effects in decreasing revenues for businesses and income for households directly. According to the results, the impact of reducing on household income is not quite high. This infers that Thailand successfully controls the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic due to a strong public health system and a strong collaboration with the private sectors in businesses and people with announced the state of emergency for nightly curfew, partial lockdown and restrictions.

The limitations of this study are that the estimating impacts on household income just collected the data during the first and second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interesting case, the third wave (April of 2021) hugely contributed to the worst wave of infections but the study could not currently collect with the quarterly secondary data for estimations. For specification, further research should analyze the empirical estimations by using the data in the micro level. The study will use a questionnaire that the samples are collected from random respondents in urban and rural in Thailand. However, at this moment, the COVID pandemic in Thailand is battling its third of worst wave since the start of the pandemic during the first quarter of 2020. The new COVID clusters, the delta variant of the coronavirus will continue to spread rapidly and beat out other strains. The government announced the state of emergency and public health measures to control the pandemic currently again. The effect of lockdown, social distancing and several restrictions did not allow face-to-face interviews. Therefore, this study analyzed the empirical specification by using the data in the macro level, instead.

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Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Business : Consumer Confidence

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact and induced an excessive loss in human life, and political, social and economic activities globally. One of the critical consequences from the crisis is the widespread business disturbance. The disruption tends have an effect not only on business confidence but also considerably on consumer confidence, which represents as an indicator for the forthcoming development of households' consumption and saving and reflects on the prospect economic situation. This paper aims to study how the pandemic have had an impact on the consumer confidence in Thailand by observing Thailand Consumer Confidence Index (CCI) and to explore substantial factors, which relates to COVID-19 pandemic, affecting it. This paper presents an evidence of a relationship between the consumer confidence and the pandemic-related factors; Google search volume index on 'Coronavirus-19' in Thai language (GSVI_Co), Google search volume index on 'Covid-19 Vaccine' in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) and Google search volume index on 'Lockdown in Thailand'(GSVI_Lock), which is a noteworthy dataset from an important digital tool, Google Trend, by the analysis of multiple linear regression model with ordinary least square (OLS) basis.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, consumer confidence, digital tool, Google Trend

1. Introduction

As the confirm cases of COVID-19 was primarily detected in December 2019, loss in human life and an effect on political, social and economic activities, soon later, occurred all over the world. The consequences of the pandemic have approached the society and the economy in overall. This led to a dramatic shift in the business sector especially in terms of the consumer behaviour (Donthu and Gustafsson, 2020). Studies reveal that the consumer concern correlated with COVID-19 have been high (Bui et. Al, 2021) and this expressively affects behaviour and confidence of consumer in overall (Numerator Intelligence, 2021). The consumer confidence is one of the main indicators denoting the overall well-being of the economy. When people feel assured on the economy stability, this leads to a drive in consumer spending activities and the economic activity in general. Teresiene (2021) stated that the studies of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business and consumer segment are still deficient and suggested a consumer confidence index presenting as a consumer indicator affected by the pandemic to be considered. Some interesting pandemic-related factors, presenting as independent variables, were taken into account.

Nowadays, Google Trend digital tool was used to obtain some significant pseudo-real time simulating data including the dataset related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic activity (Woloszko, 2020). Rogers (2016) simplified the Google Trend data as an unbiased sample of the Google search data, which denotes level of interest in a specific issue from around the world.

Consequently, the propose of this paper is to explore the impact of pandemic on consumer confidence in Thailand by the observation in Thailand Consumer Confidence Index (CCI) and to examine its substantial pandemic-related factors based on Google Trend search data known as Google search volume index. The independent variables in this paper are Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language, Google

search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language and Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data and Variable Definition

The dataset used in this study as presented in Table 1 is secondary time series data. The data analytics is on monthly statistics covering the time period of January 2020 to July 2021 with 19 observations. This is limited to the fact that the initial detection of COVID-19 cases started in December 2019. Variables observed consist of dependent variable, which is Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) obtained from National Statistical Office, and independent variables comprising of Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co), Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) and Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ (GSVI_Lock) from Google Trend.

Table 1: Variable abbreviation, variable description and sources of data.

Abbreviation	Description	Source of Data
Dependent Variable		
CCI	Thailand Consumer Confidence Index	National Statistical Office
Independent Variables		
GSVI_Co	Google Search Volume Index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai Language	Google Trend
GSVI_Vac	Google Search Volume Index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai Language	
GSVI_Lock	Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’	

2.2 Process of the Study

This paper explores how the pandemic have had an impact on the consumer confidence in Thailand and the analysis of this study is essentially on multiple linear regression model with a fundamental of ordinary least square (OLS), estimating relationship between Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI), a dependent variable, and a set of Google search volume indexes on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language, on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language and on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ staging as independent variables. However, the paper is divided into 4 parts of study as followed.

Part 1: Dynamic of Thailand consumer confidence index by observing the impact of the pandemic on it.

Part 2: Descriptive statistics of all variables in the study including maximum, minimum, mean, median and standard deviation, and graphs displaying their dynamics.

Part 3: Simple correlation analysis by considering the correlation matrix, which discloses relationship between each 2 variables, and taking into account the correlation coefficient. The variables are considered to have a perfect linear relationship when the correlation coefficient is 1. There is no correlation between any 2 variables when the correlation coefficient is 0 and a perfectly correlated negative relationship is stated when the correlation coefficient is at -1.

Part 4: Multiple linear regression model by estimating relationship between a dependent variable and 2 or more independent variables.

$$CCI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GSVI_Co + \beta_2 GSVI_Vac + \beta_3 GSVI_Lock + \varepsilon$$

Whereas:	CCI	represents Thailand Consumer Confidence Index
	GSVI_Co	represents Google Search Volume Index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai Language
	GSVI_Vac	represents Google Search Volume Index

on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai Language

GSVI_Lock represents Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’

β_0 represents a coefficient, which is a constant

ε represents an error term, which also known

as

residual or disturbance

3. Results

3.1 Dynamic of Thailand Consumer Confidence Index

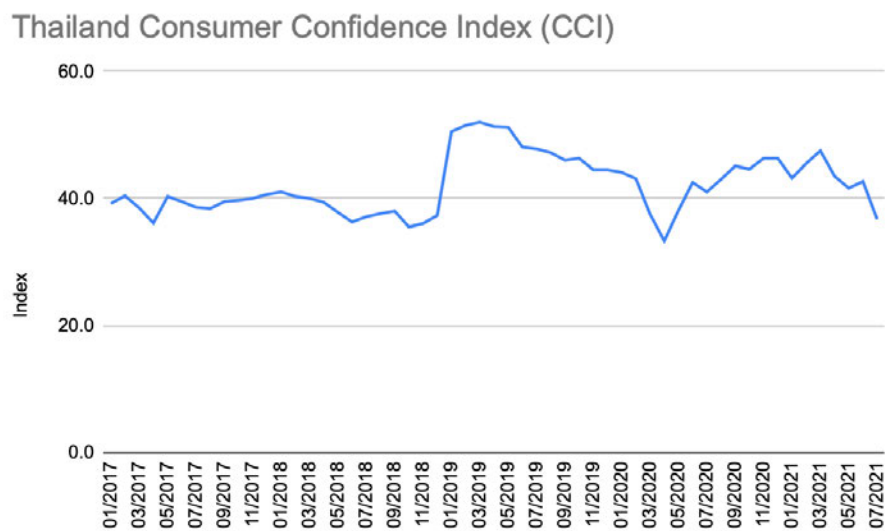


Figure 1: Dynamic of Thailand consumer confidence index covering the time period of January, 2017 to July, 2021.

Figure 1 displays dynamic of Thailand consumer confidence index from January, 2017 to July, 2021 covering the time before and during the pandemic to explore how the

pandemic have had an impact on the consumer confidence index. Surveying the consumer confidence index before the pandemic started to get detected in December, 2019, the figure shows a steady dynamic with the index ranging between 35.5 and 41.0 and a swift increase, which rapidly brought the index up to 50.5 in January, 2019. This tends to be a consequence of an expansion of the national demand and growth in Thai economy, which led to a decrease in the inflation rate and in the employment rate in the country. Moreover, consumer purchasing power in every type of spending and the agriculture situation grows encouragingly (Bank of Thailand, 2019).

Nevertheless, after the detected cases of COVID-19 started in 2019, the consumer confidence index gradually fell and reached the lowest point in years at 33.3. This is because of the concern in consumers on the stability of Thai politic situation and Thai economy, and also the uncertainty of the global economy (The Center for Economic and Business Forecasting, 2020). Due to a recovering in COVID-19 situation in Thailand, the consumer confidence was risen though it did not reach the peak as before.

The situation of Thai consumer confidence was worsen again in January, 2021 when the confirmed cases returned. This led to a fall of consumer confidence index to 43.1. Later, the government brought up some policy supporting the economy recovery projects; for example, ‘We Win’, ‘We Love Each Other’, ‘We Travel Together’, and the COVID-19 vaccine issue was started to be considered. Therefore, the index was increased slightly.

As the pandemic tends to be worse in March 2021 according to , the consumer confidence has obviously fallen ever since and finally reached 36.7 in July 2021 (Trade Policy and Strategy Office, 2021). The COVID-19 situation evidently has an impact on consumers as they tends to feel the uncertainty towards the economy situation consequently.

3.2 Results of Descriptive Statistics

By exploring the descriptive statistics for all variables, Table 2 displays that the dataset contains 19 observations on a monthly basis covering time period of 19

months from January 2020 to July 2021. The result on the dependent variable, which is Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI), shows that the mean of the data is at 42.4, the median is at 43.4, the maximum is at 47.5, the minimum is at 33.3 and the standard deviation is at 3.683.

Looking at the independent variables, Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co) presents the mean at 36.579, the median at 17, the maximum at 100, the minimum at 1 and the standard deviation at 32.399. Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) demonstrates the mean at 24.316, the median at 11, the maximum at 100, the minimum at 0 and the standard deviation at 30.927. Moreover, Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ (GSVI_Lock) expresses the mean at 26.052, the median at 14, the maximum at 78, the minimum at 0 and the standard deviation at 26.307.

Figure 2 exhibits the dynamic of all variables whereas Figure 3 shows a comparison of the dynamic of 3 independent variables in the study. Interestingly, in 2020, the dynamic of Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co) and Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ (GSVI_Lock) display similarity.

Table 2: Results of descriptive statistics for all variables.

Variables	CCI	GSVI_Co	GSVI_Vac	GSVI_Lock
Mean	42.4	36.579	24.316	26.052
Median	43.1	17	11	14
Maximum	47.5	100	100	78
Minimum	33.3	1	0	0
Standard Deviation	3.683	32.399	30.927	26.307
Observation	19	19	19	19

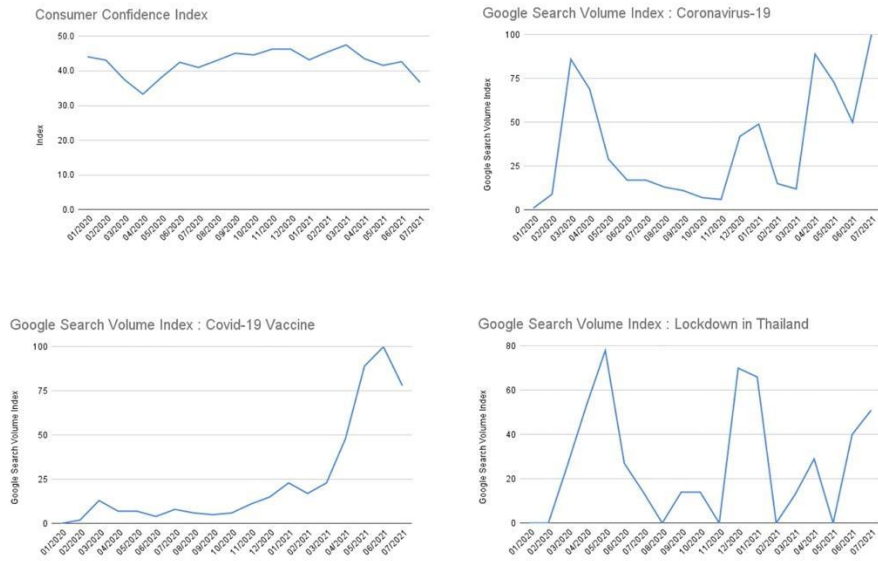


Figure 2: Dynamics of all variables covering time period of January, 2009 to July, 2021.

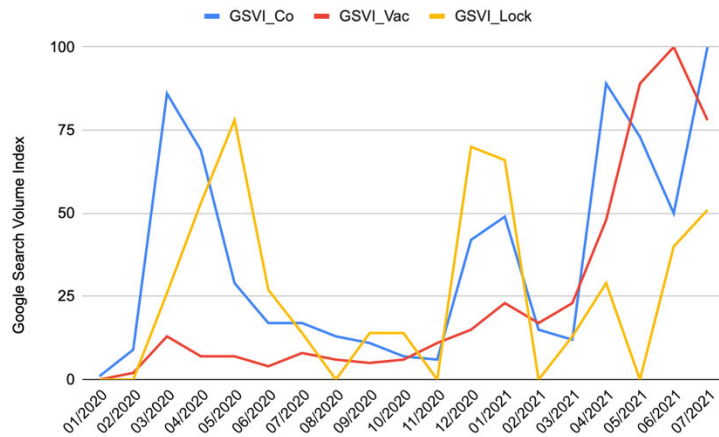


Figure 3: Dynamics of independent variables; Google search volume indexes on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language, on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language and on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’, covering time period of January, 2009 to July, 2021.

3.3 Results from Simple Correlation Analysis

Simple correlation analysis is constructed to explore the correlation between 2

variables where 6 pairs of variables are surveyed in this study. Figure 4 presents the scatter plots of each pair of variables and according to the correlation matrix as shown in Table 3, the Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI), which is a dependent variable in the study, and Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co) have a correlation coefficient at -0.613 implying that their relationship is negatively correlated. The correlation coefficient between Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) and Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) is at -0.136 indicating a negative correlation. The equivalent result occurs with Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) and Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ (GSVI_Lock) presenting a negative correlation with a correlation coefficient at -0.429.

Considering relationship among the independent variables, conversely, it is stated in the correlation matrix that the correlation coefficient between Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co) and Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) is at 0.622 referring that the variables are positively correlated. Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co) and Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ (GSVI_Lock) are also positively correlation at the correlation coefficient at 0.457. In addition, Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) have a positive correlation with Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ (GSVI_Lock) as the correlation coefficient shown at 0.125.

Table 3: Results from simple correlation analysis of all variables.

Variable	CCI	GSVI_Co	GSVI_Vac	GSVI_Lock
CCI	1.000			
GSVI_Co	-0.613	1.000		
GSVI_Vac	-0.136	0.622	1.000	
GSVI_Lock	-0.429	0.457	0.125	1.000

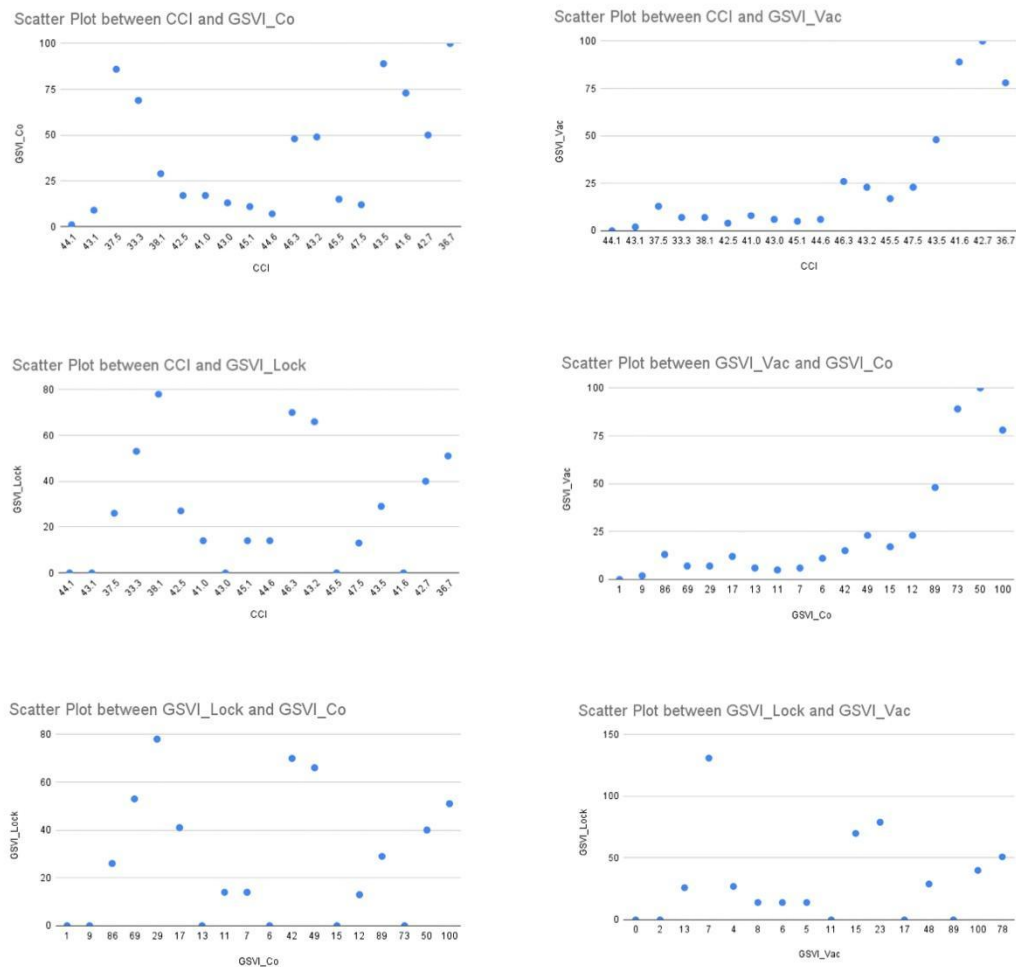


Figure 4: Scatter plots showing the relationship between each 2 variables.

3.4 Results from Multiple Linear Regression Model

Table 4 demonstrates results from the analysis of multiple linear regression model with the use of ordinary least square (OLS) approach investigating relationship between a dependent variable, Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI), and 3 pandemic-related independent variables Google search volume indexes on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co), Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) and Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’(GSVI_Lock).

Independent variables that have an impact on Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI), the dependent variable, at 1 per cent level of statistical significance are

Google search volume indexes on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co) and Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) while Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’(GSVI_Lock) affects Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) positively.

The coefficient of determination (R-Squared or r^2), a useful index suggesting the confidence level of the multiple regression model, is at 0.785 whereas the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjust R-Squared or \bar{r}^{-2}) is at 0.695.

Table 4: Results from multiple linear regression model with Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) presenting as a dependent variable

Variable	OLS Coefficients
GSVI_Co	-0.080***
GSVI_Vac	0.085***
GSVI_Lock	0.011*
R-Squared	0.785
Adjust R-Squared	0.695
F-Statistic	8.755
Durbin-Watson	0.988

Note: *, **, *** indicate non statistically significant, statistically significant at 5 per cent level and statistically significant at 1 per cent level respectively.

4. Conclusion

The consumer confidence is considered as one of the key economic indicators displaying the overall well-being of the economy. When people feel confident on the economy stability, this leads to consumer spending activities and the economic activity movement. The paper explored the dynamic of Thailand consumer confidence index from January, 2017 to July, 2021 covering the time period before and during the pandemic. The evidence reveals how the pandemic have had an impact on the consumer confidence index. The dynamic shows a significant drop of Thailand consumer confidence index

after the

COVID-19 pandemic hit the nation. Therefore, the challenge for the government is to bring back the confidence of the consumer to gain their assurance on spending activities so that the overall economy of the country continues.

Furthermore, the study also presents the pandemic-related factors based on an important digital tool, Google Trend, that have an impact on Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) are determined as followed:

5.1 Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language (GSVI_Co) has a negative impact on Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) at a statistical significance level of 0.01. The finding denotes that when Google search volume index on ‘Coronavirus-19’ in Thai language increases, consumer confidence index decreases.

5.2 Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language (GSVI_Vac) has a positive impact on Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI) at a statistical significance level of 0.01. This implies that when Google search volume index on ‘Covid-19 Vaccine’ in Thai language rises, consumer confidence index ascends.

5.3 Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’(GSVI_Lock) has a positive impact on Thailand consumer confidence index (CCI). The outcome suggests that when Google search volume index on ‘Lockdown in Thailand’ grows, consumer confidence index also increases.

The conclusion reveals a relationship between Thailand consumer confidence index and the pandemic-related factors, which are Google search volume indexes based on Google Trend dataset.

Limitation and Recommendation

1. Considering the consumer confidence index as the principal dependent variable in this study, the further study may be interested in taking into account other indexes or business indicators related to the consumer behaviour as a dependent variable instead.

2. With the limitation on dataset consisting of 19 observations covering the time period of January 2020 to July 2021 due to the fact that the COVID-19 cases were primarily detected in December 2019, the further study with more observation will be able to construct a more accurate multiple regression model.
3. This study deliberates on 3 pandemic-related variables; Google search volume indexes attained from Google Trend. The further study may contemplate other Google search volume indexes or other pandemic-related variables from Google Trend or from other alternative digital sources.

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After earning the first degree in Mathematical Statistics from Chulalongkorn University, Pittaya Klongkratoke goes on to further my study in Modelling and Management of Risk at Brunel University, England, and later on in Quantitative Finance at University of Glasgow, Scotland. After graduation in 2016, she started a career in academic as a lecturer in Business Economics at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University where she got partially funded for PhD from. In addition to her primary job function, she is also in a research team at Green-Smart Energy Technology Research Unit. Her research interest is in Business Economics, Mathematical Economics and Econometrics.

**Micro Influencers and Online Marketing:
Small Enterprises' Way to Survive in New Normal**

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Abstract

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted people's behavior to the New Normal. People cannot spend their time outside their house. Due to the COVID-19 preventive measures by the government, small enterprises have to changed their business models to online marketing. This academic article aimed to study models of online marketing through a micro influencer, case study of small enterprises in Chiang Mai. It was found that online marketing is suitable for the current situation because its expenses is low budget, however, it can spread information to target customers quickly. This result could be one of solutions for small enterprises to overcome problems, and get through the COVID-19 crisis.

Keyword: Micro Influencer, Online Marketing, Small Enterprises', New Normal

Introduction

The society in current era is in the move to become digital society. Internet has influenced and created changes to the society in every aspect; way of living, community, including communication. The way of human's communication has become the communication via social media which allows every person living in the society can interact using network without having to meet in person like in the past. Social Media is a digital media that being used to communicate with one another within social network through websites and applications on any media connected to the internet. These platforms focus on allowing users to be both message sender and receiver collaboratively in producing their own content creatively (User-Generate Content: UGC) in the form of data, pictures and audios. With this attribute, it encourages many companies, from international to local companies, to be interested

more in online marketing through social media. The reason to that is because it can publish fast and uses less budget for marketing than other communication channels and reaches a lot of message receivers in short time. Phillips (2015) mentioned that the beginning of smart phones allowed people to access internet anywhere at any time. That has influenced on the consumers' behaviors to change from buying goods from shops or shopping centers to buying via online media. Moreover, with the effects from the pandemic of COVID-19, there has been a change to the form of people's ways of living, transforming to new normal era. Therefore, people cannot continue living their lives outside their accommodations, including the measures announced by the government. These matters have affected greatly on society and world economics.

Chiang Mai is the second capital city of Thailand. In 2019 economic value of Chiang Mai was 231,726 million baht. Chiang Mai's main revenue was from tourism and other products consists of tourist attractions, accommodation, restaurants, goods and services, and beauty business. It generated approximately 102,300 million baht or 43 percent of total economic value of the province (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020). Small enterprises are keeping these businesses running. Owners of these business who are local people and operate their business for long time has inevitably affected from the pandemics. Their financial budget is not stable and powerful as same as large investors. Therefore, these businesses have to adapt for survival during the pandemics. First of all, the small enterprises need to reduce their expense. A model that small enterprises has widely adopted is online marketing. In 2018 – 2019, online marketing was only an add-on for online marketing because business have not had the impact of the crisis. However, since the new normal model has been developed, many enterprises need to consider their business model to online marketing for survival. They have changed a selling platform by selling products online instead of a physical store and launched advertising campaigns through an internet. This information relates to the total number of expenses for advertising campaigns through various media in Thailand from 2019- 2020, internet was the only media that its budget had been increasing (Infoquest, 2021), as shown in figure 1.

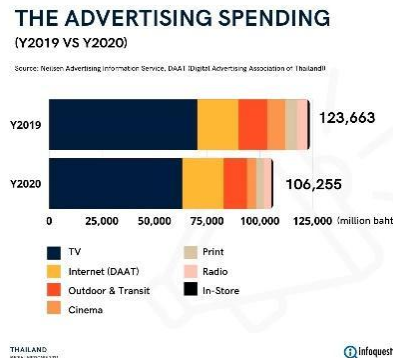


Figure 1 - total advertising spending via media in Thailand from 2019-2020

In the past online marketing was mainly used for advertising through social media. It occasionally used to communicate with consumers. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged, small enterprises have to changed their business models quickly. One of strategies that is widely used is influencer marketing, especially in countries that social media can get through easily. According to survey result by Nielsen company, it showed that Asia-pacific consumers seem to trust in advertising campaigns through Facebook rather than old way advertising campaigns (Nielsen, 2015). Furthermore, as a result of social phenomena resulting from rapidly information technology transformation, consumers has preferred to communicate via social media channels because it is convenience if they have a smartphone. There are various social networking platforms can choose for communication. The social networking platform that is the most popular is Facebook; an American online social media application that people around the world use the most, according to the survey of We are social which is research company about online social media advertising from United Kingdom. It was stated that there are 2.7 billion of Facebook users all over the world. Only in Thailand there are already 51 million accounts of Facebook users. A very interesting statistics found that 55 million of Thai people use social media which equals to 78.7% of the whole national population. The usage of social

media lasts 2 hours and 48 minutes and 51.4% of the time was about influencers. Moreover, it was found that, in 2021, the number of mobile phone users was decreased 3.6 million compared to 2020, but the number of social media users was increased for 3 million users. These numbers are interesting because during the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, everything stopped including the limitation of travelling and work from home policy (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021). Those has affected people to express behavior of using social media more. Besides, consumers' behavior in Generation Z which are people who use social media actively and do not rely on advertising via media. They use internet to look for the required information first before making decision of purchase. The consumers in New Normal era tend to believe in advice given from other people even they do not know those people in person. They tend to believe that influencers have knowledge or some expertise in particular matters even though it is meant for advertising to sell products/services for the brands. Influencers, therefore, become marketing tool that a brand must seek for and use them as a channel to reach their consumers.

As described earlier, it impacts on small enterprises in Chiang Mai to widespread adoption of micro influencer for marketing campaigns. Since they have feature to create content that can be particularly used for advertising/ public relation of products/services of theirs rapidly with low cost. Furthermore, influencers have their friends and their own followers, so when they present any information, this group of people will acknowledge and feel interested and then choose to use that product/service. These are new to all small enterprises. In case there is a study, focused on this exact matter, the result of the study can be used to be a guideline for applying online marketing for enterprises. It will be considered one of the solutions to allow them to continue their business through obstacles and this crisis.

Research Objective

To study the form of online marketing through micro influencers, case study of small enterprises in Chiang Mai.

Literature Review

For this study, the author studied concepts, theories, and related researches as follow.

1. Concept of Online Social Media

Online social media means media or digital tools that are used to be a way to communicate among people in the society for conveying content and share information as the message sender wants to deliver. This makes the communication easier and reaches more message receivers in shorter time. It can be done by one on one or in public which is considers a two-way communication, everyone can be both message sender and receiver at the same time.

2. Concept of Influencer

Influencer refers to a famous person and a regular person who has some expertise with credibility or interest in particular matter. An influencer must also have ability to convince people's minds to have mutual opinion and to further create belief and form of behavior. They are also people who have a lot of followers on online social media which can come from many reasons such as the liking of appearance, capability, style of dressing and way of living until they become acceptable and have people respects and consider them a role model. They must have some expertise in some specific field or gained some experiences which will affect their credibility to customers such as singers, athletes or beauty experts. Moreover, they must be creative and capable of creating content of their interest or expertise into an interesting form and creatively new. This will draw more followers and motivate the consumers to acknowledge and accept that which leads to decision making at the end. For micro influencer refers to a group of influencers that have followers from 5,00 to 100,000 followers. Influencer is a person who possess the image of being knowledgeable and an expert of what they are good at. That is the reason why they look reliable. Even this group of people does not

have a lot of followers, they can influence and convince people to buy more. They are quite a specific target group; therefore, they are suitable for the use of creating engagement for the product and stimulate the customers to buy.

3. Concept of consumer behavior responses towards communication via online social media

Consumer behavior responses can be divided into 2 forms: expression towards the communication on online social media and expression through behavior by making decision of purchase. The expression towards the communication on online social media was measured from numbers of follows, likes, comments and shares of posts that influencers who used their own account to post digital photos/ videos of attach related link that leads to the product/service. For expression through behavior by making decision of purchase, it can be measured from the purchases and consuming of goods/services as the influencers suggested

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework can be summarized as shown in figure 2.

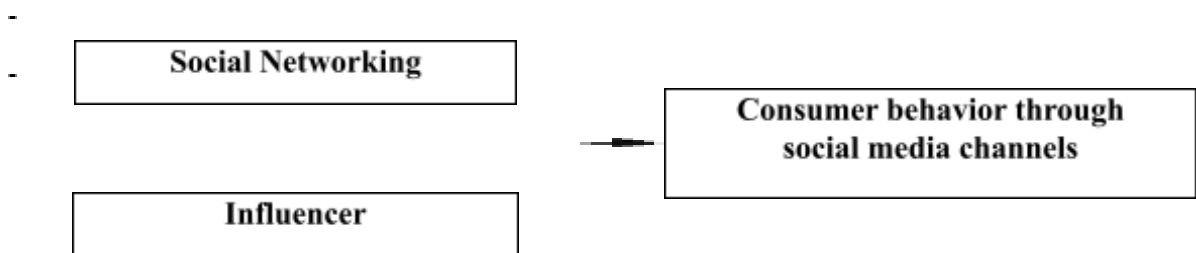


Figure 2 – conceptual framework

Research Methods

This research is qualitative research. The results will be further developed and refer it to small enterprises in Chiang Mai. It will be use as a guideline for creating an online marketing strategy through micro influencers.

Data collection and Sampling

Primary data

The sample group is from 15 people who is an owner or representative of small enterprises in Chiang Mai and use micro influencers as an online marketing strategy for at least 1 year. There are 3 groups of tourism-related small enterprises were selected by purposive sampling as following.

1. Tourist attraction and restaurant entrepreneurs, total in five persons
2. Health and beauty entrepreneurs. (Beauty clinic and spa), total in five persons
3. Consumer goods entrepreneurs. (Clothes and foods), total in five persons

Secondary data

Document resources are collected from academic publications, textbooks, and research papers, including online information related to online marketing through social media using micro influencer as a messenger. Data, including texts, photos, videos and other related to marketing activities from Facebook fanpage of sample was also collected.

Research instrument

The research used in-depth interview semi-structure. It consists of 3 main questions which divided into 3 parts as following

1. Overview of marketing communication through social media
2. Online marketing with micro influencers strategy through Facebook Fanpage
3. Future trends for creating online marketing strategy and other recommendations.

Time scope

The process of survey and data collecting was from November 2020 – April 2021.

Data analysis and presentation

Qualitative data analysis was used for classifying the data, finding relationship, summarizing, and presenting it in the form of descriptive analysis.

Research Result

The result can be reported as follows

1. Overview of marketing communication through social media: all these small enterprises have directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It caused them to adjust their model of business operation to keep the business running. Previously the small enterprises had operated smoothly because consumers had purchasing power. Online marketing strategies were used to promote new activities or products/services by posting texts and uploading photo of the products. All these activities were done by small enterprise's staffs which is a defensive strategy. There are many social network channels that was used in early stage such as Facebook Fanpage, Line, Twitter, YouTube, and Tiktok. After testing many social network channels for a while, every small enterprise decided to create their own Facebook Fanpage. The main reason to that is the enterprise's owners can assign staffs or representatives to manage the Fanpage and also can monitor it on their own. Moreover, it is able to organize and easily access the data. The owners can log in using multiple devices at the same time. However, other social network channels cannot respond to this requirement as same as Facebook Fanpage.

When the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic had become worse, revenue from walk-in customers had decreased or could not operate marketing activities due to COVID-19 control and preventive measures. Small enterprises had recognized that old-way marketing strategies could not help their business survives. The number of customers dropped to 60 – 80 percent comparing to the previous year. Though they had reduced some expenses, they could not continue their business till the situation is better and back to the normal. Therefore, online marketing with micro influencers strategy was chose to solve this problem.

2. Online marketing with micro influencers strategy through Facebook Fanpage: the main reason for small enterprises to do that is to save a budget. Micro influencers are not only to communicate with customers but also to participate with the small enterprises to create online marketing strategies. It includes consultation, advices, and statistical analysis. The information from micro influencers would be beneficial for future marketing plans in case the situation becomes worse. Moreover, some micro influencers have characteristics that people can relate to. They also have the expertise or are locals in specific areas who can easily build trust with local people because now target customer group has changed from international tourists to local people. Therefore, small enterprises can rely on followers of influencers to acknowledge their products/services instantly.

Recruiting the micro-influencers specific selects female micro-influencers as they can communicate with target customers of every gender. They must have great personalities, be professional in acting and speaking, and have unique characteristics that people easily recognize. The forms that the micro influencers use for marketing communication can be divided as following

2.1 Pictures with captions by posting their photos with products/services with description below. They would also attach hashtags of the products or the name of the enterprise. Their strategy is to present by creating real-life situations, sharing photos of their daily life and activities during free time to deliver happy and fun vibe. It stimulates the interest of the followers.

2.2 Video with messages attached. This is the strategy of presenting the product by giving their reviews to the products or their recommendations of places. The micro influencer will act in front of the camera. This suits beauty and tourism enterprises.

2.3 Live broadcasting. It is the strategy that relies on personal capabilities of the influencers to make people interested in and follow up which leads to making decision of buying such goods or products.

About the channel of presenting the products, normally would be the broadcast on official Facebook Fanpage of the small enterprise or micro influencer's personal

Facebook Account with hashtag of products/services of the enterprise. The frequency of posting is according to the agreement with the enterprise. Each day the influencer must post at least 2-3 activities. According to the agreement, they will count the time of posting products/services of influencers that have been hired, including the time that the product appeared in the pictures with also locations and hashtags. Moreover, there will set requirement for indicators from the numbers of likes, comments, shares, and link to products/services from the account of the influencer.

3. Even though the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic is getting better, overall of economics in the global and Thailand are still struggling and preparing back to the normal situation. Moreover, as a result of new normal situation, people's shopping lifestyle has changed. Every small enterprise has same opinions that trend for online marketing with micro influencers strategy is very important for business in future because micro influencers can support both promoting business, and giving advising about business operation in online platforms, including using social media techniques which is the key to continue business.

Conclusion

Choosing online marketing with micro influencer strategy through Facebook Fanpage channel for small enterprises is a suitable channel for marketing communication in current era because Facebook is a popular online social media and has the highest number of users including in Thailand. The users can connect from computer, other internet connecting devices, and smart phones which are easy for everyone to access.

Model of communication through Facebook Fanpage will use photos, videos, texts, live broadcasting including using hastags for products and services. Micro influencers create contents by giving information, knowledge and showing how to use products and service via posting. The frequency of posting is at least 2-3 activities per day with relatable language that easily to understand for consumers. It likes a

recommendation from friends rather than a serious sale presentation. They are considered as a relatable people since they are from the same hometown as the products/services are in. Moreover, micro influencers have their followers as a fundamental source of acknowledgement.

Marketing activities that make communication success is customer engagement such as likes, shares, and comments, videos watching and using hashtags. These activities can reach to target customers widely and rapidly, including choosing to buy products and services and creating its awareness. Beside, previously regular customers who have engagement with enterprises were in Generation X (age over 41 years old). However, after taking online marketing seriously, it found that regular customers are from Generation Y (age between 18 – 40 years old) and the number of them is increasing. They have skills to use social media for communication and can receive small enterprise's information via micro influencers then deciding to purchase products and services. It assumes that Generation Y customers can replace the old regular customers and will become new regular customers in the future.

Most small enterprises have acknowledged and planned to develop their business for online marketing, but it is just an intermediate-range plan, approximately 3-5 years. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these small enterprises have to change their plan suddenly. Overall income after using online marketing has just 20 - 30 percent compared to the previous year's income. When considering with an aspect of consumers' purchasing power has reduced before using online marketing, income was just zero, it could say that these small enterprises use the right solution for business struggles and let them further continue through the crisis.

Discussion and Suggestions

Using online marketing in the past was mainly indicated by likes, shares and comments. Nowadays, however, using hashtags aims to conclude contents and stories or articles related to it into one category for the convenience of finding information when needed from the users. It is only putting in some words or sentences that are related to what they need to communicate after “#”. Having hashtags on Facebook can

communicate with mass consumers. It agrees to the statistics that stated clearly that there are 2.7 billion of Facebook users and 51 million of that are in Thailand. Same to the research result of Ritveeradej (2019) who clearly stated that to use online social media that has a lot of users will increase market opportunity for the products/services. Communicating with pictures makes people understand and acknowledge the products/services that are being presented without limitations of time and place. Using videos and live broadcasting allows people to watch the micro influencers closely which creates trust and reliability that the products/services truly work.

Evaluation of Facebook Fanpage success is not only from increasing of revenue but also from engagement data via Facebook statistics report device such as likes, shares, comments, clicks of seeing photo and video view counting. The engagement will show the efficiency of contents and advertising that can reach the target group or not and how it attracts the target group. The user can check the previous result of evaluation. This statistic data is reliable and help to indicate that micro influencers are a part of successful in using online marketing. Consumer behavior in current era has started to no trust in marketing communication via celebrities and actors/actress who are employed to promote such products and services obviously. They do not even use the products and services in real life. However, some micro influencers, who actually use the products and services themselves .give its information and help consumers make decision easily to purchase. According to Chayapatch (2019), she stated that using influencers to represent the products/services is a suitable way because consumers in the new era, especially Generation Z have confidence and focus on the significance of news and information more than other marketing communications. Furthermore, people who can be influencers can do it easily as online social media is open and equal when it comes to communication. Owners of the local products/services can hire influencers using less marketing budget but can reach to more receivers and widely than other marketing communications. This matter agrees to the study of Piromsuwan (2018) who has concluded that there are 3 forms of marketing communications: advertising,

public relation, and sale promotion. Using online social media can present pictures and messages. Furthermore, choosing female influencers succeeds more than using male influencers as they can present to message receivers in every gender. Moreover, they can make them convinced and buy the products/services.

Marketing communication via Facebook Fanpage has to rely on attractive digital photo with the interested caption to build more motivation for message receivers to understand and purchase products. Small enterprises have limitation at this point. Therefore, specific skills of micro influencers are needed. These points agree to the research result about marketing communication strategy by online influencers for café business of Udomsilpa (2014).

The payments that enterprises pay for influencers are divided into 3 forms.

1. Cash payment depends on the agreement and numbers of influencer's followers. Moreover, it is up to the form of product presentation. If the presentation is presented by video, its payment is the highest. The second to that is live broadcasting while posting pictures with captions gets lowest payment.

2. The benefit by receiving products or services from goods enterprises.

3. The mixed of (1) and (2) payment. It is a very popular method.

The research of Chotipan (2017) is clearly stated that local enterprises will choose to use micro influencers to present their products/services to decrease their marketing budget.

The result of this study is a fundamental study which collected data from 15 persons from small enterprises. It will benefit in academic which is using it for improving learning methods. There is interested information from national and international study. It found that a new career that may be popular after the COVID-19 pandemic is a content creator which an influence is a part of this career. If education institute can develop programs to produces graduates in this field, it will respond society's requirement or community in term of new generation of journalism in media transformation era.

For the suggestion of the research in the next step, compared study in many social networking platforms can genuinely use the result of the study. Small

enterprises could adopt the result of this study with their online marketing strategy because it could be a solution to overcome problems, and get through the COVID-19 crisis.

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Challenges in communication during COVID-19 crisis in Japan¹

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Abstract

Despite its image as world’s advanced economy as well as leader in disaster preparedness and management, Japan has been questioned on its performance to communicate COVID-19 crisis. This research is aimed to scrutinise challenges of COVID-19 communication in Japan from various approaches. This study conducted qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews. Eight key informants were interviewed in the research. Five of them are Japanese in Japan, two Thai informants in Thailand and one Thai informant in Japan. The interview was a communication part of the grand interview that was framed on situational analysis, impacts, policies, evaluation of the policies and practices implemented, challenges, pitfalls and recommendations that are related to COVID-19 responses in Japan. The analysis was conducted with the framework of effective and inclusive communication during crisis. Japan’s distinctive characteristics on culture and decentralisation are also considered. The findings suggested that if the central and local governments in Japan can find a mutual direction to make a communication framework to be clear, transparent and continual with the use of existing varied communication platforms, the communication during COVID-19 can be effective and resilient. However, the communication scheme has to be ensured to be inclusive as the study found that group of elders, women and migrant workers are still marginalised.

¹ The research was commissioned by the National Research Council of Thailand as a part of “COVID-19 Pandemic: Prevalence, impact, and government responses in Asia” Project.

Keywords: COVID-19, crisis, communication and Japan

Introduction

The coronavirus outbreak has created uncertainty, and disruption in the world. Despite its image as world's advanced economy as well as leader in disaster preparedness and management, Japan has been questioned on its performance to manage COVID-19 situation. In September 2021, the country's fifth wave was the most explosive yet and wreaked havoc on the nation's health care system. Health ministry data shows the daily tally routinely topped 20,000 and peaked over 25,000 in August 2021 (Osaki, 2021). Report on 1 September 2021, infections in Japan topped 1.5 million with 27 countries other than Japan reached the same situation that More and more people are testing positive, even in countries with high vaccination rates, as the Delta variant spreads globally (NHK World, 2021) Although Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games gathered praises and positive feedbacks, the game was rescheduled and held without spectators amid protests and opposition from local people with increased number of infections and delayed vaccine rollout. These can be seen as main factors that made the ratings of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga dropped to record lows in media polls and made him to decide to step down after a year that He navigated Japan through a foreign policy minefield, vaccine rollout and delayed Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Pandemic has brought challenges across sectors and nations. Communication continues to be a key for governments issuing vital information, keeping the public alert as well helps building trust and minimizing confusion. Communication approaches are varied internationally. Some focus on positives, emphasising a return to normality and solidarity to beat the virus, and others holding a negative focus on risks and costs. Given the need to mobilize the majority of people in prevention measures, facing this challenge is of the greatest importance (Wood, 2021)

Japanese government, however, has been criticized widely for its failure on communication with the lack of single and clear message, transparency and trustworthy

(Johnston, 2021; Snow, 2020). The transition of government's leader as well as unique characteristic in culture and decentralization of Japan are also important factors that accounted to 'Japan's way' of communication during the pandemic.

This research is aimed to scrutinise challenges of COVID-19 communication in Japan from various approaches. This study conducted qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews. The sampling selection is a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling method, relying on researchers' judgment of the informants' representatives. The purposive sampling method guarantees the heterogeneity of the sample in terms of age and occupation to better illustrate the public opinions (Bryman, 2001). While snowball sampling is commonly employed sampling method in qualitative research in which one interviewee gives the researchers the name of at least one more potential interviewee. That interviewee, in turn, provides the name of at least one more potential interviewee, and so on, with the sample growing like a rolling snowball if more than one referral per interviewee is provided (Kirchherr and Charles, 2018). The semi-structured interview is focused interview while still giving the investigator the autonomy to explore pertinent ideas that may come up in the course of the interview (Jamshed, 2014)

Eight key informants were interviewed in the research. All of them are experts in COVID-19 from five different areas; Public health, economy, communication, education and civil society. Five of them are Japanese in Japan, two Thai informants in Thailand and one Thai informant in Japan. The interview was a communication part of the grand interview that was framed on situational analysis, impacts, policies, evaluation of the policies and practices implemented, challenges, pitfalls and recommendations that are related to COVID-19 responses in Japan. The interviews had been conducted during 22 March 2021 until 9 July 2021. Seven interviews were conducted via Zoom Application and one interview was face-to-face interview.

Ad campaign critical of Japan's coronavirus response makes waves



The full-page ad by magazine publisher Takarajimasha, which ran in three national newspapers Tuesday morning, was a rare rebuke of the country's pandemic response by a private company. | TAKARAJIMASHA / VIA KYODO

Figure 1: A full-page advertisement campaign published on three national newspapers by a private company illustrating a dissatisfaction toward Suga's government in response to COVID-19. The government's unpreparedness is like rushing to the war with batons².

Effective and inclusive communication during COVID-19 crisis

Although communication is a key to tackle with the pandemic, it is hard to figure out how to communicate COVID-19 effectively. COVID-19 is not just a medical issue but also a social, economic and political issue. It is also complicated as the science about COVID-19 has been uncertain and evolving. Moreover, there are a range of communicators involved from international organizations, central governments, local governments, experts, journalists and individuals. Scholars and organizations, however, suggested some guidelines to communicate effectively and inclusively to ensure that messages will be delivered to all walks of life based on the concept of crisis communication.

² The picture appears in a news article. Japan Times. 2021. "Ad campaign critical of Japan's coronavirus response makes waves". 11 May at:

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/05/11/national/takarajimasha-coronavirus-advertisement/>

Communication experts from McKency and Company (Mendy, Stewart, and VanAkin, 2020) suggested that effective crisis communicators tend to do five things during COVID-19; 1) Give people what they need, when they need it; 2) Communicate clearly, simply, frequently; 3) Choose candor over charisma ; 4) Revitalize resilience; 5) Distill meaning from chaos. Among the suggested tips, combination with transparency, clarity and continuity seems to be the most important.

A group researchers from Department of Life Sciences Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Newman, Brossard and Howell, 2021) highlighted that public health messages must be clear, consistent and transparent, especially for issues that have high uncertainty, like COVID-19. The “so what” of the message has to feel relevant. They also suggested that to persuade people to change aspects of their daily lives during the pandemic the communicators should remember that it’s human nature to want to go along with social norms – people change their behavior and beliefs to better match what they perceive other people are doing, especially those they most identify with.

Anushka Singh (2021) from Boston University emphasised the Role Crisis Communicators in the COVID-19 pandemic that it is important to Make sure all communication efforts are consistent, clear, and continual. Leaders and communicators need to make the messaging as positive, reassuring, and hopeful as possible and remind their stakeholder groups of ways the organization has faced and overcome challenges in the past.

However, COVID-19 is exacerbating global inequalities and injustice. Marginalised groups such as people living with poverty, disabilities, social exclusion and digital gaps have got affected much more severe. Therefore, it is crucial to make sure that the communication during COVID-19 crisis spread the messages to everyone inclusively. Cordivano (2019) suggested the three principles of inclusive communication; Principle 1: Empathy (think about audience’s experiences and how language and communication can impact the way they absorb your message.); Principle 2: Culture (gives audience visibility and gives more authenticity to your communication.); Principle 3: Empowerment (Provide tools for inclusion and showcase role model behavior.)

In conclusion, to ensure effective communication during COVID-19 crisis, communicators have to communicate clearly, simply, frequently with transparency and inclusiveness to make sure that the messages got across to everyone.

Findings and discussions

Trust and leadership

Leader's personality is one of critical factors affecting the government's credibility toward the COVID-19 management. This is emphasised by the communication expert from a university in Japan in a personal interview. The informant stated that the communication made by Japanese government to the public in response to COVID-19 could considerably divided into two periods based on the leaders; Abe's administration and Suga's administration. Those periods were obviously different. During Abe's period, PM Abe at least showed his effort to do something in encountering with the outbreak. On the other hand, his successor, "PM Suga" took less actions leading to a low public trust. Most people did not believe in what the government had said.

Japan does not establish a COVID-19-centric agency. As the result, there is no specific agency responsible for providing COVID-19 information and having an exact schedule for press briefing; it instead depends on each local government in communicating to the people. In the meantime, the government also separately reports the COVID-19 situation. Consequently, there is no single message sent to the public. The media plays a significant role in collecting information from various sources causing the number of infested people reported by the news agencies to be different. Later on, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) will be the last agency to report the data. Due to the slower update from the government agency, most people prefer to get to a number of cases and COVID-related information from the media, such as NHK. After PM Abe stepped down due to his health condition, PM Suga took his post with the huge pressure in dealing with the unprecedented outbreak.

There is a distinct difference between the two administrations. PM Abe's government frequently gave a talk and answered questions from the media. This helped the public know the government's stands on handling with COVID-19 and it showed the power centralisation on the communication. On the other hand, PM Suga rarely showed up comparing with PM Abe. This

led the public to question about his leadership. As leader's personality and communication style have a huge impact amid the COVID-19 crisis, many media praise the communication made by the 'charismatic' leaders—who have charming and attractive manners in communication to people with their confidence, clear messages and full of empathy. Singapore's PM Lee Hsien Loong and New Zealand's PM Jacinda Ardern become outstanding examples. PM Suga, in contrast, does not have those characteristics. His looks seem to have less confidence, seldom communicate and frequently keep repeating the same issues.

When the leader cannot build the confidence via communication at the same time with facing public's strong criticism on 'failure' to control a wide spread of COVID-19 causing adverse impacts to country's economy and society, it became a pressure to PM Suga's political future. Later, he announced to step down and would not join the race for re-election as the Liberal Democratic Party's leader.

Beside the heads of local governments, vaccination minister Taro Kono plays an outstanding role in communicating the information on COVID-19 to millions of his Twitter's followers. He also appears on the TV to convey messages about COVID-19 to the public. Thanks to this, his popularity has rapidly increased, especially among the young generation who uses Twitter. With his 'Charisma,' Kono was believed to be highly suitable for becoming Japan's next PM amid this unprecedented COVID-19 situation.

Lack of single-message communication amid the outbreak

Japan's government established an official website <http://corona.go.jp> to provide information about the spread of COVID-19, measures and guidelines to prevent from the outbreak. Meanwhile, the government's spokesperson or officials will be in-charge of update in case of a risk communication. In parallel, the COVID-19 advisers also hold the press briefing to provide information with the aims of building more understanding. However, this communication style sometimes causes the public to be confused as no single message is conveyed; same issue but different ways of communication. Besides, when the communications made by the central government and local government are not in the same direction, an ineffectiveness of

communication can occur. A failure of the ‘GoTo Travel’³ programme is a good example. At first, this programme was expected to help stimulate the country’s economy through a tourism. However, due to a confused announcement on the control restrictions for the travel across prefectures and no integrated communication between the central government and local governments, the programme was carried out in different directions and received a strong criticism on creating the new COVID-19 wave.

The communication expert from a university in Japan said that a communication amid the emergency of each agency creates a single message in the local level but not nationwide. For example, there was a conflict between the central government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. As Suga’s government does not have a communication team, therefore, when they try to communicate, their messages are not so strong. In contrast, the local government has an effective communication team to send the clear message to people. Consequently, the local governments take a lead instead of the central government. In particular, during the second state of emergency, Tokyo jointed hands with other three nearby prefectures to call the central government to announce the state of emergency in preventing the widespread of COVID-19. Still, there are many cases on the conflict between the local governments and the central government.



³ “Go To Travel” is a domestic travel campaign that the government subsidizes a part of individual vacationers' travel costs. It began in July 2020, but was suspended in December of the same year when coronavirus infections surged. However, later in November 2021, the Japanese government has decided it will restart "Go To Travel" as early as January 2022.

Figure 2 (left) and Figure 3 (right): The news articles praise the local governors who play a significant role in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic; namely Hokkaido Governor Naomichi Suzuki (left)⁴, Osaka Governor Hirofumi Yoshimura (right) and Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike (far right)⁵.

While the central government's popularity has dramatically declined, the pandemic has raised a spotlight to a leadership of local governors in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Opposite with the central government, the local government actively communicates to their people and shows more efforts in dealing with COVID-19.

According to a personal interview with Japanese health experts, Japan's MHLW could play a leading role in the CCSA, where several ministries have worked together. Japan, on the other hand, is lack of the experts in disease prevention and control because the officials must be rotated every three years. Relative this, the MHLW's responsibility is limited to formulate the policies rather than taking the lead in working with other ministries in response to the widespread of COVID-19.

The Thai expert on Japanese studies also reiterated during a personal interview that the local government has more power than the central government. However, it is "normal" to see those parties having different communication. Particularly, the COVID-19 pandemic is new so more chance of having conflicts could be seen.

Integration of communication platforms

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many platforms have been used to handle with the widespread of the outbreak. They become as the tools in monitoring and communicating with the groups of people from the small to wider ones. The COVID-19 Contact-Confirming Application (COCOA) provided by the MHLW is one of examples. The contact tracing app rely on Apple

⁴ The picture appears in a news article. Nippon.com. 2020. "Two Young Japanese Governors Rise to Prominence in COVID-19 Crisis", 18 May at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00718/>

⁵ The picture appears in an article. Michio Ueda. 2020. "The Rise of Japan's Governors: Central-Local Relations During a Pandemic", *The Diplomat*, 12 May at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/the-rise-of-japans-governors-central-local-relations-during-a-pandemic/>

and Google's co-developed exposure notification platform, using Bluetooth to help determine whether users have come into close contact with others who have tested positive for COVID-19. COCOA doesn't store personal information like location data or phone numbers. Instead, it records encrypted data flagging phones that have been within one meter for more than 15 minutes; when one person reports the fact that they have tested positive for COVID-19, those other users will be notified (Byford, 2020).

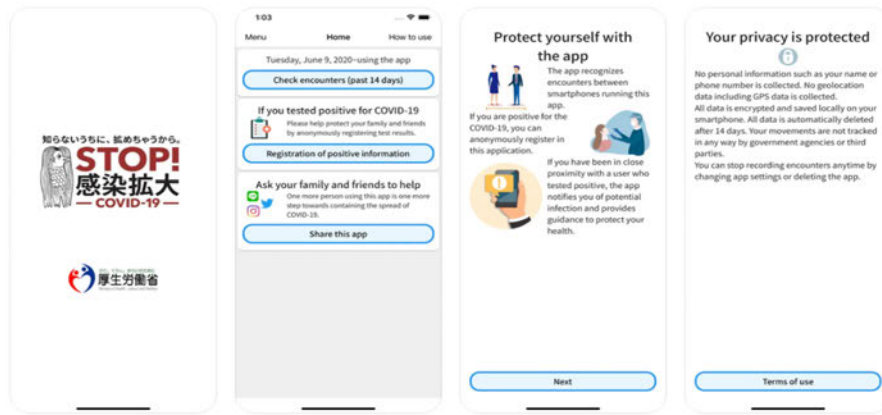


Figure 4: The COVID-19 Contact-Confirming Application (COCOA)



Figure 5 (left): The Tokyo Metropolitan Government car drives around in Tokyo to promote and provide information about COVID-19.⁶

Figure 6 (right): The Tokyo Metropolitan Government officials hold the signs encouraging people to stay at home to avoid the spread of COVID-19.⁷

To ensure that the communication reaches all groups, such as the elders in the distant areas, Japan also relies on the traditional communication means; a public address (PA) system or notice boards. This is an advantage. According to the interview, an informant gave an example that in Saitama Prefecture, the local government uses the PA announcement to promote on the vaccine bookings and situation updates. Also, there is a door-to-door circulation of government's local newspapers to provide COVID-19 related information to people.

For the wider level of communication, the government has a Twitter to especially promote a vaccination. The government uses Twitter as the main communication channel in the update of the vaccination. As Japan does not have the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the nation therefore has no one to take a lead in formulating the COVID-19-related policies, especially vaccination. The situation has become better after an appointment of Kono as the vaccination minister to supervise on the vaccine rollout and communicate to the public. According to The communication expert from a university in Japan's interview, the objective on appointing Kono was for coordinating with PM Suga's inactive administration and the public through Kono's social media which quicker and receive more public's trust.

⁶ The picture appears in a news article. Japan Times. 2020. "COVID-19 tracker: Tokyo reports 854 new coronavirus cases, Osaka confirms 576", 14 May at:

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/05/14/national/tokyo-cases-may-14/>

⁷ The picture appears in a news article. Reuters and Julian Ryall. 2020. "Coronavirus: Japan warns deaths could hit 420,000, amid rising anger at government response," *South China Morning Post*, 15 April at:

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3080069/japan-warns-coronavirus-deaths-could-hit-400000-amid>

The spread of COVID-19 infodemic

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of misleading or false information known as ‘Infodemic’ which rapidly spreads in parallel with the COVID-19 outbreak. This is one of factors spurring the widespread of unprecedented pandemic. Comparing with other Asian countries, Japanese society has more a media literacy. Yet, surprisingly the interview with the expert found that Japan has also faced the infodemic crisis (WHO, 2021)

The communication expert from Japan confirmed during her personal interview that there were a lot of fakes news in Japan. For example, the case of toilet paper shortage because of people’s panic came from the fake news posted on Twitter. This kind of thing is still frequently seen on the Webboard or Twitter. Most of people normally get information from TV or follow Twitter. However, NHK is still a creditable source together with Line from the local authorities. People need to gather information from various sources to compare; adhering to only one source may not enough.

Nevertheless, Japan does not have an agency responsible for checking fake news unlike Thailand and Taiwan’s COFACT or Thailand’s Sure and Share Centre and Anti-Fake News Centre. Japan’s fact-checking system is carried out by the media. To maintain its credibility, the media agencies are responsible to check each other as the co-regulation prior to broadcast. This means is called self-regulation.

Most of infodemic comes from the public, such as the conspiracy theory related to the vaccine. This is a very sensitive issue in Japanese society. The communication expert from a university in Japan explained that the spread of infodemic is also for political advantages. The fake news was shared by the right-wing group while the criticism on the government’s response to COVID-19 will be the left-wing group.

Twitter becomes the main platform to communicate between people during the pandemic because it is very popular among Japanese people. It is the main source of spreading infodemic without checking. On the other hand, it helps people to share and promptly access to information, especially the medical staff and experts using Twitter to communicate with people. Further, people can freely criticise the government on dealing with COVID-19 while a conduct of

volunteer works by the public sector is also established via this platform. In relation to this, promoting the media literacy and fact-checking skills to people is still vital.

Communication to the vulnerable group

Japan uses various platforms to communicate about COVID-19. Yet, an ‘inclusive communication’ seems to be missing. Considering all people or inclusiveness means to create channels for people who lost their opportunities due to their identity to become a part of the society. Those people should have rights and opportunities to participate in society, economy and politics equally without discrimination. According to Sarah Cordivano (2019), there are three principles of inclusive communication consisting of empathy, culture and empower.

In this research, elderly people, women and migrant workers are prioritised. Considering the communication to elders and women which are the large vulnerable groups in Japan, they have not yet achieved the inclusive communication. Japan’s suicide rate among women is higher showing that the access to information and assistance is not sufficient and timely. The experts said that there were no specific communication platforms and content exclusively designed for elders and women. There are only a few civil society groups that provide supports and communication to affected women. One example is Colabo, a civil society platform that provide shelters and advice to women who affected by COVID-19 such as job loss or domestic violence.



Figure 7 and Figure 8: Colabo platform and shelter for affected women⁸

For the migrant workers, Japan's government launched an official website <http://corona.go.jp> to provide information on the COVID-19 situation in various languages. Still, most of information is Japanese and a few local governments provide information in foreign languages. The language limitation also includes in the application, such as COCOA. This was confirmed by an expert in migrant workers during a personal interview who said that COCOA application is not reliable by migrant workers in Japan as it provides only Japanese and English.

Since December 2020, health centres in Japan have started a hotline to provide information for people who have a fever and sending them to clinics or hospital for treatment. However, the language used in the hotline is limited. According to the interview with Public Health experts in Japan, the objective of hotline is not for being interpreters. The government thus allocated a few budgets for interpreting. Likewise, the interpreting service in the hospitals faces the same problem. Although every hospital has the interpreting service, only a few languages, such as English, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Korean and Viet Nam are provided. In practical, it will be impossible for the migrant workers to use this service.

Conclusion

Despite its image as world's advanced economy as well as leader in disaster preparedness and management, Japan has been questioned on its performance to communicate COVID-19 crisis. The analysis has to take Japan's distinctive characteristics on culture and decentralisation into account. If the central and local governments in Japan can find a mutual direction to make a communication framework to be clear, transparent and continual with the use of existing varied communication platforms, the communication during COVID-19 can be effective and resilient. However, the communication scheme has to be ensured to be inclusive as the study found that group of elders, women and migrant workers and still marginalised.

⁸ The picture appears in an website of Colabo at: <https://colabo-official.net/projects-english/>

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**The Records of Remote Education in the Humanities:
Teachers' Efforts During 2020 in Japan**

Lion Press, Japan

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Introduction

In January 2020, when the first person infected with COVID-19 was confirmed in Japan, higher education facilities decided to launch remote education in the country, requiring the teachers, most of whom had no remote education experience, to prepare quickly for this new type of delivery. Reflecting on this exceptional situation, we established Lion Press online to share information among teachers (mostly university professors). Gathering many reports from teachers, we aimed to we aimed to create a platform to access resources for the 2020 spring and fall terms. We finally published Volume 1 of the collection, titled 『遠隔でつくる人文社会学知—2020年度前期の授業実践報告—』*Enkakudetsukuru Jinbunsyakaigakuchi* (The Records of Remote Education in the Humanities: Teachers' Efforts in Universities During 2020 in Japan), consisting of reports only from higher education and limited to language teaching, the humanities, and the social sciences, followed by Volume 2, including teacher's reports from junior high school, high school, and specialized training colleges in the fall term and opened this time to all disciplines. There were 148 reports in Volume 1 in the spring and 105 in Volume 2 in the fall term. This paper focuses on some characteristic cases from our teaching report collection, particularly from Volume 1. Consequently, we found three types of remarkable changes in the provision of education from the COVID-19 period: adapting the content of a course to the crisis period, using new remote methods to better enhance students' understanding, and the necessity of

financial aid. In doing so, we can glimpse the status quo of Japan's remote higher education environment, the instructors' methodologies in attempting to maintain the quality of higher education that is remotely delivered, and their unique attempts to study and derive meaning from the COVID-19 experience with their students. Moreover, this report provides us with overall observations of university teachers' perspectives amid the turmoil of changing their education methods based on face-to-face contact in university classrooms. This exploration centered on one simple question: What does this prevailing trend of online education mean to educators, students, and universities? To answer this question, this paper discusses remarkable transferences since the COVID-19 period through four cases observed in the published volumes of Lion Press.

Adapting the content of courses to the crisis period

Some reports outline the methods instructors used to help students publish their academic translation work as a way of remembering and enhancing their community in the future. For instance, Toshio Onuki (2020), in his class on European History at Tokyo Metropolitan University, decided to use Bruce Campbell's *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease, and Society in the Late Medieval World* (2016), which describes the historical background of the 15th-century plague period from a microscopic perspective. This is also an appropriate reference for comprehending the COVID-19 period. In a seminar consisting of 15 students, each participant was required to translate one to two paragraphs from the book before class for preparation. They then formed pairs to discuss their comprehension of the text and uploaded Scrapbox, an online application, to write and connect their ideas. In the actual lesson, a Zoom seminar, the instructor pointed out the mistranslations or unclear points to help the students better comprehend the text. He also asked critical questions to stimulate discussion on the topic.

By analyzing the plague period in the 15th century through this close reading, the seminar members aimed to publish academic work to remember their studies during the COVID-19 period. As Onuki stated, "It is necessary to record the documents so each student can remember their studies in the university and say, 'I read this text with my classmates in our seminar during the perils of the pandemic emergency,' after the

pandemic has ceased.” The instructor negotiated with the publisher of the book to obtain copyright permission, and the students successfully submitted their Japanese translation of *The Great Transition*’s Chapter 1 to an academic journal. Onuki undertook this endeavor with his students to memorialize the seminar community’s experience. The students’ academic work published in the journal will be evidence to remember the power of the academic community in 2020. “This is the best work I did,” Onuki commented, “educating my students through the publication during the emergency.”

Using new remote methods to enhance students’ understanding

The drastic transition of teaching methods questioned the previous ones both teachers and students had been accustomed to because online education benefited them in aspects such as the quick access to the virtual space in Zoom. Although teachers reported some issues concerning students’ wi-fi connections, online teaching seems to work with virtual face-to-face learning on a computer screen. Observing the collection of teachers’ reports, we understand how many of the teachers have successfully handled their classes, one way or another, which were close to their education style before the pandemic. In other words, teachers tried their best to maintain their previous style of instruction. Conversely, some instructors attempted to include the topic of online education in their class, including Onuki, who used Campbell’s prophetic *The Great Transition* as a reference for the COVID-19 period.

Another approach uses online education by intentionally making it “difficult” to handle for students. In one case, an instructor reported using online learning in a “painful” way to demonstrate how learning activities follow social norms and remain non-inclusive. In a sociology course about discrimination and prejudice, the teacher only uploaded a PDF version of PowerPoint slides and asked students to take the class on demand and submit comments through a learning management system. The uploaded slides did not contain narration but had a hyperlink to an online page with the text version of the lecture script. The challenging part was that the students had to make the computer read the script aloud.

Yasuo Yabuki (2020), who taught this course at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, intentionally asked his abled students to embark on this cumbersome way of learning. Besides minimizing students' data usage only by uploading the PDF and text, he wanted to guarantee accessibility for disabled students with hearing loss by providing the entire content in the text version.

Furthermore, he wanted his students to realize how the classes they took before COVID-19 had been structured for non-disabled people. In most face-to-face lectures in the classroom, students gather at a specific time and place to listen to the instructor speaking, receive non-braille handouts, and watch slides or clips in a 100-minute session. However, this "normal" in-person environment in higher education is largely inaccessible to many disabled students. For example, with some of these students, movement from home to the classroom can be challenging, they may have difficulty managing the academic schedule and comprehending visual and audio information, and they are often highly anxious in a closed or crowded space. However, remote education with slides and the on-demand style better enables disabled students to engage in academic classes.

Through this learning process, the students also became aware of their able-bodied prerogatives. In their feedback, they expressed instinctive repulsion and dissatisfaction. One student wrote, "Why should I have to do such painful work?" Another said, "I felt creepy when I heard the synthesized, robotic speech read by the PC application." However, when they understood the purpose of the lecture style, it made sense to most of them. They experienced a remote and inconvenient environment and realized how unaware they were of their privileges as non-disabled students. Thus, the class provided them with the opportunity to imagine a reality wherein the rights of disabled people are generally not guaranteed.

Another report showed a similar example of an instructor designing his lessons with hard-of-hearing students in mind. Kain Julian (2020), the instructor of a course in audiovisual studies at St. Andrew's University in Osaka, was concerned about the difficulties many students face: For example, they might share a computer with their family, only have a smartphone, or have a weak Wi-Fi connection. The instructor

arranged his room with new lighting equipment and used a microphone and camera tripod to facilitate the making and uploading of his lecture video to YouTube in the most accessible way for his students.

However, what concerned him the most was the deaf and hard-of-hearing students who were taking the course. To support these students, he decided to put subtitles on his lecture video when he uploaded it to YouTube. Moreover, when this practice became somewhat daunting in terms of his workload, he explained his approach to the student support section of the university, and staff and student volunteers took over the job of creating the subtitles. This case shows the extent of one instructor's dedication to caring for disabled students during remote education periods and the importance of cooperation between the university and teachers.

The difficulty of maintaining privacy and part-time lecturers' overload

Teachers reported that students experienced some anxiety about their privacy when taking face-to-face classes on Zoom and that they also experienced anxiety concerning this, as well as for other reasons. Yumiko Yokota (2020), a part-time lecturer teaching modern philosophy at Gakushuin University, had trouble finding a quiet place to deliver her lecture. Her spouse is also a part-time lecturer who needed to manage his classes at home, making it challenging for them both to lecture in their home, particularly when their class periods overlapped.

This case demonstrates how universities could better support part-time lecturers who have insufficient space for delivering a lecture. We also need to consider how universities can help instructors secure the equipment required to make a video, such as in Julian's case, above. Mami Isambert (2020), who teaches African studies in English at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, argues, "Financial support is desperately needed. Zoom classes require reliable computers and equipment, in addition to an optical communication line. However, part-time lecturers often supply these at their expense, despite their small salaries. Universities should ask the government for subsidies for part-time lecturers." The need for a quiet place protecting the privacy of the lecturer and the need for financial aid show how remote education demanded

individual efforts from instructors and how social structures such as universities and the Japanese government did not support instructors enough.

Conclusion

We have discussed here a few of the methods some Japanese university teachers have used to deliver their classes during the remote learning periods imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. With our collection of teaching reports, named *The Records of Remote Education in the Humanities*, we have attempted to explore the question: What does this prevailing trend of online education mean to educators? Is this a welcome expansion for higher education, or does it represent a confinement in the sense of being stuck in virtual universities without any physical contact? This presentation has described examples of teachers' efforts to evoke this physical resonance in remote learning environments in 2020.

We witnessed the novel approach of an instructor attempting to reinforce the memory of the academic community experience through collectively published work and an instructor successfully using the remote education opportunity to help students recognize disabled students' learning challenges. Finally, the importance of financial aid to support part-time lecturers in remote education has been highlighted. These examples are representative of what teachers experienced during the first year of the pandemic and demonstrate the changing content of some courses due to COVID-19, the part that new methods of remote education played in enhancing the understanding of the students, and last, structural issues that part-time lecturers often face over remote education. We did find bias in our volumes, as all contributors were motivated and willing to share their experiences, which might not be the case for everyone. Nonetheless, we hope this paper and our volumes of the collection accessible on the Internet will be a helpful resource in responding to the call for remote education in the present and the future.

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The Use of Metaphors in the COVID-19 Crisis: A Comparison of East and West

Introduction (Taro Mochizuki, Osaka University, Japan)

To begin with, let me quote an article from a newspaper. It was in a Japanese newspaper, *The Mainichi* (Japanese edition) published on the morning of 7th August 2021. The text was written in Japanese. So I translate it into English. The article's title is: *The Parallel Worlds*. This article was written during the period of Tokyo Olympics in August this year.

“Athletes live in the parallel worlds”---- Regarding the relationship between the rapid spread of the novel Corona virus and Tokyo Olympic Games, the spokesman of International Olympic Committee, IOC, answered: The Olympic Village was wrapped with a bubble sheet [Please note It's not an answer sheet for computer-scored tests, but a metaphor of a kind of plastic air bubble sheet], and, he said, so it was a different world, separate from the real world in the city of Tokyo. So he seemed to want to say that the prior PCR tests were sufficient enough, and that the infection had never spread to the city of Tokyo. But, in reality, the so-called bubble sheet was with full of holes. More than 380 positive results for the athletes and tournament officials have been revealed [as of 7th August 2021; In fact, 878 positive results have been revealed finally, as of 9th September 2021]. So it was hard to say that it was a different world. However, I would rather feel the parallel worlds were somewhere outside of the venue of the Olympics and the city of Tokyo. The first one is a “crisis world,” filled with senses of crisis on the outbreak of the COVID-19 infection, plus the collapse of medical care. The other one is the “optimistic world” that was bubbling with gold medals obtained by Japanese athletes. In the “crisis world,” the medical experts warned many times of the rapid spread of infection. Holding the Olympic games might indirectly lead to the spread of infection, even if it wasn't direct impact. Vaccination of Tokyo citizens was not in time. Above all, the worst effects of the highly infectious Delta variant were unpredictable. Actually, we are now following the worst-case, the most pessimistic scenario, according to which the declaration of state of emergency doesn't change people's mindset, and the spread of infection still continues increasingly.... (by Yuri Aono, Specialist editor, The Mainichi Shinbun, 7 August 2021, page 2. Trans. Taro Mochizuki)

The topic of our panel is the use of metaphors in the current COVID-19 crisis time. We have such metaphors as ‘war metaphor’, ‘social metaphor’, and others. And it seems people are using those

kinds of metaphors in the parallel worlds. Suppose it is in *that* ‘optimistic world’ where a ‘war metaphor is used’, then the Sars-CoV-2 is the enemy to be beaten and people will win. It is in the vision of *that* ‘optimistic world’, which is the other world, that the history of war with the virus develops. People project their future vision onto the other world. However, *that* ‘optimistic world’ is not *this* real ‘crisis world’ *de facto*. *This* and *that* parallel worlds have different horizons: In *that* world, those people who believe in an optimism that finally humans will win a virtual war against Sars-CoV-2 share the horizon that serves their common optimistic understanding of the present situation, on the one hand; while, on the other, in *this* real ‘crisis’ world, do we share the same horizon?

The COVID-19 crisis is a phenomenon; it presupposes a certain *phenomenal field* (Merleau-Ponty) where men live with their body and grasp unconsciously any subjective reality with whatsoever understanding they may have; the other *that* ‘optimistic world’ is a mirror of the unconscious phenomenal field where we live now; and, therefore, the analysis of the varied use of metaphors would serve better understanding of what is happening here and there in *this* real ‘crisis world’ because the two different horizons of the parallel worlds are reflected upon each other as though they were the mirror frames reflected upon each other.

Metaphorically Speaking, We Are At War: The Case of Thai Government’s COVID-19 Response (Kasem Phenpinant, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand)

As COVID-19 spreads all around the globe, it is both a physical danger and a psychological affect. Many news media have used war metaphors to describe the pandemics we are encountering with. The corona virus is described as an enemy, whereas the medical personnel is labelled as the front-line warriors. In Thailand, the government treats the pandemics as a threat, while portraying the current as a war-time. “We all Thai are at war. We need to fight it like a war; we will win.” This expression not only metaphorically depicts the current as a war-time imaginary, but it also points to the act the government calls for obedience and follows instruction.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given war metaphors a new life. The corona virus has been described as ‘invisible enemy,’ while the Thai government frequently identifies its duty to wage war against the virus, like ‘we are going to a battle-field.’ Health care workers have been described as ‘frontline warriors’ who devote themselves to combat the enemy. The government have embraced this,

spouting rhetoric about the war on COVID-19. This easily creates a nationalistic sentiment, in order for the country to win. The government also treats the war as a justified war, because it can unite people altogether.

Metaphors give us honor in the fight for one's health. This allows the government an easy transition into the mindset of urgency and the employment of emergency measures. The government's speaker has kept saying, "We are *fighting* pandemic; we are *declaring war* against COVID-19. The government *protect* everyone from coronavirus. We can't let our guard down. Healthcare workers are *heroes*; they are the *frontline knights who battle the invisible enemy*."

By pondering corona virus as the invisible enemy, the government are tempted to justify their uses and abuses of power. Since the first lockdown in March-May 2020, the government has used the state of emergency law to take control the situation. Political activities are not legally allowed; police excessively exercise their power to target political activists and protesters.

Once Susan Sontag reminds us, "The military metaphor [...] not only provides a persuasive justification for authoritarian rule but implicitly suggests the necessity of state-sponsored repression and violence." **And this is the same as Thai government's response to COVID-19.**

I conclude. Metaphors constitute meanings; they linguistically develop public recognition and collective awareness. The Thai government utilizes them to endorse the legitimacy of war and of social and political violence. It takes advantage of metaphors to manipulate its citizen and blame them for their misconducts. This creates a scenario that the war on COVID-19 can be won and victory can be declared by the government.

Use of "War" Metaphor during the COVID-19 Crisis in China (Xiaojun Ding, Xi'an Jiaotong University, China)

1. The COVID-19 Epidemic in China

The whole world is confronted with greater challenges than ever during the period of COVID-19 epidemic, especially in China, where the outbreak of the epidemic was firstly noticed. The COVID-19 epidemic is having quite important impacts on everyone's life and work, no matter who

you are or what you do. Taking myself as an example, as a teacher, I have to learn how to efficiently teach online courses. Besides, we are also more and more accustomed to the online meetings through video platforms like Zoom or VooV Meeting.

Chinese people now use the “war” metaphor when referring to the COVID-19 crisis, which is regarded as a war without gunpowder. On February 10, 2020, Xi Jinping firstly used the war metaphor and described this war as “People’s War, Total War, and Blocking War.” Xi Jinping especially explained that he called this war people’s war because: it is waged by the people; it is for the benefits of the people; to win this war we are closely relying on the people; we are also marshaling national resources to fight against the ‘invisible enemy’.

2. “War” as a Metaphor

Whether you are from Thailand, China or Netherlands, we all use the war metaphor somehow, and we see the COVID-19 virus as invisible enemies. In China, there are many comics and cartoons that described or depicted the COVID-19 virus as some ghosts or demons, and the medical and the nursing staff are warriors who are bravely fighting against the COVID-19 epidemic or the virus at the front line of the war.

I would like to especially explain in the etymological sense why people in China use the war metaphor. The Chinese characters for disease (“疾”), war (“役”) and epidemic (“疫”) are quite similar in their shapes. The Chinese character for disease (“疾”) shows the appearance of someone who is sick and leaning on or against something to have a rest, while the Chinese character for war (“役”) means driving the chariots. By combining the Chinese characters for disease (“疾”) and war (“役”) together, we will get the Chinese character for epidemic (“疫”), which actually means that diseases are spreading and prevalent like the operation of chariots, so that it becomes an epidemic. Most importantly, the Chinese character for epidemic (“疫”) is pronounced exactly the same as the Chinese character for war (“役”). Therefore, it is very interesting to see that the use of war metaphor in China is quite natural, and people use the Chinese characters for war (“役”) and epidemic (“疫”) interchangeably for most of the time during the COVID-19 epidemic.

In 2020, “疫” (epidemic) was declared the international Chinese character of the year, and “COVID-19 epidemic” (新冠疫情) was declared the international Chinese phrase of the year. There are many slogans and posters that use phrases that we would normally use during a war time, such

as ‘Wuhan, fighting’ (“武漢加油”) or ‘Victory for Wuhan’ (“武漢必勝”). The whole Chinese people unites in order to win the war of epidemic prevention and control, just like what people would do during a real war: The medical and nursing staff were busy day and night; relevant enterprises and institutions resumed work and production to ensure supply; all sectors of society donated money and materials to help prevent the epidemic; the general public actively did their personal hygiene protection. Hundreds of millions of Chinese people have acted and gathered a strong force of will and determination. In the face of the epidemic, we are in a community of the shared destiny. Everyone is responsible, and everyone is a combatant, so that we can inspire a flood of strength to overcome the difficulties together and win the war against the epidemic.

On September 8, 2020, at the National Anti-Epidemic Commendation Conference, Xi Jinping proposed the ‘Spirit of Fighting against the COVID-19 Epidemic’. He summarized the spirit that we can see and feel during the fight against the epidemic in China as the following: life first, which means the life of the infected; unite the whole country to fight against the epidemic; disregard one’s own safety, which refers to the safety of the CPC members; respect science; share a common destiny, where the destiny is not only about all the Chinese, but also about people all around the world since we are living in the same world.

3. Advantages of Using Metaphors

So why do people from different areas like to use the war metaphor? As I see, there are several advantages of doing so. First of all, by using the war metaphor, we can visualize the objects of the prevention and control during the epidemic. We keep saying that the COVID-19 virus is an invisible enemy, but by understanding the epidemic through the war metaphor, we can visualize the enemy rather vividly by picturing them as some demons, ghosts, or some ugly creatures. For people in China, even for children and old people, all of them can always see the metaphorical comics, cartoons or slogans, which help people to understand what is going on, what we are fighting against, and we are doing during this very difficult time. It helps to gather the spiritual strength to fight against the epidemic in an easier and more efficient way.

Secondly, the advantage of using the war metaphor also lies in that in this way we can understand better the importance of weapons, because in the war time, in order to win a war, you will have to have very good weapons, which is also the same situation during the epidemic war. Of course, the weapons we are using during the epidemic war are not guns. By speaking of weapons used in the

epidemic war, we are referring to the high technologies that we can use to detect or kill the COVID-19 virus. So in China and also in many other areas, lots of technological products are designed and produced to fight against the COVID-19 virus, such as the nucleic acid detection self-service sampling machines, disinfection robots which have been seen a lot during Tokyo Olympic Games, thermal imaging intelligent helmets, AI epidemic prevention and control platforms, etc. These kinds of technological products are very useful and also very good weapons that we can rely on during our war against the COVID-19 epidemic.

Lastly, closely related with the war metaphor, we also have ‘Sun Tzu’s Art of War’ (“孫子兵法”) in China, which is very famous in Chinese philosophy of war. It is stated by Sun Tzu (“孫子”) that generals must have the qualities of wisdom, integrity, benevolence, courage, and strictness. During the COVID-19 epidemic war, just like generals in a normal war, the government officials also need to have the qualities such as wisdom, which means that they have to respect science, and also they have to be benevolent, which means that they have to value people’s life, and they must have the courage to fight against the virus, which means that they have to always move forward bravely, and they must make strict guidelines, such as the social distancing and quarantine regulations, making sure that they are rigidly enforced.

4. Conclusion and beyond

Of course, there are still more benefits of using the war metaphor besides what I have shown here in order to demonstrate why it is very important to use the war metaphor during our fight against the COVID-19 epidemic in China. From some data that we can obtain from the internet, we can further see clearly the great achievement of using this war metaphor in China, although this does not necessarily imply that the use of the war metaphor should take all the credits.

Until September 9, 2021, the Global cumulative cases are still increasing quite rapidly, while for mainland China, the increase is quite slow. Actually for the recent days, there are only 10 or 20 new confirmed cases daily. As to the cumulative deaths, after May 10, 2021, there are almost no newly dead cases in mainland China, and for the cumulative vaccinations, almost half of the people who have got vaccinated are from mainland China, and most people in mainland China have got vaccinated.

Therefore, we can see that with the war metaphor, the Chinese have kind of gathered the spirit and strength together to fight. Although the enemies are invisible, with the war metaphor, we unite together to share our common destiny, therefore we can hopefully get back to the old good life as soon as possible.

All in all, the use of “war” metaphor during the COVID-19 crisis in China had its positive effect in helping lift spirits of the people, by making everyone thinking of the COVID-19 virus as an enemy, so that people would more like to share bitter hatred against the enemy and jointly resist outside aggression, which is the essence of Sun Tzu’s art of war, and it contributes greatly to the success of the defence and control of the COVID-19 epidemic in mainland China.

The Use of Metaphors in the COVID-19 Crisis in Europe (Peter Harteloh, Erasmus Institute of Philosophical Practice, The Netherlands)

In my presentation, I want to approach the topic of our panel from the perspective of a philosophical practitioner. With regard to the COVID-19 crisis, we should consider the following questions: 1. What is the best question to ask? 2. What is a philosophical interpretation of the crisis? And, 3. what kind of metaphor can capture its meaning best? These three questions that correspond to the aspects of the circle of wisdom cannot be separated, but in our panel, I will focus on the metaphor as vehicle of meaning. In philosophical practice, a metaphor is a coherent story expressing the main idea of a philosophical practice. A metaphor enables understanding, discussion and the development of an idea in the end.

Since 2019, the emerging SARS-CoV-2 virus is a challenge to understanding. Two dominant metaphors were put forward in March 2020 when the virus first spread around in Europe. The French president Macron framed the situation as a battle against an invisible enemy. We might call this the war metaphor. The German chancellor Angela Merkel appealed to (social) control. She asked to take the “serious” situation “seriously” and act accordingly. We might call this the social metaphor. Most countries in Europe used the war or social metaphor with slight variations to understand the COVID-19 crisis. “War” and “control” were key words. The tone was different, but the measures were the same: lock downs, social distancing, abolishing group meetings and eventually (this year) vaccination programs with a promise to regain our old life again.

The words used to understand the crisis mirror the nature of the society using them. Do they also suit the situation? Is there an enemy? How can we be in control? Is a return to our old life sensible and imaginable? As the virus is part of us, the war against an invisible enemy actually is a war against the enemy in our self. Measures to control the virus come down to controlling the people carrying the virus. Democracy is put aside, like the ancient Athens republic did in times of crisis. Alternative stories denying the virus, relativizing its impact or criticizing the measures taken were controlled from the beginning and overruled by science. Politics was said to be driven by science. However, it involved choices not “caused” by the data, but made by people with fear for the unknown and an urge to act. Metaphors put forward were part of a political battle. The current situation still requires a philosophical link.

Obviously, the emerging virus implies a change of our life. It meant the end of mass meetings, a push of the individual into the virtual with a challenge to personal identity and friendship. It is a challenge to meaning. The Cartesian doubt of the existence of the external world becomes reality. Our virtual meetings with people we never saw in real life might raise a suspicion about their actual existence. They might be created just to keep us busy. Life as we know it comes to an end. The crisis implies change. Knowledge of change is in the I Ching (the book of changes). So, I will propose to capture the current situation by one of its sayings: “When the way comes to an end, then change – having changed, you pass through (窮則變, 變則通, 通則久)” and explore the new horizons it will reveal.

Taxation of Digital Economy: A Fiscal Measure in Strengthening The Economy During and After The Covid-19 Pandemic

Dwi Resti Pratiwi¹

Abstract

Since the pandemic began, the Indonesian government has responded immediately through the provision of fiscal stimulus packages. This was in line with handling the impact of the pandemic through the National Economic Recovery (PEN) program. In 2020, the government disbursed a total of IDR 579.8 trillion or approximately \$39 billion (40 percent to the state budget) through the PEN Program which increased by 21.4 percent in 2021. Undeniably, fiscal deficit extended significantly by 6.13 percent of GDP in 2020. On the other side, the government must bring fiscal deficit back below 3 percent of GDP by 2023, as mandated the Law 2/2020. To achieve this, and to maintain fiscal sustainability in the medium and long term, fiscal reforms need to be carried out by the government. Therefore, state revenue must be optimized by taxing the digital economy since it has reached an impressive value in transactions during pandemic. This study examined the tax policy of the digital economy in Indonesia to help recover and strengthen the economy during and after the Covid-19 Pandemic. It involved a qualitative approach to review the taxing policy on the digital economy in Indonesia. The results showed that unilateral action by the Government of Indonesia in imposing direct tax on over the top (OTT) electronic transactions as mandated by Law 2/2020 is hard and challenging. This is because it requires the multilateral consensus for a taxation of the digital economy. Otherwise, the tax policies are likely to intersect or contradict one another, causing uncertainty and double taxation. In addition, there are issues that arise from imposing VAT on digital economy. First, ensuring that the tax collector complies with the VAT regulation. Second, the determination of consumer criteria for digital products is easy to ignore. The prerequisite for using Indonesian IP can be avoided by a virtual private network (VPN) to use the domain of another country. Therefore, this study suggests that the Government of Indonesia must encourage the global consensus on a digital tax framework that benefits all parties. Furthermore, the Directorate General of Tax (DGT) must enforce data exchange from financial institutions and take serious actions against non-compliance. Strong and sustainable cooperation among governments and business sectors is necessary.

Keywords: Covid 19 Pandemic, Fiscal Policy, Digital Economy, Multilateral Consensus, Taxing Digital Economy

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 Pandemic created unprecedented challenges worldwide in terms of global healthcare and worldwide economic systems. Most countries experienced significant reductions in income, a rise in unemployment, disruptions in transportation services, and

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manufacturing industries. To contain the spread of the virus, most countries resorted to stringent lockdown measures. Consequently, the global economy contracted by 3.5 percent in 2020, a 7percent loss relative to the 3.4 percent growth forecast before the pandemic, in October 2019 (IMF, 2020). As shown in figure 1, the pandemic caused an economic recession in many countries. Most experienced a sharp contraction of economic growth in the second quarter of 2020 when many governments-imposed lockdowns of varying stringency and duration.

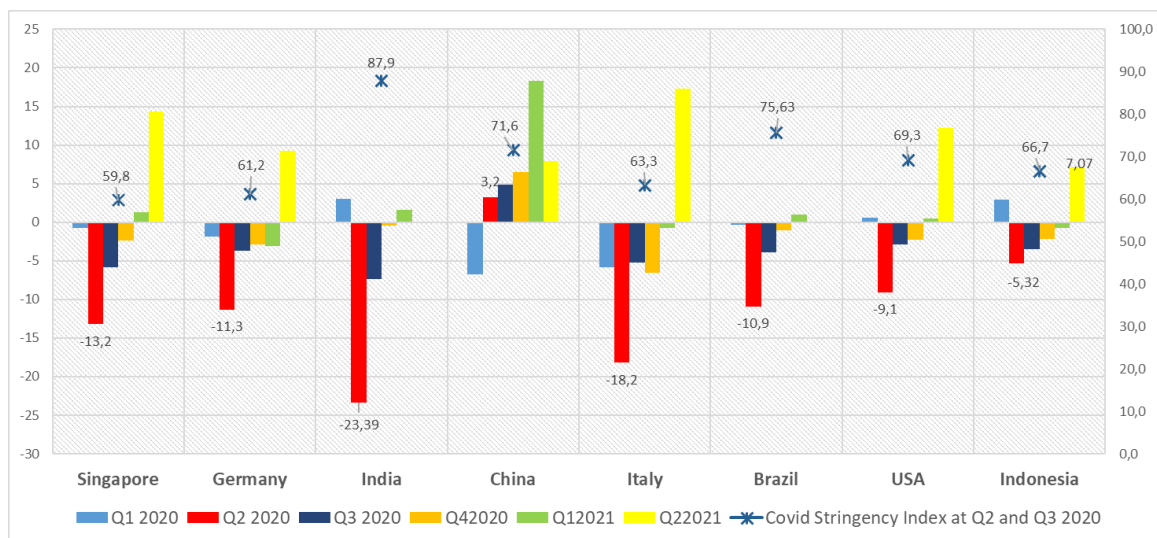


Figure 1. Economic Growth in Some Countries (percent) and Covid Stringency Index
 Source: Tradingeconomic.com (2021); Thomas Hale et al (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (2021)

As the virus has spread rapidly since March 2020, Indonesia imposed large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The implementation of mobility restriction in Indonesia was quite moderate according to the Covid stringency index as shown in figure 1, therefore, Indonesia experienced a shallower recession than many other countries. Indonesia’s economy shrank by 2.07percent, while the global economy experienced a deeper contraction by 3.5 percent in 2020. In addition, the global crisis caused by the covid-19 pandemic increased both poverty and unemployment rates in Indonesia. From March until September 2020, official statistics reported an increase in the national poverty rate from 9.78percent to 10.19percent, translating into an increase in the number of poor people from 26.42 million to 27.55 million, out of a population of 270.2 million – turning back three years of progress in poverty reduction. On the other hand, the open unemployment rate rose from

4,94percent in March 2020 to 7.07 percent in August 2020 and declined to 6.26 percent in February 2021 (BPS, 2021).

The outcome indicators could have gone even steeper had the government not swiftly responded and acted by taking extraordinary and countercyclical policies throughout 2020. Accordingly, the Government of Indonesia immediately enacted law No 2/2020 concerning State Financial Policy and Financial System Stability in handling the Covid-19 Pandemic. Following this, several policy steps taken by the Government included refocusing and reallocating the budget for non-priority activities and providing stimulus for handling the impact of the pandemic, and the national economic recovery program. In 2020, the government disbursed a total of IDR 579.8 trillion or approximately US\$39 billion (40 percent to the state budget or 3.5 percent to GDP) as part of a national economic recovery program (PEN) (Figure 2). The PEN program was focused on five areas, namely health, social protection, priority programs, business incentives, and support for MSMEs and corporate financing. As the pandemic continued, in 2021, the government increased PEN program allocation by 21.5percent, which amounted to IDR699.43 trillion, approximately US\$48,2 billion.

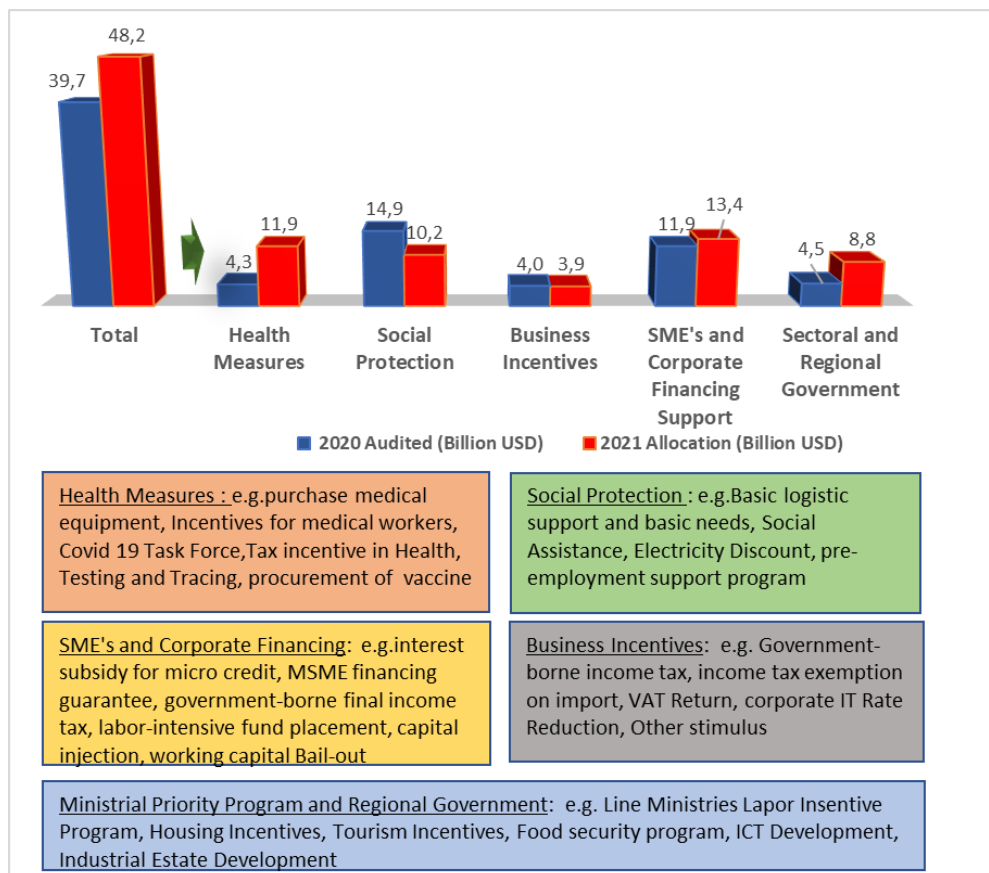


Figure 2. Economic Recovery Program Budget (US\$ Billion)

Notes: 1 \$ = IDR14,500

Source: Ministry of Finance (2021a)

The fiscal stimulus for handling the pandemic increased the pressure on 2020 state finance. This caused a decrease in tax ratio, an increase in government debt, and a significant extension of fiscal deficit by 6.13 percent of GDP (figure 3). Meanwhile, as mandated by Law 2/2020 the government must bring the fiscal deficit back below 3percent of GDP by 2023 to maintain economic stability in the medium and long term. The UN ESCAP (2020) suggested that to accelerate economic recovery, governments need to expand their fiscal space revenue reforms and effect public debt management. In line with this, Law 2/2020 also regulated four taxation policies as an extraordinary measure to recover and strengthen the national economy, which includes the taxation of the digital economy or Trade through Electronic Systems (*Perdagangan Melalui Sistem Elektronik/PMSE*).

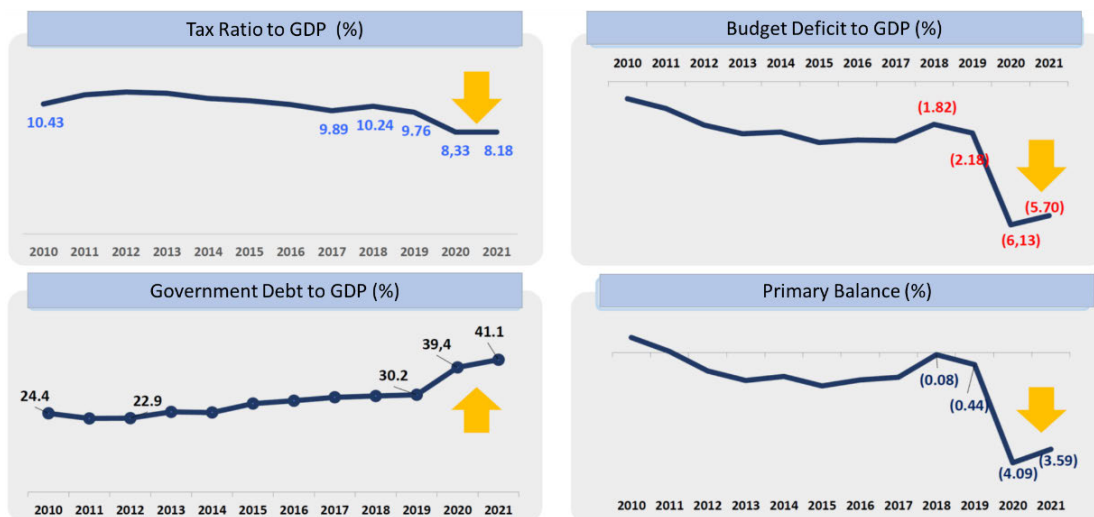


Figure 3. Government Fiscal Risk

Source: Ministry of Finance, 2021

During this pandemic, the digital economy grew exponentially, while various economic sectors decelerated. Digital transformation is expanding to more sectors such as finance, education, healthcare, etc, as the pandemic changed people's consumption behaviour from offline to online purchases. For digital companies, this transformation certainly created profitable conditions. Therefore, the government has observed the fiscal potential of the ever-growing digital markets by the enactment of taxes in this sector. In principle, the tax treatment policy of PMSE is a unilateral step considering that there is currently no global

consensus on digital economy taxation. This study examined the tax policy of the digital economy in Indonesia to enhance recovery and strengthen the economy during and after the Covid-19 Pandemic.

2. Digital Economy Acceleration during Covid-19 Pandemic

The digital economy consists of economic activities that occur during billions of online connections every day among people, businesses, devices, data, and processes (Deloitte, 2021). It is made up of intangibles, information, innovation, and creativity, which expand economic potential (Sharma, 2006). According to Bukht & Heeks (2017), the core scope of a digital economy is Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) sector. Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, it has been a blessing in disguise for ICT sector development and continues to lead the acceleration of the digital economy. This is reflected in the structure of Indonesia's GDP which showed an impressive growth of the ICT sector. This sector recorded its highest growth economic sector in the second quarter of 2020, while most other sectors experienced a deep contraction. It rose significantly by 10.8 percent in the second quarter of 2020 and its growth was higher even before the pandemic (Figure 4). This sectors' high performance was enhanced by the increased digitalization of people's daily activities, such as work and school, including the imposition of mobility restrictions by the government during the pandemic.

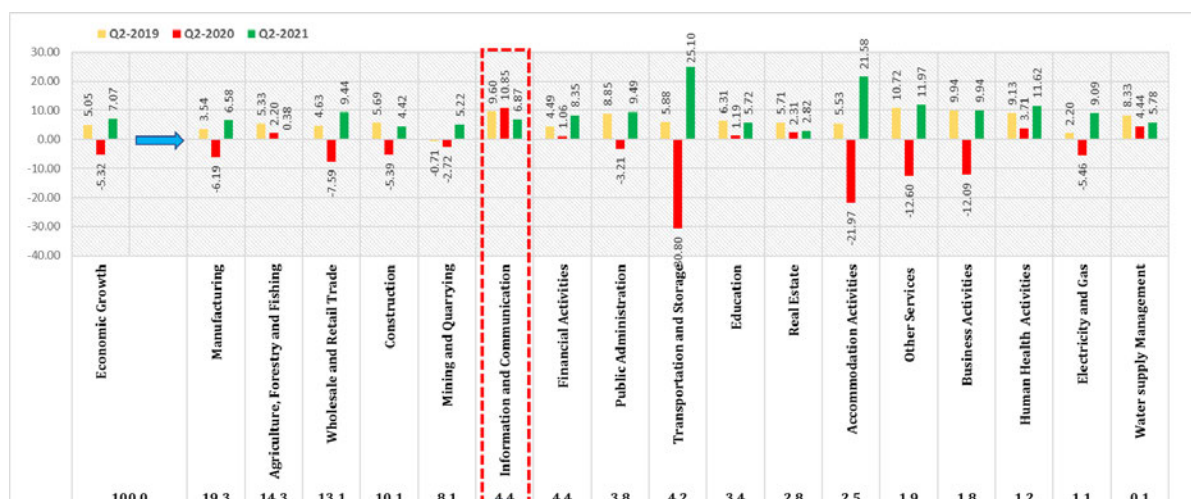


Figure 4. Indonesia Economic Growth in 2020-2021 (Percent)

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

Furthermore, the pandemic also changed household expense patterns, which declined in certain needs and increased in other needs (Baker, Farrokhnia, Meyer, Pagel, & Yannelis, 2020). As shown in Figure 5, expenses on some household consumption in Indonesia declined dramatically during the pandemic, while others stayed in line with the pattern. The significant drop included transportation and communication consumption followed by restaurants and hotels, food and beverages. Meanwhile, the expenditure on health and education consumption remained on track (Figure 5).

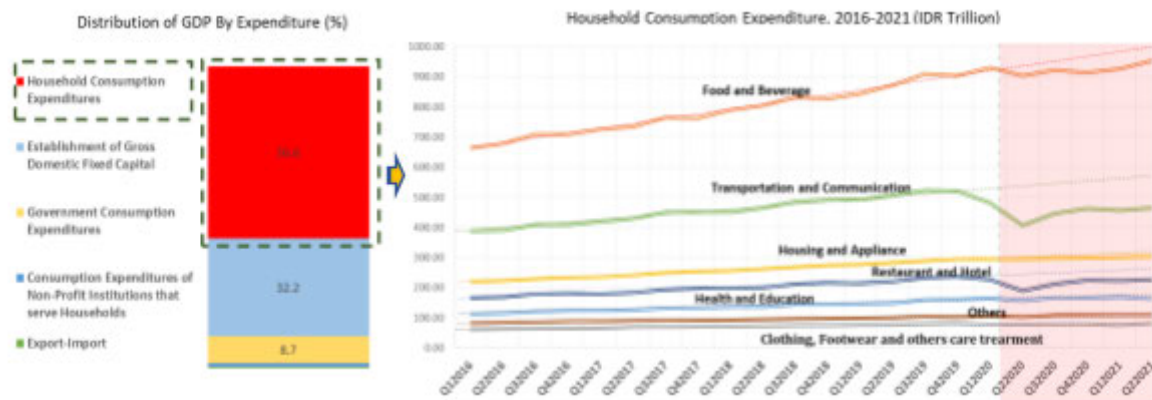


Figure 5. Distribution of GDP (left) and Household Expenditure by Category 2016-2021 (right)
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021

The changes in consumption behaviour are closely related to the limited community mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chenarides, Grebitus, Lusk, & Printezis, 2021; Eftimov, Popovski, Petković, Seljak, & Kocev, 2020; Hirvonen, De Brauw, & Abate, 2020). Furthermore, with the present advancement of information technology, these limitations can be overcome through online activities/transactions. This has been proven by Google Trends which shows an increased search trend for online selling-related queries. For example, the online search on essential goods-related topics such as food and drinks grew dramatically during large-scale social restrictions (PSBB). This is an initial indicator that more people tend to purchase food and beverage products through online means. Online searching on parcel packaging and delivery has gone up tremendously during the pandemic which indicated the rise of e-commerce activities during PSBB. Meanwhile, search trends index on hotel, restaurant and transportation topics shrunk dramatically due to mobility and travel restrictions (figure 6).

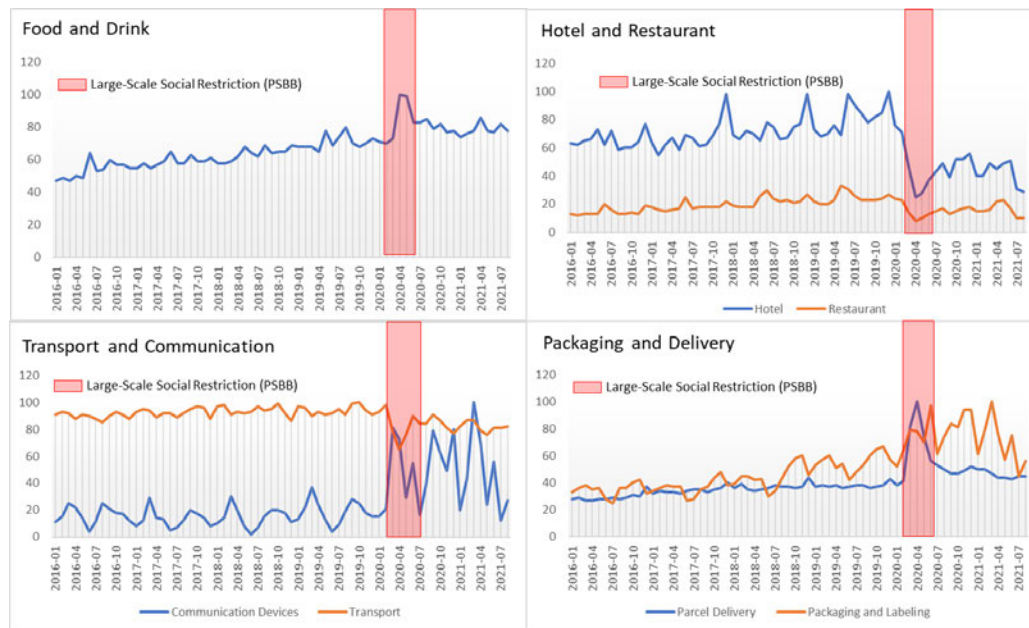


Figure 6. Google Search trends for online selling-related queries during 2016-2021 in Indonesia
Source: Google Trends, 2021

This shows that the need for the Internet has dramatically increased since the pandemic, as it provides access to essential goods, healthcare, education, work and entertainment. Furthermore, operating digitally also enables businesses to keep running in this contactless world (Deloitte, 2021). This enhanced the significant increase of Internet penetration in Indonesia, which went from 64.8percent in 2018 to 73.7percent or 196.7 million users in 2019-Q2 2020 (APJII, 2020). The E-Conomy SEA 2020 report² shows that Indonesia's digital economy has reached an impressive size. In 2020, its Gross Merchandise Value (GMV), which measures the value of transactions or sales, projected a sharp increase to US\$44 billion, an 11percent growth compared to 2019. This value made Indonesia be the most contributing Internet economy in Southeast Asia, which comprised 42percent of the total GMV to the Internet economy in the region. Most of the Indonesian GMV was generated by e-commerce services (US\$ 32 billion), followed by transportation & food platforms (US\$ 5 billion), online media (US\$ 4.4 billion), and online travel (US\$ 3 billion) (Google, Temasek, Bain Company, 2020). Furthermore, Statista (2021) estimated the revenue in the digital market to reach about US\$53,3 billion in 2021. Millions of consumers in Indonesia now acquire and utilize overseas goods and services, including digital products over electronic transactions (Ministry of Finance, 2020). Therefore, the government has to

² It covers 6 countries, namely Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia

formulate appropriate tax policies for the digital economy that are relevant to current digital business development. Otherwise, it will experience two major problems, the potential loss of tax revenue and an uneven playing field between domestic taxpayers and offshore suppliers (Hidayat, 2020).

3. International Tax Framework for Digital Economy

The digital economy era requires countries to update and improve their taxation policies as part of value capture efforts (UNCTAD, 2019). According to Terada-Hagiwara, Gonzales, and Wang (2019), one of the implications of the growing size and complexity of the digital economy is the loss of tax revenue due to the growing business operations on digital platforms. This is likely to happen as new technologies have facilitated tax avoidance through the shifting of profits by multinational enterprises (MNEs) to low or no-tax jurisdictions (OECD 2014). In this context, as most large digital companies are multinational corporations, they generate profits from countries across the world without a physical presence in any country and shift these profits to the jurisdiction where they are resident, or locate their operation in lower-tax countries. Meanwhile, this may be considered unfair in consumers' countries, which legitimates as Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) practices based on the existing international tax framework (Rebecca, 2020).

Under article 5 of OECD Model Tax Convention which is a standard for double taxation avoidance agreement (tax treaty), it states that a company is subject to tax on its business profit in a country of which it is a non-resident, only if it has a permanent establishment (PE) in the country. It implies that the current international corporate tax convention—with its traditional permanent establishment rules—does not capture the new digital business models properly (Asen, 2020). For sourcing countries that unilaterally impose income tax on multinational digital companies, the absence of a permanent establishment may cause uncertainty and double taxation, as it clashes with the tax treaties. Therefore, the polemics led OECD negotiations in over 130 countries to initiate the Action Plan on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) which began in 2013. The digital economy issue was identified under BEPS initiative's Action 1: "Addressing the Tax Challenges of the Digital Economy". However, this Action 1 report showed that it would be difficult to impose taxes on the digital economy. In 2015, The OECD issued a final report on Action 1 and a subsequent report in 2018 yet has failed to recommend a solution to address the physical

presence issue. After years of intense work and negotiations, 130 countries and jurisdictions joined the statement establishing a new framework for international tax reforms in July 2021. The framework updates key elements of the century-old international tax system, which is no longer fit for purpose in a globalised and digitalised 21st century economy. Furthermore, this negotiation updated two-pillar plans to reform international taxation rules. Pillar One will ensure a fairer distribution of profits and taxing rights among countries with respect to the largest MNEs, including digital companies, while Pillar Two seeks to put a floor on competition over corporate income tax, through the introduction of a global minimum corporate tax rate that countries can use to protect their tax bases (OECD 2021). These 2-pillar packages will ensure that large multinational companies pay their fair share of tax everywhere.

While waiting for the final agreement which is expected in October 2021, several countries have moved ahead with unilateral measures to tax the digital economy (Asen, 2021). These unilateral measures taken by different countries can be categorized into direct and indirect taxes. Direct taxes are paid directly to the government and can be in form of income tax, digital services tax (DST), withholding tax, or digital permanent establishment (PE) (Sukardi and Jiaqian, 2020). In July 2020, there are 26 countries worldwide that have enacted the direct tax regulation on the digital economy, 10 countries announced the intention to implement, 5 were still in the process of legislation drafting, and the rest were either waiting for a global solution or have been rejected (figure 4). Many countries intending to impose new digital service taxes (DST) have chosen to go ahead regardless of OECD's progress. DSTs are gross revenue taxes with a tax base that includes revenues derived from a specific set of digital goods or services, or based on the number of digital users within a country (Bunn, Asen, Enache, 2020). The design of DST varies significantly. France's tax revenues are derived from the provision of digital interface and advertising services, while Austria and Hungary's tax bases are derived from online advertising. The tax rates vary from 1percent in Poland, 3percent in Italy and France to 7.5percent in Hungary and Turkey (KPMG, 2021)

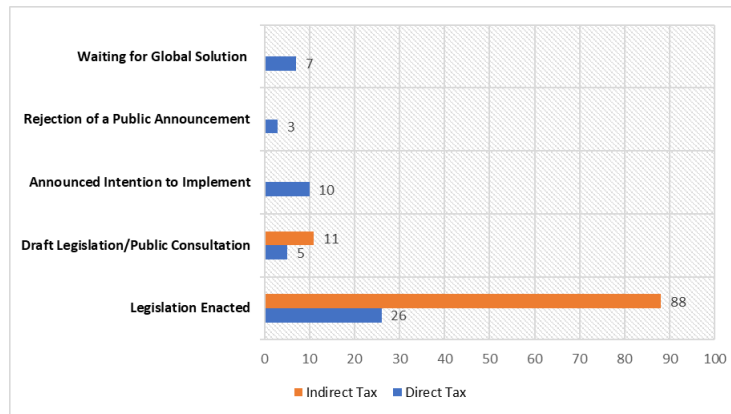


Figure 4. Summary of Certain Enacted and Proposed Digital Economy Tax
Source: KPMG, 2021

Indirect tax is manifested through the collection of Value Added Tax (VAT) or goods and services tax (GST) (Elms, 2021). There are approximately 88 countries that have implemented legislation and 11 countries that have begun the drafting process (Figure 4). The OECD has published consolidated VAT/GST guidelines since 2017. These guidelines are aimed at reducing the uncertainty and risks of double taxation and unintended non-taxation that occur due to inconsistencies in the application of VAT in a cross-border context (OECD, 2017). It laid out the basic principle that VAT for cross-border transactions should be levied in the jurisdiction where the final consumption is located, referring to it as the ‘destination principle (Sukardi and Jiaqian, 2020). However, these guidelines are not aimed at detailed prescriptions for national legislation, and jurisdictions are sovereign with respect to the design and application of their laws. Since the implementation of indirect tax on the digital economy does not impact as much public controversy as the direct tax does (ibid), several countries have applied indirect tax (VAT) rather than direct. Indonesia is on the list of countries that impose unilateral measures on both direct and indirect tax of digital economy.

4. Tax Policy on Digital Economy in Indonesia and Its Challenge

Following the spread of COVID-19, the Indonesian government issued Law No.2 /2020 which aimed to secure the country’s national finance and economic stability during the pandemic. This law imposed unilateral measures in taxing electronic trading activities. Its approach to taxing the digital economy is to exert both direct tax (income tax/electronic transaction) and indirect tax (VAT) on digital businesses. In addition, to giving equal treatment to all business players, this tax policy is also expected to increase state revenue.

This is currently highly important as it serves as a source of funding used in handling the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the economic recovery during and after.

a. Income Tax/Electronic Transaction Tax (ETT) on Trading Through Electronic System (PMSE)

According to article 6 Law 2/2020, trade activities via e-commerce will be subject to the following taxes: (a) Corporate Income Tax payable by deeming Permanent Establishment (PE) of overseas e-commerce companies which have a significant economic presence in Indonesia. This significant economic presence will be determined further by the Minister of Finance and would cover consolidated gross revenue; sales amounts; and/or the size of active members in Indonesia; (b) In case that income tax cannot be imposed due to the application of tax treaty, the offshore seller, offshore service provider, and/or offshore electronic trading provider meeting the significant economic presence criteria will be imposed with Electronic Transaction Tax (PTE). The detailed PTE provision furthermore will be stipulated on government regulation. Meanwhile, the Minister of Finance (MoF) decree will be issued to stipulate provisions on the threshold of constituting 'significant economic presence', procedures for payment and the reporting of income tax or ETT, and procedures for the appointment of representatives.

b. VAT On Foreign E-Commerce

Following Law 2/2020, the government issued the Minister of Finance (MoF) Regulation No 48/PMK.03/2020 regarding the procedures for the Appointment of Collectors and for the Collection, Deposit, and Reporting of VAT for Use Inside the Customs Area of Intangible Taxable Goods and/or Taxable Services from Outside the Customs Area through Electronic System Trade Activities (PMSE). This regulation was effectively implemented as of 1 July 2021. Therefore, the VAT at 10percent needs to be applied to the provision of foreign intangible goods or services through electronic commerce. The scope of foreign intangible goods and services includes all possible usage that can be delivered in digitalised format, such as e-book, e-magazine, e-comic, computer software, electronic data, multimedia, virtual goods, movie and video streaming, web hosting, video conference and other services. The foreign traders or

foreign service providers will be appointed by the Directorate General on Taxation (DGT) as the PMSE VAT Collector.

In principle, VAT is an indirect tax levied on consumption where the end consumer bears the tax burden. Therefore, business actors, including foreign traders, foreign service providers, trade through electronic systems operators, both foreign and domestic, are appointed by the Minister of Finance to collect, deposit, and report the VAT. To qualify as a PMSE VAT Collector a party must: a) have a transaction value with customers in Indonesia exceeding IDR 600 million (\$40,300) in a year or IDR 50 million in a month, and/or; b) there are 12,000 users that visit their e-commerce platform from Indonesia in 12 months or 1,000 users in one month. The PMSE VAT collectors are required to submit quarterly reports on VAT payments collected. Reports are submitted electronically through an application or system provided by the DGT. Furthermore, the DGT may also ask the PMSE VAT Collector to submit a detailed report on VAT transactions for each period of one calendar year.

Policy Challenge on Taxing Digital Economy

Fiscal pressures following pandemic spending have accelerated efforts to properly tax companies and purchases made in the digital or online environment. Consequently, the government of Indonesia (GoI) issued Law No 2/2020 as the legal basis for the government to tax foreign companies with a “significant economic presence” that provides digital services and intangible goods from outside the country. However, the implementation of tax policies on multinational digital companies is inseparable from struggles. It was observed that the government received more pressure on imposing a direct tax on digital businesses than the indirect. Therefore, the government postponed the imposition of income tax and electronic transaction tax on foreign digital businesses.

In terms of imposing income tax on over-the-top companies, this policy has risen polemics regarding the determination of a permanent establishment (*PE*). According to the current international tax agreement which refers to the OECD Model Tax Convention, a source country may impose income tax on an offshore business entity only if that entity runs its business through a permanent establishment (PE) in the source country. The term “PE” as

stipulated of Model Tax Convention requires a physical presence such as a branch, office, or factory. However, this convention has not stipulated a PE or a business profit clause that adopts a digital business concept or significant economic presence. By adopting the Model Tax Convention, Indonesia currently has 67 tax treaties or double tax avoidance agreements (DTA) between Indonesia and partner countries. Consequently, the imposition of income tax on digital transactions may generate a clash with the treaty due to a PE issue. On the other side, renegotiating tax treaties is challenging as it requires a long process and time (Budi and Ayudia, 2020). Therefore, the reasons why the government needs to postpone the policy are significantly obvious.

In anticipating a constraint of “PE” status, the government introduced the Electronic Transaction Tax (PTE) or digital service tax (DST). PTE is imposed on direct sales or sales through the marketplace. Foreign digital players can appoint a representative in Indonesia to fulfill their tax obligations (Sukardi and Jiaqian, 2020). This is the same with income tax and implementing PTE as a unilateral policy may also generate many challenges. These include the high likelihood of multiple payments and double taxation from cross-border transactions, as companies can be subject to both PTE and direct tax on the same transaction or income (Elms, 2021). Consequently, it raises a conflict between taxpayers and tax authorities, leading to trade war conflicts and threatening exports. The electronic transaction tax application therefore depends on how courageous the Indonesian Government is in facing international threats or sanctions (Budi and Ayudia, 2020). The possibility of occurrence of such conflict is shown by how the United States (US) reacted after GoI enacted Law 2/2020 in imposing a tax on OTT companies. Since the US is a “home” of many multinational digital companies, the US responded to the imposition of PTE with retaliatory threats. In June 2020, The Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) issued a document called the “Initiation of Section 301 Investigations Status Update on Digital Services Tax”. This was aimed at investigating with respect to Digital Services Taxes (DSTs) adopted or under consideration by Indonesia and other countries such as Austria, Brazil, the Czech Republic, the European Union, India, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The US government launched its investigation out of concerns that the unilateral imposition of income taxes and PTE by Indonesia and other countries will create unfavourable tax treatment of U.S. companies. To avoid a prolonged conflict, the Indonesia Ministry of Finance then suspended the imposition of income tax and PTE on digital multinational companies until a multilateral solution will be

identified. Accordingly, in March 2021 the USTR terminated the investigations of digital service tax (DST)s for Indonesia as it had not adopted and implemented a DST during the period of investigation.

In terms of the implementation of VAT on intangible goods/services, the DGT observed that they still face difficulty attracting overseas digital businesses to be appointed as VAT collectors and depositors of VAT PMSE due to lack of data and information on digital transactions. These difficulties were significant, as only 80 entities were confirmed to be appointed as VAT collectors from July 2020 until August 2021, and DGT earned IDR 2.2 trillion or approximately \$152.7 million from January-August 2021 (Directorate General of Tax, 2021). Compared to the huge number of digital overseas companies and fantastic amounts of digital transactions in Indonesia, the revenue captured was quite lower than its potential. Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance itself predicted that the potential for VAT on digital services/goods to reach Rp 10.2 trillion per year. This projection was based on the transaction value of digital goods and services which amounted to Rp 102.67 trillion in 2017 (Santoso, 2020)

There is a lack of legal certainty in ensuring VAT collector's compliance. The OECD's VAT Guideline in 2017 discussed more on VAT tax avoidance, while the sanctions/penalties mechanism for non-compliant VAT collectors were returned to each country. According to Article 7 of Law No. 2 of 2020, administrative sanctions of non-compliant VAT collectors referred to The Law on Administrative Guidelines of Indonesian Taxation (KUP), which was stipulated in 1983 and its latest version in 2009. Therefore, the referring Law was no longer fit for the current digital economy businesses as it still maintains an old-conventional tax dispute settlement mechanism. This issue will be significant for future compliance cases. In addition, Law 2/2020 states that penalties for non-compliant VAT collectors also include operational access disconnection by the Ministry of Communication and Informatics. However, further regulation regarding the penalties or sanctions has not been stipulated by the Ministry of Finance. This issue needs to be addressed to provide legal certainty for the involved parties.

According to the PMK 48/2020, one of the criteria for consumers of digital products involves carrying out any transactions using the Internet protocol (IP) address in Indonesia or telephone number with Indonesia's country code. The prerequisite for using IP however is to be ignored, as IP from Indonesia can be averted by a virtual private network (Syah and

Ilhami, 2020). By using VPN, a customer's IP address can be directed through a remote server or another country's domain. Therefore, the customer cannot be determined as an Indonesian resident. Furthermore, when customers do not use an Indonesian telephone number during international payment, this may result in a potential loss in tax revenue. In the long term, these kinds of consumer actions in aggregate will make the desire to apply an equal playing field complete nonsense. Therefore, more detailed derivative regulation is required for measuring the existing problems (Syah and Ilhami, 2020).

5. Recommendation

Tax reform in Indonesia by expanding the tax base from a digital company must be implemented to increase state revenue. This is important for handling the Covid-19 pandemic, fiscal sustainability, and economic stability in the medium and long term. However, this reform requires a global consensus on reforming international tax to address the tax challenges of globalisation and the digitalisation of the economy. Without a global consensus, unilateral action in taxing the digital economy is likely to intersect or contradict one another, producing uncertainty and double taxation. The Government of Indonesia therefore must encourage a global consensus on taxing the business profits of a digital company. Having a big market size and placing as the fourth position of Internet users globally after China, India, and United States (Internet Worlds States 2021), Indonesia has a strong bargaining power for ensuring multilateral consensus on digital tax framework benefit for all parties. If this global agreement needs a longer time to be achieved without a certain time frame, the GoI needs to take rapid action to set a tax regional agreement or bilateral agreement on digital economy with treaty partners.

While waiting for the global consensus, optimizing VAT revenues from cross-border digital transactions is more achievable and supported by the law. This will require commitment from the Government of Indonesia, especially the Directorate General of Tax to address the challenge of current VAT policies implementation. In terms of compliance issues, the Government needs to revise outdated laws on KUP which maintains an old-conventional tax dispute settlement mechanism. This will involve meaningful public-private dialogue with broad stakeholder representatives to set up an inclusive dispute settlement mechanism. It enhances the provision of legal certainty for tax subjects and VAT collectors. The dialogue helps to build trust and bridge gaps between MOF and digital business actors. In addition, it

may help MOF to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of digital business models, and identify suitable responses to rapidly evolving markets.

To ensure that the amount of VAT collected is appropriate, the DGT has to enforce data exchange from financial institutions, such as on credit card transactions (PT. Visa Worldwide Indonesia and PT Mastercard Indonesia), to verify the compliance of the appointed VAT collector in reporting the transaction. Furthermore, the government needs to take seriously Indonesian customers which use VPN to avoid tax. For example, the New Zealand government ruled that customers in the country can be fined up to NZ \$25,000 if they make use of VPN services and pretend that they are in another jurisdiction to avoid VAT on digital goods and services (Rebecca, 2021). However, the implementation of this regulation must be combined with the improvement of tax authorities' human resource capability and the use of information technology to adapt to recent business developments.

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