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Influence of emotion on fake news sharing behavior: The case study from Thailand

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ITS Chalmers Online Conference

“Influence of emotion on fake news sharing behavior: The case study from Thailand” (*working paper*) KAMPLEAN, Artima

1. Introduction

In recent years, fake news has become a worldwide phenomenon. The advancement of technology also plays a critical part in the spreading process since it changes the process and the speed of information spreading. Media consumption trend has shifted toward more online content and therefore, recently fake news report also follows the trend to occur more in an online platform. One of the most significant events in the U.S. presidential election in 2016 which sparks a wide concern that the effect of fake news spreading could lead to further social problems especially in the online platform such as social media (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

This study is an empirical study aiming to investigate how people react with different types of fake news focusing on spreading or encountering behavior. The study uses a quantitative approach with international and domestic case studies, in a total of 4 case studies. Most studies focus in the U.S. (especially after the 2016 presidential election) leaving a gap of study from other regions. This study can fill in the academic gap of fake news studies in Asia where the region is a high internet usage and also faces fake news problem.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fake news

The term ‘fake news’ has various scope of definition in the academic field. A similar term often mentions to misinformation, misinformation or rumor. Misinformation defined as “the presence of or belief in objectively incorrect information (Bodex and Vraga, 2015)”. While UNESCO defines disinformation as “Information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country”. This research follows the definition of Fake News from Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), a widely accepted academic paper on the field of fake news, where fake news refers to news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). So that this definition can cover a variety of cases in this study.

2.2 Emotions

Recent research has tackled fake news from the emotional aspect. A study on emotion and news literacy point out key problems that emotion has become fundamental to spread digital content and call out for more emphasis on feeling generated by news in news literature education (Sivek, 2018). The previous marketing study on the emotional combinations that make stories go viral found that content or

image that generates strong emotion is more likely to be shared (Jones, Libert, and Tynski, 2016 cited in Sivek 2018). Moreover, the same study also found that negative emotion will increase the likelihood to be viral more. The study also cited Jones, Libert, and Tynski's marketing research article that negative emotion increasing the likelihood to be shared. The stronger emotion the content generated, the more opportunity for fake news to be viral. The article uses Valence-Arousal-Dominance Model (VAD) to explain the emotion that makes the story goes viral. Valence is a state of emotion: positive or negative. Arousal is a degree from exciting to relax emotions. And dominance is a degree from in-control to submission. The finding suggested that negative emotions have higher tendency goes to be viral. Another interesting element is surprised which also generates strong emotion and can be paired both positively and negatively.

This consists of a previous study on unverified information in a conflict zone that investigates rumors in Southern Thailand and Mindanao, The Philippines (Greenhill and Oppenheim, 2017). The study chooses dread rumor on economic and security issues as a case study because this type of information can create fear and stimulate more discussion. Lastly, the study investigates an individual's behavior of further spreading fake news. This study tests the intention to share the information and intention to tell others that this information is not true.

3. Case studies

3.1 Thailand

Thailand is suitable for the case study because its media landscape where traditional media is declining while online media is rising. This provides a good opportunity for fake news to spread in the country. A "Global Digital 2019" report from a digital agency We Are Social and Hootsuite, one of the major reports for digital media landscape in Thailand, stated that the country is a heavy media user with internet users at 57.00 million and active social media user at 51.00 million. The country also reports the average daily time spent using the internet at any device at 9 hours and 11 minutes (DataReportal, 2019). A survey report "Thailand Internet User Profile 2019" published by Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) reveals that the country has entered a digital society with compound annual growth rate up to 81.5 percent (ETDA, 2019).

Like other countries, Thailand also faces the fake news problem. The government has attempted to solve the problem by enforcing a cybersecurity act from a computer crime act in 2017 which gives authority to the National Cybersecurity Committee (NCSC) to investigate the activities that could lead to serious cyber threats. The act received criticism from both local and international media for instance, Routers (Tanakasempipat, 2019). There is a petition sign campaign against this law in 2017(Thainetizen, 2017). For this reason, the country can serve as a good case study for an online heavy media user which is scenery that fake news has high potential to spread.

3.2 Case studies

All case studies in this research were selected from the one reported by several domestic fact-checking websites or news agency which indicated that the information has spread at some level in the country. Therefore, they are significant enough to be a case study in this research.

This research has 2 case studies that spread internationally and got translated into the Thai language version. Both cases are also widely circulated inside Thailand too. The first case is Japan banning the use of microwaves claiming that the Japanese government decided to eliminate microwaves within 2019 due to its radioactive which researcher from Hiroshima University discovered that causes harm to citizen health for more than 20 years. The news also stated that in Japan, those who violate will be threatened with a fine and imprison while South Korea and China plan to eliminate microwave within 2023. The second case study is the airport bus. This took place in 2018 when typhoon-hit Kansai airport, Japan and caused the airport bridge to collapse and flight cancelation. The fake news claimed that Taiwanese tourists are forced to say that they are Chinese in order to get on the bus sent by the Chinese embassy to help evacuate tourists.

For domestic fake news, 2 case studies that were selected. The first case study is the marriage tax calming that the Thai government will start collecting 5 percent tax from the money a couple presents to others to prevent illegal money transfer. Starting from 6th August 2019, those who not paying the tax will not receive the marriage license. The second case study is Muslim praying before the terrorist attack. The fake news shows a picture of a Muslim group of people sitting in the street praying with a caption stated that the group blocks the road for praying before the terrorist attack. In fact, the event actually happens in the Southern part of Thailand, but it is the activity of praying for peace in the area.

4. Methodology

4.1 Survey

The data is collecting through an online questionnaire by a survey company in December 2019. Samples are data collected from 2,060 participants living in the metropolitan area in Thailand. The choices including Bangkok (the capital city of Thailand), Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan, Prathumthani, Samutsakorn, Nakornpathom and others. Participants are fairly distributed in gender with 50:50 portion of male and female (male = 1, female = 0). The majority of participants are from 40-44 year-old at 14.1 percent, followed by 45-49 year-old (12.1 percent), 35-39 year-old (12 percent), 30-34 year-old (11.9 percent), 50-54 year-old (11.5 percent), 25-29 year-old (11.1 percent), 55-59 year-old (9.5 percent), 20-24 year-old (9 percent), 60-64 year-old (5.4 percent), 18-19 year-old (2 percent) and 65-69 year-old (1.4 percent) in the following order. For education, the majority is bachelor degrees at 60 percent, high school at 11 percent, master degrees at 9.9 percent, high vocational certificate at 6.9 percent, vocational certificate at 4.6 percent, junior high school at 4 percent, associate degree at 2.2 percent, doctor degrees at 1 percent and others at 0.4 percent in the following orders.

4.2 Control variables

Since the domestic case study related to terrorist and taxation, political ideology and salary should be considered as one of the variables in the model. For political ideology, the question asks participants to self-report with 5 ordinal scales whether they considered themselves as conservative or liberal. The majority of participants indicated that they are in the middle of both (answer at the level of 3) with 37.9 percent and followed by liberal ideology at level of 5 with 26 percent and level of 4 at 21.5 percent. While participants who identified themselves as conservative are lower at the level of 1 with 8.2 percent and a level of 2 at 6.4 percent. For salary, the majority of participants reported that their yearly household income is more than 660,001 Thai Baht at 28 percent, between 300,001 – 420,000 Thai baht at 10.7 percent and lower than 120,000 baht at 10 percent.

4.3 Independent variables

The key independent variables in the model are as follows. The section shows each 4 case studies with a description that participant will be presented with the information appeared in online media which including visual and text of unverified information too. And the following picture is one of the examples of that information. The content of each case study is described in the text and followed by the visual. All case studies provided sources. Then, participants were asked to evaluate their level of opinion toward each variable with 6 ordinal scales. The answer ranged from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), slightly disagree (3), slightly agree (4), agree (5) and strongly agree (6).

The first variable is the frequency. Several previous studies (Greenhill and Openheim, 2017) found that repeating information has influence perceived as truth or further spreading of the unverified information. The question asked, “Have you heard about this story before?”. From this, we proposed the following hypotheses are proposed,

H1a: frequency will have a positive influence on sharing behavior.

H1b: frequency will have a positive influence on encounter sharing behavior.

The same influence pattern also found in the second variable, perceived as truth. To see whether people share fake news or encounter it because they believe it is true. The questionnaire asked, “Do you think this story has a chance to be true?”. From this, we proposed the following hypotheses are proposed,

H2a: Perceived truth will have a positive influence on sharing behavior.

H2b: Perceived truth will have a negative influence on encounter sharing behavior.

The third and fourth variables are emotions. This study divided emotion into 2 groups: angry or anxiety and surprise or interest. The question asked, “Do you feel angry or anxiety when you see this information?” and “Do you feel surprised and interesting when you see this information?”. From this, we proposed the following hypotheses are proposed,

H3a: angry or anxiety will have a positive influence on sharing behavior.

H3b: angry or anxiety will have a negative influence on encounter sharing behavior.

H4a: surprised and interesting will have a positive influence on sharing behavior.

H4b: surprised and interesting will have negative influence toward encounter sharing behavior

The fifth variable is importance. The question asked, “Do you think this story is important to you?” From this, we proposed the following hypotheses are proposed,

H5a: Importance will have a positive influence on sharing behavior.

H5b: Importance will have a positive influence on encounter sharing behavior.

The sixth variable is ambiguity. To see whether if people perceived that the information looks ambiguous, will they refrain from spreading it or contribute to encountering it or not. The question asked, “Do you think this story is ambiguous?” From this, we proposed the following hypotheses are proposed,

H6a: Ambiguity will have a negative influence on sharing behavior.

H6b: Ambiguity will have a positive influence on encounter sharing behavior.

4.4 Media usage for the purpose of news consumption

This section asks participants how often they use the following media as a source for receiving the news. The choices are listed with 5 scales: 1 = not at all, 2 = rarely (once a month or less), 3 = sometimes (several times a month), 4 = often (several times a week) and 5 = always (almost every day). The media in the list included 11 items as follows: broadcast television, broadcast radio, newspaper, magazine (including free magazine), online radio or podcast, newspaper or magazine website, online news agency, portal sites, social media, video website (including OTT) and web board or personal blog. The result shows that majority of participants receiving news from an online channel such as social media or video or OTT websites. While traditional media especially print for instance, newspaper or magazine has decreased its popularity, broadcasting television still remains the channel for news even if the consumption is lower than the online channel (see figure 1).

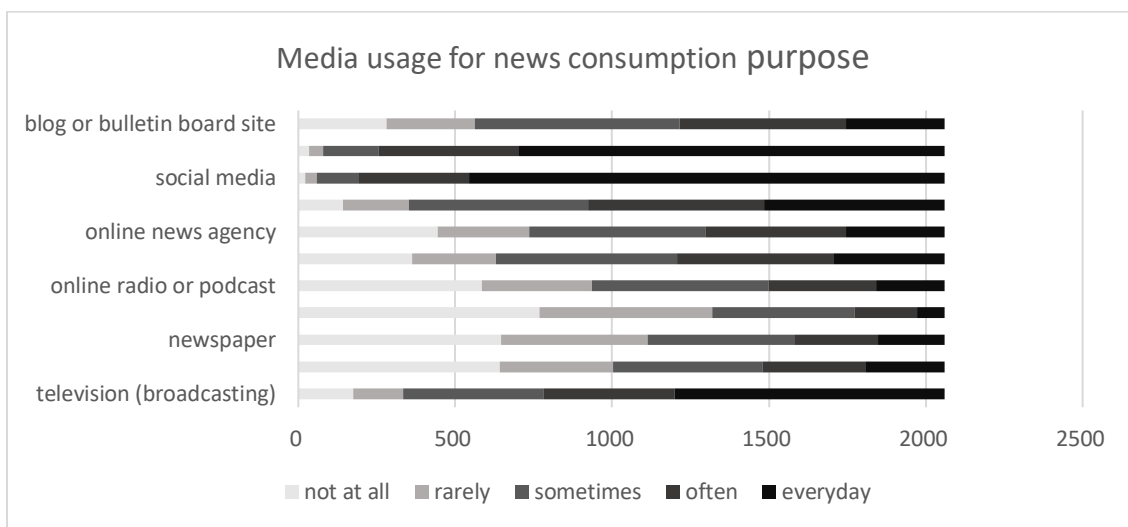


Figure 1. Media usage for news consumption purpose

4.5 Dependent variables

This study has two behavior as dependent variables: sharing fake news and encountering fake news. To answer the question what drive people to share fake news, the questionnaire asked participant “Do you want to tell others about this story?”. The second dependent variable is encountering fake news. One of the proposed solutions that can solve the fake news problem is to correct the ‘fake’ part of fake news with correct information. A fact-checker is one of the ways to encounter in this aspect. To see whether people want to take behavior in an attempt to encounter the fake news, the questionnaire asked participants that “Do you want to tell others that this story is not true?”.

5. Result and Discussion

The data is run through a variance inflation factor (VIF) test to check for the multicollinearity before performing a multiple regression analysis. The results show the correlation between the independent variables in each case study is acceptable and none of the variables exceed 3 which considering it a low level. Therefore, the data is safe to perform multiple regression analysis.

Case 1, microwave. The significant regression results are shown in the table below (see table 1).

Variables	Tell others (spread)			Tell others this is not true (encounter)		
	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)
Control variables						
Age						
Gender	0.124903	0.047843	0.009103 **	0.1181677	0.0544749	0.030182 *
Education						
Salary						
Political ideology						
Independent variables						
Frequency	0.141252	0.017306	5.71e-16 ***	0.1955569	0.0197048	< 2e-16 ***
Chance to be true	0.228173	0.021622	< 2e-16 ***			
Angry/anxiety	0.077331	0.022548	0.000616 ***	0.0921065	0.0256730	0.000342 ***
Surprised/interesting	0.176462	0.025056	2.57e-12 ***			
Importance	0.208206	0.023342	< 2e-16 ***	0.0577403	0.0265779	0.029934 *
Ambiguity				0.2288510	0.0218994	< 2e-16 ***
Media as a news source						
Television						
Radio						
Newspaper	0.060539	0.026090	0.020420 *			
Magazine						
Online radio and podcast						
Online newspaper and magazine						
Online news agency						
Portal site						
Social media						
VDO site and OTT						
Web board				0.0748692	0.0279752	0.007504 **
R-square	0.4735			0.2547		
Adjusted R-square	0.4678			0.2467		

*** P≤ 0.001

** P≤ 0.01

* P≤ 0.05

Table 1. Regression result for the Microwave case study.

Case 2, airport bus, the significant regression results are shown as in the table below (see table 2).

Variables	Tell others (spread)			Tell others this is not true (encounter)		
	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)
Control variables						
Age						
Gender						
Education						
Salary						
Political ideology						
Independent variables						
Frequency	0.1754420	0.0182554	< 2e-16 ***	0.130596	0.021378	1.20e-09 ***
Chance to be true	0.1551711	0.0219467	2.12e-12 ***			
Angry/anxiety	0.0797441	0.0213807	0.000197 ***	0.100566	0.025038	6.12e-05 ***
Surprised/interesting	0.2185899	0.0234235	< 2e-16 ** *	0.110560	0.027430	5.77e-05 ***
Importance	0.2534992	0.0225655	< 2e-16 ***	0.145595	0.026425	4.05e-08 ***
Ambiguity				0.187650	0.020802	< 2e-16 * **
Media as a news source						
Television						
Radio						
Newspaper						
Magazine						
Online radio and podcast						
Online newspaper and magazine						
Online news agency						
Portal site						
Social media						
VDO site and OTT						
Web board						
R-square	0.5171			0.2922		
Adjusted R-square	0.5119			0.2846		

*** P ≤ 0.001 ** P ≤ 0.01 * P ≤ 0.05

Table 2. Regression result for airport bus case study.

Case 3, marriage tax, the significant regression results are shown in the table below (see table 3).

Variables	Tell others (spread)			Tell others this is not true (encounter)		
	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)
Control variables						
Age				0.040324	0.014282	0.00480 **
Gender						
Education						
Salary						
Political ideology						
Independent variables						
Frequency	0.0965282	0.0188549	3.35e-07 ***	0.129255	0.020960	8.39e-10 ***
Chance to be true	0.1964949	0.0224294	< 2e-16 ***	-0.084077	0.024934	0.00076 ** *
Angry/anxiety	0.1903020	0.0238034	2.15e-15 ***	0.060531	0.026461	0.02227 *
Surprised/interesting	0.1247448	0.0240447	2.34e-07 ***	0.131158	0.026730	9.99e-07 ***
Importance	0.1729889	0.0234298	2.24e-13 ***	0.105119	0.026046	5.64e-05 ***
Ambiguity	0.0634653	0.0195811	0.00121 **	0.275718	0.021767	< 2e-16 ** *
Media as a news source						
Television						
Radio						
Newspaper						
Magazine						
Online radio and podcast						
Online newspaper and magazine						
Online news agency						
Portal site						
Social media						
VDO site and OTT	0.1015699	0.0419074	0.01545 *			
Web board	0.0611796	0.0290363	0.03524 *			
R-square	0.4402			0.2466		
Adjusted R-square	0.4342			0.2385		

*** P ≤ 0.001

** P ≤ 0.01

* P ≤ 0.05

Table 3. Regression result for the tax case study.

Case 4, Muslim terrorists, the significant regression results are shown in the table below (see table 4).

Variables	Tell others (share)			Tell others this is not true (encounter)		
	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)	Estimate	SE	Pr (> t)
Control variables						
Age						
Gender	0.120568	0.052538	0.0218 *			.
Education				0.047226	0.018645	0.0114 *
Salary						
Political ideology						
Independent variables						
Frequency	0.178894	0.019909	< 2e-16 ***	0.176819	0.022824	1.47e-14 ***
Chance to be true	0.201221	0.023317	< 2e-16 ***	-0.107132	0.026732	6.35e-05 **
Angry/anxiety	0.143306	0.024226	3.88e-09 ***	0.137862	0.027774	7.49e-07 ***
Surprised/interesting	0.181837	0.025780	2.38e-12 ***			
Importance	0.183501	0.023864	2.28e-14 ***	0.116132	0.027358	2.29e-05 ***
Ambiguity				0.277615	0.022235	< 2e-16 ***
Media as a news source						
Television						
Radio						
Newspaper						
Magazine			.	-0.093781	0.039329	0.0172 *
Online radio and podcast						
Online newspaper and magazine						
Online news agency						
Portal site						
Social media						
VDO site and OTT				-0.098243	0.044750	0.0282 *
Web board				0.067621	0.030835	0.0284 *
R-square	0.4746			0.2623		
Adjusted R-square	0.4689			0.2543		

*** P ≤ 0.001 ** P ≤ 0.01 * P ≤ 0.05

Table 4. Regression result for the terrorist case study.

6. Conclusion

The multiple regression in each case study shows a worth highlighted insight. The patterns from all case studies are summarized in the tables below (see table 5).

Case studies	Age	Gender	Education	Salary	Political ideology
Microwave (spread)		**			
Microwave (encounter)		*			
Bus (spread)					
Bus (encounter)					
Tax (spread)					
Tax (encounter)	**				
Terrorist (spread)		*			
Terrorist (encounter)			*		

*** $P \leq 0.001$ ** $P \leq 0.01$ * $P \leq 0.05$

Table 5. The pattern of regression results for control variables in all case studies.

For control variables, gender has statistically significant for both sharing and encounter in the case from international fake news, microwave case, and only for sharing in domestic fake news of terrorist cases. Interestingly, political ideology does not show a statistically significant result in any case even in the domestic fake news of government collecting marriage tax. Age only significant for the domestic case study of tax in the encounter part. The regression result shows that gender is significant in this regression in both spreading and encountering international fake news of microwave case while in domestic fake news of terrorists only spreading behavior is significant. Education is only significant in domestic fake news encountering behavior.

For the independent variables, some outstanding patterns can be seen in the pattern summary table below (see table 6). Some patterns worth highlighting are listed as follows.

Variables	Frequency	Chance to be true	Angry/ anxiety	Surprised/ Interesting	Importance	Ambiguity
Microwave (spread)	***	***	***	***	***	-
Microwave (encounter)	***	-	***	-	*	***
Bus (spread)	***	***	***	***	***	-
Bus (encounter)	***	-	***	***	***	***
Tax	***	***	***	***	***	**

(spread)						
Tax (encounter)	***	Negative ***	*	***	***	***
Terrorist (spread)	***	***	***	***	***	-
Terrorist (encounter)	***	Negative ***	***	-	***	***

*** P≤ 0.001 ** P≤ 0.01 * P≤ 0.05

Table 6. The pattern of regression results for independent variables in all case studies.

The first variable, frequency has strongly significant at the level of $P \leq 0.001$ in all cases for both sharing and encountering. The result consists of a previous study of rumors done by Greenhill and Oppenheim (2017). Their study found that repetition (repeating of exposure to rumor) as one of the key variables has a strong and significant relationship to receptivity. The current study finding emphasizes the influence of repeat as one of the key factors in fake news spreading.

The second variable, a chance to be true. As expected, the variable is statistically significant with spreading behavior in all cases. However, it does not have significant in the encountering part for case studies from international fake news but has a negative significance in both domestic case studies. One possible explanation of the negative sign in encountering part is the familiarity of the content. Both events took place inside the country. Therefore, it is easier to evaluate a chance whether if it can happen or seek more information.

The third and fourth variables are emotion when receiving fake news. Angry or anxiety is statistically significant in all cases although for encounter part in domestic fake news of tax has a lower significance level than others at $P \leq 0.05$. While surprised or interesting does not significant in the international case of microwave and the domestic case of terrorists in encountering part. This result consists of a previous study by Jones, Libert and Tynski, (2016) that negative emotion which in this study is angry and anxiety, is more likely to spread. It also contributed to the finding from the same study that interesting is able to generate strong emotion that increases the possibility for the story to be shared but does not have influences as negative emotion does.

The fifth variable, importance is statistically significant in all case studies for both sharing and encountering part. However, only the statistic significant in encountering a part of the international case of microwave is lower than in other cases at $P \leq 0.05$. The importance is statistically in all case studies. However, encountering part in the microwave has a slightly lower level than other cases at $P \leq 0.05$.

The last variable is ambiguity. In sharing part, the variables are expected to be insignificant in sharing (because the story looks ambiguous, so I do not want to share) while in encountering is expected to be significant (because the story looks ambiguous, so I want to tell other people that this is not true). Although the encountering part is statistically significant as expected. However, the result shows that ambiguity also has statistically significant in sharing for the domestic case of tax too. Although political ideology in control variables does not significantly influence spread or encountering behavior, a marriage

tax, and only case study that related to political topics shows outstanding significance in ambiguity. This could be a result of the political scenario of Thailand itself. The questionnaire including a set of questions asking whether participants believe that the Thai government is doing their best in the following topic. The result shows that almost half of the answers are pruning that their government does not perform their best (see figure 2). This could influence the result just for the case study that related to the government directly like in the case study that claims itself as an announcement from the government.

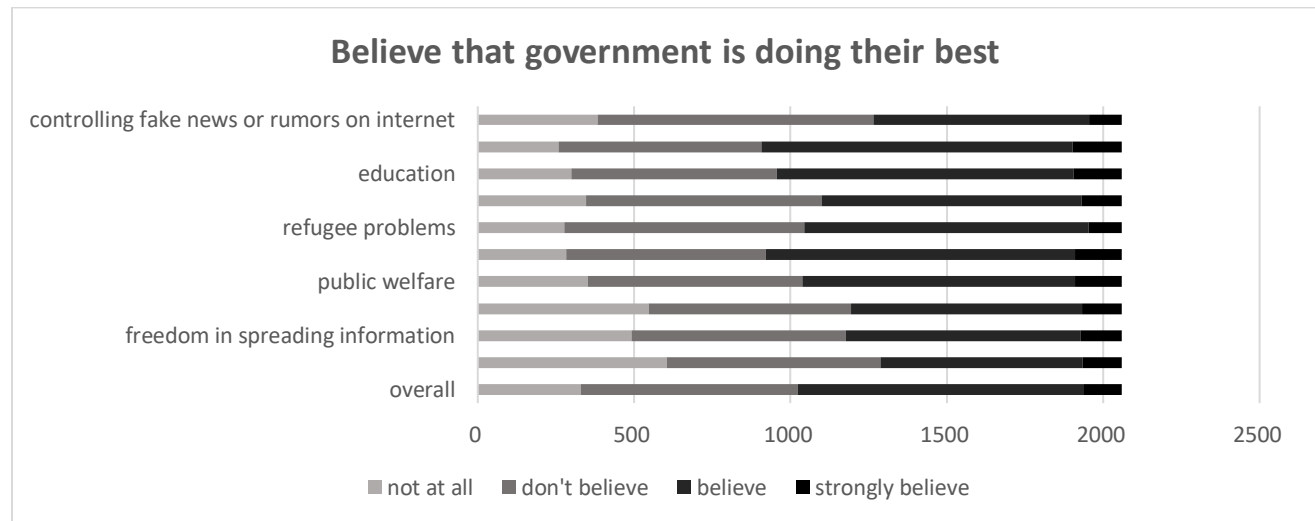


Figure 2. Believe that the government is doing their best

Noted that R-square for spreading behavior is higher than encounter behavior in all models where R-square in spreading models are ranged from 0.4342 to 0.5171, encountering ranged from 0.2466 to 0.2922. This suggests the possibility of other influences factors that not include in the current model. This shows the evidence that behavior to encounter fake news is more complex and consists of more related variables than sharing one.

Variables	TV	Radio	Newspaper	Magazine	Online radio	Online newspaper /magazine	Online news agency	Portal site	Social media	Video website or OTT	Web board
Microwave (spread)			*								
Microwave (encounter)											**
Bus (spread)											
Bus (encounter)											
Tax (spread)										*	*
Tax (encounter)											
Terrorist (spread)											
Terrorist (encounter)				Negative *						Negative *	*

*** P ≤ 0.001 ** P ≤ 0.01 * P ≤ 0.05

Table 7. The pattern of regression results for news media consumption in all case studies.

For the media as a source of news, the regression result suggests that the source of news does not have an outstanding influence on spreading or encountering behavior. Newspapers only significant for the international case of microwave in sharing behavior while the web board is significant in encountering one. For another international case of the airport bus, none of the media as a news source has statistically significant for both sharing and encountering. The domestic case study of marriage tax has statistically significant for sharing in video websites or OTT and web boards as a source of news. The outstanding result is that encountering a part of a terrorist domestic fake news magazine and video website or OTT have statistically negative correlations for encountering while the web board has positively significant. This could suggest that the choice of media for news consumption does not increase the likelihood of encountering fake news. The regression result also shows other significant media but unfortunately at the 0.1 level. Therefore, those results are not included in the paper.

This study contributed to the research in fake news in Asia by choosing Thailand as a case study to reflect the phenomena in this region. The result expands the understanding of fake news in the academic field in the region where research in fake news is still lack of numbers. The result emphasized that strong emotion especially negative like anger and anxiety increasing a chance to be spread and also increased a chance to be encountered too. Repeating expose has strong significance to both spreading and encountering fake news too. This consists of a “repetition effect” from a cognitive bias theory that explained people are most likely to believe the message that keeps repeating.

Another interesting part of the finding is that when categories of fake news are varied, political ideology does not always play an important role in spreading or encountering fake news as same as which media one uses as a source of news. Lastly, 3 out of 4 case studies' ambiguity does not have a significant result for spreading. This is one of the evidence of how media literacy can help solves the problem. When individuals perceived that the information is ambiguous, they will have less likelihood to spread it. However, further, investigation needed to be done in order to confirm this point.

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