

# The Spiral of Silence on Political Movement of Thai Youth under the Imagined Community from Milk Tea Alliance Tactics on Twitter

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**ABSTRACT**

The main focus of this research is how the youth demonstration started in Thailand in late 2020. It is now and this demonstration is still going on in a more severe stage as Thailand just had an election on May 14th, 2023 but the authoritarian regime seems not to respect the majority votes. The analysis since late 2020, the demonstration of Thai youths, will be discussed in this research and the main question is what is the motivation of Youth's demonstration will be analyzed. Why are high school and elementary school students walking out on the street for a political movement, and some out mobilizing in front of the Ministry of Education to represent people's opinions on political changes? When comparing student activism in Thailand on the Day of Great Sorrow "Wan Maha Wippayok" in 1973 and 1976, one sees that the two movements were to promote anti-dictatorship in Thailand. The people who played the role of a striker were university students. In contrast, the demonstration in 2020, it differs from the demonstrations in the 1970s; in the 2020 demonstration, people from all levels participated in this protest, especially elementary school and high school students. This research discovered the deep roots of this protest and how the government and Thai Youth should encounter it halfway through this shift so that the movement will achieve its goal and have less harm on the current economy. An aggressive movement has no benefit to Thai people and the economy. It destroys national GDP and wastes too much time rebuilding the economy under an aging society. Anonymously interviewing the scholars and students who joined the demonstration, data analysis, and online survey from the people who attended Thai schools are the key to finding an answer to the research questions.

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## INTRODUCTION

Thai Youth from all over Thailand and abroad are striving for a democratic movement against the military-dominated coalition. The youth movement calls for three critical demands for democratic reform: the dissolution of the authoritarian parliament, termination of the intimidation of citizens by the government, amendments to the military-backed constitution, and reform of the monarchy (Channel News Asia 2020). Amid COVID-19, the movement has been active both online and offline in voicing people's frustrations and grievances against the government. The pro-democracy group tries to have freedom of speech through utilizing social media, but it is seen as harmful to the government's reputation and creates misunderstandings. This could be claimed as a human rights abuse action by the Thai government against the majority citizens who are suffering from the rule by law of the Thai government. Thailand lacks a legal statute criminalizing torture, as required by the United Nations Convention against Torture, adopted in 2007 under the coup (UN Thailand 2021). Authorities failed to conduct meaningful and credible investigations into complaints of torture regularly in 2018.

Generally, Thai Youth is one of the participants in the Milk Tea Alliance movement on Twitter. Research found that the most relatable groups of Youth participating in the certain hashtags are from Hong Kong and Thailand (Bangkok Post 2020). The hashtag was initially a form of digital activism against China's ultra-nationalistic internet users. Later, it became a loose transnational cohesive movement demanding change, emphasizing the young generation as digital natives, as this generation has been born into a technology infused society. The research concept aims to explore and study the ideology of the results. However, it can provide a more in-depth understanding of perceptions and motivations regarding this movement. Thai Youth have adopted tactics from the Movement of Milk Tea Alliance against authoritarianism in Thai society via Twitter, now formally recognized as 'X'.

Consequently, this research aims to interpret the use of digital media and the politics of the younger generation's distress with the Twitter hashtag movements in Thailand during the pandemic. By turning into a medium on its own, this process has fostered communication, exchanging ideas, and creating an imagined community (Anderson, B. 2006). It brings together those willing to share their thoughts through online media without demanding a political movement leader, place, physical collaboration or other resources to generate an international alliance. Only the media, universal language, and ideology can explicate the phenomenon of youth resistance against authoritarianism through transnational cooperation. The youth-driven rebellion movement of pro-democracy campaigners, mainly in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Myanmar, and Thailand, portrays a new era of social movements (Giga Focus Asia 2021).

When one's society and community they belong to judge something, and if the individual has a contrary idea, it is terrifying to be isolated by that community. Humans fear being alone, so being associated with the popular trend, among the majority, seems like the safest decision to make. Nonetheless, are humans that easily controlled by society? If a popular opinion does not match one's mind, it would not be able to become the trend. A popular opinion is something people significantly like or agree with, so it means it should touch the true feelings that people have been hiding for a long time until one day there is a person who is brave enough to stand and speak up their voice and make the voice heard and hope for the changes that allow a trend to start (Noelle-Neumann, 2006). What happened in the 2020 Thai Youth demonstration falls into the theory of the Spiral of Silence?

The 2020 demonstration is not the first youth-led movement, but has been one of the salient movements both on digital media and the street (Sirivunnabud 2020). Twitter is often chosen as the primary medium for discussing social issues; it is true that the hashtag Milk Tea Alliance originated on Twitter (Charoentansakul 2023) and then spread across the region. The convenience of microblog technology results in the speedy and timely dissemination of information and opinions. Another influential factor in why Twitter is such a popular medium in this instance is because Twitter regulations only require that new users upload some photos or personal information - whether that information is real or fake does not necessarily matter - to create an account (Forsey 2021). This factor created research limitations due to the privacy of Twitter users and the duration of the trend in 2020, and the researcher struggled to reach out to those involved in the movement. Nonetheless, the mechanism allows for political speech to be less filtered and easier to spread. Indeed, the credibility of the data is not greater than on any other platform, and these factors are sufficient for Twitter to become the perfect political tool.

In 1973 and 1976, Thai students demonstrated that most of the population tended to be conservative then (Time Magazine by Feliz Solomon 2016). Certain conservative behavior, such as political criticism led to dehumanizing political activists. Thousands of demonstrators were imprisoned after the coup in the 1970s, seeking to wipe out the military government, rioting, and gathering weapons for revolution (Time Magazine by Feliz Solomon 2016). Thailand had less respect for individual rights. In the 21st Century, Twitter is one of the safest places for allowing those without power and status to spread majority opinions about inequality and other social issues relating to Thai society. On Twitter, people can have fake names and be able to post anything within a limit of 280 characters. Young people are practically born with a smartphone; they are used to receiving information quick and fast as they can search for endless data on smartphones within a second. Therefore, young people must be focused enough to read long essays, and Twitter could catch this trend. Thai youth post and receive news on Twitter as in an everyday habitual routine (NLBI 2022).

Anderson mentioned that the community imagines an inability to recognize the existence of everyone in society. However, with imagination and feelings in the mind of each individual, there is a picture of people's contributions and thoughts which could be unseen. Nonetheless, this can be recognized through communication. An overview perspective and motivation of the Youth indicate that

they want a change in Thai society, especially among those who grew up in Thailand and were born after 1997. For Thai people, the movement has influenced the way people recognize one's rights that the elite ruling has exploited. It also created a new medium in online platforms. After offline and online movements emerged, it became a method for the new generation's emerging news distribution. People discussing and collaborating with like-minded individuals has dramatically changed the overview. Moreover, they are gathering dissatisfaction and symbols sent into society to put more or less pressure on the opponent, Thai youth will express their opinion and share photos then make a hashtag. So when people want to follow a specific news, they just search from the keyword of hashtags.

Not only did the Youth learn from this call, but so did martial law. Thailand's Youth have learned to build networks and connections in online spaces to share information on social issues and debates. People from various aforementioned countries tended to acknowledge and express the majority opinions.

### **The Core Issue of Spiral of Silence in Thai Society**

The Spiral of Silence theory reflects a particular aspect of modernity in which transient or superficial events are essential to society. Erlebnisgesellschaft captures these elements well. The term 'refers to a society that privileges intense but superficial experiences oriented toward instant happening in the present and consumption of goods, cultural events, and mass-marketed lifestyles (Neumann 1974). The potential approach is to consider the power of Twitter to democratize consumption. Twitter and other social media platforms give consumers an excellent choice, allowing an alternative of digital political movements to the dominant elite-centered broadcasting, for example Thai television Channels: 3, 5, 7, 9, 11.

Interestingly, there are always sensational trending topics, which allow the people to see the dark side of Thailand. Many tweets referring to breaking news events contain hyperlinks to full-length newspaper articles. Therefore, it is more helpful to see Twitter and other social media as part of what Therborn calls an 'event society,' the theory of Erlebnisgesellschaft (Brock, Ditmar; Lechner, Götz 2000).

### **Twitter as digital media and social movements in Thailand via Milk Tea Alliance**

In order to understand the framework of youth engagement with politics towards the Milk Tea Alliance movement using digital media research, it is necessary to comprehend three main concepts, including: social movements, Twitter as a digital media, and the political behavior of Youth in digital media. This is an issue that is arduous for the government to manage. Legislative hurdles and resources are required to spread propaganda and give incentives to convince the public of the majority's legitimacy. Furthermore, states would need more than double the resources to gain international recognition of the fact that Thailand is facing a political crisis (BTI 2022). This is one of the advantages of globalization and the Youth has been born in this new era. Sheer numbers and decentralized networks give them an edge over the old state model. After the movement emerged in 2020, milk tea was seen and rematerialized as a material culture to achieve political intent by young generations in the region (Palapong 2022). Therefore, the movement can be interpreted to scrutinize its new cultural meaning through consumption of digital movements, which constructs a transnational identity among young generations in the Asian region, as well as the politicization of this constructed transnational identity as a soft power of looming democratization for several countries in Asia, including Thailand.

### **The Core of Authoritarianism in Thai SOTUS Society**

In Thailand, some university students may face the SOTUS (Seniority, Order, Tradition, Unity, Spirit) system (the system hazing younger university students by older students) once they walk onto campus for the first time (Brown 2020). First-year students will receive orders from the seniors. These orders include: the control of uniforms by seniors, non-sensual activities after classes, such as running in circles, kissing grotesque objects and demanding exercise, the demand for respecting seniors, and being forced to unite with students from the same department, even if you are not a social person, Known as *rab nong* in Thai, orientation activities can range from lighthearted events such as mass dances and mingling with strangers, to actions that lead to dire consequences, like being forced to do physical activities or even getting beaten up by seniors in the name of "tradition" (Kerdsang 2020). Uniform control is something that seniors should not have the authority to tell the freshmen how to wear clothes when they are in university; additionally some university freshmen are controlled by seniors even outside the campus. University students are older than eighteen once they enter a

university in Thailand, which means they are already adults. Seniors should not have any right to tell freshmen how to dress.

The Spiral of Silence occurs in this context when a student starts to stand up and asks why they have to follow these rules as they were not written into law - they are arbitrary. Moreover, underclassmen are punished by seniors when they cannot complete certain tasks, such as remembering classmate's names, classmate's student codes, and classmate's mobile phone numbers. These arbitrary tasks are automatically followed by underclassmen who are new to the university environment. These novice students believe that this system of hazing is the status-quo. Despite actions like these going against human rights, decades of Thai authoritarianism has shaped the way Thai people are corrupted by power (Glassman 2020). When the seniors tell the first-year students that everyone should know about all the information of their classmates as all the first-year students are from many provinces of Thailand. Most students are far from their home town, so they quickly obeys the order. Once first-year students attend the activities after class, first-year students are giving the upperclassmen a chance to bully them with nonsense activities.

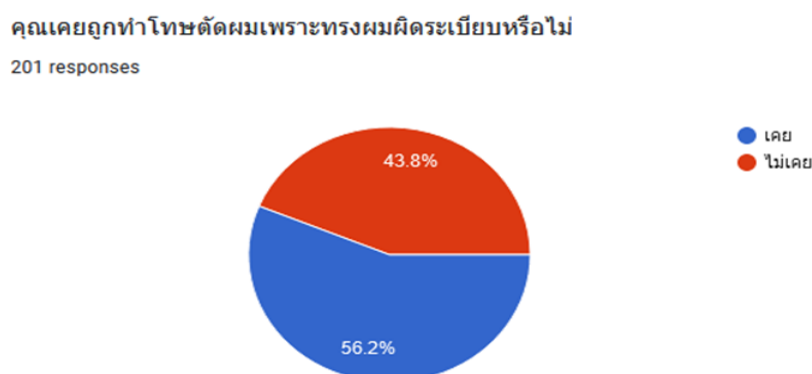
### Authoritarianism in the Thai Education System.

Both public and private Thai schools control their student's hair and clothes (Thai PBS, 2023). Ploy, a public school student in Bangkok, came out to do this campaign to communicate to society that this is what Thai students have to face and required society to realize that this is a violation of the human rights of children (Ployrung Sibplang, The Matter June 2020). "It was too cruel and harsh for a child to go through, and there was no one to help," said Ploy, a female student who came out to campaign for Thai students' hairstyles (Ployrung Sibplang, The Matter June 2020). She filed a complaint to an adult, but there was no sign of any substantial change. Ploy then came out and requested help again through the twitter campaign, #เลิกบังคับหรือจับตัด (which translates to #Quit cutting students hair without their consent). This was in order to make people understand the feeling of Thai students forced to live in the framework of adults, like the chains that bind them, so the students feel as if they do not have freedom in their own bodies.

The following research findings reveal that Thai people have both negative and positive opinions about authoritarianism in Thai schools. In this case, the researcher would like to present the results of three generations, Generation X (42 years old – 56 years old), generation Y (24 years old – 41 years old), and Generation Z (12 years old – 23 years old). This research discovered how these three groups have expressed their opinion about authoritarianism in a safe place, 'Twitter' or "X" in nowadays.

These are the result of a small survey of Thai students' experiences in school; the snowball sampling method is used in this survey. This research has received 201 responses from survey participants. The survey topic is "The Experiences of Authoritarianism in Thai Schools and Using Social Media as a Tool of Solving Problems" through the 2020 demonstration group of people.

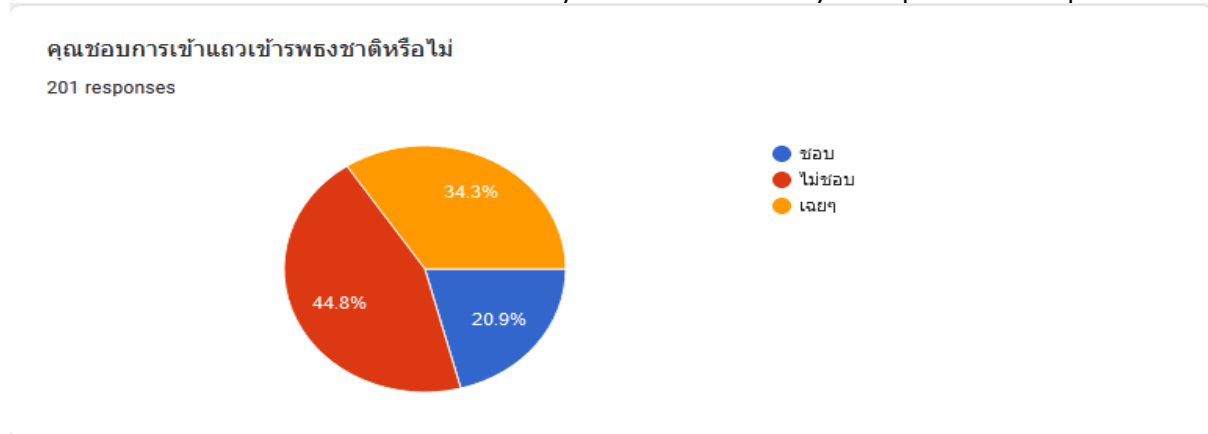
**Figure two:** Have you ever been penalized for having the wrong hairstyle for school?



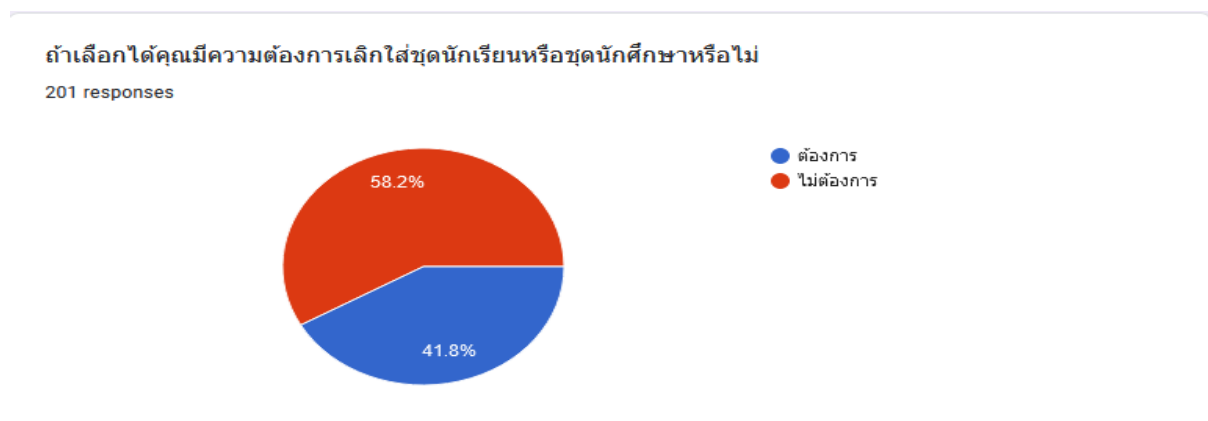
In the figure two pie chart, blue (56.2%) represents students who responded "yes" to the question about being penalized for having the wrong hairstyle in school. Red (43.8%) represents students who responded "no" to the question. As can be seen from the data, students are more likely than not to be penalized by their teachers.

**Figure three:** Do you like to pay respect to the National Flag by standing in rows every morning on school days?

In this following pie chart, blue (20.9%) represents the students who do "like" (enjoy) to pay respect to the national flag of Thailand every morning on school days. This includes singing and listening to the national anthem, as well as paying respects to the King and declaring one's love and commitment to their country. Red (44.8%) represents the students who "dislike" participating in these activities every morning. Yellow (34.3%) represents students who are "neutral" and have no opinion on having to do these activities. These students do not participate passionately, but they do not complain about them either. Over 200 Thai citizens were surveyed across the country in response to the question.



**Figure four:** If you have a choice, would you like to cancel school and university student uniforms?

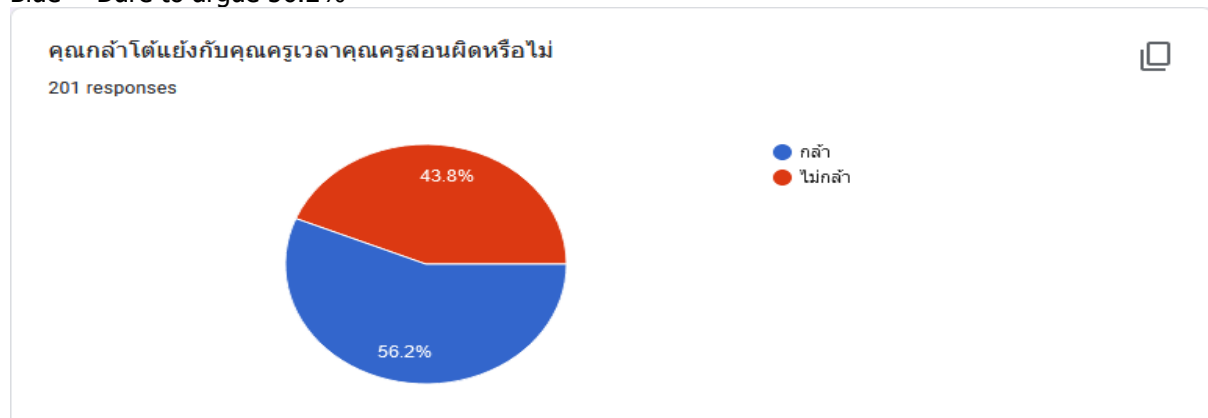


The pie chart shows that more than half of people - representing red - do not prefer to cancel wearing school uniforms (58.2%), but the differences between preferring and not preferring are very close. Seen in blue, almost forty-two percent (41.8%) of people want to cancel the uniform system.

**Figure Five:** Do you argue with the teacher when making mistakes in the lecture?

Red = No courage to argue 43.8%

Blue = Dare to argue 56.2%

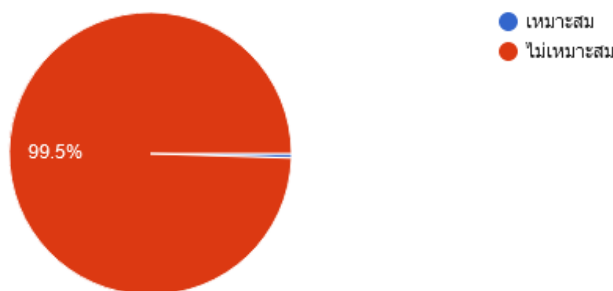


The pie chart shows that more than half of people (56.2%) are likely to argue with the teacher when the teacher is wrong, but the percentage of students who are not likely to argue with the teacher is relatively high at almost forty-four percent (43.8%). The color blue represents survey participants who “dare to argue” with their teacher, while red represents those students who had “no courage to argue.”

**Figure Six:** Is it appropriate to blame students in front of others to make the student feel shameful?

การทำโทษนักเรียนโดยการด่าประจานให้อับอายเหมาะสมหรือไม่

200 responses

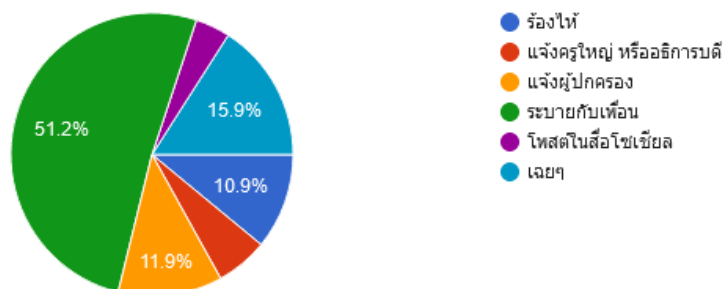


The pie chart clearly shows that people agree that it is not appropriate at all to do so. Represented by red, 99.5% of survey participants believe blaming and shaming students in front of others is “unproper” (inappropriate). Represented by blue, only 0.5% of participants believe it is “proper” (appropriate) to do so.

**Figure Seven:** What will you do when the teacher blames you in front of others?

คุณทำอย่างไรเมื่อถูกคุณครูหรืออาจารย์ต่อว่าให้อับอายต่อหน้าเพื่อนๆ

201 responses



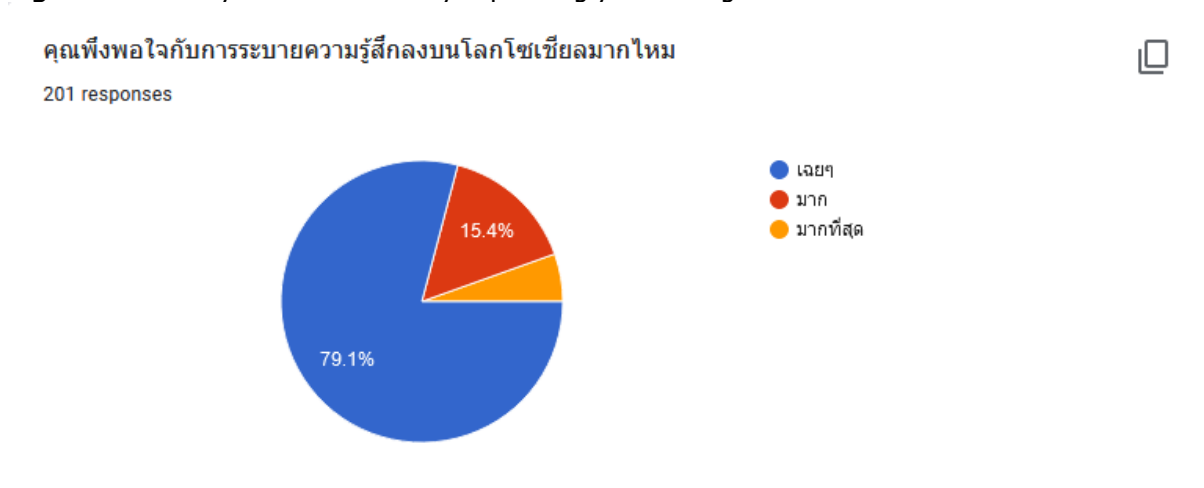
The pie chart shows that more than half of people choose to talk to friends rather than post on social media. When asked how they would respond to being shamed by their teacher, 51.2% (represented by green) of survey participants said they would “talk to friends.” 15.9% (light blue) of participants would “not do anything,” while 11.9% (orange) would “talk to their guardians” and 13% (red) would “tell the school president” about the event. Other responses included: 10.9% (dark blue) who would “cry” and not say anything, and 8% (purple) of participants would “post on social media.” This data reflects the reality that Thai youth feel more comfortable talking with their peers, rather than raising grievances to the older generation (who hold the positions of teacher, school principal and guardians) who may not understand why they are upset.

**Figure Eight:** Do you have any friends who ever experience sexual harassment from a teacher?



The figure eight pie chart reflects a dark reality about Thai society. Both boys and girls were surveyed, and in response to being asked if they had friends who experienced forms of sexual harassment, 25.4% (represented by blue) said they "have had friends" who were sexually harassed by their teacher, and 74.6% (represented by red) "have not heard" about this harassment.

**Figure Nine:** Do you feel satisfied by expressing your feelings on social media?



The pie chart shows that a majority of respondents seen in blue (79.1%) feel "neutral" about expressing their feelings on social media. 15.4% (red) feel "satisfied" when they make their feelings/emotions public, and 5.5% (yellow) feel "very satisfied" about expressing their emotions. This pie chart supports the data seen in Figure 7, and shows that Thai people utilize social media to connect with their peers and communities online. Social media allows them to feel less isolated and gives the opportunity to connect with an imagined community more. Social media gives Thai people purpose by offering a sense of community, where one does not have to keep their grievances to themselves or feel judged for expressing how they feel, but instead be accepted and realize there are many other people who feel the same way. Social media is not just for expression for its own sake, but rather to connect with like-minded individuals.

### A Call Out movement

Children raised in harsh conditions - within their home, school and societal life-will have a different effect than those raised in more comfortable conditions. The younger the child, the more these conditions affect growth and development. Children will show many forms of aggression, irritability, and anger because of experiencing their teacher's anger on a daily basis. When in school, students would choose to express their opinions and emotions in another area, such as social media or safe-social places where the youth tend to gather such as malls or shopping centers. With an aggressive response or taking action, some children will choose a way to escape and cry and do not want to go to school. They are attending activities they don't want to go to because they do not want to be blamed or beaten by their parents and teachers for not attending. Anxiety, lethargy and separation plague

children who agree to follow the teacher to survive, while children willing to grow up will feel powerless and have low self-esteem, leading to depression (Martinsen 2021).

Therefore, authoritarianism in Thai schools and economic degradation was the catalyst of a call out for a democratic movement in Thailand during the 2020 pandemic. Furthermore, during this time the anti-authoritarianism movement had spread to all of Thailand because everyone had the ability to receive sudden information by accessing Twitter on their smartphones. Approximately 62.3 million Thai people use smartphones, or 95.2% of the population (Market Online. Co, 2022). There is no need to physically travel far to give information, which highlights the widespread use and social utility of smartphones. Several retweets and hashtags could quickly become a grand movement in social media and influence people's decisions and mindsets.

Nevertheless, the Spiral of Silence would not be able to succeed if there wasn't a deep depression in Thai people's minds that has been dormant for a long time, waiting for the day of release. Successful professional social movements - such as the global Gen-z environmental movement - have become effective at mobilizing resources, both from inside and outside themselves, to effect desired change (Jenkins 1983). On the other hand, the way Covid-19 hit the economy in Thailand strengthened the demonstration against the current authoritarian regime. The conflict between the resilient population and the government started in 2014 when the coup started under the power of Yingluck, the first and only female prime minister in Thailand's history (BBC 2017). Thailand had struggled during the Asian economic crisis of 1997 and it has since only partially recovered. Thailand's economy was doing better from the years 2003 to 2013, then it began to fail again, and it is now getting worse. Thailand has reached the 76th rank of income inequality in the world; Global Finance shows that the bottom 50% of the Thai population hold only 13.89% of the country's wealth, while the Top 10% of people hold 48.79% of the country's wealth, and the top 1% of people hold 17.76% of the country's wealth (Ventura 2022).

The Thai Youth questioned that if the government were not dictators, Thailand could better deal with the economic problem during the pandemic. A democratically elected government would care more about people's economic difficulties, listen to their demands and make decisions which would influence the next election's results. Since the military government has been in power for seven years - from May 22, 2014, to the present - the Thai Youth has questioned whether this government supported authoritarianism in Thai society, which stems from the Thai schooling system. For this reason, it made it easier for Thai people to obey and follow conservative social norms, which have dehumanized the population for a long time, as mentioned previously. In regards to the conservative norms in the educational sphere, the rules are primarily about student hairstyles and student uniforms. Thai students wanted to make a political movement because the students concluded that authoritarianism started with the influence of the teacher on students' hair and clothes (Rogozhina 2021). Thai students paid more attention to students' hair and school uniforms to comply with the rules than students' academic performances. Unfortunately, the education system in Thailand has been towards the bottom of ASEAN countries since 2013; Thailand was the eighth rank of ASEAN countries (World Economic Forum (WEF) - The Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013). It is essential that students receive a better education system from the government. Thai students seek student rights in the education system since there is no freedom to dress in a school—students are expected to be treated like real human beings, not animals on a farm.

### **Economic Factors**

Gen Z was affected by the economic disruption of the Asian economic crisis of 1997 while growing up - they saw their parent's economic situation fluctuate. An unstable household economy affects young people significantly, as the education system in Thailand forces the Thai Youth to invest petty cash instead of seeking long-term success. Education inequality is a typical reality, and one who can get a better education has the potential to afford their children's cram schools (Phuaphansawat 2021). Cram school business in Thailand is quite popular as it could help the student with a lot of tactics guessing the right answer on their entrance exam, normally will open in the evening after school time or weekend. The potential of cram school payments means more chances to get into good universities and good departments. Once the student get a 'regular education' and get into a none skill department in a university, the student needs to take a job where they receive a minimum wage payment, which is 15,000THB or 441USD (1USD = 34THB) per month, which is not enough for a person living in Bangkok. The Thai Youth usually have to take care of the household as well, further fuelling worries into the Thai Youth's head. Thai Youth tried to figure out the root of the problem, and the mop for

change started during the pandemic and accelerated. Young people join the mob because of the Youth's anger at the unstable life that the government has created for them. When Gen Z compares the possibility of buying a house with that of parents, Gen Z discovers that it is more difficult to buy a house than the Gen X and Y generation, as the housing market is 50 times higher now than Gen X and Gen Y (before 1990). However, Gen Z's salary is only 7-10 times higher than in the Gen Z generation (Lertchoosakul 2021). Therefore, the Thai Youth shape a new identity that they are pro-democratic and will sacrifice themselves to make things change in Thailand and for the betterment of Thai society, especially the determinants that affect the Youth's rights and future prospects. Amid the pandemic, many young people become jobless after graduating according to the unemployment rate from 2019 - 2022 it has risen from 0.98% - 1.32%, and the year of youth demonstration on the street in 2020, the unemployment rate was 1.69% (Brand Inside 2023). They assume that if Thailand had a better government and economic system, unemployment could be remedied via better solutions and policies.

The economic pressure put on Generation X and Y influenced Generation Z's success, their school scores, and job prospects after graduation (Lertchoosakul 2021). However, when Gen Z students graduated in 2020, the world was hit by the pandemic crisis. Nobody could predict that most of Gen Z would become jobless after studying hard for sixteen years of their life (primary school for six years, elementary school for three years, high school for three years, and undergraduate for four years). The success of Gen X and Gen Y puts pressure on Gen Z's life expectations and future earnings as Thailand's FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) is less glorious now, than during the Cold War period (Lertchoosakul 2021). This reality forces Gen Z to try to figure out the factors of Thailand's middle-income trap and why they become jobless after graduating. Authoritarianism is the critical factor because it creates a monopoly economic structure, and this monopoly begins with the power of the military, which can enter the economic market cap.

Situations like this, have caused the Thai Gen Z to look for economic opportunities outside their own home. A facebook group called "Yok Yai Ma Sai Sa Pok Yok Yai (Move out, Shake your butt and let's move out)" proves that a large number of Thai youth want to move out of the country and try their luck in another global city. This facebook group has now reached 1.1 million members. This facebook page is sharing the ways that one can effectively work and move abroad. This facebook page is one of many examples that shows a large population of the Thai youth have no hope in their own country <https://m.facebook.com/groups/456929628904615/?ref=share>.

Moreover, the capitalists have accumulated assets and wealth since Rama the fifth period; once there was a liberalized market, they could enter the system and build wealth more quickly. So, since 1960 - the industrialization period of Thailand - these two groups of people (the military and the capitalist) started to monopolize the country's market cap and hold it until these days (Ungphakorn 2020). The Youth figured out why people experiencing poverty become poorer and realize that even if the poor work hard, they cannot live a better life because the market cap is exclusive for one percent of Thais. This problem could be rectified if the economic structure changes and only when the politicians play fair with the Thai people.

Additionally, the law that protects the economy from monopoly is cheated and weak, not practical. FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) and national economic strategy will continue to support the one percent of people (Couto 2018). The rest of the population will face the reality that even if they are a high-skill laborer, they will never become rich and will be another choice for rich people to take advantage of, one will just be a cog in the machine. Moreover, Thailand has no retirement pension for older people, and the economic burden is on the young people in the family. They face low income or joblessness and thus the anger within them about the current system has raged. The office of the National Economic and Social Development Council had predicted that in 2037, Thailand could face 31% of their population being qualified for retirement (Lertchoosakul 2021). Soon 1/3 Thai people will be retired; this means that Thailand will have an older population, and the younger generation will need to work harder to feed the old; additionally taxes will be higher when that time comes (in the year 2037).

There have been some different economic factors today compared to the past. Thailand's political movements in the 1973 Thai popular uprising and the 1976 Massacre were active only in Bangkok, but in 2020, the movement expanded all over the country (Winichakul 2002). Surprisingly, high school and elementary school students joined the movement without fear. Young students had no fear of the current authoritarian regime, but rather they feared having no future. Joblessness is a different reality from what they expected after graduation. These students have studied hard for more than half of their lives. Once Gen Z graduates are given their degrees, Gen Z should start receiving a

salary and thus paying for their parent's living expenses. Because there is no pension system for the retirees in Thailand, a person above 60 years old will only get 600 baht per month from the government, equal to 17.64USD (1USD = 34THB); this amount can only buy ten dishes of Thai style fast food, according to the cost living in the year 2022 (World bank 2022). That means it is not even enough for one week to survive. The students started questioning how the government manages Thai people's taxes and why many people live below living standards. Young students agreed to begin a political movement as they are still young, and things need to change so that when they become adults, they do not need to face the same problems the graduates face nowadays. Furthermore, the Gen Z are also very active in making a political movement as they prefer authoritarianism to end in the 2020s so that the next generation will have a brighter future.

### **The Core Issue of Thailand's Lottery Military System**

Overnight, however, can be the foundation for future remodeling. Not only did the Youth learn from this call, but so did martial law. Thailand's Youth have learned to build networks and connections in online spaces to share information on social issues and debates. As a soft power digital media, Twitter makes it easy to know and access news for everyone. People from various countries attended to acknowledge and express opinions.

All Thai men in Thailand must enter the red and black card lottery to serve as soldiers for the country. Most people do not want to get a red card because it means they must be drafted into the military for 1-2 years, but the government says that is luck. Nevertheless, getting a black card means they do not have to be drafted into the military. All males must go and draw lots. There will be a warning letter at home.

The Spiral of Silence started among the Thai Youth who had seen the unfair situations in the country and wanted to build changes in Thai society. The current lottery system was canceled and changed to a volunteer system (Whitman 2023) Thai Youth started to moan about military services that have been unfair to Thai young men who are supposed to spend time building career paths during their formative twenties. Many dehumanized treatments in the military also have been discussed among Twitter users. For example, Chatri, a 27-year-old student who preferred to use a pseudonym for fear of reprisals, recalled an overwhelming sense of anxiety as soon as he walked into the army barracks that would soon become his home.

Thai male citizens become eligible for military service once they turn 21 years old. For those who have never attended the Thai Reserve Officer Training Corps Student (TROTCS), Thai men will receive a letter to attend military service for two years. Thai men are most afraid of being called to serve in the military because it will be two years of low-income and hard work in Thai men's life. The salary for military service is 9,904THB per month (291.29 USD) (MGR online, 2023). However, there will be a cut of 1,920 THB (56.47USD), so the soldier will receive around 7,984 THB (234.82USD) monthly (MGR online, 2023). It will be a 5,800 THB increase for the soldier who serves in Southern Thailand because it is a hazardous area due to the conflict between local Southern people and the Thai government. The separatists groups of Thailand have been fighting for independence from the central government since 2004. The unfair salary for private soldiers has been discussed publicly and on Twitter, #CDG\_Regulator, #กรมบัญชีกลาง (The Comptroller General's Department) #เงินเดือน (Salary) #ทหารกองประจำการ (Enlisted Soldiers) #เงินเดือนทหาร (Soldiers salary) #กองทัพบก (Royal Thai Army)

Thai men who are selected have to serve for two years in the military without any other choices in life. Once the private soldiers started to serve in the military, the chances of improving technical skills other than fighting or serving the high ranks of military people stopped. Some were ordered to be a maid or a driver for generals for two years. Living or supporting the family is insufficient at 7,984THB (234.82) per month. If people are not called out for canceling this system, then Thai people are not civilized enough to care about the humanity of fellow citizens.

Several people in Thailand considered torturing, punishing, or physically harming recruits an excellent method to instill discipline and make them respectable soldiers for Thailand's future (Amnesty International 2016). These people hold this belief because many people in Thailand think torturing recruits is an effective way to make them good soldiers (Amnesty International 2020). This idea comes from the fact that a sizable portion of the Thai population holds this misconception. In Thailand's military society, this behavior is starting to repeat itself: higher-rank soldiers will treat lower-rank soldiers poorly, and this cycle will continue; later, when those lower-ranking soldiers are promoted to higher ranks, they will undoubtedly use the same tactics toward newly enlisted soldiers. This cycle will keep repeating itself until Thailand's military requirements and overall culture are reformed. In other words, the Thai

military forces are affected by a typical cycle in the population. The cycle of hatred, violence, and harassment in the Thai armed forces can be broken, however, by using a variety of more human friendly techniques and reformed methods. These techniques strengthen Thai soldiers' bodies and minds and make them disciplined and effective soldiers without embarrassing, humiliating or abusing them, leading to mental disorders later on in life.

The military's higher ranks might instruct the lower ranks using these techniques. Unfortunately the hazing techniques used in the military have been replicated by seniors against freshmen, in order to have power over them. This system produces individuals who yearn for power and influence over others in lower positions. After university and the military service, these actions and attitudes can continue into the workplace and areas of everyday life.

Implementing these military reforms will assist in gaining the respect of lower-ranking military people and earning high-rank military confidence. Gaining the trust of military personnel at higher ranks will also be facilitated by doing this. On the other hand, the Thai military has decided against employing this tactic and has instead continued to instruct its men violently (Chamber 2023)

The primary purpose of this research is to determine why, even though the lottery system for conscription was first used in Thailand in 1905, the Thai military still uses it to select recruits. Men who are over the age of 21 will be eligible for the draft. Contrarily, under the new proposed system, males who voluntarily engage in reserve training will not be subject to being conscripted. Those who draw a red card in the lottery must serve in the military for two years, while those who draw a black card are exempt from ever being called up for the draft again. Because conscription in Thailand can force males to spend two years away from employment and family, this tactic goes against the human rights principle.

Furthermore, during the two years of military service, there is a risk of dying or suffering a severe injury. As stated in Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to work, to a free choice of employment, to reasonable and favorable working conditions, and unemployment protection," conscription may also result in an individual losing a job if they are already employed (Pongsudhirak and Thitinan 2003). Due to the numerous incidents in which recruits for the new army were beaten to death or subjected to various forms of abuse during their training, the training for the new army also has a bad image—taking care of the personal requirements of higher-ranked officials as an example, or being treated like a slave (Amnesty international 2020). The question of why these methods are still being used is brought up by the lack of indication that the demanding training techniques currently employed by the Thai military will be changed anytime soon. There is no sign, so far, that these techniques will be abandoned.

Continuing the current military draft will produce a culture with more murders and violation of human rights, especially the right to conscientious objection, which leads to mental suffering, is economically ineffective, fosters corruption, and encourages military interventionism as seen with the military's involvement in politics. In other words, the physical abuse accompanying the Thai form of military conscription is an example of how the military system is one of the roots of Thailand's authoritarian society. Thailand should reform the current model, one that maintains the right to conscientious objector status while providing both civilian and military options (Siwach et al. Crumpton 2018).

In conclusion, the Thai military draft (lottery system) violates the Human Rights principle. This drafting system violates Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Thai military draft is an excellent example of dehumanization and exploitation by the state, as most Thai men required to serve are already employed or self-employed. Therefore, if those Thai men were unlucky and had to join the army for two years because they drew the red card, this military drafting could force them out of work, causing them to miss out on many opportunities for work or education, losing economic productivity in the process. Moreover, this could pose a problem for the families of those men who are required to serve in the military for two years, as many of them are the primary breadwinners and supporters of the family. In addition, even though these men have returned from military service, they may not be able to find employment due to the possibility that others have filled the positions or that a company will not rehire them. However, some scenarios are even direr for Thai men drafted into the military. Numerous men were killed or severely injured while serving in military camps (Thai PBS 2023). There were numerous reports that men were tortured, harassed, and murdered in a military camp (Amnesty 2020). Report camps like these had higher-rank military personnel who committed these violent acts. This could result in many men suffering physical and mental injuries that could affect Thai men's lives after two-year of service. In addition, many recruits were treated as enslaved people in the

military camp. Most higher-rank officers would use force to control the recruited soldier by making them mow the lawn or take care of the higher-ranking officer, which is not the job of someone who was drafted to defend the nation. However, a few countries (South Korea, Israel, Brazil, Cyprus, and Singapore) continue to use conscription because they require military power to defend the country (Siwach et al. Crumpton 2018).

Since Thailand is not currently involved in any major wars or conflicts with neighboring countries, researchers believe that the best recruitment method for Thailand would be voluntary enlistment (Bangkokbiznews 2023). Individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to end up serving in the military and being subjected to corruption due to their mandatory military service. Military service may also contribute to the perpetuation of inequality, as explored earlier. In addition, men must give up jobs or continue their education to fulfill military obligations, which places a significant financial strain on their lives and family's economic conditions.

### **How has the "hashtag war" from an online platform gained increasing attention?**

Several retweets and hashtags have become a popular movement in social media which influence people's decisions. Nevertheless, the Spiral of Silence will never thrive if there is no heartfelt depression in Thai people's minds that has been kept for a long time and waiting for the day of liberation. Anger about the unfairness of how the Thai government treats the Thai people was more than ready to be exposed. The most significant weapon in Thai society is no longer a physical, tangible power. Now the most prominent weapon is cyberbullying and hate speech (Sittichai 2023). The new era of political movement in Thai society will be driven-by hate speech that can be spread via Twitter (X). Thai Gen Z could start a new political group on Twitter by creating a hashtag to persuade people to follow the keyword of the hashtag in order to procure attention and trace the deep sentiments of people. They have the ability to forward political videos and pictures on Twitter anytime and anywhere.

There are some political movement hashtags on Twitter, for example, #ให้มันจบที่รุ่นเรา (let it finish in our generation) #นักเรียนเลว (bad student) #เยาวชนปลดแอก (free Youth) #ชุดนักเรียนไม่ปลอดภัย (student uniform is not safe). The context of these hashtags will be discussed in the following section. Therefore, exploring the factors that affect the political view of generation Z is fascinating, as members of Gen Z of Thailand and Hong Kong made political, rallying calls to their respective people throughout the same period (Bangkok Post 2020). Additionally, the digital space as a medium is a new emerging social movement that should be studied in more detail due to the invisibility of the leading actors and members. One can only sometimes know the precise identity of those who post on Twitter, which is such a powerful platform, and many gain success after trending on Twitter - Twitter is different from other social media platforms, such as Facebook which requires personal data - there are widespread ideologies that drive the movement. Research result shows Gen Z engagement with politics towards the Milk Tea Alliance movement, specifically on the Twitter platform. Separating the components of variables allows for better visualization and comprehension.

Unlike traditional political activity, group politics are interactive, peer-based, and guided by institutions like political parties or newspaper editors (Zhang 2022). Those active in participatory politics, especially young people, start new political group online, write and disseminate blogs about political issues, forward political videos to others on social networks, or take part in poetry slams. Those concerned about the future of politics should consider how much social media and participatory politics could change the landscape. The Youth and Participatory Political Survey found that 45% of Thai Gen Z reported getting news at least once a week from family and friends on Twitter and Facebook (Kahne 2012), which means there have been some digital movements since 2012. In earlier decades, Thai Gen Z needed a platform independent from power holders to spread and associate people's thoughts (Bangkok Post March 2020). Nowadays, these practices create new opportunities for the Youth to express their opinion, grant, and potentially have substantial and opinion influence, including Twitter, Thailand's second most popular social media platform, with a penetration rate of about 19.0% (Kemp 2022).

There are similar movements happening in Asia, with Youth movements against their respective authoritarian regimes. The same situation is occurring in Myanmar; even though the hashtag is losing attention, it has inspired the fight against unrighteousness.

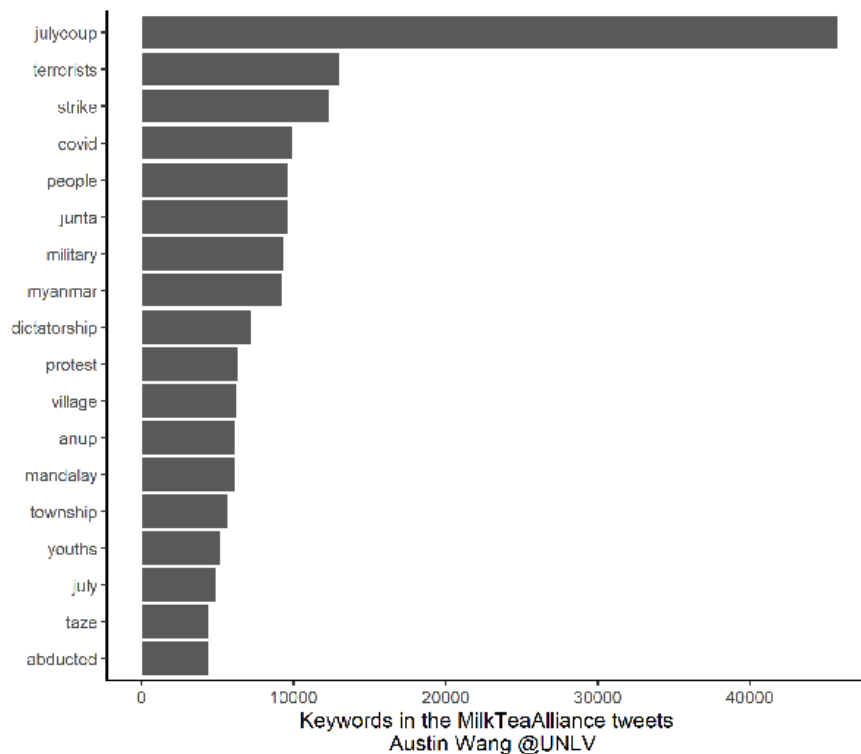


Figure 1: Content analysis of #MilkTeaAlliance hashtags on Twitter between July 13–19, 2021  
Source: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/milkteaalliance-no-more>

As one can see in Figure 1, the hashtag represents the fight against authoritarianism in Myanmar led by the Youth. Imagine a community on Twitter practicing against authoritarianism in Southeast Asia. These territories have long been advocating for democracy. Nevertheless, the novelty of this generation is their use of the Internet. This generation expresses the majority of Youth feelings and actions straightforwardly. The Internet media has become very difficult for authoritarian governments to control (Southeastasiaglobe, January 2023). The young generation has the ability to communicate through international media, such as TikTok, Instagram, Youtube and pre-established media. The new generation can act as their own broadcast media and spread the news through such platforms. Thus the movement exists not only online but is also influenced by, and influences, offline action seen when the government tries to censor its opponents and critics. The nature of twitter makes doing this a difficult task. For instance, when there is a protest, nearly everyone present will record it on their phones. The output of these images is potent and can encourage further participation. People can observe this situation in incidents where protesters in Thailand use a variety of tactics adopted from protesters in Hong Kong (Yang 2020). The spread of online information also influenced protesters in Myanmar, who have adopted several tactics from protesters in Thailand and used certain hashtags to spread the news of the Myanmar coup d'état (Austin Wang 2021). The Internet is, therefore, a tool for expressing the need for change. Social media is the primary mechanism in the youth-driven rebellion movement (Barron, L. 2020). Even though the demands are different in each pre-mentioned country, a loose transnational network aimed at fighting against authoritarianism holds these alliances together.

### **What is the core issue that brings Thai, Hongkong, Myanmar, and Taiwanese Youth together in Milk Tea Alliance on Twitter? How did Thai Youth learn from the Milk Tea Alliance to make a 2020 movement?**

An overview of the perspectives and motivations of the Youth indicated that they share the sentiment of wanting societal change (Rojas 2020). The contemporary Youth-led movement is governed by the need for social change among those who grew up in Thai society who were born in 1997 onwards (Gen Z). Several problems in the Milk Tea Alliance Countries differ in each dimension yet are structurally identical, such as corruption, environmental degradation, failures of capitalism, and limited resources for earning a decent income (Time 2020). No matter where the Youth live in the region, they are affected similarly, with authoritarianism being the most urgent and salient topic that

needs to be addressed and reformed. Adolescents are of the age where they must plan for the future of today's society. Therefore, the stance and concept of adjustment comes from the desire for change.

However, in 2022 the hashtag has begun to slightly fade from every platform (ET economic time, 2022). Participants in each country commented and shared their opinion on the impacts. Thai participants mentioned that the movement had influenced people to recognize one's rights and societal exploitation (Marc 2022). It also created a new medium in online platforms. After offline and online movements emerged, consequently, a new generation of news distribution methods grew in popularity.

As is known under authoritarian regimes, discussion about specific social issues is difficult and risks jail time. Therefore, the emergence of new mediums for people to discuss and encounter like-minded people has dramatically changed political views among populations. Still, since the Milk Tea Alliance emergence, there have been no direct political shifts or affirmative effects from the Milk Tea Alliance (Solace Global 2021). On the other hand, a gathering of dissatisfaction and symbols sent into society puts pressure on people's political opponents. A change that does not occur overnight - but rather, over a prolonged period of time - can be the foundation for future reformation. While the situation in Hong Kong is similar to that in Thailand and Taiwan, it has stayed the same according to the purpose of the movement.



Source: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/04/16/20/young-thais-join-milk-tea-alliance-in-online-backlash-that-angers-beijing>

Although the Milk Tea Alliance's initial allure began to wear off, the social movement in Hong Kong is still ongoing (Taipei Time 2020). It is not only the Youth who have learned from this call for mobilizing but also the police and military learn the benefit of using Twitter for making propaganda. After learning of the Milk Tea partners, young people in Hong Kong have learned to build networks, connections, and online spaces to share information on social issues and debates. Twitter connects the Thai Youth digital imagined community movement. This situation is defined as a digital movement, as is the case for Thai Gen Z. Thai youth use digital mobilizing tactics to unite all the young people who are unsatisfied about the current situation in the country and the current Thai government (Srdja Popovic and Steve Parks 2023) .

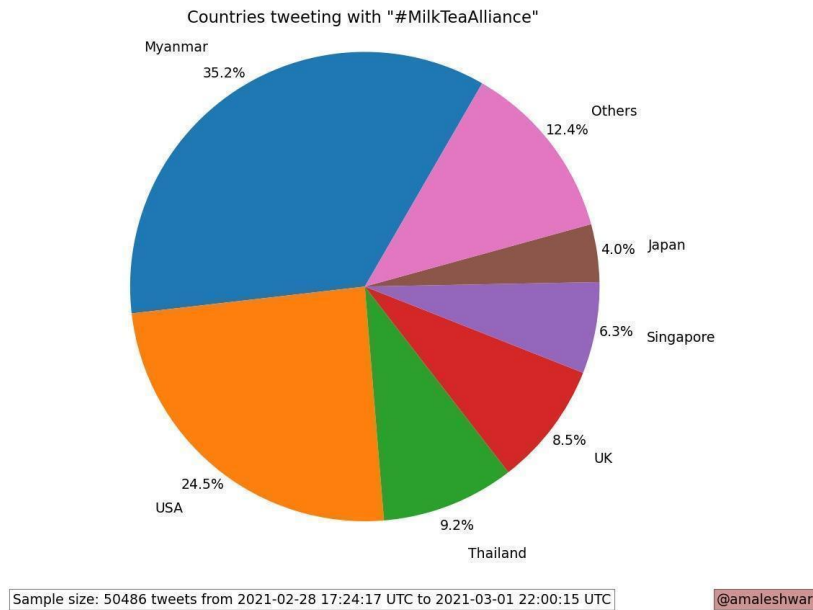


Figure 2: Countries tweeting with #MilkTeaAlliance from 2021-02-28 to 2021-03-01  
Source: [https://twitter.com/Amalesh\\_11](https://twitter.com/Amalesh_11)

More importantly, as can be seen in Figure 2, the problem has become well-known internationally. The figure shows that not only the original countries participated in news distributions; but also western superpowers such as the USA and UK. Twitter is a soft power, and digital media makes it easy to access news anywhere. People from various countries tended to acknowledge and express people's opinions.

### Twitter as a digital media and social movements in Thailand via Milk Tea Alliance

Political movements via Twitter among Thai users is a new medium designed to facilitate social interaction, the sharing of A dot-com cyber evangelist, Twitter has promoted the idea that technologies can drastically alter the cultural balance of power. Twitter as a microblog represents a significant 'demotic turn' (i.e., ordinary people can publicly break the news, produce media content, or voice majority opinions) (Kahn's, J., and Middaugh, E. 2012). Microblogging, more remarkable than many other web spaces, is event-driven because of the ability to retweet. Another preferable way for people to make things trend includes a reel (short video clip) of the most popular subjects people are tweeting about, allowing for explosive growth. This includes reels exposing the dark side of Thailand (Gulatee 2021). Twitter, Thailand's most prominent social media site for young people in GEN Y and Z, is experiencing immense growth and harsh criticism. Twitter changed the modes of self-production, how people communicated, and interaction modes of, the synchronicity of social interaction, forbidden language use, and power relations among interactants (Tan 2022).

Moreover, explicitly youth-led movements demand participants to remember that young people actively assimilate majority experiences and what they read, see, discuss, and learn into one's emergent political selves. Regarding Twitter, its features make it practical for users to track and follow trending topics and express opinions side by side. Additionally, anyone can be a transmitter of information without relying on fame. Twitter's (X) usability and convenience makes publishing messages simple, concise, and instant, driving the participation of the Youth's use of the Internet in response to politics, as opposed to relying on in-person activism.

### CONCLUSION

Youth movements in all the Milk Tea Alliance countries are comparable, as political change is often the desire among Gen Z Milk Tea Alliance countries. The tools for achieving political reform in each generation are different and depend on which media can propagate faster and spread information more virally. Even though the digital movement in 2020 cannot yet claim any tangible victories, it does widely illuminate some butterfly effects. Interestingly, all factors in the resistance against authoritarianism are mutually supportive and widely used. This includes the vision of Youth in this generation that has swelled with a flood of data from various media, such as Twitter. Therefore,

authoritarianism in Thai schools and pre-existing economic disruption was the catalyst of a call out for a democratic movement in Thailand during the 2020 pandemic. Furthermore, this time the desire for democracy has spread to all of Thailand - rather than just being concentrated in Bangkok - via social media because everyone could receive sudden information by using Twitter on their smartphone.

The Orange Fandom phenomenon arose from the need for change in the new generation. The Move Forward Party is aware of this problem of Gen Z, the desire to break the power of dictatorship shaped from the root of the idea of teachers and senior power in Thai schools. This resulted in a movement of thought and mobilization via Twitter, which has modeled tactics after the Milk Tea Alliance Movement. Today, adolescents grow up in smaller families, and most of them are only children of the family or just one of two, so they dare to come out and make changes because they realize their value to their family and society. The upbringing of parents who were more compromising than the previous generation of parents thus making them free from the fear that the Thai state has been trying to dominate Thai society for a long time.

The results of the recent election shed light on the fact that the new generation wanted to overthrow the current dictatorship and desired for democracy. This election saw the highest number of voters in Thailand's history. The central policy that attracts young people is likely to be the abolition of military conscription; according to the result of the poll that shows a high percentage of Youth want to cancel military service, up to 84.7% (Matichon News 2022). With the success of various hashtags that have protesters communicating through Twitter, the new contemporary political movement of Gen Z is a war between the liberals and the conservatives, the new generation and the old generation.

The results of this following research have shed light on the fact that the Gen Z in Thailand is very unsatisfied with the authoritarianism that exists in Thailand. So far, the tactics employed by the generation through the utilization of social media has been quite successful, as can be seen with the shocking popularity of the MFP (Move Forward Party). Although Thailand may be low ranked among ASEAN countries in terms of education, the youth's tenacious and innovative political resistance has been one of the most successful in the region. The quest for democracy is unwavering and the movement only seems to be growing. Through utilizing social media and mobilizing in popular contemporary spaces, the Gen Z of Thailand will not rest, or accept defeat until democracy for Thai people has been achieved.

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