

Internet Freedom and the Impact of Social Media: Political Buzzer Behavior in Indonesia and Thailand

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Abstract:

The presence of political buzzers in many countries shows that the democratic process has experienced a serious setback. This paper specifically looks at the practice of working political buzzers in Indonesia and Thailand. These two countries were chosen because the condition of their democratic institutionalization is still low, marked by the massive violence, provocations, and black campaigns on social media due to the actions of political buzzers. The internet, which is supposed to strengthen democracy by providing space for egalitarian and democratic political participation through social media, has become a new arena for the practice of violence and the creation of political polarization carried out by political buzzers. To clarify these assumptions, this study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The main data was obtained from literature studies. This study shows that political buzzers in Thailand and Indonesia have the same motivation, namely maintaining the continuity of power. The difference lies in the power relationship, where in Indonesia, buzzers are not directly and legally affiliated with power, while in Thailand, it is the opposite.

Keywords:

Political buzzer; Democracy; Social Media; Freedom

Introduction

Initially, democracy was predicted to grow with the presence of the internet because it expanded opportunities for public participation and could increase government accountability (Lindquist & Huse, 2017; Yuniarta & Gusti Ayu Purnamawati, 2020; MácHová et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019). The internet has great potential to increase democratic participation by providing wider access to political information, open discussion spaces, and platforms for participating in the political process. Through the

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internet, citizens can easily access news, research, and views from various sources, allowing them to make more informed political decisions. Social media and blogging platforms allow individuals to share their opinions, opening up space for dialogue and discussion on political issues. The internet also facilitates direct participation in political processes, such as online voting, petitions, and crowdfunding campaigns, which can increase citizen involvement in decision-making. Thus, the internet can be a tool that encourages transparency, accountability, and participation in democratic systems.

This hope creates high optimism on the internet as a medium for spreading democratic values (Fukuyama, 2018). Several studies have also shown that the internet has strengthened democracy (Christensen, 2012; Crothers, 2015; Evans, 2019; Horstink, 2017; Jha & Kodila-Tedika, 2020; Man, 2011). All of this arose because the internet gave birth to social media – a medium that has become one of the progressive channels in facilitating people's political participation.

However, the internet also facilitates the destruction of democracy. First, social media is an arena for political polarization (Irawanto, 2019), the dissemination of hoaxes (Cano-Orón et al., 2021), and bullying among fellow communities. Second, there is strict control and violence carried out by the state in the digital space against the community, which causes fear (Suh et al., 2017; Salter, 2014).

One of the actors that has become a destroyer in social media is the presence of buzzers. Several studies show that buzzers have damaged democracy worldwide (Campbell-Smith & Bradshaw, 2019; Lacko, 2013; Merlyna Lim, 2017), including Indonesia (Idris, 2018; Panatra et al., 2019; Seto, 2019a). The word "buzzer" in a political context usually refers to individuals or groups that are used to spread messages or influence public opinion through social media or online platforms that are harmed through provocations and hoax messages.

The bad behavior of political buzzers can be witnessed in the democracies of Indonesia and Thailand. Political buzzers often operate negatively in various election moments in Indonesia at the central and local levels because they carry out various black and doxing campaigns. In Indonesia's findings, Bradshaw and Howard show that buzzers are suspected of favoring government work strongly, not because of the government's direct control but because of their sympathy for the government (Fadil, 2019). A different thing happened in Thailand, where political buzzers were formed and directly controlled by the state. In Thailand, Cyber Scouts and Cyber Witch Hunts were formed in 2010 to protect the Thailand Monarchy and support the military leadership (Arifin, 2021).

This research further focuses on how comparing political buzzers in the two countries works. It has to do with motivation, mode, way of working, and the impact produced by both. These two countries were chosen because of the massive buzzer movement on social media, and they had a strong influence in seizing power and maintaining the status quo. These two countries have the same democratic characteristics, Flawed Democracy if we refer to the demolition index issued by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in 2022 (Ahdiat, 2023).

This article fills in the gaps of previous studies that have not specifically examined comparing the reality of these two pseudo-democracies in Southeast Asia. Some studies look at the practice in other country-specific countries such as the United States (Lacko, 2013), Philippines (Ong & Tapsell, 2022), Costa Rica (Bunse, 2020), Vietnamese (Nguyen & Luong, 2021), India (Campbell-Smith & Bradshaw, 2019) and Thailand (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018a). In Indonesia, many studies on buzzers have been carried out by other researchers, namely (Ibrahim et al. 2016; Idris, 2018; Lim, 2017; Masduki, 2021;

Ong & Tapsell, 2022; Panatra et al., 2019; Seto, 2019; Syahputra et al., 2021; Wahid & Syahputra, 2020), but these studies have not elaborated in depth on the comparison of the two in one study.

Literature review

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Freedom of expression

Political literature states that one of the main pillars of democracy is freedom of expression (Erdem & Ozejder, 2021; Solomon & Klyton, 2020). Democracy must facilitate the ability of every citizen to express their political views and expressions without fear of potential violence. The state, in this context, as the holder of power, is obliged not only to protect the expression of these freedoms but also to accommodate several important political aspirations of the community related to policy-making and implementation, for example.

Freedom of expression is a space for the community to participate actively in government administration. In a country regime whose democratic consolidation has not been completed, freedom of expression is urgently needed to criticize problematic government policies. More than that, freedom of expression is one of the main doors to changing social policies.

Although it offers flexibility, freedom of expression still needs specific regulation in the form of a law (law). The goal is that freedom of expression can still maintain order and respect the rights of others. In some democracies, these restrictions contain criteria for what community activities can and cannot be declared freedom of expression. This is closely related to the purpose and content of the information produced. If it contains hate speech, slander, and incitement, then this freedom is prohibited because it can potentially damage social harmony.

The presence of social media as a result of the information technology revolution provides a wider space for freedom of expression (Archer et al., 2021; Dovbysh & Somfalvy, 2021; Dwifatma, 2021; Marsden et al., 2020). Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have managed to efficiently and effectively become channels for disseminating information and facilitating public participation (Demirhan & Çakir-Demirhan, 2015; Enikolopov et al., 2020; Hilabi et al., 2020; Karatas & Saka, 2017; Sari et al., 2021). This technology provides an opportunity for the public to voice their aspirations for running the government, including criticizing problematic power. In conclusion, social media can be called one of the important keys to successfully implementing democracy in a country.

Political Buzzer

The information technology revolution is positively beneficial for fostering democratization in cyberspace. The public can participate and control power through

cyber networks. Social media has been effective and efficient in many studies that have successfully moved political change toward democratization (Boulianne, 2019; Rautela & Singhal, 2020; Almqvist, 2016; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013).

Unfortunately, social media also facilitates the dark side of democracy with the presence of political buzzers. It is a term recently considered a force that undermines social cohesion through several attempts to kill characters and spread hoaxes. Many world democracies have experienced a serious narrowing of civil liberties because of buzzers.

It is worth clarifying first because, often, the public cannot provide a clear line between influencers and buzzers. This term is frequently used haphazardly to obscure both main characters. Influencer is a term for those who work to influence or convince the public/society of goods/services or political choices adhered to. They understand the choice of action taken and have a clear and verified account. Instead, buzzers disseminate opinions to influence the public with a buzzing, noisy, and provocative character. The goal is to make an issue more crowded and often driven by minimal knowledge on the issue disseminated because it moves on blind fanaticism (rigid ideology) and is organized, including paid. Their accounts are also generally anonymous (without an obvious identity), and bot accounts are used to raise issues.

Initially, buzzers had a positive meaning because they were used as a marketing strategy in the business world. However, its meaning and orientation change when entering the political context because it becomes a violent actor in the digital world. Buzzers have become destructive political partisans because they create unsafe social media for public participation.

Methodology

The operation of political buzzers in Indonesia and Thailand primarily serves electoral purposes and the maintenance of political power. To explore and clarify these assumptions, this study adopts a qualitative descriptive research approach. A qualitative approach is a research method aimed at deeply understanding social phenomena by exploring meaning, experience, and the subjective context of particular behaviors or events. This approach is chosen because it allows for a thorough exploration of the meaning, context, and strategies behind the complex operations of political buzzers in Indonesia and Thailand—phenomena that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative data alone.

The primary data were collected through an extensive literature review, drawing from books, academic journals, newspapers, magazines, and credible online sources that directly discuss the role and function of political buzzers in both countries. To reach relevant and insightful conclusions, this research employs descriptive analysis, focusing on a comprehensive and critical examination of the phenomenon. This analytical framework enables the study to reveal how political buzzers actually function within the political landscapes of Indonesia and Thailand.

Results and discussion

Democracy is the most ideal system for providing space for open and critical debate. Users, especially activists, have made social media their primary means of expanding the movement's reach. On the other hand, governments in authoritarian countries create mechanisms to control and limit public debate on social media through

censorship or the deployment of buzzers (influencers) to influence public opinion. This can be seen in real life in Indonesia and Thailand.

Buzzers in Indonesia

Political buzzers in Indonesia emerged and became an industry in which social media was considered one of the most effective means of influencing public opinion. The rapid development of social media has made this vehicle one of the public's political information sources. Social media has succeeded in shifting political conversations from real to virtual spaces. Social media is more effective in influencing public political preferences and orientations than conventional socialization, especially when social media users continue to increase. Therefore, politicians need political buzzers who can carry out political propaganda on social media.

In Indonesia's politics, buzzers are a lucrative industry. The ability to build an extensive, more effective, and efficient network to produce and disseminate issues makes buzzers an important job in the *tirto.id* report (Haryanto, 2021). Similar findings are confirmed by findings Research Results from the Research Institutions Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance (CIPG) (CIPG, 2017), which provides evidence that since the 2012 Jakarta Regional Election, Buzzer has continued to be a political player in the 2014 Presidential Election, the 2017 Jakarta Regional Election, and the 2019 Presidential Election. Similar findings also come from research (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019), which states that Indonesian politicians and political parties pay cyber troops or buzzers to manipulate public opinion for electoral purposes.

The main media used is Twitter. Their presence (buzzer) can be marked when a new issue arises, which will be greeted with a movement, often collectively to publicize the issue, one of which is trending to get high attention from Twitter netizens. The goal is framing to accompany public opinion even in uncivilized ways so that it is natural to cause controversy. With anonymous accounts whose holders are unknown, they freely spread content.

Buzzers in Indonesian politics are inseparable from Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 United States Presidential Election. At that time, Barack Obama managed to win phenomenally despite coming from a black ethnicity - something that has a weak political position in the United States political landscape. The victory is inseparable from the success of the political buzzer of Barack Obama's supporters in portraying a positive image of Barack Obama on Twitter. The campaign significantly increased Barack Obama's electability, especially among the younger generation, the largest Twitter user group.

This success validly proves the greatness of buzzers in building public perception about certain candidates. The ability to build an effective and efficient narrative makes political buzzers increasingly in demand by politicians, including in Indonesia. That was seen right in the 2012 Jakarta regional elections. At that time, DKI Jakarta voters who knew much about Twitter made the penetration of the Jokowi-Ahok couple's buzzer even stronger. Through a creative campaign, simultaneously highlighting the strength of the Jokowi-Ahok figure and attacking the weaknesses of other candidates, this political buzzer raised the electability of the Jokowi-Ahok pair. It is a proud achievement because the pair is against the incumbent Foke-Nara, supported by most major parties in Jakarta and controls the bureaucratic network.

Not only Twitter, buzzers also utilize other social media, such as Facebook, Instagram to WhatsApp. Buzzers are considered an efficient and effective political

campaign strategy, especially in winning the narrative war on social media. The character of social media users (netizens) who tend to get information in short messages on social media makes buzzer propaganda even more powerful. Digital literacy and low information from netizens make information disseminated by political buzzers that are indeed wavy and massive, succeeding in shaping public opinion as voters. As a result, many netizens consider the information conveyed by buzzers to be valid and credible, and it has become a hot topic.

Political buzzers in Indonesia can be classified into two categories based on their motivation. First, it is economically motivated. They work professionally and are paid at different rates depending on the position and role. The number is small but has a significant role in revitalizing an issue so that it becomes public attention and can influence public perception.

Second, the encouragement of political ideology. These people work voluntarily because they think a common political view exists with the candidate they support. Their number is more than the economic motive. They will be very enthusiastic about echoing an issue that follows ideology.

Furthermore, there are several typical characteristics of political buzzers in Indonesia. First, it is very active on social media. Political buzzers tend to be very active on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. They use these platforms to spread political messages, memes, images, and videos that support or attack a particular party or issue. Second, it has special connections with politicians. Political buzzers often have connections with political parties or certain political figures. They can openly support a particular party or candidate or work indirectly with them to spread a favorable narrative. Political buzzers often receive financial support or awards from certain political parties, candidates, or interest groups in exchange for their support in spreading the desired political message.

Third, Aggressiveness and Intensity. Political buzzers often show high aggressiveness and intensity in spreading their political messages. They use sharp language and provocative memes and often take advantage of sensitive issues to attract attention. They work to spread information that supports the political narrative they speak, even if it means spreading hoaxes or information that is not accurately verified. Rapid Reaction to Political Events: They tend to respond quickly and proactively to political events, using social media to spread narratives that align with their interests. Polarization of Public Opinion: Political buzzers often amplify the polarization of public opinion by spreading messages that compartmentalize society between "us" and "them," as well as magnifying political divisions.

The use of political buzzers in Indonesia is related to power issues, especially elections and other political activities. During the implementation of elections, political buzzers have a significant contribution in carrying out political campaigns to support and bring down other candidates through a series of negative campaigns and black campaigns. This is part of an effort to influence public opinion and is quite successful. In the 2019 election, for example, which is considered the peak of political buzzers in Indonesia, a report from Reuters stated that various kinds of political buzzer operations were neatly and systematically arranged to bring down the reputation of the two presidential candidates, namely Jokowi and Prabowo. This shows that the two candidates also have political buzzers that move militantly.

Political buzzers usually operate hundreds of bot accounts, so they naturally have a quick viral effect. For them, the accuracy of information is unimportant, so naturally,

most of the information disseminated will contain hoaxes. The most important thing is that the information can be disseminated to influence the political preferences of voters who do not have good digital information literacy. As a result, political buzzers are getting easier and more aggressive in shaping public opinion, even from misleading information.

The presence of buzzers in Indonesia's politics shows the opposite side. From a positive aspect, political buzzers can increase political participation by encouraging discussion and debate on social media. Meanwhile, the negative aspect of the political buzzer presents a serious problem for Indonesia's democracy. Their ability to buzz manipulative information often leads to political conflicts and cyber warfare on social media. Political buzzers have succeeded in creating deep political polarization, which is bad for the institutionalization of democracy in Indonesia. Their propaganda resulted in a decrease in public trust in information circulating on social media. Hoaxes and distortions spread by buzzers are often difficult to track and prove, confusing the public.

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Political buzzers usually operate hundreds of bot accounts, so they have a quick viral effect. For them, the accuracy of information is unimportant, so it is not surprising that most of the information disseminated will contain hoaxes. The most important thing is that the information can be communicated to influence the political preferences of voters who do not have good digital information literacy. As a result, political buzzers are getting easier and more aggressive in shaping public opinion, even from misleading information. They promote a particular candidate or party and shape public opinion by spreading information that favors their clients or discredits opponents. Buzzers often use aggressive strategies, including spreading disinformation or hoaxes and creating viral content to attract attention and influence people's emotions.

The cases of cebong and kampret reflect the destruction of the buzzer in Indonesian politics. Cebong is a term for Jokowi's supporters and Kampret for Prabowo. The support war resulted in a very massive cyber war accompanied using identity politics and black campaign issues. As a result, the division between supporters is very deep, resulting in the collapse of social harmony, which is one of the hearts of Indonesia's democracy.

Buzzers that are slowly killing democracy in Indonesia are gaining public resistance not only from the government and civil society groups but also from religious-based organizations. MUI even issued MUI Fatwa Number 24 of 2017 related to buzzer activities that provide information containing hoaxes, backbiting, slander, bullying, disgrace, gossip, and other things to gain profits. The fatwa does not explicitly mention buzzers, but it is also clear for them if you look at the buzzer temperament.

Political buzzers in Indonesia exist because politicians need them and get special protection from power. Although the government has cracked down on several political buzzers, it still does not ease the political buzzer that has become this industry. The

government argues that law enforcement against buzzer activity still faces many challenges, especially because of the difficulty of proving the direct involvement of certain parties and the anonymous nature of many buzzers.

In addition, there is a strong suspicion that political buzzers are protected by power. Politicians are interested in winning the election, so they need a buzzer. These needs will protect the buzzer's action. Unfortunately, the protection is carried out unfairly. For example, for buzzer accounts that support the government and its analysts, even though they commit government violations, they are very slow to disseminate them. Some political buzzers who lied through their posts have been very slow to respond to the police. This is different from political buzzers who criticize the government. The enforcement of the law is fast. Different treatments show that there is unfair law enforcement.

Buzzers in Thailand

Under the leadership of Prayut Chan-o-cha, who has a military background, Cyber Scouts continue to move freely to keep an eye on anti-coup and anti-monarchy movements on social media. Prime Minister Prayut's regime transformed schools across Thailand into watchdog units that protected the monarchy while nourishing its supporting ideology (Schaffar & Thabchumpon, 2019). Their alliance with the monarchy, which relies on each other, makes information in cyberspace need to be strictly controlled. This further shows that the nature of power is decisive for cyberspace democratization. (Schaffar & Thabchumpon, 2019).

With strong state support, Cyber Scouts continues to increase. For example, in 2016, as many as 112 schools supported the Cyber Scouts. In the same year, more than 120,000 members of Cyber Scouts spread throughout Thailand (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018a). It also shows that young people are the main strength of this program because it is easier to inject pro-kingdom ideas.

In addition to having Cyber Scouts, in Thailand, one program has a similar goal, namely Cyber Witch Hunts (CWH). The main goal of this movement is also to condition users on social media who oppose the Monarchy of Thailand. In contrast to Cyber Scouts owned by the state, Cyber Witch Hunts stand independently despite the majority of its leaders identified as having strong associations with the military, either as retired military personnel or supporters of the coup against Yingluck Shinawatra (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018a).

By utilizing Facebook, Cyber Witch Hunts have a neat and strong organization. In recruiting members, CWH opens vacancies openly by targeting the younger generation. They are offered to work professionally with a clear salary system, which is very attractive to the younger generation. Recruits then receive online training to be taught how to effectively hunt down people in the Facebook anti-monarchy (Laungaramsri, 2016).

One of the groups from CWH that has high militancy, is feared, and has a reputation for being famous is the Rubbish Collection Organization (RCO). This group is very powerful because it has managed to combine the activist movement with a professional military organizational style. This capacity is inseparable from the founder of this organization, Rienthong Nanna, a retired military, doctor, and ultra-royalist of the Thailand monarchy who understands power security operations very well. Rienthong has a proven ability to paralyze the opposition against the monarchy (Schaffar & Thabchumpon, 2019). To make it more acceptable, they called the anti-movement public garbage because it criticized the monarchy, which is considered sacred in Thailand.

In Thailand, the monarchy is indeed protected by the constitution. This is clearly stated in one of the strictest *lèse-majesté* laws in the world. *Lèse-majesté* is a law that intends to make the leader of a state inviolable or not to be criticized. The law is enforced in Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Brunei Darussalam in Southeast Asia. The law expressly prohibits the public from insulting the monarchy. In Thailand, the ban is in Article 112 of the constitution, which prohibits attempts to slander and criticize the Royal family. If they violate this, there is a very serious criminal threat to the public, especially social media users. Under Article 112 of Thailand's penal code, a person who "defames, insults, or threatens a king, queen, crown prince, or royalty" is punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

The article has received high resistance and controversy, especially from human rights activists. The criminal threat, used to detain many Thais who criticize the king, is seen as an attempt to restrict political freedom. According to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), since November 2020, at least 218 people have been charged with defamation of the Kingdom in Thailand, including 17 minors (Sasipornkarn, 2022). The report also shows that more than half of these cases are related to online political expression, while about 45% come from civilian complaints. The law also allows individuals to file *lese-majeste* claims against others.

So far, this law has become a powerful political weapon for the government and the military, which, of course, are pro-status quo of the Kingdom to control the opposition. Under the pretext of controlling national stability, the media and freedom of expression are controlled so as not to criticize the behavior of the monarchy. As a result, although the Kingdom of Thailand has carried out controversial actions several times, public criticism is minimal due to strict censorship from the government and the military, including in traditional media and social media. In the context of social media, that is one of the tasks of Cyberhunts and Cyberscouts.

Social media has been the main means of supporting the monarchy reform movement in Thailand. Social media, especially Facebook, is considered effective in disseminating anti-monarchist propaganda to Thailand's millennial generation and Generation X. social media has been proven to create awareness of a movement for change that Thai citizens have demanded.

The monarchy of Thailand does get many privileges regarding legal protection because it is considered a symbol of the greatness of Thailand's history. The monarchy in Thailand has a long history and has become an integral part of Thailand's national identity and culture. The king is considered a symbol of unity and stability for the country. This is because the Kingdom of Thailand has gained a sacred position in Thailand society, and it is not uncommon for his figure to be considered a god (Editor, 2016). The king in Thailand is considered a demigod in the people's culture and beliefs. This gave the king a highly respected and protected status. Therefore, criticizing the monarchy is the same as trying to undermine social unity and political stability in Thailand.

In practice, the RCU conducts strict monitoring and sweeping on social media regarding posts attacking the monarchy. If the upload is found, it will be reported to the police for follow-up. Suppose the police report is not followed up. In that case, RCO members will take systematic action by carrying out attacks in the form of hate speech, threats on social media, distributing the perpetrator's address, and mobilizing ultra-royalists to attack the perpetrator's residence.

This event occurred during the death of King Bhumibol in 2016. At that time, many Thais did not show sympathy, and many were even grateful for the incident. They

are, of course, a society that has been anti-monarchy because it is considered too much privilege and anti-criticism. These are the victims who are the targets of violence, both verbally and physically. Unfortunately, the government left the majority of these incidents and the perpetrators were covered by the government of the Military Junta Prayut Chan-o-cha (Arifin, 2021).

Subsequently, when the protests against the monarchy's rule in 2020 were protested, the RCO returned to action. In August 2020, a youth-initiated protest movement began to spread in Thailand. At the time, they called for constitutional reforms to control the monarchy's power. Their demands inspired hundreds of thousands of people across Thailand, with the student-led group following through by issuing a 10-point manifesto aimed at curbing the court's broad powers, including cuts to the royal budget and the repeal of the lese-majeste law.

This is a big problem for the Thailand monarchy. In response, the RCO acted by infiltration into pro-democracy demonstrations. One of the goals is to identify the main actors behind the movement. They were photographed by RCO members, for example, and block-listed. The consequences are fatal because the block-list has been updated so that companies, government agencies, and educational institutions can refuse their attendance. Those who are block-listed will find it difficult to be able to work in companies, get into government agencies, apply for schools, and receive scholarships.

Discussion

Political buzzers in Indonesia and Thailand work on the same motivation, namely, maintaining the existence of power. In Indonesia, the presence of buzzers is inseparable from the need for politicians to attract the sympathy of millennial voters who use social media as one of the main sources of information in making political choices. Political buzzers have relatively more freedom in operating because of the weak rule of law and its enforcers, and of course, they are specifically protected by power.

Unlike in Indonesia, in Thailand, political buzzers are fully supported by the government or groups that are strongly affiliated with the government. The involvement of power is very different from that in Indonesia, which looks vague. They were formed to reinforce the pro-monarchy narrative and suppress opposition voices. Political buzzers in Thailand, especially those that support the monarchy, play a role in strengthening existing political stability and protecting the interests of the monarchy's institutions. They are often involved in campaigns to silence criticism of the monarchy and the government. Political buzzers seek to restrict freedom of speech and voice criticism of the government and monarchy.

This study confirms findings that show that buzzers undermine democracy by spreading false information or manipulating public opinion (Lacko, 2013; M Lim, 2017; Masduki, 2021b; Ong & Tapsell, 2022; Seto, 2019b; Syahputra et al., 2021; Widyatama & Mahbob, 2024). All of these studies agree that buzzers have succeeded in disrupting the integrity of elections, creating deep political polarization that leads to social conflicts and weakens public trust in democratic institutions. Several studies also confirm this study, which says that buzzers have succeeded in creating digital violence because of intimidation and repression (Kurniavati, 2023; Ramasuta, 2016; Sombatpoonsiri, 2018b; Thalamayan, 2020). This is a serious problem for world democracy.

This study shows the ability of political buzzers to secure power and win candidates effectively. Their ability to shape public opinion and branding and kill their political opponents' reputations always makes political buzzers relevant in the politics of a

regime of power. The more integrated politics with social media, the more important the role of buzzers will be in the political arena. For elected candidates, political buzzers are needed to maintain power stability and avoid potential threats to leadership. They help a positive image and public trust in the ongoing power.

Political buzzers are a serious challenge to global democracy. Not only in Indonesia and Thailand, the phenomenon of political buzzers has also become a challenge in many countries, both democratic and non-democratic. This research shows the relevance of understanding the character and working pattern of buzzers so that it can provide valuable insights not only for Indonesia and Thailand but also for other countries to formulate effective policies to overcome the adverse impact of this political buzzer penetration.

Eliminating the destructive impact of political buzzers on the decline in democratic integrity is not easy. Therefore, the key is to form and enforce stricter regulations, increase digital literacy in the community, and promote cooperation between the government and social media platforms. In addition, civil society is urgently needed.

Conclusion

This study explores the role of internet freedom and the impact of social media on political buzzer behavior in Indonesia and Thailand. In the context of Indonesia, the relative freedom of the internet has allowed political buzzers to operate freely, which in turn influences public opinion through disseminating information that supports or brings down certain candidates. On the other hand, Thailand has stricter internet regulations, especially against insults to the monarchy. Still, political buzzers actively use social media to influence the political agenda, especially in securing the monarchy's status quo.

The Indonesian government has tried to regulate political buzzer activities through several laws and regulations, but its implementation and enforcement still face challenges. One of them is that politicians need buzzers. On the other hand, Thailand's political buzzer is integrated with the government, which shows why Cyber Scouts and Cyber Witch Hunts are so widely operating.

The presence of political buzzers in both countries poses a significant threat to freedom of expression. Far from being neutral participants in political discourse, these actors often function as digital mercenaries—disseminating disinformation, manipulating public opinion, and silencing dissent through coordinated harassment or smear campaigns. Their persistence is not merely a technical or regulatory failure, but a symptom of a deeper political pathology: they serve the strategic interests of those in power. Governments or political elites may tolerate or even sponsor buzzers as tools to control narratives, manufacture consent, and delegitimize opposition. This symbiotic relationship makes political buzzers exceedingly difficult to dismantle. As long as the political costs of eliminating them outweigh the benefits, and as long as buzzers help sustain a favorable status quo, they are likely to remain entrenched in the political ecosystem.

This research shows its urgency because it explains the serious problem of people's political participation in cyberspace, which has been increasing lately. The limitation lies in the access to accurate and representative data because it is carried out only through literature studies. Further studies can complement this by conducting direct data mining involving the active participation of political buzzers to understand their motivations and strategies more deeply.

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