Political Media Messages and Their Relationships With Audience's Attitudes Toward the Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

ศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการเปิดรับข่าวสารทางการเมืองที่ถูกนำเสนอผ่านสื่อมวลชนและทัศนคติทางด้านการเมืองของผู้รับสารต่อพันตำรวจโท ดร. ทักษิณ ชินวัตร

Benjapa Kaithong (เบญจภา ไกรทอง) *   **Dr.Ratanasuda Punnahitanond (ดร.รัตนสุดา ปุณณะหิตานนท์)** **

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to study the correlations between the audience's exposure to nine characteristics of political media messages as the independent variables and their political attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as the dependent variables. The study also aims to investigate the Two-Step Flow of Communication Model.

With the use of the purposive sampling technique, student samples who are member of the Political Assembly in the universities in the Bangkok area that have played a prominent role in Thai politics were selected as the research participants. The sample size is 300. The survey questionnaires were based on the political information during the early 2001 and mid 2006 from print media (such as newspapers, magazines, and political books) and online media.

The research findings reveal that the audience's exposures to five characteristics of political media messages (such as logical arguments, logical and emotional arguments, two-sided messages, persuasive messages, and political media messages with political opinion leaders' comment or ideas) are correlated negatively with their political attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In other words, the more the college students were exposed to such political media messages, the more their attitudes were likely to be negative toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In addition, the college students' exposure to the political messages via both *mass media* and *political opinion* leaders are significantly correlated with their negative attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. However, the last hypothesis developed from the notion of the Two-Step Flow of Communication Model is not supported.

* Student in Language Institute, Bangkok University and Instructor International College in the School of Communication Arts.

** Director of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok University.

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาหาความสัมพันธ์การเปิดรับข่าวสารทางการเมืองที่ถูกนำเสนอ ผ่านสื่อมวลชนกับทัศนคติทางด้านการเมืองของผู้รับข่าวสารต่อพันตำรวจโท ดร. ทักษิณ ชินวัตร รวมถึง ได้นำทฤษฎีการสื่อสารสองขั้นตอน (Two-Step Flow Theory) มาเป็นกรอบทางทฤษฎีเพื่อศึกษาบริบท การสื่อสารทางการเมืองในประเทศไทย (Star and Hughes, 1950) การวิจัยครั้งนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงสำรวจ โดยใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล กลุ่มที่ใช้ในการศึกษาคือ นักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษา ขึ้นไปในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครและเป็นสมาชิกในชมรมที่เกี่ยวข้องทางด้านการเมืองเท่านั้น จำนวน 300 คน โดยใช้วิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเฉพาะเจาะจง (Purposive Sampling Technique) ในการทดสอบสมมุติฐาน เพื่อวิเคราะห์หาค่าสัมประสิทธิ์สหสัมพันธ์ระหว่างตัวแปรอิสระและตัวแปรตาม โดยใช้สถิติ Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ผลการวิจัยสรุปว่า การเปิดรับข่าวสารทางการเมืองที่ถูกนำเสนอผ่าน สื่อมวลชนและ ข่าวสารทางการเมืองที่นำเอาคำพูดหรือความคิดเห็นของผู้นำความคิดมาตีพิมพ์ผ่านสื่อมวลชน มีความสัมพันธ์กับทัศนคติทางด้านลบของผู้รับข่าวสารต่อพันตำรวจโท ดร. ทักษิณ ชินวัตร รวมถึงผลวิจัย ชี้ให้เห็นว่าผู้นำความคิดทางการเมืองไม่ได้เป็นตัวแปรแทรกแทรงในทฤษฎีการสื่อสารสองขั้นตอน (Two-Step Flow Theory)

Key Words : Political Media Messages, Political attitudes, Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra
คำสำคัญ : ข่าวสารทางการเมือง ทัศนคติทางด้านการเมือง พันตำรวจโท ดร.ทักษิณ ชินวัตร

Introduction

During the 2001 - 2006 Thaksin government, the differences that happened in the political news reporting became significantly evident: from admiration to criticism and from criticism to resistance to the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (Vachirarungchai, 2006). The review of political information in mass media during the Thaksin government reveals that the negative news reporting of the former Prime Minister Thaksin and his party during the mid 2004 - 2006 increased rapidly, until it led to the 2006 political turmoil as well as the division of the major Thai mass media and Thai people, which can be divided into two groups--- those who supported and those who opposed the former Prime Minister Thaksin (McCargo, 2000; Phijidtar, 2003; Matichon, 2005 ;

Taisuriyathamma, 2004; Vachirarungchai, 2006).

For these political incidents, the Thaksin government was discredited and distrusted by the majority of middle and upper-middle class Thai people (Vachirarungchai, 2006; Matichon, 2005; A Free Press?, Internet, 2006).

As a result, this phenomenon made the researcher become interested in investigating whether and how the college students' exposure to various political media messages and to political messages via three kinds of the political opinion leaders is correlated with their negative attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Literarure Review And Hypothesis

Five important concepts -- media effects, attitude formation and change, message contents,

source credibility and political opinion leaders -
and the Two-Step Flow of Communication Model
were reviewed for the development of research
hypotheses.

Media Effects

Lippmann's and Lasswell's studies found
that mass communication could become the basis
for people's view of the world and the essential
tools for manipulation and social control. This
finding led to the political communication study.
However, based on Lazarsfeld, et al. (1968), who
investigated the 1940 presidential campaign using
panel techniques to acquire the respondents'
response right before the potential voters made up
their minds who would be the 1940 president,
it was concluded that the mass media had light
effects on the audience. In addition, other researchers
yielded support to these findings (Berelson, et al.
1954; DeFeleur and Dennis, 1994; Klapper, 1960;
Rowland, 1983; Frey and Campbell, 1978).

Although the concept of minimal effects
is widely accepted among many political
communication researchers, some researchers
attempted to challenge this concept because they
believed that media messages had strong effects
(Merrill, et at. 1994). This argument led to the
increasing investigation of the powerful effects of
the mass media. Most of those studies proposed
that mass media have an influence on the receiver's
attitudes. For example, in the period of the 1980's,
Senator Jesse Helms was interested in taking over
CBS with the aim to shape its news coverage.
During the 1992 Campaign, Vice President
Dan Quayle attempted to bring the issue of
"family values" to the media and public agenda.
Moreover, the 1996 Republican candidate,

Robert Dole, decried the violence in films and
congratulated producers of films that promote
wholesome values, such as the Independence Day's
celebration of patriotism (Sparks, 2002). Based
on all of these examples, it is obvious that the mass
media have become essential tools for politicians.
Consequently, it is not surprising that most of the
politicians used the mass media to achieve
reelection and to gain support for their political goals.

The review of above research leads to the
presumption that the audience's exposure to the
political information in the mass media is likely to
have result in their attitude formation and change.
This presumption led to the following review of the
literature on attitude formation and change.

Attitude Formation and Change

Many evidences suggested that the mass
media tend to serve as reinforcing agents for media
messages. Most of the listeners and readers do not
switch their attitudes when they are exposed to the
political news reported by the mass media. The
researchers found that their original positions are
likely to be reinforced, and whatever attitude change
occurs is in the form of further strengthening the
original attitudes (Berelson, et at. 1954; Lazarsfeld,
et al. 1968).

However, other studies indicated that
political messages were highly likely to influence
the attitude formation and change. For example,
Annis and Meier (1934), who believed that media
messages based on rational and emotional strategies
are the crucial factor in shaping political attitudes,
conducted an experimental study to investigate the
influence of published materials based on logical
and emotional strategies on Prime Minister Hughes.
They found that those who had read pro-Hughes

materials were much more favorable to him than those who had been exposed to anti-Hughes articles. In addition, the findings of Lang and Lang (1983) revealed that the political news relating to Richard Nixon during the Watergate Scandal affected the popular rating of Nixon. Similarly, the media coverage of Iran-Contra Scandal and the Persian Gulf War affected President George Bush's rating. Therefore, these findings indicate that political messages using logical and emotional strategies influenced the receiver's attitudes. Other studies (Lynda, 2004; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Zaller, 1992) also yielded support for this result

Accordingly, this study attempts to investigate the correlations between the audiences' exposure to various types of political messages in the major mass media and their attitudes toward a prominent Thai politician. The message variables are reviewed below.

Message Variable: Rational versus Emotional Messages

Several researches noted that "at heart" people are rational beings who only respond favorably to emotional messages when rational alternatives are not available. For this reason, most of the receivers tend to respond to logical messages more than to emotional messages. However, some studies argue that the use of evidence, logical structure, and tight organization is not persuasive unless the evidence or structure is used to make an appeal to the emotions (Josephine and Wright, 1979; Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). This discussion of messages strategies research cannot indicate clearly which message strategies have sufficient influence to change the audience's

opinion (Roloff, 1983). However, in fact, journalists, reporter, and writer use both logical and emotional messages in order to convince their audiences to believe in those particular issues (Kaid, 2004). Therefore, the researcher proposes the first hypothesis regarding the correlation between audience's exposure to rational and emotional messages and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

H#1: College students' exposure to political media messages that use both rational and emotional arguments correlates negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to greater extent than does exposure to messages that use either rational or emotional arguments

Message Variable: One-Sided versus Two-Sided Messages

Not only do rational and emotional messages affect attitude change, but also do one-sided messages and two-sided messages. Most of the researchers' studies revealed that two-sided messages are more effective than one-sided messages because the information of two-sided messages is more credible and reasonable than that of the one-sided messages (Defluer and Dennis, 1994; Jackson and Allen, 1982).

There has often been speculation that the advantage of the two-sided messages might depended upon other factors; commonly suggested possible factors include the audience's educational level, the audience's familiarity with issue, and audience's initial attitudes on the topic (whether the audience is initially favorable or unfavorable to the position advocated). For both familiar and unfamiliar topics, two-sided messages are more

effective than one-sided messages, but the advantage is greater for familiar than for unfamiliar ones. Thus, it appeared that most of speaker, writer, reporter, and journalists along with persuader are well advised to employ two-sided-messages rather than one-sided messages (even on issue unfamiliar to the audience).

However, Moss and Tubbs's research found that one-sided messages seemed to work better if most of the members of the audience are poorly educated or of low intelligence. As the sample of this study is the college students who are quite well-educated and familiar with political issues, their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin should be correlated to greater extent with two-sided than one-sided messages. Consequently, the researcher predicts:

H#2: College students' exposure to two-sided political media message correlates negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to greater extent than does exposure to one-sided political media messages.

Message Variable: Persuasive versus Non-Persuasive Messages

The pioneering work in the persuasive messages in terms of politics, focused on the role of propaganda in forming public attitudes. Scholars and observers who examined the activities of skilled mass persuaders' activities, such as Roosevelt and Hitler, found that persuasive messages influenced attitude formation and change because the citizens' needs could be satisfied by the mass media content, such as the reinforcement of weak predispositions, the guidance for decision-making, the excitement from following the political game, and so forth

(Sparks, 2002). Moreover, most panel studies on political attitudes and behaviors in presidential elections were conducted increasingly due to the fact that most of the scholars presumed that a plethora of persuasive messages during the election influenced the political attitude and voting behaviors. Based on these studies, it leads to the development of the third hypothesis.

H#3: College students' exposure to persuasive political media messages correlates negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to greater extent than does exposure to non-persuasive political media messages.

Source Credibility

A large number of literatures have concluded that the source credibility is an important element in persuasion (Anderson and Clevenger, 1963). For these reasons, it is considered one of the essential variables influencing the receivers to accord with the news reporting.

According to Kinder's study, the credibility of presidential candidates and presidents depended on the performance (expertise) and promises (trustworthiness) during their campaigns. Kinder investigated George Bush's credibility and found that most of the American people chose Bush as their next president because of his competency, leadership ability, integrity, and empathy. However, Bush's trustworthiness was reduced considerably because he did not follow his promises. During his campaign for the presidency, he promised the voters that there would be no tax increase if he were elected, but the financial crisis, a growing deficit, and other problems in 1990 caused President Bush to increase tax. As a result,

President Bush's credibility was damaged (Reardon, 1991). From this research, this concept could be linked to the credibility of Thaksin Shinawatra. His credibility was reduced dramatically due to his negative performance on such matters as tax invasion and his cabinet being accused of corruption. In brief, the credibility of a politician is more or less determined by the politician's performance and promise.

Although, source credibility is regarded as playing an important role to establish the reliability toward messages, some political researchers noted that political messages presented by high source credibility are not sufficient to the audience's attitude change (Berlo, et al. 1969).

This research, therefore, examined another factor called political opinion leaders that are believed to exert an influence on audience cognition.

Political Opinion Leaders.

Several researchers presumed that message contents reported by various kinds of mass media are the crucial factor in shaping and changing political attitudes; however, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues found that political media coverage given by political opinion leaders are likely highly to switch the voters' perception process. This is because the voters evaluate other people's attitudes while forming their own attitudes. As a result, several scholars presumed that what citizens discussed with others may be more influential than what they received as information from the media. At the same time, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) found that when faced with voting decisions, many voters simply did not rely on information from the media and

instead sought advice from people they respected, either to find out how to vote or to reinforce the decision already made. Consequently, much political information reached the public only after it had passed through political media coverage given by political opinion leaders. Based on these studies, the concept of political opinion leader can be linked to the political events during the Thaksin government. In that period of time, the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was the first prime minister in Thailand, to whom a large number of political elites have opposed. As a result, it is likely that major Thai media's coverage of these political opinion leaders' negative comments toward the Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra affected young audience's attitude formation and change. The review of above research leads to this study's fourth assumption.

H#4: College students' exposure to political media messages with political opinion leaders' comments correlates negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to greater extent than does exposure to political media messages without political opinion leaders' comments.

As opinion leaders are major component of the Two-Step Flow of Communication Model, the literature review includes the discussion of this model.

Two-Step Flow of Communication Model

Star and Hughes (1950) proposed that information given by opinion leaders through media coverage is probably the important variables to opinion formation and change. Consequently, in 1949, they collected the data that lead to the development of the hypotheses which have been

called "the two-step flow" of the mass media influence. In that period of time, they were interested in the effects of a six-week campaign in Cincinnati on political opinions on the United Nations. After the political campaigns were ended, it was found that there was very relatively little attitude change. Consequently, they hypothesized that after the presentation of materials through the mass media channels had been made, people in the city turned for conforming evidence to several political opinion leaders and that through political media coverage given by these political opinion leaders, attitude changes were finally made.

This conceptual framework was first fully formulated by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet in The People's Choice, a report of an election campaign. The research findings confirmed the central notion. That is, the mass media are the first step in reinforcing the audience's attitudes, while opinion leaders are regarded as the final step that results in the audience's attitude change. The credibility of the two step flow theory is significantly increased after the research of Lowery and De Fleur, which revealed that the mass media are highly unlikely to cause people to do things that they really do not want to do. In addition, other researchers yielded support to these findings (Berelson, et al. 1954; O'Keefe, 1950, O'Keefe, 1990, Fisher and Adams, 1994).The unique assumption of the two-step flow leads to the development of the last hypothesis of this research.

H#5: The college students' exposure to political media messages and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra are negatively correlated through the effects of political opinion leaders.

Research Methods

To test the above hypotheses, the survey research was conducted with 300 college students within a one-month period from April 1 to May 1, 2007.

Samples

The population of this study is college students who are current members of an active political club in higher educational institutions in the Bangkok area. According to the online search on political assemblies in higher education institutions (Universities in Bangkok area, Internet, 2005), there are 28 universities in the Bangkok area that have a Political Assembly (See the name list of the higher educational institutions in Bangkok in Table 1). According to the number of relevant universities, the purposive sampling was used for selecting higher educational institutions in the Bangkok area that play a prominent role in Thai politics. The researcher reviewed both primary and secondary data and found that students from two public universities- Thammasat University and Ramkhamhaeng University-have been playing a crucial role in political participation for a long time (Morell and Somudavanja, 1981). Meanwhile, one private university, Rangsit University, is regarded as the Central Organization of Political Assemblies that relate to political activities over five years (Student Center for Democracy, Internet, 2006). Due to their high interest in politics, the college students in these universities are highly likely to be exposed to political information in mass media. Consequently, their responses to the investigation of the potential relation between their exposure to political media

messages and political attitudes are likely to be more valid than responses from students who are not members of the group.

Based on the data gained from the Student Affairs Office of three universities, the total number of political assembly members in these selected institutions equals to 1,200 persons. Based on the Yamane's (1967) formula, (to lower the probability (risk) of having an error above .05), when the population is 1,200, this study requires 300 research participants.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire contains four sections:

Section 1: Participants' Attitudes toward former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of twenty three statements designed to measure the participants' attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra using the five-point scale, ranging from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scales of the statements 10-23 are reversed, namely, 1 (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) and 5 (*from strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*).

Section 2: Exposure to Political Media Messages

This section is composed of nine categories of political messages (rational messages, emotional messages, rational and emotional arguments, one-sided messages, two-sided messages, persuasive messages, non-persuasive messages, messages with political opinion leaders' comments, and messages without political opinion leaders' comments). These messages were excerpted from the major print and online media in Thailand. This instrument aims to measure the participants'

frequency of exposure to political media messages using the five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*regularly*).

Section 3: Personal Data

This section consists of questions asking the participants to specify their demographics including gender, age, academic major, educational institution, family income, and their head of the household's education level and occupation.

Section 4: Message Channels

The last section of the questionnaire asked the participants about their frequency of exposure to political information via thirteen message channels using the five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*regularly*).

Procedures

Before distributing the questionnaire to the participants by hand at each university, the researcher had it translated into Thai by using the method of back translation. That is, the statements of all instruments were translated into English, and then translated back into Thai. During the data collection, the researcher asked for assistance from the Presidents of the political assembly of each sampled university in order to distribute the questionnaires to their members, who can be regarded as the representatives of college students who are active members of a political assembly in Bangkok area. The researcher distributed 150 questionnaires at Thammasat University, 120 questionnaires at Ramkhamhaeng University, and 100 questionnaires at Rangsit University. Within one week, the researcher received 300 sets of questionnaires from the sampled universities-127

questionnaires (42.3%) from Thammasat University, 104 questionnaires (34.7%) from Ramkhamhaeng University, and 69 questionnaires (23%) from Rangsit University (see Table 2). The data collection was done between April 1 and May 1, 2007.

Results

The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient is used to investigate the relationships between variables presented in the research hypotheses (see Table 3). In addition, in the supplemental analysis section, t-test independent sample and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) are performed to analyze the impact of respondents' demographics on their attitudes toward Thaksin Shinawatra (see Table 4).

Hypothesis # 1 predicts that the college students' exposure to political media messages that use *both logical and emotional arguments* does correlate negatively to their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, to a greater extent than does exposure to messages that use *either logical or emotional arguments.*

Pearson's correlation analysis reveals that college students who were exposed to political media messages using *both logical and emotional arguments* ($r = -.176**$, $p < .01$), and political media messages using *only logical argument* ($r = -.160**$, $p < .01$) are likely to have negative attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (see Table 1).

In short, the first research hypothesis is partially supported because it presumed that exposure to *either logical messages* or *emotional*

messages does not significantly correlate with the college student's attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin. However, the result Pearson's Correlation analyses reveal that the exposure to *only logical media messages* is associated with the respondents' negative attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin. When comparing the Pearson's correlation value between *both logical and emotional arguments* and *only logical arguments*, it was found that the Pearson's correlation value of messages using *both logical and emotional arguments* ($r = -.176**$, $p < .01$) is higher than that of messages using *only logical arguments* ($r = -.160**$, $p < .01$) or those using only emotional arguments ($r = -.077$, $p > .05$).

Hypothesis # 2 proposes that the college students' exposure to *two-sided* political media messages does correlate negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to a greater extent than does exposure to *one-sided* political media messages.

The Pearson's correlation analysis in Table 1 indicates that there is no statistically significant negative correlation between the college students' exposure to *one-sided* political media messages and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ($r = -.052$, $p > .05$). However, there is a statistically significant negative correlation between the college students' exposure to *two-sided* political media messages and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ($r = -.132*$, $p < .05$). It means that the more respondents are exposed to *two-sided* political media messages, the more their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin are

negative. In addition, the comparison of the Pearson's correlation values between exposure to *one-sided* and *two-sided* political media messages reveal that the value of *two-sided* political media messages ($r = -.132^*$, $p < .05$) is higher than that of one-sided political media messages ($r = -.052$, $p > .05$). As a result, the second research hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis # 3 states that the college students' exposure to *persuasive* political media messages does correlate negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, to a greater extent than does exposure to *non-persuasive* political media messages.

In Table 1, the correlation analysis indicates that the college students' attitudes were negative toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin, when being exposed to *persuasive* political media messages. In other words, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between the independent and dependent variables ($r = -.131^*$, $p < .05$). However, there is no statistically significant negative correlation between the college students' exposure to non-persuasive political media messages and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ($r = -.023$, $p > .05$). The comparison of the Pearson's correlation values between exposure to *persuasive* and *non-persuasive* political media messages reveal that the value of persuasive political media messages ($r = -.131^*$, $p < .05$) is higher than that of non-persuasive political media messages ($r = -.023$, $p > .05$). As a result, the third research hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis # 4 proposes that the college students' exposure to political media messages *with political opinion leaders' comments* does correlate negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, to a greater extent than does exposure to political media messages *without political opinion leaders' comments.*

The Pearson' correlation analysis was performed to test the hypothesis. In table 1, the analysis reveals that the college students' exposure to political media messages *with political opinion leaders' comments* does correlate negatively with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ($r = -.335^{**}$, $p < .01$). In contrast, the analysis of Pearson's correlation indicates the negative relationship between exposure to political messages *without political opinion leaders' comments* and the respondents' attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin was not significant ($r = -.090$, $p > .05$). The comparison of the Pearson's correlation values between exposure to political media messages *with political opinion leaders' comments* and messages *without political opinion leaders' comments* reveals that the value of messages *with political opinion leaders' comments* ($r = -.335^{**}$, $p < .01$) is much higher than that of messages *without political opinion leaders' comments* ($r = -.090$, $p > .05$). Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis # 5 predicts that the college students' exposure to political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra are correlated through the effect of *political opinion leaders.*

According to Table 2, the result of Pearson's bivariate correlation conveys that there are quite strong correlations between the college students' exposure to political messages *via three kinds of political opinion leaders* as the independent variables and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as the dependent variable. The highest correlation belongs to the leading protestors ($r = -.317^{**}$, $p < .01$), followed closely by the politicians ($r = -.313^{**}$, $p < .01$), and the political scholars ($r = -311^{**}$, $p < .01$) respectively. In other words, the more the college students are exposed to political messages via three kinds of the *political opinion leaders*, the more their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra becomes negative. However, the research findings also suggest that there are weaker correlations between the college students' exposure to political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

In short, when the correlation values between the exposure to political messages via three kinds of *political opinion leaders* and the exposure to political messages *via mass media* are compared, it is obvious that the correlations of the exposure to political messages *via three kinds of the political opinion leaders* and negative response on Thaksin are stronger than that of the exposure to political messages *via mass media.*

In addition to the bivariate correlation, the partial correlations between exposure to political messages *via mass media*, exposure to political messages *via political opinion leaders*, and attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra were analyzed. The partial correlation coefficient between the college students' exposure to the political messages *via political opinion leader* and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin, when the effect of mass media is controlled, is statistically significant ($r = -.497^{***}$, $p < .000$). Similarly, the correlation between the exposure to the political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin, when the effect of political opinion leader is controlled, is statistically significant ($r = -.385^{***}$, $p < .000$, see Table 3). The significant correlation between the college students' exposure to the political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes was found. This result does not support the Two-Step Flow of Communication Model, which postulates that the audience's exposure to political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra are correlated through political opinion leaders. When the effect of political opinion leaders is controlled, the correlation between the exposure to political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes toward Thaksin must be zero in order to support the model. However, their correlation is significantly negative ($r = -.385^{***}$, $p < .000$). Consequently, this hypothesis is rejected.

This finding also indicates that the negative correlation between the college students' exposure to the political messages *via political opinion leaders* and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is stronger than that of their exposure to the political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes toward him. This implies that both audiences' exposures to the political messages *via mass media* and *via political opinion leaders* are independently correlated with their attitudes toward the former

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (see figure 1).

Supplemental Analysis

The T-test independent sample analysis revealed that the gender, level of study, working status, and relative/parents' relating to politic do not lead to respondents' different attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. However, the result of One-way ANOVA indicates that the respondents' academic disciplines, which is categorized into three distinct branches: Social Sciences, Arts/Humanities, and Sciences, are another significant factor that leads to their different attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ($F(2, 297) = 3.778$, $p < .001$). The finding also indicates that Social Sciences students' attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin are likely to be the most negative ($x = 71.0$), followed closely by Arts/Humanities students' attitudes ($x = 63.9$), and Sciences students' attitudes ($x = 58.1$) respectively (see Table 4).

Discussion

The research findings reported above provide an answer for the first research question-- How does the college students' exposure to various political media messages correlate with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin? That is, the college students' attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin are likely to be negative when being exposed to both logical and *emotional arguments*, *only logical arguments*, *two-sided* messages, *persuasive* messages, and political media messages *with political opinion leaders' comments* (see Table 1).

The research finding of the fifth hypothesis provides the answer for the second research question – How does the college students' exposure to the political messages via political opinion leaders correlate with their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra? The finding reveals that the more the college students' are exposed to political messages via political opinion leaders, particularly three kinds of the opinion leaders (leading protestors, politicians, and political scholars), the more their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra become negative. In addition, it also answers the third research question – Does the college students' exposure to the political messages in mass media and their attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra correlate through the effect of political opinion leaders? The findings indicate that the Two-Step Flow of Communication Model is not applicable to political communication since it cannot accurately explain the relationships between the audience's exposure to the political messages *via mass media* and their attitudes toward a particular politician. In other words, political opinion leader does not mediate the relationship between mass media and audience's response as the model postulates. Based on this finding, the audience's political attitudes are likely to be directly correlated not only with their exposure to the political messages *via political opinion leaders*, but also with their exposure to messages *via mass media.*

Although the majority of the research hypotheses are of a statistically significant relationship, all of the Pearson's correlation values are not high. They imply that the political media messages studied in this research project are not the

sole factor that relates to audience's attitudes toward a particular politician. Other variables that are likely to influence audience's attitude formation and change such as political messages presented via interpersonal channels should be explored in future research.

Limitation and Implications for Future Research

This study employed only students who are current members of active political assembly in universities in Bangkok area. Therefore, this sample cannot represent all Thai students or the general public in Thailand. As a result, the findings of this research project can be generalized only to college students who are members of the political assembly.

In addition, Most of the information in the questionnaire was excerpted from print media (newspapers, political magazines, and political books) and online media (internet) Accordingly, this research project is unable to make a definite conclusion that the audience's exposure to all kinds of mass media, especially broadcast one, correlated negatively with their political attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Moreover, most of the questions in the questionnaire are the political incidents happening in the past As a result, research participants are required to recall those incidents when they are asked to respond to the research questions.

In the future, this study should be replicated using bigger and different samples, especially the college students in rural areas. A variety of sample helps to provide audience's

different perspectives of politics. In fact, general public's attitudes toward the political events happening in the Thaksin government are more interesting than specific groups' attitudes. If time and budget allow, the general public, who are between 18 and 60, is a better sample for investigating the potential influence of political messages in the major Thai mass media. Future research should also compare potential impact of different types of media on the audience's political attitudes.

In addition, it would be fruitful to investigate political messages via *interpersonal channels* because the research findings of this study reveal that audience's exposure to political opinion leaders' comments correlated more with their political attitudes than did their exposure to political messages via mass media. Audience's interpersonal communication with family, friends, and colleagues may possibly lead to significant opinion formation and change due to their day-to-day interaction with these people.

References

A free press? (n.d.). Retrieved 3 June, 2006, from http:// www.sanook.comI/?freedom.

Anderson, K., and Clevenger, T. A summary of experimental research in ethos. In T. D. Besiseker and D. W. Person (Eds.), *the process of social influence (pp. 223-247)*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Annis, AD., and Meier, N. 1934. The introduction of opinion through suggestion by means of planted content. *Journal of Social Psychology, 84,* 65-81.

Ansolabehere, S., and Iyengar, S. 1995. *Going Negative: How political advertisements shrink and polarize the electorate.* New York: Sage.

Berelson, B., Lazarsfeld, P., and McPhee, W. 1954. *Voting: A studyopinion formation in a Presidential Campaign.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berlo, DK., Lemert. JB., and Mertz, RJ. 1969. Dimensions for evaluating the acceptability of message source. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 33*,563–576.

Defluer, ML., and Dennis, EE. 1994. Understanding masscommunication: A liberal arts perspective (5th Ed). In P. J. Devlin (Eds.), *Political persuasion in presidential campaign.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Defluer, ML., and Dennis, EE. 1994. Understanding mass communication: A liberal arts perspective (5th Ed). In P. J. Devlin (Eds.), *Political persuasion in presidential campaign.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Frey, D., and Campbell, DT. 1978. A clarification of selective exposure: The impact of choice. *Journal of Experiment Social Psychology, 14,* 132–139.

Fisher, AB., and Adams, LK. 1994. *Interpersonal communication.* NY: McGRAW–HILL, INC.

Jackson, S., and Allen, M. 1982. Meta analysis of the effectiveness of one–sided and two–sided argument. *The Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association,* 484–513.

Josephine, RH., and Wright, RC. 1979. Sociology of mass communications. *AnnualReview of Sociology, 5,* 193–217.

Kaid, LL. 2004. *Handbook of political communication research.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum .

Katz, E. 1987. On conceptualizing media effects: Another look. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Applied Social Psychology Annual (Vol. 8, pp. 32–42).* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Klapper, JT. 1960. *The effects of mass communication.* New York: Free Press.

Lange, GE., and Lang, K. 1983. *The battle for public opinion: The President, the press, and the polls during Watergate.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Lazarsfeld, PF., Berelson, B., and Gaudet, H. 1968. *The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in presidential election.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Lynda, LK. 2004. *Political Communication Research.* London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Matichon. 2005. *Thaksin…Pookahtuaeng [Thaksin kill himself].* Matichon Book.

McCargo, D. 2000. *Politics and the Press in Thailand.* Media Machinations, London: Routledge.

Merill, CJ., Lee, J., and Friedlander, JE. 1994. *Modern Mass Media.* Harper Collins College Publishers.

Morell, D., and Samudavanija, C. 1981. *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution.* Cambridge MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain.

O'Keefe, JD. 1950. *Persuasion: Theory and research.* The International Professional Publisher, Newbury Park:Sage.

O'Keefe, DJ. 1990. *Persuasion: Theory and Research.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Petty, RE., and Cacioppo, JT. 1984. The effect of involvement on responses to arguments quantity and quality: Central and peripheral routes to persuasion. *Journal of and Psychology*, 46, 69-81.

Phijidtar, B. 2003. Kidyhang Thaksin [Learning from Thaksin].Chaing Mai: Silkworm Book.

Reardon, KK. 1991. *Persuasion in practice.* The international Educational and Professional, CA: Sage.

Roloff, ME., 1976. Communication Strategies, relationship, and relational change. In G. R.Miller (ed.), *Perspectives on interpersonal communication.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Rowland, WD. 1983. *The politics of TV violence: Policy use of communication research.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Sparks, GG. 2002. *Media Effects Research: A basic overview.* Australian: Wadsworth: Thomson Learning.

Star, S., and Hughes, H. 1955. Report of on educational campaign: The Cincinnati plan for the United Nations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 55, 389-400.

Student center for democracy. Retrieved 10 April, 2007, from www.ypdthai.com/en/ 01abouts.htm.

Taisuriyathamma, P. 2004. *Toxinomics.* Offset Creation. www.sanook.comI/?freedom.

Vachirarungchai, N. 2006. *Yoottakanyeudmuang [Thaksin abuse his power].*Chaing Mai: Silkworm Book.

Yamane, T. 1967. *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis.* NY: Harper and Row.

Zaller. 1992. *The nature and origins of mass opinion.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Table 1 Correlation between the exposure to nine characteristics of political media messages and total attitudes of the respondents toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Opinion	-	-160**	-077	-176**	-052	-132*	-131*	-023	-335**	-090
2 Logical		-	-190	-177*	-035	-105	-382*	-095	-171*	-006
3 Emotion			-	-261*	-297**	-217*	-129*	-002	-238*	.012
4 Log & Emo.				-	-284**	-774**	-113	-112	-893**	.057
5 One-sided					-	-233*	-045	-069	-207*	.165**
6 Two-sided						-	-054	-153**	-702*	.076
7 Persuasive							-	-087	.069	.122*
8 Non-persua.								-	.058	.147*
9 Opi. Leader									-	.009
10 No opi.										-

Note. *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$

The meaning of the number 1-10

1 = the total attitudes of the respondents

2 = the exposure to only logical political media arguments

3 = the exposure to only emotional political media arguments

4 = the exposure to both logical and emotional political media arguments

5 = the exposure to one-sided political media messages

6 = the exposure to two-sided political media messages

7 = the exposure to persuasive political media messages

8 = the exposure to non-persuasive political media messages

9 = the exposure to political media messages with political opinion leaders

10 = the exposure to political media messages without political opinion leaders

Table 2 Correlations between thirteen message channels and attitudes toward the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Opinion	-	-.317**	-.311**	-.313**	-.023	-.135*	.005	-.242*	-.176*	.058	-.189**	-.070	-.079	-.007
2. Protestors		-	.985**	.712**	.094	-.832**	.061	.811**	.692**	-.070	.865**	.009	.010	.046
3. Scholars			-	.956**	.101	.877**	.051	.815**	.636	-.082	.799**	.031	.011	.019
4. Politicians				-	.909**	.888**	.077	.756**	.739**	.019	.941**	.053	.009	.043
5. Magazines					-	.185**	.288**	.155**	.100	.008	.146*	.054.	.204	.089
6. Newspapers						-	.093	.033**	.736**	.016	.718**	.098	.037	.043
7. Books							-	.090	.101	.027	.098	.141*	.148*	.126*
8. Radio								-	.663**	.012	.785**	.064	.018	.045
9. TV									-	-.018	.763**	.074	-.009	.030
10. Cable TV										-	.015	-.123*	-.045	-.087
11. Internet											-	.077	.041	.053
12. Web board												-	.465*	.380*
13. News onli.													-	.657**
14. Mag.online														-

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01

The meaning of the number 1-14

1= Attitudes toward Thaksin	3 = Political scholar	5 = Magazine	6 = Newspapers
2 = Leadership protestors	4 = Politician	11 = Internet	12 = web board
7 = Political books	8 = Radio	9 = Television	10 = Cable TV
13 = Newspaper online	14 = magazine online		

Table 3 Partial correlation coefficient between the exposure to political messages via opinion leaders and via mass
media and opinion on the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

Controlling …for the mass media group

	Exposure to Political Opinion Leader	Total Attitudes
Exposure to Opinion Leader	1.00	-.497*** (n = 300) p = .000
Total Opinion	-.497*** (n = 300) p = .000	1.00

Controlling…for the opinion leader group

	Exposure to Mass Media	Total Attitudes
Exposure to Mass Media	1.00	-.385*** (n = 300) p = .000
Total Opinion	-.385*** (n = 300) p = .000	1.00

Table 4 Mean differences of three academic disciplines with the respondents' political attitudes toward the former
Prime Minister Thaksin

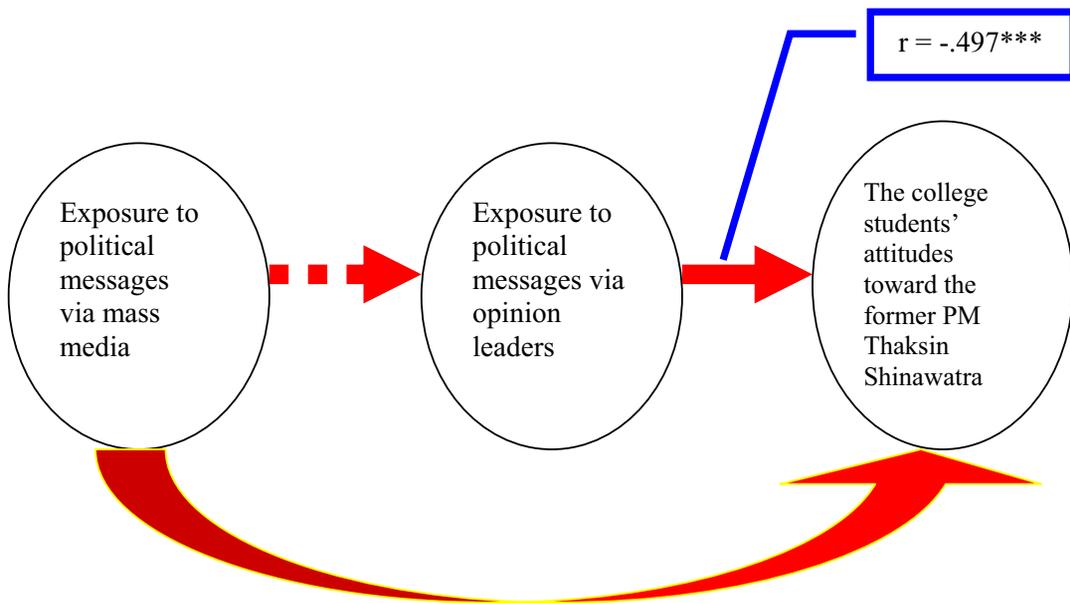| Academic Disciplines	Mean	S.D.	F	df 1	df2	2P-value
Social Sciences (N = 190)	63.9271	16.3245	3.778	2	297	.001
Art (N = 90)	58.0897	18.0448				
Sciences (N = 20)	71.0000	13.5857				

Figure 1 The Fifth hypothesis findings