Going Viral for Victory: A Study of User-Generated Content's Influence on The Success of the Move Forward Party in the 2023 Thai Election.
ถอดรหัสไวรัลการเมือง: อิทธิพลของเนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้สร้างขึ้น ต่อชัยชนะของพรรคก้าวไกลในการเลือกตั้งปี 2566

อาลี ปรียากร[1*]

Ali Priyakorn

Abstract

The 2023 Thai general election underscored the growing influence of social media, particularly User-Generated Content (UGC) on TikTok, in shaping public perception and political participation. This study aims to classify UGC related to the election, explore its contribution to voter decision-making, and analyse the persuasive strategies employed by content creators. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative analysis of engagement metrics (likes, comments, views) with qualitative thematic analysis of 171 high-engagement TikTok videos selected through purposive sampling during the 45 days before and 30 days after the election.

Thematic analysis revealed eight key themes: Everyday Accessibility, Fan Affection and Emotion, Grassroots and Street Campaign, Parody and Politainment, Policy and Power Critique, Gratitude and Mobilisation, Religious or Cultural Context, and Context-Specific Specials. Persuasive tactics observed included emotional appeals, identity and affiliation building, humour and parody, rational policy cues, authenticity narratives, and direct calls to action. The study found that user-generated content on TikTok is an effective political medium, significantly influencing voters' attitudes and behaviours. It played a key role in the Move Forward Party winning the most votes in the election through emotionally resonant and accessible content.

Keywords: User-Generated Content, TikTok, Political Communication, Persuasive Strategies, the Move Forward Party (MFP), Thailand General Election 2023

บทคัดย่อ

การเลือกตั้งสมาชิกสภาผู้แทนราษฎรไทย พ.ศ. 2566 สะท้อนอิทธิพลที่เพิ่มขึ้นของสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ โดยเฉพาะเนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้งานสร้างขึ้น (User-Generated Content: UGC) บนแพลตฟอร์มติ๊กต็อก ในการกำหนดการรับรู้และการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองของประชาชน งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อจำแนก

---
[1] อาจารย์ประจำคณะสื่อสารมวลชน มหาวิทยาลัยรามคำแหง

Lecturer, Faculty of Mass Communication, Ramkhamhaeng University

*Corresponding Author; E-mail address: ali.p@rumail.ru.ac.th

ประเภทของเนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้งานสร้างขึ้นที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการเลือกตั้ง ศึกษาบทบาทของเนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้งานสร้าง
ขึ้น ต่อการตัดสินใจเลือกตั้ง และวิเคราะห์กลยุทธ์การโน้มน้าวใจที่ผู้สร้างเนื้อหาใช้ โดยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัย
แบบผสมผสาน ทั้งการวิเคราะห์เชิงปริมาณจากสถิติการมีส่วนร่วม (จำนวนการถูกใจ ความคิดเห็น และ
การเข้าชม) และการวิเคราะห์เชิงแก่นสาระจากคลิปวิดีโอที่เผยแพร่บนแพลตฟอร์มติ๊กต็อก ที่มีการมีผู้ชมมี
ส่วนร่วมสูงจำนวน 171 คลิป โดยเป็นการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงในช่วง 45 วันก่อนและ 30 วัน
หลังการเลือกตั้ง

ผลการวิเคราะห์พบแก่นสาระหลัก 8 ประการ ได้แก่ การเข้าถึงได้ในชีวิตประจำวัน ความรักและ
ความผูกพัน การหาเสียงแบบเข้าถึงรากฐาน การล้อเลียนและการเมืองเชิงบันเทิง การวิพากษ์นโยบายและ
อำนาจ ความกตัญญูและการระดมพล บริบทศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม และประเด็นเฉพาะตามบริบท ผู้สร้าง
เนื้อหาใช้กลยุทธ์การโน้มน้าวใจหลากหลาย อาทิ การกระตุ้นอารมณ์ การสร้างอัตลักษณ์ร่วม การใช้
อารมณ์ขัน ข้อมูลเชิงเหตุผล การเสนอภาพความจริง และการเรียกร้องให้ลงมือทันที ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็น
ว่าเนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้งานสร้างขึ้นบนแพลตฟอร์มติ๊กต็อก เป็นสื่อกลางทางการเมืองที่มีประสิทธิภาพ มีอิทธิพลต่อ
ทัศนคติและพฤติกรรมของผู้มีสิทธิเลือกตั้ง และมีบทบาทสำคัญต่อการได้คะแนนเสียงมากที่สุดในการ
เลือกตั้งครั้งนี้

คำสำคัญ: เนื้อหาที่ผู้ใช้งานสร้างขึ้น ติ๊กต็อก การสื่อสารทางการเมือง กลยุทธ์การโน้มน้าวใจ พรรคก้าวไกล
การเลือกตั้งทั่วไปประเทศไทย พ.ศ. 2566

1. Introduction

Although traditional media plays an essential role in election-related information, such as the debate between two party leaders on television, various online platforms now play an equal role in communicating election-related incidents to a large audience (Anyanwu et al., 2024; Min et al., 2020; Idid, 2018). The main reason is that people use many online platforms on their hands in daily lives for multiple goals, such as following the news, communicating with their community, seeking some entertainment matters, and sharing their own experiences with others, including political attitudes (Yadav et al., 2023; Patel et al., 2020; Majó-Vázquez et al., 2019). With the advent of technology that allows individuals to create and share information easily, there has been a noteworthy increase in content generated by everyday people, rather than solely by professional media outlets or established brands. This phenomenon, called User-Generated Content (UGC) (Bruns, 2016), has emerged as an essential component of the modern media landscape. It significantly influences public opinion and holds a comparable impact to that of traditional media (Tefertiller et al., 2019).

UGC has the strength to create emotional connections and credibility because it reflects the real experiences of content creators. UGC formats include text, images, and videos published on platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok. TikTok, in particular, has grown rapidly by allowing ordinary people's voices to be heard in society through an algorithm that emphasises content rather than user reputation, making TikTok an essential

space for social and political communication (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023; Guinaudeau et al., 2022). User-generated content (UGC) on TikTok significantly increases awareness and promotes political movements (Cervi, 2023; Hindarto, 2022), as evidenced in Thailand. The general parliamentary elections of 2019 and 2023 illustrate the impactful use of new media for campaign strategies (Sinpeng, 2024).

The Media Alert by the Thai Media Fund (2023) report indicates that election-related content received the highest engagement on social media, accounting for 66% of all engagement. During the same period, it surpasses entertainment or socio-cultural content, demonstrating high political awareness and the role of social media as a rhetorical arena.

In the May 14, 2023, election, the Move Forward Party (MFP) secured the most seats in the House of Representatives, with a voter turnout of 75.71%, the highest in Thailand's history. User-generated content (UGC) on platforms like TikTok is crucial in shaping trends and influencing voters' decisions (Sinpeng, 2024). It achieves this through accessible, emotionally engaging communication, fostering a sense of connection between the public and political parties.

Currently, UGC, which is emotionally accessible and highly entertaining, tends to generate better engagement than official content, emphasising logic, especially among young TikTok users (Moffett & Rice, 2023). This content helps bridge the gap between politics and the public, making political participation more intimate and engaging, significantly affecting voting decisions. Therefore, this study examines the role of UGC in the 2023 general election, where the Move Forward Party won, focusing on content types, formats, strategies, and their impact on political perceptions and behaviour in the digital age.
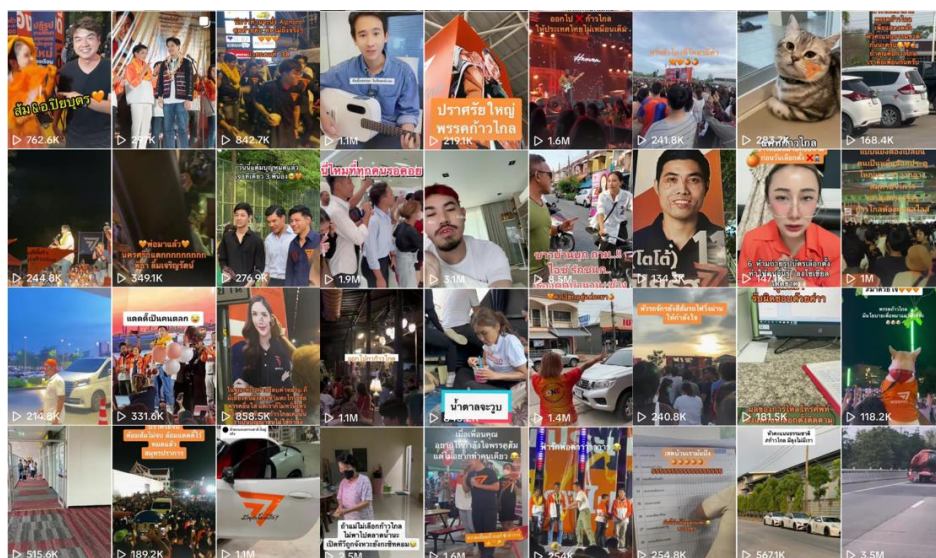

Figure 1: Examples of High-Engagement User-Generated Content (UGC) on TikTok.

2. Research Objectives

2.1 This study aims to classify user-generated content (UGC) types on the TikTok platform, which is used to communicate about the 2023 Thailand general election.

2.2 This study aims to understand how user-generated content (UGC) on the TikTok platform contributes to voters' decisions.

2.3 This study aims to analyse the specific elements and persuasive strategies for voting through user-generated content (UGC) on the TikTok platform.

3. Literature Review

In the past, political communication in Thailand was mainly controlled by the government and powerful groups through traditional media. This made many people feel that politics was *"impure"* and difficult to get involved in.

The advent of new media, particularly the platform TikTok, has altered the dynamics of political communication. This technological disruption has dismantled traditional barriers, empowering citizens to become producers of User-Generated Content (UGC) and thereby facilitating a more decentralised and participatory communication ecosystem. TikTok's format of short, easy-to-watch, and entertaining videos makes complex political topics much simpler for young people to understand and connect with. This trend aligns with the growing public desire to be more involved in politics and to help bring about change.

This research examines issues related to user-generated content (UGC) on TikTok, particularly issues related to political communication, through a case study of the 2023 The Thai general election requires a review of relevant literature, concepts, theories, and research, divided into the following sections.

3.1 User-Generated Content (UGC) and Political Participation

User-generated content (UGC) is an important element in online political communication. Users can produce media such as photos, short videos, and texts to express their opinions and personal experiences on social and political issues (Vujnovic et al., 2010), and on various platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok). Such content is often created in response to important political or social events, such as elections or citizen movements, reflecting people's attitudes, beliefs, and emotions (Lin, 2015; Östman, 2012). User-generated content (UGC), therefore, plays an important role in generating interest in political issues and can further influence voters' decision-making processes (Okechukwu, 2023).

Several studies have shown that UGC encourages more significant political participation, allowing ordinary users to express opinions and organise support or opposition toward policies, political parties, or political figures (Valenzuela, 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Furthermore, Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) found that individuals who

produce or engage with political content online can participate in real-world political activities (offline participation). Similarly, Valenzuela (2013) pointed out that UGC can potentially promote offline political mobilisation, such as creating online content to encourage people to vote or join political protests. Moreover, a study has shown that platforms emphasising short videos, like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, increase political interest among younger generations by presenting *"entertainment-infused"* political content (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). Some findings suggest that UGC serves as a critical tool for opening up spaces for public expression and promoting political clarity by strengthening the influence of citizens' voices in driving social and political change (Valenzuela, 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

This study also draws upon foundational communication theories to understand the impact of UGC. The *Two-Step Flow of Communication* theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), traditionally applied to mass media, is re-contextualised here for the digital era. In the context of TikTok, "opinion leaders" are no longer limited to journalists or established media figures. Instead, they are everyday users and social media influencers who create and disseminate UGC, shaping political discourse and influencing a wider audience of peers, a trend noted in recent analyses of digital media's role in politics (Cervi et al., 2021).

This phenomenon is closely linked to the *Personalisation of Politics*. As referenced in Theme 1, UGC on platforms like TikTok amplifies this effect by presenting politicians in a more relatable and accessible light. The content often showcases their personal lives and informal interactions, which helps to build a strong emotional connection with voters. This creation of an "affective bond," cultivated through personalised and seemingly authentic content, can significantly influence voting decisions (Brader, 2005; Seibt et al., 2019) by making political figures appear more trustworthy and aligned with the voters' own values. This shift empowers citizens and has been shown to be a factor in promoting democratic engagement, particularly among younger, previously disengaged groups (Östman, 2012).

3.2 TikTok and Political Mobilisation

TikTok was designed primarily as a short-form entertainment platform, but in recent years, it has expanded its platform to include various issues, particularly sociopolitical (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). TikTok's popularity among millennials worldwide has made it a platform for users, particularly young people, to express their opinions, frustrations, and activism about social and political issues (Le Compte & Klug, 2021). Some research has found that one of the most popular forms of political content on TikTok is *"politainment"*, which combines politics with entertainment, such as by incorporating musical accompaniment, dancing challenges, effect templates, comedic editing, or satirising political figures (Cervi et al., 2023; Zamora-Medina, 2023). This approach

makes political discussions feel more intimate and appealing to younger audiences, who often feel alienated from traditional political processes (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021).

This starting point can be seen globally, such as the significant beginning of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, where TikTok users used the platform to share videos that criticised police practices and social injustice through news footage, personal and creative storytelling, and music that criticised the social system (He, 2020). Alternatively, some cases in Southeast Asia can examine TikTok, e.g. during the 2020 labour law investigations in Indonesia and the 2021 official investigations in Myanmar regarding disseminating against government policies (Jalli, 2021). In the Thai Context, TikTok has also been the leading media outlet used by protesters to criticise the government and any official dissemination of information (Sinpeng, 2024; Rugsajai, 2022).

Another key feature of TikTok is its algorithmic system, which prioritises content over the creator's popularity. This allows regular users' posts to reach a large audience or go viral regardless of their follower count (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). This dynamic allows individuals who may not have large followers or not be online influencers to communicate effectively on TikTok, comparable to mainstream media, boosting their voices and participating in broader political discourse, especially in contexts with limited media freedom (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021)

3.3 Persuasion Strategies and Communication Tactics on TikTok

Another important factor contributing to the influence of political content on TikTok is the embedded persuasive strategy that combines emotional appeals with entertainment elements. Several studies have shown that *emotional appeals*, for example, to provoke anger toward social injustices and inspire hope for social changes, have the potential to persuade viewers more than factual information alone (Moffett & Rice, 2024; Zamora-Medina et al., 2023; Serrano et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies have found that TikTok is a media environment rich in emotional expressions, both entertaining and critical, where users often create content to provoke reactions and spark debate, including the incorporation of entertaining viral songs or memes into political messages, which can significantly increase *"go viral"* possibilities or the visibility and engagement of the content (McLaughlin et al., 2024; Zamora-Medina et al., 2023).

This study uses a framework from the literature review to identify key persuasive strategies observed on TikTok that can be used for analysis as follows:

1) Emotional appeal: Focusing on evoking emotions in viewers, such as anger at injustice, instilling hope for social change (Moffett & Rice, 2024).

2) Rational appeal: Presenting facts, statistics, or policy information to build credibility and clarify political positions (Zamora-Medina et al., 2023).

3) Humour and satire: Using jokes or parody to attract attention, such as satirical clips targeting political figures or social issues (McLaughlin et al., 2024).

4) Identity and affiliation appeal: Promoting a sense of belonging or camaraderie, such as through hashtags, group naming, and pedagogy or symbols related to political movements

5) Influencer/Relatability: Using celebrities or relevant individuals to influence viewers, such as celebrities who support political participation or share personal political experiences

6) Calls to action: Directly supporting political action, such as urging viewers to vote or join protests (Moffett & Rice, 2024)

A review of relevant concepts and research regarding political motivation strategies on TikTok found that these themes demonstrate the diverse motivation strategies used by content creators to communicate political messages on TikTok, presenting political content in an engaging and accessible format that encourages greater audience engagement. It can be adapted to be used for content analysis and decoding messages.

3.4 Relevant research on TikTok and political issues

Several relevant studies have examined TikTok's impact on political behaviour and attitudes in various global contexts. In the Thai context, Sinpeng (2024) and Rungsachai (2022) found that TikTok was utilised as a platform for criticising the Thai government, especially

General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the 2014 coup leader and his government, particularly through humour that reflected the political expression culture of younger generations. In another case, in Indonesia, the 2024 presidential election was investigated. They observed that Generation Z youths used TikTok as a primary platform to access political news and produce videos supporting or criticising candidates, forming vibrant online communities of young voters (Adinda & Ari, 2024).A systematic review by Hindarto (2022), which analysed 30 studies from 2018 to 2022, concluded that political content in short-form videos on TikTok significantly stimulated youth interest and political engagement (Hindarto, 2022). Internationally, a study of the use of TikTok by the United Nations (UNHCR) found that the organisation adapted short-form, emotionally-driven storytelling to enhance young audiences' understanding of refugee issues (Çakıcı, 2025).

In the United States, Karimi and Fox (2023) found that Generation Z youths who regularly used TikTok primarily received political information through the platform, leading to a greater shift toward liberal ideologies, particularly concerning social equality and environmental issues. Church (2022) surveyed American youth, and 91% of respondents admitted that their political views had changed after engaging with TikTok content, with most respondents becoming more liberal. A study examined TikTok's role during the 2020

US presidential election. It highlighted the platform's influence in shaping candidates' image-building strategies, prompting political campaigns to adapt TikTok content to better connect with younger voters (Hernandez, 2022). The most important aspect that Moffett and Rice (2023) found is that the relationship between TikTok users and political activity is examined, finding that youth who create and post political content or follow it on TikTok are more likely to engage in political activities, such as voting and local politics, than non-TikTok users.

Other studies exploring online political activism provide additional insights. According to Haslem (2022), TikTok was an important platform for marginalised groups to express their political activism creatively during the 2020 social justice protests. Additionally, studies have found that TikTok's *"politainment"* content helps bridge the gap between those who are less interested in political engagement or people who think that politics is too far to engage with, which TikTok made social and political issues more accessible and engaging (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023; Zamora-Medina, 2023). Moreover, as McLaughlin et al. (2024) note, there is a positive relationship between TikTok usage and aggressive political behaviour online, suggesting that users who consume political content on TikTok are more likely to express confrontational behaviour than users on other platforms, especially Facebook. Meanwhile, a study has found that TikTok content combining entertainment elements, dance, or memes with political messages tends to generate more engagement than traditional forms of political communication (Umansky & Pipal, 2023).

In a comparative study of TikTok usage in Spain and Poland, Zamora-Medina et al. (2023) found that while official political party accounts are largely information-based and logically appealing (logos), individual political leaders often use emotionally charged narratives and personal narratives (pathos) to connect with their audiences. Similarly, in the US context, Serrano et al. (2020) observed that Republican and Democratic supporters on TikTok share similar demographics and usage patterns. Although Republican supporters generate more political content and attract higher engagement, Democrat supporters were more inclined to engage in dialogue across ideological lines. This aligns with the finding that neutral users can become more liberal after receiving election-related information on TikTok (Church, 2022).

Regarding content adaptation, a study found that Spain's Podemos party effectively leveraged TikTok's features and effects; however, their content largely remained formal and resembled traditional political communication, falling under the category of *"politainment"* (Cervi et al., 2021). Then, Cervi et al. (2023) analysed TikTok campaigns during the 2021 Peruvian presidential election and concluded that most candidates utilised TikTok primarily to build personal image and entertainment-focused content rather than

to explain policy details, again reinforcing the *"politainment"* phenomenon (Cervi et al., 2023).

These studies highlight TikTok as a key platform for political communication, where content that mixes entertainment and emotion most effectively drives engagement and participation.

4. Research Material and Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Data Analysis

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive perspective. Quantitative Data: Engagement data related to UGC content about the MFP on TikTok were collected, including the number of likes, comments, and views. Qualitative Data: Highly engaged UGC content was selected for in-depth analysis, focusing on thematic structures and creative strategies.

A purposive sampling method was employed to select TikTok videos and user-generated content specifically related to the MFP, with high engagement rates within 45 days before and 30 days after the 2023 general election. The sample comprised 171 associated high-engagement posts. Content from the selected 171 TikTok posts was analysed using two complementary approaches:

- **Quantitative Analysis**: Descriptive statistics were applied to summarise engagement levels, and correlation analysis was conducted to explore relationships between UGC content types and audience engagement.
- **Qualitative Analysis**: Thematic analysis was employed following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to systematically identify core thematic structures within the UGC content, particularly to emotional appeals and creative strategies that enhanced audience engagement. The analysis began with an initial familiarisation phase, during which all 171 TikTok posts were reviewed multiple times. Subsequently, 804 initial codes were generated through open coding, focusing on semantic and latent meanings related to political communication strategies. Manual coding was conducted without qualitative analysis software to ensure close engagement with the data. The initial codes were refined, grouped, and categorised into eight overarching primary themes through iterative analysis and team discussions.

4.2 Data Validation

Data validation was executed using triangulation, specifically internal triangulation, in the analysis process, following the framework of Carter et al. (2014) and Patton (1999). This method involves comparing data from different perspectives during the reading and

interpretation process to avoid researcher bias and increase the credibility of the research results.

Quantitative data, including engagement rates from TikTok content, was measured using Hootsuite Analytics, a tool provided by Hootsuite Inc., a social media management and networking company. The process involved counting the sum of Like, Comment, Save, and Share divided by Views multiplied by hundred (or to create a percentage). This supported cross-validation of the thematic findings from the qualitative analysis.

A total of 804 initial codes were generated from 171 TikTok posts, which were subsequently organised into eight main themes. Some posts can be identified in more than two themes, which makes some posts have both primary and secondary themes. To increase the reliability of the coding process, two independent reviewers assessed the initial codes against the finalised primary themes. This comparison resulted in an intercoder agreement exceeding 87.68%, ensuring consistency and robustness of thematic interpretations.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key research findings sourced from a qualitative data analysis using Thematic Analysis (TA), based on the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The first two phases of this study involved closely examining a dataset of 171 TikTok videos related to Thailand's 2023 general election and generating 804 initial codes.

Examples of these initial codes: *rally atmosphere*, *leader humility*, *expectation vs. reality*, *local political enthusiasm*, *symbolic future projection*, *humorous political expression*, *elder participation*, *gamified endorsement*, *creative voter voice*, and *generational engagement*. These initial codes were analysed and clustered during phases (3) to (5) to identify meaning patterns and develop a set of primary themes. The final eight themes reflect how political content was creatively communicated through User-Generated Content (UGC) on TikTok. These themes are detailed in the following section.

Theme 1: Everyday Accessibility of Leaders; This theme highlights the portrayal of political leaders in everyday, informal contexts such as queuing at airports or shopping at local markets. The aim is to project an image of accessibility and relatability, aligned with the personalisation of politics (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Of 171 posts, 28 (16.4%) fall into this theme, with an average engagement rate (ER) of 4.82%. This strategy fosters street-level trust between leaders and voters.

Theme 2: Fan Affection & Emotion; This theme reflects emotionally driven content, emphasising admiration, loyalty, and personal connection to political leaders.

TikTok users often express affection through heartfelt language and storytelling, promoting emotional identity over policy reasoning (Theocharis, 2015). A total of 35 posts (20.5%) fit this theme, achieving a high average ER of 6.55%, underscoring the role of emotions in political engagement.

Theme 3: Grassroots & Street Campaign; This theme captures ground-level campaigning activities where leaders and candidates interact directly with citizens through walkabouts, small gatherings, and market visits. Such grassroots engagement signals authenticity and community connection (Scarrow, 2015). It is the most frequent theme with 59 posts (34.5%) and an average ER of 5.30%, demonstrating audience interest in localised political efforts.

Theme 4: Parody & Politainment; Focusing on humour, parody, and entertainment-infused political content, this theme uses dubbing, skits, and remixes to make politics more accessible and enjoyable (Highfield, 2016). With 18 posts (10.5%) and the highest average ER of 7.12%, politainment is the most effective format for capturing attention and facilitating the viral spread of political messages on TikTok.

Theme 5: Policy & Power Critique; This theme consists of critical content questioning political authority, governance failures, and systemic injustices. TikTok users employ direct critiques, sarcasm, and dark humour to highlight political flaws, aligning with everyday civic participation practices (Highfield, 2016). Fourteen posts (8.2%) represent this theme, with an average ER of 5.01%, showing moderate but meaningful engagement.

Theme 6: Gratitude & Mobilisation; TikTok serves as a tool for political mobilisation in this theme, combining expressions of gratitude with calls to action like voter encouragement and campaign support promotion (Boulianne, 2015). Although only eight posts (4.7%) are classified here, they achieve a high average ER of 6.78%, illustrating the effectiveness of gratitude and mobilisation in activating civic participation.

Theme 7: Religious or Cultural Context; This theme involves integrating political messages with religious and cultural references, such as the use of sacred space or moral metaphors, which makes political issues more accessible by relating them to morality and karma (Campbell & Putnam, 2011). These videos accounted for only five posts (2.9%) and an average ER of 5.47%, demonstrating that cultural and religious frames remain influential even in a rapidly changing digital platform.

Theme 8: Context-Specific Specials; Covering content tied to specific events, emergencies, or localised issues, this theme showcases the adaptability of TikTok users in addressing current socio-political developments creatively. Despite being the smallest group with four posts (2.3%) and a lower average ER of 4.25%, these posts are vital in expanding the political discourse to include timely, community-based issues.

The data collected from this study were analysed in line with the three main research objectives. 171 TikTok posts related to the 2023 Thai general election were gathered for analysis. After categorising and conducting an in-depth analysis, several significant findings emerged.

5.1 Types of UGC Content on TikTok Related to the 2023 Election

The content format analysis found that most videos were single-shot, followed by multi-shot edited videos, videos using templates or special effects, and slideshow posts with still images, respectively. This preference for short, straightforward clips is consistent with TikTok's focus on fast-paced and engaging storytelling (Mueller & Rajaram, 2022). On average, videos are around 34 seconds long, indicating that creators want to be *"think shot, tell fast"* to fit the platform's nature (Schellewald, 2021). Considering the production method, most videos were recorded live on location, which helped convey a sense of timeliness and authenticity about political events. While in other formats, it also shows users' efforts to adapt previous content to TikTok's participatory culture (Gitomer et al., 2024).

Table 1: Categorisation and Frequency of Content Format Representation.

Post Format	N	(%)	Type of recoding	N	(%)
Single-shot video	118	69.0	New recording (on-site shooting)	133	77.8
Edited montage	33	19.3	Selfie / POV (camera facing oneself)	17	9.9
Template / effect-based	15	8.8	Republish / Remix (reuse of old clips)	10	5.8
Picture slideshow	5	2.9	Slideshow-still (collection of still images)	5	2.9
			POV walk-through	4	2.3
			Interview / Singing, etc. (Others)	2	1.2
			Total	171	100

Regarding the main subjects shown (appearing in more than half of the video duration), leading figures from the Move Forward Party—such as Pita Limjaroenrat and Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit—featured most frequently (74 clips, 43.3%), followed by constituency candidates (36 clips, 21.1%), and ordinary citizens and supporters (40 clips, 23.4%). A smaller number of clips included influencers or celebrities (8 clips, 4.7%), families and children (6 clips, 3.5%), and cultural or religious figures (4 clips, 2.3%), reflecting the diversity of representation among creators (Shutsko, 2020).

Table 2: Types of Main Actors in High-Engagement TikTok Clips

Main Actors	Description	N	(%)
Party leader (e.g., Pita, Thanathorn, etc.)	Party's public figurehead	74	43.3
Constituency candidate / MP	Local election candidates, including former MPs	36	21.1

Supporter – ordinary citizen	General public (non-celebrities)	40	23.4
Influencer / celebrity ally	Internet personalities, actors, TikTokers, etc.	8	4.7
Family / children	Family members or children of party leaders featured in the clips	6	3.5
Religious / cultural figure	Monks, folk artists, traditional cultural performers	4	2.3
Multi-actor montage	Montage featuring multiple people without a clear main figure	3	1.7
	Total	**171**	**100**

In short, the analysis of UGC content revealed three key observations.

1) The short video format commonly used on platforms like TikTok allowed political content to reach audiences rapidly and efficiently. However, this compactness may hinder more complex or nuanced political deliberation (Van Aelst et al., 2017).

2) Using real or lightly edited footage of events increases the content's and the creator's credibility. However, the impact of such footage may depend on factors such as camera angle, timing, framing, and release (Juel, 2019).

(3) There is a clear shift away from traditional "top-down" political message communication towards more citizen-led storytelling. This trend demonstrates that new media have a more individualistic, decentralised, and participatory effect on political communication (Kruikemeier et al., 2013).

5.2 Influence of UGC on Political Party Decision-Making

For the second research objective, this study reveals that UGC content on TikTok influences political decision-making in multiple dimensions, with some selective aspects below.

1) Creating emotional resonance and increasing leader recall have become important functions. A post categorised as *an Everyday Accessibility theme* and *Fan Affection & Emotion* theme presents political leaders in accessible everyday situations or fan-centred stories. For example, clips showing Pita Limjaroenrat queuing at an airport as an ordinary person or Piyabutr Saengkanokkul responding to supporters in a friendly manner help viewers perceive the leader as approachable and sincere. This sense of familiarity is likely to strengthen emotional attachment, making the leader more memorable during voting decisions (Kruikemeier et al., 2013).

2) Building credibility through citizen engagement is observed to be an effective strategy, as Themes such as *grassroots and street campaigns, gratitude and mobilisation* have been displayed. Videos documenting real-life campaign events, public meetings, and gratitude demonstrations create the impression and increase engagement that political leaders are genuinely committed to the people. This helps to reinforce perceptions of transparency and sincerity. Such portrayals can encourage audiences to believe that

supporting a political party will help them participate more meaningfully in politics (Scarrow, 2015).

3) The use of the TikTok platform prominently promotes sociopolitical mobilisation. Posts considered the *Gratitude & Mobilisation* theme and the *Parody & Politainment* theme directly incite political action. For example, clips showing a band playing songs that repurpose other songs into "*Ork-Pai-Ka-Kao-Klai*" (*in Thai ออกไปกาก้าว ไกล),* which means "go vote for the Move Forward Party", or clips reminding people to respect voting rules (with stated "Please do not take pictures of your ballot paper, it is stupid") reinforce social norms around elections.

In short, these types of content on TikTok can significantly increase audience awareness about the importance of political participation (Serrano et al.,2020). Representing a wide range of political voices and perspectives highlights the diversity of options available in the democratic process. The findings suggest that UGC on TikTok contributed positively to political decision-making by presenting political issues in more relatable ways. This form of content helped transform politics from an abstract or distant concept into something more accessible, personal, and participatory (Sinpeng, 2024; Gitomer et al., 2024; Cervi et al., 2023).

5.3 Persuasive Components and Strategies for Electoral Engagement

The third research objective found that UGC creators on TikTok used a variety of persuasive strategies to engage viewers and encourage election participation. An analysis of

171 TikTok posts revealed that some clips used more than one communication strategy, resulting in 231 instances of strategy samples. The table below shows the number and percentage of clips using each type of political communication strategy on TikTok.

Table 3: Amounts of the Persuasive Strategy adapted into each post.

Persuasive Strategy	Posts
E1 Emotional Appeal	74
E2 Identity & Affiliation	48
E3 Humour/Parody	29
E4 Rational/Policy Cue	19
E5 Witness & Authenticity	53
E6 Direct Call-to-Action	8

The content generally leaned towards a more personal and emotionally resonant style, rather than a purely rational or policy-oriented approach (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023; Zamora-Medina, 2023; Cervi et al., 2023). Many TikTok creators use storytelling that

emphasises everyday life, humour, and emotional appeal, rather than focusing primarily on political messages, especially those critical ones. These strategies make otherwise complex and daunting political topics more accessible and allow content creators to connect with their audiences personally (Santos, 2012). Emotion and creative expression are more important than purely factual content, which helps to capture attention and encourage engagement (Brady et al., 2020).

This study confirms that political communication on TikTok increasingly eliminates *top-down* communication led by politicians. Instead, it is being replaced by citizen-led word-of-mouth communication that offers a more participatory and connected format. These *bottom-up* approaches help to de-complexify political communication and allow users across platforms to see themselves reflected in their content; this trend is consistent with previous research that has focused on democratising political discussions via social media (Adinda & Ari, 2024; Gitomer et al., 2024; Cervi et al., 2023; Karimi & Fox, 2023; Hernandez, 2022).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations
6.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that *User-Generated Content (UGC) on TikTok was a transformative force in Thailand's 2023 general election*, driven by content that was highly personalised, emotional, and culturally resonant. Through a multitude of videos, the Move Forward Party's leaders were portrayed in everyday situations, such as buying noodles without a waiting TV news camera or shopping at a local supermarket, with an emphasis on images where the more familiar the atmosphere, the more people could relate to the politicians' lives. This framing of *"Everyday Accessibility"* is consistent with theories on political personalisation and reflects how UGC can humanise politicians. Furthermore, many videos featured supporters expressing admiration, loyalty, and love for their favourite politicians. This underscores Theocharis's (2015) finding that fan-based identity and emotional attachment drive online political engagement and resonates with recent observations that TikTok's short-video environment encourages highly emotional content (McLaughlin et al., 2024; Moffett & Rice, 2023).

The analysis also highlighted how TikTok became a venue for *grassroots campaigning and digital mobilisation.* Ground-level activities, such as small street rallies and community meetups, were richly represented. These scenes of leaders interacting directly with ordinary citizens signal authenticity and trust, validating arguments that face-to-face mobilisation can translate effectively online (Scarrow, 2015). This content was plentiful (over one-third of clips) and achieved strong engagement, reflecting voters' interest in genuine local campaign efforts.

Perhaps most strikingly, *satirical and entertainment-infused 'politainment' content drew the highest engagement* of all themes. Videos featuring comedy, parody, or remixing speeches confirmed that humour is a powerful tool for political engagement (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023; Cervi et al., 2023). By using viral memes, sticker effects, and popular songs, content creators presented complex issues in an accessible way, underscoring the great potential of this communication form.

A unique finding in the Thai context was the effective use of *religious and cultural themes.* Videos referencing Buddhist concepts like karma, merit, or even ghosts to discuss election issues tapped into familiar values and community identities, extending Campbell and Putnam's (2011) framework by demonstrating that spiritual metaphors remain powerful in political communication.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following strategic recommendations are proposed:

6.2.1 For Political Parties

- *Embrace 'Politainment' Strategically:* Given that entertainment-led content achieved the highest engagement (ER 7.12%), parties should actively encourage the creation of content that simplifies complex policies into short, humorous, and trend-aware clips to reach younger, often apolitical, demographics.

- *Cultivate Everyday Accessibility:* To build trust, parties should strategically create opportunities for politicians to be seen in authentic, everyday situations. Supporting the organic capture and sharing of these moments by the public can generate powerful *'Authenticity Narratives'* that are more credible than curated party communications.

- *Amplify Digital Grassroots Campaigns:* Parties should equip local teams and volunteers to use smartphones to transform every ground-level event into a potential online trend, capitalising on the public's high interest (34.5% of content) in tangible, local campaign activities.

6.2.2 For Content Creators and the Public

Leverage Algorithmic Power: Citizens should harness TikTok's algorithm, which prioritises content quality over creator fame, to amplify their voices. This provides a unique opportunity to raise local issues, hold politicians accountable, and drive political discourse from the ground up.

6.2.3 Implications for the ASEAN Context

A Potential Blueprint for Regional Parties: The strategies observed in Thailand offer a valuable blueprint for parties in other ASEAN nations with similar digital cultures, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, or Malaysia. For opposition or alternative parties with limited access to mainstream media, using politainment and cultivating an

accessible leadership image could be a key tool for driving political change, provided strategies are adapted to local cultural and political constraints.

7. Limitations & Suggestions

While the study provides insights across topics, there are several limitations. First, the study only focused on TikTok, meaning the results may not be generalisable to other traditional media or online platforms with different content formats or user behaviour. Second, the study only selected high-engagement posts in the sample, which might reflect algorithmic and selective biases. Some content may overlook less visible content, which, as MFP-related clips influenced this study, may slightly contradict the overall goal. Finally, the target data collection period only covers the 75 days before and after the election, i.e., the period after the previous government dissolved parliament until the government was formed, which ultimately led the Move Forward Party to be unable to form a government. As a result, this study did not explore long-term trends and political discourse beyond the election, especially with Thai politics, which is highly unstable and has a very high context.

Future research could extend these findings in several ways. Focusing on content during critical events, such as government transitions or after party dissolutions, to examine shifts in narratives and engagement, discourse analysis, and audience studies could explore how audiences interpret user-generated content (UGC) or explore professionally-celebrity-influencers' content work. Comparative research across political parties or platforms could be used to test the broader relevance of the themes people found in this study. Focusing on content could also examine the influence of algorithms, such as how TikTok's recommendation system influences political visibility or fosters echo chambers. In summary, this study shows that UGC makes citizens feel political promptly. These findings help us better understand modern political communication and highlight the need to continue studying new media formats.

References

Adinda, A. M. P., & Ari, A. A. H. J. A. (2024). TikTok and Generation Z political communication in the issue of presidential and vice presidential elections 2024. *COSTEC (Communication, Social and Technology), 1*(2).

Anyanwu, C., Imiti, A. L., & Anyanwu, C. J. (2024). Traditional news media as agents of authenticity: Nigerian audiences weathering the onslaught of new media streaming. *Journalism and Media, 5*(2), 456–466. https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia5020030

Brader, T. (2005). Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions. *American Journal of Political Science, 49*(2), 388–405.

Brady, W. J., Gantman, A. P., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2020). Attentional capture helps explain why moral and emotional content go viral. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 149*(4), 746.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(5), 524–538.

Bruns, A. (2016). User-generated content. In *The international encyclopedia of communication theory and philosophy* (Vol. 10). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect222

Campbell, D. E., & Putnam, R. D. (2011). *American grace: How religion divides and unites us*. Simon & Schuster.

Çakıcı, Z. (2025). TikTok as a political communication medium: An examination of the United Nations. *İletişim Kuram ve Araştırma Dergisi*, (69), 136–156.

Cervi, L., Tejedor, S., & Blesa, F. G. (2023). TikTok and political communication: The latest frontier of politainment? A case study. *Media and Communication, 11*(2), 203–217.

Cervi, L., Tejedor, S., & Marín Lladó, C. (2021). TikTok and the new language of political communication: The case of Podemos. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación, 26,* 267–287. http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/clr.5817

Cervi, L., Marín-Lladó, C., & Sánchez-Castillo, S. (2021). TikTok and Political Communication: The Latest Frontier of Politainment? A Case Study of the 2020 Regional Elections in Madrid (Spain). In *Profesional de la información, 30*(6).

Church, L. (2022). *TikTok's impact on political identity among young adults* (Bachelor of Arts' thesis, University of Oregon).

Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17*(3), 319–336.

Gitomer, A., Atienza-Barthelemy, J., & Foucault Welles, B. (2024). Youth activism and (de) personalized remix on TikTok. *Social Movement Studies*, 1-19.

Guinaudeau, B., Munger, K., & Votta, F. (2022). Fifteen seconds of fame: TikTok and the supply side of social video. *Computational Communication Research, 4*(2), 463–485.

Haslem, B. (2022). *TikTok as a digital activism space: Social justice under algorithmic control* (Master's thesis, Old Dominion University). ODU Digital Commons. https://doi.org/10.25777/d5v6-ab64

He, J. (2020, December 15). We shouldn't ignore the political potential of TikTok. *The Gateway*. https://thegatewayonline.ca/2020/12/political-potenital-of-tiktok/

Hernandez, A. (2022). *TikTok's strategic influence on political communication and campaigns*. https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/1v53k3627

Highfield, T. (2016). *Social media and everyday politics*. Polity Press.

Hindarto, I. H. (2022). TikTok and political communication of youth: A systematic review. *Jurnal Review Politik, 12*(2), 146–176. https://doi.org/10.15642/jrp.2022.12.2.146-176

Idid, S. A. (2018, April 5). The Malaysian 14th General Election: Media use and trust among party supporters. Paper presented at the Forum on "Media and Communications Ahead of the 14th General Election," Novotel Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

Juel, H. (2019). The Power of the Camera Presenting Politicians: a study in the rhetoric of camera techniques. *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*, 14(1).

Karimi, M., & Fox, J. (2023). Scrolling, Simping, and Mobilizing: TikTok's influence over Generation Z's political behavior. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*. https://thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/1251

Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications.* The Free Press.

Kruikemeier, S., Van Noort, G., Vliegenthart, R., & De Vreese, C. H. (2013). Getting closer: The effects of personalized and interactive online political communication. *European journal of communication, 28*(1), 53-66.

Le Compte, D., & Klug, D. (2021, October). "It's Viral!"—A study of the behaviors, practices, and motivations of TikTok users and social activism. In *Companion publication of the 2021 conference on computer supported cooperative work and social computing* (pp. 108–111).

Lin, T. T. (2015). Online political participation and attitudes: Analysing election user-generated videos in Singapore. *Communication Research and Practice*, *1*(2), 131–146.

Literat, I., & Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2021). How popular culture prompts youth collective political expression and cross-cutting political talk on social media: A cross-platform analysis. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(2), 20563051211008821.

Literat, I., & Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2023). TikTok as a key platform for youth political expression: Reflecting on the opportunities and stakes involved. *Social Media + Society*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157595

Majó-Vázquez, S., Nielsen, R. K., & González-Bailón, S. (2019). The backbone structure of audience networks: A new approach to comparing online news consumption across countries. *Political Communication*, *36*(2).

McLaughlin, B., Cloudy, J., Hunter, J., & Potter, B. (2024). Stitch incoming: Political engagement and aggression on TikTok. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, *43*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2024.2354436

Medina Serrano, J. C., Papakyriakopoulos, O., & Hegelich, S. (2020). Dancing to the partisan beat: A first analysis of political communication on TikTok. In *WebSci 2020 – Proceedings of the 12th ACM Conference on Web Science* (pp. 157–166). https://doi.org/10.1145/3394231.3397916

Min, B., Bai, Y., Wang, R. Y., Grzeslo, J., & Jayakar, K. (2020). Voting in local and national elections: The role of local and national news consumption and news media preference. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, *30*(2), 159–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2020.1856108

Moffett, K. W., & Rice, L. L. (2023). TikTok and civic activity among young adults. *Social Science Computer Review*, *42*(2), 535–553. https://doi.org/10.1177/08944393231188470

Mueller, M. E., & Rajaram, D. (2022). *Social media storytelling*. Routledge.

Napatsawan Rugsajai. (2022). *Political communication through TikTok for anti-government movements on online platforms during 2020–2021* [Master's thesis in Political Science, Chulalongkorn University]. https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/chulaetd/6165

Okechukwu, C. (2023). Media influence on public opinion and political decision-making. *International Journal of Political Science Studies*, *1*(1), 13–24.

Östman, J. (2012). Information, expression, participation: How involvement in user-generated content relates to democratic engagement among young people. *New Media & Society*, *14*(6), 1004–1021.

Patel, K., Binjola, H., & Siddiqui, T. (2020). Indian social media politics: New era of election war. *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism*, *25*(1), 184–192. https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2020-25-1-184-192

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, *34*(5), 1189–1208.

Santos, D. (2012). The politics of storytelling: unfolding the multiple layers of politics in (P) AR publications. *Educational Action Research*, *20*(1), 113-128.

Scarrow, S. E. (2015). *Beyond party members: Changing approaches to partisan mobilization*. Oxford University Press.

Schellewald, A. (2021). Communicative forms on TikTok: Perspectives from digital ethnography. *International journal of communication*, *15*, 21.

Seibt, B., et al. (2019). Emotional Campaigning in Politics: Being Moved and Anger in Political Ads Motivate to Support Candidate and Party. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 2891.

Shutsko, A. (2020). User-generated short video content in social media. A case study of TikTok. In *Social Computing and Social Media. Participation, User Experience, Consumer Experience, and Applications of Social Computing: 12th International Conference, SCSM 2020, Held as Part of the 22nd HCI International Conference, HCII 2020, Copenhagen, Denmark, July 19–24, 2020, Proceedings, Part II 22* (pp. 108-125). Springer International Publishing.

Sinpeng, A. (2024). Social media and the DIY politics in Thailand's 2023 election. *Pacific Affairs*, *97*(1), 99–116. https://doi.org/10.5509/2024971-art5

Tefertiller, A., Maxwell, L. C., & Morris, D. L. (2019). Social media goes to the movies: Fear of missing out, social capital, and social motivations of cinema attendance. *Mass Communication and Society*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1653468

Thai Media Fund. (2023, September 25). *Online interest trends in the first half of 2023: Politics and elections take the lead, followed by entertainment topics*. Safe and Creative Media Development Fund website. https://shorturl.asia/ulUKt *(published in Thai)*

Thammasat University. (2023, June 7). *Politics after the 2023 election: Transformation and the power of social media*. Thammasat University website. https://tu.ac.th/thammasat-070666-politics-after-the-election *(published in Thai)*

Theocharis, Y. (2015). The conceptualization of digitally networked participation. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2).

Theocharis, Y., & Van Deth, J. W. (2018). The continuous expansion of citizen participation: A new taxonomy. *European Political Science Review*, *10*(1), 139–163.

Umansky, N., & Pipal, C. (2023). Dances, duets, and debates: Analysing political communication and viewer engagement on TikTok. *OSF Preprints*.

Valenzuela, S. (2013). Unpacking the use of social media for protest behavior: The roles of information, opinion expression, and activism. *American behavioral scientist*, *57*(7), 920-942.

Van Aelst, P., Sheafer, T., & Stanyer, J. (2017). The personalization of mediated political communication: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, *18*(1), 48–65.

Vujnovic, M., Singer, J., Paulussen, S., Heinonen, A., Reich, Z., Quandt, T., Hermida, A. & Domingo, D. (2010). Exploring the Political-Economic Factors of Participatory Journalism: Views of Online Journalists in 10 Countries. *Journalism Practice, 4*(3), pp. 285- 296. doi: 10.1080/17512781003640588

Yadav, J., Yadav, A., Misra, M., Rana, N. P., & Zhou, J. (2023). Role of social media in technology adoption for sustainable agriculture practices: Evidence from twitter analytics. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, *52*(1), 833-851.

Zamora-Medina, R. (2023). Politainment as dance: Visual storytelling on TikTok among Spanish political parties. In *Research handbook on visual politics* (pp. 228–243). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Zamora-Medina, R., Suminas, A., & Fahmy, S. S. (2023). Securing the youth vote: A comparative analysis of digital persuasion on TikTok among political actors. *Media and Communication*, *11*(2), 218–231.