Collective Representations of the Thai Dating Community: Space and Power on Social Media

ภาพตัวแทนของชุมชนการหาคู่ในประเทศไทย: พื้นที่และอำนาจบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์

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Abstract

Online social networks serve as virtual platforms for people to connect over shared goals and interests, including the search for a partner. This study explored the self-presentation patterns of individuals actively seeking partners via social networks, particularly using representative images, and examined the implications of these patterns for understanding modern social and cultural dynamics. Using qualitative methods, the research analyzed content from partner-seeking groups on Facebook in Thailand, with data collected over four months, from August to December 2023. The analysis primarily utilized the concepts of representation and social phenomena as reflected through social media to interpret the data. Six distinct self-presentation patterns were identified, namely idealized personal scenarios, images evoking sympathy through perceived limitations, the portrayal of ordinary people seeking true love, provocative attire and poses, gender diversity, and cross-cultural representations. The reflection of social phenomena through dating group communication on Facebook revealed ten patterns: hope in 'true love online' is real, disbelief in the existence of 'true love online', love based on benefits and deception, equality in the virtual world, negotiation space, mutual vigilance and surveillance, spaces to alleviate loneliness, platforms for exchange, encouragement, and advice, sexual harassment, and media literacy phenomenon.

Keywords: Dating Community, Facebook, Representation, Social Media, Thailand

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บทคัดย่อ

เครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ทำหน้าที่เป็นแพลตฟอร์มเสมือนจริงสำหรับผู้คนในการเชื่อมต่อผ่านเป้าหมายที่มีร่วมกันรวมถึงเป้าหมายในการหาคู่ การศึกษานี้สำรวจรูปแบบการนำเสนอตนเองของบุคคลที่กำลังมองหาคู่รักผ่านเครือข่ายโซเชียลผ่านภาพตัวแทน เพื่อทำความเข้าใจพลวัตทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมสมัยใหม่ การวิจัยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาจากกลุ่มคนหาคู่บน Facebook ในประเทศไทย โดยเก็บข้อมูลระหว่างเดือนสิงหาคม - ธันวาคม 2566 ใช้แนวคิดภาพตัวแทนและแนวคิดสื่อสังคมออนไลน์เป็นแนวคิดหลักในการวิเคราะห์ ในที่นี้ มีการระบุรูปแบบการนำเสนอตนเอง 6 รูปแบบ ได้แก่ บุคคลในอุดมคติ ภาพที่กระตุ้นความเห็นอกเห็นใจผ่านข้อจำกัดที่รับรู้ ตัวแทนของคนธรรมดาที่ต้องการรักแท้ การแต่งกายและท่าทางที่ยั่วยุ ความหลากหลายทางเพศ และการเป็นตัวแทนข้ามวัฒนธรรม ภาพสะท้อนปรากฏการณ์ทางสังคมผ่านกลุ่มคนหาคู่บนเฟซบุ๊ค พบปรากฏการณ์ 10 รูปแบบ ประกอบด้วย การแสดงออกถึงความหวัง "รักแท้บนโลกออนไลน์" มีอยู่จริง กลุ่มที่ไม่เชื่อว่า "รักแท้บนโลกออนไลน์" มีอยู่จริง ความรักบนผลประโยชน์และการหลอกลวง ความเสมอภาคในโลกเสมือนจริง การสร้างอำนาจและพื้นที่แห่งการต่อรอง พื้นที่แห่งการเฝ้าระวังซึ่งกันและกัน พื้นที่แก้เหงา พื้นที่แลกเปลี่ยน/สร้างกำลังใจ/ตักเตือนแนะนำ ปรากฏการณ์การคุกคามทางเพศและปรากฏการณ์การรู้เท่าทันสื่อ

คำสำคัญ: กลุ่มคนหาคู่ เฟซบุ๊ก ภาพตัวแทน สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ประเทศไทย

Introduction

In today's world, communication technology has become a global connector, which allows people from every corner of the world to communicate, exchange information, access knowledge, and share diverse experiences. The internet has given rise to online social services or social networking platforms that focus on creating online communities of individuals with shared interests. This medium has introduced new patterns of communication and information sharing, such as emails, blogs, websites, and social media. Social media, categorized as Social Networking Services (SNS), encompasses various platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram, Ning, and Wikipedia. These platforms emphasize the creation of online communities, connecting groups of people with shared interests and fostering new ways of communication and information sharing (Afolaranmi, 2020).

Facebook is the most popular platform globally, with approximately 2.98 billion monthly users in the first quarter of 2023, making it the largest online social network worldwide (Statista, 2023). Thailand ranks among the top eight countries with the highest number of Facebook users globally, with 91.5% of the country's 63.2 million internet users actively engaging on the platform (Nukulsomprattana, 2024). In the second quarter of 2023, Facebook experienced significant growth in Thailand, adding an estimated 96 million new users compared to the previous year (Thai PBS Digital Media, 2024). Thai users access Facebook an average of 376 times per month, second only to LINE, with most interactions occurring via smartphones. According to statistics from the first quarter of 2024, the gender ratio of Facebook users in Thailand continues to favor female users, with 50.8% identifying as female and 49.2%

identifying as male. These figures are based on the gender settings users have chosen on Facebook, which may not always correspond to their actual gender (Simon, 2024).

Facebook, a platform used by billions of people to connect and share information, has become a widespread tool. Facebook's widespread popularity on social media channels worldwide can be attributed to its comprehensive functionalities. It offers various features, including profile pages, groups, instant messaging, photo posting, live streaming, and more. Facebook facilitates personal connections through friend searches and fosters community building through the creation of groups and pages, which users can join based on their interests.

Facebook also serves as a source of entertainment and offers multiple avenues for communication. Users can engage in instant messaging through text or video, as well as communicate via friends' timeline. On Facebook, the profile space resembles a public bulletin board where users can post messages and share photos, music, or videos. Additionally, Facebook provides various ways for users to communicate, fostering both public and private connections (Giannikas, 2020; Toland, 2013).

Previous studies on Facebook have been categorized into five main areas: users' behaviors, motivations for using Facebook, self-presentation, Facebook's role in social interactions, and privacy and data disclosure (Wilson et al., 2012). Prior to COVID-19, the emergence of Facebook brought benefits to various aspects of society, including education, with new teaching formats integrating Facebook for online communication and networking. This highlights the central role of reciprocal attention exchange in the platform (Allen, 2012). However, one must acknowledge the drawbacks of Facebook. For example, Mosquera et al. (2020) found that excessive Facebook use has led to rising issues in both physical and mental health as well as an increase in cybercrimes, such as property fraud. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing the potential risks associated with the overuse of Facebook, particularly its detrimental effects on health and the rise of cybercrime, which can outweigh the social and educational benefits if not properly managed.

The diversity of groups on Facebook can be likened to a representation of cultural diversity, created by individuals with similar needs and interests coming together. In this virtual community space, individuals can freely create their identities. Facebook dating groups for example provide an inspiring virtual community where individuals from all walks of life can present themselves in pursuit of their dating goals (Yampochai & Masae, 2018). Nonetheless, online social networks have greatly contributed to the rise in cybercrimes, particularly those involving emotional and financial deception (Phumbandit & Yuadyong, 2022). Dating groups are notably susceptible to fraud, as identities on Facebook can be easily fabricated and concealed. Studies have shown that online social media reflects social phenomena as one of the influential factors affecting people's choices today. Accessing social media for dating purposes can take various forms, such as dating apps like Tinder, Grindr, Omi, or Facebook Dating.

Our study focuses on Facebook dating groups. Unlike dating apps, where matches are automatically made by algorithms based on initial criteria, Facebook dating groups allow users to select partners based on their own criteria, which they can modify at any time. This allows Facebook to offer more freedom, flexibility, and ease of use compared to dating apps.

This research aims to understand how users of Facebook dating groups present themselves through representative images to achieve their objectives. Our study seeks to explore how individuals on these platforms successfully portray their identities and how this presentation reflects current social phenomena. By building negotiation power, users can choose preferred individuals and cultivate future relationships under terms negotiated or constraints expressed through dialogue. This interaction reflects the creation of space and power on Facebook that allows users to manage and control their own territory. Our goal is to gain insights into the user behaviors observed in Facebook dating groups, leading to the design of relevant policies aimed at preventing social issues or criminal activities. This approach not only promotes learning through behavioral monitoring but also creates awareness of staying informed about the current format of online social societies, which helps users to keep up with the changing dynamics of contemporary society.

Objectives

1. To explore self-presentation patterns of individuals seeking partners through profile pictures in Facebook dating groups.

2. To analyze social phenomena that contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary social and cultural contexts.

Research Questions

1. How do individuals in Facebook dating groups present themselves through online social networks to achieve their dating objectives?

2. What societal trends are reflected in the way individuals present themselves through online social networks in Facebook dating groups?

Literature Review

1. The concept of representation

Representation is rooted in the social construction of reality, which posits that "representative images" are constructed by individuals and society to serve their needs (Hall, 1997). These images operate similarly to language, as they are the meaningful output of the human cognitive system through language operations. Language enables people to reference both the natural and imaginative worlds, which allows them to construct self-representation with characteristics that resemble reality. Veloo and Mustafa (2023) found that millennial women continue to construct representative images based on prevailing beauty standards, often perpetuated by advertising. Such standards emphasize fair skin, an "ideal" slim, and curvy physique. While diverse beauty standards are acknowledged, societal expectations still pressure individuals to conform to the ideal.

Nakaray's (2016) work further highlights the influence of media on the construction of stereotypical images. However, sociocultural factors lead to varying interpretations of media, which in turn shape how individuals understand these representative images. Similarly, research by Chaichana et al. (2016) on the role of ordinary women in contemporary Thai folk songs supports the idea that sociocultural factors have played a role in shaping the idealized image of women as seen in the past. However, changing social factors,

such as social status, education, economy, technological advancements, and media, have altered the roles and personalities of women in country songs. Women now have greater social bargaining power. This change has established new representative images that empower women to negotiate gender roles in social spaces.

Representative images selectively highlight certain reality features, modifying and embellishing them to convey thoughts and imagination, thereby influencing how others perceive individual or group identities. Such images, especially on social media, serve specific purposes for individuals, which allow them to create representations the way they desired. The construction of these representations depends on how they are presented to and interpreted by the sender. On social media, these representations can be entirely true, partially true, or completely false. The creation of such representations online reflects real-world phenomena. This is evident in how representations in Facebook dating groups are interpreted and presented based on the intentions of the group members.

2. The concept of social media

Nowadays, online social media platforms have revolutionized how people communicate and interact, allowing for multidirectional social interaction and creating opportunities for simultaneous conversations among many participants. Social media has also transformed consumers into content producers, enabling them to share messages, videos, pictures, and music (Karakiza, 2015). The different types of social media platforms can be broadly categorized into four main categories of social media platforms, namely blogging, X (formerly Twitter) and microblogging, social networking sites, and media sharing.

Online social media provides many positive impacts, such as social support, learning opportunities, worldview and lifestyle changes, community involvement, and entertainment. However, it can also have negative consequences, such as privacy violations, cyberbullying, online deception, distortion, manipulation, infidelity, and divorce. For instance, social media can compromise an individual's privacy by using their images or information without consent. Moreover, it can lead to an unhealthy obsession with online conversations, resulting in neglect of offline activities. Social media platforms can also deceive and manipulate individuals' emotions. To avoid such unfavorable consequences, it is essential to be aware of these negative aspects and utilize social media responsibly. While media offers a number of advantages, in the current era of technological advancement, it is crucial to be cautious and mindful of its potential negative impacts (Afolaranmi, 2020).

In online communities, the baseline behavior is relatively broad, flexible, and somewhat different from offline social norms. However, these communities still adhere to both online and offline social norms, such as accepted etiquette, politeness, respect in communication, and mutual respect. Generally, people do not deviate much from their offline behavior when they are interacting online. This finding reinforces the idea that interpreting one's online identity often depends on an understanding of the offline context, leading to manifestations of identity according to established norms (Chaiharn et al., 2022).

Research Methodology

This qualitative research employs content analysis as its approach. The steps and procedures for data collection and analysis are as follows:

Data collection

1. Data sources consist of documents related to self-presentation in dating groups. These sources are used to frame conceptual frameworks for analyzing phenomena such as member profile information, types of images used in posts, post content, comments on posts, and the popularity of posts found on dating group pages on Facebook.

2. Data sources from discussion boards on Facebook include five groups:1) Dating Group, 2) Friend-Seeking Group for People Aged 40 and Above (40+ Friend-Seeking group), 3) Dating and Friend-Seeking Group for Those Seeking Companionship and Conversation (Companionship Group), 4) Chatting and Travel Companion-Seeking Group (Chat & Travel group), and 5) Singles Group Seeking Partners (Partner-Seeking Group). The selection criteria for these groups were based on their large membership, which exceeds 100,000 individuals, daily posting activity of at least 50 posts, and diverse membership in terms of ethnicity, age, occupation, and hometown. The researcher participated as a passive member of all five groups to observe discussions, collect data, and analyze it to address the research objectives without actively engaging in conversations or influencing discussions. It was found that all five groups used Thai as the primary language of communication, despite the ethnic diversity within the groups.

3. The data collection period for this study spans from August to December 2023.

Table 1

Details of Population in Facebook Dating Groups

Group's Name	The number of members	The average number of posts per day	Average total for 5 months
Dating group	284,414	321	48,150
40+ Friend-seeking Group	419,868	189	28,350
Companionship Group	218,622	114	17,100
Chat & Travel Group	232,921	88	13,200
Partner-seeking Group	377,754	144	21,600
Total	**1,533,579**	**856**	**128,400**

Table 1 shows details of the population in each dating group on Facebook, based on the number of user accounts. The total number of user accounts counted was 1,533,579. Many users were members of more than one dating group, as evidenced by comments referencing multiple groups.

Data Analysis

1. The data analysis involved collecting information from five Facebook discussion groups. Researchers gathered data through surveys to record content such as member profile

information, types of images used in posts, post content, comments on posts, and the popularity of posts. Three experts reviewed the content validity use in the data collection process from these dating groups on Facebook.

2. Data analysis began with understanding and interpreting the content from profile information, types of images used in posts, post content, comments on posts, and the popularity of posts, categorizing them into groups. The data obtained from the discussion boards of all five groups were categorized by topic, followed by content and image analysis of the posts. This was then summarized and analyzed to identify self-presentation patterns among dating groups on Facebook. The extracted images reflected current social phenomena in virtual spaces. Subsequently, content analysis findings were synthesized with documentary sources to fulfil the research objectives and present descriptive analysis.

Findings

1. Self-representation Patterns

Based on the content analysis of posts, profile pictures, comments, and post popularity on Facebook dating groups, six distinct self-presentation patterns emerged among members. These patterns were identified through daily data categorization and subsequent analysis to achieve the study's objectives. The six self-presentation patterns are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Self-representation patterns of Facebook account users

Group Name	Self-representation Patterns of Facebook account users (During August to December 2023)						Warning posts	Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Dating group	14,511	9,765	22,089	1,509	97	134	45	48,150
40+ Friend-seeking Group	11,088	675	7,625	8,899	19	33	11	28,350
Companionship Group	2,239	1,112	8,466	5,162	22	43	56	17,100
Chat & Travel Group	5,533	742	3,082	3,801	13	15	14	13,200
Partner-seeking Group	5,253	3,326	9,206	3,720	20	44	31	21,600
Total	38,624	15,620	50,468	23,091	171	269	157	128,400
Total (%)	30.08	12.17	39.31	17.98	0.13	0.21	0.12	100

In Table 2, the six self-presentation patterns are as follows: 1) idealized personal scenarios; 2) images evoking sympathy through perceived limitations; 3) the portrayal of ordinary people seeking true love; 4) provocative attire and poses; 5) gender diversity; and 6) cross-cultural representations.

It was found that the dating group had the highest posting frequency and the largest number of posts among all the groups. Among the six self-presentation patterns identified, the three most prevalent were: 1) the portrayal of ordinary people seeking true love (39.31%); 2) idealized personal scenarios (30.08%); 3) provocative attire and poses (17.98%); and 4) images evoking sympathy through perceived limitations (12.17%). These four patterns of posts accounted for 99.54% of all posts.

Users were observed to exhibit overlapping and diverse self-presentation patterns within the same post. Additionally, identical posts were found to be shared across different groups.

Description of the six self-presentation patterns are as follows:

1.1   Idealized personal scenarios

These images are accompanied by descriptions of the desired qualities in potential partners, such as having a stable job (e.g., teachers, police officers, soldiers, and businesspeople), a good-looking appearance, positive personality traits, and ownership of assets like houses, cars, cash, and valuable jewelries. This style of representation often receives positive responses from individuals within the group:

"Is there anyone who would accept a civil servant with a moderate salary?"

(Nit, Dating group, 2023)

1.2   Images evoking sympathy through perceived limitations

People interested in initiating conversations often present limited images, highlighting their limitations. This includes those who are pregnant, visually impaired, have dependents, are unemployed, or have no assets. Common representations include images of women expressing past disappointments in love, seeking care and understanding, and using images of crying or pictures with children to evoke sympathy. These portrayals highlight the conditions or restrictions they seek in a desired partner:

"Currently 7 months pregnant and looking for someone to take care of
me. If you can help, please reach out."

(Bell, Dating group, 2023)

"Seeking a man who is not a womanizer, does not drink alcohol, and
does not smoke."

(Wann, Partner-seeking Group, 2023)

1.3 The portrayal of ordinary people seeking true love

It portrays individuals as ordinary people who may not possess the ideal qualities of a dream partner but has the qualities of being a good father, good husband, good mother, or

good wife in the future. Qualities such as being hardworking and dedicated as a homemaker are emphasized as selling points in the search for true love.

> "Not beautiful, not wealthy, but good at cooking, taking care of the
> house, and being a good wife."

(Choompoo, Companionship group, 2023)

1.4 Provocative attire and poses

This pattern is characterized by using the body to express sexuality. For example, women often post pictures showcasing their figure in lingerie, swimsuits, or provocative clothing to attract attention from men. Meanwhile, men emphasize elegance by displaying their muscles, flaunting six-pack abs, and wearing swimsuits to attract attention from the opposite sex for comments and likes, including captions related to sexuality:

> "Being alone is lonely. Want to come to my room?"

(Ploy, Companionship group, 2023)

1.5 Gender diversity

In this pattern, regardless of gender identity, everyone is free to post and search for a partner without any interference, judgement, or bullying. Simultaneously, those interested in someone's post may greet or initiate a conversation with the post owner, and some may even offer words of encouragement for their success:

> "I am a transgender woman. Who can accept me, please chat with me."

(Green, Dating group, 2023)

1.6 Cross-cultural representations

In this dating group, it is found that identity diversity is prominently displayed among members, ranging from various regions of Thailand to cross-cultural backgrounds. Some posts specify the user's origin, such as Laotian, Chinese, or Western. It was observed that users often use their native language for their profile names but switch to Thai when posting dating content.

These identities are acknowledged and positively received by Thai members in the group. However, it is important to note that the authenticity of each individual's identity cannot be definitively confirmed:

> "I'm from Laos. Nice to meet you."

(Bank, Dating group, 2023)

2. Social phenomena through the dating group on Facebook

This analysis delves into the social phenomena observed within Facebook dating groups. It draws insights from the self-presentation patterns exhibited by members and contextualizes these findings within the current social landscape. The following social phenomena were identified:

2.1 The expression of hope in 'true love online' is real

This social phenomenon involves individuals publicly declaring their success in finding a romantic partner through Facebook dating groups. They share their success by posting messages and couple photos, stating that they have found their ideal match through these groups. These individuals often express a belief that genuine and suitable love can indeed blossom in the virtual world. While the posts and images of those who have found love within these dating groups are relatively few compared to those still searching, the mere existence of such evidence serves as a beacon of hope for other members pursuing the same goal: "Thank you to this group for bringing us together. I love you all forever!"

(Dao, Dating group, 2023)

2.2 The group that does not believe that 'true love online' exists

The challenge of finding authentic love online is quite noticeable. Many individuals in dating groups post messages, quotes, or descriptive texts describing the difficulties and obstacles associated with discovering true love online. Some individuals choose to leave the group due to their dissatisfaction with online dating:

"Finding true love online seems like a fantasy. I've posted so many times, yet I haven't met my soulmate."

(Sale, 40+ Friend-Seeking group, 2023)

2.3 Love based on benefits and deception

While the internet fosters virtual connections, anonymity enables deceptive identities and manipulative behavior in online relationships, often disguised as affection to exploit others. As intimacy develops, requests for financial assistance may arise, such as borrowing money or asking for phone credit top-ups. Unfortunately, deception can take various forms, including online gambling, loans, or investment scams:

"We barely talked, and you're already asking me to invest? I'm broke, so don't try to scam me into transferring money."

(Pong, 40+ Friend-Seeking group, 2023)

2.4 Equality in the virtual world

Within dating groups, another observed phenomenon is digital egalitarianism, which creates a space for diversity. Regardless of who individuals are, they have the right to seek love in their own way. Comments reveal no signs of bullying, judgment, or discrimination. Instead, everyone respects the poster's space by sharing positive messages, encouragement, and support, as long as the post does not hurt others. This mutual respect reflects the modern perspectives and equality experienced in virtual space, where everyone has equal rights to participate without any limitations. The observed equality includes gender, age, occupation, ethnicity, status, and physical abilities:

"At 55, I'm not beautiful or young anymore. Will anyone still want to talk with me?"

(Ta, 40+ Friend-Seeking group, 2023)

2.5 Negotiation space

In dating group space, individuals can assert their power and engage in negotiation. Each member can define their own criteria for an ideal partner based on personal preferences. This creates a negotiation space where individuals have the authority to establish their requirements, such as "seeking someone over 180 cm tall." Furthermore, this space allows for the negotiation of perceived imperfections by emphasizing other qualities based on the general ideals of the opposite gender. For instance, one may compensate for not being handsome or wealthy by emphasizing traits like loyalty and love, such as stating "not handsome or wealthy, but loyal and loving".

"Calling all women! Beauty, wealth, body type, and skin tone are not important. I'm seeking a partner to walk alongside me, ready to take on the challenges of building a small business together."

(Peth, Dating group, 2023)

2.6 A space of mutual vigilance and surveillance

Online anonymity raises concerns about the reliability of participants' identities in online communities. Group members often play a crucial role in monitoring and identifying potential online deception and fraud. By raising awareness and warning others about false identities and financial scams, they show ethical responsibility in protecting fellow members. This collective vigilance helps reduce cybercrime risks, fostering mutual protection and trust within the community:

"I've said it many times before, there are both good and bad people on this page. Don't be fooled by good looks and transfer money to them only to complain later. We're all adults here, use your common sense!"

(Nee, Companionship group, 2023)

2.7 A space to alleviate loneliness

Participating in Facebook groups is frequently motivated by the need for a community that provides solace from loneliness and caters to the interests and preferences of its members. For instance, in the 40+ Friend-Seeking Group and the Chat & Travel Group, individuals often seek companionship and conversation rather than solely pursuing a genuine romantic relationship. Consequently, the nature of posts in these groups may differ from those in groups focused primarily on seeking romantic partners, such as dating groups or companionship groups:

"Looking for travel buddies to Sattahip this weekend! Can pick you up from Bang Na area. Expenses will be shared."

(Kai, Chat & Travel Group, 2023)

2.8 A space for exchange, encouragement, and advice

Dating groups help members find partners by sharing viewpoints, motivating each other, and offering advice. For instance, when a teenage girl posts about seeking a partner, male members often advise her to wait until she is older or has finished her studies. Similarly, those seeking financial support may receive comments encouraging them to face challenges and exercise caution. Despite the online superficiality, compassionate members driven by universal values and ethics provide support where needed:

> "Stay calm and think things through. There's always a solution to every
> problem."

(Satit, Dating Group, 2023)

2.9 Sexual Harassment

The threat of harassment in dating groups includes instances of sexual harassment. This can involve the transmission of messages and images that violate personal rights, with female victims often targeted by sending explicit images through private messages or being subjected to offensive language, such as invitations to engage in sexual activities:

> "We've only been talking for less than 5 minutes and you're already suggesting
> we have sex or a sex call? I'm looking for a soulmate, someone to grow old
> with, not just a casual hookup."

(Ploy, Chat & Travel group, 2023)

2.10 Media literacy phenomenon

Most members of this group are able to analyze information presented through photographs and posted messages to make reasoned decisions or identify deception. They draw on both direct experiences and indirect exposure to news via online social media, which alerts them to maintain vigilance. Consequently, these members are cautious about transferring money to others and exercise media literacy to detect potential manipulation within the group:

> "Attention everyone, please beware of fake photos! Those pictures of money you see
> online are most likely scams. Don't fall for it!"

(Looktan, Companionship group, 2023)

Online social media is a powerful tool with significant benefits, but connecting with unknown individuals also presents risks. Understanding the positive and negative patterns of social media use can enhance learning and awareness. This awareness promotes self-assurance, vigilance, and mutual respect within the community.

Discussion

Images on social media networks are often categorized into six patterns, each shaped by the social and cultural influences of the group. These patterns are as follows:

1) Idealized personal scenarios are often presented to create an impressive image and attract the opposite sex by showcasing desirable qualities that reflect the ideal of a well-rounded

individual. This format aligns with Veloo and Mustafa's (2023) research, which found that such representations arise from societal values perpetuated by social institutions. These values lead to idealized qualities, such as beauty standards and the perfect dream partner. Standards related to body shape and power create sexual appeal and prompt women to enhance their appearance. Despite an acceptance of beauty diversity, societal beauty standards continue to influence everyone to strive for this ideal beauty.

2) Images evoking sympathy through perceived limitations portray individuals as pitiable, flawed, or limited, which may hinder their chances of finding a sincere partner. Examples include being a widow, having children from a previous relationship, or living in poverty. In dating groups, this self-representation seeks acceptance and understanding before initiating conversations or developing real-life relationships. This aligns with Jitpiriyakan's (2019) research, "Widows: The Representation of Marginalized Heroines in Contemporary Thai Novels," which found that widows are stigmatized and marginalized, perceived as flawed and less valuable than unmarried women, leading to less acceptance.

3) The portrayal of ordinary people seeking true love involves posting online messages that express their desire for a partner without presenting themselves as the ideal man or woman. Most of these posters reflect a lack of middle or high social standing and seek acceptance for who they are. They aim for a serious and mutual relationship. Chaichana et al. (2016) found that while societal norms push women to meet ideal standards, modern women negotiate their roles, showing that they can be valued without strictly adhering to traditional roles. This negotiation empowers women to redefine gender roles, using other qualities to gain acceptance and achieve their goals.

4) Provocative attire and poses use the body to convey seductiveness and attract the opposite sex, emphasizing physical features such as muscular physiques or swimsuits. This approach aligns with idealized personal scenarios and supports Tasuan's (2016) study on metrosexual men. Tasuan found that portraying a health-conscious, self-loving man with a good physique and mental health reflects economic and social readiness. Their self-care through various activities highlights the idealized qualities of perfection.

5) Gender diversity refers to the representation of various gender identities within online dating communities on social media. Facebook serves as a platform for individuals to express diverse gender identities, including both specific and general dating groups. Today, gender-diverse identities are increasingly accepted and respected. Thepthewin (2015) found that social media provides a new space for individuals to present their true gender identity and gain acceptance. It facilitates virtual connections and the free exchange of information, photos, and videos.

6) Cross-cultural representations reflect the accessibility of social media in the Thai dating community, where users can either be identifiable or anonymous. These representations reveal two main groups, namely individuals from neighboring countries who present themselves as laborers in Thailand and those from Western countries whose identities may be unverifiable. Online scams are frequently observed in this context. Phumbandit and Yuadyong (2022) found that criminals often infiltrate online dating platforms, using pictures of attractive men from the internet to create fake profiles. They deceive victims on dating websites, either to engage in sexual relationships or to solicit money.

The social phenomenon observed through online dating groups on Facebook can be analyzed in ten aspects, as follows:

1) the expression of hope in 'true love online' is real., and 2) the group that does not believe in the existence of 'true love online'.

This social phenomenon involves individuals in Facebook dating groups showcasing their experiences of success or failure in finding partners. They post messages and photos that reflect their satisfaction or disappointment, including showcasing couples who have successfully met through these groups. This reflects Facebook's role in connecting people for various purposes—whether for business, relationships, or finding partners online (Afolaranmi, 2020). The virtual world can manifest in reality, bringing both the potential for deception and disappointment.

3) love based on benefits and deception

Despite the benefits of Facebook, there are also negative impacts, such as violating individuals' rights by using their photos or information without permission, excessive engagement in online conversations, and encountering emotional deception prevalent in the online world. Examples of emotional deception include misrepresentation in self-presentation, such as lying about age, occupation, education, income, height, weight, or gender (Phumbandit & Yuadyong, 2022). Additionally, becoming friends with strangers online can lead to scams. Cybercrimes known as Internet Romance Scams, for instance, target lonely and desperate individuals, resulting in significant financial fraud (Arora & Scheiber, 2017). Despite awareness of such deceptions, many users continue to seek partners and love through online platforms.

4) equality in the virtual world

The phenomenon observed in dating groups is the equality of digital citizenship, which creates a space for all kinds of differences. Regardless of an individual's background, everyone has the right to seek love in their own way. This reflects the contemporary perspective on equality through the virtual space of the online world, where access is granted equally to all. Valtysson (2012) supports this view, which highlights Facebook as a public space for communication that serves as a liberating platform that facilitates networking, practical management, maintaining friendships, and recreation. As such, it enables everyone to access and express themselves equally in this public space.

5) negotiation space

In reflecting the space for empowerment and negotiation within dating groups, it is evident that each member has the authority to fully define the qualities of their ideal partner within the group's space. This ability to establish criteria based on personal preferences establish the acceptance of one's identity among group members, who, in turn, acknowledge the chooser's criteria. Regardless of whether a person is rich or poor, handsome or not, they can still create the power to define the qualities of the partner they desire. This aligns with the research of Yampochai and Masae (2018), who studied power dynamics in communication. Their findings suggest that communication about love on Facebook can alter power dynamics, drawing on internal power through self-presentation on the platform to promote self-acceptance and self-respect. While profile deception may occur to conceal one's true self, especially in the early stages of membership, there is often a shift towards clearer self-presentation over time.

Simultaneously, the power of group communication facilitates knowledge exchange through trial-and-error experiences and independent interactions in the virtual community.

6) a space of mutual vigilance and surveillance

Though the online world may often seem impersonal, group members vigilantly monitor for potential scams within their communities. This vigilance arises from increased awareness of online scams, leading to recognition, learning, and self-protection. Archer et al. (2021) found that while Facebook groups are private, they can be accessed publicly and privately. Members protect and monitor their virtual spaces to ensure safety. The study examined three closed Facebook groups: "mommy bloggers" and their Australian readers, partners of the Australian Defense Force, and migrant mothers in Australia, exploring women's motivations for creating and joining these spaces and maintaining privacy and safety expectations.

7) a space to alleviate loneliness, and 8) a space for exchange, encouragement, and advice

In addition to seeking a partner, members of dating groups use the space to exchange views, provide encouragement, offer advice, and alleviate loneliness, especially when some posts are inappropriate. These groups function as communities for their members. This is supported by the research of Al-Saggaf and Nielsen (2014), which highlights Facebook's role in alleviating loneliness. The study found that "lonely" individuals are more likely to disclose personal information, relationship details, and their location compared to "connected" individuals. In contrast, "connected" individuals tend to share their perspectives and wall posts more than "lonely" individuals.

9) sexual harassment

The threats associated with participation in dating groups often include incidents of sexual harassment through online social networks. This harassment manifests through messages and images that violate personal rights and constitute sexual harassment. According to Maghfiroh and Muqoddam (2019), sexual harassment is a prevalent behavior among netizens on social media today. The study's findings show that sexual harassment on social media occurs both directly (explicitly) and indirectly (implicitly). Factors contributing to this behavior include: 1) netizens seeking attention (evidenced by the use of fake accounts) and 2) photo content or account owner captions that provoke harassment from others. The study suggests the need for psychoeducation for adolescents and families, both as offenders and victims, to help prevent sexual harassment.

10) media literacy phenomenon.

Media literacy shows that most group members can analyze photos and messages to identify potential scams. They learn from direct and indirect experiences and warn others to stay vigilant, particularly advising against transferring money. Witek and Grettano (2012) found that Facebook's Feeds, Share, and Comment functions develop and exhibit information literacy practices. In social media, information literacy requires "meta-literacy", which involves a critical awareness of why we use information.

Facebook acts as a public communication space, especially for accessing dating channels. The ways dating group members present themselves highlight how social media is adapted for various purposes, reflecting social changes and fostering learning among both group members and society.

Conclusion

The study has identified a total of six self-presentation patterns: idealized personal scenarios, images evoking sympathy through perceived limitations, portrayals of ordinary people seeking true love, provocative attire and poses, gender diversity, and cross-cultural representations. This study reflects both the positive and negative social phenomena observed in digital spaces, which provides insights into behavior of individuals as digital citizens who freely express their thoughts and create identities through their self-representations. These phenomena have led to the formation of group and individual spaces where people communicate their needs and goals. This empowers individuals to manage and control their own social online spaces according to their preferences. At the same time, individuals within these spaces are aware of expressing their own and the group's shared goals, while respecting each other's spaces. Despite the positive aspects, these virtual spaces also expose users to potential online criminal activity, as reflected in the phenomena that have emerged. This highlights the need for continued learning and awareness that are beneficial to the general public.

Recommendations

From the research findings, it has been observed that the problem of accessing Facebook without authentic identification during communication leads to a significant increase in cybercrime issues. Therefore, we propose the following guidelines for policymakers and users to enhance the efficiency and safety of online social media usage in the long term:

1. Build a comprehensive understanding of the role and impact of Facebook in contemporary partner search practices.

2. Optimize the use of Facebook for partner search while mitigating potential risks and challenges. To ensure the safety of these spaces, the government, as the protector of citizens' interests, should implement measures to maximize the benefits of online social media usage. This includes fostering the development and utilization of secure technologies to help users safeguard their personal data and mitigate risks associated with using platforms like Facebook. Further, there should be strict enforcement privacy controls and checks for users.

3. Since social media platforms are constantly evolving, the results of this study can serve as a guideline for monitoring other dating applications, such as Tinder, Bumble, and TanTan. Although these applications verify the identities of users to provide an initial level of safety, crimes can still occur if users do not exercise caution. Therefore, this study will contribute to raising awareness and vigilance against traditional forms of deception, helping potential victims in the future.

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