An Exploration of Hostility Towards Covid-19 Patients From Cluster Infection in Thailand on a Facebook News Page[1]

การศึกษาความเป็นปรปักษ์ต่อผู้ป่วยโควิด-19 จากการติดเชื้อโควิด-19 แบบกลุ่มก้อนในประเทศไทยบนเพจเฟซบุ๊กสำนักข่าว

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Abstract

The imposition of quarantine during the Covid-19 pandemic led to increased social media use to stay updated on infection levels. It was reported that the virus had spread through cluster infections resulting from quarantine violations. Consequently, social media users expressed their feelings towards the infected group in these clusters through evaluative language. This study aims to investigate the expression of hostility towards Covid-19-infected individuals from cluster infections in Thailand. The data comprised 44 clauses extracted from comments on 11 posts about cluster infections in Thailand on

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the official Facebook page of the Thai news TV program *Rueang Lao Chao Ni* during 2020-2021. The ATTITUDE system in Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory was employed to analyze the data. The findings showed a co-occurrence of hostility and satisfaction in comments directed at infected people who violated the quarantine guidelines. Hostility was expressed by Facebook users in the extremity of violence. Satisfaction was invoked based on the belief that these infected people should be removed by violent methods so that infection levels in the country would decline. The findings of this study contribute to designing better communication content in the digital era for future pandemic crises to prevent stigmatization and hate speech towards patients.

Keywords: Covid-19 cluster infections, Facebook news page, appraisal theory, hostility and satisfaction, Facebook comments

บทคัดย่อ

การประกาศให้มีการกักตัวในช่วงที่มีการระบาดใหญ่โควิด-19 ทำให้เกิดการใช้โซเชียลมีเดียในการติดตามระดับการติดเชื้อมากขึ้น และมีการรายงานว่ามีการแพร่ระบาดจากการติดเชื้อโควิด-19 แบบกลุ่มก้อน (คลัสเตอร์) อันสืบเนื่องมาจากการฝ่าฝืนการกักตัว จึงทำให้เกิดการแสดงความรู้สึกที่ผู้ใช้โซเชียลมีเดียมีต่อกลุ่มผู้ติดเชื้อจากคลัสเตอร์ดังกล่าวผ่านการใช้ภาษาที่แสดงถึงการบอกความรู้สึก บทความนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการแสดงออกถึงความรุนแรงต่อผู้ติดเชื้อจากคลัสเตอร์ ที่แสดงออกผ่านการใช้ภาษา ข้อมูลประกอบด้วย 44 อนุประโยค จากคอมเม้นต์ของโพสต์ในเพจเฟซบุ๊ก "เรื่องเล่าเช้านี้" ที่โพสต์ข่าวการติดเชื้อโควิด-19 แบบกลุ่มก้อน (คลัสเตอร์) ในประเทศไทย ช่วงปี พ.ศ. 2563-2564 ทั้งหมด 11 โพสต์ วิเคราะห์โดยใช้กรอบแนวคิด ระบบแอตติจูด (ATTITUDE system) ในทฤษฎีการประเมินค่า (Appraisal theory) ของ มาร์ตินและไวท์ (2005) ผลการวิจัยพบว่ามีการปรากฏร่วมระหว่างความเป็นปรปักษ์และความพึงพอใจผ่านคอมเม้นต์ มุ่งเป้าไปที่ผู้ติดเชื้อจากคลัสเตอร์ที่ฝ่าฝืนข้อบังคับของภาครัฐ ผู้ใช้เฟซบุ๊กแสดงความเป็นปรปักษ์ผ่านการใช้ข้อความที่ส่อถึงการใช้ความรุนแรง และพบความพึงพอใจแฝงไว้ผ่านการเสนอดังกล่าวซึ่งเกิดจากความเชื่อที่ว่าหากผู้ติดเชื้อจากคลัสเตอร์ถูกกำจัดด้วยการใช้ความรุนแรง ระดับการติดเชื้อในประเทศจะลดลง ผลวิจัยของงานชิ้นนี้จะเป็นประโยชน์ในการออกแบบเนื้อหาในการ

สื่อสารในยุคดิจิทัลที่ดีขึ้น สำหรับวิกฤติการระบาดใหญ่ในอนาคต เพื่อป้องกันการตีตรา และการใช้ถ้อยคำแสดงความเกลียดชังต่อผู้ป่วยจากโรคระบาด

คำสำคัญ: การติดเชื้อโควิด-19 แบบกลุ่มก้อน (คลัสเตอร์) เพจเฟซบุ๊กสำนักข่าว ทฤษฎีการประเมินค่า ความเป็นปรปักษ์และความพึงพอใจ คอมเม้นต์เฟซบุ๊ก

Introduction

The absence of face-to-face communication during the Covid-19 pandemic stifled human interaction, leading to the growing influence of digitalization (Sharma, 2023). According to Park et al. (2021), the number of Covid-19 cases was a major concern for social media users, and many mainstream media outlets managed to expand their audiences by reporting the news on their social media platforms.

In Thailand, Kemp (2021) reported that Facebook was ranked second (surpassed only by YouTube) among the most visited social media websites in 2021; thus, many mainstream media outlets in Thailand created their own Facebook accounts to report news about Covid-19 cluster infections to their online audiences. Rawinit and Tepjak (2021) found that Facebook news outlets were among the main platforms people used to stay informed about the Covid-19 pandemic in Thailand. The popularity of using Facebook to receive updates on the Covid-19 pandemic in Thailand is further supported by Ubolwan et al. (2023), who reported that Facebook was the most widely used platform by university students to follow news about the pandemic and that commenting was one of the online behaviors commonly exhibited by Facebook users.

Che Hassan and Mohammad Nor (2022) argued that pandemic-related Facebook comments often targeted the government's approaches to pandemic management, one of which was the enforcement of stricter quarantine law in the hope that the positive cases would decrease. Phansuma and Boonruksa (2021) conducted surveys on public attitudes toward Covid-19 virus and the importance of following quarantine guidelines, showing that the majority of people held negative attitudes toward Covid-19. The Covid-19 virus was viewed as controllable if quarantine guidelines were strictly followed. The results from Phansuma and Boonruksa (2021) highlight the emphasis on compliance with quarantine, which resulted in negative attitudes towards those who violated the quarantine guidelines. Chinsuwatay (2021) reported that people were well aware

of quarantine measures. Violators were blamed for causing new infection due to their negligence; as a result, people imposed negative labels on them (e.g., "uncooperative" and "troublemakers"). Such labels caused those infected to be viewed as individuals who aggravated the pandemic due to their lack of social awareness. This terminology aligns with the public's perception of quarantine violators.

Commenting as an online behavior and the negative public sentiment about the pandemic served as sources of evaluative language reflecting Facebook users' views towards the infected people. Thus, Facebook users evaluated and expressed their dissatisfaction towards the "troublemakers" by calling for stricter enforcement, punishments, or greater public health awareness.

To study this evaluative language, Appraisal Theory, established by Martin and White (2005), was employed. The theory focuses on the expression of attitudes and opinions. The main subsystem of Appraisal Theory is ATTITUDE, which is essential in investigating the expression of emotions (either positive or negative) through language, whether inscribed or invoked. The interpretation depends on the interpreter's language competence as well as shared social and cultural knowledge interlinked with the language.

It is believed that text-based analysis of Facebook comments regarding "troublemakers" during the Covid-19 pandemic in Thailand will provide empirical evidence confirming the negative public sentiment towards quarantine violators. Without an understanding of public sentiment towards "troublemakers", governments and authorities might not be able to effectively address violations of quarantine guidelines in event of a future pandemic.

Objective

The objective of this study is to investigate the hostility expressed in the language used towards the Covid-19 cluster-infected people on the *Rueang Lao Chao Ni* Facebook news page. The program was the most popular news show in Thailand (Jongwilaikasaem, 2015) at that time, with 12.45 million Facebook followers (Statista, 2021).

Literature Review

1. Language Use During the Covid-19 Pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, institutional agencies (e.g., governmental organizations and TV news outlets) reported news on both social media and traditional platforms (TV and radio) to encourage the public to adhere to the new health safety measures. According to Amusan (2024), the communicative functions of these institutional agencies were threefold: first, to warn about the virus; second, to recommend vaccination; and third, to persuade the general public to get vaccinated. Syntactically, Amusan (2024) states that one of the most prominent sentence types used by institutional agencies is the imperative mood, whose primary function is to give orders or commands.

Mohammad Nor and Che Hassan (2022) studied the speech acts of online comments on Facebook regarding Covid-19 reports disseminated on the official Facebook page of the Malaysian National Security Council in 2021 and found that directive speech acts were used to suggest to the government that stricter law enforcement be implemented to ensure compliance with its guidelines. Beyond directive speech acts, expressive speech acts were used by Facebook users to convey negative emotional reactions (i.e., anxiety, unhappiness, frustration, and anger) towards the rising Covid-19 cases and the management of the pandemic. Overall, the language used on social media reflects the negative public sentiment about the pandemic, expressed through emotional language.

2. Definition of Violence

Bufacchi (2005) explored both the original and the extended concepts of violence; the former focuses solely on physical force as a litmus test for identifying violence; while the latter expands the definition to include psychological abuse. Jia (2024) argued the victims of cyber violence can also experience deterioration in both physical and mental health. Cansiz and Akça (2024) defined cyber violence as the exhibition of aggressive and hostile behaviors on online platforms. They investigated cyber violence in digital games with instant messaging features. The results show that digital game players often used threats, hate speech, and insults.

Jia (2024) argues that moral disengagement is the main factor contributing to cyber violence. Aside from psychological factors, Mukred et al. (2024) also highlight technological factors that influence cyber violence, such as online anonymity, the proliferation of harmful content, and the expansion of virtual environments.

2.1 Online Hostile Language

Language used in online comments reflects hostility towards those who are different through word choice, meaning, and language structure. The term "hostile language" is used in this study to refer to various types of language used to express hostility towards troublemakers, who are viewed as "non-conforming". The "non-conforming" refers to troublemakers who fail to comply with quarantine guidelines, thereby not aligning with public sentiment during the pandemic. "Hostility", as used in this study, refers to the expression of negative attitudes or behaviors towards the non-conforming, based on the explanations of hostility provided by Humprecht et al. (2020) and Esposito and Breeze (2022).

Humprecht et al. (2020) argued that the expression of hostility is shaped by the social and cultural contexts of a particular time, often targeting those who are deemed "non-conforming" or part of an "out-group". The judgement may be based on identity (such as immigrants or foreigners) or on deviations from conventional norms. For example, Esposito and Breeze (2022) reported that female politicians in the UK are frequently the targets of hostile comments rooted in misogynistic ideas.

Hostile language is commonly found in comments on social media platforms that report hard news (e.g., politics) (Su et al., 2018). The reason for such aggressive reactions is that many people, including social media users, may be directly affected by the political situation. Su et al. (2018) reported that many uncivil comments on hard news on Facebook involve inappropriate or insulting vocabulary, which commenters often project onto the individuals mentioned in the news.

Online hostile language involves the expression of hate towards a particular group of people. Murthy and Sharma (2019) stated that comments containing hateful content are expressed through various word choices, such as name-calling and threats.

Although "troublemakers" is a proposed term, it shares characteristics with incitement in hate speech. Culpeper (2021) gave two examples of incitement, namely, threats of killing and forcing someone out of the country. If such threats are directed at others with the intention of prompting them to commit the act expressed, it is considered incitement. The participants in incitement in hate speech include the inciter, the incitee, and the target. In this study, these participants are represented by Facebook users as the inciter, the authorities as the incitee, and the troublemakers as the target. Thus, if hostile language is expressed as a suggestion of violence, it may constitute incitement. Hostile language also aligns with the characteristics of curses and ill-wishes, which involve conventionalized language forms used to attack someone's face, as proposed by Culpeper (2011).

In this study, hostility was directed at the troublemakers during a time when compliance with quarantine guidelines was strongly encouraged. These infected individuals were viewed as "non-conforming" because they failed to adhere to the quarantine guidelines.

3. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic functional linguistics (thereafter SFL) examines language in its social context (Martin & Rose, 2007). SFL views language in two ways: strata of language and metafunctions. The former consists of phonology/graphology, lexicogrammar, discourse semantics, and context, while the latter pertains to three broad functions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

This current research only deals with one language stratum, namely, semantics. Semantic resources were identified in Facebook comments to analyze how Facebook users evaluated individuals infected in Covid-19 clusters. This study focuses on the interpersonal metafunction, i.e., language in interactions, such as the expression of subjective opinions (Eggins, 2004). Different evaluations arise from different perspectives: how speakers view the situation and how their preconceived ideas influence that view. Hart (2014) further argued that people also use language to legitimate their ideas and persuade others to adopt the same viewpoint.

3.1 Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory was developed by Martin and White (White, 2015) to extend the analysis of Halliday's interpersonal metafunction in SFL. The theory shifts the analysis of evaluative language from the Modality system to a more comprehensive system of Appraisal, enabling the analysis of subjective opinions together with the underlying stance-taking (Hart, 2014, p.44). According to White (2015, p.1), Appraisal Theory views positive and negative assessments in texts as "language of evaluation" that reflects language users' personal evaluations and stance-taking. Martin and White (2005) argued that the evaluative source in the Appraisal theory is situated within the semantics stratum of Halliday's SFL.

There are three main systems in Appraisal Theory, namely, ATTITUDE, ENGAGEMENT, and GRADUATION. ENGAGEMENT refers to how language users engineer stance-taking in relation to the propositions of previous speakers (Hart, 2014; Martin & White, 2005; White, 2015). GRADUATION refers to mechanisms by which speakers or writers 'graduate' either force or focus (Martin & White, 2005 p. 94). ATTITUDE deals with emotional reactions, social judgements, and aesthetic evaluations (Hart, 2014). There are three types of ATTITUDE: AFFECT, JUDGEMENT, APPRECIATION (written in uppercase to adhere to Hart's (2014) orthographic representation). AFFECT refers to emotional reactions and is considered the main category of ATTITUDE (Lu, 2023; Zhang, 2024). JUDGEMENT refers to evaluations in terms of social esteem and social sanctions, while APPRECIATION refers to the assessment of aesthetic value. As emotions are mainly expressed in Facebook comments on hard news (Lopes, 2020; Su et al., 2018), the ATTITUDE system and its subsystem AFFECT were chosen as the most suitable analytical tools for this study.

In English, ATTITUDE is realized by an adjective, a descriptive verb, or a noun (Hart, 2014). Lu (2023) and Zhang (2024) argued that attitudes can be identified through lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic strategies. ATTITUDE can be either inscribed or invoked; the former is realized through grammatical resources, while the latter is realized through experience (Thompson, 2008) and based on predefined values (Hart, 2014), rather than being directly inscribed in the text.

AFFECT is pivotal to the data as it deals with emotional reactions. There are three types of emotions subsumed under AFFECT: happiness, security, and satisfaction. The focus here is on the expression of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This focus is grounded in four major contextual factors: frustration towards quarantine violators (Chinsuwatay, 2021), the use of directive speech act to call for stricter management of the pandemic (Mohammad Nor & Che Hassan, 2022), compliance with the quarantine guidelines (Phansuma & Boonruksa, 2021), and the incitement in hate speech (Culpeper, 2021).

Previous studies on evaluation in hard news incorporated AFFECT into their analysis to investigate the sentiment of news agencies. For instance, Lu (2023) deployed AFFECT to explore the perspective of a Chinese news agency regarding the Japanese government's handling of nuclear-contaminated water from the damaged Fukushima reactor. The results showed that the agency's overall impression was mainly negative, as it was dissatisfied with how the Japanese government planned to address the problem. Prastikawati (2021) employs Appraisal Theory to analyze online news articles on the BBC website regarding the typhoon disaster in the Philippines amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Verbs such as 'to evacuate' (the Covid-19 patients) and 'to shut' (the airport) are categorized under Dis-/satisfaction of AFFECT, based on the context reflecting how people felt about these actions.

Appraisal Theory contributes to the study of evaluative meaning in Thai hard news platform. Arunsirot (2012) analyzed AFFECT found in Thai adjectives, noun phrases, and verbs in news content regarding the disruption of the 2009 ASEAN summit carried out by the Red Shirts (supporters of former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was forced out of power). The dissatisfaction of the Red Shirts was inscribed through verbs denoting mental states and invoked through action verbs. Results from Prastikawati (2021) and Arunsirot (2012) show that dis-/satisfaction can be invoked through verbs in both Thai and English. In this study, the suggestion of violence is expressed through verb; thus, it is hypothesized that the invocation of dis-/satisfaction is also expressed through verbs.

This study addresses a specific research gap related to instant reaction, namely, online comments in response to hard news reports and the empirical evidence of incitement to violence on social media, as realized through text-based analysis.

Research Methodology

The data for this study consisted of Facebook comments from posts reporting news about Covid-19 cluster infections in Thailand during 2020-2021. The satisfaction invoked in words referring to hostility was analyzed based on Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005).

1. Data Collection

The data for this research consisted of Thai-language Facebook comments on news about Covid-19 cluster infections in Thailand, sourced from the official Facebook page of the popular Thai news show *Rueang Lao Chao Ni*. Comments were extracted from official posts on the *Rueang Lao Chao Ni* Facebook page shared between December 2020 and November 2021, in which the term 'cluster' (in Thai orthography) was circulated in the news. The reason for using only this keyword is its wide circulation in the media and its strong recognition in Thai society.

In total, 45 posts were analyzed, with details recorded about the location of each cluster infection and the identity of the infected people mentioned in the news items. The total number of comments in these 45 posts was 1,100, and the total number of clauses in these comments was 3,641. This study focuses on examples from 11 posts that contained hostile language towards the Covid-19 infected group, with 44 clauses identified as hostile language.

The comments in each post were selected according to the following criteria. Firstly, the comments had to be posted on the same date the news item was shared to ensure they represented instant reactions. Secondly, only written texts were extracted; pictorial aids (e.g., memes and emoticons) were excluded to focus on linguistic sources. Thirdly, the content of the comments had to be relevant to the infected people or other parties mentioned in the cluster infection news. Comment replies were not extracted, as they might not have been directly related to the infected people. Lastly, commercial advertisements in the comments were excluded. After extracting the comments, clause numbering was done by identifying clause boundaries when a comment contained more than one clause. In total, 44 clauses were selected for analysis.

Table 1

Troublemakers in Facebook Posts

No.	Infected troublemakers	Type of violation	Location of cluster	Posted on (D/M/Y)	Clauses with hostile language
Post 1	Visitors to a gambling house	Social gathering	A gambling house in Rayong	28/12/2020	3
Post 2	Visitors to a gambling house	Social gathering	A gambling house in Rayong	28/12/2020	1
Post 3	A deceased male programmer	Social gathering	A nightclub in Thonglor district	16/4/2021	1
Post 4	Partygoers	Social gathering	A nightclub in Thonglor district	16/4/2021	1
Post 5	Menial workers	Unhygienic practice	A factory	5/5/2021	1
Post 6	Menial workers	Social gathering	A tunnel workers' camp	5/5/2021	2
Post 7	Migrant workers	Unhygienic practice	A factory	23/5/2021	6
Post 8	Migrant workers	Social gathering	Suan Luang & Chatuchak district, Bangkok	5/6/2021	16
Post 9	Partygoers	Social gathering	A birthday party in Nakhon Panom	25/7/2021	8
Post 10	Partygoers	Social gathering	A civil servants' farewell party in Chaiyaphum province	12/10/2021	5

No.	Infected troublemakers	Type of violation	Location of cluster	Posted on (D/M/Y)	Clauses with hostile language
Post 11	Tourists	Social gathering	The Phu Tap Boek National Park	18/10/2021	1

This study only collected data on the use of hostile language toward marginalized groups in Thailand (i.e., migrant workers, laborers, gambler, and partygoers), with an awareness of the intentional exclusion of other groups, such as teachers, students, or individuals whose careers are deemed mainstream or prestigious.

Generally, those categorized as troublemakers were mainly guilty of violating the quarantine guidelines, and this was considered sufficient reason for Facebook users to identify them as a problem and justify the incitement of violence against them.

2. Data analysis

After collecting the comments, the data was analyzed according to the following steps:

1. Identifying semantic resources with evaluative meaning in a clause within a comment for subsequent analysis through the ATTITUDE system
2. Identifying the type of ATTITUDE
3. Identifying the subtypes belonging to the ATTITUDE type identified in Step 2.
4. Identifying how ATTITUDE is expressed (explicitly, as inscribed; or implicitly, as invoked) and its polarity (positive or negative).

Analyses of ATTITUDE involve examining the semantic resources of words that convey evaluation, along with the polarity of those attitudes. Words with evaluative meaning are identified and categorized according to the categories outlined in the ATTITUDE system, namely:

1. AFFECT —emotional reactions
2. JUDGEMENT — moral judgement based on one's characteristics and behavior.
3. APPRECIATION —aesthetic assessment.

The focus here is on the analysis of AFFECT – emotional reactions to the infected "troublemakers" in the comments. There are three types of AFFECT: happiness, security, and satisfaction.

Un-/happiness refers to the state of being happy or unhappy. It is explicitly realized through words expressing happiness or unhappiness (e.g., happy, glad (Zhu, 2023); *sia chai* "to be sad" (Arunsirot, 2012)).

In-/security refers to the state of being secure or insecure. It is explicitly realized through words denoting being safe or unsafe (e.g., take care of, confident (Zhu, 2023); *nihuasukhuasun* "a headlong escape", *opphayop* "to evacuate" (Arunsirot, 2012)).

Dis-/satisfaction refers to the state of being satisfied or dissatisfied. It is explicitly realized through words indicating being satisfactory or unsatisfactory (e.g., satisfied (Zhu, 2023), *sajai* "very satisfied" (Arunsirot, 2012); angry (Aljuraywi & Alyousef, 2022), the Thai rude suffix 'e' referring to a woman (Rungswang, 2021)).

This study focuses on employing Dis-/satisfaction in the analysis of the suggestion of violence as incitement, as it can reveal whether Facebook users are pleased with the suggestions they make.

Table 2

Context of the Expression of ATTITUDE

Evaluated entity	Evaluator	Social context
The infected "troublemakers"	Facebook users	Ongoing Covid-19 cluster infections in Thailand
		The encouragement of quarantine guidelines

Note: Contextual information on the expression of ATTITUDE is shown in Table 2. The infected group in the cluster was evaluated through linguistic representations by Facebook users, based on the Covid-19 situation in Thailand mentioned in the social context column.

Polarity was analyzed to explore attitudes towards the troublemakers, focusing on whether they were mainly negative or positive, as well as whether the semantic resources conveying these attitudes were inscribed or invoked.

As the data was in Thai orthography, romanization was necessary to accommodate readers who do not speak Thai. The Romanized version used in the analysis adheres to the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS) (URL: https://www.orst.go.th/). Tones are not marked. After the romanization, a free translation was provided for the Thai words.

The format of the analysis based on ATTITUDE system is presented as follows:

[+/-: Type of ATTITUDE: Subtype: Inscribed or Invoked]

"+" refers to a positive attitude (e.g., happiness and satisfaction), while "-" indicates a negative attitude (e.g., unhappiness and dissatisfaction). For example, in this study, the type of ATTITUDE identified is *invoked satisfaction*, which is subsumed under the subsystem of AFFECT. Therefore, the format used in the analysis is [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked].

After the data was collected, comments containing hostile language were selected based on their semantic content. Comments featuring words that connoted violence were identified and categorized accordingly. For instance, *nerathet* ("to deport") and *song klap prathet* ("to send somebody back to their homeland") connote the same concept, i.e., forcing someone to leave the country; therefore, these two words were categorized under the deportation group.

Findings and Discussion

It was found that Facebook users expressed hostility by justifying violence and showing apathy toward those infected. They justified violence using words connoting aggression, suggesting that authorities should use force against the troublemakers in order to eliminate them, in the hope that this would help improve the country's infection situation.

The findings show that Facebook users disguised their acceptance of violence against the cluster-infected group. The invoked attitude toward these individuals is one of satisfaction [+AFFECT: satisfaction], implied through language that suggests violence and dehumanization.

The words connoting violence encompassed a wide range of hateful emotions and threats. The types of violence were divided into five categories based on their lexical meaning, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Types of Violence Towards the Infected People in Covid-19 Clusters (Based on 11 Posts)

Type of violence	Examples of words and phrases	Type of troublemakers	ATTITUDE type	Number of instances
Killing	*tat hua siap prachan* "to decapitate in public"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	5
	wisaman "to execute"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
	pai chap ma ying pao "to execute by firing squad"	Partygoers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
Inhumane acts	*tat ham* "to chop male genitalia off"	Partygoers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	11
	chap tat khaen tat kha "to chop the arms and legs off"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
	chap chit ya kha ya "to inject with herbicide"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
Legal punishment	*chap khang diao* "to put somebody in solitary confinement"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
	dam noen kadi "to bring a	Gamblers	AFFECT Negative	11

Type of violence	Examples of words and phrases	Type of troublemakers	ATTITUDE type	Number of instances
	lawsuit"		satisfaction invoked	
	khang khuk "to jail"	Partygoers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
Deportation	*nerathet* "to deport"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
	song klap prathet "to send somebody back to their homeland"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	6
	blacklist "to get somebody blacklisted"	Migrant workers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
Apathy	*som laeo* "You're supposed to die"	Partygoer	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
	som nam na "Serves you right"	Tourists	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	3
	pai tai sa "You should die!"	Partygoers	AFFECT Negative satisfaction invoked	
	Total			36

Note: The number of instances in the last column of the table shows how many clauses contained words connoting each type of violence. The total number of instances is lower than the total number of clauses, as some instances appeared in more than one clause.

The following subsections provide an overview of each type of violence. Each subsection begins with an introductory paragraph summarizing the relationship between the type of troublemaker and the corresponding type of violence. This is followed by example analysis, illustrating how Facebook users expressed the type of violence they believed should be inflicted on the troublemakers.

1. Killing

Facebook users suggested capital punishment as a suitable response to the troublemakers, particularly targeting infected migrant workers and infected partygoers. Outdated forms of execution, such as beheading and firing squads, were suggested. However, Facebook users who suggested such methods appeared to believe that infected migrant workers and partygoers were deserving of such punishments. This reflects a broader negative attitude among some Facebook users toward both migrant workers and quarantine violators, especially migrant workers, who are often perceived in Thai society as the opposite of being "Thai".

Example 1
wisaman loei krap
Execute them.
ATTITUDE: *wisaman* "to execute"
[+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

Example 2
tat hua siap prachan
Decapitate them in public.
ATTITUDE: *tat hua siap prachan* "to decapitate in public"
[+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

In Example 1, a Facebook user comments on news that infected migrant workers had allegedly sneaked out of a campsite where a cluster infection was detected, suggesting that they should be executed. In Example 2, another Facebook user suggests public beheading, using the Thai words *tat*

hua siap prachan (to decapitate in public). These users urged the authorities to kill the infected migrant workers to rid Thai society of them. In both examples, satisfaction is invoked, as the suggestions imply that eliminating these individuals would help reduce the number of cluster infections in Thailand. Moreover, the act proposed in Example 2 is more extreme than that in Example 1, as it not only calls for execution but also specifies that the punishment be carried out in public.

2. Inhumane Acts

The suggested use of physical violence is categorized under inhumane acts. This may be attributed to the way public perception of the virus was shaped by the media, which portrayed as deadly, and that spurred hostility toward those infected. Inhumane acts were proposed against the troublemakers, who were perceived by Facebook users as belonging to an out-group (i.e., migrant workers) or as quarantine violators (i.e., partygoers).

> Example 3
> *chap tat khaen tat kha* man loei
> Chop their arms and legs off.
> ATTITUDE: *chap tat khaen tat kha* "to chop their arms and legs off"
> [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

> Example 4
> *tat ham* man
>
> Chop their penises off.
> ATTITUDE: *tat ham* "to chop male genitalia off"
> [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

In Example 3, a Facebook user suggests the authorities should cut off the limbs of infected migrant workers. In Example 4, another Facebook user recommends that infected partygoers be mutilated by having their penises removed. Although these actions may not be fatal, they are unquestionably disproportionate and inhumane for simply being infected with the Covid-19 virus.

Satisfaction is implied in both comments, as the Facebook users appeared to believe that these troublemakers had contributed to the emergence of yet another cluster amid rising number of cases nationwide. To them, violent punishment was seen as a justified deterrent against further violations of quarantine guidelines.

3. Legal Punishment

This category refers to the use of legal measures that Facebook users suggested as a way to deal with those infected in the cluster. Unlike the previous category, it does not advocate physical violence. The most frequently suggested legal punishment was incarceration for causing cluster infections.

Such comments imply a legitimation of punishment, and it indicates a sense of satisfaction if the infected groups were punished legally. According to Facebook users' viewpoint, legal punishment was perceived as one of the possible ways to eliminate the perceived threat and thereby restore the Covid-19 situation.

The troublemakers in this category were mainly those engaged in 'morally incorrect' activities, such as gamblers and partygoers, those in labor-intensive occupations (i.e., menial tunnel workers), and those identified as out-group members (i.e., migrant workers). These associations may have led Facebook users to justify legal action as both a deterrent and a means of forcing these groups of people to comply with the quarantine guidelines.

> Example 5
> *laeo chap pai khang diao nai hong*
> And then put them in solitary confinement
> ATTITUDE: *chap pai khang diao* "to put in solitary confinement"
> [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

> Example 6
> *khang khuk ha pi*
> Put them in jail for five years.
> ATTITUDE: *khang khuk* "to jail" [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

In Example 5, a Facebook user suggests that the infected migrant workers, who were reported to have sneaked out of the campsite, should be placed in solitary confinement. In Example 6, another Facebook user suggests that the infected partygoers be imprisoned for half a decade for becoming infected in the cluster.

4. Deportation

Words connoting deportation were employed by Facebook users to suggest to the authorities an alternative method of expelling the troublemakers, whose identity was subsumed under the out-group (i.e., migrant workers). Satisfaction was invoked in the suggestion of deportation in that if these migrant workers were forced to leave Thailand, the cluster infections would drop. Ultimately, this would result in satisfaction for Facebook users.

> Example 7
> _nerathet_ pai
> Just deport them.
> ATTITUDE*: nerathet* "to deport" [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

> Example 8
> _khuan cha blacklist mai hai klap khao ma ik_
> The authorities should get them blacklisted so that they will be denied entry.
> ATTITUDE: _Blacklist_ "to get someone blacklisted" [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

Words synonymous with deportation are shown in Examples 7 and 8. In Example 7, a Facebook user simply advises the authorities to deport the infected migrant workers who were trafficked into the country. In this case, the infected migrant workers were violators of state quarantine; therefore, the suggestion that they be deported is solely based on a binary "us" and "them", an attitude that distinguishes between the migrant workers (an out-group) and Thai society (an in-group). In Example 8, a Facebook user comes up with a method to ensure that the deported migrant workers are unable to enter Thailand again by suggesting that the authorities blacklist all the deported migrant workers to prevent them from bringing the virus back into the country.

5. Apathy

Facebook users directly expressed apathy towards those in the Covid-19 cluster by saying that they deserved to be infected or die from the virus. This may be attributed to the belief that these quarantine violators were not disciplined, so they did not deserve sympathy. Moreover, another way to express apathy is to tell the infected group to pay the medical expenses out of their own pockets despite the existence of health schemes in the country.

Satisfaction is invoked in the expression of apathy, especially in phrases whose English equivalents are "You deserve it" and "It serves you right". Arguably, these phrases might be interpreted as expressions of pure dissatisfaction towards those infected; however, they are interpreted as expressions of satisfaction because the troublemakers are frowned upon by Facebook users. Thus, it is more reasonable to feel satisfied that something undesirable happened to those they were hostile to.

> Example 9
> *tai sa*
> You should die.
> ATTITUDE: *tai sa* 'You should die' [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

> Example 10
> *ko som laeo*
> You're supposed to die.
> ATTITUDE: *som laeo* 'You're supposed to die' [+AFFECT: satisfaction: invoked]

In Example 9, a Facebook user expresses their apathy towards the infected partygoers in the cluster by evaluating that the partygoers are fated to die from the virus. Invoked with satisfaction, it indicates that if the infected partygoers died from the Covid-19 virus, this Facebook user would be satisfied. In Example 10, the news headlines alerted viewers to the death of a visitor to the nightclub where the cluster infection occurred. The male nightclubber was categorized as a troublemaker for violating quarantine guidelines by attending public gatherings. Thus, this Facebook user asserts that it was right for him to die.

Disguising satisfaction in words connoting violence and wishing harm on infected people in the cluster demonstrates that people in Thailand were inclined to lack empathy during the health crisis. Furthermore, it suggests that people tended to seize the moral high ground and justify punishment for those they considered less socially responsible than themselves.

In terms of linguistic form, the results correspond to those of Amusan (2024), in that the prominent linguistic form used on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic was the imperative mood. Apart from institutions' use of the imperative to persuade the general public, as shown in Amusan (2024), the results set out in this study show that the imperative was used by the general public (i.e., Facebook users) as a means to persuade the authorities to take a certain action. By and large, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the main communicative function of social media platforms was to persuade; the findings reveal that Facebook users resorted to persuasion in order to get the authorities to deal with the infected group, whom they viewed as "troublemakers".

6. The Association Between Violence and "Troublemakers"

There was a co-occurrence between the type of violence and the type of "troublemaker". Killing and inhumane acts were both associated with migrant workers and partygoers. The association between killing and migrant workers may be attributed to the inherent negative perception of migrant workers. This led Facebook users to think that killing and dehumanizing the infected migrant workers were acceptable. The association between killing and partygoers may be due to the perceived inappropriateness of partying during the pandemic. Facebook users felt justified in calling for the killing and dehumanizing of the partygoers.

Legal punishment was recommended by Facebook users for the infected "troublemakers" who gambled and ignored hygienic practices. The suggestion may have originated from the idea that Facebook users viewed this group as troublemakers and wrongdoers for engaging in these activities; thus, the punishment should be applied to make them realize that what they were doing was wrong.

Deportation was associated with migrant workers, based on the expectation that ridding the country of migrant workers would alleviate the cluster infection. Facebook users suggested deporting them, as it was an effective legal method. Apathy was associated with a deceased partygoer. This may be due to a combination of Facebook users' attitudes concerning the immorality of partying and a belief in karmic punishment for partying, indicating that they thought the partygoer deserved to die.

7. The Concomitance of Hostility and Satisfaction as a Distinctive Characteristic of Facebook Users During Covid-19 Cluster Infections

Prima facie, based on the literal meaning of the words connoting violence, Facebook users appeared openly hostile towards these troublemakers; their use of violent language indicated that they were provoked by the infected individuals and wished for violent acts to be carried out against them. However, at a deeper level, using the ATTITUDE system in Appraisal Theory and with contextual consideration, the analysis in this study, based on semantic resources conveying attitudinal meaning, reveals that Facebook users expressed a sense of satisfaction in making such suggestions. This satisfaction stemmed from their preconceived beliefs that the infected individuals should be expelled from society in order to alleviate the worsening cluster infection in Thailand. Consequently, they justified violent acts against those infected, as doing so allowed them to feel vindicated in believing that these "troublemakers" deserved to be eliminated from society.

The concomitant expressions of hostility and satisfaction to justify violence against those in the infected group are a distinguishing characteristic of Facebook users. They established criteria by which to express their feelings based on the details about the Covid-19 sufferers in the cluster. That is, the infected people in the cluster had to fit the "troublemaker" identity and therefore be eliminated.

Echoing Humprecht et al. (2020), this study found that infected groups featured in the news were regarded as "non-conforming" due to their alleged violation of quarantine guidelines, which led to victimization through hostile comments. The infected groups who were deemed to belong to an "out-group" (i.e., infected migrant workers) were verbally abused with threats of killing and deportation.

Conclusion

In summary, the concomitant expressions of hostility and satisfaction in Facebook comments directed at infected people in the Covid-19 cluster infections in Thailand are based on the subjective perspectives of Facebook users toward those infected. These expressions were realized through nominal and verbal groups, with nouns and verbs used to convey authority and justify violence against the infected "troublemakers". The justification of

violence is based on the wish to get rid of the troublemakers to alleviate the severity of the then-Covid-19 situation in Thailand. Perceptions toward each type of troublemaker resulted in different forms of violence. The results reflect the dissatisfaction with the quarantine violators (Chinsuwatay, 2021), and the veiled satisfaction found in this study corresponds to the concept of incitement (Culpeper, 2021).

Linguistically, this study has shown that the AFFECT system in ATTITUDE can be a tool for a deeper analysis of online verbal attacks, as it involves contexts beyond the mere circulation of hostile language. This study has demonstrated the subjective nature of these Facebook comments, and it is hoped that it has contributed to raising awareness among Facebook users about the justification of violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. Social media users should be aware of the danger of violence circulating on social networks. However, there should be a multimodal study to examine the interface between evaluative language and the pictorial representation of Facebook comment features, which this study did not analyze due to its singular focus on language forms.

The concomitance of hostility and satisfaction that found justification and gave rise to violent comments may be attributed to the fact that Covid-19 was a global pandemic that directly affected members of society. This made prevention a universal theme that almost everyone supported, meaning that particular groups who did not comply were denounced and threatened. This study represents an empirical study based on naturally occurring texts from a Thai social media platform. However, how sufferers of other diseases are evaluated in online comments has not yet been explored. It is suggested that subsequent studies should focus on other health crises among communities such as sex workers, the LGBTQ+ community, and low-income people. Determining how online users evaluate and respond to such groups suffering health crises would greatly enhance our understanding of how social media is used as a conduit for expressing feelings, attitudes, and opinions toward the marginalized and afflicted.

This study illustrates the use of hostile language to incite violence against a particular group; thus, it is hoped that the findings will be useful for stakeholders, such as educators, social media platforms, and policymakers, in formulating actionable measures to mitigate negative online behavior.

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