The Role of Social Media in Political Advertising:
An Exploratory Investigation of the Bangkok Governor's Election

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Abstract

The utilization of both traditional media (e.g. television advertising, posters) and new media (e.g. online social media, websites) plays a major role in decision making process of voters. The survey questionnaires were distributed among Bangkokians in different areas to find out how they used media during the Bangkok governor campaigns in 2013. Contrary to the increasing use of social media in the society, it turned out that the voters still relied on the traditional media such as television to make decision on voting. For the upcoming election campaigns in Thailand, the campaigners should creatively communicate via new media to target younger generation. Nevertheless, the traditional ways of persuading are still necessary to gain votes.

KEYWORDS: Election compaign, Political marketing, Bangkok governors, Thai voters

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Introduction

Bangkok election has been viewed as particular and different from the rest of Thailand. The nature of voters, the campaign styles and the candidate selection are viewed from the urban middle class's perspectives (Laothamatas, 1996). The perception of Bangkok residents and political communication can be considered different from those living in rural areas where the old-style election campaign still works to win the votes. In the tenth election for the governorship of Bangkok in 2013, the dynamics of election campaigns and candidate contest have created riveting ways of political persuasion particularly the innovative ways of media utilization including mobile phone device applications and LED screen projectors.

In the past, Thai political campaigns relied on vote canvasser who would persuade the voters whom to vote for (Chanttharakul, 2010). However, the middle-class voters cannot easily be convinced by this approach and they tend to rely more on the information of candidates' duty and national affairs. Thus, the election campaign aimed at winning the votes has become more complex in urban area.

The tenth election for the governorship of Bangkok in 2013 was won by the incumbent governor, MR Sukhumphand Paribatra from the Democrat Party. Despite his traditional ways of running an election campaign with billboards, public speeches and roadshows, the current governor employed several new media including social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram which could gain a high number of followers. Interestingly, the other major contender, Pol. Gen. Pongsapat Pongcharoen, representing the Pheu Thai Party, also used similar media which could attract a large number of followers as well. Still, the police general lost the election. This has raised a question of how effective social media was during the election.

This article will start with how media are utilized in election campaign in Thailand from the early years of democracy. The review of media used by the Bangkok governor election candidates is also included. The results of surveys on Bangkok voters and their utilization of communication devices together with their decision making process will be reported. The the importance of traditional media and upcoming general election in Thailand is discussed at the final part of the article.

The Development of Election Media Utilization in Thailand

Thailand has reformed its government system from an absolute monarchy to a democracy in 1932. The first election in 1934 was considered an indirect election, as the citizens would choose the representatives to cast votes in the parliament. In 1937, the first direct election was conducted with the emergence of various types of campaign media.

Personal media were the most popular techniques used in the beginning of election. This includes face-to-face communication, door-to-door campaigns and opinion leaders. The use of mass media was not widely utilized during the first period of election because the cost was very high compared to he face-to-face communication (Timmaung, 1998). The candidates preferred to communicate face-to-face with the voters. The door-to-door campaigns reinforced the modest value and could convince the voters to appreciate and respect the candidates. Psychologically, this method of knocking on voters' door could be more effective than campaign with billboards and flyers (Sangpitak, 1992). In the early days, the voters were less interested in political policy, but they voted for candidates' qualification and competency. It was likely that the voters would vote for those who granted personal favors or were part of their relatives (Sangpitak, 1992).

The mass media became more influential after the revolution by citizens and students in October 1973. After the military dictatorship had withdrawn its power, the freedom of expression was promoted in mass media. During this second period of Thai election, the

advertising via mass was widely used particularly in Bangkok, as more than 95% of voters could access to these channels. Printed media including flyers and newspaper became the most popular channels for candidates to communicate to the voters (Timmaung, 1998).

Newspaper was highly used to build positive image for the candidates directly or indirectly in paid advertising space and free editorial columns. Several techniques were employed to convince the readers such as articles to discuss the candidates' policies, cartoons, and daily news updates. Thus, there were attempts to gain media space by publicity both positively or negatively covered. To persuade voters, sometimes it was more attractive to talk about the party with reliable and long history, as well as the highly qualified candidates who could gain attention and votes (Sotanasathien, 1991).

Television and radio have become more popular after another crucial citizens' demonstration in May 1992. The government has granted the broadcast time for political parties in two formats which are 30-second advertisement and 10-minute show. The parties could produce the shows by themselves or hire the advertising agencies to be in charge of the production. In this era of mass media prosperity, political parties strategically used different channels to gain votes and the political marketing became systematically accepted in election campaign (Timmaung, 1998).

In Bangkok, there are several media that political parties use in election campaigns. They can be categorized into three major groups: 1) printed media, 2) special media and 3) electronic media (Worapan et al., 1993). The printed media range from an individual reach such as brochure, pamphlet to a mass distribution such as newspaper announcement and poster. The special media include the roadshow, t-shirt, house visit and public speech. The electronic media refer to radio and television. Thai political parties employ all three categories of these media to publicize and encourage voters to support them in a hope for the synergistic effect.

Personalization of a candidate's individual leadership style was central to the political marketing campaign. The tactic was initiatively employed by Thaksin Shinawatra for his national election campaign in 2001 and 2005 and resulted in his nationwide landslide victory. His political marketing is salient; yet its impact can be considered as more marginal because not all voters are convinced by this method. Still, the political marketing has to work vis-á-vis with Thai old-style local vote-canvasser networks to achieve the votes.

The utilization of advertising agency to create an election campaign, especially for Bangkok governor election, has been in use since 1989. In that year, Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang who was supported by the business sectors hired an advertising agency to plan a campaign for him. The result was a major success with 480,000 voters which account for the highest number compared to the previous local elections in Bangkok. The advertising agency built his image with honest, credible and religious personality. In the following Bangkok governor's election, Capt. Kritsada Arunwong na Ayutthaya also won the election with the same image strategy being portrayed as a sincere and capable candidate. This can signify the beginning of advertising agencies in political realm and how their role has expanded to the national election afterwards.

Given the hefty budget needed to run an advertising campaign for election, the political advertisement has become more complex and creative in persuading voters. Candidates spend a huge amount to buy mass media including television time, poster and billboard production, and out-of-home media.

The advertising approach in political campaign views voters as consumers. The commercials are designed to build good attitude in hopes of change in behavior. The persuasive technique from advertising perspective, therefore, aims to change behavior or lead the voters to vote rather than informing them. As a result, only half truth is presented to win the votes (Sotanasatien, 1999). Even though an advertising campaign can influence the exposure level

of voters, it cannot guarantee a good quality of content in terms of truth and credibility. From the advertising agency's perspective, the production of election campaign is based on half-truth concept which is similar to any typical product advertisements.

The result showed that political advertising had moderate influence on voters who agreed that it was necessary to consider advertising of each party before making any decision (Chayangkura, 1998). Moreover, the Bangkok voters revealed that they were neutral toward the statement "political advertising can change your decision". Yet, they did not vote for the candidates whose advertising attracted voters more. On the other hand, the image of candidates plays an important role in the voters' decision making. It is found that image was more important than the issue. Thus, the voters tend to rely on the individual image rather than the party's policy in order to make their decision. The most influential campaign media include speech on television, public speech and political advertising on television.

The voters are simply categorized into three groups: 1) closed, 2) open, and 3) semi-closed, semi-open categories (Chanttharakul, 2010). Bangkok voters are identified as open house, as part of urban middle class who expect MPs to concentrate on legislative duties and national affairs rather than the delivery of pork-barrel benefits. Thus, the election campaigns of political parties via mass media and television were the most influential methods to win votes in this "closed house" category. Vote-buying can hardly convince this particular group to vote. Another way to identify the voters is based on whether those neighborhoods are "ours", "theirs" or "undecided". In Bangkok, there are 50 districts with prediction of more than 50% supporting the Democrat Party.

Candidates' Media Utilization in Bangkok Governor Election Campaign in 2013

In March 2013, election for Bangkok Government took place with twenty-five candidates. MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra (number 16) of the Democrat Party won the election over his major contender, Police General Pongsapat Pongcharoen (number 9) from the Pheu Thai Party. There were also two other interesting candidates who gained the votes in the third and fourth places. Receiving votes at the third place was Police General Seripisut Temiyavet (number 11), the former Commissioner-General of the Royal Thai Police and anti-corruption activist. The fourth position was Suharit Siamwala (number 17), a DJ, music artist and business executive who was popular among younger generation. The number of voters turning out is 2,715,640 from the total of 4,244,465 registered voters.

Table 1: The Voting Results from the Top Four Candidates

Candidates' Numbers	Candidates' Names	Votes
16	MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra	1,256,349 (47.75% of vote cast)
9	Police General Pongsapat Pongcharoen	1,077,899 (40.97% of vote cast)
11	Police General Sereepisuth Temeeyaves	166,582
17	Suharit Siamwala	78,825

MR Sukhumbhand, 60, is a core member of the opposition Democrat Party who campaigned for re-election on the slogan "Love Bangkok, make Bangkok a metropolis for all." He previously served as the deputy minister of foreign affairs from 1997-

2001 and was elected the 15th Bangkok governor in 2009.

Pol. Gen. Pongsapat, 57, a Pheu Thai Party member, served as the deputy police chief and secretary-general of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board before

resigning to run for the Bangkok governor. His campaign slogan "working with the government seamlessly" suggested that he planned to zero in on what he saw as MR Sukhumbhand's failure to work closely with the Pheu Thai-led administration.

Pol. Gen. Sereepisuth Temeeyaves, 64, was a former national police chief. He was the national police chief under the late Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej and was removed from his position to open way for his successor. Pol. Gen. Sereepisuth asked the people to help change Bangkok together and bring eternal happiness to its people.

Mr. Suharit, 46, was a singer, musician and a well-known disc jockey for Fat Radio 104.5 FM. He is also a managing director of DHA Siamwalla Ltd which is his family business, distributing stationary supplies under the Elephant brand. He launched his campaign via social media in August year before the election. His slogan was "Superb Bangkok, surprising Bangkok with Suharit."

All major candidates applied Facebook as their main social media (see Table 2 for a summary of all social media usage by the four major candidates). All of them posted not only the statuses, but also included the photos and videos. The highest number of 'likes' belonged to Pol. Gen. Sereepisuth Temeeyaves (238,138). The highest number for talking about this is MR Sukhumbhand (146,294). This latter won the highest votes while the former received the third place.

All of the candidates also had their own YouTube channels. Only one of them, Mr. Suharit, had activated his channel long before the election back in 2007. He used his channel for music purpose, but during the election, he turned it into the channel of political campaigns. The other three candidates just started the channels in 2013. Thus, the highest video uploads and views belonged to Mr. Suharit, as he had opened this channel ahead of other candidates.

Only MR Sukhumbhand provided Google+ and Mobile Application but each of the candidates used Twitter. The highest number of followers belonged to MR Sukhumbhand (115,328). The second highest number of followers was those of Pol. Gen. Pongsapat who had the highest number of tweets compared to others. While all candidates used Instagram to pose photos and messages, the highest number of followers and photos belonged to Mr. Suharit. Each candidate had their own web links where they gathered the campaign materials as well as providing news sources for their campaigns. Only Pol. Gen. Sereepisuth Temeeyaves employed Augmented Reality (AR) technology in his election campaign.

Most of the interviewees preferred Twitter, as it was fast and provided a space for dialogue. They preferred using it to argue or make comments on several issues. Facebook, however, has also been seen as a useful gate for information distribution. This channel provides technology that can collect messages, photos and videos, as well as having a room for exchanging opinions. However, as for Facebook, when compared to Twitter, most interviewees commented that Twitter was faster in sending the messages out. People also use Twitter for political information, while Facebook is likely to be used for personal outlet.

They all agreed that social media were new to this Bangkok governor election compared to the one held 4 years ago. During that time, social media were not as popular as they were in 2013. Despite the low budget used for social media, most candidates except one still had to hire a team to handle the online media.

Social media are convenient and attractive. However, most of candidates said these channels were not able determine the voter's choices. The numbers of likes, followers, or subscribers did not correlate positively with voting numbers. "Anyone from anywhere can click like. They may not be Bangkok residents who can vote," said one of the interviewees. Moreover, those who were exposed to the candidate's social media may be younger generation who were not eligible to vote. These people

can even include those Thais living overseas, but would like to have updates with the election. Most candidates agreed that social media were fast and cheap, but could not assist in predicting the votes. What they could do for this election was offering alternative ways to communicate. The voters still relied on face-to-face communication such as roadshow and community visit to help them make a decision.

Table 2: Summary of Social Media Utilized by the Four Major Candidates

Cand. Number	Facebook	YouTube	Google+	Twitter	Instagram	web link
9	Likes: 129,888, Talking about this: 64,125	Pongsapatbkk Channel Subscribers: 2,064 Video uploads: 43 Views: 479,077 First Activated: Jan 13, 2013	No	Username: Pongsapatbkk Tweets: 756 Followers: 5,012	Username: pongsapatbkk Photos: 88 Followers: 1,734	www.pongsapatbkk.com
11	Likes: 238,138, Talking about this: 38,154	Sereepisuth11 Channel Subscribers: 14 Videouploads: 9 Views: 6,100 First Activated: Jan31, 2013	No	Username: Sereepisuth Tweets: 196 Followers: 1,745	Username: Sereepisuth Photos: 192 Followers: 258	www.sereepisuth.com
16	Likes: 158,769, Talking about this: 146,294	SukhumbhandParibatra Subscribers: 346 Video uploads: 41 Views:174,067 First Activated: Jan, 11 2013	45 circles 79 followers	Username: sukhumbhandp Tweets: 6,312 Followers: 115,328	Username: sukhumbhandp Photos: 312 Followers: 1,328	www.sukhumbhand. com/
17	Likes: 128,871, Talking about this: 69,492	SuharitSiamwalla Subscribers: 5,797 Video uploads: 51 Views: 2,566,067 Activated Jan 14, 2007	No	Username: SuharitTweets: 36,711 Followers: 76,110	Username: Suharit Photos: 522 Followers: 10k	http://www.suharit.com

The above information focuses on the utilization of media by the Bangkok governor election major candidates. The media record and candidates' interview revealed how election campaigns are communicated through different channels. The candidates' insights demonstrated their preferences on social media, even though the votes did not support that the use of online media influenced number of vote. Therefore, to understand the whole dynamics of election campaign communication, it is also important to unfold how voters used media to gain information and help them make voting decision. The next section is the survey research conducted in Bangkok to explore the media exposure and voting decision of the Bangkokians.

Methodology

The questionnaires were distributed to 400 respondents who were legitimate voters in Bangkok. The survey was conducted in twelve groups of districts with 7-9% of the samples from each district. The questions can be divided into three main parts: demographic profile, media utilization and voting decision. The descriptive analysis and inferential analysis will be reported in the following section.

Bangkok Voters and Media Utilization

The respondents were required to complete the screening question to ensure that they were legitimate voters and have voted for Governor in the previous election. 58.9% of them were female while 41.1% were male. The majority of them was in the age of 26-45 years old with a bachelor's degree education (44.8%). From the statistics, it shows that most respondents (56.8%) received at least a bachelor's degree. Most of the respondents work in the business sector (64.4%) such as 48.3% work as employees in the company, 10.3% own their business and 5.8% were in freelance business. 15.3% of them were students. Only 8.8% of the samples worked in the government related sectors (6.8% are government employees and 3% were the public enterprises employees). The average income was in the range of 10,000-30,000 baht per month (52.8%). Most of respondents were single (55.1%) while 41.5% were married and only 3.3% were divorced or separated.

The respondents were asked to rate their media exposure frequency. The most frequent media first chosen to receive information for election was television (47.3%). The second choice of media was outdoor channels (66.5%) including billboards, cut-outs, and posters on the streets. The third type of media used is announcement vehicles (95.5%). However, the print media: newspaper and magazine, pamphlet and letter also played quite significant roles in the election period when combined such media together, the percentage of election media exposure among the respondents was also high (25.8%).

The media that influenced the voters' decision were television (37.8%) and outdoor media (16.5%) which were consistent with the media exposure for election with television to be ranked as the number one choice and outdoor media the second. However, when it comes to making decision for voting, the respondents preferred public stage event, for the candidates to express their vision, to the announcement vehicles which comes as number 4 media that influenced the vote in the list. Interestingly, to

influence their votes for election, the samples did not perceive new media (website and social media) as important. Only 10% of them stated that new media influence them to vote.

Consistently with the above findings, traditional media still played important roles on the election (average mean of 3.58 of scale of 5) while new media played lesser important role (average mean of 2.84). When asking the opinion of the voters about media for the election, they stated that they agree, for the highest mean (3.85), that candidate should have personal contact with the voters. The statements that gained high means were the statement about the personal contact with voters, contact via television, via outdoor media or via print media that these media should be interesting.

Utilization of Traditional and New Media among Voters in Bangkok

There were significant differences of opinion when compared within demographic profiles namely gender, age, educational level, occupation, income, and marital status.

As for gender, males tended to agree that traditional media were interesting and credible when compared with females. In details, males found print media and radio more interesting media while woman found them significantly interesting.

There are significant differences in opinion on new media among groups of districts. The Srinakarin group (residential area) seemed to agree less that new media was interesting or instant when compared with 7 other districts. (For this section, Scheffe was used as the post hoc analysis).

There were significant differences among ages in opinion about new media. The 56 or older group seemed to be outstanding for this section as they seemed to agree less than younger ages that new media was interesting or instant.

For traditional media, there were significant differences among age groups in these three topics: candidates'

meeting with the voters was interesting, candidates' interview on radio was interesting, and television broadcasting of the candidates' debates was intriguing. In details, was is found that the older the respondents were, the more important they thought that candidates' meeting with the voters was interesting. The respondents whose ages were between 46-55 years old though tthat candidates' interview on radio were interesting when compared with those of younger ages. The respondents whose ages were between 18-25 years old agreed less that television broadcasting of the candidates' debates was intriguing when compared with those who were 36 and above.

Regarding new media, there were significant differences among age groups in all topics except for the Line application. The oldest age range of 56 and above agreed less that websites were interesting compared to those with younger ages. Respondents with the age of 46-55 agreed less that candidates' Facebook was instant when compared with those with the aged of 18-35. For the oldest age of 56 and above, they also agreed less that candidates' Facebook was instant when compared with those with the age of 18-45. The oldest age range of 56 and above seemed to agree less that candidates' Twitter was instant compared to those with younger ages. The oldest age group of 56 and above agreed less that candidates' Instagram was interesting when compared with those with the aged of 18-45. For the oldest age of 56 and above, they agreed less that candidates' Youtube was interesting when compared with those with the age of 18-45. Samples with the age of 46-55 also agreed less that candidates' Youtube was interesting when compared with those with the age of 18-25 years old.

In sum for age difference, the older they were, the more they felt that these traditional media were interesting and intriguing. On the contrary, the older they were, the less they felt that new media were interesting or instant. Younger ages seemed to be more interested in and more familiar with new media.

In the same vein, education levels seemed to have a vital role in opinion on both traditional and new media. There was a significant difference when considering these 3 topics: the announcement vehicles helped drawing interest to the election, candidates' interview via television programs was interesting and candidates' Facebook was instant. To elaborate, those with a master's degree or higher seemed to agree less than those who acquired the lower degree level that the announcement vehicles helped draw interest to the election. However, with the exception of those with a diploma degree or higher vocational degree, there seemed to be no significant differences in opinion when compared with those who had a master's degree or higher. The respondents with an elementary degree to vocational degree seemed to agree less that candidates' interview via television programs was interesting when compared with those with a bachelor's degree and higher. The samples with a bachelor's degree seemed to agree more that candidates' Facebook was instant when compared with those with elementary to vocational degree.

Moreover, there were significant differences between occupations in opinion on new media. Those with no occupation (unemployed, housewives, retired) seemed to agree less that new media was interesting or instant compared to other respondents with occupations, except for those who worked as freelancers.

For traditional media, there were significant differences between occupations in these two topics: announcement vehicle was interesting, and interviewing via LED outdoor ad was interesting. The results showed that employees of private companies agreed less on announcement vehicle as being interesting when compared with the unemployed and government employees.

On the topic of interviewing via LED outdoor ad was interesting, business owners agreed more that the ad was interesting when compared with the unemployed, public enterprise employees and private company employees. Furthermore, freelancers also agreed more

that the ad was interesting when compared with the unemployed and public enterprise employees.

For new media, there were significant differences between occupations in all topics except for the Line application. The unemployed seemed to agree less that websites were interesting, that candidates' Facebook was instant and that candidates' Twitter was instant compared to all other occupations, except only freelancers. Respondents with unemployed status agreed less that candidates' Instagram was interesting when compared with all other occupations.

For 'candidates' Youtube was interesting' topic, university students agreed more when compared with all other occupations, except only public enterprise employees. In contrast to the Youtube topic, the unemployed agreed less that candidates' Youtube was interesting when compared with all other occupations, except only freelancers. It can be said that the unemployed agreed less that new media were interesting or instant compared to those with other occupations.

Income level seems to be significantly different when considered these 2 topics: the announcement vehicles helps to draw interest to the election, and television broadcasting of the candidates' debates is intriguing. In details, for both topics, those with the highest incomes of 40,001 Baht per month and above seem to agree less that the announcement vehicles helping to draw interest to the election and that television broadcasting of the candidates' debates is intriguing, when compared with those who have the lower income which is between 5,000-30,000 Baht per month. Furthermore, those with the income between 10,001-20,000 Baht seem to agree more when compared with those with the income higher than 30,000 Baht that the announcement vehicles help to draw interest to the election.

In terms of traditional media, there are significant differences between marital statuses in the two topics related to candidates' meeting with the voters: candidates' meeting with the voters is credible and candidates' meet-ing with the voters was interesting. It turned out that those with married status agree more with candidates' meeting with the voters to be credible and interesting. For new media, there were significant differences between marital statuses in the two topics, candidates' Facebook was instant and candidates' Instagram is interesting. The single samples agreed more that candidates' Facebook was instant and candidates' Instagram was interesting when compared with those who were married.

Discussion

Various media were utilized during the Bangkok Governor's election including both traditional campaign media and digital channels. However, results showed that the voters in Bangkok still preferred traditional media including television, outdoor advertising along with announcement vehicles to gain election information and to make voting decision. Despite the increasing use of online media, the voters' attitude toward social media especially among older generation is not rated high. The differences in demographic profile have significant relationship with the utilization of traditional and new media.

From the early days of democracy, voters relied heavily on personal communication of candidates to influence their voting decision (Sotanasathien, 1991). This has not changed much in today democracy where people prefer using media to gain more information of the candidates personally. Bangkok voters used television to receive election information. This may be due to the perception on television broadcast as a reliable source under regulations (Timmaung. 1998). Interestingly, announcement vehicles that can be considered an old-fashion campaign tactics can still draw attention from voters and have a certain influence on their decision making.

The generation gap is a major factor differentiating the choice of media as well as their attitudes on media use for election campaign. The older generation is more predictable with the way they use media and think

about media, unlike the younger generation who is becoming the majority of voters in the future. It is important to understand not only how they use media, but also what type of content that can persuade them to vote. Moreover, education and employment are other factors differentiating media exposure. It may be more useful to identify why all these factors lead to different choice of media and choice of votes. Other external factors can also be studied to understand Thai people's voting decision. This should help to either confirm or deny the same old beliefs about vote buying and other Thai traditional ways of communication during election.

More research can be conducted to examine the wider range of voters including those in other provinces or even those residing outside Thailand. Moreover, next general election will take place sometime soon. This, ideally, will take place after country's reform by the military. More studies can be done to explore how people use media to gain information nationwide and what content they express or exchange particularly on digital platforms where regulations are less restricted. Moreover, the campaign tactics and tools can be examined to see how political marketing strategy is employed to persuade

voters. The comparison work can also be done among members of ASEAN countries who are considered as young democratic societies such as Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos respectively.

Thailand is a democratic society by the constitution. Despite the intervention of the military from time to time, the democratic ways should be encouraged to respect people's voices. The election is one of the important tools to strengthen people's power. Ideally, voting for a suitable and qualified candidate is one way to achieve this goal. One of the methods to help the voters to know the candidates can be conducted through the effective utilization of media in the election campaign. Even though this research only focused on Bangkok election and how people used media to help them make voting decision, it helps to put a spotlight on one province out of 77 provinces. More lights should be encouraged to improve the ways to help the candidate communicate with the voters in efficient manners so that the votes would be able to learn and select the right representative. As a result, this should also brighten the way to become stronger democratic country with qualified advocates as hoped by many citizens in this Land of Smile.

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