Social Media vs Traditional Spatial Strategy: Analyzing Political Event Spatial Strategies with Mobilization Consequences through the Case of Thai Politics

Puttaporn Areeprachakun*

Centre of Excellence in Geography and Geoinformatics, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Article Info

บทคัดย่อ

Traditionally, resistance has found its footing in physical spaces, often bolstered by the power of media and social media. However, relying solely on these physical arenas comes with significant drawbacks. Not only is it easier for authorities to exert control over tangible gatherings, but these spaces can also lead to unforeseen repercussions. This limitation became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where in-person protests were largely curtailed. As a result, there is a pressing need to shift from conventional spatial strategies to dynamic social media tactics. This transformation has sparked intriguing questions about how spatial strategies interact with political outcomes. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between spatial strategies—both physical and digital—and their political consequences, using Thailand's political movements from 2005 to 2021 as case studies. Drawing on statistical and historical data, the study uncovers three key insights: First, there is a clear connection between spatial strategies used during events and their political consequences, proved by Fisher's exact test. Second, social media movements have a greater potential to drive policy-level changes than traditional methods, though they may struggle to instigate shifts at the political level. Interestingly, a hybrid approach that combines physical presence with social media seems to maximize the potential for significant political change. Lastly, this study finds that social media usage tends to mitigate the risk of unintended negative outcomes. Ultimately, it argues that social media serves as a powerful platform for mobilizing efforts aimed at achieving meaningful policy change without adverse repercussions.

1. Unpacking Resistance: From Physical Spaces to Social Media

Resistance embodies diverse actions, from striking and protesting to forming social movements—all centred around the refusal to comply with established norms or laws. At its core, resistance can be understood as both an individual and collective response to structures of domination, often emerging from perceived injustices and driven by the pursuit of change (Sharp et al., 2000). It manifests through everyday acts as well as organized political movements, with varying degrees of visibility, coordination, and impact. In the realm of human geography, resistance often carries potent political implications (Roger et al., 2013, p. 350). Traditionally, many forms of resistance unfolded in tangible physical spaces, sometimes supplemented by media or social media. Today, social media has become a vital tool in organizing protests within these physical realms, creating a dynamic interplay of power and social relations (Staeheli, 1994, p. 387). This evolving landscape has transformed spaces into arenas of contestation, where inequality is challenged.

However, the limitations of traditional spatial strategies have become evident, especially during the global upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. Lockdowns and social distancing measures forced activists to pivot from in-person demonstrations to virtual mobilizations, reshaping the landscape of resistance. This shift raised intriguing questions about how different spatial strategies influence political outcomes. While recent literature has examined the connections between movements' organizational structures and their consequences (Amenta et al., 2010; Andrews, 2004; King et al., 2005), there remains a scarcity of studies analyzing how spatial strategies themselves impact these outcomes.

To address this gap, the objective of this paper is to examine how different spatial strategies—both physical and digital—affect the political outcomes of resistance movements, with a focus on case studies from Thailand between 2005 and 2021. In this paper, I propose a framework for understanding the "space of resistance" as a cohesive entity that includes both traditional and social media-driven mobilization. When discussing the "traditional space of resistance," I refer to physical gatherings that utilize media to coordinate activities. In contrast, the "social media space of resistance" encompasses political actions that occur entirely online, with little to no physical component.

The political landscape in Thailand from 2005 to 2021 offers rich case studies for examining the interplay between spatial strategies and political consequences. During this period, various protest groups—most notably the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), and Free

Youth—mobilized to advocate for democracy, each employing distinct strategies that evolved, particularly during the pandemic. The outcomes of these movements varied widely, ranging from minimal impact to significant political change.

This paper begins by exploring theoretical frameworks surrounding political space, followed by a review of research on both traditional and digital forms of resistance and their outcomes. The methodology section outlines the research design, leading to an analysis of the findings. Ultimately, I argue for a significant relationship between the spatial strategies employed in political events and their resulting consequences.

Preliminary findings suggest that traditional spatial strategies primarily yield individual or group-level changes, occasionally sparking broader political transformations. Conversely, social media strategies have shown potential for effecting policy-level changes but have been less effective in driving substantial political shifts. This indicates that while social media can mobilize individuals for policy reform, traditional spatial strategies remain crucial for achieving significant political goals, such as parliamentary dissolution or reelections.

In an age where both physical and virtual spaces intersect, understanding these dynamics is essential for grasping the future of political resistance and mobilization.

2. Space and Social Media

Technological advancements and global shifts have transformed the concept of space. This paper explores two major changes. First, space is not merely physical and static but shaped by processes and social interactions, akin to Massey's notion of place (1999, 2005). Media and social media function as spaces where interactions and practices coexist.

Second, space is inherently political, a perspective long overlooked. Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey argue that "space is political" in two ways: as a socially constructed entity governed by political rules (Lefebvre, 1991) and as a site of contestation and resistance (Dikeç, 2005; Rancière, 1999; Rancière et al., 2001). Rancière distinguishes between the "police," which maintains order, and "politics," which disrupts it. Political space emerges when the established order is challenged.

Space is neither singular nor static; it encompasses physical and non-physical sites governed by social rules. Disruptions within these spaces can transform them into what Rancière calls "political space" or what I term a "space of resistance."

3. Social Media as a Space of Resistance

Research on resistance has explored both physical spaces and social media, revealing three key trends in physical sites. First, scholars highlight the role of physical spaces in social mobilization, with parks and streets serving as strategic protest sites (Arora, 2015, p. 56).

Second, strategies within these spaces shape movements. Static symbols (balloons, flags) and dynamic elements (protesters, activists) foster solidarity (Cayli, 2017, p. 62). Shared experiences in physical spaces build a collective identity and long-term cohesion (Daphi, 2017, p. 41; Ozduzen, 2019, p. 42).

Third, police employ various control tactics. Responses range from negotiation to repression (Gillham, 2011, p. 637; Noakes et al., 2005, p. 236), with recent shifts toward softer strategies (Zajko & Béland, 2008, pp. 731-732).

Media and social media have become vital protest arenas. Some studies examine their integration with physical protests (Valenzuela et al., 2012, pp. 302-303), while others explore their role in mobilization (Boulianne et al., 2020, p. 642; Breuer, 2012, p. 2; Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015, p. 866). Social media amplifies protests by increasing visibility and reach, dismantling barriers, and fostering collective identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 747; Breuer, 2012, p. 1).

However, its effectiveness is debated. Some argue it fails to drive political action (Tusa, 2013; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013, p. 115) and facilitates government surveillance (Jost et al., 2018, p. 111) or dissent suppression (Neumayer & Rossi, 2018, p. 4293). Despite this, social media contributes to a more engaged public sphere (Hari, 2014, p. 33) and enhances political communication (Scott & Street, 2000, p. 215).

While social media aids mobilization, research remains focused on offline activism. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of spatial strategies, warranting further exploration.

The convergence of space, resistance, social media, and protest reveals a dynamic interplay that reshapes how political action is organized, experienced, and contested. Space is not merely a passive backdrop for resistance but an active medium through which power is exercised and challenged. In this sense, both physical and digital spaces serve as arenas for protest, where actors negotiate visibility, control, and legitimacy. Physical spaces such as streets, plazas, and public buildings retain symbolic and strategic importance for asserting collective presence. Meanwhile, social media platforms function as parallel spaces of resistance, allowing activists to construct narratives, coordinate actions, and amplify dissent beyond geographic constraints.

These spaces are co-constitutive protests on the ground which are increasingly supported by online mobilization, and online actions can catalyze or substitute for physical gatherings, especially under restrictive conditions such as authoritarian suppression or pandemic lockdowns. Thus, understanding protest today requires analyzing how spatial strategies—whether physical, digital, or hybrid—are deliberately employed to resist dominant power structures, mobilize participants, and influence political outcomes.

4. Identifying the Protests' Consequences

Previous literature has widely discussed the consequences of political movements, which can be divided into four main consequences: individual-level and group-level change, policy-level change, politics-level change, and negative consequences. First, individual-level change refers to the construction of effective collective actors (Uluğ & Acar, 2018, p. 45; Vestergren et al., 2016, p. 204). Political movements can change participants' grievances into a collective feeling; and this feeling will motivate more engagement in further movements (Uluğ & Acar, 2018, p. 46). Moreover, the movements can raise awareness among non-participants. Consequently, it might lead to a motivation of non-participants to become involved in further movements. Furthermore, individual-level change predominantly develops group-level change. The group-level change refers to the public opinion change and groups' increased visibility (Barrie, 2021, p. 930; Branton et al., 2015, p. 400). The groups of protesters might be named, and other groups or movements with a similar objective emerge. Subsequently, there might be corroboration between groups and groups' becoming more active in politics (Uluğ & Acar, 2018, p. 45). However, the movement's goals are not always to create public discussion and groups' visibility; it is focused more on policy-level change or politics-level change.
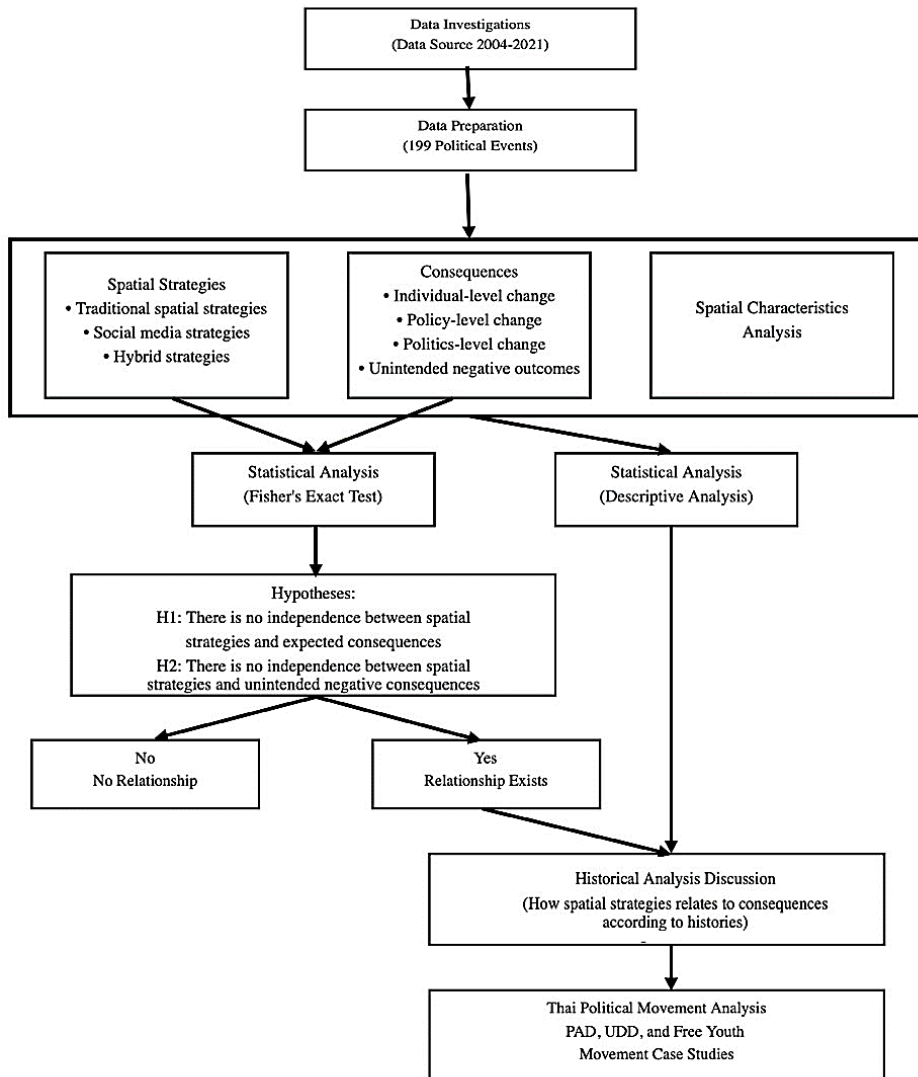
Policy-level change refers to any related policy effects (Uluğ & Acar, 2018, p. 46), such as the creation of a new policy, the change of the policy, or the cancellation of a launching policy. Politics-level change refers to the potential change in the political pole, such as electoral consequences or a coup, either intended or unintended (Mazumder, 2020). The last two consequences are more practical, and they are the protesters' expected goals. However, not every protest results in one of these consequences. Many events create unintended negative consequences (Mazumder, 2020), such as violence or demise. In addition, many events lead to both positive and negative consequences simultaneously.

5. Methodologies

To examine the relationship between space, resistance, social media, protest, and political outcomes, this study employs a mixed-method approach combining statistical analysis, qualitative content analysis, historical interpretation, and comparative case studies. Drawing from protest archives, social media data, and media reports, the research adopts a multi-scalar perspective that considers not only where and how protests occurred but also the outcomes they produced—ranging from symbolic gains to policy changes and institutional disruptions. Guided by the concept of the "space of resistance," the analysis evaluates how physical, digital, and hybrid spaces influence the effectiveness of resistance strategies. This framework supports the study's central aim: to understand how spatial strategies shape protest outcomes and how digital mobilization is transforming traditional forms of resistance.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research process begins with data collection on political events in Thailand between 2004 and 2021. A total of 199 events were compiled and categorized into three main analytical dimensions: spatial strategies, consequences, and spatial characteristics. Spatial strategies were grouped into three categories: traditional strategies (physical gatherings), social media strategies (primarily digital actions), and hybrid strategies (combined online and offline tactics). Consequences were categorized as individual-level change, policy-level change, politics-level change, or unintended negative outcomes. Spatial characteristics were analyzed separately through descriptive methods, considering locations such as public squares, monuments, academic institutions, government buildings, communication hubs, busy streets, online platforms, and others.

The primary analytical techniques include Fisher's Exact Test, used to assess two hypotheses: (H1) that spatial strategies are independent of expected consequences, and (H2) that spatial strategies are independent of unintended negative consequences. If statistical relationships are found, a historical analysis is conducted to explore how spatial strategies relate to political outcomes over time. This analysis leads into detailed case studies of key Thai political movements, including the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), and Free Youth, offering contextual insights into spatial resistance and its effectiveness.

Figure 1

Dual approach: Methodology diagram


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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │      Data Investigations        │
                    │    (Data Source 2004-2021)      │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                  │
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                    │        Data Preparation         │
                    │     (199 Political Events)      │
                    └─────────────────────────────────┘
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Spatial Strategies
• Traditional spatial strategies
• Social media strategies
• Hybrid strategies

Consequences
• Individual-level change
• Policy-level change
• Politics-level change
• Unintended negative outcomes

Spatial Characteristics Analysis

Statistical Analysis
(Fisher's Exact Test)

Statistical Analysis
(Descriptive Analysis)

Hypotheses:
H1: There is no independence between spatial strategies and expected consequences
H2: There is no independence between spatial strategies and unintended negative consequences

No
No Relationship

Yes
Relationship Exists

Historical Analysis Discussion
(How spatial strategies relates to consequences according to histories)

Thai Political Movement Analysis
PAD, UDD, and Free Youth
Movement Case Studies

5.1 Data Preparation

Data on political events in Bangkok organized by the PAD, the UDD, and the Free Youth movement between 2004 and 2021 were collected (see Figure 2). A triangulation method was employed to ensure data reliability, integrating sources such as official and independent news media, activist social media accounts, and academic publications. Social media content—including posts from Free Youth, iLawClub, Way

Magazine, and Thammasat University Alliance—was analyzed for mobilization patterns and protest announcements. These were cross-referenced with coverage from media outlets like Naewna, Thai PBS, Thairath, Matichon Weekly, Prachatai, and international sources including BBC Thai and Reuters. Scholarly analyses from journals such as Critical Asian Studies and Asian Survey, as well as works by researchers like Aim Sinpeng, provided critical context for interpreting protest events and outcomes.

Figure 2

Sample Excel Sheet Used for Data Collection

Figure 3

Sample Excel Sheet Showing the Classification of Events

Following data collection, each event was classified by criteria outlined in Figure 3. Events were coded as either traditional or social media strategies based on the dominant mode of action; hybrid events involved both digital and physical components. Consequences were categorized into political, policy, individual/group-level change, or no change, with attention to unintended outcomes. Causality was inferred through

temporal proximity, media framing, and official statements linking protests to subsequent developments.

Spatial Strategies: Events were divided into two primary groups: traditional spatial strategies and social media strategies. Traditional spatial strategies included events held in physical locations or those that combined physical presence with social media. If social media was the dominant platform, the event was categorized as a social media strategy. Conversely, if social media primarily facilitated organization, it was classified as using a traditional spatial strategy, see Table 1.

Table 1

Percentage and Number of 199 Events Classified by Spatial Strategy

Spatial strategies	Percentage	Number
Use social media spatial strategy	25.6	51
Use mixed-spatial strategy	60.8	121
Use traditional spatial strategy	13.6	27

Table 2

Fisher's exact test for spatial strategies and the protesters' expected consequence

Consequences	Percentage	Number
No change	2	4
Individual/group-level change	75	150
Policy-level change	22	44
Politics-level change	1	1

Consequences: Events were grouped based on the expected outcomes of the protesters—either politics-level change and policy-level change, or individual/group-level change and no change. Additionally, we noted the presence or absence of unintended negative consequences, see Table 2. To determine whether a consequence resulted from political mobilization, we examined temporal proximity, official statements, and media coverage that explicitly linked the event to subsequent policy decisions or political developments.

Spatial Characteristics: Events were categorized into groups such as public squares, monuments, academic institutions, government buildings, communication hubs, busy streets, online platforms, and others.

5.2 Statistical Analysis and Historical Analysis

The collected data underwent statistical analysis using Fisher's exact test to explore potential associations between spatial strategies and their consequences. This analysis was guided by two hypotheses:

5.2.1 There is no independence between spatial strategies and expected consequences.

5.2.2 There is no independence between spatial strategies and unintended negative consequences.

Following the identification of significant associations, historical analysis with descriptive statistics was combined to assess how different spatial strategies impacted political outcomes. Historical analysis involved reviewing digital records of political events from sources like online news articles and social media posts (Wyche et al., 2006, pp. 37-38). This approach allowed us to extract vital information about the PAD, UDD, and Free Youth's political activities, including their backgrounds, objectives, strategies, and consequences.

Then, historical data was analyzed alongside descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution and central measures, drawn from our initial categorization. This mixed-method approach enabled us to identify patterns in political events and their associated outcomes, ultimately revealing which spatial strategies were most effective in achieving favourable results in Thai society.

5.3 Statistical Results: Association between the Protesters' Spatial Strategies and Consequences

The Fisher's Exact Test was utilized to determine the presence of a significant association between protesters' spatial strategies and the consequences of political events. Fisher's Exact Test is a statistical method used to assess the significance of the association between two categorical variables, especially suitable for small sample sizes (McDonald, 2014). The analysis involved all 199 political events gathered from the digital platform. For the first hypothesis, testing the independence of spatial strategies and the

protesters' expected consequences, refer to Table 3 for the detailed results of the data collection and Fisher's exact test.

Table 3

Fisher's exact test for spatial strategies and the protesters' expected consequence

	Not-as-expected consequence	Expected consequence	Total	Pearson Chi-square
Traditional spatial strategy	144	4	148	X^2 = 130.82 Sig. <.001
Social media strategy	10	41	51	Exact Sig. <.001 Cramer's
Total	**154**	**45**	**199**	V Value = .811

The analysis reveals a strong and significant association between spatial strategies and protesters' expected consequences (X^2 = 130.82, p < .001, Cramer's V = .811). Traditional spatial strategies overwhelmingly failed to meet expectations, with 97.3% of cases (144 out of 148) producing not-as-expected outcomes. In contrast, social media strategies were substantially more effective, achieving expected consequences in 80.4% of cases (41 out of 51).

Additionally, Fisher's exact test indicated a significant association between spatial strategies and unintended negative consequences, as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Fisher's exact test for spatial strategies and unintended negative consequence

	No negative consequence	Negative consequence	Total	Pearson Chi-square
Traditional spatial strategy	111	37	148	X^2 = 15.66 Sig. <.001
Social media strategy	51	0	51	Exact Sig. <.001 Cramer's
Total	**162**	**37**	**199**	V Value = .281

A significant but more moderate association was found between spatial strategies and unintended negative consequences (X^2 = 15.66, p < .001, Cramer's V = .281). Traditional spatial strategies resulted in negative consequences for 25% of cases

(37 out of 148), while social media strategies completely avoided such outcomes, with zero negative consequences reported across all 51 cases. This suggests that social media-based approaches carry a substantially lower risk of producing harmful unintended effects.

To conclude, the statistical analysis reveals a relationship between the spatial strategies employed in events and the resulting political consequences. Specific spatial strategies used by protesters were associated with distinct consequences, whether expected or negative. To further understand which type of space of resistance (traditional or social media) could yield more favourable consequences and to address the question of whether a social media strategy can become the primary platform for political change, we conducted a historical and descriptive-statistical analysis in the following section.

6. Historical Analysis Discussion: Thai Protesters and Their Spatial Strategies for Political Movements

In analyzing 199 political events in Thailand, it was found that protesters predominantly employed traditional spatial strategies (74.4%) compared to social media strategies (25.6%). The outcomes of these movements varied, impacting everything from individual changes to broader political transformations.

6.1 The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)

The PAD, also known as the National Rescue Alliance or the Yellow Shirts, played a crucial role in Thailand's political landscape from 2005 to 2009. Their primary aim was to oust Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, motivated by three main concerns: the Shinawatra family's sale of shares to Temasek, perceived as a conflict of interest ("Thai PM Thaksin sells stake," 2006); allegations of corruption and the emergence of a "Thaksin monarchy" during his second term (Atipoth et al., 2006); and the monarchy's indirect disapproval of Thaksin's governance (Chartsuthichai, 2011). The Yellow Shirts' mobilization ultimately led to a military coup in 2006, halting their protests temporarily.

Following the 2007 general election, where the People Power Party—linked to Thaksin—won, the PAD regrouped in 2008. However, by 2009, Abhisit Vejjajiva's government declared a state of emergency to quell unrest from both the PAD and the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD). The political landscape shifted

again in 2011 with Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister, assuming office. In 2013, her government proposed an Amnesty Act that the PAD believed favoured Thaksin, prompting renewed protests and ultimately contributing to the military coup on May 22, 2014.

While some factions of the Yellow Shirts continue to support the current government, many have shifted their stance, opposing Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's administration and aligning with the UDD and Free Youth movements ("April 4: Former leader," 2021).

In terms of the spatial strategies of the PAD, The PAD primarily utilized traditional spatial strategies, favouring crowded public spaces, transportation hubs, and universities for their protests. Their approach involved choosing locations that were both spacious and accessible, where they could be easily recognized by non-protesters. They often returned to the same sites for mobilization, such as familiar junctions or monuments, though this repetitive use did not significantly result in policy changes. Instead, many events led to individual or group-level changes, falling short of their broader political aims.

In addition to physical spaces, the PAD leveraged media—television, radio, and print—to bolster their mobilization efforts. Approximately 45% of their events incorporated media support, enhancing visibility and public awareness. For example, during the 2006 protests against Thaksin, PAD leader Sonthi Limthongkul utilized a television channel to raise awareness, effectively rallying significant public support (Fyeted, 2019, p. 181). This heightened visibility played a crucial role in the military's decision to intervene and remove Thaksin from power.

The protests against the proposed Amnesty Act in 2013 showcased the effective interplay between physical and social media strategies. The PAD mobilized in various public spaces while simultaneously engaging audiences online, which helped to galvanize opposition to the Act and maintain public focus on Yingluck's administration. Despite the eventual withdrawal of the Amnesty Act, the protests continued, culminating in the declaration of martial law by General Prayut on May 20, 2014, in response to widespread unrest ("Timeline on 20-22 May," 2014).

The impacts of PAD events ranged widely, with only three out of 33 analyzed events achieving notable political or policy-level consequences. Key successes included the ousting of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006 and the halting of the Amnesty Act in 2013. These outcomes were significant for their effective use of both physical and social media

spaces. While traditional venues remained the primary sites for protest, social media emerged as a vital tool to amplify messages and foster broader engagement.

Overall, the analysis indicates that the effectiveness of the PAD's spatial strategies was heightened when social media complemented traditional mobilization efforts, suggesting a dynamic interplay between physical and digital realms in contemporary political movements.

6.2 UDD And Their Space of Resistance

In the wake of the 2006 coup, the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), previously known as the Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (DAAD), emerged as a political activist group aligned with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ("DAAD has changed to UDD, escalating the fight", 2007). The UDD's objectives shifted in response to the political landscape: initially focused on opposing the coup and expelling Surayut Chulanont from the premiership, their movement paused after the People Power Party, often referred to as the "Thaksin Party," won the election in December 2007 (Prommachart, 2019, p. 2).

From 2008 to 2009, the UDD resumed mobilization to challenge the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva, which culminated in the declaration of a state of emergency and military intervention against the protesters (Prommachart, 2019, p. 7; Yun, 2009). After a period of sporadic gatherings, the UDD faced another significant setback with the 2014 military coup, which aimed to dismantle political networks associated with Thaksin ("Why is Thailand under military rule?" 2014). In the aftermath, the UDD adopted a clear ideology centred on promoting democracy and opposing dictatorship (Prommachart, 2019, p. 5), becoming a vital participant in various movements, including student-led protests (Treesuwan, 2021).

In terms of the spatial strategies of the UDD, like the PAD, the UDD primarily utilized traditional spatial strategies, holding events in junctions, streets, government buildings, monuments, and parks. They favoured recurring, spacious, and densely populated areas for mobilization. However, in contrast to the PAD, social media played a relatively minor role for the UDD, with only 44% of events utilizing these platforms. For the UDD, social media served mainly to disseminate news and information and to share the protesters' perspectives, enhancing public awareness but achieving minimal impact on policy-level and politics-level changes.

As a result, the consequences of UDD protests predominantly reflected individual- and group-level changes (87.5%), with a small percentage resulting in no change (12.5%). Notably, 62.5% of UDD events led to unintended consequences, including violence and arrests, a stark contrast to the PAD, where only 24% of events resulted in such outcomes. Transportation-related spaces were particularly prone to unintended consequences, with incidents occurring primarily in these areas (61%), as well as in monuments, parks, government sites, and universities.

6.3 Free People/Free Youth and Their Space of Resistance

The Free People Movement emerged in 2019, driven by discontent with Prayut Chan-o-cha's administration and the dissolution of the Future Forward Party. Originally branded as Free Youth, the movement expanded its demographic base, leading to the adoption of the name Free People. Their primary goals include reclaiming democracy, protecting human rights, reducing the Ministry of Defense's budget, and dissolving the parliament to address perceived corruption and injustice within the electoral system (Puangngam, 2020). Recently, their objectives have evolved to encompass limiting monarchical power, promoting democratic reforms, expelling the military from politics, and addressing social inequalities ("Free YOUTH' announced," 2021).

The Free People Movement employs a hybrid approach, utilizing both traditional spatial and social media strategies. Approximately 66% of their events incorporate social media as a supporting tool, while 34% are conducted entirely on these platforms. Their evolving objectives reflect a commitment to both physical and online activism.

An analysis of the consequences of events associated with the Free People Movement reveals that 72% resulted in individual- or group-level changes, while 28% led to policy-level outcomes. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter played a critical role in facilitating these shifts, particularly during the 2020 pro-democracy protests led by the Free Youth movement. These platforms enabled decentralized communication, rapid mobilization, and the viral dissemination of protest messages, allowing young activists to circumvent state-controlled media. Hashtags such as #FreeYouth and #SaveMili were instrumental in coordinating actions and fostering a sense of collective political identity. The #SaveMili campaign, which emerged after rapper MILLI was fined for criticizing the government's COVID-19 response, evolved into a prominent symbol of digital resistance and freedom of expression. As a tangible outcome, the movement

encouraged other artists and public figures to speak out on political issues (Sinpeng, 2021). Crucially, the widespread public support generated by the hashtag halted the government's efforts to suppress political expression, illustrating the power of coordinated digital activism. However, it is noteworthy that no events in the dataset led to changes at the political system level. The data suggests that events organized through social media channels are significantly more likely to achieve policy-level impacts, with an effectiveness rate of up to 80%. In contrast, traditional spatial strategies—such as street protests without digital amplification—primarily resulted in individual- or group-level changes, with only a single instance yielding a policy-level shift.

Moreover, events held in physical spaces were significantly associated with unintended consequences (81%), including violence and arrests. In contrast, events utilizing social media strategies reported no unintended consequences. This suggests that policy-level change is more achievable through social media protests than through traditional methods. While traditional protests may incorporate social media as a supplementary tool, the primary use of social media as a space of resistance correlates with fewer unintended negative outcomes, highlighting its effectiveness in fostering political change.

7. Conclusion

This study provides initial evidence of the relationship between spatial strategy and political consequences using statistical and historical analysis of political movements in Thailand. The study introduces three key findings.

Firstly, there is a discernible relationship between the events' spatial strategies and the political events' consequences. A specific spatial strategy had the potential to generate a particular consequence, whether expected or unexpected. Secondly, a social media strategy demonstrated a greater potential to produce policy-level consequences compared to a traditional spatial strategy. However, it could not lead to politics-level change; only the traditional spatial strategy that used social media to mediate physical mobilization could lead to politics-level change. Finally, unintended consequences were less likely to occur from the social media movement. Unintended consequences typically arose when using traditional spatial strategy, predominantly in transportation-related

spaces. However, the types and characteristics of a physical site might not significantly affect the quantity of unintended consequences, as highlighted by the cases of the PAD and UDD. Although both the PAD and the UDD predominantly used the same physical sites, unintended consequences occurred more frequently in the UDD's events than in the PAD's events.

What do these results mean for the social media movement, and what does this study contribute to the fields of information communication and political geography? First, the findings suggest that social media is an effective strategy for mobilizing people toward policy change or avoiding negative consequences. However, for movements aiming at transformative political outcomes—such as re-elections or parliamentary dissolution—social media alone is insufficient. Only traditional spatial strategies, particularly those that integrate social media to support physical mobilization, have shown potential to produce such high-level political consequences.

Second, this study adds a new dimension to the study of digital space in geography. Rather than focusing solely on social media's role in social mobilities, it reframes social media as a political space—one in which the existing order is challenged and contestation becomes visible (Rancière, 1999; Rancière et al., 2001). It argues that spatial strategy—whether digital, physical, or hybrid—is directly linked to the consequences of political movements. In the Thai context, where multiple protest waves have emerged, a digital strategy can yield meaningful, albeit limited, results. Thus, spatial strategy becomes a critical factor in determining mobilization success.

Yet, distinguishing between social media strategy and traditional spatial strategy is inherently problematic. Most movements unfold across multiple spaces simultaneously, with digital and physical spheres often working in tandem. The "space of resistance" is co-produced through online and offline practices, raising the question: can these spaces truly be separated?

This question became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Thai government invoked emergency powers to prohibit physical gatherings, and health concerns led many protesters to withdraw from public spaces. It was during this time that digital and physical forms of political engagement became more clearly differentiated. Some movements occurred exclusively online—yet still managed to

influence policy. This shift sparked renewed interest in how digital technologies and spatial strategies reshape political practices and resistance.

Globally, similar patterns emerged. In the United States, the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 adapted to lockdown conditions through hashtags, livestreams, and digital organizing—while still maintaining a physical presence on the streets (Kavakli & Gurses, 2021). In more repressive regimes like Russia or Myanmar, digital tools became the essential, and often the only available, medium for dissent (Nilsen, 2021; Pan & Siegel, 2020). In Thailand, youth-led protests also blended digital and physical strategies (Sinpeng, 2021). However, while the spatial strategies across contexts were comparable, the political consequences varied, shaped by national political environments. For instance, while U.S. protests led to public discourse shifts and localized reforms, Thailand's hybrid strategy encountered limited institutional responsiveness—highlighting the constraints of its political context (Kengkij & Hewison, 2021).

The pandemic and the digital era have introduced new temporal dynamics to resistance. Rapid responsiveness, public health restrictions, and algorithmic visibility have redefined how movements emerge and evolve. Although some forms of protest are returning to hybrid physical-digital modes, the norms shaped during the pandemic continue to influence strategies.

This study concludes with the recognition that the form of political practice is changing. As digital tools become increasingly central, further research is necessary to understand how spatial strategies—particularly in hybrid or repressive contexts—affect political outcomes in the post-pandemic era. This study acknowledges certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, while the dataset includes 199 political events, it may not encompass the full spectrum of protests and mobilizations that occurred in Bangkok between 2004 and 2021. Due to the absence of comprehensive archival records, it is difficult to determine the exact number of events that took place during this period. Nonetheless, the dataset reflects the most accessible and verifiable information available for analysis.

Second, the study intentionally focuses on the relationship between spatial strategies and political consequences, setting aside other potentially influential variables. While this focused scope allows for a more in-depth exploration of spatial dynamics, the author acknowledges that protest outcomes are often shaped by a broader constellation of

social, economic, and institutional factors. Future research would benefit from incorporating these dimensions to provide a more holistic understanding of movement dynamics.

Third, while the study highlights correlations between spatial strategies and outcomes, it does not fully address causal mechanisms—particularly in relation to the effectiveness of social media strategies. Further investigation is needed to unpack how and why digital mobilizations yield particular consequences.

Because this research relies heavily on data from social media and news media, it's important to acknowledge potential limitations related to access to diverse political information. In contexts where state censorship, platform regulation, or media monopolies influence dominant narratives, voices of dissent or marginalized groups may be underrepresented. This issue is especially relevant in politically sensitive environments. The author is critically aware of these challenges and has taken them into account when interpreting the findings. To ensure data reliability and diversity, a triangulation method was used—drawing from official and independent news sources, activist social media accounts, and academic publications. Rather than weakening the analysis, this reflexive approach enhances transparency and situates the study within the broader political and media environment that shapes public debates.

Finally, as this study draws on the Thai political context as its central case, the generalizability of its conclusions may be context-specific. Future research could usefully explore similar questions in other national or regional contexts to enrich comparative understanding.

In conclusion, this study lays the groundwork for understanding the interplay between spatial strategies and political consequences, a crucial aspect of contemporary digital and political geography. As political practices continue to evolve in the digital age, ongoing research will be essential to adapt our understanding of resistance in this new landscape.

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Certificate of Research Ethics involving Human Subjects

This research has been approved and conducted in accordance with the principles set by the Office of the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects.

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