Unveiling Thai Public Sentiment towards Transgressive Monks: Facebook Critical Discourse Analysis

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Article info

Abstract

This study examines Thai public perceptions of Praiwan Wannabutra (commonly known as "Parry"), a former monk who publicly exposed cases of misconduct within the Thai monastic community. Employing a critical discourse analysis approach, the research analyzed 2,428 comments posted over one year on Wannabutra's Facebook fan page. The findings yielded 12 themes, organized into three overarching categories: positive, neutral, and negative. The positive category reflected expressions of admiration and support for Wannabutra. The neutral category included comments that avoided direct judgment but engaged in discussion and exchange of religious knowledge. The negative category comprised criticisms directed primarily at monks accused of misconduct and the legal professionals defending them. Overall, the study highlights increasing public awareness of Buddhist principles and underscores the role of social media as a space for discourse on monastic accountability. It further reveals a growing willingness among Thai social media users to engage openly with issues of ethical violations in the Buddhist monastic sphere.

Introduction

In conventional Thai society, there exists a tacit expectation that discussions or critiques pertaining to Thai Buddhism and Buddhists remain largely positive or abstained from entirely. Similarly, issues related to the LGBTQ+ community historically have been relegated to the shadows, concealed from public discourse. However, the 2020s have witnessed a noticeable shift towards open and robust debates regarding both the complexities within Buddhism and the rightful inclusion and engagement of LGBTQ+ individuals. These phenomena demand a meticulous examination, reflecting an evolving sociocultural landscape. The LGBTQ+ community comprises individuals whose gender or sexual orientation differs from societal norms (Institute of Medicine, 2011). It encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals, with "Q" sometimes indicating those questioning their orientation (Dastagir, 2017). "LGB" emphasizes sexual identity, "T" denotes gender identity, and "Q" encompasses both (Eliason, 2014). Lesbian refers to women loving women (Megarry, 2021), gay to men loving men (UConn Rainbow Center, 2018), bisexual to attraction to both genders (Killermann, 2020), transgender to those transitioning genders (American Psychological Association, 2011), and queer to those fluid in their

attractions (The Center, 2022). Sexual orientation pertains to feelings about sexuality, while gender identity concerns identification as male or female (Mental Health America, 2022). In Thai society, recently, there's debate about LGBTQ+ individuals' eligibility for ordination as monks, with Buddhism generally open to their inclusion (Kanoksinlapatham, 2013). While some temples may restrict LGBTQ+ ordination, overall Buddhism lacks a consensus, unlike Judaism that has ordained LGBTQ+ rabbis since 2006 (HRC Foundation, n.d.).

Praiwan Wannabut (Parry), formerly *Phra Maha Praiwan Worawanno,* a former Thai monk, has played a significant role in Thailand's LGBTQ+ and monastic communities. He became a novice in 2003 and achieved the highest level of education in the Pali Department in 2012, akin to a Ph.D. (Tnews, 2021; Amarin, 2021). Additionally, he pursued a master's degree in

Buddhism (BBC, 2021). Later, renowned for his progressive views and extensive social media following, Phra Praiwan gained fame for disseminating religious teachings and societal commentary, often infused with humor, alongside former Phra Maha Sompong Tanputto (Praithongyam, 2021). Their Facebook live streams garnered significant attention, with one session reaching over 100,000 viewers and sparking discussions across platforms (MGR, 2021). Responding to public demand, Phra Maha Praiwan engaged in a live Dharma discussion with Phra Maha Sompong Tanputto, further boosting his online presence and followership (PPTV, 2022). However, citing injustices within the Buddhist community, Phra Maha Praiwan renounced his monkhood in late 2021 but continues to share Buddhist teachings on social media as an influencer and business owner (Natchaphon, 2022).

Unlike his role as a critical monk, formerly known as Praiwan Wannabut (Parry), reappeared on social media and the "Hone-Krasae" program, a talk show focusing on social issues (Hone-Krasae, 2017). A conflict arose with "Phra Chatree Hemphan," the abbot of Wat Buddhawihan, resulting in accusations against Parry for allegedly tarnishing the image of the clergy in Thailand (Moo, 2022). Despite an apology from Phra Chatree Hemphan, legal action was pursued against Parry for defamation. Parry countered with allegations of inappropriate behavior by Phra Chatree, including sexual harassment and misappropriation of temple funds, sparking a controversy and intensifying discussions on social media (Moo, 2022).

After Parry responded to Phra Chatree, Buddha Isara (Suwit Thongprasert, a former abbot of Wat Or Noi

in Nakhon Pathom Province) publicly supported Phra Chatree via his Facebook page, Luang Pu Buddha Isara. Buddha Isara attributed Parry's behavior to his sexuality, deeming it inappropriate for a monk, and accused Parry of violating precepts and disciplinary codes. Consequently, he endorsed Phra Chatree's reprimand of Parry, asserting that Parry deserved criticism and condemnation. In response, Parry, retaliated against both Phra Charti and Buddha Isara, exposing their inappropriate behavior through a post on Parry's Facebook page.

Religion and homosexuality

The influence of Theravada Buddhism, widely practiced in Thailand, is profound on Thai culture, traditions, values, and social norms, thus shaping contemporary perceptions of gender diversity. Scholars have highlighted the presence of heterosexual male behavior in Tripitaka Buddhism (Jackson, 1997a), which references four gender types, including intersex and homosexual individuals (Jackson, 1997b). Theravada Buddhism maintains a negative stance towards sexual desires, considering them hindrances to moral practice, as per the Vinaya Pitaka (Jackson, 1998). Historical records reveal instances of sexual attraction between monks and novices, regulated by Sangha Law (Phongsaipian, 2006).

In contemporary Thai society, Western-influenced heterosexual norms contribute to increasing prejudice against transgender and homosexual individuals (Jackson, 2003; Duangwises, 2013). The question of whether homosexual men can become Buddhist monks remains contentious, with the Vinaya prohibiting transgender ordination (Punyanuphap, 1996). However, Thai clergy communities often interpret Atthakatha to allow LGBTQ+ individuals to ordain (Phromtha, 2005). The Buddha's disapproval of homosexuality within the clergy stems from concerns about disrupting monastic harmony and discipline (Department of Religious Affairs, 1982).

Buddhist enlightenment transcends gender distinctions, with sexual orientation deemed inconsequential to spiritual practice (Phromtha, 2006). Studies exploring religious ethics towards LGBTQ+ individuals reveal varying interpretations within Buddhism and Christianity, emphasizing the importance of human dignity and compassion (Kanoksinlapatham, 2013). Cheng's (2018) research on Buddhist acceptance of homosexuality highlights the role of Buddhist teachings in fostering self-acceptance among LGBTQ+ individuals, despite societal discrimination. According

to Cheng, challenges in understanding Buddhist perspectives on homosexuality include insufficient historical context and the need for clearer delineation of interviewee perspectives.

History and support of LGBTQ+ in Thailand

The history and societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals in Thailand have evolved significantly over time, albeit with persistent challenges. While homosexuality and transsexuality have long existed in Thai society, they were initially neglected and considered abnormal, contrary to societal norms and Theravada Buddhist principles (Jackson, 1999). The post-1932 era, marked by Thailand's transition to constitutional monarchy, witnessed discussions on "national culture" and traditional gender roles, which were instrumental in regulating societal behavior (Barmé, 1993; Winichakul, 1994). Efforts to adopt Western-style conceptions of sexuality faced resistance due to Thailand's informal moral codes (Mosse, 1985; Jackson, 2003). Later, the post-World War II period saw increased media sensationalization of homosexuality, contributing to its association with immoral behavior (Jackson, 1997b). However, the subsequent decades witnessed the emergence of LGBTQ+-focused media, advocacy groups, and increased visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals, challenging societal stereotypes (Jackson, 2011). Thailand has become a destination for LGBTQ+ tourists, yet societal acceptance remains contentious (Kinori, 2020).

Contemporary Thai society grapples with conflicting attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, evident in both acceptance and discrimination (Bangkok Post, 2020). Discussions on sexuality remain taboo, and sex education in schools is limited (UNDP, 2014). LGBTQ+ communities face various forms of discrimination, including mockery, bullying, and employment and healthcare disparities (Wijitwatchararak et al., 2019). Social movements advocating for LGBTQ+ rights have gained momentum, demanding legal protections and societal acceptance (Wijitwatchararak et al., 2019).

Studies exploring transgender identities in Thai society reveal the formation of subcultures and social spaces among transgender individuals, highlighting their struggles for acceptance and inclusion (Potiwan, 2011). Despite limitations such as terminology ambiguities and lack of detailed examples, these studies provide valuable insights into LGBTQ+ experiences and societal dynamics in Thailand. They contribute to a deeper understanding of LGBTQ+ social movements and the broader context of sexual orientation and gender identity in Thai society.

LGBTQ+ influencers on social media

The emergence of social media has revolutionized communication and interpersonal interactions, allowing users to exchange information and engage with diverse perspectives (Tiggermann & Zaccardo, 2018; Booth & Matic, 2011). Influencers on social media platforms wield significant power, often surpassing that of traditional celebrities, as they are perceived as more relatable and trustworthy (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). LGBTQ+ individuals utilize social media as a platform for self-expression, community building, and accessing information that may be unavailable offline (Adkins et al., 2018; Jenzen, 2017; McConnell et al., 2017).

However, the online environment also presents risks for LGBTQ+ individuals, including exposure to physical aggression, hate speech, and trolling (Mkhize et al., 2020; Scheuerman et al., 2018). To navigate these challenges, LGBTQ+ individuals employ privacy settings and safety measures on social media platforms (Duguay, 2016; McConnell et al., 2017; Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). Despite these risks, social media offers a vital space for LGBTQ+ individuals to connect, share experiences, and advocate for visibility and acceptance (Roth, 2015).

Research on LGBTQ+ influencers on social media sheds light on perceptions and engagement patterns of followers. Sabala (2020) found that LGBTQ+ influencers attract higher engagement rates but also face increased scrutiny, particularly regarding physical appearance. However, comment samples were not provided, and there was limited analysis of commentator behavior (Sabala, 2020). Similarly, Hu (2016) and McInroy et al. (2019) explored the impact of social media on LGBTQ+ identity development and community engagement. While social media facilitates access to information and resources for LGBTQ+ youth, challenges such as internet dependence and mental health implications warrant further investigation (Hu, 2016; McInroy et al., 2019).

Overall, studies prove that social media is a significant tool for LGBTQ+ individuals to navigate identity, access resources, and engage in community activism. However, the complexities of online interactions, including risks and limitations, highlight the need for continued research and targeted support for LGBTQ+ individuals in digital spaces.

Facebook posts and the online social media

Facebook, with its 2.2 billion monthly users, has become a powerful communication tool, shaping societal interactions and facilitating various activities (Kassa et al., 2018; Lindgren, 2017). It serves as a platform for sharing diverse content, including news articles, personal opinions, and multimedia, thereby influencing users' perceptions and behaviors (Soontjens, 2019; Smith, 2018). Particularly among youth, Facebook has become integral to social relationships, with LGBTQ+ individuals utilizing it to connect with peers, access support, and explore identity-related topics (Drushel, 2010; Nabi et al., 2013).

Research delving into LGBTQ+ representation on Facebook display how social media platforms shape identities and foster community engagement. Chu (2017) examined the self-representations of LGBTQ+ individuals on Facebook, highlighting the platform's role in promoting values of equality and respect. However, concerns regarding privacy and negative content also emerged, underscoring the need for further exploration. Similarly, Thepthewin (2015) explored how Facebook pages contribute to the formation of gay subcultures in Chiang Mai, Thailand, emphasizing the platform's significance in facilitating discussions on sexuality and community building. Poedloknimit (2019) focused on the role of Facebook pages in advocating for LGBT rights in Thailand, revealing their impact in mobilizing support and amplifying voices within the community.

These studies stress that Facebook has an influence in shaping LGBTQ+ identities, fostering community connections, and driving social activism. However, they also highlight challenges such as privacy concerns and the need for a broader societal engagement with LGBTQ+ issues. Further research is needed to explore these dynamics and their implications for online and offline communities.

Objectives

1. To survey opinions, explore attitudes of Thai people towards Parry as a famous LGBTQ+ figure who spreads Buddhist doctrines and exposes the dark side of the monastic circle through Parry's Facebook page.

2. To analyze Parry's Facebook fan page and general Facebook commenters reflecting on misconduct of certain transgressive Thai monks using critical discourse analysis approach and thematic analysis.

Conceptual Framework

The research employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how Facebook comments reflect individuals' attitudes towards Parry. A conceptual framework for data analysis, as developed by Curci-Wallis (2019) in her 2019 study on how Facebook comments reflect certain characteristics of Islamophobia is utilized. Wallis employed qualitative content analysis to investigate opinions. Initially, Wallis randomly selected a Facebook post pertaining to Muslims and extremism, which could include articles shared from websites, blogs, comments, or images. Subsequently, she analyzed critical discourse using semiotic options, employing linguistic analysis to understand the presented information and discern opinions regarding Muslims and extremism. Furthermore, Wallis categorized opinions into themes to identify recurring patterns of ideas, themes, stereotypes, or prejudices, thereby revealing characteristics of Islamophobia. Hence, researchers will adapt Wallis's concept of comment analysis to explore Facebook users' attitudes towards Parry, who disseminates religious teachings and unveils negative aspects of Buddhism in Thailand. See Figure 1 below for the conceptual framework's summary.
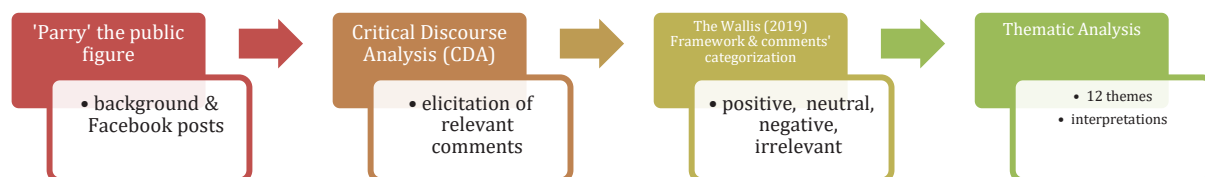

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

1. Research Setting

The methodology involved collecting data from a specific Facebook post made on September 23, 2022, by Parry-Praiwan Wannabut, which garnered significant attention with 56,700 likes, 2,428 comments, and 735 shares (Praiwan Wannabut's Facebook page, data retrieved on February 26, 2024). This post was a response to remarks made by "Phra Chatree Hemaphan," the abbot of Wat Buddhavihara in St. Petersburg, Russia, during a Facebook live session on September 19, 2022. Phra Chatree had alluded to Parry in a derogatory manner, prompting Parry to address the issue on his Facebook page, where he also criticized Buddha Isara for supporting Phra Chatree and condemning Parry's sexuality and behavior.

2. Research Approach

Data analysis focused on comments from Thai individuals on Parry's Facebook platform, which boasts 2.7 million followers (Parry's Facebook page, data retrieved and revisited on November 17, 2023). Only comments related to religious scandals were selected for analysis, excluding irrelevant data. The selected post from September 2022 was purposely chosen due to Parry's increased and highest social media presence and the Thai Buddhist controversy has gained its most popularity.

This time is also marked by a clear departure from his previous identity as a monk and a shift towards embracing his true identity, including dressing as a woman.

3. Content Analysis Method

The analysis; thus, aimed to explore Thai people's attitudes towards Parry's actions in exposing the inappropriate behavior of monks and whether they accept him as an LGBTQ+ evangelist of Buddhist teachings. Through his posts on the incident, comments were translated into English and analyzed thematically to understand the reasons behind people's opinions expressed on Facebook. This method provided valuable insights into public attitudes towards Parry and his role in addressing religious issues and promoting LGBTQ+ rights within the context of Buddhist teachings. By analyzing the uncontrolled comments in natural Facebook posting and commenting settings, intervened data can suggest subtle information and opinions regarding the controversial issue. Additionally, thematic comment analysis was conducted on Parry's Facebook page to further enrich the data analysis process.

Results

The table presented below delineates outcomes of the thematic analysis conducted on Facebook comments gathered from Parry's official fan page on Facebook. The total number of comments analyzed amounts to 2,428. Additionally, the table provides a breakdown of the number of commenters within each theme, accompanied by a percentage representation for clarity and comparative analysis. Table 1 below presents all the elicited themes in order of frequency of comments.

Table 1 Number and Percentage of Commenters on Each Theme on Parry's Facebook Page

No.	Themes	No. of comments	Percentage
1	Supporting Parry	765	31.1
2	Scolding and taunting Buddha Isara	356	14.7
3	Appreciating Parry's narrative skills	332	13.7
4	Praising Parry's talents	272	11.2
5	Appreciating Parry's religious knowledge	128	5.3
6	Admiring Parry's external appearance	75	3.1
7	Commenting on religion	63	2.6
8	Accepting Parry's true identity	39	1.6
9	Scolding lawyer Thammarat	37	1.5
10	Insulting Pha Chatree	32	1.3
11	Respecting Parry	12	0.5
*12	Irrelevant comments	317	13.1
	Total	**2428**	**100**

Table 1 clearly shows 11 discernible themes. Theme 12, however, is omitted as it comprises irrelevant comments, such as stickers, emojis, memes, advertisements, or replies unrelated to the post. Additionally, the table depicts the number of comments alongside their respective percentages. Expressing the figures as percentages elucidates the proportionate relationship between a specific quantity and the total number of comments. These 11 themes are organized in descending order, with the most prevalent being support and praise, while the least prevalent is respect for Parry. An intriguing finding is the admiration for Parry's appearance. The purpose behind crafting this table is to succinctly showcase the theme results and facilitate a straightforward overview of the data.

Thematic analysis

The primary and frequently observed theme is the outpouring of support for Parry from his Facebook followers. They urge him to stand up for his rights, not allowing those who defame him to go unpunished. There is a consensus among them that Parry should respond assertively to prevent further defamation. Additionally, Facebook commentors express solidarity with Parry and encourage him to persist in his efforts. They also endorse

his actions in exposing the inappropriate behavior of a monk. Furthermore, they assert their readiness to believe in and consistently support Parry regardless of his future actions or statements. Examples of supportive messages include, "I always support sister Prae (Parry). Keep going! love Parry!" and "I'm with you," indicating the depth of support and affection towards Parry among his followers. The use of terms like "sister" and "team" further underscores the familial bond perceived by the commentators. Moreover, expressions of agreement with Parry's stance, such as "I agree with Parry in all respects," demonstrate the extent to which his followers align themselves with his beliefs and actions.

The second prominent theme observed involves the condemnation and use of derogatory language against a monk criticized by Parry. Parry's assertion in an article, wherein he identifies an immoral monk, Buddha Isara (Suwit), who publicly reproached Parry following his response to Phra Chatree, garnered significant attention from Parry's Facebook followers. Notably, Parry's celebrity status led commentators to perceive Buddha Isara's actions as an attempt to gain social media recognition rather than addressing personal matters. Some followers on fan pages criticized Buddha Isara's past and present misconduct, labeling him as a gangster and cheater who exploits religion for financial gain. This incited anger and resentment among certain commenters, who expressed their disapproval using coarse language. Examples include phrases like "This guy is not normal shit, he is the top of shit," and "He's just an idiot."

The admiration for Parry's article-writing prowess among Fanpage interactors constitutes the third noteworthy theme. Parry is perceived as a skilled writer, well-suited for the craft due to his adeptness in effectively conveying knowledge through text. His ability to choose appropriate and eloquent words, along with impeccable spelling and clear expression, resonates with readers. Despite occasional rudeness in his language, commenters appreciate how these words effectively convey emotions, making the articles enjoyable to read. Parry's words, though rough, are considered not mere profanity but rather imbued with wisdom and dharma. They provoke critical thinking and instill belief in Parry's message. Consequently, many readers engage with Parry's articles in their entirety, despite their length, finding them compelling and attractive. Even those who typically avoid lengthy reads are drawn to read Parry's articles fully, as they find them engaging. Examples include statements such as "I do not really like to read anything religious,

but Parry writes so well that I like to read and immediately want to know the meaning of those words", "What Parry wrote in every word, I read and felt attracted, like reading my favorite book.", "Parry's articulation in the article is remarkably clear and thoughtful, offering solace in his selection of words.", "Parry communicates with directness and conviction, supported by coherent reasoning and evidence. ", "Parry's meticulous writing deeply resonated with me. I appreciate the enlightening aspect within his sarcastic discourse, which transforms reading into an engaging experience, evading monotony.", and "Every word crafted by Parry captivated me, prompting a desire to revisit the article and glean its wealth of knowledge and wisdom."

Fourthly, Parry's defense strategy, manifested through his responses on the Hone-Krasae program and the publication of articles on his Facebook page, elicited admiration from his followers for his multifaceted abilities. Commentators regard Parry as both intellectually astute and articulate, possessing a wealth of knowledge in religious and legal domains. Furthermore, they perceive him as courageous for boldly confronting his detractors and exposing misconduct of certain monks, actions often deemed taboo by society. Consequently, commentators endorse his actions as commendable and hold admiration for his versatile skill set. Examples of such sentiments include: "I admire you a lot", "You are truly awesome, Parry", "You are phenomenal, Parry", and "You are smart, brave, good, and great! #a role model for the new generation".

Next, Parry's Facebook followers regard him as highly knowledgeable in Buddhist teachings, despite no longer being a monk. They appreciate his continued utilization of religious knowledge, particularly noting his completion of the challenging Pali 9 graduate course, a testament to his depth of understanding. Moreover, they commend his ability to effectively communicate doctrinal concepts, including the critique of religious aspects, alongside practical applications for everyday life. Examples illustrating these sentiments include: "I find Parry's teachings on Dharma to be superior to those taught in temples", "Parry provides information about Lord Buddha with precision, akin to a mobile repository of Buddhist scriptures. He's deserving of a prominent role within the Buddhist community", "Parry's scolding is effective; I've learned valuable teachings. His ordination and extensive knowledge are truly admirable", "Since his time as a monk, Parry has exemplified

exemplary conduct and gratitude, utilizing his knowledge as a Pali graduate to simplify the Buddha's teachings for us", and "Despite resigning as a monk, Parry continues to impart accessible Dharma teachings to the public.".

Sixthly, despite the context that Parry admonishes monks exhibiting inappropriate behavior while teaching religion, some followers on his fan page diverge from discussing Parry's written content, which exposes monk misconduct and religious scandals. Instead, they divert attention to praising Parry's physical appearance, including attire, makeup, and mannerisms, as a form of encouragement. Examples include remarks such as "You look lovely and cute", "Excuse me for the off-topic, but I'd like to know the shade of Phi Parry's lipstick. It's beautiful", and "This hairstyle suits you best. Very beautiful, Parry". Other compliments focus on Parry's facial features and makeup skills, with comments like "Sweet disarming eyes" and "Your makeup is beautiful, Parry. You should offer makeup tutorials". Additionally, there's admiration for Parry's lip color during the Hone-Krasae program, expressed as, "In the Hone-Krasae, Parry's makeup is very beautiful. I cannot take my eyes off Parry's lip color. I want to get the coordinates of the lipstick that Parry is wearing. It is such a beautiful color. Awesome!!!".

Similar to the sixth theme, the seventh theme is also supportive. On Parry's official Facebook fanpage, a group of commentators exhibits a keen interest in the exposure of religious scandals. They express concurrence with Parry's revelations, crediting his 18-year stint as a monk for his profound understanding of Buddhism. Consequently, he possesses intricate insights into the inner sanctum of the Sangha, unearthing stories hitherto unknown to the general public. Commentators perceive Parry's exposés as shedding light on the darker facets of religion and the genuine malevolence within the monastic community. Such revelations are deemed enlightening, fostering a broader awareness of the multifaceted nature of religion. In addition, Facebook commentators share personal anecdotes regarding the inappropriate conduct of Thai monks, indicating a broader societal concern. Examples include statements such as: "Parry's straightforwardness might help Buddhism become much cleaner," "Nowadays, religion is declining because some people exploit citizens' religious faith for profit," "I changed to make merit for people who are inferior," "Some people are just bald and covered with yellow cloth," and "Handle it, Parry. They are tricky using the yellow robe as their armour".

Eighth, Parry garners sympathy from his Facebook interactors for his LGBTQ+ identity. They assert normalcy and naturalness of LGBTQ+ individuals, commending Parry for his honesty in revealing his identity. Retirement from monkhood is viewed as Parry's personal prerogative by Facebook commentators, who emphasize his right to autonomy as long as it does not harm others. Moreover, Parry's abilities receive more attention than his physical appearance or sexual orientation. Commentators regard those who critique Parry's work or sexual orientation as irrational, indifferent to moral principles. Examples include such statements as: "He departs from monastic life," "Parry quit his monkhood," "I do not mind Parry," "I have followed Parry since he was a monk," "I do not care about Parry's sexual preference," and "Just be yourself as you are not causing trouble to anyone".

Ninth, although the Facebook post on Parry's page does not directly address Lawyer Thammarat, Phra Chatree's key supporter, some fanpage interactors have mentioned him. This relates to their viewing of the Hone-Krasae program, where both Parry and Thammarat discussed Phra Chatree's issues and Religious Law since September 2022. Some interactors criticize Thammarat, accusing him of being intellectually deficient and misleading in his discussions, straying off-topic, and displaying a lack of legal clarity. They perceive Thammarat as aligning with Phra Chatree and undermining citizens' rights to express opinions regarding religion or monks. Consequently, certain fans express strong agreement, anger and dissatisfaction with Thammarat's viewpoints, resorting to harsh criticism. Sample statements include: "Some lawyers are brainless." "I watched the Hone-Krasae today and got a headache because of a brainless lawyer," "Love you, Parry. I watched the Hone-Krasae program today. I want to rip off Thammarat's head so badly. It's so irritating," "How did he study law to look stupid? People can distinguish good monks from evil ones. Today, I still like to go to temples to make merit. Parry wrote the ending very well," "I watched the Hone-Krasae program and wanted to jump and kick the lawyer in the face," and "I watched the Hone-Krasae program for 1 full hour until the end. I admire Parry and Ms. Chaturon. They speak in ways that people without legal knowledge can understand. I laughed at that lawyer Thammarat. He was beating around the bush, trying to make Parry guilty, but he didn't know how. His words confused me."

Tenth, certain individuals interacting on Parry's Facebook page have criticized Phra Chatree, utilizing offensive language to condemn his capabilities. This critique stems from a perception of Phra Chatree's incompetence, as he is seen as contributing nothing beneficial to religion and, furthermore, tarnishing its reputation. Commentators on Facebook expressed the belief that Phra Chatree deceives people for financial gain, using religion as a tool. They advise Parry to disregard Phra Chatree, suggesting that he is mentally impaired. Additionally, some commentators cursed, expressing their disapproval of Phra Chatree's actions insulting Parry, as they perceive Parry to have done nothing wrong. Furthermore, some individuals likened Phra Chatree's worth to that of animals or objects deemed useless in society, such as garbage. Examples include: "Chatree's core brain is sick. Parry does not pay any attention to him. Chatree is a good person, that's why he is with someone (Buddha Isara) who just escaped a lawsuit." "Fight him and teach him a lesson, this bastard bald guy." "Earthworms have more benefits than him." "Parry, get rid of worthless pieces of trash man, please." "The words 'immoral' and 'hellish' are no different. I would rather call it a bastard."

Eleventh, certain commentators hold Parry in high regard for fearlessly exposing events within the monastic circle, despite potential repercussions. This respect stems from the reverence Thais generally have for Buddhism and monks. While some are aware of the controversies within the monastic community, few dare to disclose them as Parry has done. It is often harder for people to believe allegations against monks than against ordinary individuals. Consequently, Parry's willingness to confront injustice has earned him even greater respect, as he is seen as representing societal voices against wrongdoing. Examples include: "I respect sister (Parry)." "I respect Parry. He gave his opinion honestly. I'm with you, Parry." "I respect Parry. He dared to speak up, think, and get to the bottom of what happened, but no one dared to say and accept the truth. I sincerely respect you." "Great; I am really faithful to him." "My name is Yoi. I respect Paiwan (Parry). Keep going! I've always followed the good stuff. With respect."

Twelfth, unlike all of the eleven themes aforementioned, irrelevant comments are also found. In his Facebook post, Parry addresses the issue concerning Phra Chratree and Buddha Isara, criticizing them as "immoral monks" due to their religious misconduct, a behavior Parry himself acknowledges. However, some

of Parry's Facebook interactions diverged from this topic. Fanpage interactors engaged in discussions ranging from general topics to those unrelated to Parry. Some commentators may have done so to promote products, possibly capitalizing on Parry's reputation and the topic's social media traction. Consequently, it presents a favorable opportunity for product promotion. Moreover, instead of using words, many employed a variety of emojis to convey their sentiments. Examples include: "Noodles are also sold here." "I want to invite Parry to visit Koh Libong." "I'm hungry again." "I received the product myself. Parry is a very honest durian seller. When I received the durian with the slightest problem, Parry promptly sent me a new one to compensate. He is really clear." "Really powerful. High-pressure water blaster."

Discussion

This section elucidates the principal findings derived from the survey outcomes or the attitudes of Thai individuals towards LGBTQ+ Parry as conducted on Praiwan Wannabut's official Facebook fan page. It also addresses the research inquiry concerning Thai people's perceptions of Parry's exposure of monks' unethical conduct.

The 12 discourse themes identified in this study can be generally categorized into positive, neutral, and negative feedback. This classification will distinctly illustrate the sentiments of individuals within Parry's Facebook group towards Parry and religious circles. Themes supporting, appreciating religious knowledge and communication, praising his talent, accepting his identity, admiring his external appearance, and showing respect are construed as the positive group. The negative group encompasses comments critiquing religion and rebuking themes. Commenters within this group do not hold negative opinions of Parry; rather, they solely criticize the monks and Lawyer Thammarat. Lastly, irrelevant comments are grouped under the neutral category.

1. Attitudes of Thai People towards Parry as a Famous LGBTQ+ Figure
Recognition of Parry's Skills and Qualifications
The most notable finding from the data is that the majority of commentators have commended Parry for his expertise, possibly explaining why people believe in and support him despite his LGBTQ+ status and departure from monastic life. This could be elucidated by Parry's past ordination as a monk, suggesting a profound understanding of various clergy behaviors and

experiences within the monastic sphere. Moreover, Parry's attainment of a master's degree is esteemed by some Thais, who perceive individuals with higher education as credible.

Furthermore, others place trust in Parry's authenticity; numerous Facebook fans perceive him as forthright with both himself and others, maintaining commendable conduct. Parry serves as a commendable exemplar as a Buddhist instructor, adhering strictly to monastic regulations during his ordination.

Moreover, Parry's commitment to monogamy is evident, as demonstrated by his decision to terminate a relationship when his partner refuses to publicly acknowledge it, suspecting insincerity or infidelity. Parry also exposes erring monks and disseminates Dharma teachings across various platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube to foster widespread awareness and prevent deception. For instance, Parry's revelation regarding Kruba Kai's purported ability to unearth Buddha images underscores the public's credulity. Parry clarifies that the excavated Buddha images were predominantly counterfeit, challenging perceptions of magical prowess. According to Buddhist teachings, monks should refrain from boasting about supernatural abilities, as it fosters credulity and violates precepts, warranting disciplinary action.

Moreover, Parry's credibility is bolstered by his outward demeanor, with some attributing believability to his well-groomed appearance and punctuality, which are considered indicative of intelligence, dignity, and maturity. This aligns with prior research by Phramaha Pitsanu et al. (2021) on the impact of attire on a speaker's appeal and credibility.

Additionally, Parry's proficiency in communication skills contributes to his persuasiveness, as evidenced by his adept word choice and tone selection. His substantiated arguments enhance the credibility of his statements, aligning with findings by Chewpreecha (2015), who noted the persuasive influence of individuals adept in communication.

Acceptance the true identity

Recent research indicates a positive shift in Thai society's attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, contrasting with historical prejudices within Buddhism. Formerly, LGBTQ+ individuals faced exclusion from monastic life due to societal perceptions of eccentricity. However, contemporary Thai society exhibits increasing openness and acceptance towards LGBTQ+ individuals, with growing support for their inclusion. Despite

awareness of Parry's LGBTQ+ identity during his ordination, he continues to garner admiration and respect, suggesting a departure from judgment based on gender differences. This finding aligns with studies by Kanoksinlapatham (2013) and Cheng (2018), illustrating evolving Buddhist perspectives towards LGBTQ+ individuals and their increasing acceptance in society.

Furthermore, Parry's disclosure of his LGBTQ+ identity on Facebook has garnered significant support, in line with Chu (2017) and Potiwan's (2011) findings on the platform's influence on LGBTQ+ identity expression. This contrasts with Thepthewin's (2015) research, which emphasized Facebook's role in facilitating romantic encounters rather than identity formation. Parry's utilization of Facebook to promote his social identity and advocate for monogamy in Thai Buddhism shows the platform's potential for social activism.

Parry's involvement in the LGBTQ+ rights movement through social media indicates the platform's significance in advocacy efforts. Despite facing discrimination from figures like Phra Chatree and Buddha Isara, Parry receives widespread support from commentators, with some urging him to take legal action against the offending parties. These findings parallel those of Poedloknimit (2019), Hu (2016), and Wijitwatchararak et al. (2019), emphasizing social media's role in empowering LGBTQ+ individuals to challenge societal inequality and defend their rights.

Irrelevant comments

The analysis reveals a notable interest in external appearance among commentators, with many diverging from the post's topic to focus on superficial aspects such as hairstyle, attire, and makeup. This unexpected emphasis on appearance likely suggests a tendency among some individuals to prioritize superficial attributes over substantive content. Sabala's (2020) study on attitudes towards LGBTQ+ influencers on YouTube and Instagram supports this notion, revealing that individuals often value appearances more than the actual content presented by influencers. This inclination to prioritize aesthetics may explain why some Thai people are drawn to Parry, admiring his makeup, personality, and fashionable attire, and subsequently engaging with him on social media platforms.

Furthermore, the analysis uncovers another surprising trend: the proliferation of irrelevant comments promoting various products on a post addressing a serious topic. This indicates that some of Parry's Facebook followers are primarily interested in

commercial endeavors, leveraging trending media spaces to advertise their products. Buathoeng's (2015) research demonstrates that businesses utilize concise and straightforward messages in their social media marketing efforts, often collaborating with influencers to boost follower counts and sales. Hence, social media platforms serve as a conduit for sellers to leverage promotional comments and expand their reach.

2. The Reflections of Misconduct of Transgressive Thai monks

People's engagement in religious movements

The findings suggest that Parry has played a significant role in the religious movement by highlighting misconduct within the monastic circle. As a former monk, Parry possesses a deep understanding of the improprieties prevalent among clergy members, enabling him to speak out impartially and offer insights grounded in Buddhist principles. He emphasizes the importance of monks adhering to the monastic code of conduct and advocates for rationality and critical thinking among Buddhists to prevent deception and religious disgrace. Unveiling such issues as sexual harassment and financial misconduct within the clergy, Parry has sparked public discourse and led to increased scrutiny of monk behavior, even among those of high rank.

These revelations mark a departure from traditional norms, where speaking out against monks was considered taboo due to societal reverence for Buddhism and monks' elevated status. However, the rise in awareness of ethical standards has led to a shift in public opinion, with individuals becoming more vocal in condemning wrongdoing within the monastic community. This trend aligns with the findings of Paknoi and Piriyakul (2018), who documented instances of misconduct among monks and their detrimental impact on the perception of Buddhism. While some individuals remain loyal to monks who have contributed positively to temple development, others are increasingly unwilling to overlook transgressions, leading to a crisis of faith and prompting some to turn away from Buddhism altogether.

Despite controversies surrounding monk behavior, a significant portion of the population maintains a favorable view of Buddhism, underlining the resilience of Buddhist beliefs. Paknoi (2018) notes that while scandals may erode confidence in certain aspects of Buddhism, the fundamental faith of believers remains steadfast. This resilience reflects the deeply ingrained nature of Buddhist beliefs and the enduring appeal of the religion to its adherents.

Buddhism and sexual misconduct

In contemporary times, there is a disturbing trend of monks engaging in inappropriate sexual conduct, as revealed in Parry's exposé of monk behavior, predominantly involving sexual encounters. For example, instances such as Phra Chatree sending explicit images and videos to women and the disclosure of an abbot engaging in oral sex with young men have surfaced. Parry's actions underscore the gravity of such offenses, recognizing them as serious transgressions potentially punishable under Parajik or expulsion from the Buddhist Order (Soka Gakkai, 2002), as highlighted in prior research by Eiemcharoen (2018). The present study emphasizes that sexual misconduct among monks and novices constitutes a significant and recurring issue, eroding trust in the clergy and the Buddhist institution as a whole.

Reports from various news sources further corroborate the prevalence of sexual impropriety among monks, encompassing interactions with both genders and even same-sex relationships. Terms such as *"Chan Buap," "Kam Khok," "Tok Sao Kham," "Chan Pla Duk,"* and *"Thaway buua"* denote oral sexual activities among monks, signaling the gravity of such transgressions within the Sangha community. Scholar Chaturong Chongasa's disclosures to news agencies have shed light on the escalating incidence of monk-related sexual intercourse, with nearly 100 monks contracting sexually transmitted diseases annually, dating back a decade (cited in P.Y. Payutto, 2015).

These revelations stress the challenges monks face in reconciling their vows of celibacy with innate sexual desires, leading some to seek gratification through prohibited means. The inability of the Sangha Supreme Council to effectively address this issue exacerbates the problem, contributing to a culture of impunity and further eroding public trust in the clergy. Thus, while monks are expected to renounce worldly desires, the prevalence of sexual activity among them is embedded with the complexities and shortcomings within the monastic community, posing significant challenges to the integrity of the Sangha institution.

Sangha Administration and criticizing the Sangha

The recent decade has seen an alarming increase in criminal activities among Thai monks, including fraud, theft, and, most frequently, sexual misconduct, underscores the inefficiency of monastic organizations in addressing these issues. Prior research aligns with this

observation, with Sangkhawichit (2017) pointing out the ineffectiveness of the Sangha Supreme Council in governance due to decision-making authority delegated to elderly and potentially inept clergy members, hindering effective oversight of monk behaviors. This governance model, coupled with an overly lenient Sangha Act that encourages monks, exacerbates the challenge of addressing inappropriate conduct within the Sangha.

The conflict between Parry and Phra Chatree brings attention to grievances regarding the Sangha Act, particularly Article 44, which penalizes individuals for disparaging or insulting monks. Despite public outcry over monk misconduct, disciplinary actions often fall short, as evidenced by the lenient response to Kruba Kai's controversial activities, revealing discrepancies between monk and secular laws. Sittikorn's (2019) findings further highlight the mild nature of disciplinary measures within the Sangha, contrasting starkly with criminal penalties.

Criticism of the Sangha Act's protective stance towards monks reflects broader discontent with limitations on freedom of speech in Thai society, hindering accountability and exacerbating monk misconduct. Despite these challenges, some individuals bravely speak out against wrongdoing, underscoring a nascent push for accountability despite legal constraints.

To address monk misconduct effectively, official Sangha orgasnizations should implement robust monitoring mechanisms, potentially leveraging social media platforms for enhanced oversight and prevention. Such initiatives could empower both Sangha officials and the public to address monk misconduct and uphold the integrity of the Thai monastic community.

To conclude, more than a quarter of the overall themes and comments focus on the misconduct of certain transgressive Thai monks. This suggests that the general Thai population is well aware of these monks' deviant behaviors and feels empowered to voice their opinions directly, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Number and Percentage of Comments Reflecting on Misconduct of Transgressive Thai Monks

No.	Themes	No. of comments	Percentage
1	Scolding and taunting Buddha Isara	356	14.7
2	Appreciating Parry's religious knowledge	128	5.3
3	Commenting on religion	63	2.6
4	Scolding lawyer Thammarat	37	1.5
5	Insulting Phra Chatree	32	1.3
	Total	**616**	**25.4**

Some final remarks on people's criticism and their political stances

In contemporary discourse, a notable shift is observed in the demographic composition of individuals engaging in religious discussions, particularly on social media platforms such as Parry's Facebook page. Contrary to previous studies indicating disinterest among Thai teenagers towards religion (Thantanakun, 2016), our analysis reveals active participation from middle-aged individuals and adolescents, suggesting keen interest among the younger generation in religious matters. This shift may be attributed to increased access to information and discernment among the youth, enabling them to comprehend and engage with religious issues more critically and explicitly. Plus, commenters demonstrate proficiency in spelling and grammar, indicative of thoughtful engagement rather than impulsive reactions, aligning with findings by Kongjun et al. (2020).

Furthermore, observations reveal a correlation between political ideologies and criticism voiced on Parry's platform, particularly regarding figures like Buddha Isara. Supporters of progressive democratic ideals, termed "Sam Kip," express opposition to Buddha Isara, whom they perceive as aligning with authoritarian regimes. Their criticisms are rooted in political history, highlighting Buddha Isara's past involvement in supporting dictatorial regimes, which intersects with his current stance against Parry. This political polarization mirrors broader societal divisions evident in previous research examining political conflicts on social media platforms like Facebook (Wutthiworapong & Jongsukklai, 2019; Wongsapphakran, 2019).

Suggestions

It would be useful if future research would delve deeper into the intricacies of these relationships and correlations. Other research endeavors should include how the Sangha organizations and institutions solve Buddhist problems of different kinds and forms in the contemporary digital world or provide spiritual remedies to individuals grappling incessantly with mental health afflictions in the current era.

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