Self-Compassion, Psychological Resilience and Social Media Use in Thai Students

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Social media is widely used in Thai students, but relatively few studies have explored the effects of social media use on psychological wellbeing. In this study we explored the effects of social media use on self-compassion and psychological resilience. A total of 484 Thai undergraduate students completed a questionnaire and 21 Thai students were interviewed addressing these three constructs. The findings revealed that those Thai students who sacrificed the friends and family time to spend more time on social media use were less self-compassionate and less resilient.

Self-compassion, Psychological resilience, Social media use, Thai students

1. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rapid uptake of smartphones in Thailand has meant that Internet and social media use are growing rapidly. A 2013 study reported that 76.3 percent of Thai citizens used the Internet, with 9 percent of them reporting more than 105 hours of Internet use per week\(^1\). For adolescents and young adults (i.e. those aged 15 to 24 years old), the average time spent online has increased from 39.7 hours per week in 2007 to 51.9 hours per week in 2011\(^2\). For Thai generation Y, who were born between the years 1981-2000, approximately 54.2 hours per week were spent online in 2015\(^3\). Thus, many researchers have become interested in investigating the effects of Internet use in general and social networking in particular on the wellbeing of young Thai people\(^4\).

The parents of Thai adolescents are particularly concerned about the impact of social media use on young people\(^5\). But for Thai adolescents themselves, we find that while they show some concerns about the growth of materialism, sex, and violence in social media content, many exhibited positive attitudes toward social media in terms of the support offered for creativity and for their communities and friendship networks\(^6\).

Thailand was ranked seventh amongst Asia Pacific countries in terms of social media use in January, 2016 (34 millions)\(^7\). Facebook addiction in Thai high school students is relatively high in comparison to some countries such as German and Philippines\(^8\). It is therefore pertinent to investigate the general effects of social media on mental health and wellbeing in Thai adolescents. In this study, we explore social media use and its relationship to two psychological constructs: self-compassion and psychological resilience.

On the one hand, we know that social media systems can have a positive lifestyle effect as they are effective tools relationship building and for supporting social integration\(^9-11\). The number of Facebook friends an individual has been related to perceived social support and has been shown to offer benefits in terms of an individual’s physical health (for example, in reducing stress), improving psychological wellbeing\(^12\) and subjective wellbeing\(^13\). Friends activities on Facebook can also influence individual decision making\(^14\). Further, the use of microblogging tools to share emotional states has been found to be beneficial both because of the capability to discuss concerns more widely but also from the responses of online friends as they constitute a form of social support. Such improvements in wellbeing can be immediate (i.e. the act of disclosure in itself can produce benefits, before any response is made)\(^15\). Thus social media use can impact psychological wellbeing by providing both social support and by enhancing self-esteem\(^16\).

In addition, social media websites can offer educational support, helping students to improve in their studies. In one example, Dartmouth College students who used the Pizza site (an online bulletin board for class notification) to read, post and ask some questions found they could study better on a programming class. Specifically, the number of their posts was significantly related to their grades in this class whereas class attendance per se was not linked to their academic achievement\(^17\). In Thailand, social media can also use to develop the varied model for university students\(^18-20\).
On the other hand, some recent research has associated social media use with loneliness and depressive symptoms. Internet addiction is also common among Asian adolescents. Measures taken using the IAT (the Internet Addiction Test) in Asian countries found scores that were comparatively higher than the currency of IAT founded in Europe.

This can also be a pressing problem when viewed in they were likely to have emotional problem without their mobile phones. Playing electronic games has also been found to negatively impact upon academic outcomes in Thai adolescents in the South of Thailand. Playing games reduces the time people spend on academic work or social activities, for instance, doing homework, spending time with friends or family. Moreover, 22.4 percent of Thai female adolescents met the strangers whom they had known via the Internet and 8.2 percent of them had sex with someone whom they had known via the Internet.

Previous studies have explored a number of different dimensions of wellbeing in general, and self-compassion and resilience in particular, but no research has yet explored the relationship between self-compassion, psychological resilience, and social media in Thai students. Additionally, no research had been investigated the effect of social media use that might have on these constructs. From the first author’s personal teaching experiences, some Thai students use social media to vent their feelings when they feel distressed, hence, it is interesting to determine whether social media affects self-compassion and psychological resilience in Thai students and, conversely, to understand how social media use might help them these students to better deal with difficulties in their lives.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are to study the factors affecting self-compassion and psychological resilience and to explore the role that social media use has on these constructs.

3. KEY POINTS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a substantial body of literature addressing those factors affecting adolescents’ social media use. For example, it has been found that the quality of the child-mother relationship affected adolescents’ self-concept and friendship quality whereas friends played an important role on their digital media use. Specifically, communicating with one’s friends online played a role in their sense of identity positively. Takao, Takahashi, and Kitamura investigated addictive personality and problematic mobile phone use among Japanese college students and found that gender, self-monitoring and approval motivation were predictors of problematic mobile phone use. They also indicated that females were more likely to exhibit this behavioral problem. Finally, they concluded that cultural differences might have an effect on this phenomenon, especially in Asian countries.

Social media use is very popular among Thai adolescents and the time that young Thais are likely to spend on Facebook is growing rapidly. Thailand also has higher rates of Facebook addiction than in many countries. Moreover, Thai people who was affected by media and important people in their lives were likely to spend more time to use social network site, including Facebook.

Self-compassion originated in Buddhist Psychology but it is not specific to Buddhism. It has been investigated in a psychological research for many years. It was defined by Kristin Neff as treating ourselves with the gentle and understanding (Self-kindness), feeling that individual’s experience are interconnected with other people (Common humanity) and having an emotional awareness when negative feeling occurs (Mindfulness). These three elements of self-compassion could moderate the relationship between cognitive-personality vulnerability and depression differently. Also, self-compassion mediated the association between body image contentment and self-esteem in Thai female adolescents. Specifically, self-compassion helped them to accept their physical imperfections and perceived that they were parts of human experience. Interestingly, it was found that Thais had the higher levels of self-compassion compare to Taiwanese and Americans even though Thailand and Taiwan were collectivist countries. Their study also indicated that the self-compassion levels in three countries are related to the particular cultural context and it was related to psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that self-compassion has been valuable for moderating internet addiction and has been associated with lower anxiety levels. However, it was unclear that how these constructs related to each other.

Psychological resilience is another construct that related to individual’s adjustment. It was defined as an ordinary quality of humans consisting of 5 factors. They include; personal competence/high standards/ tenacity, trust/ tolerance/ strengthening effects of stress, positive acceptance of change secure relationship, control and spiritual influences.

For university students, resilience can help in dealing with adversity and distress and has been
shown as a factor in supporting success\textsuperscript{36}. Karremans and Vingerhoets found that secure attachment was related to reduced reappraisal and resilience than other attachment styles and that this partly mediated the effects on well-being\textsuperscript{37} with second year students showing higher levels of subjective well-being compared with first and third year students\textsuperscript{38}. Furthermore, the risk factors may lead the new students to negative events and brought undesirable results whereas the psychological resilience in the long-term would help the new students to deal with difficulties. The relationship between resilience and academic outcomes needs further examination in higher education (HE)\textsuperscript{36}. Moreover, there were moderate scores on psychological resilience among Thai and Muslim undergraduate students and there were the different levels of psychological resilience among Thai undergraduate students in different faculties, academic outcomes and birth of order. Finally, it was found that Thai and Muslims shared the collectivism culture even though they had the different religions and most students who studied in Faculty of Arts and Applied Arts had the high levels of psychological resilience\textsuperscript{39}.

In summary, then, social media is widely used by Thai students, however, there no research has investigated the effects of social media use on their wellbeing, in particular on the important constructs of self-compassion and psychological resilience. Hence, this study tries to fill this gap. The aims of this study were to study those factors affecting both self-compassion and psychological resilience, to study the relationship between them and to explore the role that social media use has on both of these constructs.

4. METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods design using both questionnaire and in-depth interviews was employed to explore self-compassion, psychological resilience and social media use in Thai students. This is outlined below:

4.1 Quantitative materials

A questionnaire was constructed to investigate the predictors of self-compassion and psychological resilience with the following structure:

- **Personal factors (15 items)**: Social support and family factors (48 items), social media use (18 items), educational attainment (9 items), self-compassion and psychological resilience.

The social support and family factors section was divided into 4 categories. They included:

- **Family** (10 items) e.g. ‘Your parents asked you about your studies.’ (alpha = 0.80)
- **Friends in classrooms** (10 items) e.g. ‘You have many friends in your classes.’ (alpha = 0.84)

Other friends outside the classroom (10 items), e.g. ‘You have many friends.’ (alpha = 0.90)

The section on social media use was divided into 3 categories (time spent on social media, attitude towards social media use and effects of social media use on friends and family). Items included inter alia, ‘Social media helps you to keep in touch with your friends and family’ and your use of social media means that you spend less time with family than you used to.’

Educational attainment was divided into 2 categories.

- **Frequency of absence**, e.g. ‘Over the last semester approximately how many days were you absent from your classes?’
- **Teacher support**, e.g. ‘How often do you talk to your teachers/lecturers after the session.’

Self-compassion (26 items): The Self-compassion Scale (SCS) consists of 26 items that included varied ranking from almost never (1), occasionally (2), about half of the time (3), fairly often (4) and almost always (5). The total scores range from 1 – 130\textsuperscript{28}. The total scores would perform individuals’ level of self-compassion; self-kindness versus self-judgement, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over identification\textsuperscript{40}. The example items were ‘I’m disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.’ and ‘When I’m feeling down, I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong’\textsuperscript{28} (alpha = 0.81).

Psychological resilience (25 items): The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) consists of 25 items. All items have 5 different scales from not true at all (0), rarely true (1), sometimes true (2), often true (3) and true nearly all the time (4) . The total scores varied from 0 – 100. Higher scores meant more resilience. The example items were ‘Able to adapt to change’ and ‘Close and secure relationships’\textsuperscript{41}. It was translated into Thai by Nauwarat Imlintham\textsuperscript{41} (alpha = 0.90).

The questionnaire was approved by the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences ethics committee. In addition, the researcher received full permission to use both SCS and CD-RISC for the data collection.

4.2 Participants

In total, 484 undergraduate students completed the questionnaires. They were 234 males, 248 females (2 participants did not say) with ages ranging from 17 to 44 years old (M = 20.41 and SD = 2.18). All of them had taken the general courses in the second semester of 2014 at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (Chiang Mai and Lampang Campus).
4.3 Qualitative follow-up
As a follow-up to the questionnaire, 21 Thai students (male=12) were interviewed. All of them were Thais, Buddhists with the ages from 19 – 22 years old (M = 19.90 and SD = 0.94). They had taken the general courses in the second semester of 2014 at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (Chiang Mai Campus).

5. RESULTS

Data analysis
Linear multiple regression was used to investigate the factors that predicted self-compassion and psychological resilience. Correlation was used to study the relationship between self-compassion and psychological resilience. An alpha level of .01 and .05 was applied as the level of significance throughout.

The predictors of self-compassion
The result showed that the independent variables could significantly predict 19 % of self-compassion (F = 6.60, p < .01). Interestingly, the effects of social media use on friends and family was significantly related to self-compassion, r = 0.21, p < .01. There was a small positive relationship between these two variables. It indicated that those students who perceived that those students who sacrificed the friends and family time to spend more time on social media use are less self-compassionate. Furthermore, gender, degree, performance in comparison with friends, family, other friends outside classrooms, and finally teacher support could significantly predict self-compassion of Thai students at an alpha level of .05. However, religion, year of study, current average mark, total household income, a number of brothers and sisters, friends in classrooms, social media use, attitude towards social media use and frequency of absence could not predict self-compassion in Thai students. (Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Predictors</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>2.54</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
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<td>.20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.40</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
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<td>-2.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current average mark</td>
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<td>-1.13</td>
<td>.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance in comparison with friends</td>
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<td>2.43</td>
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<td>A number of brothers and sisters</td>
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<td>-.66</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
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<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends in classrooms</td>
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Table 1 Standardized Regression Coefficient, t-Value, and Significance Value for the predictors of self-compassion

Specifically, if they spent less time with their families, it is likely to make them feel bad or guilty about themselves due to the family is vital for collectivist cultures, including in Thailand. In addition, friends are also crucial for their social lives. If they spent less time with friends, they may feel alienated or unhappy. Therefore, when they perceive the disadvantages of social media use, students with high self-compassion tend to think about themselves with caring and understanding (self-kindness) and try to balance their negative and positive feelings (mindfulness). Sometimes, they are likely to realize that it may happen with other people. This study is in accord with the previous study in Thai adolescents indicating that playing electronic games was negatively related to academic outcomes due to it would reduce the time that they spent for academic or social purposes, for instance, doing homework, spending time with friends or family22. It also confirmed an importance of key people in their lives on social media use, in particular families and friends26,27.

The predictors of psychological resilience
The finding revealed that the independent variable could significantly predict psychological resilience for 26% (F = 9.86, p < 0.001). Crucially, there was a significant relationship between effects of social media use on friends and family and psychological resilience, r = 0.16, p < 0.001. These result suggested that the students who sacrificed the friends and family time to spend more time on social media use are less resilient. Additionally, religion, year of study, degree, current average mark, performance in comparison with friends, family, and teacher support could predict psychological resilience of Thai students at an alpha level of .05 whereas gender, total household annual income, a number of brothers and sisters, friends in classrooms, other friends outside classrooms, social media use, attitude towards social media use and frequency of absence could not predict psychological resilience in Thai students. (Table 2)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Predictors</th>
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<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Standardized Regression Coefficient, t-Value, and Significance Value for the predictors of psychological resilience
Self-Compassion, Psychological Resilience and Social Media Use in Thai Students

Thanyalak Boonlue ● Pam Briggs ● Elizabeth Silence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>.13</th>
<th>3.01</th>
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<tr>
<td>Year of study</td>
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<td>A number of brothers and sisters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends in classrooms</td>
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<td>1.88</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other friends outside classrooms</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media use</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards social media use</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of social media use on friends and family</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequency of absence</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher support</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results suggested that the students who sacrificed the friends and family time to spend more time on social media use are less resilient due to they are more likely to addict to the Internet or social media use. When people were addicted to their mobile phone, they were likely to have emotional problem without their mobile phones. This can influence their decision making and coping ability. Also, they match those observed in earlier studies which found the association between social media use with loneliness and depressive symptoms. In addition, this results further support the ideas that social media use could be a cause of time-consuming and online danger and influenced people’s social comparison and these comparisons can cause negative effects on their wellbeing.

### The relationship between self-compassion and psychological resilience

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the relationship between self-compassion and psychological resilience. A significant positive correlation was found between self-compassion and psychological resilience at the $p = 0.01$ level. Specifically, those students with a high level of self-compassion, are also likely to obtain a high score in psychological resilience. This result supports previous research results. For example, it confirmed Krieger, Altenstein, Baettig, Doerig, & Holtforth's study because they mentioned that self-compassion has been declared to be linked with resilience in various aspects. It was in agreement with MacBeth & Gumley's finding which indicated that self-compassion was a vital variable to understand health and resilience. In addition, it proved Neff & McGehee's concept that self-compassion had a strong relationship with well-being among adolescents. The last thing to note is that these results supported that demographic factors had an effect on psychological wellbeing in Thailand. In addition, cultural contexts played a vital role in underpinning subjective wellbeing.

### Qualitative analysis

A Thematic Analysis was used to analyse themes and sub-themes from the semi-structured interviews and to explore how Thai students used social media to deal with the difficulties in their lives. Many of the participants used social media as an alternative way to vent their feelings, effectively using social media as a tool to help them come to terms with their own feelings (Self-compassion) and to restore an emotional balance (Mindfulness). Furthermore, some participants used social media to share their negative experiences and receive the support of other people who had been through similar situations before (Common humanity). For example, Thitima reported that

'If I feel as if I have repressed my feelings and I have not expressed them. So, I express them on Twitter. When I stay alone and I want to tell my friends something, I use social media. Then, I feel better.' (female)

Additionally, some participants used social media to distract themselves from the negative feelings. However, sometimes social media led to post 'posting' regret in terms of over disclosure and some of them revealed that social media use offered no physical comfort. Sarin noting during his interview that

'If I am telling my friends that I feel sad and my tear is running down, they can use their hands to comfort me. If I use social media, they just click ‘Like’. I am indifferent. I do not like to use them much in general.' (male)

Therefore, this result was in line with previous studies which mentioned that when people share their emotions via microblog, they can gain social support from their online friends and their psychological wellbeing would be increased before perceiving some responses from the audiences.

### 6. SUMMARY OF MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

The first thing to note is that the students who sacrificed time with friends and family in order to engage with social media were less self-compassionate. This relationship might be explained in relation to the cultural context of collectivism in Thailand. Thai people perceive gratitude as being vital to a moral society and this
is reflected in a strong sense of duty and care with respect to family. In addition, peer groups play a vital role during adolescence. When the participants spent more time on social media, they may feel alienated and disconnected from their family and friends. In addition, they probably judge themselves to be bad family members or friends and have negative feelings about themselves when they did not make enough time for these people. This could eventually decrease the way that they think, treat and accept themselves (self-compassion).

Another thing to note is that the students who sacrificed time with friends and family to spend more time on social media were less resilient. This relationship may also be explained in relation to Thai culture which identified that families and communities were more important than individuals. When Thai children and adolescents have to deal with the difficulties in life, they always receive some support and advice from their families. Friends also provided support and made them feel better. If they spent more time using social media, they were likely to get less support from their friends and family. They could get some support from online friendship, however, some adolescents found out that it could not compensate for a lack of face-to-face, physical communication. Finally, some adolescents used social media to distract themselves from undesirable feelings but the problems often remained unresolved. This may not help them to recover when they had to deal with a range of difficulties (psychological resilience).

The research findings are the primary data for the researchers to investigate the difference between self-compassion, psychological resilience, and social media use among Thai and British students in the next stage of the research. Secondly, the findings provide beneficial information for Thai university lecturers and psychologists to develop programs to enhance Thai students’ self-compassion psychological resilience and effective social media use.

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