
**THE INFLUENCE OF THE LINE SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION IN
THAI COMMUNICATIONS**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to present the influence of the social media platform, LINE within Thailand, which is an application created for communication and social networking by the Japanese Line Company, a subsidiary of Korean Naver Corporation. Line has exerted a disproportionate influence on communications in Thailand since 2012, with an exponentially increasing user base that has placed Line as the second most positively mentioned brand within Thailand as reported by You Gov's Brand Index. Line Thailand is the second largest subsidiary and lucrative market for the Line application after Japan, with over 42 million users, a penetration rate of 83% of mobile users within the country. Thai Line users also display divergent behavior from users in other markets, spending 84 minutes per day on average using the app and receiving 52% more messages, 114% more pictures, 85% more videos and 52% more stickers per day than users in other markets, reflecting the unique usage of the application within Thailand.

In addition to personal use, both the public and private sectors of Thailand have embraced the Line application and use it to facilitate their productivity and value creation. Further, as line expands into further digital medias and facilitating payments Line will increasingly permeating even more facets of Thai life.

This paper aims to examine the divergent behavior of Thai Line users compared to other global markets, as well as examining related consumer law that governs the Line platform. The research will consist of qualitative primary research aimed at understanding how and why Line has dominated the Thai social media ecosystem by interviewing users, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders.

The result has found that many features of the line application such as stickers, text-to-speech functions, large group chats, integration of payment platforms and user generated content have especially appealed to Thai consumers and their social and expressive needs and social dynamics compared to other platforms.

Keywords: Mobile application online communication online business in Thailand

Introduction

Statement of the Problems

Currently, users have many ways to communicate, such as; mobile phones, instant messaging and e-mail among other digital tools that allows us to contact individuals or groups of people in many different ways at any time with the aim to present various stories, including news, facts,

feelings, thoughts, needs, as well as opinions on various matters and let people or groups recognize our daily lives fulfilling self-expressive and bonding needs. There are applications that are used to communicate openly, such as Face book, Instagram or closed communication by sending private messages such as LINE, WhatsApp, We Chat, these applications have become more active in today's society in the field of communication and have drastically impacted how individuals facilitate their lives.

Within Thailand, LINE is the most popular social media application and is considered one of the most important marketing communications channels due to its 42 million addressable daily users(Siwat C., 2019) and is an important promotional and communication tool for organisations and stakeholders. LINE's large audience can initially be attributed to its simple signup process only requiring a phone number and its compatibility with the types of phones that are easily available to Thais(Mark Rendon, 2017)

Within the markets for online communication applications in; Europe, South America, Africa and India, WhatsApp which was established in 2009, remains the most popular application and has over 13 billion users (Siwat C., 2019),closely ranking with Facebook Messenger, the most popular in America and other culturally Western countries (BI Intelligence, 2016). With the third most popular application is the We Chat application with over 980 million users, most of which are users in China. (Mark Rendon, 2017)

According to the statistics (Siwat C., 2019),the LINE application, which is launched more slowly than other social media applications has been able to dominate the market in Japan, Thailand and Taiwan with 200 million users worldwide. Normally, the consumption behavior of Asian countries is often influenced by the Chinese and European markets. Therefore, it is a primary source of influence on consumer culture and consumption within Thailand (Chadha, R., 2017)

This article will focus on 2 issues: 1. Influence of LINE application in Thailand 2. Factors that have resulted in the LINE application dominating the Thai social media landscape and the interpersonal communications of Thai society. Both issues will be studied by; using marketing theory, collecting questionnaires from users and interviewing entrepreneurs and other business stakeholders who use or a related to the application. The data obtained was analysed and interpreted to describe the influence of LINE on Thai consumer behavior and how this may impact trends in the future.

1. Definition of LINE Application

LINE was first developed in 2011 in Japan by NHN Japan, a company that provides Internet services, games and search engines which collaborates with Naver Japan Corporation and Live door companies (McCracken, H., 2015). All three companies have developed together by improving various formats and applications to support continuous use of their offerings (McCracken, H., 2015). The name "LINE" occurred after an earthquake occurred in Japan in 2011that incident causing the communication system of the country to be interrupted. People in the country could only use a public telephone service that was automatically installed to be utilised when a disaster occurs. Many people had to line up to wait for help or services, therefore this are the origin of the word "line". (Khwanradee H, 2017)

LINE is an application for digital communication on various smart devices, such as smart phones, computers and tablets. Users can communicate by typing messages from one communication device to another. LINE Applications has been developed with a wide range of capabilities to support applications in many areas as portal platform, a service center that is useful in everyday life of consumers and aims to capture more of their usage and value from typical consumer behavior. Currently, LINE services can be divided into 6 main groups, namely;

1. Content business - LINE TV, LINE TODAY, LINE STICKERS
2. Business solutions for organizations - LINE Official Account, LINE @
3. Entertainment business - LINE GAME and LINE TV
4. E-commerce business - LINE GIFTSHOP
5. Payment business - Rabbit LINE Pay
6. Other businesses - LINE MAN (Delivery service), LINE FINANCE, LINE JOBS

2. Concepts and theories

2.1) Customer dynamics is an emerging theory on customer-business relationships that describes the ongoing interchange of information and transactions between customers and organizations. These exchanges occur over a wide range of communication channels, such as phone, email, Web and text, including those outside of organizational control like social media. Similar to the scientific disciplines of family and social dynamics, Customer Dynamics looks at the relationships between organizations and customers from an interpersonal viewpoint. It goes beyond the transactional nature of the interaction to look at emotions, intent, and desires and their change as customers move through their lifecycle. It views interactions as a chain of events that constantly evolve rather than single point occurrences. (Khwanradee H, 2017)

Customer dynamics can be used to describe the success of a line application in Thailand. Reflected by the users of the line application that covers all ages. Based on a survey of 300 samples, it was found that 7.8% of the users were younger than 15 years old, 25.6% were between 15-25 years old, 23.5% were between 26-35 years old, 18.3% were between 35-45 years old. and 24.8% of the users were over 45 years old, which is consistent with the statistics of the Electronic Transactions Development Agency in Thailand, which states that the aging society now uses more line applications than other applications in the same group of business.

LINE's user covers all sexes, ages and orientations with users joining groups of families, friends, and business both in personal conversations or group creating in discussions from three or more people to groups in workplace or organizations that correspond to Thai values of collectivism (Leesa-Nguansuk, S., 2017) From the sample survey, it was found that each user joined an average of 5 to 10 groups, representing 53% and there were no users who did not participate in any group, representing 0%. This encouraged business to grow rapidly because LINE was used in family groups and also used in work groups, people who are not interested in using the application are urged to use it for becoming part of a group or organization representing a powerful network effect.

In addition, LINE application also creates a relationship between customers. Based on the data of LINE Thailand in December 2018 (Siwat C., 2019) showed that the behavior of consumers interacting with various LINE services. LINE Thailand is the second largest in the world, with over 83% of the population accessing Internet services and also they showed

statistics for other LINE services such as stickers that had over 500 million downloads, the average number of comic readers on LINE WEBTOON about 3 million per month, LINE TV had 12 million downloads, etc. (Siwat C., 2019)

2.2) Lauterborn's 4Cs: Consumer wants and needs; Cost to satisfy; Convenience to buy and Communication

Lauterborn discusses the concept of marketing through 4Cs, a more customer centric framework that integrates consumers' perspectives that may replace the 4Ps popularized by Kottler. When applying this theory to study the factors of choosing Thai communication applications it can be considered through the following topics

Consumer Wants and Needs in the perspective of 4Ps are products, but in 4Cs view is the needs and wishes of customers in products or services that consumers choose to meet the needs and desires. The main requirement for selecting applications for communication in Thailand was 68.5% chose to use the application because they can use a variety of applications. Followed by the group that chose to use because of the convenience of communication 30.5% due to network effects (Ren J., 2018)

Consumer's Cost to Satisfy In the view of the 4Cs, means understanding the costs customers incur in order to create satisfaction for their needs or desires. In using various services through LINE Application, including communication as well as using Line Official Account (business accounts) to contact Customers are able to save on communication costs through the phone and can reach a large number of customers by sending messages group messages (Weng, C.,2016) Further, consumers do not incur costs using lines beyond data consumption unless they choose to access other services for self-expression, entertainment or to meet other needs through category extensions such as LINE Man that provide additional physical services (Weng, C.,2016)

Convenience to buy or place with the 4Ps is increasingly facilitated by LINE's platform strategy that is extending the platform into more distribution channels or increasingly making consumers other purchasing behaviours more convenient through digital commerce. LINE users are more able to express themselves in communications through multimedia and stickers within the application (Mark R., 2015)

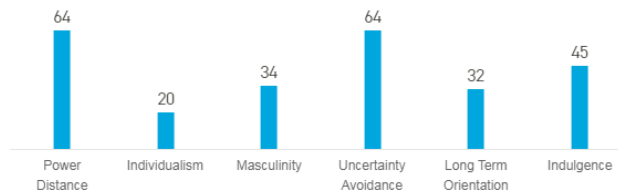
Communication in the perspective of 4Ps will be a marketing promotion, but in the 4Cs view is communication that consumers can choose to listen or not, believe it or not. By focusing on the importance of communication, organizing appropriate media for target customers For example, if consumers want to listen to news, they can use LINE TODAY. If customers want to watch products, they can buy via LINE because businesses and brands use LINE to communicate with consumers. It can be seen that LINE expands the business of the company in every aspect by focusing on services that are useful in the daily lives of consumers.

From a 4Cs perspective promotion changes to communication, with consumers deciding when, how and why to interact with customers. LINE facilitates customers to communicate with each other but to also seek information through LINE's various extensions such as LINE TODAY or other entertainment offerings. Further, LINE uses its own platform to facilitate, communicate with and sell to its customers (Siwat C., 2019)

3. Cultural influences that affect the success of LINE Application in Thailand

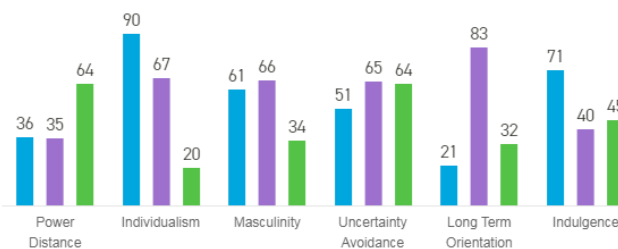
The rapid growth of the business in one country is not only a result of the strategy and marketing plans of entrepreneurs that create success for a business, rather there is another important factor affecting growth of the business, these factors are business compatibility and the basic cultural characteristics of the country which will shape the needs of the people in that country. In the case of LINE, it can be seen that the expansion of LINE within the Thai market in through new product development and increasing usage patterns is very consistent with the basic characteristics of Thai society. (Hofstede, 2019)

Hofstede Insights has shown the values for the 6 dimensions. To compare your personal preferences to the scores of a country by utilizing effective and proven framework based on Geert Hofstede’s work (Hofstede, 2019)



Graph 1: The Hofstede 6 dimensions of Thailand

Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>



Graph2: The Hofstede 6 dimensions of Australia, Germany and Thailand

Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/australia,germany,thailand/>

From the result above Thailand has high scores for Power distance and Uncertainty Avoidance. Thailand scores 64 on PDI index for Power distance, slightly lower than the average Asian countries (71) and quite high compares to Australia and Germany as examples of Western countries. It is a society in which inequalities are accepted; a strict chain of command and protocol are observed. Each rank has its privileges and employees show loyalty, respect and deference for their superiors in return for protection and guidance. This may lead to paternalistic

management. Thus, the attitude towards managers are more formal, the information flow is hierarchical and controlled. (Hofstede, 2019)

From the aforementioned characteristics, Thai society accepts the opinion of the group (Collectivism) are the main factors which result in Thai people choosing to use products and services according to the majority of people. In particular, when government organizations, such as banks, hospitals, educational institutions have used LINE that increase the number of users quickly and become a daily necessity, both personal and corporate communication as well as the purchase of various products and services. Currently, LINE Thailand has more than 42 million users, accounting for 83 percent of mobile internet users in Thailand, while the behavior of LINE users in Thailand compared to Global found that users in Thailand use LINE Application is estimated to be 84 minutes a day, with 52 percent more messages received in other countries, and 114 percent of images received, 85 percent of videos, and The sticker 52 percent

In addition, Thailand scores 64 on PDI index for Uncertainty Avoidance. As a result of this high characteristic, the society does not readily accept change and is very risk adverse. Change has to be seen for the greater good of the in group. (Hofstede, 2019)

Due to the nature of Thai people who do not like rapid changesso they do not have much exposure to new brands, but if any product is already known, it will be able to expand business extensively, such as LINE Application that came to Thailand since 2011 and continuously expanding business. Based on You Gov's Brand Index ranking, LINE is the second largest brand from 250 brands that have been most positively mentioned in Thailand. LINE Thailand is the second largest after Japan and has a rate Growing over 40 percent in the past year, with the main businesses that generate revenue including entertainment business (LINE Entertainment), business organizations (Official accounts), Stickers (Corporate) and content businesses (LINE TV, Stickers). (McCracken, H, 2015)

4. Characteristics of LINE Application that correspond to the needs of users in Thailand

Based on interviewing Mr. Ariya Banomyong, the Managing Director of LINE Thailand in conjunction with results of a survey consisting of 300 questionnaires from LINE Application users in Bangkok between the ages of 12 - 65 years, it is found that LINE Application has characteristics that are consistent with the needs of Use in Thailand as follows:

4.1) Creating a convenient and fast user account that can be generated from phone numbers, or other social media accounts such as Facebook accounts or email. After registering, users can automatically connect to contacts in both their phone contacts and e-mail immediately and can choose to receive or not receive contact from the chat partner freely and can register at the same time on mobile phones and computers.

4.2) Group Communication can be created when the user needs a specific communicative area for members. Users can create specific groups and communicate with each other within groups such as tertiary friends, family, colleagues, etc. When a member of the group sends out the message, it will reach all the members at the same time, which is consistent with the

character of Thai people who like to live a group life in conjunction with collectivist cultural values (SiwatC , 2019).

4.3) Using LINE for business development. A business can select specific target groups and can deliver information to the recipients exactly according to their interests. At present, there are many organizations bringing intellectual property to Line, as various digital products such allowing users to download the sticker of the brand to use without any cost, with the condition of accepting the friendship between the brand owner and the user which allows the product to send information of various products and services directly to the target customers by identifying the brand, the incentive, and various advertisements. (SiwatC , 2019)

4.4) Multi-media can be sent. The characteristics of LINE can deliver a variety of different forms which the sender can choose as suitable for the target audience such as text, pictures, posters, links to connect external websites, logo applications, video clips, stickers and voice messages etc allow for richer communication and expression. (Weng, C, 2016)

4.5) Users can chat with voice calls without charge, even if the destination of that chat partner is abroad. LINE users can chat by voice via Voice Call from a Smartphone to a Smartphone, Smartphone to a computer or computer, to the computer without any charge except the internet. Voice Call services reduce the gap of communication and reduce business costs as well. (Bualak N., 2017)

4.6) Rich media such as LINE's cartoon style stickers help support the speed and expressiveness of messages between the communicators more clearly as a symbol of expression of the emotions and feelings of the communication partner, which is suitable for Thai character who loves fun. In Thailand, the business of selling LINE Stickers have rapidly expanded, and users can design stickers and sell them (Siwat C , 2019) LINE will deduct from the sales amount, making stickers that reach the feelings and preferences of Thai people, rather than stickers that are distributed by the company forming an effective co-creation strategy that meets the needs of both LINE and its Thai users. It is considered as one of the strengths of LINE. Stickers can also be combined between creating cartoon characters and products, allowing them to be branded to consumers, allowing for promotional collaboration between brands and LINE. Therefore, the owner of products and services using can utilize line stickers to raise awareness about products and create positive brand attitude.

4.7) LINE Application can create a timeline as well as other online communities such as Facebook and Twitter that users can post messages, images or video clips on their own timeline page as needed, allowing for self-expressive benefits as well as meeting social needs of users. (Chada R., 2017)

4.8) Creating albums and storing messages. In addition to sending image files through the application, which may sometimes be lost when users change phones or stop chatting for a long time. The LINE application can create albums that store a large number of images and no time limit, and can be downloaded when needed even if the chat has been deleted. In addition, there

are feature keeps that can be used to record important messages or important files to be stored for later.

Conclusion

Thailand currently has more mobile internet users than internet users via computers. After the arrival of 4G, the growth rate of internet users via mobile phones has jumped with the number of users surpassing 50 million, increased from 40 million in the past year. Data from LINE TH PLAYBOOK (Siwat C , 2019) 63% of the population uses LINE, with 53% women and 47% men spending an average of 1 hour a day on LINE. Therefore, it can be said that LINE is the most powerful social media application in Thailand, with Thailand having the second largest number of users worldwide due to the fit between Thai users' culture and needs and the features and benefits responding to the needs of Thai people, such as group conversations, sending stickers instead of messages And corporate account creation.

People who live in the city are a group that uses high mobile phones because everyday life is hectic and requires flexibility. Therefore, the line application is very important for helping about communication because it not only helps facilitating work and also shortening the duration of activities. Nowadays many people from countryside move to work and live in Bangkok. The main migration suppliers are the North and Northeast regions of Thailand, while the main migration destinations are the Bangkok Metropolis and vicinities, and the Central region (National Statistical Office, 2016). There for online communication became very important for the migratory workers because they usually get low income and haven't had chance to visit their hometown often so they often use the line application instead.

For family communication in which Thai society tends to spend 7 hours a day outside the home due to traffic problems in large cities and other activities (Siwat C , 2019) Therefore, many family members choose modern communication channels to help communicate. With the LINE application being equally popular within different generations of a family.(SiwatC , 2019) The function of group chat responds well to the needs of the family as well, and also has a face-to-face video call, which is free of charge, making it economical, fast and easy to use.

Within organizations and among other stakeholders LINE acts as an internal communication tool, helping create understanding of executive policies and create relationships between the personnel in the organization and make the organization more efficient and positive in order to achieve objectives.

In conclusion, LINE has come to dominate the Thai social media and communication landscapes, being used by all demographic groups as well as within most business contexts. As LINE has continued to expand its service offerings and thus increase its value to Thai consumers LINE reduces the amount of apps that users are required to use to function effectively in a digital society by utilising a platform strategy to further meet more and evolving needs of Thai consumers. Due to particular Thai cultural characteristics (especially collectivism and power distance among other values) LINE has been able to incorporate itself into most daily aspects of

Thai life from communication, transport, payment, entertainment, business and employment and ultimately the most lucrative promotional channel for both business and individuals.

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