Paradigm Shift in Gender Equality Development Policy in Thailand: Parity versus Differences

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the recent paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality development policy, moving from a focus on parity (equal treatment) to recognizing and addressing gender differences. Despite significant progress in women's development through policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and empowerment, gender inequality and discrimination remain significant issues in Thailand. The study employs Michel Foucault's discourse analysis (1970, 1972, 1991) and Luce Irigaray's critical thoughts on gender differences in neoliberal capitalism (1985, 1995) to analyze the construction of "women" in Thailand's recent National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027). The findings suggest that the policy's focus on gender equality and women's empowerment is a gender-blind practice that fails to consider the different roles and diverse needs of women. Consequently, the national plan maintains the status quo and does not necessarily transform the unequal structure of gender relations in Thailand. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for a more nuanced approach to gender equality policy that recognizes and addresses the complex intersections of gender with other forms of social differentiation.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, National Action Plans, Paradigm Shift

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การปรับเปลี่ยนกระบวนทัศน์นโยบายการพัฒนาความเท่าเทียม
ทางเพศในประเทศไทย: ความเท่าเทียม vs. ความแตกต่าง

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการเปลี่ยนแปลงกระบวนทัศน์ในนโยบายการพัฒนา
ความเท่าเทียมทางเพศของประเทศไทย จากการมุ่งเน้นความเท่าเทียม (การปฏิบัติที่เท่าเทียมกัน)
ไปสู่การตระหนักและจัดการกับความแตกต่างทางเพศ แม้จะมีความก้าวหน้าอย่างมีนัยสำคัญในการ
พัฒนาสตรีผ่านนโยบายและโครงการที่มุ่งส่งเสริมความเสมอภาคทางเพศและการเสริมพลัง
ความไม่เท่าเทียมทางเพศและการเลือกปฏิบัติยังคงเป็นปัญหาสำคัญในประเทศไทย การศึกษานี้
ใช้การวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมของ Michel Foucault (1970, 1972, 1991) และแนวคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ของ
Luce Irrigaray เกี่ยวกับความแตกต่างทางเพศในระบบทุนนิยมเสรีนิยมใหม่ (1985, 1995)
เพื่อวิเคราะห์การสร้างความหมายของ "ผู้หญิง" ในแผนปฏิบัติการระดับชาติว่าด้วยการพัฒนาสตรี
(พ.ศ. 2566-2570) ของประเทศไทย ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่าการมุ่งเน้นความเสมอภาคทางเพศและ
การเสริมพลังสตรีในนโยบายเป็นแนวปฏิบัติที่ไม่คำนึงถึงความแตกต่างทางเพศ ซึ่งไม่ได้พิจารณา
ถึงบทบาทที่แตกต่างกันและความต้องการที่หลากหลายของผู้หญิง ส่งผลให้แผนระดับชาติยังคงรักษา
สถานะเดิมและไม่ได้เปลี่ยนแปลงโครงสร้างความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศที่ไม่เท่าเทียมในประเทศไทย
อย่างแท้จริง บทความนี้สรุปด้วยการเน้นย้ำถึงความจำเป็นในการใช้แนวทางที่ละเอียดอ่อนมากขึ้น
ต่อนโยบายความเสมอภาคทางเพศ ซึ่งตระหนักและจัดการกับความซับซ้อนของการตัดกันระหว่าง
เพศสภาพกับรูปแบบอื่น ๆ ของความแตกต่างทางสังคม

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Introduction

Gender equality policies and initiatives play a critical role in shaping societal norms and promoting inclusivity (UN Women, 2015, p. 19). Over the years, governments and international organizations have been striving to address gender disparities and promote equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their gender. The Thai government has recognized the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as key drivers of sustainable development (Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 3). Thailand's national women development policy framework has been instrumental in uplifting the quality of life for women throughout the country. The policy framework encompasses a wide range of initiatives aimed at addressing various aspects of women's lives, including education, healthcare, employment, and political participation (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2020a, p. 7). These initiatives focus on promoting equal opportunities, eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence, and enhancing women's access to resources and decision-making processes (Sopchokchai et al., 2017, p. 60). Through the implementation of targeted programs and legislative reforms, Sasiwimon Warunsiri Paweenawat, World Bank consultant, (2021, p.1) notes that Thailand has made significant progress in narrowing gender gaps and improving the overall well-being of women.

Thailand's pursuit of gender equality has undergone a paradigm shift, marked by a transition from a focus on parity or equal treatment to recognizing and addressing gender differences. (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2022b, p. 7). This shift reflects an evolving understanding of the complex nature of gender issues and the need for nuanced approaches that go beyond a numerical representation (UN Women, 2022, p. 11). This entails understanding that equal treatment does not always result in true equality and instead requires an approach that acknowledges and addresses the distinct experiences and obstacles faced by women and other gender groups. A paradigm shift in women's equality, thus, refers to a fundamental change in the way society perceives and approaches gender equality. It involves a shift away from traditional,

binary notions of gender roles and towards a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of gender identity and expression. This shift means a change in awareness, belief, communication, and design, and is characterized by a move towards more constructive attitudes and approaches to gender equality. Argued by Tiffani Betts Razavi, (2023, p. 17), a paradigm shift is necessary to achieve the ambitious and comprehensive targets set by the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) and to secure a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

The paradigm shift occurs at various stages of the policy process, from agenda-setting and policy formulation to implementation and evaluation. At the agenda-setting stage, the shift is evident in the recognition of gender equality as a critical issue requiring urgent attention and action, and the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in policy debates (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development & Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, 2022, p. 1). During policy formulation, the shift manifests in the development of policies that are informed by a nuanced understanding of the intersectional nature of gender inequality and that address the root causes of gender disparities (Hankivsky, 2012, p. 8). In terms of policy implementation, the paradigm shift is reflected in the adoption of gender-transformative approaches that actively challenge and seek to transform unequal gender relations, and in the implementation of policies that are sensitive to the diverse needs and experiences of different gender groups (MacArthur et al, 2022, p. 2). Finally, at the evaluation stage, the shift is evident in the use of gender-sensitive indicators and metrics to assess the effectiveness and impact of policies in promoting gender equality and social justice (Hochfeld & Bassadien, 2007, p. 218).

Despite a significant shift in Thailand's women's development policy, focusing on recognizing and addressing gender differences, persistent gender inequality, gender-based violence, and discrimination continue to be influenced by societal binary and heteronormative gender ideology. This study, which analyzes the portrayal of "women" in Thailand's recent national action plan for women's development using Michel Foucault's discourse analysis (1970, 1971, 1991) and Luce Irigaray's

critical perspectives on gender differences within a neoliberal capitalist context (1985, 1995), contends that the policy's emphasis on gender equality and empowerment overlooks the varying roles and diverse needs of women. This deeply embeded perspective, along with the inadvertent reinforcement of existing norms by the recent national plan, continues to affect various social aspects and overshadows the potential positive impacts of policy changes. Achieving true gender equality in Thailand may thus require a more profound transformation that not only challenges entrenched norms but also recognizes the complex and multifaceted nature of gender relations.

Literature Review

Thailand's Path toward Gender Equality

Thailand has demonstrated admirable advancements in women's development over the years, due in large part to the adoption of various international and regional instruments. These instruments include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and key instruments on women's rights under the ASEAN framework, such as the Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW), the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals, and the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN (Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 2). Thailand's adoption of these instruments has helped to promote gender equality and women's empowerment by providing a framework for actions and setting standards for progress. For example, the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 (2015) was enacted in response to Thailand's obligations under CEDAW, protecting not only women but also LGBTQ+ persons from discrimination. The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) has guided Thailand's efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women. Other legislative achievements towards gender equality during 2014-2019 include the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560 (2017), which guarantees

equality and prohibits gender discrimination. The Thai government also proposed that local administrative councils have no less than one-third members as women to promote women's participation in politics and decision-making. Overall, the adoption of these policies and key ASEAN framework instruments like the Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children has helped promote gender equality and women's empowerment by providing a roadmap for progress and setting standards for action. (The Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 2, 9).

Thailand's recent commitment to gender equality is demonstrated by the launch of the national action plan for women's development (2023-2027), a far-reaching effort encompassing issues like women's health, education, economic empowerment, and gender equality. The current national action plan for women's development involved a collaboration between Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA). The action plan on women's development in Thailand aims to foster awareness and understanding of gender equality, ensuring that women and girls are treated fairly, protected from violence, given opportunities for self-development, and have equal roles in leadership, with a focus on transforming societal attitudes and beliefs to elevate women's status.(Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development & Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, 2022, p. 1).

Despite progress, gender inequality and discrimination continue to be hindrances that require constant attention in Thailand. According to the country's Department of Disease Control, the Injury Surveillance System reported 8,577 cases of women injured from abuse per year from 2019 to 2021 in 51 hospitals across Thailand (Department of Disease Control, 2022, November 25). Meanwhile, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation noted that at least 7 women are found to be sexually or physically abused daily, according to media reports. This leads to up to 30,000 women being treated and reporting grievances annually, with contributing factors identified as alcohol, drugs, media influence, family background,

and societal environment. The Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation, a Thailand-based non-governmental organization, suggested that the 20 percent rise in reported cases of gender-based violence during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown was a result of stressors such as confinement and economic insecurity (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2021, August 31).

Gender Equality Development Models: Parity vs. Differences

The global discourse on gender equality is marked by contentious debates and diverse theoretical models. Chief among these models are two primary approaches: 'Parity' and 'Differences'. The former emphasizes the equal treatment and rights of all genders, while the latter acknowledges and values the unique experiences and needs of different genders (Walby, 2005, p. 321- 322; Bacchi & Eveline, 2009, p. 2). These perspectives often inform and shape the gender equality development policies (Balducci, 2023, p. 13). This paper explores the significant paradigm shift in Thailand's approach to gender equality development, charting the transition from a focus on parity to an embrace of differences and diversity.

The Parity Model

The Parity Model, also known as the Equality or Sameness Model, has its roots in the feminist movement and academic thought, and it primarily advocates for equality between men and women in every sphere of life. The basis of this model is the idea that women should have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as men (Walby, 2005, p. 326). Historically, the development of the parity model can be traced back to the Enlightenment era in the 18th century, where the concept of universal human rights started gaining ground. Women's rights advocates like Mary Wollstonecraft in her seminal work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), argued for the inclusion of women within this discourse of universal rights, advocating for the same social, political and economic rights as men (cited in Ferguson, 1999, p. 443). Wollstonecraft's ideas had a significant influence on later feminist movements and thinkers, such as the suffragettes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The focus of the parity model until the early 20th centuries was largely on suffrage.

Feminist activists, such as Emmeline Pankhurst, Annie Kennie, Christabel Pankhurst fought for women's right to vote, basing their arguments on the concept of equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their gender. This wave of feminism led to the adoption of women's suffrage in many countries around the world (Ramirez, Soysal, & Shanahan, 1997, p. 737).

In the mid-20th century, the parity model continued to evolve with the second wave of feminism. During this period, feminist scholars, such as Betty Friedan (2013/1963), Simone de Beauvoir (2011/1949), who pushed for the dismantling of institutionalized sexism, arguing that women should have the same opportunities as men in employment and education (cited in Mohajan, 2022, p.17). The landmark Civil Rights Act in the United States (1964), which prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, was a testament to the success of these efforts (Couch, Hersch & Shinall 2015 p. 448). The parity model was further reinforced in the 1970s and 1980s by the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) movement in the United States and similar movements in other parts of the world. The core of these movements was the demand for constitutional or legislative reforms to ensure gender parity.

In recent decades, this model has been increasingly questioned and complemented by other approaches. While the parity model undeniably played a critical role in advancing women's rights and opportunities, it has also been criticized for assuming that equality means sameness. Critics argue that it often neglects the diversity and intersectionality among women, and fails to address the systemic barriers rooted in these differences. Emphasizing the need to go beyond mere statistics for gender parity and examine the deeper societal norms and identities shaping daily realities, Aisa Manlosa from Leuphana University of Lüneburg and Denise Margaret Matias from the German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik or DIE) suggest that gender parity indicators can identify problem areas needing attention but caution that this mindset, while promoting workplace equality through equal representation in areas like income and education, must be distinguished from true gender equality, requiring a more comprehensive shift in societal norms and identities (2018, March 5).

Despite these critiques, the parity model remains an influential framework in the discourse on gender equality. Its principles continue to inform policies and legislation in many societies, reflecting an ongoing commitment to the ideals of equal rights and opportunities. Tiffani Betts Razavi's paper, *Parity, Paradigms, and Possibilities: A Constructive Approach to Advancing Women's Equality*, explores the concept of paradigm shift towards gender equality, arguing that the current dominant parity model has limitations. Razavi suggests a move towards more nuanced and inclusive understanding characterized by constructive attitudes, a focus on process, and a dynamic model allowing for various combinations, specialization, innovation, and synergies, with the abundance of questions in the literature about difference and sameness, women's identity and role, and the value of diversity and fairness in resource distribution, indicative of this shift (2023, p. 6).

The Differences Model

The Differences Model, also known as the Equity or Difference Approach, emerged in the latter part of the 20th century as an essential framework in gender studies, feminist theory, and policy-making. Diverging from the Parity Model's emphasis on sameness, it underscores the need to recognize and accommodate the biological, social, and cultural differences between genders, arguing that true equality can be achieved by acknowledging these distinctions and allocating resources accordingly (Cain, 1990, pp. 834, 836; Fraser, 2013, pp. 115, 192).

The origin of the Differences Model is deeply rooted in the critique of "equality feminism," the dominant ideology during the second wave of feminism in the mid to late 20th century, closely associated with the Parity Model (Vantin, 2021, p. 2). This model stressed the similarities between men and women, promoting equal rights and opportunities. However, the 1980s saw growing discontent with this "sameness" concept, a sentiment articulated by feminist scholars, such as Carol Gilligan (2003/1982, pp. 16-17). In her book, *In a Different Voice. Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Gilligan emphasized that women's moral orientation, often seen as a weakness, is also a strength. She argued that "women's deference" is rooted not only in social subordination but also in a profound concern for relationships

and responsibilities, an awareness of others' needs, and a willingness to include multiple viewpoints. This reflection prompted the development of "difference feminism," leading to the Differences Model, which underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing gender differences rather than treating them as identical.

This perspective grew prominent with the rise of third-wave feminism and postmodern feminist theory during the 1990s and 2000s, leading to the development of the concept of intersectionality. This concept highlighted how different aspects of identity, including gender, race, class, and sexuality, intersect to shape individual experiences, significantly contributing to the Differences Model. It encouraged policies that recognize and address the unique needs of diverse groups of women. Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 paper, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, played a crucial role in this understanding. She focused on how concentrating on the most privileged group members can sideline those burdened by multiple forms of discrimination, making the argument for a more nuanced view of oppression. Her work provided a way to describe both the simultaneous occurrence of various oppressions and the complexity of identity, emphasizing the intersection of differences in shaping women's experiences of oppression (p. 140).

The Differences Model has influenced a variety of gender-responsive strategies in policy-making. For example, in development policy, this approach encouraged the design of programs that consider the specific needs and realities of women, instead of treating them as a homogenous group (Hervías Parejo & Radulović, 2023, p. 412). While the Differences Model has been instrumental in highlighting diversity and promoting equity, it is not without criticism. Differences feminism has been criticized for risking essentialism in its view of traditional femininity and masculinity, reinforcing conventional stereotypes, and overlooking the fact that women and men across various classes and cultures have diverse perspectives and values (Narayan, 1998, p. 104, Naldini, 2011, p. 3). However, despite these challenges, the Differences Model continues to shape academic discourse and policy-making in the realm of gender equality, emphasizing the need to recognize, respect, and respond to differences (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021, September 27, p. 34).

Irigaray and The Emphasis of Differences

Luce Irigaray, a feminist, philosopher and linguist, has played a pivotal role in shaping contemporary discourse on gender and sexuality (Whitford, 1991, p. 3). Her theories explore psychoanalysis, philosophy, and linguistics to unravel and critically examine the ingrained androcentrism and phallocentrism in Western thought. Her works offer essential insights with broader implications for the development of gender policy.

Irigaray's theoretical framework centers on the concept of "sexual difference," emphasizing the necessity of recognizing and celebrating the intrinsic distinctions between men and women (Irigaray, 1985, p.68). She challenges the way Western philosophy and psychoanalytic theory have constructed women as the "Other" relative to men, thus denying women their own unique identity. Her proposal involves the acknowledgment of two discrete and equal genders, each possessing its own singular identity and ways of interacting with the world.

In the context of gender policy development, Irigaray's notions can be considered an extension of the "Differences Model" (Poe, 2011, p. 126), accentuating the need for acknowledgment and respect of gender differences in policy crafting and execution. Her claim of distinct gender identities opposes the universalist view frequently found in policy-making, thereby underscoring the importance of policies that attend to the particular needs and experiences of both women and men.

Irigaray's influence is observable in policies targeting gender-specific needs and experiences. For instance, her stress on the separate identities and experiences of women has facilitated the crafting of policies and programs that particularly address matters such as maternal health, violence against women, and women's economic empowerment (Moi, 1999, p. 9). However, the application of Irigaray's theories to policy development is not without criticism. A significant critique is that her focus on binary gender differences might be exclusionary, potentially marginalizing individuals who do not conform to the traditional gender binary, like transgender and non-binary individuals (Butler, 1990, p. 30). This could lead to the inadvertent reinforcement of detrimental gender binaries and stereotypes.

Moreover, Irigaray's stress on the distinct identities and experiences of men and women falls short of addressing the intersections of gender with other identity aspects like race, class, and sexuality. Critics contend that a genuinely inclusive gender policy must recognize and respond to these intersections to appropriately meet the varied needs and experiences of all individuals (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 144).

In conclusion, Luce Irigaray's concept of sexual difference has furnished invaluable insights into the recognition of distinct gender identities and experiences. Yet, its utilization in policy-making necessitates careful consideration to prevent the reinforcement of harmful binaries or oversight of intersectionality. The task for policymakers is to employ these insights to foster more inclusive and efficacious gender policies (Connell, 2009, p. 40).

Policy Evolution in Thailand

Thailand's shift towards the parity model, advocating equal rights for men and women, began with legal and policy frameworks in the latter half of the 20th century. This change was epitomized in 1932 when the transition from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy led to the country's inaugural constitution, promising equal rights for all citizens regardless of sex, and marking a significant milestone toward gender equality (Paweenawat, 2021, p. iv). The progression emphasized a legislative framework aiming to grant women identical opportunities across various domains of life (Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 2). Although well-intentioned, this approach met with criticism for neglecting intrinsic gender differences and failing to consider the country's socio-cultural diversity (Buranajaroenkij, 2017, p.7). Subsequent constitution revisions consistently embraced this gender equality principle.

In the field of education, the National Education Act of 1999 stressed gender parity, mandating identical rights and opportunities for all in education (Kantavong, Nethanomsak, & luang-ungkool 2012, p. 1045). Within the labor market, the Labor Protection Act (2001) and the Gender Equality Act (2015) were also tailored to bolster equal opportunities, expressly forbidding gender-based discrimination (Paweenawat,

2021, p. 6-7). Furthermore, the Thai government launched the Women Development Plan under the National Economic and Social Development Plan to augment women's financial and social status. For example, the Thai Women's Empowerment Plan (2002-2006) aspired to elevate women's role in decision-making and bolster their economic autonomy (United Nations Development Programme, 2006, p. 11).

Despite concerted efforts towards gender equality, many parity-based initiatives, including the Gender Equality Act (2015), have faced substantial scrutiny. Sawitri Suksri's research (2021, p. x) reveals that even with the act's significant intentions, empirical evidence and stakeholder feedback suggest limited progress since its introduction in 2015. This sentiment is echoed by Wasi (2021, p.2), who critiques these policies for overlooking the unique challenges faced by rural women and ethnic minorities, thereby neglecting to address systemic and cultural barriers impeding true gender equality.

The emphasis on homogeneity was also challenged, as critics maintained that sameness may not necessarily translate into real equality (Gopal, 2004, p. 69). A burgeoning awareness developed, recognizing the need for a more sophisticated approach—one that recognizes and responds to the differences and diversity among women—to truly attain gender equality in Thailand. This critical insight gradually catalyzed a transformation in Thailand's gender policy strategy, steering it from the "parity" model to a differences model, which focuses on acknowledging and addressing diverse needs and challenges among women (Buranajaroenkij, 2017, p.11).

Methodology

This study employs Irigaray's concepts and Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine the representation of women in Thailand's recent national action plan for women's development. Irigaray's framework focuses on the critique of phallocentrism and the exploration of sexual difference, while Foucauldian discourse analysis offers a methodological approach to understanding how knowledge and power are constructed and maintained through language and social practices.

Foucault's discourse analysis offers a multifaceted framework for analyzing the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy. By unpacking power structures, deconstructing gender binaries, offering historical context, examining institutional influence, and empowering marginalized perspectives, Foucault's approach provides a nuanced and critical tool for understanding the complex ways in which policies both shape and reflect the societal construction of "woman" (Foucault, 1980).

Unpacking Power Structures

Foucault's discourse analysis helps to identify how power is exercised within language and how it shapes the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy. This approach reveals how policies define and position women, often in ways that may reinforce traditional gender roles or inequalities (Butler, 1990). Understanding power relations within gender discourse enables a critical examination of how policy both reflects and shapes societal attitudes towards women (Scott, 1988).

Deconstructing Gender Binaries

Foucault's deconstruction of binary oppositions is insightful for analyzing the unintended consequences of gender equality policies, particularly how they might inadvertently reinforce binary conceptions of gender. Within such policies, women are frequently defined in contrast to men, echoing the binary structures (Foucault, 1978). This perspective permits a nuanced exploration of how policies simultaneously contest and reaffirm gender stereotypes. This nuanced view aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's critiques, as she dissected societal frameworks and the social construction of "woman" (Beauvoir, 2011/1949).

Historical and Contextual Analysis

Foucault's emphasis on historical analysis is crucial for understanding the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy within its historical context (Foucault, 1972/1971). It facilitates tracing the evolving definitions and representations of women in policies, linking current discourses to historical beliefs and practices.

Lois McNay's work suggests that Foucault's insights into power can illuminate gendered mechanisms in public policy, enabling an understanding of how policies reflect and respond to shifting societal norms and attitudes towards women (McNay, 1992).

Institutional Influence on Gender Construction

Foucault's focus on institutional influence provides insights into how different institutions shape the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy. Analyzing the role of government, legal frameworks, and other institutions reveals how they contribute to defining and positioning women within the social structure, often in ways that can either challenge or perpetuate gender inequalities (Connell, 2009).

Empowering Marginalized Perspectives

Foucault's discourse analysis brings to the center the voices and perspectives of marginalized individuals, including women (Foucault, 1982). It highlights how gender equality policies may both include and exclude different groups of women, reflecting broader societal biases and assumptions (Crenshaw, 1991). This focus on marginalized voices can contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive analysis of gender equality policies.

Integrating Irigaray's Concepts and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

This research explores the potential synergy between Luce Irigaray's concepts and Michel Foucault's discourse analysis in examining gender and power relations, particularly in the context of Thailand's gender equality policy. Foucault's methodology reveals underlying power structures shaping social reality through analyses of institutions, practices, and discourses. Irigaray, conversely, challenges these structures by exposing gender biases in traditional philosophical and psychoanalytic discourses. Despite their differences, both approaches critically examine how language and discourse construct and maintain power relations, emphasizing the need to challenge dominant discourses perpetuating gender inequality (Whitford, 1991).

In analyzing Thailand's gender equality policy, Irigaray's framework helps examine how policy discourse constructs and represents the feminine, assessing its challenge to masculine norms. Her concept of mimesis, involving strategic reappropriation of masculine discourse, could analyze attempts to revalue the feminine (Xu, 1995). Simultaneously, Foucault's discourse analysis can contextualize the policy within broader historical and institutional frameworks, examining how it shapes and is shaped by existing power relations. His concept of governmentality could analyze how the policy discourse constructs and governs gendered subjects (Binkley, 2009).

Combining these approaches offers a more comprehensive understanding of the paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality policy. This integration can identify how the policy challenges or reinforces dominant gender norms and power relations, assessing its potential to promote genuine gender equality and social transformation. The synergy between these frameworks can contribute to developing more effective gender equality policies in Thailand. By incorporating insights from both Irigaray and Foucault, policymakers can design policies that not only challenge dominant gender discourses but also create new spaces for feminine affirmation and empowerment. In conclusion, while distinct, Irigaray's framework and Foucault's discourse analysis offer valuable complementary perspectives for analyzing and developing transformative gender equality policies in Thailand and beyond.

Findings

Analytical Framework: Parity vs. Differences Approach

Thailand's approach to gender equality policy has undergone a significant paradigm shift, moving from a 'parity' model to a 'differences' model. This shift forms the core of our analytical framework. The parity model focuses on achieving equal representation, treats women as a homogeneous group, and aims for uniform solutions. In contrast, the differences model recognizes diverse needs and experiences, acknowledges intersectionality, and tailors solutions to specific groups.

This framework allows us to analyze the evolution and implications of Thailand's gender equality policies.

The Paradigm Shift

Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plans have evolved in their approach to women's development over the years. **The ninth national development plan (2002-2006) exemplified the parity model, focusing primarily on increasing women's participation in decision-making roles and economic empowerment. However, this approach fell short in addressing the complex realities of gender inequality in Thailand.

The shift towards the differences model became evident in the eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016). This plan acknowledged the distinct needs, roles, and challenges faced by women across varied socio-economic strata, particularly rural and ethnic minority women. The twelfth plan (2017-2021) further solidified this shift by adopting an intersectional approach, recognizing how overlapping identities influence discrimination and opportunity. This paradigm shift represents a fundamental change in how gender issues are conceptualized and addressed in policy, moving beyond narrow parity goals to recognize the complex, multi-dimensional nature of gender inequality (Razavi, 2023, p. 6).

Case Study: National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027)

To illustrate the implications of this paradigm shift, Thailand's Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027) is analyzed as a case study. This plan exemplifies the differences approach through six key principles: women's human capital development, eradication of violence against women, promotion of women in governance and leadership, reshaping societal perspectives through public communication, enhancement of administrative tools for gender equality, and development of core competencies in national women's development agencies.

These principles demonstrate how the differences model translates into policy design. The plan includes targeted interventions, such as specific measures for different groups like economic empowerment initiatives for rural women (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development et al., 2022). It adopts an intersectional approach, addressing multiple dimensions of inequality and recognizing how gender intersects with other factors like ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the plan implements gender mainstreaming, integrating gender perspectives across all policy areas (Mendoza, 2024).

The paradigm shift towards the differences model has significant implications for policy effectiveness and inclusivity. By recognizing diverse needs, policies can more effectively address specific barriers faced by different groups of women (Jongwilaiwan & Thompson, 2011). The consideration of intersectionality allows for more inclusive policies that address the needs of marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals and women with disabilities (Unterhalter et al, 2020). Additionally, gender mainstreaming has the potential to lead to more comprehensive and sustainable changes across all policy areas.

While the paradigm shift offers many benefits, it also presents challenges. The effectiveness of these policies will depend on factors such as resource availability, institutional capacity, and political will. Linguistic and conceptual barriers persist, as the construction of gender in policy language may still reinforce binary concepts, potentially limiting full inclusivity. Moreover, there's a need to balance targeted interventions with overarching principles of gender equality, highlighting the complexity of implementing the differences model in practice.

Conclusion

The paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality policy, from a parity model to a differences model, represents a significant step towards more effective and inclusive policies. This shift, as exemplified by the National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027), has the potential to address the complex and multi-faceted nature of

gender inequality more comprehensively. By recognizing diverse needs, addressing intersectional inequalities, promoting participation and inclusion, and mainstreaming gender in all policy areas, Thailand's new approach to gender equality policies has the potential to promote greater social justice and equity. However, the success of this approach will depend on effective implementation, ongoing evaluation, and a commitment to addressing the challenges identified.

This analysis demonstrates how the paradigm shift affects policy design and implementation in Thailand, offering insights that may be valuable for other contexts grappling with similar challenges in advancing gender equality.

Revisiting Irigaray's Lens: Progress and Persistent Challenges

While the paradigm shift towards the differences model represents significant progress, Irigaray's critique of gender construction in policy remains relevant. The National Action Plan's recognition of diverse needs and intersectionality aligns with Irigaray's call to move beyond viewing women as "the Other" in relation to men. However, challenges persist in fully embodying Irigaray's vision.

The plan's emphasis on tailored solutions for specific groups of women acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences, a key aspect of Irigaray's philosophy. Yet, the linguistic framing of gender equality in Thai policy (as "equality between genders") still reinforces a binary opposition that Irigaray critiques. This highlights the ongoing tension between progressing towards more inclusive policies and the deep-rooted linguistic and conceptual frameworks that shape our understanding of gender. Moreover, while the plan addresses intersectionality, it may not fully capture the fluid and non-binary nature of gender that Irigaray's work points towards. The challenge lies in translating the theoretical recognition of gender complexity into practical policy measures that truly represent and protect all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

The National Action Plan's approach to gender mainstreaming and reshaping societal perspectives through public communication offers potential avenues for addressing these lingering issues. While these policies aim for greater inclusivity by acknowledging the complex and intersectional dimensions of women and marginalized communities, they have notable gaps in a key area. They do not adequately represent or account for non-normative gender and sexual identities and characteristics. As a result, there is a latent risk of inadvertently perpetuating heteronormative ideologies and essentializing the gender binary, which can be limiting and exclusionary.

In essence, by continuously emphasizing the traditional gender binary and presenting women as "the Other", these policies exclude non-normative women and other marginalized groups. Such exclusions reinforce existing prejudices and can impede the very progress the policies aim to promote. It is crucial for a comprehensive gender policy to recognize and address these nuances, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression, are truly represented and protected. Fully realizing Irigaray's vision of moving beyond gender as a binary construct remains an ongoing challenge in policy development and implementation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality policy, transitioning from a 'parity' to a 'differences' approach, represents a significant advancement in addressing unequal gender relations. This shift, as exemplified by the National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027), has the potential to transform the landscape of gender equality in Thailand by recognizing the diverse needs and experiences of different groups of women, addressing intersectional inequalities, and promoting inclusive participation. The significance of this paradigm shift lies in its potential to address the complex, multi-dimensional nature of gender inequality, challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, promote a more equitable and inclusive society, and respond more effectively to the specific needs of marginalized groups. However, to fully realize the transformative potential of this paradigm

shift, further refinement and effective implementation of gender equality policies are crucial. Based on the insights gained from our analysis, we propose several recommendations. These include strengthening institutional capacity and resources, promoting greater coordination and collaboration between government agencies and civil society actors, engaging men and boys in challenging traditional gender norms, strengthening data and evidence for policy-making, promoting accountability and transparency in the policy process, and addressing cultural beliefs and practices that may impede progress.

The path towards gender equality in Thailand remains a work in progress. The nation's approach now combines carefully designed policies that address the complex issues of gender disparities with efforts to promote a broad shift in cultural attitudes and practices. The paradigm shift towards a 'differences' approach provides a strong foundation for this dual-faceted strategy. By implementing these recommendations and continuously refining its approach based on emerging insights and challenges, Thailand can further strengthen its gender equality policies and accelerate the transformation of unequal gender relations.

While challenges remain, this paradigm shift represents a significant step towards creating a more inclusive, equitable, and just society for all genders in Thailand. The success of this approach will depend on continued commitment, effective implementation, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that policies truly meet the diverse needs of all women and marginalized groups in Thai society. As Thailand continues to refine and implement its gender equality policies, it has the potential to serve as a model for other countries grappling with similar challenges in advancing gender equality.

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Has Thailand Succeeded in the War on Drugs?

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Abstract

This research case outlines the fundamental questions concerning the direct and indirect effects of drug eradication policy. While proponents argue that the war on drugs is successful in deterring the illicit drugs use and production and drug-related crimes, opponents are skeptical in the effectiveness of the policy in reducing the drug market and warn against the possibility that such policy may even exacerbate drug-related problems. The study further unravels the seemingly unrelated lessons from prohibition policies in the United States, Mexico, the Philippines, and Thailand and unifies the findings amongst these countries with fundamental concepts in microeconomic theory such as partial equilibrium analysis and price elasticity of demand. Empirical evidence of demand for Methamphetamine in Thailand from the author's own research is also discussed.

Keywords: Drug eradication policy, Economics of drugs, partial equilibrium analysis, demand estimation

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ฤๅไทยประสบชัยในสงครามยาเสพติด

ทองใหญ่ อัยยะวรากูล*

บทคัดย่อ

กรณีศึกษาเรื่องนี้มุ่งสำรวจประเด็นสำคัญเกี่ยวกับผลกระทบทั้งในทางตรงและทางอ้อมจากนโยบายการปรามปรามยาเสพติด ทั้งจากมุมมองของผู้สนับสนุนนโยบายซึ่งมักเชื่อว่านโยบายการปรามปรามยาเสพติดสามารถลดการซื้อขายยาเสพติดและอาชญากรรมที่เกี่ยวข้องกับยาเสพติดได้ และจากมุมมองของผู้ต่อต้านนโยบายซึ่งเชื่อว่านโยบายดังกล่าวอาจไม่มีประสิทธิผลเท่าใดนักในการลดการซื้อขายยาเสพติด อีกทั้งยังอาจกระตุ้นให้ปัญหาต่างๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับยาเสพติดรุนแรงยิ่งขึ้น งานศึกษาเรื่องนี้ยังได้อธิบายผลกระทบจากการทำสงครามยาเสพติดใน สหรัฐอเมริกา เม็กซิโก ฟิลิปปินส์ และไทย และเชื่อมโยงผลที่ค้นพบทั้งหมดด้วยแนวคิดทางเศรษฐศาสตร์ขั้นพื้นฐาน อาทิการวิเคราะห์ดุลยภาพบางส่วน และความยืดหยุ่นต่อราคาของอุปสงค์ โดยจะได้ยกหลักฐานเชิงประจักษ์จากผลงานวิจัยของผู้เขียนเกี่ยวกับการประมาณการอุปสงค์ของเมทแอมเฟตามีนในประเทศไทยมาพิจารณาประกอบกรณีศึกษานี้

คำสำคัญ: นโยบายการปราบปรามยาเสพติด เศรษฐศาสตร์ว่าด้วยยาเสพติด การวิเคราะห์ดุลยภาพบางส่วน การประมาณการอุปสงค์

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Prologue

Thailand had held the status of being one of the biggest drug hubs in the world. Although the strictness of the law and the intensity of the policy on the possession and the distribution of drugs in the country varied, never before had they reached the level of severity during the premiership of Thaksin Shinawatra (2003-2006), where the first War on Drugs in Thailand was declared in February 2003. By the first three months of the campaign, it was estimated that there were as many as 2,300 extra judicial killings resulting from the program. In December 2003, the end of the first phase of the War, more than 70,000 arrests allegedly connected with drugs were made. Despite the vast amount of budget and human resources being poured into the program, the trend of drug supply after such a violent measure had not been permanently reversed (See Exhibit 1). The question thus remained in the minds of the policy makers, academicians, and human rights activists alike was whether a firm grip on drug policy should be maintained or a more lenient measure or even a decriminalization policy should be adopted.

War on Drugs Around the World

The term "war on drugs" was coined with a campaign that was initiated by the U.S. Government during the presidency of Richard Nixon, as an attempt to cope with the rampant drug and drug-related problems in the U.S. during the time. Proponents of the war on drugs argued that a firm grip on drug measures that emphasized on eradication, interdiction, and incarceration was an effective mean to cleanse the society of the drug problems, a benefit that was discernably worth the cost of sacrificing the lives of those involved in the drug trade and the estimated economic cost of war on drugs that after 50 years accumulated over 1 U.S. trillion dollars.[1] As many of the popular drugs of choice of the American such as cocaine and opioids had to be imported, the U.S. Government had quickly come to realize that drug problems were not a domestic but a global affair that required a wider

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[1] "Drug War Statistics". Drug Policy Alliance. Archived from the original on July 5, 2017. Retrieved December 5, 2022.

cooperation outside the U.S. border especially among the exporting and the importing countries of the drugs. Nevertheless, a much-desired cooperation that was met with little enthusiasm from the government of other countries had often turned into several foreign interventions by the U.S. Government, especially in South America and Southeast Asia. Some of these interventions such as the deployment of the U.S. troops to crack down drug hubs in foreign territories were blatant, while some of the interventions such as trade and other economic sanctions were relatively subtle.

Prohibition Policy on Drugs in the U.S., Mexico, and the Philippines

The philosophy of the war on drugs in the U.S. had been manifested into a variety of measures of various legal, political, and even economic consequences. A comprehensive law such as the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970 was enacted to consolidate drug laws, with a classification of drugs into five classes on the basis of their potential of abuse that ranked from substances in Class I that had a greater risk of abuse with no medical benefit, to substances in Class V that were freely available without prescriptions[2]. The Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 that was enacted also increased the penalty on the possession of marijuana, imposed mandatory minimum sentence on drug offences, and established civil procedures for asset forfeiture of drug dealers. Despite the fact that drug users and dealers are criminalized, the trend on the number of U.S. population in incarceration during the onset of the war on drugs in the early 1970s was relatively stable (Exhibit 4). The long-term trend of the statistic could however not be further from expectation. A war on drugs that was intended to eradicate drug problems, was followed by a sharp rise rather than a fall in the number of population in incarceration, with an estimate that the war on drugs resulted in an incarceration of 1 million population a year[3]. There was also a grave concern that the war on drugs also led to a wider social

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[2] Such classification became quickly popular and was adopted by many countries over the world, including Thailand.

[3] Grinspoon, L., & Bakalar, J. B. (1994). The war on drugs--a peace proposal. *New England Journal of Medicine, 330*(5), 357-360.

disaggregation that had long persisted in the U.S., as statistic showed that there was a disproportionately increase in the number of prison inmates from drug offences among different racial groups. During 1990 and 2000, for example, the number of black inmates from drug offences increased by 27%, compared with 15% of white inmates[4].

The aftermath of the drug war in the U.S. that was met with overpopulous inmates was by no means comparable to that of the Mexican drug war that was met with violence and drug-related murders. As an attempt of the Mexican government to reduce drug-related violence in 2006, the Mexican military in corporation with the U.S. government launched a war against drug lords in Mexico, whose cartels accounted for the majority of cocaine trafficked into the U.S. The war resulted in escalated violence among different drug gangs that were fighting for shrinking market. After only a few years following the onset of the war at the end of 2006, the number of drug-related murders increased by more than two folds from just around 2,000 in 2006 to over 5,000 in 2008, before skyrocketed to over 12,000 in 2011[5]. Perhaps a surprising pattern that paralleled that of rising number of inmates in the U.S., the Mexican drug war was also accompanied by an increase in drug consumption and prevalence of sexually transmitted infections among drug users[6].

Among the most recent, the Philippines war on drugs in 2016, with the financial support of China and the U.S., also seemed far from success. During the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines whose political stand on drug issues mirrored that of Thaksin Shinawatra of the Thailand just over a decade ago, the results following

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[4]   Yates, J., Collins, T. A., & Chin, G. J. (2005). A War on Drugs or a War on Immigrants-Expanding the Definition of Drug Trafficking in Determining Aggravated Felon Status for Noncitizens. *Md. L. Rev., 64*, 875.

[5]   Milenio, (2017). Organized-crime group related homicides (2007-2015) from Milenio. Compiled by Justice in Mexico, San Diego.

[6]   Bucardo, J., Brouwer, K. C., Magis-Rodríguez, C., Ramos, R., Fraga, M., Perez, S. G., ... & Strathdee, S. A. (2005). Historical trends in the production and consumption of illicit drugs in Mexico: implications for the prevention of blood borne infections. *Drug and alcohol dependence, 79*(3), 281-293.

the war on drugs in the two countries were unsurprisingly similar. Following the inauguration speech of the president in 2016 that urged citizens to kill drug criminals and drug addicts, and the police to adopt a shoot-to-kill policy towards drug suspects, it was estimated that over six thousand people were killed between 2016 and 2022, the last year of his presidency[7].

Physical Harm, Psychological Harm, and Social Harm of Drugs

Given the length that the governments in many countries were willing to go through to eradicate drug problems, a question that naturally rose in one's mind was perhaps about the extent of the drug harms. A recent study that aimed to assess the harms of several illicit drugs including tobacco and alcohol revealed however surprising results[8]. In the study where members of the Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs in the U.K., including two invited specialists, were asked to rank twenty drugs on a score of one to one hundred on sixteen criteria, alcohol, a widely available and legalized drug, was ranked the most harmful drug in terms of overall harm score, injury caused by the drug, as well as economic cost of the drug (Exhibit 2). A scatter diagram shown in Exhibit 3 that classified harm criteria into two dimensions, one that combines the score from the criteria for harms to users, and the other for harms to others, also clearly portrayed the striking harm of alcohol. While three of the commonly perceived hard drugs, i.e. heroin, crack cocaine, and methamphetamine, were, unsurprisingly, in the top of the chart in terms of their harms to users, no other drugs came close to alcohol in terms of their harms to others. Indeed, illicit drugs such as cannabis and ecstasy, were considered even less harmful in all dimensions to tobacco.

While the somewhat surprising evidence of drug harms should never tempt ones to illogically exonerate hard drugs, such findings should nevertheless draw a

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[7]   Geducos, Argyll Cyrus (June 29, 2022). "Duterte Legacy: A quick look back at Duterte's 6 years". *Manila Bulletin*. Retrieved December 5, 2022.

[8]   Nutt, D. J., King, L. A., & Phillips, L. D. (2010). Drug harms in the UK: a multicriteria decision analysis. *The Lancet, 376*(9752), 1558-1565.

careful attention to policymakers to revise and rethink policy approach in light of relative drug harms. As an extreme example, a fervent measure during the war on drugs might drive users and sellers in the illicit drug markets to substitute illicit drugs with legalized drugs, which were ironically not necessarily less harmful.

The Direct and Side Effects of the War on Drugs

The effects of the war on drugs could be systematically understood through the lens of economics, whereby the war could affect both the demand and supply side of the drug market. While these effects were by no means uniform and often specific to each country, an important message that should be borne in the minds of policymakers was perhaps that there were almost always unintended consequences of the war on drugs. It was thus imperative that both the likely effects of the policy, as well as their relative magnitude and extents be understood before the declaration of war.

While any war on drugs was probably intended to induce fear of those involved and thus deter drug users from using and drug dealer from selling drugs, such impacts from the war in reality were often minimal for a number of reasons. Drug users, especially heavy and chronic users, might not be rational thinkers who necessarily took into account the rise in the cost of legal violation because of their drug dependence. A surge of drug price after the war might even increase the profit of drug dealers, especially after the market tended to become more concentrated. Nonetheless, it was the unintended negative consequences of the war that were often overlooked and not only mitigated but completely offset the desired effect, if any, that the war would lower the trade volume in the drug market. An increase the drug price was often associated with increasing violence that resulted from a fight over a shrinking drug market as in the case of Mexico. Users of lower economic background who now faced a higher drug price also had a higher propensity to commit property crime to finance a more expensive drug consumption.

The number of overdose deaths from illicit drugs also often rose during the time of stricter enforcement of drug laws as many users were forced to purchase

drugs from new sellers, whose potency and purity of the products were unknown. Stricter drug laws could also cause drug users to be less willing to seek medical help in case of an overdose or even medical advice for drug rehabilitation, thereby increasing the number of drug-related deaths and injuries, and prolonging the spell of drug use.

Lessons Learned from Other Countries

Despite the seemingly overwhelming evidence that emphasized how the benefits of the wars on drugs, if any, generally did not outweigh the costs, there are still quite a few lessons drawn from past studies that might shed light into future policy design. First and foremost, a war on drugs was expensive and often conveyed unintended consequences that resulted in a mitigated or even contradictory net effect. A war that aimed to reduce drug consumption, dismantle the profit from drug production, and reduce drug-related violence might therefore, in an extreme case, cause more harm to drug users and allow drug dealers to enjoy more profit. Second, such impacts from drug war were country specific that had to be empirically examined. Similar policies adopted by one country during a particular period could therefore result in markedly different outcomes were they adopted by another country or even by the same country during a different time period. One might also note that a reinterpretation of a war on drug that departed from a binary view in which a country decided whether to launch a war or not, towards a more continuous view of the war as a varying degree of intensity of drug law was perhaps more appropriate.

The War on Drugs in Thailand

Thailand was perhaps among a few countries in the world that officially launched a war on drugs during her modern history, although several severe measures of drug enforcement policy of varying degrees had indeed been launched in the past. Given the geographic location of the country that situated right below the "golden triangle", one of the biggest drug hubs in the world that saw its peak during the boom of opium production from the past decades, the drug policies in Thailand were often under the scrutiny of the global audience and pivotal in determining

the shape of world drug market. Yet it was not until the recent war on drugs in Thailand in 2003 that the country's drug policies had taken another step that drew both admiration and concern.

The War on Drugs in Thailand: the Horror Unfolded

Like almost all countries, Thailand did not allow for a free market of drugs. Legal restrictions on the consumption and production of drugs had constantly consisted of harsh measures, ranging from fine for first-time users, imprisonment of users and sellers of smaller amount, to the mandatory death penalty on distributors of large quantity of drugs. The evolution of the law on drugs in Thailand had been continual. Starting with the Opium act enacted in 1360 during the reign of King Uthong, the first law on drug in Thailand imposed a penalty that the users and sellers be confiscated of their assets and put in jail until they stopped using drugs. Despite the harsh punishment, evidence showed that opium trade was rather common in Thailand at the time as there were many aristocrats involved in the opium trade. The law was changed dramatically during the reign of King Rama IV, when opium trade was no longer illegal but monopolized by the state authority and taxed. The law was once again reversed in 1959, when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat staged a *coup d'etat* and imposed a severe law on drugs that imposed the death penalty on drugs trader in 1959. As of 2016, Thailand remained one of the few countries where a capital punishment on drug is imposed. Mostly male during the criminal age, the majority of death row prisoners and general inmates in Thailand were those convicted under drug offences (Exhibit 5).

Thaksin Regimes, and Extra Judicial Killings

Thailand had experienced many drastic changes when Thaksin Shinawatra, a telecommunication tycoon who won a landslide election in Thailand in 2001, came into power. Indeed, many development milestones during his premiership were unsurpassed; the economy was rapidly growing; the poverty rate declined by half; income distribution became more equal; a national health universal coverage scheme was initiated; a village fund was established to allow rural villages

access to micro-credit financing.

His most controversial initiative was perhaps a war on drug in Thailand that was launched in 2003. The war comprised of several measures such as increase punishment of drug addicts and drug dealers, and provision of financial incentives for enforcement officials, with an aim to completely eradicate any types of illicit drugs from Thailand within three months. Indeed, a noticeable result was seen, as over 2,000 people connected with drug-related activities were killed in the first three months after the war began[9]. Such a strikingly high number was of grave concern about a horrendous fact that the deaths resulting from the war were not all sentences passed on from the court, but also the extra judicial killings. Another even more dreadful fact being unfolded later was not that there were many extra judicial killings, but that some of the killings were not among the drug traders themselves, but by police officials who delivered "justice" outside the court of law[10].

Mixed Response from the Public

The blood shed resulting from the War has naturally been met with much criticism from the public, both in the domestic and international forum alike. Humanists

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[9]   Human Rights Watch (2004). The War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and Violations of Human Rights in Thailand. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/aids/2004/thai.htm

[10] Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, Thailand had experienced a marked turn in its drug policy towards an increasingly lenient approach after Mr. Shinawatra was ousted by a coup d'etat in 2006. As of 2024, Thailand had joined a number of countries that de facto legalized the consumption and the production of marijuana, and decriminalized the personal possession of a limited amount of amphetamine. In particular, an individual who possessed no more than 5 amphetamine pills, was presumed by law to be a user, rather than a seller or distributor of drug, and was subject to a lesser measure, such as a compulsory rehabilitation program rather than a jail sentence. The current Thai government under the premiership of Srettha Thavisin, with the support of Thaksin Shinawatra, however, quickly rebuked the policy in less than two years after it came into power. Under the new drug law that was to be in effect in 2025, marijuana would be once again criminalized, and any individuals who possessed more than 1 amphetamine pill were presumed to be a seller or distributor of illicit substance, and subject to possible imprisonment.

and delegates from various international organizations were terrified as there was evidence supporting the possibility that the extra judicial killings were not just killings among the drug traders and came quick to condemn the policy:

> "Of 2,500 deaths in the government's war on drugs in 2003, a fact-finding panel has found that more than half was not involved in drug at all. At a brainstorming session, a representative from the Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) Tuesday disclosed that as many as 1,400 people were killed and labelled as drug suspects despite the fact that they had no link to drugs. ... Senior public prosecutor Kunlapon Ponlawan said it was not difficult to investigate extra-judicial killings carried out by police officers as the trigger-pullers usually confessed."[11]

> "Yet a panel set up last year by the outgoing junta recently concluded the opposite: over half of those killed in 2003 had no links to the drugs trade. The panel blamed the violence on a government "shoot-to-kill" policy based on flawed blacklists. But far from leading to the prosecutions of those involved, its findings have been buried. The outgoing interim prime minister, Surayud Chulanont, took office vowing to right Mr Thaksin's wrongs. Yet this week he said there was insufficient evidence to take legal action over the killings. It is easy to see why the tide has turned. Sunai Phasuk, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, a lobbying group, says that the panel's original report named the politicians who egged on the gunmen. But after the PPP won last month's elections, those names were omitted"[12]

> "Since the death of 9-year-old Chakraphan, there have been frequent reports in the Thai press of summary executions and their innocent victims. There was the 16-month-old girl who was shot

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[11] Most of those killed in the war not involved in drug. (2007, November 27). *The Nation.*

[12] Back on the offensive. (2008, January 24). *The Economist.*

dead along with her mother, Raiwan Khwanthongyen. There was the pregnant woman, Daranee Tasanawadee, who was killed in front of her two young sons. There was the 8-year-old boy, Jirasak Unthong, who was the only witness to the killing of his parents as they headed home from a temple fair. There was Suwit Baison, 23, a cameraman for a local television station, who fell to his knees in tears in front of Mr. Thaksin and begged for an investigation into the killing of his parents. His stepfather had once been arrested for smoking marijuana, Mr. Suwit said. When the police offered to drop the charge if he would admit to using methamphetamines, he opted instead to pay the $100 fine for marijuana use. Both parents were shot dead as they returned BIK home from the police station on a motorbike. Mr. Suwit said 10 other people in his neighborhood had also been killed after surrendering to the police."[13]

Despite the above outcry from those who mourned the loss of the drug dealers, there were others who felt that the wheel of justice in Thailand had spun too slowly for too long and preferred other quicker, violent alternatives that could make the dealers pay for their crimes.

"Drug dealers are deserved to be dealt with an iron fist. As General Police Phao Sriyanont, our former deputy leader of the Royal Thai Police force once said, 'There was nothing that the Thai police could not do under the sun'. I am fully confident that the Thai police can handle these drug dealers."

"It will be a hard work during the first 3 months. It is normal that some dealers die as a result of the crackdown. In fact, those that die should also be confiscated of their properties. We need to be as ruthless as they are as drugs are detrimental to the national security. That is

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[13] Mydans, S. (2003, April 8). A Wave of Drug Killings Is Linked to Thai Police. *The New York Times.*

the very reason why there needs to be a war, and it is normal that war must result in some casualties. Their ends are either in jail or in a box."[14]

Drug Market in Thailand

Knowledge concerning the environment of the drug market was ubiquitous in the analysis of the consequences of drug policies. Data and reliable statistics concerning this drug market in Thailand were, unsurprisingly, very scarce given the fact that any drug market was naturally a dark market. Despite such a palpable shortcoming of the lack of data, recent attempts were made to collect some microdata of the drug market at the national scale in Thailand. Among notably the Survey of Illicit Drug in Thailand in 2014, funded by Thailand Research Fund, was conducted view interview method to obtain information about the drug market from respondents in three categories i.e., drug sellers in incarceration for drug offences, drug users in private and public rehabilitation program, and the general population. The survey contained information about the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, their *past* drug using and drug dealing behavior, as well as some drug market environments such as drug prices. Respondents in the general population were taken from population residing in low-income neighborhoods in five metropolitan areas across Thailand, namely Bangkok metropolitan, Chiangmai, Nakhonrachasima, Chonburi, and Songkla, and in three provinces in the Deep South region, namely Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala.

Drug Market Structure in Thailand

Descriptive statistics of the information obtained from 1,083 respondents in the general population showed that approximately ten percent of the respondents involved in drug-dealing activity in the past. With an emphasis on methamphetamine that was the most rampant drug in circulation at the time in Thailand, the survey

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[14] Shinawatra, T. (2003), Excerpts from a speech delivered to the Royal Thai Police Force, translated from Thai by the author.

found the average quantity sold per transaction among respondents in the survey who engaged in drug-dealing activity in the past that ranged between the minimum of 1 gram to the maximum of 800,000 grams, with a frequency distribution that is highly skewed to the right (Exhibit 6).

While the fact that the respondents in the survey were not completely randomly selected should warn against the generalization of the finding to infer that over 10 percent of the Thai population were drug dealers, the statistics did provide an evidence suggesting that the drug market in Thailand was far from being a monopolized market. An extremely wide range of the average quantity of methamphetamine sold per transaction, coupled with the fact that distribution of this average quantity per transaction was highly right-skewed, also suggested that the majority of these sellers were petty drug dealers with probably rather limited market power.

Empirical Evidence on Market for Methamphetamine

Report analysis of the survey also revealed the estimated price elasticity of demand of methamphetamine to be approximately -0.53, a finding that was consistent with the theoretical conjecture that the demand for drug was inelastic due to the addictive nature of the drug. The estimated income elasticity of demand was positive, which suggested that methamphetamine was a normal good. This finding probably contradicted some previous beliefs that drug using was a problem that was pertinent among individuals from a lower socioeconomic background.

Epilogue

While it was unquestionably clear that the war on drug resulted in violence, many held the belief that the violence was a mere side effect that the country must strive to endure should she plan to overcome the drug problem. In the eyes of many, drug use caused not only self-harm, but also physical harm and psychological harm to others, and many kinds of social harm such as loss of life, unemployment, property and violent crime, traffic accidents, destruction of human resources, as well as other opportunity cost of the vast resources wasted on drug-related policies.

Indeed, the very dilemma any government had to confront was to choose between a laissez faire route where drug use was more rampant, and a more stringent route, perhaps a war if needed, that curbed the drug market at a cost of increasing drug price. A parallel question that one could envisage would also be a choice between a *status quo* drug policy and a policy reform that could bifurcate into any of the polarized extremes. While it was a well-known fact that life was full of trade-offs and a choice between different types of drug policy was no exception, the question that still remained was the magnitude of such trade-offs and if the benefit of this war outweighed its cost.
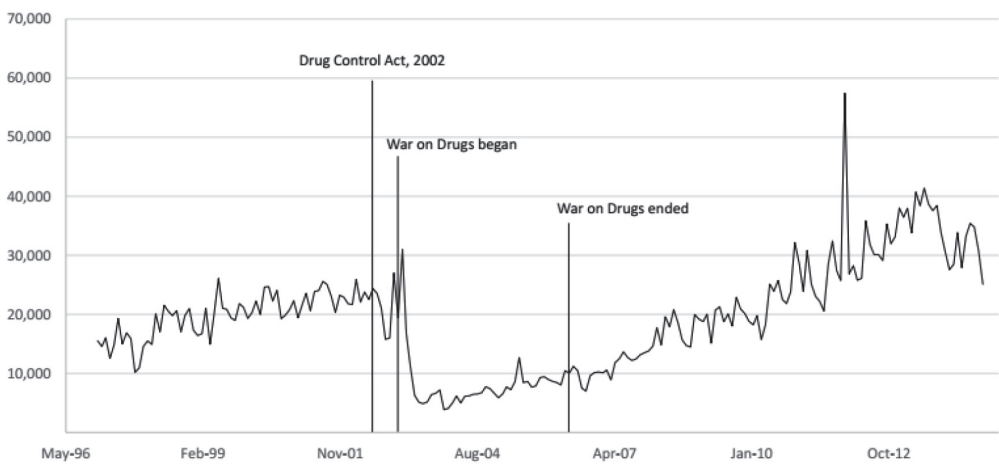
Exhibit 1: Number of Drug Offenses.
Source: Royal Thai Police Office
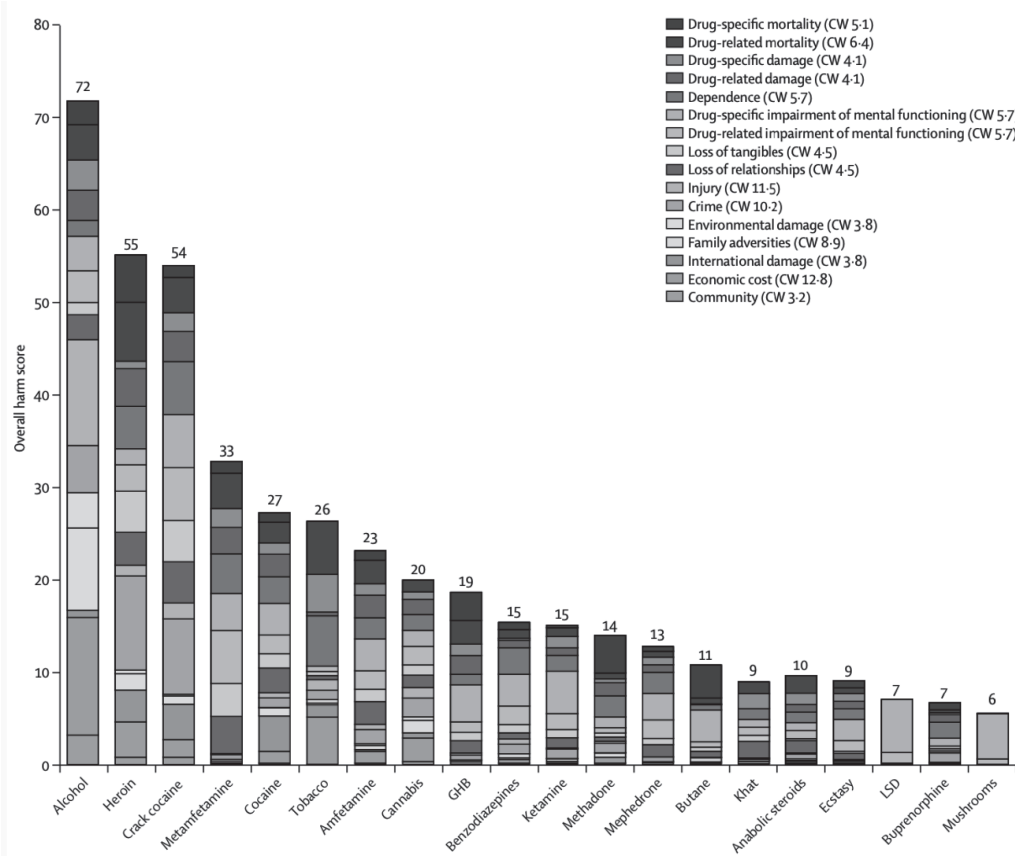
Exhibit 2: Multidimensional Dimension of Drug Harms

Source Nutt, D. J., King, L. A., & Phillips, L. D. (2010). Drug harms in the UK: a multicriteria decision analysis. *The Lancet, 376*(9752), 1558-1565.
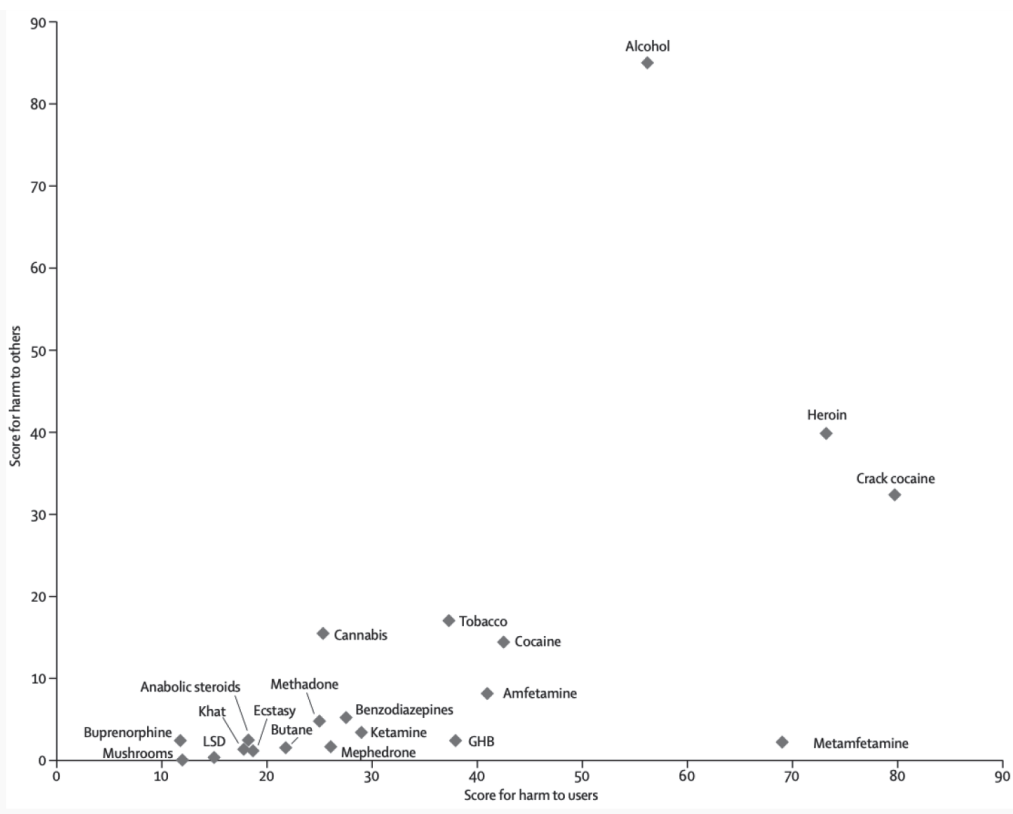
Exhibit 3: Drugs Harms Classified by Harm to User and Harm to Others

Source Nutt, D. J., King, L. A., & Phillips, L. D. (2010). Drug harms in the UK: a multicriteria decision analysis. *The Lancet, 376*(9752), 1558-1565.
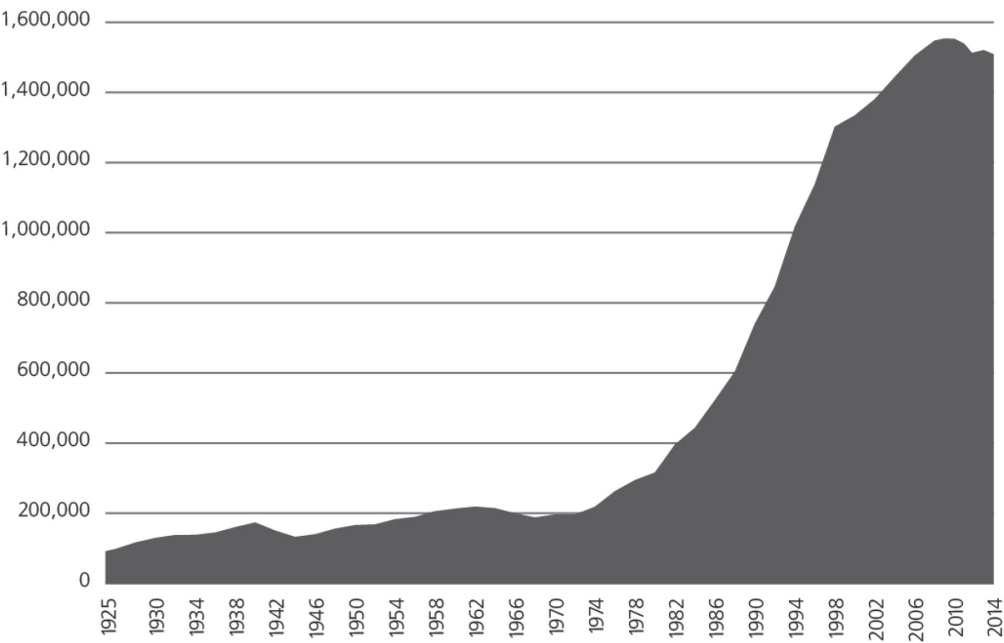
Exhibit 4: Total Number of People Incarcerated in the U.S., 1925-2014

Source: Bureau of Statistics of the United States, Prison Series

Type	Male	Female	Total	Percent
1. Prisoners	180,382	30,362	210,744	73.34
2. Detainee during:	63,018	11,125	74,143	25.80
2.1 Appeal	33,049	5,162	38,211	13.30
2.2 Court hearing	10,674	2,210	12,884	4.48
2.3 Investigation	19,295	3,753	23,048	8.02
3. Juvenile	179	8	187	0.07
4. Internee	35	1	36	0.01
5. Detainee	1,989	236	2,225	100

Exhibit 5: Total Inmates in Thailand, 2013

Source: Department of Correction of Thailand
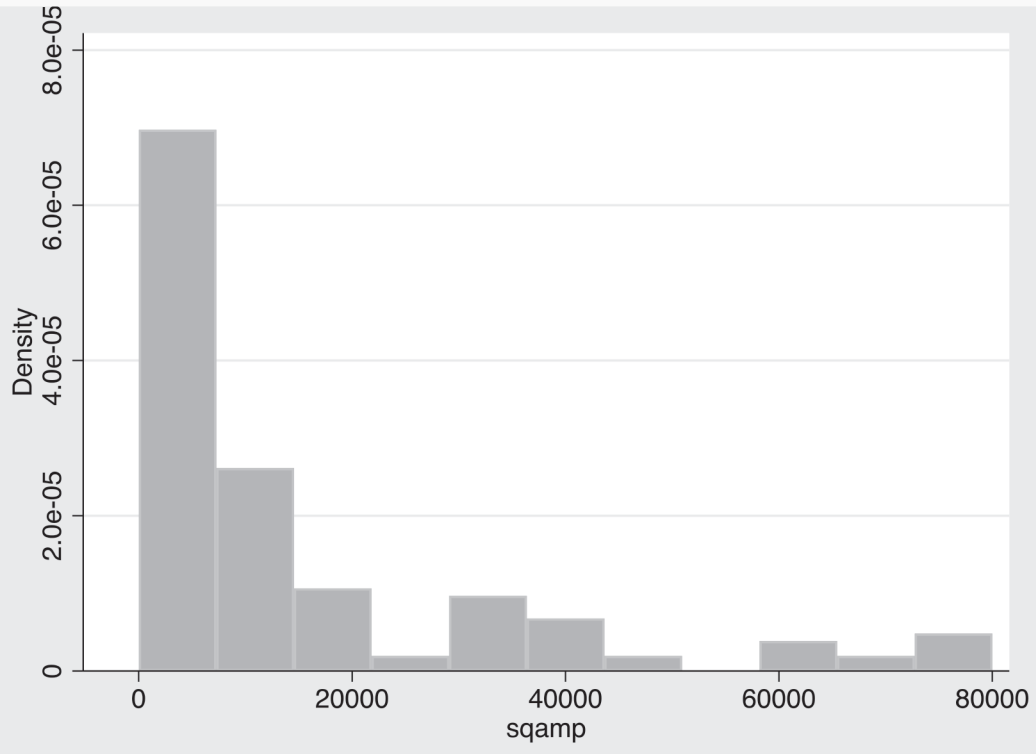
Exhibit 6:   Histogram of the Average Quantity of Methamphetamine Sold per Transaction (in gram). The Data Used to Construct the Histogram Excluded Outliers Whose Average Quantity Sold per Transaction Exceeded 100,000 Grams.

Source The Survey of Illicit Drugs in Thailand, 2014

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Sustainable Transformation Strategies for Mitigating Socio-Economic Challenges of Rural to Urban Migration in Developing Countries. A Case Study: Garment Factories in Hlaing Thar Yar Township, Yangon City, Myanmar

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Abstract

Significant socio-economic challenges were presented by the rapid urban expansion in developing countries, which was further exacerbated by rural-to-urban migration. This paper investigated Myanmar's policies and community development initiatives (CDIs) in relation to the obstacles encountered by internal migrants, including housing, employment, and legal rights and the socioeconomic challenges faced by rural-to-urban migrants in Myanmar, focusing on garment industry workers in Yangon. These migrants encountered significant challenges including precarious employment, inadequate housing, and limited access to essential services. Current policies and initiatives failed to adequately address these challenges, perpetuating cycles of poverty and vulnerability. The research employed mainly qualitative methodologies and some quantitative approaches to support, including household surveys, in-depth interviews with 20 migrant workers in garment factories, and 8 key

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informant interviews with NGO and CSO representatives. The findings exposed critical gaps in current policies and initiatives, emphasizing the necessity of inclusive regulatory reforms to reduce migration-driven inequalities and foster resilient urban development. The study's insights into the socio-economic challenges of migrant workers were crucial for comprehending the dynamics of rural-to-urban migration and emphasized the necessity of comprehensive strategies to address structural disparities, such as equitable labor practices and affordable housing. The findings also represented the deficiencies in government and NGO initiatives to adequately address the needs of migrants and recommend the ongoing assessment and modification of strategies to facilitate the integration of internal migrants into the broader community.

Keywords: Community Development Initiatives, Internal Migrants, Socioeconomic Challenges, Sustainability, Transformation Strategies

กลยุทธ์การเปลี่ยนแปลงเชิงยั่งยืนสำหรับความท้าทายด้านเศรษฐกิจสังคมการย้ายถิ่นฐานจากชนบทสู่เมืองในประเทศกำลังพัฒนา กรณีศึกษา: โรงงานผลิตเสื้อผ้าในหล่ายธะยา นครย่างกุ้ง ประเทศเมียนมา

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บทคัดย่อ

ความท้าทายด้านเศรษฐกิจสังคมเป็นผมมาจากการขยายตัวอย่างรวดเร็วของเมืองในประเทศกำลังพัฒนา ซึ่งส่งผลกระทบต่อการย้ายถิ่นฐานจากชนบทสู่เมืองงานวิจัยนี้ศึกษานโยบายของประเทศเมียนมาและการริเริ่มพัฒนาการชุมชน. (community development initiatives หรือ CDIs ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับอุปสรรคที่ประสบโดยผู้ย้ายถิ่นฐานภายในประเทศ รวมถึงประเด็นด้านที่อยู่อาศัย การทำงานและสิทธิทางกฎหมาย ตลอดจนความท้าทายด้านเศรษฐกิจสังคม ที่ผู้ย้ายถิ่นฐานจากชนบทสู่เมืองต้องเผชิญในประเทศเมียนมา ทั้งนี้งานวิจัยมุ่งเน้นการศึกษาไปที่คนงานในอุตสาหกรรมผลิตเสื้อผ้าของนครย่างกุ้ง ผู้ย้ายถิ่นฐานดังกล่าวเผชิญความท้าทายมากมาย ประกอบด้วย อาชีพอันตราย ขาดแคลนที่อยู่อาศัย และมีการเข้าถึงบริการสำคัญที่จำกัด นโยบายและแนวคิดริเริ่มในปัจจุบันไม่สามารถตอบสนองต่อความท้าทายดังกล่าวได้เพียงพอ อีกทั้งยังมีระเด็นเรื่องวงจรความยากจนและเป็นกลุ่มชนเปราะบางด้วย งานวิจัยนี้เป็นเชิงคุณภาพผสมกับวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ ประกอบด้วยแบบสำรวจครัวเรือน สัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกคนงานย้ายถิ่นฐานจำนวน 20 ราย ในโรงงานผลิตเสื้อผ้า และผู้ให้สัมภาษณ์หลัก 8 ราย ซึ่งเป็นผู้แทนจากองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนแบบไม่แสวงหากำไรและองค์กรภาคประชาสังคม ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นถึงจุดโหว่สำคัญของนโยบายและการริเริ่มในปัจจุบัน

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และมุ่งให้เห็นถึงความจำเป็นของการปฏิรูประเบียบเพื่อลดความไม่เท่าเทียมการจำเป็นในการย้าย
ถิ่นฐานและส่งเสริมการฟื้นตัวของการพัฒนาเมือง งานวิจัยยังเผยว่าความท้าทายด้านเศรษฐกิจสังคม
ของผู้ย้ายถิ่นฐานเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญต่อความเข้าใจพลวัตของการย้ายถิ่นฐานจากชนบทสู่เมืองและ
เน้นย้ำความจำเป็นของกลยุทธ์ที่ครอบคลุมความแตกต่างเชิงโครงสร้าง เช่น การปฏิบัติที่เท่าเทียม
กันของแรงงาน และที่อยู่อาศัยราคาย่อมเยา นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยยังแสดงถึงความบกพร่องของ
การริเริ่มของภาครัฐและองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน ที่ไม่สามารถตอบสนองความต้องการของผู้ย้ายถิ่นฐาน
ได้เพียงพอ จึงแนะนำให้มีการประเมินและเปลี่ยนแปลงกลยุทธ์อย่างต่อเนื่องเพื่อเอื้อให้เกิดการ
บูรณาการของผู้ย้ายถิ่นฐานกับชุมชนในวงกว้างต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: การริเริ่มการพัฒนาชุมชน, ผู้ย้ายถิ่นฐาน, ความท้าทายด้านเศรษฐกิจสังคม, ความยั่งยืน, กลยุทธ์การเปลี่ยนแปลง

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The relocation of individuals from rural areas to urban centers, known as rural to urban migration, is primarily motivated by employment opportunities. Depending on a variety of factors, this migration may be permanent, transient, seasonal, or shuttle (Skeldon, 2018). Often a critical survival strategy for vulnerable communities, offering a means of escape from poverty, despite the fact that it is frequently viewed as a reaction to economic disruptions (Ramuhulu, 2021). In some cases, domestic migration has historically been a significant factor in poverty alleviation, as evidenced by the substantial increases in consumption and enhanced living standards for migrant households in countries such as South Korea, China, and Vietnam (World Bank, 2016).

Over the past few decades, there has been a significant increase in the global trend of rural to urban migration, notably apparent in developing nations throughout Asia, where industrialization and urbanization have significantly altered socioeconomic landscapes (Antobam, 2016; Awumbila et al., 2011; UN-Habitat, 2020). For example, in Bangladesh, the early 20th century saw a substantial increase in the urban population as a result of approximately 66% of rural-to-urban migrations (Afsar, 2003). In the same vein, economic reforms and improved employment prospects in urban areas have influenced migration in China (Awumbila et al., 2011).

Internal migrants, who transition from rural to urban areas, encounter a diverse array of socioeconomic challenges that influence numerous aspects of their lives. Some migrants may experience social marginalization, vulnerability, and exploitation, while others may benefit from increased economic opportunities and social mobility. It can be challenging for migrants to find consistent, respectable work, which can result in informal and precarious employment situations. (De Brauw and Mueller, 2012). Additionally, the majority of individuals lack formal and stable employment due to their inadequate credentials and absence of necessary documentation. This induces individuals to pursue employment opportunities that are intermittent, unstructured, and low-wage, and are distinguished by unpredictable compensation (Denney et al., 2016). Those who are evicted, particularly those who lack the requisite documentation

for domicile, are not entitled to any legal protections and are not eligible for any laws that require compensation (Forbes 2016).

Additionally, despite the fact that the rural to urban migration is contributing to the increase in the migration population rate, numerous government officials are concerned that granting tenure security to these individuals will result in a significant influx of new migrants to the city once it is revealed that they are being welcomed. Many migrants reside in substandard conditions as renters in dilapidated hostels or as informal settlements on the outskirts of the city due to the fact that they lack legal access to services and documents. The government has not provided any official housing or land allotments to accommodate the significant influx and is now paying less attention to urban housing as the migration rate accelerates (Helene Maria Kyed, 2019).

The majority of migrants in Myanmar have been compelled to work in garment industries. Migrants from rural and suburban regions have been afforded numerous employment opportunities by the garment industry. The garment sectors in Myanmar employ more than 400,000 individuals (ILO, 2018b). Nevertheless, numerous researchers contended that garment factories generate employment opportunities in developing countries, yet the working conditions are frequently described as substandard (Kabir, Maple, Usher, & Islam, 2019). Furthermore, the Myanmar garment sector paid less than half of the wages of workers in Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, and Pakistan, less than a third of the wages of workers in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, and Cambodia, and a fourth of the wages of workers in China in 2004 (Myint, & Rasiah, 2012).

Robust community development initiatives are necessary to address these challenges. The social and economic integration of migrants is the focus of a variety of community-led programs, government interventions, and non-governmental initiatives (Datta et al., 2017). For example, health programs that concentrate on migrant-specific risks and offer support systems can reduce vulnerabilities and improve overall well-being (Schiavo, 2021). Development endeavors can make a substantial contribution to poverty reduction and enhanced living conditions by concentrating on migrants, who frequently originate from the most impoverished

sectors of society (Ramuhulu, 2021). It also has been acknowledged that migration studies have to look at the socio-economic problems related to employment and housing situations in urban areas. At the same time, there is a need to identify what programs are functioning for internal migrants in order to determine whether they may be improved.

Current migration research often emphasizes push-pull factors and other determinants affecting migrants' decisions. However, there is a notable gap in examining the specific socio-economic challenges faced by internal migrants and evaluating the effectiveness of community development programs designed to address these issues. This study aims to bridge this gap by focusing on the socio-economic difficulties experienced by internal migrants in Myanmar's urban areas and assessing the relevant community development programs. This research is crucial for filling the existing knowledge gap and improving the understanding of internal migration challenges in Myanmar, particularly by evaluating programs that are often focused on internal migrants.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the socio-economic challenges that migrants encounter in terms of employment opportunities and housing conditions.

2. To evaluate the effectiveness of community development initiatives implemented by a variety of organizations in addressing the challenges faced by rural-to-urban migrants.

3. To propose sustainable and comprehensive strategies that address the underlying causes and effects of migration.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rural-Urban Migration

2.1.1 Definition of Rural-Urban Migration

Rural-urban migration is the movement of individuals, groups, and families from rural areas to urban areas, often influenced by poverty, low agricultural

productivity, high population growth rate, environmental degradation, land fragmentation, unequal distribution of agricultural lands, and lack of socioeconomic opportunities (IOM, 2011; Mpanza, 2021). Migration is an important living and adaptation strategy in developing countries and can be categorized into different pathways. Migrants can be labor migrants or seasonal migrants, and economic forces alone cannot fully explain migration patterns. Institutions, social networks, and cultural or historical factors may also cause migration patterns (Shikongo, 2014).

Migration is a salient feature of life in developing countries, such as Myanmar, which has a relatively high level of internal migration and population redistribution (Journal Articles of Myanmar Insider, 2014). The et al. (2015) state that there are various patterns of migration, including permanent, temporary, seasonal, and shuttle migration. Permanent migration involves leaving one's origin place for good and settling in the destination indefinitely, temporary migration involves settling in the destination but still intending to return, seasonal migration occurs only at specific times of the year or when returning to the original place of residence, and shuttle migration involves daily commutes between residence and work place.

2.1.2 Global trends of Rural-Urban Migration

Rural-urban migration is a growing global phenomenon, with developing countries experiencing higher migration rates than developed ones (Selod & Shilpi, 2021a). Although international migration is a significant focus, the number of internal migrants is often larger. Over 50% of the world's population now resides in urban areas, with the UN estimating a 72% increase in urban populations by 2050. All together 92% of the world's rural population is concentrated in developing countries, where urban expansion occurs according to the International Office for Migration. Cities need data on migration patterns and migrant struggles to better manage migration (Ibid).
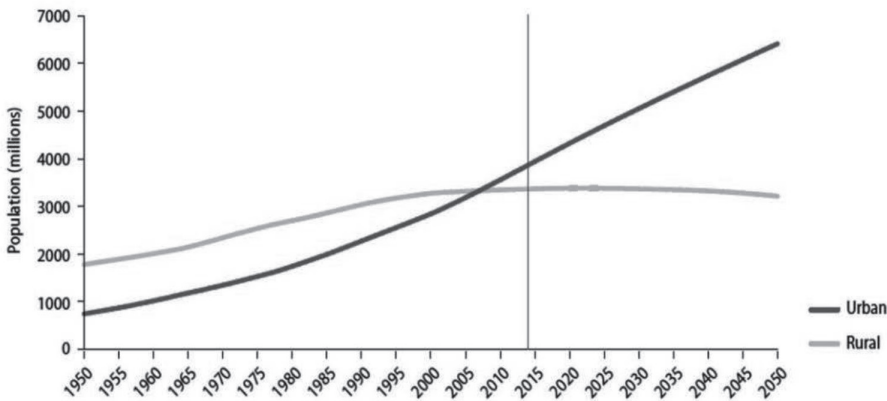
Figure 1 Urban and Rural Population of The World, 1950-2050
Source: Adapted from UN World Urbanization (2014)

Data on internal migration is scarce, especially in low-income countries (Parsons & Moffat, 2014). Due to the absence of comprehensive tracking systems in numerous of these countries, it is challenging to evaluate the complete extent and impact of rural-urban migration. Selod & Shilpi (2021) further explains that the lack of global estimates reflects the scarcity of national-level measures, especially in developing countries. Furthermore, the economic and social repercussions of migration in low-income countries are frequently neglected, which restricts the capacity of policymakers to develop effective interventions. Many developing countries view rural-urban migration negatively, arguing that poverty drives migration, leading to increased poverty in both rural and urban areas.

2.1.3 Rural-Urban Migration in developing countries

The urban-rural divide is a significant issue in developing countries, where nearly half of the world's 8 billion inhabitants live (Rica & Salvador, 2020). Migration from rural to urban areas has been a significant trend in these countries, with studies focusing on its dynamics, causes, and repercussions. Theories such as Todaro and

Harris' work in the late 1960s and early 1970s have contributed much to understanding migration trends (Selod & Shilpi, 2021a).

Rural to urban migration has historically played a significant role in urbanization, with migration from rural areas contributing to at least 50% of Africa's urban expansion in the 1960s and 1970s and around 25% of urban growth in the 1980s and 1990s (Sammy, 2019) In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the rural population remains disproportionately large (Brueckner and Lall, 2015).

The integration of migrants into the urban labor market in developing nations has been the subject of several research, with migrants often turning to informal routes to find employment (Banerjee, 1984). The complex effects of migration from rural to urban areas include transformations in agricultural techniques, land use patterns, remittance flows, social networks, community structures, and gender dynamics (Selod & Shilpi, 2021b).

Remittances sent to rural regions can serve various purposes, including home investments (Cox, Hansen, & Jimenez, 2004), consumption, and capital expenditure (De La Brière, Sadoulet, De Janvry, & Lambert, 2002). Urban planning professionals and academics have studied the effects of fast rural-urban migration and they found that they included promoting sustainable urban growth and providing infrastructure, housing, and social services to handle the expanding urban population (Yamauchi K., Hojo H., Yamamoto Y., & Tanabe T., 2003). However, migrants from rural areas may face challenges such as prejudice (Assaad, 1997; (Meng & Zhang, 2001) and difficulties in obtaining financing and local public goods (Activity, M. A. P. S.,2023).

2.2 Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Rural-to-Urban Migrants

The United Nations predicts that 50% of the world's urban population growth will come from rural to urban migration, with over 1.1 billion urban people in less developed regions expected to be rural migrants by 2025 (World Migration Report, 2015). This migration has played a crucial role in urban population growth, but it may lead to increased unemployment and higher cross-border migration flows (Berry, 1997; Garcini et al., 2016; Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Hombrados-Mendieta et al.,

2019). Migrants face stressors such as adaptation to changes in working and economic conditions, legal status issues, and loss of social support networks. Socio-economic challenges include lack of housing, unemployment, informal employment, poverty, crime, and social basic needs (Errickky, 2013). Knowledge about rural-urban mobility in developing countries is limited due to the lack of systematically collected statistical information (UNESCO, IOM, UNDP, U.-H. (2018)).

2.2.1 Economic Challenges

Liao & Yip (2023) explain that the unemployment rate in urban areas has been significantly increased due to the economic factors driving rural-urban migration. Migrants often have high expectations of finding meaningful jobs and seeking sustainable opportunities but may face barriers in the labor market (Creighton, 2013). Research conducted by Harris and Todaro (1970) argues economic factors such as lack of job opportunities and poverty in rural areas drive individuals to seek better economic prospects in urban areas. Studies by de Haan (2002) and (Kandel & Massey, 2002) further investigate the informal sector is often the primary source of employment for rural-urban migrants, as they lack appropriate skills and lack access to legal documents. Many migrants remain unemployed or underemployed due to their lack of appropriate skills or the absence of jobs (Menjívar & Lakhani, 2016). The informal sector, particularly in the garment sector, often exploits migrants, exposing them to vulnerability, stigmatization, and risks (Patel & Goyena, 2019). The government and NGOs are not paying sufficient attention to creating jobs for migrants, and previous studies have focused on rural migrants' intention to settle in cities without addressing the employment challenges they encounter in urban areas (Lysg & Development, 2017).

2.2.2 Housing and Living Conditions

Adhiambo & Williams (2017) noted migrants face a big issue in finding safe, economical, and decent urban housing. Major cities provide various housing options, but financially strapped migrants often seek informal housing in crowded regions like slums, which are generally inexpensive. The rising slum population affects

the infrastructure in place, including sewage, water supply, healthcare, and sanitation services. Many services are in limited supply in informal settlements (Chepngeno-Langat, van der Wielen, Evandrou, & Falkingham, 2019). Urban geographer David Harvey's studies inform the social and physical inequities in cities, especially the housing issues encountered by disadvantaged groups. High rates of unemployment, poverty, crime, dangerous sexual and reproductive behavior, and poor health outcomes are characteristics of urban living (Ahsan et al., 2014). According to a similar study on the impact of rural-to-urbanmigration done in Ghana by Enu (2015), migrants often struggle to find housing due to the high cost of rent, as they work in informal jobs or are unemployed. Industrial zones, where a large concentration of employees is produced, create a significant demand for homes. However, there is no rule specifying who would oversee meeting these workers' housing needs (Arifin, 2001).

2.3 Case Study: Rural to Urban Migration in Myanmar

Myanmar is experiencing a phase of intensifying internal migration, with highly uneven flows, affecting the distribution of the national population. In 2014, 17.3% of the Myanmar population moved from one state, district, or township to another, indicating that urbanization is a major force behind the country's current internal migration system (Charles-Edwards et al. 2019). Myanmar is in the middle of the list of Asia's countries with the highest migration rates. The eagerness of Myanmar to significant international investment has prompted the exodus of rural workers to urban areas, such as Yangon, which has seen a significant increase in urban employment (World Bank and Enlighten Myanmar Research 2016). The structural shift away from a rural agricultural economy toward a more urban, industrial, and service-based economy has prompted the exodus of rural workers to industrial areas outside of Yangon (Department of Population and UNFPA 2016a). The stability and regularity of metropolitan occupations are a strong inducement for individuals to migrate, especially for migrants looking to control risk. The current research indicates that urban areas, especially Yangon, are unable to accommodate the migrant flow, causing an increase in informal settlements and employment (Boutry et al. 2014; Boutry 2016, 2018).

Migrants in Hlaing Thar Yar Township, Yangon often face challenges such as insufficient infrastructure, overcrowding, and subpar housing. Many migrants seek better pay and career opportunities in Yangon, but often end up in the secondary sector (garment sector) with poor earnings and job security, increasing financial vulnerability and perpetuating poverty. The informal economy often takes in migrants, impacting wage levels in some industries (Kabir, Maple, Usher, & Islam, 2019). Local urban inhabitants may become resentful of migrants, viewing them as rivals for resources and employment according to local newspaper: KyeMon and Myanma Alin. The complexity of migration is influenced by political, cultural, and legal variables, and there is a need for further research on policy interventions and comparison studies across other nations, including Myanmar.

3. Methodology

This exploratory research examined the phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration in Hlaing Thar Yar Township, Yangon, Myanmar. The research concentrates on internal migrants who have been residing in Yangon for a minimum of five years, with a particular emphasis on those who are employed in informal capacity in garment factories situated in the Hlaing Thar Yar industrial zone. The findings are unique to this township and may not be applicable to other townships in Yangon, Myanmar as a result of the limitations in generalizability and sample size. The research did not consider the long-term challenges that migrants encounter; rather, it focused on the socioeconomic obstacles they encountered during their time in Yangon.

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 Primary Data

Although quantitative and qualitative methodologies were implemented during primary data collection, qualitative methodologies were mainly used, follows.

In-depth Interviews (IDI): Respondents were identified through snowball sampling due to the difficulty in identifying the residential locations of migrant garment

workers. There were 20 individual migrants were interviewed in a semi-structured format, with an emphasis on their experiences and challenges. Detailed, contextual information regarding housing, employment uncertainty, and living conditions was the objective of the interviews. In order to acquire broad background information from the same respondents, household surveys were implemented prior to these interviews. The survey was composed of a combination of unstructured and semi-structured questions, which were translated into Burmese and verified for accuracy prior to their final implementation.

Key Informant Interviews (KII): Representatives from local NGOs, INGOs, CSOs, and other organizations participated in interviews. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify and engage these key informants. The goal was to acquire a deeper understanding of the socio-economic circumstances that influence migrants and the efficacy of current interventions and policies. Eight critical informants were interviewed to obtain their perspectives on urban poverty alleviation, migration policies, and labor rights.

3.1.2 Secondary Data

The study was framed and theoretically grounded through the review and analysis of existing literature and documents, which comprised secondary data collection. Sources comprised: National Policy Briefs, Working Papers, Published Journals and Articles, Local Newspapers and Reports.

3.2 Data Analysis

This study mainly employed the qualitative data analysis method. However, some quantitative analysis (frequent distribution and graphical presentation) for household surveys was also used here to support the qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Analysis: Transcription and translation interviews conducted in Burmese were initially transcribed and subsequently translated into English. This procedure guaranteed the precision and uniformity of data interpretation. After that qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic and content analysis methods. This entailed the categorization of the data, the identification

of key themes, and the extraction of insights based on the experiences and perspectives of the respondents. In order to interpret the qualitative data in the context of the respondents' precise words and expressions, the study also implemented verbatim transcription.

4. Results of the Analysis of Socioeconomic Challenges

4.1 Employment Challenges

Job Security and Stability: The primary obstacles to securing and maintaining employment in garment factories are job insecurity and intense competition. The issue is further exacerbated by the competition for limited positions between urban residents and rural migrants. The labor supply and job demand discrepancy further exacerbate the competitiveness, resulting in protracted waiting periods for job seekers. This situation is a manifestation of more extensive labor market issues, including structural inequities and an unequal distribution of job creation, which lead to limited employment opportunities.

> *"There were so many rural migrants and people from semi-urban areas all vying for the same opportunities. It created a bit of a mismatch between the jobs available and the sheer number of people looking for work. It was tough out there."* (Respondent No. 13, A 21 years old man garment factory worker)

Employment conditions have been further strained by the combination of exogenous shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability, and the imbalance between job openings and job seekers in urban areas. In 2021, the pandemic resulted in a 27% decrease in garment sector employment compared to 2020, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) (Study, 2022). This situation was further exacerbated by the numerous factory closures and mass redundancies:

"The economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have been substantial.", "A significant number of factories have either declared bankruptcy or closed their doors." (Respondent No. 1 and 3, 28 years old woman garment factory workers)

The military coup in Myanmar further exacerbated the employment crisis, prompting a significant number of workers to pursue livelihood opportunities in neighboring countries such as Thailand and Malaysia. As a result, numerous migrants encountered obstacles and relocated in order to satisfy their fundamental requirements.

"Factories fire bankrupt and, reduce the number of workers and some of them go bankrupt, and leave Myanmar. So, most of the migrant face difficulties, and go to Thailand and Malaysia for their living needs." (Respondent No. 19, A 24 years old woman garment factory worker)

Additionally, the garment sector's labor demand characteristics pose a substantial challenge for individuals seeking stable and enduring employment. In order to satisfy orders from international clients during periods of high demand, companies rapidly increase production. This results in the hiring of laborers in daily basis and child labor, who were paid 4,000 kyats per day for ten and a half-hour shift, which is less than the minimum wage of 4,800 kyats. Additionally, they are denied social security benefits and leave. Nevertheless, this unforeseen increase is frequently transient, followed by rapid declines characterized by unemployment or reduced working hours during periods of low demand, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup.

The unpredictability of income is not the only issue that the continuous pattern of seasonal employment maintained; it also exacerbates the uncertainty of workers' livelihoods, particularly for those who depend on garment manufacturing jobs as their sole source of support. The UNDP survey revealed that 76% of respondents experienced a decrease in household income as a result of employment losses,

and 85% of unemployed former garment workers encountered financial difficulties (Eurocham Myanmar, 2022). The harsh truth is that this trend perpetuated a detrimental cycle of exploitation, as individuals are denied their legitimate entitlements to secure employment.

Informal Recruitment and Job Instability: Employment challenges are also exacerbated by the absence of specialized job platforms and the reliance on informal recruitment methods. Informal networks are frequently employed by factory owners to recruit employees, which disadvantages those without connections. Despite the widespread use of mobile devices among migrants, an informational deficit is perpetuated by the limited storage capacity of phones and the emphasis on amusement applications such as Facebook and TikTok, rather than job-related applications.

Working Conditions: Employee morale and workplace equity are compromised by bias and favoritism in the workplace. Dissatisfaction and decreased productivity are the result of discriminatory practices, such as the bestowing of benefits based on personal connections rather than merit.

> *"Despite my fifteen years of experience working in factories, they do not value my expertise, and I am currently paid as a trainee."*
> (Respondent No. 7, A 21 years old woman garment factory worker)

Workers' health is adversely affected by hazardous working conditions, such as inadequate lighting, poor ventilation, and a lack of protective apparel. Furthermore, the well-being of workers is further compromised by the absence of fundamental necessities, such as clean water, in certain factories.

Labor Exploitation and Wage Issues: The financial strain is substantial due to the increasing cost of living and the low salaries. Laborers' earnings continue to be inadequate to satisfy their fundamental requirements, regardless of nominal wage increases. Although the expenses for items are increasing, there has been no adjustment made to the fundamental pay. This arises from recent strikes by workers who, claiming inadequate earnings to meet their living costs, called on factories

to raise salaries. Consequently, some factories implemented a voluntary increase in pay to 5,600 kyats in response to workers protests, despite the absence of formal government acknowledgement for this adjustment. A supplementary 1,000 kyats has been added to the minimum wages (4,800 kyats) recently as a gesture of goodwill, although it has not been officially acknowledged. However, although some workers and factories functioned at a wage of 5,600 kyats-5,800 kyats, the officially acknowledged standard wage remains at 4,800 kyats.

> *"The main challenge is they do not have enough salary. Only some factories increased the salary of the workers and although they say that minimum wage is 5,600 kyats, it is not legally regarded. It is just a saying. But if it is even 5,600 kyats, it cannot cover their expenses along with higher commodity prices. In reality, the minimum wage is 4,800 kyats and it was increased in 2018, and it was quite a long time ago. So, the workers requested the factories and protested. As a result, the workers are detained. So, although some factories increased to 5,600 kyats, it cannot cover the whole industry. Moreover, while some factories increased, others did not. This can cause more problems and the workers will protest more."*
> (Key Informant C)

The salary differences exist between Myanmar ($67) and other counterpart countries in Southeast Asia, such as Cambodia ($204) (Xinhua net, 2024), Malaysia ($326) and Thailand ($250-$280) (Asia Garment Hub, 2024). Although they have similar job responsibilities, the compensation they get in Myanmar is very low and does not adequately compensate for the value of their work.

Additionally, many workers are not receiving adequate compensation for their overtime hours, as wage fraud and forced overtime are common issues. Financial instability and destitution are exacerbated by instances of forced overtime and wage theft, which frequently occur without adequate compensation or consent. Factory proprietors' anti-union strategies exacerbate the challenges faced by workers in

organizing and advocating for their rights. The personal affairs and overall well-being of workers are frequently impacted by the excessively long hours they are required to work, which may include additional overtime and weekend work.

Employment Benefits and Legal Challenges: Workers encounter obstacles regarding benefits, including medical leave, maternity and paternity leave, and social security payments. Factory proprietors frequently neglect to report their mandatory social security contributions, which results in denied benefits and additional financial hardship. The vulnerability of workers to exploitation is further exacerbated by the complexity of procuring benefits and the inadequacies of contractual safeguards during probation periods.

4.2 Housing Challenges

Housing Conditions: Garment factory workers in Yangon encounter substantial housing obstacles, including unstable and transient living arrangements. The majority of workers (19 out of 20) reside in rental accommodations. There are a variety of housing options available, including concrete or wooden dormitories and bamboo dwellings with palm leaf roofs.

Living Conditions: Garment factory workers in Hlaing Thar Yar Township face significant challenges related to transportation. Due to narrow roads and limited access, workers often endure a 30-minute walk or a 20-minute motorbike ride to reach their accommodations or workplaces. Public transportation options, mainly buses, run along major roads and are not accessible to workers living on narrow side streets.

As a result, motorbikes were a common mode of transport, and workers frequently gather at junctions to board factory-provided ferries.

> *"There is no direct access, and our dormitories are on the alternative road, and we cannot drive vehicles because the street is too narrow."*
> (Respondent No. 8, A 22 years old woman garment factory worker)

Workers have access to non-potable water via hand pumps or electric water pumps in their rental housing. The water was often contaminated and appeared yellow, making it unsuitable for drinking. Consequently, workers purchased drinking water at a cost of 300 kyats for 20 liters from water sellers from the ward. This highlights the disparity in access to clean water.

"We use water with a hand water pump, but water is not good, it is a rust color, and it cannot be used to wash. If washed, the clothes will be yellow. For drinking water, we buy purified water with 300 kyats per 20 liters from the water pull-cart." (Respondent No. 8, A 22 years old woman garment factory worker)

Many workers in dormitories experience limited or unreliable access to electricity. This affects their ability to perform basic tasks like lighting, cooking, and charging electronic devices. The lack of electricity also results in higher living costs as workers must charge their devices elsewhere. Power outages exacerbate discomfort, especially during hot weather, and contribute to poor quality of life due to insufficient ventilation and increased mosquito exposure.

"Although some places are in Yangon, the electricity cannot reach them and at that time the migrant workers have to pay for their phone charging in the house where they get electricity. So, in addition to low salaries, they cost more for many small things that lead to higher expenses." (Respondent No. 19, A 24 years old woman garment factory worker)

Due to demanding work schedules, workers prefer electricity-based cooking methods when electricity is available. In the absence of electricity, they use gas or charcoal. Many workers also resort to eating at restaurants with monthly payments to avoid cooking after long hours.

Satisfaction with sewage and sanitation services varies among workers. While some find the conditions acceptable compared to their previous locations,

others find them inadequate. The shortage of toilets relative to the number of residents leads to unhygienic conditions, despite efforts to maintain cleanliness. Moreover, the insufficient bathroom and toilet facilities, which are used by both male and female migrants, exacerbate the difficulties experienced by residents, showing the absence of privacy and essential amenities. The lack of adequate coverage for outdoor bathing places also causes considerable safety dangers, especially for women. In the absence of safe enclosures, individuals have a sense of vulnerability to harassment and intrusion of their private.

> *"Additionally, we have only two toilets which we have to share, and it is not enough for many people. It is always dirty, but we always clean it after we use it."* (Respondent No.10, A 24 years old man garment factory worker)

The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) provides inadequate waste collection services, with bins primarily located on main roads. Workers struggle to dispose of waste properly due to their irregular schedules, leading to improper disposal around their residences. This contributes to unhygienic conditions, with garbage accumulating in drains and streets.

> *"There is no well-drainage here and the trash is spread in the drainage. So, our surroundings have a bad smell and are becoming dirty."* (Respondent No. 6, A 21 years old woman garment factory worker)

Rental Demand Exceedingly High: This was evident in the high rental costs, which consumed a substantial portion of the incomes of workers. Monthly incomes range between 150,000 and 300,000 kyats ($40.54 - $81.08), with rent accounting for approximately 60,000 kyats ($16.22). Financial flexibility is limited, and economic instability was perpetuated by this substantial rent burden, which accounts for up to 40% of earnings.

Dormitory Conditions and Frequent Relocations: The transient nature of their living arrangements frequently prompts workers to migrate in search of more

affordable rental rates. It is evident that the majority of garment laborers in this study have resided in their current housing for exceedingly short amounts of time, with an average of approximately 2.18 years. This is especially apparent when people with shorter-term residencies are contrasted with those with longer-term residencies, particularly those who have been in Yangon for a minimum of five years. This suggests that garment workers are frequently required to relocate their residences.

The rooms, which are typically narrow in length and approximately 10 feet in breadth, are intended to accommodate only two individuals. Nevertheless, their utility extends beyond their primary function as residential spaces. The functions of these confined spaces are multifaceted, encompassing laundry, cooking, dining, and sleeping. The necessity for migrants to optimize and modify their living arrangements is illustrated by the utilization of limited space for multiple purposes. The dormitory is characterized by a noticeable overcrowding situation, with a single room accommodating up to four individuals and a total of five individuals occupying a space of approximately 10 square feet. The absence of adequate space contributes to thermal discomfort, cacophony, and pain, rendering the living environment disagreeable. Additionally, the absence of personal space results in additional complications for both males and females, regardless of whether they are brothers or cousins, rendering the situation unsuitable. The absence of windows in certain spaces poses a challenge for residents, as it deprives them of natural light and air. The physical comfort and well-being of residents are not the only things that were harmed by the lack of access to essential utilities and services; it also perpetuates a cycle of dependence on inadequate housing infrastructure.

Accessibility and Cost: Workers encounter challenges in financial management and access to affordable healthcare, despite the benefits of urban living, including enhanced transport and a consistent income. They frequently opt for pharmacies or clinics that are less expensive as a result of financial constraints.

These results emphasized the pressing necessity for comprehensive policy reforms to improve the living and working conditions of garment factory workers in Yangon.

5. Evaluation of Existing Strategies

5.1 Evaluation of Housing Initiatives and Employment Policies for Internal Migrants

In Myanmar, the current policy frameworks address certain aspects of internal migration; however, they were inadequate in critical areas, including housing affordability, employment security, and legal rights. In order to confront these obstacles and promote the welfare of internal migrants, it was imperative to establish effective policy frameworks. This evaluation looked at the efficacy of current policies in managing internal migration, with a particular emphasis on critical domains such as housing, employment, and legal rights according to Policy Brief on Migration and Urbanization by UNFPA Myanmar in 2018.

5.1.1. Housing Initiatives

Current Framework: The Myanmar government has implemented housing initiatives in sub-urban areas; however, these initiatives frequently fail to address the unique requirements of internal migrants and it has suspended due to military coup.

Affordability: It failed to effectively regulate rental prices, which are frequently exorbitant in comparison to the incomes of migrants.

Quality: Dormitories were frequently congested and lack essential amenities, resulting in substandard housing conditions. The housing sector's absence of regulation exacerbates concerns regarding sanitation, safety, and privacy.

5.1.2. Employment Policies

Current Framework: While Myanmar's labor laws offered some protections for workers, they frequently failed to adequately protect internal migrants especially on garment workers, who are subject to job insecurity and exploitation.

Job Security: Informal sectors with inadequate working conditions and inadequate job security are frequently employed by migrants. The frequent occurrence

of wage theft and hazardous working environments was a result of the ineffective enforcement of labor rights.

Legal Protections: Despite the existence of laws, enforcement is inadequate, and numerous migrants are oblivious of their rights. Exploitation results from this lack of awareness and protection.

5.2 Evaluation of Community Development Initiatives (CDIs) for Migrants

A critical void in the provision of support services for internal migrants in Myanmar was revealed by the evaluation of Community Development Initiatives (CDIs). It is important to note that none of the respondents reported having access to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This suggests that these initiatives are significantly underperforming in terms of their efficacy and reach.

The respondents' absence of awareness regarding NGOs and their operations represented a critical deficiency in outreach. For instance, numerous respondents were either unaware of NGOs or had only heard of them in passing, and they lacked the ability to directly communicate with or access their services. The necessity for enhanced visibility and connection to these support systems is underscored by responses such as *"No, I did not have any connections with them"* and *"No, I was not even aware of them."* According to Respondent No. 11 and 17, 26 years old men garment factory worker.

5.2.1 Current Community Development Initiatives by NGOs/CSOs

In spite of the obstacles, many community development programs have been implemented by a variety of international NGOs (INGOs), local NGOs, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to assist migrants in urban areas, particularly in Hlaing Thar Yar.

Table 1 Services Provided by the NGOs

Services	Places
Safe Migration Awareness and pre-departure training	Migrants from Dry Zones and Delta Areas to Peri-urban Areas
Protecting human rights, labor rights and labor issues and legally counseling services	Industrial Zone
Awareness on labor rights to get their rights properly	Hlaing Thar Yar, South Dagon, and Dagon Seikkan
Migrant support centers – providing accommodation, offering tailoring skills and promoting awareness on GBVs, Sexual Reproductive Health, Nutrition and Hygiene	Hlaing Thar Yar, Dagon Myo Thit (East Dagon and Dagon Seikkan)
Development Projects – assessing the social and environmental standards, discussing with the partners and stakeholders to improve and advice to comply with international labor rules and standards towards the factory owners and women center	Apparel Industries (garment, textile, footwear, and Bags)
Decent works for migrant workers – providing soft skills and preparing migrants for job searching, interviews and improving their CVs	Peri-urban Areas
Offering business small grants for over 30s migrant workers who were fired from the factories to open venders	Peri-urban Areas
Vocational Training Center	Hlaing Thar Yar
Clean Water Provision, Sanitation Improvement, Hygiene Promotion, Solid Waste Management and Food Subsidies	Hlaing Thar Yar

5.2.2 Challenges in Service Delivery

The operations of INGOs, local NGOs, and CSOs are substantially impeded by the governance challenges posed by Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC). These organizations' advocacy and service delivery endeavors were adversely affected by the SAC's suppression and security concerns, which established a hostile environment. These challenges were further exacerbated by the imposition of Martial law in affected areas, constraints on financial transactions, and the implementation of restrictive regulations such as the Organization and Registration Law (ORL).

Furthermore, operations are further complicated by the absence of systematic data on migrant populations and the necessity of "tea money" to local authorities. Inadequate coordination and inadequate funding among NGOs further exacerbate this situation, which restricted their capacity to effectively address the requirements of marginalized communities. In spite of these challenges, NGOs must maintain their essential work amidst political and operational constraints by navigating this intricate landscape with adaptability and resilience, pursuing innovative solutions and collaborative approaches.

Table 2 Restrictions Faced by NGOs/CSOs

Restrictions	Challenges
Coordination among NGOs	Not talking to each other, and delivering the same thing to the same people, rather, complementary support
Government repression on fundings	Account closure and limiting bank activities
Government repression on activities and the Organization and Registration Law (ORL)	Security threats, maintaining low-profile, legal, and regulatory limitations, and intimidation and detention on workers' associations and operational challenges
Martial Law in Hlaing Thar Yar	Limitations on public gathering e.g. promoting awareness
The lack of systematic registration and statistics on migrant populations	Insufficient and precise data on the migrant demographics
Insufficient funding	Not reaching larger populations and not addressing other areas of need, limited coverage

5.2.3 Restrictions and Suggestions

There are numerous factors that significantly limit the efficacy of Community Development Initiatives (CDIs) for migrants in Myanmar. The lack of trust and familiarity between local communities and NGOs, which is further exacerbated by the limited visibility and transparency of NGO activities, is a significant issue. NGOs are frequently viewed with suspicion or perplexity by migrants, which is partially attributable to misinformation or misunderstandings regarding the organizations' objectives and operations. Furthermore, the absence of systematic registration of migrant populations hinders the ability of NGOs to effectively identify and assist those in need, resulting in inadequate outreach. Garment workers, in particular, are subjected to lengthy work hours and limited vacation time, which further limits their capacity to interact with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or obtain assistance. Some populations receive targeted assistance, while others with similar requirements

remain underserved, due to the limited coverage of NGOs. NGOs must ensure a more inclusive and effective approach to migrant assistance by improving communication, increasing transparency, and developing flexible programs that balance specialized support with broader community requirements in order to enhance the impact of CDIs.

6. Proposed Sustainable Transformation Strategies

Numerous socioeconomic challenges arise as a result of the migration of individuals from rural to urban areas especially in Myanmar. A comprehensive set of sustainable transformation strategies is proposed in order to effectively address these challenges. These strategies are designed to improve coordination, address operational challenges, develop capacity, promote inclusivity, and enhance outreach.

Recommendations for Government:

- To guarantee fair wages, secure working conditions, and access to social security benefits for workers, the government should reform and enforce existing robust labor laws and policies that are specifically designed for the garment industry

- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation and revision of outdated or insufficient laws that pertain to worker rights and industrial safety. Strengthen legislative frameworks and eliminate existing gaps to ensure the effective protection of laborers

- In order to increase the effectiveness of policies, policymakers must ensure that they are in alignment with the realities on the ground. This entails engaging with stakeholders, such as NGOs and workers, to gain insight into their requirements and challenges

- Permit workers to legally establish unions or associations in order to express their apprehensions regarding exploitative labor practices and difficult working conditions, and to encourage constructive dialogues with them

- Collaborate with local and international organizations to implement affordable housing initiatives tailored to the needs of migrant workers, including subsidized rental programs and low-cost housing developments

- Foster sustainability by involving local communities in the design and delivery of services. This will enable the implementation of community-based programs that are specifically designed to meet the requirements of migrant populations, with a focus on healthcare, education, vocational training, and social integration

- Advocate for policy reforms that facilitate the integration of migrants and reduce regulatory barriers by engaging with policymakers to promote inclusive policies, expedite administrative procedures, and ensure legal protections for migrants

Recommendations for NGOs:

- Prioritize advocacy and mobilize their resources to underscore the significance of safeguarding and acknowledging their rights as well as increase awareness of the labor rights, health services, legal documents, and social welfare programs that are available to garment workers

- Expand access to legal aid services to address issues such as wage theft, discrimination, and workplace harassment

- Maintain a neutral stance while engaging factory owners and workers, promoting dialogue and cooperation among all parties involved to maintain a balanced advocacy effort and cultivate trust

- Improve the accessibility of information regarding available services and opportunities for expatriates by employing a variety of communication channels, including social media, local radio, community newsletters, and mobile technology

- Facilitate access to essential services by establishing intermediary positions or supporting existing community leaders to serve as bridges between

migrants and service providers. This will strengthen connections between
migrants and service providers (NGOs, government agencies, private sector)

For Reducing Rural-Urban Migration

- Infrastructure and resources for education and technology access, village
  road connectivity to urban areas, hospitals, clean water, and other social
  services should all be funded by the government in rural communities.
  Improving rural residents' quality of life and reducing the number of
  individuals moving from rural to urban regions are two benefits of improving
  living conditions in rural areas

- It is the responsibility of the government to implement revitalization
  policies for instance promoting the socio-economic development of rural
  areas and encouraging the development of secondary and tertiary industries
  in rural areas

- In addition, focus should be made on modern farming practices by adopting
  appropriate technologies for small-scale farmers to promote prosperity
  of residents and rural areas

- Governments, the private sector, and NGOs should promote the efficiency
  and quality of the agricultural sector to advance rural incomes and
  spending power

Recommendations for Further Research

- Conduct longitudinal studies to monitor the socio-economic trajectories
  of migrant workers over time, focusing on the factors that influence their
  integration into urban settings and long-term well-being outcomes

- Assess the efficacy of current government policies and NGO interventions
  in addressing the socio-economic requirements of migrant populations,
  identifying areas for improvement and gaps

- Conduct a comparative analysis of migration patterns and experiences in various sectors and regions of Yangon to identify the contextual factors that influence the dynamics and outcomes of migration

7. Discussion

The study emphasized how unstable work is in Myanmar's garment sector, which is marked by exploitation, low wages, and job instability. SDG 8, which highlights the need for quality jobs, fair salaries, and improved working conditions, is especially pertinent to these challenges. In order to ensure job security, international publications like those published by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2021) call for the formalization of work, stricter labor laws, and improved enforcement procedures. The findings of this study are aligned with these international recommendations, highlighting in particular the pressing need for extensive policy changes targeted at resolving employment instability and income disparity. For workers in Myanmar's garment industry to get fair compensation, such reforms are essential. Moreover, comparing Myanmar's employment status to that of other Southeast Asian nations like Thailand and Malaysia, where advancements in job security, labor rights, and minimum wage enforcement have been more significant, reveals a significant discrepancy. The main cause of the disparity is Myanmar's political unrest and economic difficulties, which have prevented significant advancement in these fields. Myanmar's lack of effective legislative structures and labor law enforcement exacerbates concerns of job insecurity and poor salaries, making alignment with SDG 8.5 particularly challenging, even though other countries have made incremental progress toward achieving SDG 8.

This study also highlighted the poor living conditions faced by garment workers, who frequently live in crowded, hazardous housing with limited access to clean water and sanitary facilities. These results are consistent with the global issues outlined in SDG 11, which promotes the supply of safe, reasonably priced housing. Similar housing problems in urban slums and informal settlements around the world have been reported by international agencies including UN-Habitat (2018) and the World Bank (2020). In Myanmar, migrant workers continue to face a severe

shortage of suitable housing alternatives. Both public and private sector organizations have to collaborate together to address this issue. However, Myanmar's lack to housing reforms is evident when contrasted with other nations like China and India, where notable progress has been achieved in providing cheap accommodation for low-income workers. While Myanmar still struggles with inadequate facilities and a serious lack of affordable housing options, these nations have made significant expenditures in housing projects aimed at those with low earnings. This disparity revealed the stark differences in urban planning and infrastructure development between Myanmar and other emerging countries that have effectively incorporated housing solutions into their migrant worker welfare programs. These issues are made worse by Myanmar's political and economic problems, which necessitate large investments in housing and urban development in order to meet SDG 11.1.

SDG 3, which focuses on safe wellness and health, is not being met by Myanmar's garment workers, who also frequently face health problems include hazardous working conditions and limited access to healthcare. The disproportionate health effects that migrant workers experience as a result of subpar healthcare and dangerous working conditions have been brought to light by international studies, including those conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021). The study's conclusions are consistent with more general demands for better working conditions and universal health coverage, which are essential elements of SDGs 3.8 and 3.9. In contrast Myanmar's condition with those of nations like Thailand and Vietnam who have stronger worker healthcare systems, a serious discrepancy becomes apparent. Migrant workers' well-being has improved in these nations as a result of the introduction of universal health coverage and labor-related health benefits. On the other hand, workers' access to high-quality healthcare is hampered by Myanmar's inadequate healthcare system, lack of social security benefits, and reliance on low-cost, resource-poor clinics. The disparity underscored how urgently Myanmar's healthcare system has to change in order to meet the SDG goal of universal health coverage.

The study argued that in order to address the issues encountered by garment workers, collaborations between governments, international organizations, the commercial sector, and civil society are essential. These kinds of partnerships are crucial for utilizing a range of resources and expertise to improve housing, health, and labor rights. But whereas multi-stakeholder partnerships have proven successful in nations like Indonesia and the Philippines, Myanmar faces major obstacles to establishing effective partnerships. According to the study, Myanmar's political setting and governmental systems make it difficult to establish strong alliances. Myanmar's disconnected structure and lack of collaboration among stakeholders impede progress toward accomplishing SDG 17, in contrast to other places where concerted efforts have resulted in noticeable improvements in the welfare of migrant workers. This paradox highlights the need for stronger local cooperation and more international assistance to overcome the difficulties faced by migrant workers in Myanmar.

Significant disparities between Myanmar's socioeconomic challenges and other Southeast Asian nations' successful SDG target execution are highlighted by this study. While countries like Thailand and Vietnam have made significant strides in enhancing migrant workers' housing, health, and labor rights, Myanmar's political unrest and governance issues still impede development. Myanmar needs to improve policy enforcement, strengthen its governance frameworks, and encourage more multi-stakeholder collaboration in order to meet the SDG targets for decent work, sustainable housing, and health. The findings of the study further our understanding of the interconnectedness of housing, work, health, and well-being in the context of migrant labor in Myanmar and provide significant data for upcoming legislative efforts and international cooperation targeted at enhancing migrant workers' welfare.

8. Conclusion

Myanmar's internal migration landscape is characterized by a complex landscape of socio-economic challenges, particularly for those employed in the garment industry. These migrants face employment obstacles, financial vulnerability, and economic instability, which perpetuate cycles of poverty. The garment industry

also faces gender and age disparities, with women in lower-paying positions and men struggling to secure stable employment. Technological constraints, such as inadequate mobile devices, impede migrants' access to formal job platforms and employment opportunities. Housing conditions are unstable and substandard, with high rent costs consuming a significant portion of workers' incomes. The transient nature of factory employment disrupts stability and access to essential services.

Current policies and initiatives in housing, employment, health, and legal rights are inadequate to address the needs of internal migrants. A comprehensive strategy is necessary to address these challenges, including rent control measures, improving housing standards, private sector investment, enhancing job security, introducing targeted health insurance schemes, and promoting social integration programs. Collaboration between governments, communities, and international organizations is necessary to manage rural to urban migration and establish more resilient and equitable urban environments.

This study significantly advanced and tried to fill a gap in our understanding of rural-to-urban migration dynamics among garment workers in Myanmar. The findings shed light on the realities faced by garment factory workers in Myanmar and represented the importance of addressing systemic issues to ensure their rights and well-being and emphasize the necessity of collaborative endeavors and targeted interventions to enhance the well-being of migrants and foster inclusive urban development. The administration of rural-to-urban migration can be more effectively managed and more resilient, equitable urban environments can be created by collaborating. The collaboration among governments, local communities, international organizations, and constituents is essential for the success of these strategies. This research contributes to our comprehension of the dynamics of rural-to-urban migration among garment workers in Myanmar and provides policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders in the fields of urban development, labor rights, and migration with actionable insights. Furthermore, the implementation of these strategies has the potential to generate positive change, the study can promote a more sustainable and equitable future for migrant communities in urban areas.

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The Impact of Augmented Reality on Interior Purchase Intentions: A Study in Vietnam

Hau Le*

Abstract

Augmented reality (AR) technology, integrating virtual elements into the physical environment, offers promising avenues for marketers to engage consumers. Despite the AR market's anticipated growth and adoption across industries, its influence on consumer behaviour in shopping, particularly in Vietnam, remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by quantitatively examining the effects of AR applications on customer dimensions - product knowledge, attitudes, and purchase intentions - compared to traditional website-based product experiences. Drawing data from a survey of 402 respondents in Vietnam, comprising both experimental and control groups, this research investigates AR's impact on shopping behaviour, with a focus on Generation Y consumers. The findings indicate that the AR application is seen as both enjoyable and useful, significantly increasing purchase intentions when compared to traditional website experiences. Although product attitude does not emerge as the main factor driving purchase intentions, the immersive AR experience and the unique product knowledge it offers are identified as key influencers. This study enhances our understanding of AR's potential to improve the shopping experience in Vietnam and offers valuable insights for marketers aiming to leverage AR technology to effectively engage consumers.

Keywords: 1) Augmented Reality, 2) Vietnam Interior, 3) Purchase Intentions, 4) Attitude, 5) Product Knowledge

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ผลกระทบของความจริงเสริม (Augmented Reality) ต่อเจตนาซื้อสินค้าในงานตกแต่งภายใน: การศึกษาในเวียดนาม

เฮาเล*

บทคัดย่อ

      เทคโนโลยีความจริงเสริม (Augmented Reality - AR) ซึ่งผสมผสานองค์ประกอบเสมือนจริงเข้าไปในสภาพแวดล้อมทางกายภาพ ได้เปิดโอกาสใหม่ที่น่าสนใจสำหรับนักการตลาดในการดึงดูดผู้บริโภค แม้ว่าตลาด AR คาดว่าจะเติบโตและได้รับการนำไปใช้ในหลายอุตสาหกรรม แต่การมีอิทธิพลของ AR ต่อพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคในการช็อปปิ้ง โดยเฉพาะในเวียดนาม ยังคงเป็นเรื่องที่ยังไม่ได้รับการศึกษามากนัก. การศึกษานี้ได้ตอบโจทย์นี้โดยการศึกษาผลกระทบของแอปพลิเคชัน AR ต่อมิติของลูกค้า เช่น ความรู้เกี่ยวกับผลิตภัณฑ์, ทัศนคติ, และเจตนาซื้อสินค้า โดยเปรียบเทียบกับประสบการณ์การซื้อสินค้าผ่านเว็บไซต์แบบดั้งเดิม โดยการเก็บข้อมูลจากการสำรวจความคิดเห็นของผู้ตอบ 402 คนในเวียดนาม ซึ่งประกอบด้วยกลุ่มทดลองและกลุ่มควบคุม การวิจัยนี้ได้ศึกษาผลกระทบของ AR ต่อพฤติกรรมการซื้อสินค้า โดยมุ่งเน้นที่ผู้บริโภคในกลุ่มเจนเนอเรชัน Y ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การใช้ AR ถูกมองว่าเป็นประสบการณ์ที่สนุกสนานและมีประโยชน์ ซึ่งช่วยเพิ่มเจตนาซื้อสินค้าสำหรับผู้บริโภคได้มากกว่าการใช้เว็บไซต์ทั่วไป แม้ว่าทัศนคติของผลิตภัณฑ์จะไม่เป็นปัจจัยหลักที่กระตุ้นเจตนาซื้อ แต่ประสบการณ์การใช้ AR ที่ดึงดูดและความรู้เกี่ยวกับผลิตภัณฑ์ที่ได้รับจาก AR ถูกพบว่าเป็นปัจจัยที่สำคัญ การศึกษานี้ช่วยเพิ่มความเข้าใจในศักยภาพของ AR ที่สามารถยกระดับประสบการณ์การช็อปปิ้งในบริบทของเวียดนาม และให้ข้อมูลที่เป็นประโยชน์สำหรับนักการตลาดที่ต้องการใช้เทคโนโลยี AR อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพในการดึงดูดผู้บริโภค

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Introduction

The quick pace of technology growth has resulted in the quick obsolescence of earlier innovations. An example is how smartphones have replaced the use of old cellular phones, while the automotive industry is poised to transition to solar, hybrid, and electric vehicles (Do et al., 2020). The revolution is also seen in the convergence of several daily-use gadgets into a smartphone, which serves functions previously served by other tools, such as writing letters, alarm setting, flashlight use, listening to the radio, music playing, calendar organization, and telling time (Javornik, 2014). The advertising industry has been at the forefront of the revolution, raising awareness of the products as well as influencing purchase behavior by highlighting the most desirable aspects (Jamil, 2019).

In Vietnam, Augmented Reality (AR) is poised to transform the interior design market by providing interactive, real-time visual product information that seamlessly integrates virtual 3D objects into physical environments (Jung et al., 2015; Vonkeman et al., 2017). In comparison to the static 360-degree view provided by traditional 3D technology, AR allows consumers to see furniture and decor in their real-world living spaces, enhancing the shopping experience significantly (Olsson & Salo, 2011). The technology is already being adopted by big brands such as Ikea and Tiffany & Co., which speaks to its power to disrupt the market. The rise in the use of smartphones has also boosted the growth of AR, with it being a key tool in contemporary marketing (Martínez et al., 2014).

Despite the proven benefits of AR in fields such as education, gaming, and tourism (Do et al., 2020; Kogan et al., 2017; Liou et al., 2017), its impact on consumer behavior in mobile shopping, particularly within the interior design sector, remains underexplored. This research seeks to bridge this gap by examining how AR influences consumer purchase intentions and satisfaction in Vietnam's interior design market. Identifying the mediators and conditions under which AR is most effective will provide valuable insights for marketers in this burgeoning industry.

AR technology's capability to merge real-world and digital elements enhances the user experience, offering something unique compared to fully

immersive virtual reality (VR) (Sun et al., 2022). Since its creation by Boeing in the early 1990s, AR has undergone significant development, fueled by technological advancements, decreased costs, and the widespread availability of the internet and GPS (Javornik, 2016). Significant investments by prominent technology companies such as Google, Microsoft, Snapchat, and Facebook highlight the increasing significance and potential of AR (Constine, 2017). An understanding of the impact of AR on consumer behavior is significant, as it can revolutionize the strategy for marketing through the generation of interactive, immersive experiences with the power to engage consumers in a more meaningful way (Yaoyuneyong et al., 2016). The dilemma of whether AR can be effective in influencing customer attitude and purchase behavior is a marketer's dilemma (Owyang, 2010). The dilemma is addressed in the present study by focusing in the Vietnamese market for interior design, creating a unique context in which to explore the capability and effectiveness of AR.

Given the rapid digital transformation and the increasing importance of consumer engagement in Vietnam, researching AR in the interior design sector is both timely and essential. It will provide insights into leveraging AR technology to create more engaging and effective marketing strategies, ultimately contributing to the growth and innovation of Vietnam's interior design market. Further, with the increasing popularity of AR, it is worth discovering how it will impact older consumers, those most likely to be resistant to new technology, and how to break through these barriers (Bower et al., 2014). Also, the shifting consumption of media, with consumers viewing more smart screens and less TV, underscores the need for marketers to adjust their strategies in order to effectively engage with their consumers (Hopp & Gangadharbatla, 2016; Liao, 2015).

Despite the promising potential of AR technology, challenges remain in terms of its limited usage and graphical content, creating uncertainty about its future and the sustainability of investments (Bilgili Sülük & Aydin, 2019). This study aims to address these challenges specifically within the context of Vietnam's interior design market, providing a comprehensive analysis of AR's role and effectiveness.

Furthermore, the primary goal of this research is to bridge gaps in the existing literature on augmented reality by exploring its business potential, with a particular focus on its influence on consumer purchase intentions in Vietnam. This research seeks to provide empirical evidence on how AR applications impact consumer behavior in the Vietnamese market, offering practical insights for marketing managers in this field. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: How does the use of augmented reality applications affect customers' purchase intentions in the Vietnamese market?

- RQ2: What specific factors contribute to the potential increase in purchase intentions when utilizing augmented reality applications in Vietnam?

This investigation specifically focuses on purchase intentions related to AR applications on smart devices in Vietnam, excluding other dimensions such as usage intentions or the application of AR in advertising. It is important to note that the findings of this study may be limited in their generalizability to other geographical regions due to the targeted focus on consumers within Vietnam. Additionally, cultural nuances and specific market conditions in Vietnam will be carefully considered throughout the analysis.

Furthermore, this study provides a comprehensive set of definitions to establish a shared understanding of key terms pertinent to the research, including AR, ARM (Augmented Reality Marketing), e-commerce, and purchase intention, within the unique context of the Vietnamese market.

Literature Review

Development of Augmented Reality (AR)

The concept of Augmented Reality (AR) originated in the 1950s when Morton Heilig envisioned enhancing movie viewing by stimulating the senses. Although his Sensorama simulator, developed in 1962, did not receive funding, the term «augmented reality» was later coined in the early 1990s by David Mizell and Tom Caudell from

Boeing (Carmigniani et al., 2011). The technology was initially used in the military, industrial, and medical industries, later extending to the commercial, marketing, sport, entertainment, and journalism industries (van Krevelen & Poelman, 2010). AR imposes digital elements over real-world scenery, which can be experienced through smartphones or large interactive screens (Javornik, 2014). In the business sector, AR enables consumers to try products such as clothes or furniture virtually in their environment, enhancing the consumer experience (Javornik, 2016). Popular brands including Converse, Coca-Cola, and IKEA use AR for advertising and demonstrations in order to engage customers (Marr, 2021). The use of AR in advertising has been further supported by the success of technology including Pokémon GO and the AR features of Snapchat, which have increased consumer awareness and adoption (Aslam, 2024; Seitz, 2016).

In the future, wearable computers such as Microsoft HoloLens and Google Glass have the potential to deliver more immersive AR experiences (Kalantari & Rauschnabel, 2018). Accessibility, data security, and privacy, however, remain the primary barriers (Statt, 2014). In the context of marketing, the research has been focused towards consumer adoption of AR, the impact of AR ads on purchase behavior, and how AR can be utilized to reduce return behavior while maximizing conversions in online shopping (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015; Javornik et al., 2017; Kim & Forsythe, 2010; Sung & Cho, 2012). The study shows AR can actually capture the attention of consumers in ads, improving the general shopping experience (Javornik et al., 2017).

AR Application in Marketing Research

Research in augmented reality (AR) marketing has mainly focused on a few topics. First, studies on consumers' adoption of AR technology have been done to explore the factors that influence consumers' adoption of AR applications (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015). Second, studies on consumers' perceptions of AR advertisements have been done to explore how consumers perceive and respond to the advertisement communications delivered through AR media (Yaoyuneyong et al., 2016).

Moreover, the research has made suggestions for designing effective AR experiences with the aim of achieving maximum user engagement and satisfaction (Javornik et al., 2017; Scholz & Smith, 2016). Scholars have also analyzed anticipated consumer response to various media aspects of AR and how various features of AR apps influence user behavior and attitude (Javornik, 2016).

Furthermore, consumer post-experience surveys have been conducted in order to assess the performance and impact of AR experiences in influencing the decision-making behavior of consumers (Kim & Forsythe, 2010). Of special relevance, the impact of AR in influencing purchase intentions, in the context of apparel retail, for instance, has been studied (Schwartz, 2011).

Schwartz (2011) in a seminal study underscored the power of AR to transform online retailing by providing consumers with more interactive and instant contact with products. Increased engagement, Schwartz added, could lead to a decrease in returns and an increase in the rate of conversions. AR has also been hailed as a powerful tool for attention-grabbing in advertising, offering marketers the possibility of creating effective campaigns.

Types of Augmented Reality (AR) in Marketing

Over the last few years, innovative outdoor ads with the use of augmented reality (AR) have been getting much media attention as well as consumer interest. A Swedish pharmacy, for example, added an interactive screen billboard in Stockholm with a smoke alarm which activated an anti-smoking video when it sensed smokers heading towards it (Mallinson, 2017). Pepsi also caught the attention of commuters by displaying real-time video with superimposed 3D objects, such as a tiger stalking or an attack robot on the glass front of a bus shelter (Fedko, 2023).

The transition to affluent hypermedia advertisements illustrated the power of AR in transforming consumer interaction with advertisements. Yaoyuneyong and team (2016) verified that AR hypermedia advertisements were more effective than print ads and QR ads in several areas including general performance, quality of the ads, attractiveness of the ads, recall of the ads, and success of the ads.

While the AR option required a smart device in order to view more information, the subjects believed it was more time- and effort-saving, which illustrates its information worth (Sung & Cho, 2012). The older, limited type of AR, the QR codes, did not receive broad consumer adoption through inefficient utilization of the advertising strategy, thereby limiting their impact in advertising (Stratten & Kramer, 2013).

In the field of AR applications in retailing, the focus lies in providing consumers with interactive products experiences to counter the lack of physical contact in digital environments. AR features such as virtual try-ons have been shown to be able to increase the rate of conversions as well as the rate of reductions in returns for online consumers (Schwartz, 2011). Moreover, off-line retail stores can apply AR to allow consumers to try products in the comfort of their homes before a purchase in the physical retail outlet, thereby enhancing the overall retail experience as well as the rate of sales (Lu & Smith, 2007). The success of AR in selling products, however, hinges on the effective influence of the virtual experience it presents to consumers as well as the level of consumers' adoption of the technology of augmentation.
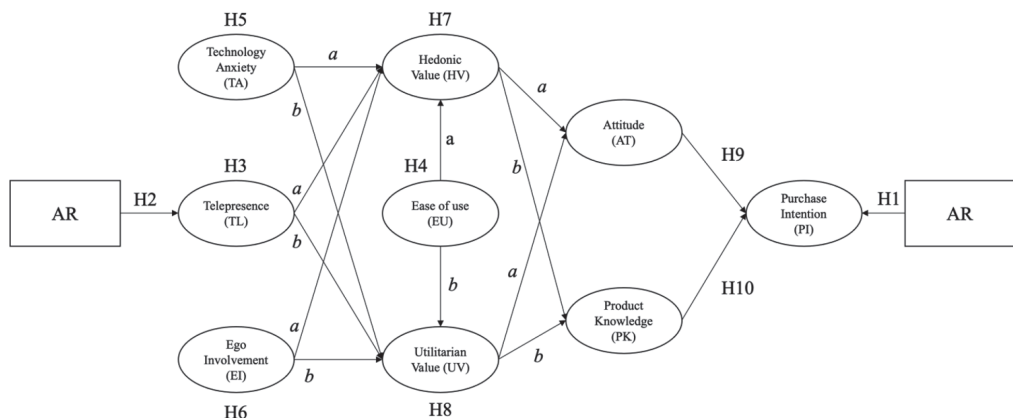
Conceptual Framework:

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

This study investigates the influence of augmented reality (AR) in influencing consumer behavior and purchase intentions in the Vietnamese market for interior design. The conceptual framework integrates the most significant variables such as interactive image technology (IIT), telepresence, technology acceptance, and consumer behavior, and analyzes how the variables interact with one another in order to influence purchase decisions.

Interactive Image Technology (IIT) and Telepresence

Interactivity, or the ability for users to modify and interact with content in real-time, is a key feature of augmented reality (AR) technology. The interactive nature of AR is key in engaging consumers by enabling them to view products in their real environment and be able to interact with them (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015). Telepresence, or the sense of being physically present in a mediated or virtual environment, is a significant component in enhancing consumer experience. Research has proven the capacity of AR to create high telepresence levels to have a positive impact on consumer attitude towards products, as well as purchase intention (L. Huang et al., 2019). Telepresence is influenced by factors such as user control, media richness, as well as vividness, with user control being key in increasing the level of engagement in AR applications (Whang et al., 2021).

The Technology Technology Acceptance

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) suggests the most influential factors in technology adoption are perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Davis, 1989). More contemporary work added intrinsic factors such as enjoyment and entertainment value to the model, which are significantly influential in the adoption of AR applications (Venkatesh et al., 2003). User characteristics such as technology anxiety and innovativeness also have an impact on the adoption of AR technology. Gender also enters the equation in the relative weighting of hedonic values (Kim & Forsythe, 2010), which indicates the role of personality traits in technology adoption.

Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions

This strategy employs the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which emphasizes the role of attitudes in the formation of purchase intentions (Ajzen, 1991). In AR, positive attitudes towards the technology and the product lead to higher purchase intentions. AR applications with visual attractiveness, ease of use, and enjoyment will likely generate positive consumer attitudes towards purchases (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015). Authenticity of the product in AR applications also plays an important role in the generation of confidence and purchase intentions. The accuracy of the display of products in AR is critical in the preservation of consumer confidence, as inaccuracies can destroy confidence and undermine the power of AR in driving purchases (Xu et al., 2023).

Hypotheses Development

The hypotheses development section presents a theoretical framework for the assessment of the impact of AR applications on purchase intentions in the Vietnamese market for interior design, an extension of Schwartz's model. By integrating hedonic and utilitarian values, usability, and human traits into the extended model, the research offers a comprehensive framework for evaluating the impact of AR-based shopping apps on consumers. Past studies have established the ability of AR to enhance telepresence, which is a primary purchase behavior driver. Given its highly interactive product displays, AR should be able to provide exciting shopping experiences resulting in favorable consumer outcomes (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Tan et al., 2022). Based on these findings, the first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: AR experiences lead to higher purchase intentions compared to traditional 2D visuals within the Vietnamese interior context.

Telepresence in AR refers to the feeling of "being present" when interacting with virtual products in a real-world environment. AR, with its high interactivity, enables users to adjust the size and position of products in their living spaces, which is expected to result in higher telepresence compared to 2D product

presentations (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015; Saleem et al., 2024). Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: AR experiences lead to higher telepresence levels compared to traditional 2D visuals within the Vietnamese interior context.

In addition to telepresence, AR is expected to enhance both utilitarian and hedonic values. AR allows users to control product interactions from various angles, helping them make more informed and rational decisions, especially for high-involvement purchases like furniture (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015). Moreover, AR provides a visually engaging and enjoyable experience, contributing to an increase in hedonic value (Sihi, 2018). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3a: Telepresence has a positive impact on utilitarian value within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 3b: Telepresence has a positive impact on hedonic value within the Vietnamese interior context.

The perceived ease of use of AR applications is another critical factor in determining user satisfaction and the benefits they perceive. Studies have shown that the easier it is to use an AR application, the more gratifying and beneficial it is perceived to be (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015; Sihi, 2018; Tan et al., 2022). Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 4a: Perceived ease of use has a positive impact on hedonic within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 4b: Perceived ease of use has a positive impact on utilitarian value within the Vietnamese interior context.

Furthermore, technology anxiety can be a barrier to adopting AR. Previous studies have shown that technological apprehension negatively affects enjoyment and perceived utility of new technologies (Kim & Forsythe, 2010). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 5a: Technology anxiety has a negative impact on hedonic value within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 5b: Technology anxiety has a negative impact on utilitarian value within the Vietnamese interior context.

Ego involvement is hypothesized to influence users' perception and adoption of new technologies, including AR, particularly within the Vietnamese interior context (M. Kang, 2014). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 6a: Ego involvement has a positive impacts on hedonic value within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 6b: Ego involvement has a positive impacts on utilitarian value within the Vietnamese interior context.

Telepresence, through its influence on both hedonic and utilitarian values, is expected to affect consumer attitudes toward products and their product knowledge. Studies have shown that telepresence influences both attitudes and product knowledge (Do et al., 2020). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 7a: Hedonic value has a positive impact on attitudes towards the product within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 7b: Hedonic value has a positive impact on product knowledge within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 8a: Utilitarian value has a positive impact on attitudes towards the product within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 8b: Utilitarian value has a positive impact on product knowledge within the Vietnamese interior context.

Finally, consumer knowledge of the product as well as consumer attitude will most likely have a direct influence on purchase intention. Previous research shows consumers are more likely to buy when there is a positive attitude towards the product, especially when consumers have the knowledge of the product through AR experiences (Smith & Swinyard, 1983). Given that telepresence is

generated by AR, which is felt as a direct interaction with the product (Saleem et al., 2024), the attitude expressed is predicted to be nearer to purchase intention. Therefore, the last two hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 9: Attitude towards the product has a positive impact on purchase intention within the Vietnamese interior context.

Hypothesis 10: Product knowledge has a positive impact on purchase intention within the Vietnamese interior context.

Methodology

Research Design, Population, and Sample:

Development of a research design plays a significant role in mapping the path of marketing research. Due to the suggestions of new research, the current study utilizes a conclusive design, its causal type, in exploring the cause-and-effect relationship between the experiences of augmented reality (AR) and consumer behavior in the Vietnamese market for interior design. Causal research has been well known to reveal cause-and-effect relationships in marketing environments (Bell et al., 2022).

The key to this strategy lies in the accurate definition of the targeted population and sampling plan. The study focuses on Generation Y due to their high technology usage and high adoption of AR. Generation Y, or digital natives, have high technology usage and purchasing power (Venkatesh et al., 2019). Studies have shown that 74% of the generation owns a smartphone, which makes them the ideal population to study AR-based consumer behavior (Vogels, 2019).

Population and Sample Characteristics

The population of study is Generation Y consumers in Vietnam, the future customers for interior design products, namely furniture, with smartphone or tablet accessibility. Generation Y is used in this study because of their technology adoption behavior, with most of them being among the early adopters of digital technologies such as AR, thus being apt for the topic of this study, which is the adoption of AR (Fadhilah & Aruan, 2023). The sample will be diverse in the sense that it will be

representative of different age groups, different gender groups, and different income groups, with the demographic variables of age, gender, and income controlled for during the analysis in order to avoid any bias.

Sampling Method

There are two broad approaches to sampling: random sampling and non-random sampling (Etikan, 2016). In light of the nature of the research, random sampling would have been the best for generalizability, but such a sampling process is impossible to implement in the absence of an exhaustive sampling frame, which we did not have at our disposal (Fink, 2024). Non-random sampling was, therefore, applied, specifically purposive sampling. The procedure lies in the selection of the participants in line with the relevance to the research topic, with only those fulfilling the specified criteria being admitted to the sample (Palinkas et al., 2015). We selected individuals with experience with or interest in AR technology, specifically in the field of interior design and furniture purchases.

To make the sampling process more efficient, convenience sampling was used, which is mostly utilised in academe research for its cost-effectiveness and ease of accessibility (Etikan, 2016). The convenience sampling process allowed us to get data from easily accessible populations such as university students, online forum participants, and consumers of online furniture discussion boards. While the process cannot ensure the same level of representativeness as random sampling (Jager et al., 2017), efforts were made to control for age, gender, and income to ensure the generalizability of the results.

Sample Size Calculation

To determine the appropriate sample size, the sample size calculation formula for proportions was applied, considering the study's use of regression analysis. The formula used is as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 . p(1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

- n is the required sample size,
- Z is the Z-score corresponding to a 95% confidence level (1.96),
- p is the estimated population proportion (0.5 for maximum variability),
- E is the margin of error (set to 0.05).

Using this formula, a sample size of approximately 400 respondents was deemed sufficient to achieve reliable results and account for potential non-responses or incomplete data. This sample size ensures statistical robustness and improves the generalizability of the findings.

Research Measurement:

The collection of data for the research involved the combination of primary data with the secondary data to provide a solid foundation for reliable research (Saunders et al., 2003). The research began with the utilization of the secondary data, which comprised raw data alongside previously released summaries of other studies (Birks & Malhotra, 2006; Saunders et al., 2003). The secondary data formed the foundation for the research model as well as the literature review. The comprehensive review was significant in placing our research in the Vietnamese interior industry context.

Experimental Setup:

The research employs an experimental approach to investigate the causation between purchase intention and the use of augmented reality (AR) technology. The participants were divided into two groups: the control group saw only the images of the products online, while the experimental group used AR technology. The purpose was to examine whether the use of AR will impact purchase intention. The participants in the experimental group engaged with an AR application in a specially designed controlled lab environment meant to resemble the environment at home. The control group, however, responded to a survey after seeing the images of the products. The same product was used by both groups to control for variables such as price, quality of the product, and brand. The influence of the intervention was kept at a

minimum, with the internal validity assured by keeping the two groups completely apart, with the participants recruited from different sources.

Questionnaire Design

There was no existing research in the area of our specific queries, so primary data was obtained through a standardised questionnaire. The questionnaire was spread through the use of Google Forms to facilitate easy response with automatic transfer of data to SPSS for the purpose of analysis.

The control group and the experimental group both used the same questionnaire with itemized scales for measuring attitude and preference (Birks & Malhotra, 2006). A 7-point Likert scale with the options ranging from «Strongly Disagree» to «Strongly Agree» was used in order to capture the sentiments of the participants (Saunders et al., 2003). Exceptions were made for the questions regarding perceived knowledge of the products with Schwartz's (2011) scale ranging from «None» to «A Ton". Purchase intention with Papagiannidis et al.'s (2014) likability scale ranging from «Not at all likely» to «Very likely». Both the positive and the negative questions were provided in order to engage the participants fully (Saunders et al., 2003). The Vietnamese language was used in the questionnaire in order to ensure comprehension, with the questions being adapted for the scenarios of AR and online shopping while keeping the questions' meanings unchanged.

The structure of the questionnaire includes:

1. Demographic Information: Questions about age, gender, income, educational level, and occupation were included to control for demographic influences on consumer behavior and ensure comparable characteristics between the experimental and control groups.

2. Attitudes and Product Perception: Questions about participants' attitudes toward the interior product were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (Schwartz, 2011) to assess their liking, satisfaction, and perception of quality.

3. AR/ 2D Visual Experience and Interaction with Product: Questions gauging the effectiveness of AR/ 2D visual in helping participants visualize products in their environment were adapted from Venkatesh et al. (2003). Example questions include: "Did you find it easy to use AR to visualize the product?" and "Did AR help you make a more confident purchase decision?"

4. Purchase Intention: Purchase intention was assessed using a 7-point Likert scale from «Not at all likely» to «Very likely» (Papagiannidis et al., 2014), with questions like: "After using AR, are you likely to purchase this product?"

5. Product Knowledge: Knowledge of the product was assessed with a scale from «None» to «A lot» (Schwartz, 2011), evaluating understanding of features like material, functionality, and aesthetics.

Each question was carefully designed to ensure accuracy in data collection. The questionnaire was written in Vietnamese to ensure clarity and relevance, with answers processed in SPSS for analysis.

Data Analysis:

To analyze the experimental data, SPSS software was used. Data from Google Forms were first transferred to Excel to convert responses into numerical values, and then imported into SPSS for outlier and missing value checks. A software issue caused some responses related to ease of use to be unavailable. Since these missing responses were deemed to be missing completely at random (MCAR), they were removed on a pairwise basis when necessary for specific analyses (Pallant, 2020). To assess the characteristics of the sample, various statistical and exploratory techniques were applied, focusing particularly on the age and gender distribution within the control group to confirm that all participants were from Generation Y. Factor analysis (FA) was used to check reliability due to wording modifications in the scales. Principal component analysis (PCA) confirmed the appropriateness of the analysis, with the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) measure at .846 and Bartlett's test for sphericity confirming suitability (Pallant, 2020).

Cronbach's alpha was applied in the evaluation of scale reliability with the scales having satisfactory values between 0.712 and 0.901 ((Nunnally & Bernstein, 1978). Validated items by PCA were summed up to create scaled mean measures, while eta squared was applied in the calculation of the effect sizes with the cut-offs being .01, .06, and .14 for small, medium, and large effects (Cohen, 2013a). Spearman's rank-order correlation was applied in the exploration of relationships between variables as the distributions of the scores were non-normal (Pallant, 2020). Multiple linear regression analyses using the ordinary least squares (OLS) method were conducted to explore the relationships between variables. Multicollinearity was assessed through correlation matrices and diagnostic measures like «tolerance» and «VIF» (Pallant, 2020). Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure and the Sobel test were applied in mediation with the indirect effects verified by the SPSS macro-PROCESS through bootstrapping for greater reliability in smaller samples

Results:

Descriptive Statistics on Survey Respondents

Table 1. Results of Descriptive Statistics on Survey Respondents

		Experimental Group (n=158)		Control Group (n=244)		Total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Gender	Male	68	43.04	147	60.25	215	53.48
	Female	90	56.96	97	39.75	187	46.52
Age	1829-	37	23.42	70	28.69	107	26.62
	3049-	91	57.59	132	54.10	223	55.47
	5065-	21	13.29	31	12.70	52	12.94
	65+	9	5.70	11	4.51	20	4.98
Education Level	High School	8	5.06	29	11.89	37	9.20
	Vocational School	27	17.09	23	9.43	50	12.44
	Bachelor's Degree	101	63.92	159	65.16	260	64.68
	Master's Degree	18	11.39	31	12.70	49	12.19
	Doctoral Degree	4	2.53	2	0.82	6	1.49
Occupation	Student	17	10.76	42	17.21	59	14.68
	Worker	48	30.38	78	31.97	126	31.34
	Officer	27	17.09	32	13.11	59	14.68
	Owner/ Business Founder	32	20.25	49	20.08	81	20.15
	Freelancer	21	13.29	37	15.16	58	14.43
	Others	13	8.23	6	2.46	19	4.73
Monthly Income (VND)	Under 10M	37	23.42	72	29.51	109	27.11
	From 10M to under 20M	51	32.28	89	36.48	140	34.83
	From 20M to under 30M	32	20.25	32	13.11	64	15.92
	From 30M to under 40M	17	10.76	19	7.79	36	8.96
	From and Over 40M	21	13.29	32	13.11	53	13.18

Table 1 provides a rich and detailed profile of survey respondents involved in a Vietnamese interior market study, showcasing the experimental group (n=158) and the control group (n=244).

As far as gender is concerned, 56.96% are female in the experiment and 39.75% are female in the control. On the other hand, 60.25% are male in the control and 43.04% are male in the experiment. When it comes to the age, the 3049- range is most dominant, where 57.59% are in the experiment and 54.10% are in the control. The 1829- year olds represent 23.42% in the experiment and 28.69% in the control, indicating a high youth presence.

The educational attainment of the respondents is quite high. Most of them hold Bachelor's Degrees, with 63.92% and 65.16% of the experimental and control groups, respectively. Holders of Master's Degrees are also prominent, occupying 11.39% and 12.70% of the experimental and control groups, respectively, while those who hold Doctoral Degrees are less prominent, comprising a minority in each group.

The occupational composition is varied, with workers being the most dominant, taking 30.38% and 31.97% in the experimental and control populations, respectively. Students and officers follow in the second order, with students taking 10.76% and 17.21% in the experimental and control populations, respectively, and officers taking 17.09% and 13.11%, respectively. Business proprietors and freelancers also represent major segments in both populations, reflecting the varied professional backgrounds.

Income levels are highly variable between respondents. The most common range is 10M and below 20M VND, which represents 32.28% of the experiment and 36.48% of the control groups. Respondents with below 10M VND represent 23.42% of the experiment and 29.51% of the control groups, indicating a high number of respondents with lower income levels.

Univariate Analysis

The experimental group had higher scores on all but one dimension, but lower scores on telepresence and technology anxiety (Table 2). However,

the telepresence difference was not statistically significant, which is the opposite to what was found by Schwartz (2011) and Fiore et al. (2005), who hypothesized that interactivity in AR enhances telepresence. Misregistration of virtual furniture and lack of graphical vividness most likely reduced user control, which may have impacted telepresence (Papagiannidis et al., 2014). Additionally, use of a tablet computer instead of a large screen could be to blame for the disparate findings. Additionally, belief in the accuracy of AR regarding product size and color was found to influence telepresence (Kim & Forsythe, 2010).

Table 2. T-test Results

	Experimental Group (AR Experience)		Control Group (2D Visual Experience)		Sig (2-tailed)	t	df.	eta squared
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation				
PI	4.82	1.00	4.08	0.78	0.000*	4.680	175	0.12
PK	3.45	0.82	3.53	0.91	0.211	-1.034	175	
AT	4.99	1.01	4.73	1.45	0.241	1.500	175	
UV	5.76	1.09	4.83	1.08	0.000*	4.601	175	0.13
EU	5.49	1.29	5.41	1.23	0.202	0.752	152	
HV	5.57	0.91	4.41	1.12	0.000*	5.241	150	0.23
TL	3.61	1.41	3.81	1.58	0.230	-0.711	175	
TA	2.33	0.67	2.67	0.86	0.002	-1.772	175	
EI	3.84	1.23	3.92	1.43	0.234	0.701	175	
Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)								

As expected for Generation Y participants, both groups showed low levels of technology anxiety (Kim & Forsythe, 2010). Ego involvement was not strongly linked to furniture shopping. Product knowledge levels were similar across groups, contrary to findings by Li et al. (2002). However, the experimental group scored higher on «style,» «size,» and purchase confidence, with «size» being significantly higher.

The control group scored higher on «comfort,» «design features,» and «quality,» likely due to the vividness of high-resolution images. Therefore, while AR did not significantly improve overall product knowledge, it provided valuable information, such as product size, which enhanced the shopping experience compared to conventional e-commerce.

Both groups were positively disposed towards the product, with more positive attitude scores for the experimental group, though not statistically significant. Schwartz (2011) found a significant AR effect on attitude, which was not found in this study. This may be due to the fact that there was an equal amount of telepresence, which did not permit users to fully immerse themselves, or to the fact that both websites and AR equally affected attitude. The fact that the armchair was familiar and that the design was neutral may also have led to the lack of significant differences in attitude.

Both the app and website were found to be easy to use by the participants. There was no significant difference in how easy they were to use between the control and experimental groups, perhaps because Generation Y as a whole is so eager to adopt new technologies (Rowinski, 2012). They are used to frequent interaction with AR via social media applications like Snapchat (Rowinski, 2012) and Pokémon GO (Seitz, 2016).

The author identified greater purchase intention, and greater hedonic and utilitarian values, for the experimental group (AR experience) versus the control group (2D visual experience). This means that the AR experience is more enjoyable and functional than an ordinary website experience. The effect sizes were moderate to large for purchase intention and utilitarian value, and very large for hedonic value . While telepresence was equivalent between groups, the experimental group had significantly higher purchase intention, and telepresence may have a smaller effect on purchase intention than was believed (Papagiannidis et al., 2014). The interactive, hedonic features of AR may have more influence on purchase intention than product authenticity (Suh & Chang, 2006).

Gender distribution (59.3% females, 40.7% males) might affect group differences. Separate t-tests validated differences for each gender. Both genders showed significant differences in purchase intention, hedonic, and utilitarian values between groups, indicating AR's effects are not gender-specific. Higher purchase intention in the experimental group supports Hypothesis 1.

Results of Hypothesis Testing

Correlations Analysis:

Multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to assess the impact of augmented reality (AR) on participants' purchase intentions. Correlation analyses were conducted prior to conducting these analyses in order to determine the direction and size of the relationships between variables and to check for multicollinearity. Correlation matrices for the control group and experimental group showed no issues with multicollinearity ($r < .9$) (See Table 3).

A positive, monotonic, and statistically significant correlation was found between hedonic and utilitarian values, and between product knowledge and purchase intention in the experimental group (Table 3). This indicates that as these variables increase, purchase intention increases. A significant correlation was also observed between telepresence and product knowledge, indicating a positive monotonic relationship between the two variables, based on Cohen's (2013b) large correlation measure. It is also important to note that no significant correlations were found between ego involvement, technology anxiety, and the other variables. These personality traits capture the participants' stable characteristics instead of the experimental stimulus, and the low correlation values are expected, as they are influenced by individual differences instead of the study's manipulation.

Table 3. Correlation matrix for both the experimental and control groups.

	PI	PK	AT	UV	EU	HV	EI	TL	TA
PI	1								
PK	.713** (.510**)	1							
AT	.352** (.411**)	.305* (.306**)	1						
UV	.708** (.431**)	.423** (.171)	.398** (.222*)	1					
EU	.312** (.327*)	.389* (.465**)	.231 (.102)	.298* (.177)	1				
HV	.601** (.578**)	.423** (.490**)	.383** (.379**)	.531** (.567**)	.484** (.401**)	1			
EI	.081 (.307**)	-.076 (.067)	.182 (.198)	.045 (.287**)	.041 (.059)	.268 (.297**)	1		
TL	.541** (.298**)	.671** (.598**)	.334* (.295**)	.412** (.213)	.358** (.134)	.432** (.179)	.094 (.236)	1	
TA	-.052 (-.055)	-.134 (-.001)	.042 (-.081)	.040 (-0.189)	.023 (.032)	-.112 (.004)	-.072 (.071)	.083 (-.179)	1

(**) .01 level (Sig. 2-tailed), (*) .05 level (Sig. 2-tailed). Control group data are in parentheses.

Regression Analysis:

Table 4. Result of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Relationship	Coefficient*	p		Result	Adj. R²
H2	AR -> TL**	.062	.450	No sig.	Rejected	-.004
H3a	TL -> HV	.391	.020		Accepted	.287
H4a	EU -> HV	.341	.021		Accepted	
H5a	TA -> HV	-.242	.009		Accepted	
H6a	EI -> HV	.145	.292	No sig.	Rejected	
H3b	TL -> UV	.435	.000		Accepted	.282
H4b	EU -> UV	.182	.168	No sig.	Rejected	
H5b	TA -> UV	-.076	.530	No sig.	Rejected	
H6b	EI -> UV	-.001	.882	No sig.	Rejected	
H7a	HV-> AT	.191	.242	No sig.	Rejected	.174
H8a	UV -> AT	.303	.072	No sig.	Rejected	
H7b	HV-> PK	.392	.019		Accepted	.312
H8b	UV -> PK	.242	.108	No sig.	Rejected	
H9	AT -> PI	.181	.132	No sig.	Rejected	.545
H10	PK -> PI	.701	.000		Accepted	

*standardized coefficient: β

**data of both groups

In order to examine the impact of augmented reality (AR) on purchase intention, a six-step multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the paths and hypotheses of the model (Table 4). While all regression analyses were statistically significant (p <.05), simple linear regression on telepresence was not significant, indicating that exposure to the AR application or website is not a strong predictor of telepresence. This finding is aligned with the univariate analysis, which showed that technical problems and graphical limitations in the AR application may have undermined telepresence. The literature has emphasized that elements of

interactivity, user control, and graphic quality are salient in inducing telepresence (Papagiannidis et al., 2014). As such, hypothesis H2 is rejected.

The first regression analysis, where hedonic value was the dependent variable, included telepresence, ease of use, technology anxiety, and ego involvement as independent variables. Among these, telepresence and ease of use were the strongest predictors of hedonic value, and technology anxiety was also significant. Ego involvement was not a significant predictor. Collectively, these variables accounted for 28.7% of the variance in hedonic value (Adjusted R^2 =.287), whereby a one standard deviation increase in telepresence resulted in a.319-point increase in hedonic value. The negative contribution of technology anxiety indicates that higher anxiety decreases hedonic value, which supports the findings of Kim and Forsy the (2010). Hypotheses H3a, H4a, and H5a are thus supported, but H6a is not. The second regression indicated telepresence to be the only significant predictor of utilitarian value, accounting for 28.2% of its variance. A one standard deviation increase in telepresence resulted in a.435-point increase in utilitarian value. Hypotheses H4b, H5b, and H6b are thus rejected, and hypothesis H3b is supported.

The third regression analyzed the influence of hedonic values (HV) and utilitarian values (UV) on product attitude. Neither value significantly predicted attitude, against previous research (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015). The low Adjusted R^2 (.174) suggests the presence of other variables that can affect product attitude, and therefore hypotheses H7a and H8a are rejected. The fourth regression analyzed the influence of hedonic and utilitarian values on product knowledge, and hedonic value was the sole significant predictor. It explained 31.2% of the variance in product knowledge (Adjusted R^2 =.312), where an increase in hedonic value by one standard deviation would increase product knowledge by.392 points. This is consistent with the fact that emotional involvement helps in learning (Deater-Deckard et al., 2013). Therefore, hypothesis H8b is rejected, while H7b is supported.

Finally, the fifth regression examined the direct impact of attitude and product knowledge (PK) on purchase intention (PI). The sole significant predictor was product knowledge, which explained 54.5% of the variance of purchase

intention. Against the presumed attitude-behavior consistency (Schwartz, 2011), hypothesis 9 was rejected and hypothesis 10 was supported. The two groups' similar levels of product knowledge and attitude toward the product suggest that a greater purchase intention of the experimental group cannot be attributed to product knowledge only. One plausible explanation is that the features of products, including the chair's size discovered by AR, have determining roles in stimulating purchase intention. Alternatively, other unforeseen variables also take part in the effect on purchase intention. An additional regression analysis, in which hedonic and utilitarian values and product knowledge were predictors, yielded a significant model (f(3.62) = 79.83, p <.000, Adjusted R^2 =.819). Utilitarian value contributed the most (β =.501), followed by product knowledge (β =.421) and hedonic value (β =.316), validating the direct effect of hedonic and utilitarian values on purchase intention.

Table 5. A mediation analysis of HV through PK on PI

		β	Unstandardized coefficients	Standard Error	Sig.	Adj. R²
total effect	HV → PI	.750	.520	.631	.000	.558
	HV → PK	.548	.542	.103	.000	.290
	HV → PI	.488	.661	.109	.000	.710
	PK → PI	.469	.660	.121	.000	
Indirect (std.) effect	(.550) * (.462) = (.254)					

Mediation analysis (Table 5) revealed that product knowledge partially mediates hedonic value's effect on purchase intention, as corroborated by the Sobel test (z = 3.69, p <.01) and standardized effect (.254). This suggests that while hedonic value has a direct influence, communication of product knowledge is essential to bring about high purchase intention in the AR experience. In the context of augmented reality (AR) and how it impacts purchase intention in the Vietnamese interior industry, it is clear that hedonic value, utilitarian value, and product knowledge obtained through the use of AR are the determinants of purchase intention. In the case of

the experiment group, the formation of purchase intention is more than the direct experience of telepresence and attitude mediation, as suggested by Schwartz (2011). Alternatively, creating a pleasant experience in terms of hedonic value-driven allows for the conveyance of product knowledge. Surprisingly, in the control group, hedonic value was the strongest driver of purchase intention (See Table 6). This connection between hedonic value and purchase intention is consistent with earlier research on non-augmented online shopping, offline consumer behavior (Chiu et al., 2014), and virtual product experiences in computer-generated environments (Papagiannidis et al., 2014).

Table 6. Predictors of PI

Variables	Experimental Group (AR Experience)		Control Group (2D Visual Experience)	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
HV	.259	.005	.376	.000
UV	.442	.000	.089	.212
PK	.386	.000	.278	.000
AT	-.065	.401	.209	.001

In comparison to the control group, it is apparent that both product knowledge and utilitarian value have a bigger influence on purchase intention (Table 7). This means that being able to experience virtual furniture in one's own home makes the experience more interactive, and the product knowledge acquired from it is more relevant to users' intentions and purchasing decisions. Although the direct influence on purchase intention is less strong in the experiment group, the overall influence, including the indirect influence through product knowledge (Table 5), is the same.

The findings obtained here differ from Schwartz's (Schwartz, 2011) findings, where attitude was the most significant predictor of purchase intention and also mediated the effect of product knowledge in uses of virtual try-on. There are several reasons why these findings could differ, including the type of the AR app, which is

less directly engaging users than personal virtual try-ons, the highly ego-involving type of apparel products in Schwartz's study (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006), and the failure to provide a higher level of telepresence by the app than by the website (Table 2). These variables emphasize the importance of rational factors related to furniture (PK) and the user's attitude toward the app itself (HV and UV).

Finally, Figure 2 illustrates the adjusted model representing the processes leading to purchase intention for the experimental group. The model reflects the complex interaction between hedonic values and utilitarian values, product knowledge, and their combined effect on purchase intention in the Vietnamese interior applications.
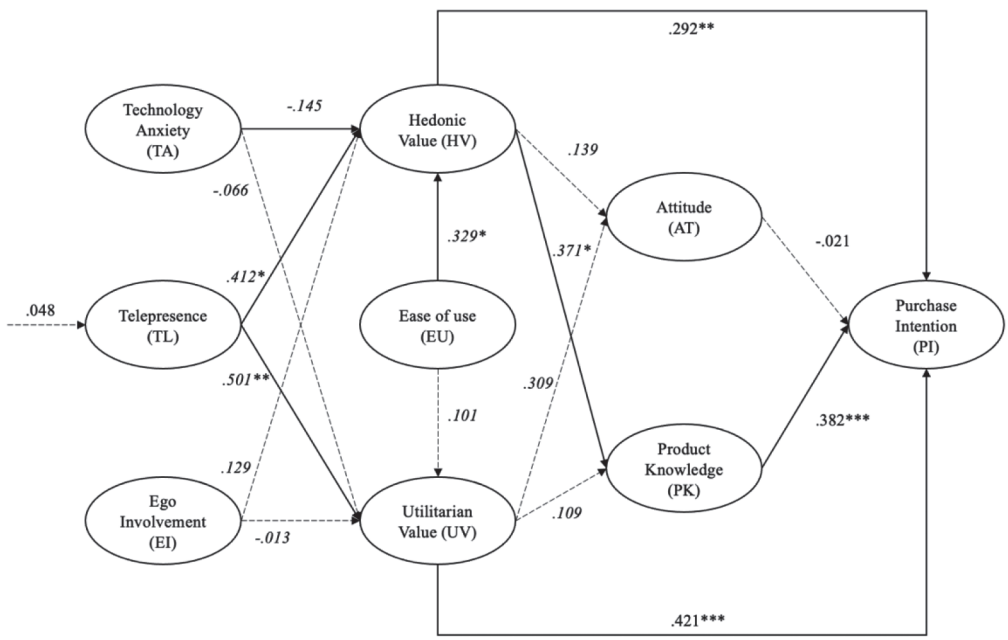
Dashed arrows represent pathways that were not found to be statistically significant.
(*) p<.05, (**) p<.01, (**) p<.001

Figure 2: Revised model for the experimental group

Discussion

This research illustrates the influence of augmented reality (AR) apps on Vietnamese consumers' purchase intentions. The research validates that hedonic and utilitarian values and product knowledge acquired through the AR experience play a significant role in developing purchase intention. These findings illustrate the progress of interactive technology over the research of Olsson and Salo (2011). The research further illustrates how the cultural background in Vietnam affects the adoption of AR, indicating that cultural issues have a great influence on technology acceptance and usage.

While our approach was quantitative in nature, qualitative remarks were elicited from the participants, with them being amazed at the capability of the AR application to mirror real furniture. This finding is in agreement with Javornik's (2016) AR study. While new, Generation Y lacks hands-on experience with AR. A few of the participants liked the AR experience but did not see it being used in the future for purchases, in agreement with concerns about AR being considered gimmicky (Owyang, 2010; Scholz & Smith, 2016) with low usage intention. This can be attributed to cultural factors, with Vietnamese consumers placing importance in other aspects of the purchase experience. Our trial highlighted the significance of ease of use and telepresence for AR applications to be considered useful.

The research also investigated the influence of AR by gender. Hedonic and utilitarian values and purchase intentions were equally affected in men and women. Women, however, showed greater technology anxiety, as implied by Reidsma (2013). The control group females liked the experience more than the control group males, in line with the finding that women shop for fun while males shop for rational choice (Dennis et al., 2010). This supports the idea that AR applications may be attractive in various ways to various demographic groups, and tailored experiences may be needed in order to maximize engagement.

Despite the skepticism surrounding the utility of AR, our findings showed that AR experiences positively influence purchase intentions. The finding, although in its preliminary stage, can change the minds of marketing managers and justify

AR investments. The opening up of Facebook's open AR platform by Mark Zuckerberg (Constine, 2017) underscores the promise of AR, as it allows developers to create with the present smartphones. This indicates the changing role of AR in the digital marketplace, particularly in markets such as Vietnam, whose mobile technology consumption is increasing. Our data showed the AR application was as simple for the participants to use as traditional e-commerce websites, which proves the acceptability of AR technology by Generation Y.

Low technology anxiety with high hedonic and utilitarian values suggest a high intention to use AR technology, especially among Generation Y. The cultural setting should be taken into account, however, as consumers in Vietnam may have different levels of awareness of AR as well as different expectations for its use in shopping experiences. The generation should be targeted by companies with AR applications, with entertainment and usability placed at the forefront in order to maximize engagement and purchase intentions. AR applications can be used to raise knowledge of the product, potentially reducing return rates as Schwartz (2011) suggests. AR, however, will need to use more in-depth information about the product as well as opinions in order to fully replace traditional ways of shopping. The participants also highlighted the assessment of personal comfort, which suggests AR applications will need to balance fun with usability.

AR can be viewed by retailers as a behavior-influencing technology, with experiential rather than functional benefits (T.-L. Huang & Liao, 2015). Quality of the graphics, saturation of the color, and elimination of bugs in the program can enhance telepresence and engagement. Allowing the possibility of viewing multiple furniture products at once may enhance the shopping experience, just the same as in the instances of e-commerce and m-commerce (McDowell et al., 2016). Businesses should also consider the cultural preferences of the targeted market when creating AR applications to ensure compatibility with the behavior and expectations of the consumers in the area.

The results of the study must be viewed in the context of several limitations. The lab experiment and the convenience sampling can potentially limit

the generalizability of the results to other populations outside Generation Y and in real-world environments. The cultural variations in technology adoption were also not completely tested, which can impact the generalizability of the results in other markets. The sample size for the experimental group can be too low for the results to be generalizable, and the single-product category of the study can limit generalizability. The ease-of-use ratings can be influenced by the tutorial presented by the researchers, and the use of a bigger display device in the lab setting can impact the perception of the participants.

Considering the novelty of AR technology and the limited existing research, there is a need for more empirical work. Future research can use experiential approaches in measuring the response of participants to AR technology with stimuli representing real interactive experiences. Researchers can also investigate the impact of cultural factors in the adoption of AR since cultural beliefs can influence consumers' behavior in responding to AR applications as well as how consumers interact with AR applications. Further evaluation of the developed model with other augmented products and virtual try-on applications can yield more precise results. Researchers can investigate UX factors related to enjoyable experiences and whether user attitude towards AR apps can impact purchase intentions.

Evaluation of the value of AR across various user segments and consideration of cultural variation in technology adoption will enhance the external validity of research on AR. Research should also examine the effects of AR on less interactive and more regularly purchased products, as utilitarian values linked to interactive image technology may vary by product category.

Conclusion:

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the effect of an augmented reality (AR) shopping program towards the purchase intentions of customers in the Vietnamese interior market. In order to accomplish this, we addressed the following research questions.

RQ1: How does the use of augmented reality applications affect customers' purchase intentions in the Vietnamese market?

The primary research question was whether the purchase intention of Vietnamese consumers is influenced by an AR application. From our experiment, we observed higher purchase intention from the group of experimental, which experienced the AR, compared with the group of control, which watched a static screenshot of an online shopping website. The outcome contrasts with Schwartz (2011), in which the presentation of the AR technology had been in video form. From the findings, it is obvious that an interactive AR application is not a novelty, but an effective instrument, which can efficiently alter users' purchase intentions and potentially convert them into actual purchasers.

RQ2: What specific factors contribute to the potential increase in purchase intentions when utilizing augmented reality applications in Vietnam?

The second research question analyzed the determinants of the enhanced purchase intentions when consumers engage with an augmented reality application in Vietnam. The results reveal a number of significant determinants of the enhanced purchase intention with the AR application. More specifically, the greater utilitarian and hedonic values of the AR experience had a direct impact on users' purchase intentions. The hedonic value of the AR experience, specifically its ability to increase product knowledge, also contributed to the increase in purchase intentions. In alignment with previous studies, the learned product knowledge by 3D augmentation positively impacts subsequent purchase intentions. However, it should be noted that, despite the product knowledge provided by AR being unique compared to traditional online experience, it is somewhat limited.

Contrary to expectations, the AR experience did not influence product attitude and did not have a direct influence on purchase intentions. The hypothesis that AR-induced telepresence is the primary driver of increased purchase intentions could not be supported. Yet, the AR experience, based on hedonic and utilitarian values and enhanced product knowledge, can increase purchase intentions if the app is simple to use and can trigger effective telepresence.

In light of the reviewers' comments, it is important to note that the use of AR technology should be focused not just on how it will influence consumer behavior, but also the effective measures business organizations can take in order to utilize AR. The study highlights the importance of having a fun as well as a rewarding AR experience as the two have a great impact on purchase intentions. Moreover, business organizations, particularly in the interior design industry, can optimize the use of AR by ensuring the information provided is accurate and useful to the consumer, leading to an increase in the rate of conversion.

The findings also show cultural factors can be a significant determinant in the adoption of AR technology. While the study focuses on the Vietnamese market, future research should examine how cultural factors can be applied to influence consumer behavior towards AR. Different cultural values and consumption behavior can influence how AR is perceived and embraced, which can vary in different regions. Future research should, therefore, examine how cultural nuances can be applied to influence marketing strategies, ensuring the effective design of AR applications to match the needs of different consumer groups.

In short, the current research emphasizes the ability of AR applications to elevate purchase intentions in the Vietnamese interior market. By leveraging the unique strengths of AR, such as increased knowledge of products and interactive user experience, business organizations can potentially increase their rate of conversion as well as revenue generation. However, for maximizing the benefits of AR, business organizations should try to increase usability, the accuracy of the information about products, as well as the attractiveness of the application. Moreover, future research should explore the contribution of cultural differences in the adoption of AR as well as how such factors can be integrated into more effective marketing campaigns in various consumer markets.

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