

Civic Volunteerism in Crisis Response: The Formation, Roles, and Coordination of the Zendai Group in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The global outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19 has enormously affected global societies and public health systems. Within this context, civic volunteerism has emerged to respond to the pandemic. Consequently, the Zendai Group was one of those groups. The aims of the study were: 1) to investigate the formation and role of the Zendai group in combating the Spread of COVID-19, and 2) to provide policy recommendations for enhancing civic volunteer system in preventing and solving the problem of future pandemics. This research was a qualitative case study using secondary data synthesis methodology, which involved analyzing secondary documents such as publications, online media, news articles, and media interviews, along with conducting in-depth interviews to triangulate the data. The reliability of the data was ensured through relevant verification methods, including triangulation methods, thematic analysis, and content analysis.

The findings revealed that several key conditions influenced the Zendai Group in volunteering, including collaboration and networks, technology use, administrative government policies, external environmental conditions, and operational factors related to motivation. A notable finding was the lack of defined professional roles and identities within the group. These conditions significantly shape the effectiveness of volunteer efforts in addressing the spread of COVID-19. The policy recommendation suggested enhancing the volunteer system requires the government to implement clear guidelines that define volunteer roles, leverage resources and expertise from diverse sectors, develop robust crisis management platforms, and give training opportunities to citizens. By adopting these policy suggestions, the government can empower volunteers, foster community engagement, and build a more resilient and effective response to societal challenges.

Keywords: Civic Volunteers, COVID-19, Prevention, Policy suggestion, Zendai Group

1. INTRODUCTION

Starting from Wuhan, China., in December 2019, the Coronavirus, known as COVID- 19 pandemic gave way to a serious health outbreak across the globe. Thailand reported its first case of the virus in January 2020. In early 2024, the number has increased to about 4.76 million confirmed cases. So far, the virus infection has killed 34,555 people. Many people have recovered, but some remain under treatment. Sometimes, the number of patients surged in the hospital showing a fluid situation. Thailand also encountered new variants and health precautions (World Health Organization, 2024). The pandemic has turned an important page in Thai history as the state was called to assume the leading role in preventing and controlling the outbreak. At the same time, people were trying hard to find solutions to recover socially and economically. This included adopting a new way of living called the 'New Normal'. Nevertheless, combating this crisis was a heavy burden for the government, which had to tackle the rapid spread of new variants that were a challenge to control. The situation needed a solid understanding of scientific principles, a well-established public health infrastructure, and effective policies to tackle both health and economic issues, including addressing budgetary and economic challenges. It became clear that no single stakeholder could deal with the crisis alone. It required multi-faceted collaboration. This was evident during the peak of the epidemic crisis from April to June 2021. This surge, driven by the B117 variant originating from England, was 1.7 times more contagious. It resulted in a crisis where patients faced difficulties accessing the treatment system. The situation put pressure on Thailand's public health system making it overwhelming and even worse.

The formation of volunteer citizen groups, known collectively as the “Zendai group” originated on April 27, 2021. The term “Zendai,” which means “yarn” in Thai, symbolizes the idea of connection and networking. This is because yarn is made up of many strands woven together to create a strong fabric. Thus, the Zendai Group stands for the coming together of individuals, community members, and organizations to form a supportive network for the vulnerabilities in societies with little or a little social connection. For those who may feel isolated or lack connections, the Zendai Group aims to bridge that gap by fostering relationships and collaboration. It serves as an invisible social platform where people can join forces, share resources, and support one another, creating a resilient community. This group formed civic volunteers and has undertaken various initiatives, including the 'Lung Examination

Vehicle Project.' This initiative involves deploying X-ray vehicles to offer public services and facilitating prompt X-ray screenings for individuals. This proactive approach enables faster detection of infected individuals. The Zendai Group came together naturally through the influence of social media and news reports. They also organized the 'Transition Center' project, aiming to care for patients classified as yellow, deep yellow, and red groups (based on the severity of their conditions) while they await treatment, helping to sustain their lives during the wait for government healthcare services. This phenomenon of citizens and civil society volunteering to address the pandemic differs from the existing state volunteer systems, such as the Bangkok Health Volunteers (BHV) and Village Health Volunteers (VHV). It is characterized by rapid and effective self-reliant management, independence, and organic group formation with social media. Additionally, there are more than 500,000 members involved in the group. Therefore, the researchers are interested in scrutinizing the case of citizen volunteers in addressing the COVID-19 outbreak. The author set out to explore how civic volunteers formed within the Zendai Group in Thailand to help prevent and tackle the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, the other goal was to provide policy suggestions to encourage civic volunteering for future pandemic challenges, believing this approach could bring many benefits. This study builds on the previous study of the Zendai Group (Nuamcharoen, 2024), while addressing the second research objective. While the previous study focused on the problems and conditions associated with civic volunteering, the present study focuses on the **formation and roles of the civic volunteer network**, with particular attention to how volunteers organized, coordinated, mobilized resources, and collaborated with public and other sectors during the crisis. Thus, the present study extends the previous analysis from identifying the conditions of civic volunteerism to examining its formation, functions, and implications for future crisis governance.

2. VOLUNTEERISM AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Volunteering is the act of dedicating one's time selflessly for the benefit of others, characterized by a cordial contribution without financial gain. It involves offering one's time, skills, and resources to engage in various activities that serve society, the environment, or the community. Volunteering is essential for tackling social issues, building community connections, and driving positive change. It plays a crucial role in helping society advance.

(Zboja et al., 2020). Wymer and his colleagues (1996) explore widely ideas about why people volunteer, looking at both altruistic reasons; that is, wanting to help those in need, and egoistic ones, such as personal enjoyment or developing skills for career growth. They suggest that these motivations can go together. Many people volunteer out of a genuine desire to help while also hoping to gain a rewarding experience. For example, someone volunteering at a local food bank might look forward to feeling fulfilled, making new friends, and learning new skills. They might also hope to gain recognition or improve their reputation in the community, which reflects those external rewards (Piliavin & Charng, 1990). Moreover, Altruism and Volunteerism are interconnected concepts within the realm of helping behavior: each owning distinct characteristics. Altruism entails selfless concern and a willingness to act for the well-being of others, without expecting any personal benefits or compensation in return. While volunteers may not anticipate direct financial compensation, they often seek various intangible rewards, including personal satisfaction and skill development (Penner et al., 2005). Furthermore, the relationship between social capital and volunteerism is complementary and mutually reinforcing. Engaging in volunteer activities contributes to the development and enhancement of networks. Putnam (1993) also defines social capital as the social characteristics that enhance societal performance by fostering cooperation, collective action, and the establishment of more efficient mechanisms. He identifies trust, norms, and networks as key social characteristics that contribute to the effectiveness of societies.

In the same direction, contemporary Public Administration theories often highlight the role of participatory mechanisms in enhancing the legitimacy, accountability, and transparency of public institutions. Participatory approaches are seen as essential tools for promoting good governance practices and building trust between governments and citizens. Theories such as Network Governance and Collaborative Governance underscore the importance of partnerships and collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector, which often involve participatory decision-making processes. Volunteerism runs as a form of network by fostering social, professional, support, resource, and community connections among individuals and organizations involved in volunteer activities. These networks play a crucial role in promoting collaboration, sharing resources, and achieving collective goals for the benefit of society.

Community participation plays a crucial role in preventing and mitigating COVID-19 (Wong, 2024). Active community engagement and involvement are essential for the success and effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs, maximizing their impact (Voinea et al., 2022). Efforts to boost community involvement include a variety of approaches like social activities, counseling, health education, and open discussions, all aimed at sharing knowledge and fostering understanding within the community. (Li et al., 2022). Through initiatives aimed at raising public awareness and fostering participation, the objective is to cultivate a healthier community, hinder the spread of COVID-19, and lower illness and mortality rates (Drugau-Constantin & Anghel-Sienert, 2022). While the COVID-19 outbreak presents challenges to civic engagement by heightening barriers to public participation, it also presents opportunities for collaboration and the collective development of public services (Pamenang & Prihanto, 2022). Citizen participation in the prevention of coronavirus disease 2019 encompasses a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration among individuals, community organizations, and governmental entities. This collective effort is pivotal in mounting an effective response to the pandemic, fostering shared responsibility, and pooling efforts to address the challenges posed by the virus. Effective citizen participation has the potential to yield improved outcomes in controlling the spread of COVID-19 and safeguarding public health.

Upon reviewing the existing literature, common conditions or factors emerge that contribute to individuals' decision to volunteer during the COVID-19 outbreak. These factors are summarized in the following framework in Figure 1.

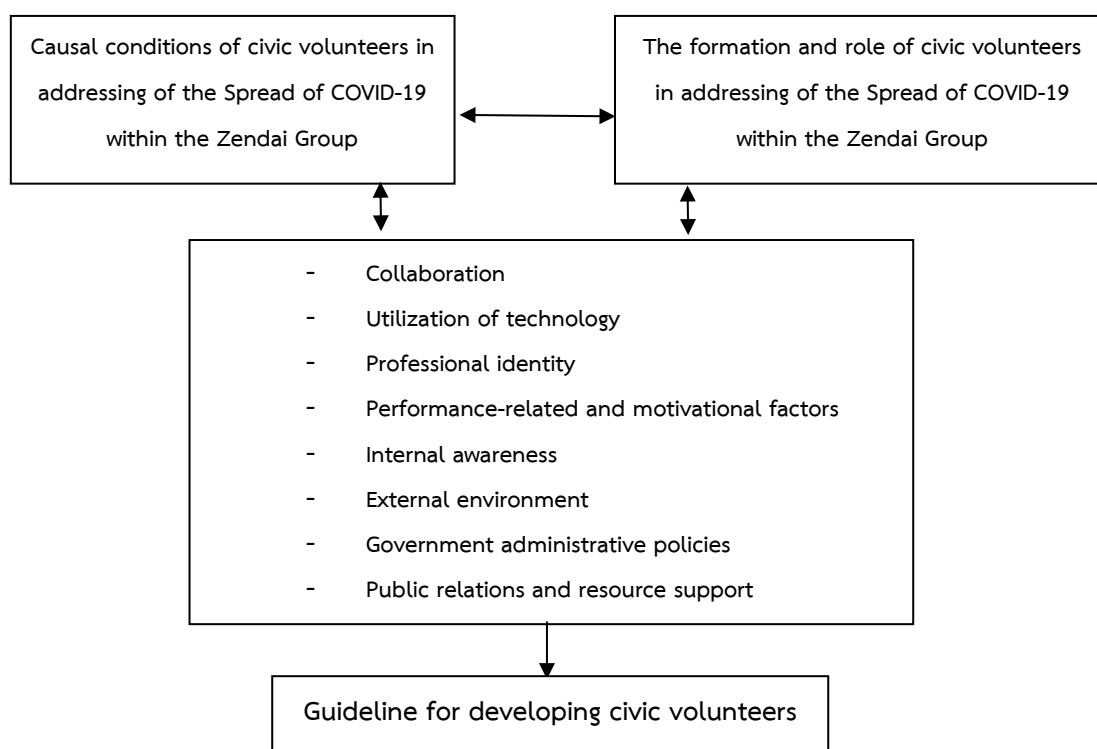


Figure 1: The research framework shows the factors that influenced individuals' conditions shaping formation and functioning.

Source: Developed by the author based on the literature review and research findings.

The above diagram shows the **collaboration** of diverse sectors in addressing COVID-19. Collaborative efforts encompass a collective process involving government agencies, the private sector, and emerging community organizations. This teamwork helps coordinate efforts to prevent the virus from spreading and tackle the challenges that arise from the pandemic. By sharing responsibilities, exchanging information, and providing dedicated support, these groups can respond quickly to urgent needs while addressing what society requires. Moreover, the **use of technology**, including applications and social media platforms, is integral to this process. Applications are to disseminate real-time information on the current situation, monitor symptoms, and track patient treatment. Meanwhile, social media platforms are used for instant communication, announcements, and the promotion of healthy behaviors. In addition, **professional identity** includes the roles and missions that workers take on to help

prevent and address COVID-19. This reflects a powerful sense of responsibility and leadership in their efforts to improve community health and safety. Furthermore, various **performance-related and motivational factors** influence COVID-19 management, encompassing commitment, cooperation, communication, volunteer engagement, purpose, knowledge, skills, and willingness to help. **Internal awareness** involves enhancing knowledge and comprehension of the epidemic among specific high-risk groups or communities. This heightened internal awareness empowers individuals within these groups to find risks, target contributing factors, and undertake proper precautions. Moreover, **the external environment** includes several factors that affect how COVID-19 spreads. These go beyond individual actions and consider wider issues like societal conditions, transportation, and economic factors that impact disease control and patient care. **National policies** serve as guidelines and regulations set up by the government to safeguard and care for the populace at the national level amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, **public relations and support** in addressing COVID-19 issues include communication and support strategies tailored to the pandemic's social and health ramifications. These efforts aim to spread the right and comprehensive information regarding COVID-19 prevention, symptom recognition, and right measures.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach, integrating secondary research methods with in-depth interviews. The researcher systematically collected relevant secondary data from various sources, including documents, publications, online media, news articles, and media interviews. The data was then organized using the MAXQDA computer program. Data triangulation was employed to confirm the accuracy of the data collected through various methods, including the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews. Once the raw data was acquired, it was transcribed into textual form for further analysis, including thematic and content analysis:

3.1 Corpus of Study

This study builds on the previous study of the Zendai Group (Nuamcharoen, 2024), while focusing specifically on the second research objective, namely, the formation and roles of civic volunteers and their implications for future pandemic response. The researcher carefully gathered a comprehensive collection of secondary data related to the Zendai Group.

This compilation is made up of reports sourced from a diverse array of outlets, encompassing documents, publications, online media platforms, news sources, and media interviews. Subsequently, employing computer programs, notably the MAXQDA program, the researcher methodically organized this wealth of data. This organized approach set the stage for the analysis, making sure the data was well-structured and easy to examine. In total, the secondary data included 24 documents, which provided a solid foundation for the research. Documents were selected based on their relevance to the formation, roles, coordination, and operations of the Zendai Group during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2 Participants and Data Collection

Key informants were selected using the purposive sampling method. The researcher deliberately chose one individual directly engaged in volunteering and managing the operations of the Zendai Group. This was followed by employing the snowballing technique to introduce the researcher to two added individuals, thereby ensuring data validation. The three informants collectively provided perspectives from individuals directly involved in the group's activities and management. During the in-depth interviews, the researcher coordinated with key informants to schedule interviews and obtain their consent in accordance with research ethics principles. The personal information of key informants remains confidential, and their names are anonymized in the research report. The three informants were considered sufficient because they had direct involvement in the formation, management, and operations of the group, and their accounts were used primarily to complement and validate the evidence obtained from the secondary data.

3.3 Data Validation and Analysis

Data credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by comparing evidence from the 24 secondary documents with information obtained from the three in-depth interviews. The data analysis process began by categorizing and organizing the data according to typology and taxonomy, which involved identifying and classifying various elements or themes within the dataset. Subsequently, thematic analysis was conducted to explore the underlying patterns, trends, and recurring themes across the data. Content analysis followed, focusing on examining the content and meaning of the data to extract relevant insights. Finally, inductive analysis was employed to derive broader conclusions and theories based on the specific findings from the data. During this analysis, the qualitative software

MAXQDA proved to be a helpful tool, making it easier to organize, code, and interpret the data. This support allowed for a thorough and detailed analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

The research findings highlight how government policies, external conditions, and factors related to work performance and motivation influence how citizens engage as volunteers in nonstate-sponsored activities. Among these factors, internal awareness and external conditions are seen as psychological and social traits that positively impact volunteering in Thailand. On the other side, issues like poor communication, lack of support, and misalignment with national policies can hinder volunteer efforts. Existing studies show that these factors can help shape individuals, communities, and society, encouraging collaboration with government initiatives to tackle prominent issues. Yet, Thailand faces challenges in both areas, which are viewed as negative influences. However, these challenges can also catalyze increased volunteer participation efforts to manage and reduce the spread of COVID-19 (Nuamcharoen, 2024). Following the earlier analysis, the author investigates how civic volunteers are formed and what roles they play within the Zendai Group, as explained below:

4.1.1 The formation and role of civic volunteers in Preventing and Solving the Problem of the Spread of COVID-19 within the Zendai Group in Thailand

The roles of civic volunteerism in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, as shown in the case study, are influenced by the circumstances and conditions that encourage people to become volunteers working with the public sector addressing public issues. This understanding is derived from the analysis of data organized thematically through *thematic analysis*. The analysis revealed several notable conditions or factors within the Zendai Group such as Collaboration and Collaborative networks, The use of technology, Government administrative policies, External environmental factors, Factors related to operations, and Motivation. Notably, there was a scarcity of professional roles and identities. The conditions for collaboration among various sectors, use of technology, government policies, and external factors play a significant role in shaping the formation and function of sector volunteering in preventing and addressing the spread of COVID-19 in the case study. Additionally, some factors

can be further categorized to encompass aspects related to performance and motivation, internal awareness, and public relations and resource support. As a result, it is recommended to reorganize and regroup these factors accordingly. The operational factors encompass public relations and resource support, while motivation includes psychological support or inner awareness of the individual as well as external motivations. Therefore, these aspects are summarized in the following in Figure 2.

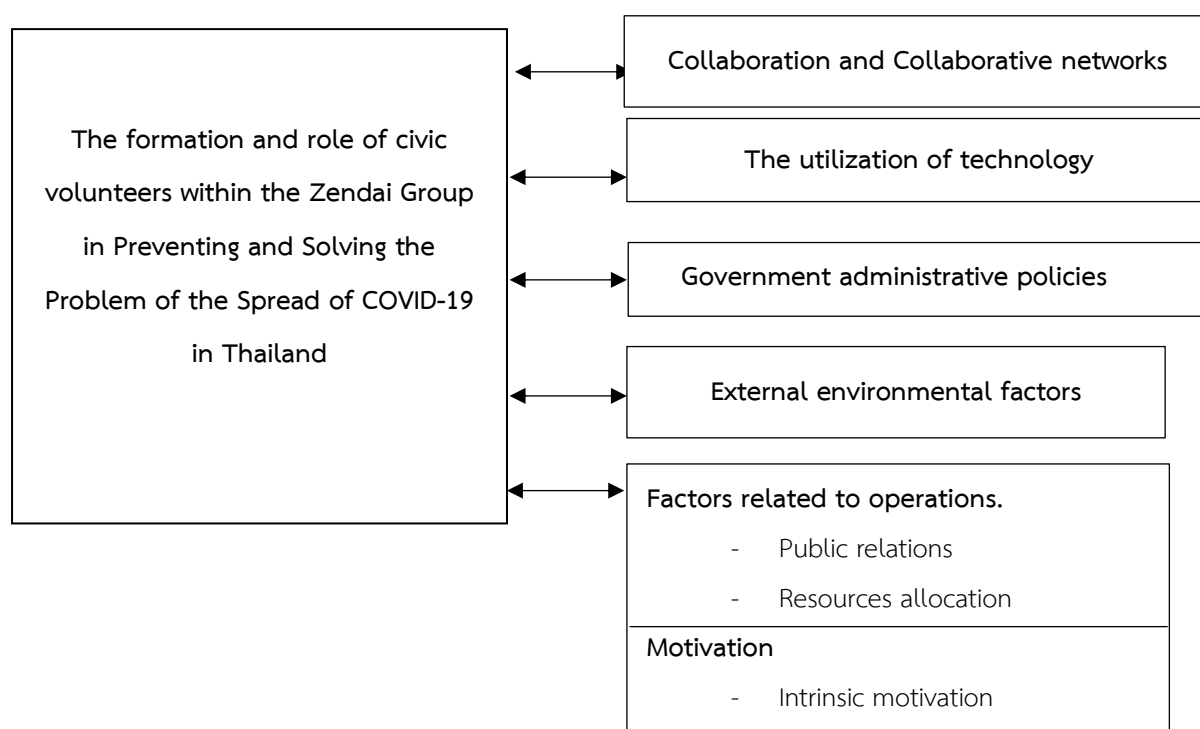


Figure 2: Factors and conditions influence the establishment and function of civic volunteerism.

Source: Developed by the author based on the literature review and research findings.

The formation and function of public volunteerism in mitigating and addressing the spread of COVID-19. The remaining datasets were used to analyze the factors influencing the establishment and function of volunteerism. The following key conditions were identified:

4.1.1.1 Collaboration and Collaborative Network

The collaboration between various sectors, particularly between the public and private sectors, is a crucial aspect of managing the COVID-19 crisis. This collaboration is centered on both medical and social responses aimed at mitigating the impact of the virus outbreak. Both

the public and private sectors have significant roles and contributions in combating COVID-19, whether through providing medical resources, supporting vulnerable groups, or developing emergency response protocols as explained in the following excerpt:

...“We’re not part of the mainstream system. We stepped in to do what the government could, but when that wasn’t enough, we filled the gaps. Like our name, Zendai—which means “yarn” in Thai—we weave connections across all sectors. Whether it's the government, private businesses, or the community, we're here to bring everyone together.” Derived from BBC News, (2021). *COVID-19: Threads of Survival - The Power of Volunteers Fighting COVID-19 When the State Can't Cope*. <https://www.bbc.com/thai/thailand-58096985>

The Zendai Group has shown a strong willingness to volunteer and support involving agencies, including the public sector, private sector, and the wider communities. The evidence was their eagerness to join forces in providing care for those infected while they wait for treatment. Such partnerships, bringing together government agencies and volunteer groups, are crucial during times of increased societal need. This collaboration shows how networks can effectively respond to urgent situations. It acts as an important connection between the public sector, which handles public welfare, and volunteer groups ready to engage in community efforts.

4.1.1.2 The use of technology

The use of technology, particularly social media platforms like Facebook, serves as an important component within the Zendai Group for member communication and engagement with individuals interested in volunteer activities. This platform plays a significant role in fostering team relationships and building trust. Social media serves as a powerful social networking tool, helping donations or other forms of support from citizens interested in contributing to a cause. The use of applications or tools designed to manage missed calls is integral to the operations of the volunteer group. For example, they may employ dashboards to meticulously record details of incoming and outgoing calls.

... “We found a missed call management tool that comes with a dashboard to track daily incoming and outgoing calls, showing how often and when each number contacts

us. In response, we set up two volunteer teams: one to make callbacks and another to handle incoming calls at the call center.” Derived from The Momentum. (2022). *“We don't want to profit from social problems forever.” The next step for Zendai group as COVID-19 becomes an endemic disease.* <https://themomentum.co/theframe-zendai/>

Through the integration of technology and trust in social media, the Zendai Group has set up an efficient system for coordinating and delivering services, facilitating prompt responses to both patient and societal needs during emergency situations. The community's clarity and cooperation, exemplified by the donation of tools and telephones from the public, have enabled the Zendai Group to provide comprehensive public health services in situations needing protection and assistance.

4.1.1.3 Government administrative policies

The Zendai Group has met challenges and uncertainties regarding government administrative policies in managing COVID-19. The government administrative policies were a negative condition but stimulated the formation of Civic volunteer in the Zendai group. It was evident that ambiguity in government policies has led to confusion within the Zendai Group, resulting in an increased willingness to volunteer and help. These challenges relate to several areas, including RT-PCR testing and the management of COVID-19 cases. The main issue is the lack of clarity in government policy. This uncertainty is especially clear in how the government views COVID-19—whether it is treated as a serious contagious disease or something more like the flu. This confusion affects the public's understanding of the government's care and protection strategies. Additionally, poor management has struggled to keep up with the changing situation, leading to problems like limited access to treatment and inadequate care for people with serious contagious illnesses. When infections are detected, people must take responsibility and follow necessary precautions. As a result, the Zendai Group felt it was their duty to step in and offer help. They emphasized that saving lives and protecting health should come before strictly following rules or policies that might lead to more COVID-19 deaths. However, there is little information available about any government policies that encourage the creation and involvement of volunteers to help manage the pandemic.

4.1.1.4 External environmental factors

The closure of hospitels² and field hospitals due to financial losses has had a serious impact on the care of COVID-19 patients, resulting in the suspension of medical services in many communities. This situation has made it even harder to treat those affected by the virus, raising worries among people about their ability to access necessary care in their neighborhoods. Field hospitals played a crucial role in providing specialized treatment for COVID-19, but as medical resources decreased and services became strained, the situation only got more complicated. Those seeking treatment may also worry about whether their local healthcare facilities could handle non-COVID-19 health issues. As medical resources have shifted to focus on COVID-19 patients, it has become harder for people to access general healthcare services, leading to worries about their personal health issues unrelated to the virus. It was essential to improve and streamline the medical service system to better navigate these challenges. Additionally, how people perceived the reduction in local treatment options affected their sense of responsibility for their own health. By adopting diverse approaches to healthcare delivery, the Zendai could help boost confidence in seeking care, ultimately strengthening both physical and mental health support in our communities.

... “Even though the Zendai Group had previously mentioned a short-term commitment and expressed concerns about financial limitations due to the worsening COVID situation, we’ve decided to keep supporting our community for as long as we can. We believe it’s important to stay engaged and help those in need until our resources run out. Derived from THAIRATH TV Originals. (2021). *Weakness Days: 'Zendai Group' Volunteers Battling COVID-19*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mU2YAyVZDSA>

² “Hospitel” is a portmanteau of “hospital” and “hotel.” It refers to a type of medical facility that combines elements of a hospital and a hotel.

4.1.1.5 Factors related to operation and performance.

Performance and motivation in volunteering went beyond just putting in time and effort; they also involved making sacrifices and distributing resources. The Zendai Group showed this dedication by not only committing their time but also using their own resources to buy the equipment needed to help patients. Additionally, there has been a strong effort to gather the essential resources needed to prevent and tackle the spread of COVID-19. Inner motivation to volunteer during the COVID-19 outbreak stemmed from a deep sense of empathy and a belief in the dignity of all people. The Zendai Group exemplified this commitment, showing determination and teamwork even with limited resources. Their efforts were fueled by emotional support from the community, which was essential to their success. The respect and encouragement they received helped them build trust and confidence, creating a solid foundation for effective volunteering. This collaboration across different sectors was crucial for understanding and addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19.

... “In times like these, it’s important for those with resources to support one another. Everyone has something valuable to offer, and each person plays a role in our society. If you find yourself in a better position than others, consider lending a hand. Helping doesn’t always mean giving money; even just offering your time can make a huge difference. In a community where people genuinely care for each other, these acts of kindness are easy to find, and everyone can contribute in their own way. Even if you have limited resources, you can still make a positive impact based on what you’re able to do.” Derived from JSL Global Media, (2021). *Zendai: COVID HERO Volunteers Delivering Support Right to Your Doorstep and Bedside (Online media interview)*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRMpUF_uRWk

Giving your time and care helps create a space where people can share their experiences and knowledge, fostering a community built on understanding and support tailored to everyone's needs. Each person has unique resources—whether it’s knowledge, skills, or simply a willingness to help—that can make a difference for others. That’s why being ready to support one another is so important for maintaining a strong and connected community.

4.1.1.5.1 Public relations

Finding success through volunteering brings excitement and confidence in the results. When the Zendai Group sees real, positive outcomes and receives clear feedback about their impact, it helps guide their future efforts and shows them the progress they're making. This boosts their motivation to keep going. Additionally, the joy and fulfillment that come from helping others build support and trust within the community. During their volunteer activities, members of the Zendai Group feel a keen sense of purpose and recognize the difference they are making, which leads to positive responses to their work.

... “After coming together and working hard, we've built confidence in other sectors to join us, including government entities like hospitals and various temples. This trust has grown from our genuine efforts. We've also received support from private companies and individuals who have donated so generously that it brings tears to my eyes.”

Excerpt from an interview with interviewee B002 on 7th November 2023

Volunteer work helped members understand the importance and impact of their work. When they saw positive results and the effects of their actions, it strengthened companionship and enthusiasm in their work, even without support from the government sector.

...“What truly matters is that when we act, we need support and to see results; otherwise, we might give up. But in our case, we've witnessed the impact of our efforts firsthand. We've seen that what we do really makes a difference and helps people in need. This is the heart of volunteering for those less fortunate.” Derived from Dailynews Online, (2021). *Volunteer Spirit for the Disconnected: The 'Threads of Connection (Zendai)' Group Becomes a 'Rope' of Hope (Online news)*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJXKwhDshLU>

With these factors, the Zendai Group feels that their work has meaning and positive outcomes for the community and patients. Building followership and a sense that their actions are important contributes to the success of volunteer activities in emergency situations.

4.1.1.5.2 Resources Allocation

The group not only devoted time and effort but also sacrificed personal property to procure essential equipment for assisting patients. Public health relied on everyone with volunteer spirit and integrity, as each Zendai in the group had an impact on both the group and the recipients of aid. This collaboration contributed to a more connected and intertwined society, where every Zendai played a crucial role in fostering a resilient and robust community in challenging times.

... “You can start making a difference in your community right now, and the central Zendai is here to help with resources. Currently, we’re working with a network of over 20 communities and 10 districts across Bangkok. Donors and supporters are stepping up to provide essential equipment to help our efforts. For example, the SCG Foundation has generously supplied 100 sets of PPEs to the Zendai Group, ensuring we can carry out our duties safely.” Derived from SCG foundation. (2021). *Helping without expecting anything in return; all we want is for the patients to survive.* <https://www.scgfoundation.org/covid19/>

The volunteer group focused on building networks and collaborating between the group and various communities to strengthen the ability to assist and uplift everyone. Support resources, hard work, and the sharing of both financial and emotional support played a huge role in helping the Zendai Group conduct their mission effectively.

... “Right now, the Zendai Group has more than 100 volunteers on the front lines, along with 5 rescue vehicles and over 40 oxygen tanks, which enable us to reach critically ill patients quickly. All this equipment has been generously provided by dedicated individuals and members of the Zendai Group, who have selflessly contributed their personal funds to ensure we have what we need to help patients in need.” Derived from THAIRATH TV Originals. (2021). *Weakness Days: 'Zendai Group' Volunteers Battling COVID-19.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mU2YAyVZDSA>

4.1.1.6 Motivation

The Zendai Group’s deep understanding of their origins and motivations has fueled their desire to volunteer during the COVID-19 outbreak. Their commitment is rooted in strong

beliefs in human values and compassion for others, along with a hope to create positive change in society. This powerful motivation drives the team members to tackle the challenges brought on by the pandemic and actively take part in volunteer efforts within the community.

... “At first, they might hesitate to use the word “doing merit” because we don’t want to be seen just as a charitable organization. Instead, we focus on actions that reflect our belief in human values, aiming to inspire a sense of worth and dignity in everyone we serve.” Derived from The Momentum. (2022). *“We don’t want to profit from social problems forever.” The next step for Zendai group as COVID-19 becomes an endemic disease.* <https://themomentum.co/theframe-zendai/>

The Zendai group showed incredible determination and teamwork, even without significant resources or influence. They believed in their ability to tackle challenges and help others, showing a strong commitment to finding solutions. Despite being a smaller group with limited means, they stayed steadfast in their resolve to keep pushing forward. Their resilience was powered by a deep faith and hope in what they could achieve together.

... “When we commit ourselves to a task, we can carry out it with excellence and genuine care for everyone involved. If those in authority take the time to pay attention, they can effectively tackle or greatly reduce the issue at hand. Volunteerism empowers those who might not have formal authority. Metaphorically, the “Zendai Group,” or “Zendai” in Thai, symbolizes a strong and resilient network, standing for strength and unity.” Derived from Dailynews Online, (2021). *Volunteer Spirit for the Disconnected: The 'Threads of Connection (Zendai)' Group Becomes a 'Rope' of Hope (Online news).* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJXKwhDshLU>

These excerpts highlight a strong belief in and commitment to working together to solve problems and inspire hope, even when facing limitations in resources and influence. Despite these challenges, there is a deep conviction that they can make a real difference and help others. It’s this genuine intrinsic motivation that drives and shapes the volunteer group.

4.1.2 Policy suggestions for developing civic volunteering in preventing and solving the problem of future pandemics.

Primarily, research findings show that there is significant potential for improvement in current government policies to better support the volunteer system, particularly within public health initiatives aimed at reducing mortality rates. To maximize effectiveness, the government should provide clear guidelines that outline the specific roles and responsibilities of different volunteer groups. This would help identify those that can work independently, allowing for more agile responses, while distinguishing them from groups that require government oversight. Moreover, the government must play a vital role in providing essential resources—financial support, training, and equipment—to empower these volunteer groups to carry out their critical missions effectively. By fostering a robust volunteer system, they can enhance community resilience and make a meaningful impact on public health outcomes.

Secondly, it's essential for the government to tap into the resources and expertise available across various sectors to strengthen the efforts of public volunteers working alongside governmental and public service organizations. This means creating a system that effectively channels support—like funding, equipment, and specialized knowledge—from private businesses, non-profit organizations, and other relevant sectors into volunteer initiatives. Additionally, the government should prioritize establishing a straightforward and accessible volunteer system that is easy for individuals to understand and engage with. This involves providing clear guidelines, simplifying the registration process, and ensuring transparent communication channels. By doing so, we can encourage broader community involvement and participation in volunteer activities that tackle important societal challenges.

Thirdly, it's crucial for the government to create strong platforms or prototype models specifically designed for crisis management. These platforms should include essential systems such as resource ordering for efficient allocation, communication tools for prompt information sharing, fundraising mechanisms to secure necessary financial support, and volunteer selection processes to recruit the right candidates. Additionally, there should be systems in place for developing volunteers' knowledge and skills, ensuring they are well-prepared and effective in crisis response efforts. By proactively building and improving these

systems, the government can enhance its ability to prepare for and respond to future crises, ultimately strengthening overall resilience and response capabilities in the face of challenges.

Finally, it's important to offer citizens opportunities for training and self-development in areas they're passionate about. By offering these chances, individuals can enhance their skills, knowledge, and expertise, making them more ready and effective in future volunteer efforts. This proactive approach not only empowers people to make meaningful contributions to their communities but also nurtures a culture of continuous learning and personal growth. Additionally, by investing in the training and development of citizens, society benefits from a more skilled and engaged volunteer workforce, better equipped to tackle emerging challenges, and support collective well-being.

4.2 Discussion

In the context of the Zendai Group, the concepts of benefiting others and volunteering are deeply intertwined but carry distinct characteristics. Benefiting others is rooted in a genuine concern for the well-being of individuals, reflecting a willingness to act selflessly for their welfare, often requiring personal sacrifice. This aligns with the ethos of the Zendai Group, where members demonstrate a heartfelt commitment to helping those in need during challenging times. Volunteering, on the other hand, involves the active offering of time, skills, or resources to support a cause or community. While volunteers within the Zendai Group do not expect direct financial compensation for their efforts, they often find intangible rewards, such as personal satisfaction and skill development. This blend of selfless action and the fulfillment derived from volunteering reinforces the group's mission to make a meaningful impact on the lives of others, embodying the spirit of helping behavior in their community engagement. This corresponded with Penner and colleagues (2005) explained that while volunteers may not expect direct financial compensation, they may anticipate intangible rewards such as personal satisfaction or skill development (Penner et al., 2005).

In the context of the Zendai Group, motivation and internal awareness play vital roles in driving individuals to volunteer. Positive feelings and a deep understanding of their purpose are key factors influencing their choice to engage in volunteer work. An intense sense of shared responsibility in addressing societal issues, along with determination and a compassionate attitude toward others, fuels their commitment. The group's members hold firm beliefs in

human worth and prioritize the well-being of others over their self-interest, embodying altruism and a sense of social responsibility. This intrinsic motivation not only strengthens their resolve but also enhances the overall impact of their efforts within the community. These factors are consistent with Chow et al. (2021) study on enhancing the effectiveness of frontline volunteer workforce through examining motivations and impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was found that volunteers in the public health sector during this pandemic were motivated by understanding the importance of serving others, a sense of duty, and the opportunity to create meaningful experiences in life. Volunteering has positive implications for personal growth both in terms of personality and professional development.

The decision to volunteer during epidemic outbreaks is shaped by a variety of motivating factors and challenges. Motivation can include the value of the work itself, a desire for understanding, opportunities for career advancement, and inspiration from government and community efforts. On the other side, potential obstacles like fear, lack of training, shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), feelings of unpreparedness, uncertainty about roles, and limited interest or support can hinder participation. (Susanti et al., 2023). Volunteers often seek personal fulfillment, social acceptance, and the chance to gain new skills: essentially looking for intangible rewards for their time and effort. They may also expect external rewards, such as positive recognition within their community. (Piliavin & Charng, 1990). When volunteers achieve meaningful goals and feel driven by significant motivations, they help build social capital, fostering trust and reciprocity among community members. (Stukas et al., 2005). Engaging in volunteer work not only promotes individual growth but also enhances social collaboration, nurturing trust, care, cooperation, and active participation in the community's social life

In countries grappling with resource shortages, technology appears as a vital tool for preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19, ultimately promoting social equity. This perspective is supported by Robredo et al. (2023), who highlight the challenges faced by marginalized groups in the Philippines—ranging from economic hardships and inadequate resource allocation to military reinforcement and poor management practices. These factors worsen inequality and lead to detrimental health outcomes for these communities. In response to these issues, the government has launched the Bayanihan E-Konsulta (BEK) platform, which aims to bridge gaps in healthcare services and improve access for those in

need. Additionally, platforms like Facebook have been used to enhance communication with the public, facilitating information sharing and engagement in addressing these challenges. By harnessing technology, both the government and community organizations can work more effectively to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and promote fair health outcomes for all. In the case study, technology - especially applications and social media - has played a vital role. In an age where technology can transform service delivery, its importance is magnified during pandemic situations. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, are crucial for communication within the Zendai Group. They help foster teamwork, build rapport, and establish trust among members. These platforms also serve as effective channels for mobilizing resources from individuals who want to support the group's activities. Additionally, using applications to formally manage Zendai volunteers is key. This approach mirrors the strategies of other volunteer organizations, both locally and globally, such as Public Health Volunteers (PHVs) and community-based COVID-19 surveillance groups. By employing tools like Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and engaging in policy synthesis, the Zendai Group can enhance its efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19, ultimately strengthening community health systems for effective virus screening. (Nawamawat, et al., 2021).

A notable finding in the study was the lack of defined professional roles and identities within the Zendai Group, which has significant implications for its operations and effectiveness. This absence of clear roles can lead to confusion and overlap in responsibilities, making it challenging for members to understand their individual contributions to the group's overall mission. Without defined roles, volunteers may feel uncertain about their specific tasks and how they fit into the larger organizational framework, which can hinder their motivation and engagement. Furthermore, the lack of professional identities may affect the group's ability to attract and keep volunteers, as potential members might seek clarity about the skills and expertise they can bring to the table. Establishing clear roles could help foster a sense of ownership and accountability among volunteers, leading to more organized and efficient operations. It would also enable the Zendai Group to use the diverse skills and backgrounds of its members more effectively, enhancing its ability to respond to community needs.

In developing the volunteer system, creating new volunteers with proper knowledge and skills for social service is a crucial process in developing a prepared volunteer group for service. These new volunteers can come from various readiness levels, such as short-

term, medium-term, and long-term volunteers, with an emphasis on responsibility, teamwork, and communication skills. The creation of new volunteers is an important process in developing a volunteer group with suitable knowledge and skills for service, aligning with Miao et al (2021). Communities can address COVID-19 by using the volunteer system to collaborate in providing public health services. Long-term cooperation between community groups and governments can result in beneficial volunteer work, enhancing public service during crises. Experienced community volunteers play a vital role in responding to disease outbreaks (Miao et al., 2021)

Lastly, the study emphasized that the government needs to maintain a leading role in managing the public health system. It's crucial for the state to lead initiatives aimed at preventing and addressing the spread of COVID-19. This responsibility includes coordinating resources and responses while encouraging collaboration among various stakeholders to create a comprehensive and effective approach to public health challenges. Allowing volunteer systems to appear without proper oversight could do more harm than good. Instead, community groups should coordinate their volunteer activities in collaboration with state agencies. This process typically starts with requests from local networks of organizations, illustrating a top-down co-production model guided by the state. This structured approach helps ensure that volunteer efforts are aligned with broader public health goals and are effective in meeting community needs. This approach allows the state to control key components, set priorities, and ensure fairness. This approach is quite different from the bottom-up co-production model. However, in China, pandemic response services have become more participatory, allowing for greater citizen involvement in areas that were once primarily managed by the government. This shift has been driven by necessity and policies that encourage volunteerism. While bottom-up co-production is an essential strategy for grassroots organizations seeking to enhance their political influence (Castán Broto & Neves Alves, 2018; Mitlin, 2008, cited in Miao et al., 2021), state-led co-production from the top down can be particularly effective during urgent public crises. This method allows for swift and decisive action, effectively engaging local communities in the response efforts (Miao et al., 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

This research employed a qualitative case study approach that used secondary data synthesis methods. This involved analyzing secondary documents like publications, online media, news articles, and media interviews, as well as conducting in-depth interviews to corroborate the findings. The reliability of the collected information was upheld through thorough verification techniques, including method triangulation, thematic analysis, and content analysis. The research tools were semi-structured interview formats, enabling the researcher to promote openness and diversity in responses. Upon gathering raw data, the information was transcribed and converted into text form for analysis. In the analysis process, the researcher employed triangulation to evaluate the accuracy and credibility of data from various sources. The analysis methods included presenting the content in the form of constructed theories, thematic analysis to capture emerging themes and trends using the MAXQDA program, and content analysis to extract key information. Through this research process, the researcher aims to achieve a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon and provide valuable and up-to-date information for relevant research and academic communities.

The findings highlighted several key factors that influenced the Zendai Group's volunteer efforts, including collaboration and networks, technology use, government policies, external environmental conditions, and motivational operational factors. A significant observation was the absence of clearly defined professional roles and identities within the group. This reflects the group's flexible and emergent nature, in which roles were largely shaped by immediate needs and available skills during the crisis. These elements critically shape the effectiveness of volunteer initiatives aimed at preventing and addressing the spread of COVID-19. To enhance the volunteer system, the study recommends that the government implement clear guidelines that delineate volunteer roles, leverage resources and expertise from various sectors, develop robust crisis management platforms, and offer training opportunities for citizens. By adopting these policy suggestions, the government can empower volunteers, promote community engagement, and strengthen resilience in responding to societal challenges.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1) This research is a case study, and therefore, the findings are specific and cannot represent other types of volunteer work or distinct groups with different contexts. In future research, other case studies with external and internal factors, as well as different contexts, can be conducted to enable comparative studies.

2) This research can be developed and expanded by changing the research method to a quantitative approach to collect data from a wider range of volunteer groups. This will allow for conclusions and the use of quantitative research results to confirm the findings of qualitative research.

7. DECLARATION

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process for readability.

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