

The Analysis of News Selection Criteria in the Digital Age: The Case Study of the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7

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Received: February 27, 2018; Revised: November 30, 2018; Accepted: December 4, 2018

ABSTRACT

In the digital era, television is still powerful, offline communication platform. The purposes of the research were to (1) study news selection in the digital age by using the case study of the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7 and to (2) discover factors influencing the channel's news selection criteria. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven policy, administrative, and professional persons of the channel. The findings revealed that, over the past few decades no changes in news selection policy could be found. In other words, it depended news selection criteria on news values. Not only what journalists are interested, likewise, the channel highlighted the importance of journalists should know. The channel's news selection nowadays was influenced by seven factors, i.e. market competition, changes in consumer behaviour, technological advances, parties concerning media control, airtime, and human resource. The study contributes to professionals working in online and offline platforms or media convergence industry as a whole in designing an appropriate communication strategy. This study can help journalists to draw the audience attention and interest.

KEYWORDS: News Selection, News Production, Digital Age, The Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7

Introduction

Although a buzz of digital transformation and disruption, television is still powerful, offline communication platforms from the past to the present. Around the globe, the current statistical report

showed an increasing number of television households in the next decade (comparing between years 2010 and 2023) (The Statistics Portal, n.d.). Of all broadcasting programme types, news programme is the most popular one (Boonsiripan, 1994) because we have to

always keep ourselves up to date. Otherwise, failures in daily and working lives can be the expected results. According to the study of Sawetsuttipan (1994), it is revealed that daily news consumption is of people's need. Especially, they love being exposed to political, social, economic, international, and sports news, respectively. Consistently, but more recently, by referring to the research of the Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (BUPAT), The Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University (ECON Chula), and the Research Centre for Social and Business Development Co., Ltd. (SAB), reading preference goes to daily news. It is followed by sports news, analysis news, entertainment news, health and food news, and horoscope, respectively (Chawsamun, 2015).

In news production, it is very important for news producers and editors to necessitate news's timeliness, immediacy, conflict, eminence and prominence, consequence and impact, human interest, unusual nature, and celebrities as news value. Recently, the study of Harcup and O'Neill (2016) pointed out additional 15 news values that can draw the audience attention. These include exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, and news organisation's agenda (p.13). Specifically in the US, its journalists fond of 'threat to the United States and world peace, anticipated reader interest, timeliness, and

U.S. involvement ... [and] loss of lives and property' (Chang & Lee, 1992).

Unfortunately, most of the news values were developed in the sights of journalists, news producers, and editors. Little research focused on those, in the views of consumers. There are the exceptions of the study of Meijer and Bijleveld (2016) revealing urgency, public, understanding, audience responsiveness, and nature, living environment and history. Also, people's need and want are voiced in the study of Eilders (1996) reflecting that they want something "continuity, controversy, consequentiality, status of location, reference to events, unexpectedness, and damage, ..." (p.11). Although audience should be listened, it is still important for studying television broadcasters whether they set news selection criteria to follow such voices.

News programmes produced by the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7, a leading television station in Thailand, are most successfully accepted among Thai people. In details, the current statistics reported that the two news programmes produced by the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7, i.e. Sanam Kao 7 See and Chao Nee Tee Mor Chit received the highest credit ratings of 3.2 and 2.8 respectively. In contrast, its competitors like Channel 3, Channel 8, Amarin TV, and Thairath TV employ their credit ratings on news programmes, ranging from 0.3 to 2.1.

As we are living in the digital world and as communicators, nowadays, it is questioned if there are changes in selecting news of a television station and also what factors influencing on such changes. Several studies and professional articles pointed out changes in news selection criteria in the digital disruption. For example, the studies of Kalogeropoulos and Nielsen (2017) and Welbers, van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok, and Schaper (2016) found that, new selection criteria depends upon what they are interestingly looking for. Merritt (2015) also made an analysis on failure of The New York Times newspaper in the age of digital transform and said that people do not want to consume something that gives too many details and provides very good information. Instead, they need something that is quick and widely known.

Purpose

The objectives of the study were to (1) study news selection in the digital age by using the case study of the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7 and to (2) discover factors influencing the channel's news selection criteria.

Contribution of the Study

The practical contributions were given to both online and offline platforms and so-called media convergence professionals in designing an appropriate communication

strategy to respond the market needs. An interesting and significant news programme can be developed and created, furthermore.

Research Method

This research employed a qualitative study. In-depth interviews were taken into consideration. Follows elaborated its sample, instruments, and data analysis.

Please be informed at this point that the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7 had granted the authors permission of data collection.

Key Informants

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with seven policy-making, administrative, and professional key informants from the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7. These included (1) Mr Krisana Anuchon, News Manager; (2) Mr Tawan Kaewwijit, News Producer; (3) Mr Anuwat Faunghongdang, News Reporter; (4) Mr Tanapat Kittibodisakul, News Reporter; (5) Mrs Suwanee Kannasut, News Producer; (6) Ms Jintana Maksin, Online News Editor; and (7) Mr Noppadol Tipyawan, Online News Editor. Please be informed that these key informants were easy to approach and we contacted them by using our personal connection. These key informants were used in this study because they are easy to access. Likewise, the researchers knew them personally. Finally, their jobs and roles were about to understand the channel's news

selection criteria and factors influencing the channel's news selection criteria.

Please be noted at this point that the key informants gave their permission to the researchers to show their names and positions in this pushblised paper.

Instruments

The key informants were mainly asked about the channel's policy and its news selection. In a greater detail, such questions covered (1) the past and current policy; (2) shifts in the policy; (3) factors impacting changes; (4) criteria for news slection; (5) the channel's agiligy in digital transformation; (6) the channel organisational structure; and (7) the channel's news selection and working process.

Data Analysis

The researchers employed the six stages of the qualitative research analysis process given by Marshall and Rossman (2006). According to them, in practice, the researchers started the analysis with transcribing, managing, and grouping the data. It was then followed by reading the data transcribed over again and again for insight and deep understanding. Main themes were, additionally, searched for so that the specific data for a specific theme was inputted. In details, the channel's news selection criteria (i.e., news values and general news writing principles and the channel's news selection policy) and the factors influencing the channel's news selection (i.e., market

competition, changes in consumer behaviour, technological advances, parties concerning media control, airtime, and human resource). Such interviewing transcripts were, moreover, interpreted and defined. The researchers went on with reviewing other options of interpretation. The research was ended with writing up the paper.

Research Findings and Discussions

The results of the study could be concluded in two main themes, i.e. the channel's news selection criteria and factors influencing the channel's news selection criteria.

1. The Channel's News Selection Criteria

The study indicated that the news slection to be broadcasted in the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7 was based upon two major viewpoints. On the one hand, news values and general news writing principles were the key indicators. In the sense, the news values used and considered were: (1) prominence; (2) proximity; (3) timeliness; (4) human interest; (5) conflict; (6) consequence; (7) suspense; (8) disaster and progress; (9) gender; and (10) oddity or unusualness.

On the other hand, the channel's news selection was framed by its policy that, surprisingly, had not changed, from the past to the present, for over the past few decades. As the key informant indicated:

“The news selection criteria of the channel has not been changed. Our main news selection criteria are accuracy, conciseness, and immediacy. Our preference especially goes for accuracy. All the news and information are considered by an editorial meeting.”

[Mr Krisana Anuchon,
News Manager]

The direction for the news selection criteria presented by the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7 was similar to the one found in Ghana when not only principled news selection, but also public’s voice were heard (Nunoo, 2016).

The two main administrative principles the channel had were inside-out of “news that people should know” and outside-in of “news that people want”. The former was something important and impactful to people even though they do not want to know. These included political policy of the government, economic policy, and general warning. The latter, nonetheless, focused on something people are interested in, so, further details of them would be discovered for the purpose of well-round information conveyed. It was easily called “advertised news”. As addressed by Ms Jintana Maksin, Online News Editor and Mr Noppadol Tipyawan, Online News Editor, it was said:

“There have been not too much changes in the channel’s news selection criteria. We consider the news that people are interested in and the one that can be beneficial to people. Further to these, we put more focus on an investigation news. Its good points are that it is new, interesting, and diverse dimensions can be reported.”

[Ms Jintana Maksin,
Online News Editor]

“Our concern is paid on news that have [huge] impacts on people. There are two types of news reported, i.e. news that people should know and news that people would like to know. Both sides should be taken into consideration because sometimes news that people would like to know cannot give any social contributions. It is the other way round when news that people should know cannot attract people’s interest.”

[Mr Noppadol Tipyawan,
Online News Editor]

The written paper of Goode (n.d.) encouraged all the sources to open up their minds with consumer’s need, not because of their financial support, but of being a source

of information for news producers, saying that “[f]or mainstream media to treat its audience as intelligent citizens and as potential contributors to an ongoing conversation does not mean treating them as equals. As a citizens we tend to look to professional journalists to keep us informed about important events and to access newsworthy places and people on our behalf. But we also look to them to interpret, analyse, sift fact from conjecture and opinion” (p.19).

The context of society and the benefits that the audience received were, likewise, taken for granted.

It was important to note that success or failure of news selection depended upon source of information. The key informants agreed that those who were familiar with an issue could certainly give profound and deep details and information and further investigation. Evidences were confirmed as follows:

“Profound and deep details and information as well as a further investigation topic can be generated by sources who have close knowledge and experience to a specific issue. And that good, well round, and detailed news can be the expected result.”

[Mr Anuwat Faungthongdang,
News Reporter]

“Apart from their professionalism and expertise, profound, well round, and interesting details are given. Source of information can be divided into 1) main source of information and 2) sub-main source of information. The latter plays the important role for giving supporting information that can make news more interesting and perfect.”

[Mr Tanapat Kittibodisakul,
News Reporter]

“Given that, for example, those who are suffering from a fire should be interviewed because not only accurate information can be provided, but also other issues can further be investigated. Especially the issues that people are interested in, the selection of information source is of higher importance.”

[Mrs Suwanee Kannasut,
News Producer]

Even if there was more popularity of online media, their content came from the one presented in the mainstream television. Having news “gatekeeper” editors could be the vital reason. This study was against with the study of Heinderyckx and Vos (2016)’s an decreasing power of gatekeeping that,

“[g]atekeeping is simply seen as a phenomenon that is fading from the modern scene. Gatekeeping theory, it is believed, is fading with it” (p.42).

The importance of gatekeeping role was, nevertheless, still existed in today’s society (e.g., Böttcher, 2014; Welbers, 2016). Clearly illustrated by Welbers (2016), it was said “... the influence of gatekeepers in the digital age is highly contingent on their interdependence with sources, audiences and each other. This is particularly visible in the intermedia agenda-setting influence of traditional news outlets, the strong influence of news agencies on online news, and the use of online audience metrics in newsrooms. Based on the investigation of these interdependencies, this dissertation concludes that traditional news organizations still fulfill a central role in the gatekeeping process regarding the selection of news, meaning that the alleged democratization of the gatekeeping process is currently still constrained” (p.188).

2. Factors Influencing the Channel’s News Selection

The channel’s news selection was influenced by seven factors as follows.

Firstly, Like today, the digital age is of high market competition because a window for the establishment for a news (digital) television was widened up. To reach the target audiences, competitive-advantage

strategies including interesting broadcast schedules that could meet consumer needs could not be neglected. Especially for the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7, as addressed above, although the main policies for news selection remained the same, i.e. accuracy, conciseness, and immediacy but what news people should know and what news they loved to know had to always and up-to-date be in mind. Not only did it in Thailand, but focuses on correctness and listening to the people’s interest were also recognised in other countries, including South Africa (Griffiths, 2010).

In comparison with other television channels, secondly, more success of the news programmes of the Bangkok Broadcasting Television Channel 7 could be reasoned by the specific target audience who were living in other provinces. Consequently, easy-to-digest, short, catchy, and local news was of high concern. The following statements exhibited such explanations:

“The majority of our audiences are people living in urban areas. It is, hence, important for us to communicate something that is easy and serves all groups of people, ranging from children to the older people. They do not have to make any interpretation.”

[Mr Anuwat Faungthongdang,
News Reporter]

“We predominantly report something that is colourful and local. Although such kinds of news we focus on, accuracy cannot be ignored.”

[Mr Tanapat Kittibodisakul,
News Reporter]

This contradicted with the study of Zubiaga (2013) that hard news was preferable for the selection of news in printed media. By considering reading general materials and printed media, in specific and by referring to the research of the Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (BUPAT), The Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University (ECON Chula), and the Research Centre for Social and Business Development Co., Ltd. (SAB), this was because Thai people were fond of something that was easy to understand and made them entertained (Chawsamun, 2015) Understanding target audience should, therefore, be the best answer. As stated above, not only the inside-out news reporting, but also the outside-in one had to always be heard. This could be reasoned by shifts in consumer behaviour.

Technological advances, thirdly, caused changes in not only the channel's news selection, but also the broadcasting channels. Currently, an online news editor was appointed to be responsible for broadcasting news and information online. This was evidenced by Tommy (2014) confirming that online and social communication platforms

could give both benefits and drawbacks on the organisation's life.

The channel's news selection was predominantly highlighted by news values and consumer's need. However, policy and structural changes made by related public organisations including the Office of National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, the Thai Journalists Association, and the Government Public Relations Department should, fifthly, be examined.

As the nature of television, the channel's news selection, sixthly, was controlled by airtime. The longer airtime a news programme had, the greater and more well round details were distributed.

Success and failure, finally, depended upon an internal factor of human resource. Skills, credibility, and performance were required.

Recommendation

The study recommended conducting further research with other public, private, and digital television channels so that a comparative study and, in the future, a journalistic standard for news selection can be foreseen. Instead of listening to the people from the channel only, additionally, future research should gear its interest to the consumer behaviour, particularly their online media use. Finally, the researchers would recommend a practical direction and suggestion for digital transformation and

adaptation in order to produce and create an attractive and significant broadcasting news programme.

Acknowledgements

This research paper is a part of an independent study submitted for the degree of Master of Communication Arts in Strategic Communications at Bangkok University. The researchers would like to express profound gratitude to all the key informants sharing their knowledge, experiences, and viewpoints. Without which, this research paper cannot be completed.

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