

How to Create Educational Children's TV Programs: A Strategic Practice for Survival in the Digital Age

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The Asian Conference on Education 2019
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Since the past to the present, the television is one type of mass communication that plays a significant role in influencing people in many areas. However, in the era of digital age, it is challenging for the educational TV channels to create the programs that gain interest from the current individual audience. This documentary research aims to give insights into the situation of current educational TV programs in Thailand and attentively proposes the strategic practices for the channels to survive in this digital age. The educational channels cannot only rely on the content of pure knowledge anymore. They must also specify the target group of the channel, use an idol and create contents and activities that serve the needs and interests of the generation Z. Significantly, the programs must be broadcasted on various media channels, especially online social network and working together with the government, community and private sectors to achieve more than anyone sector could achieve on its own.

Keywords: Educational TV Program, Children, Digital Age, Thailand

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Introduction

Since the past to the present, the television is one type of mass communication that plays a significant role in influencing people in many areas. However, in the era of digital age, it is challenging for the educational TV channels to create the programs that gain interest from the current individual audience. The television industry in Thailand has a proportion of educational programs in the broadcast schedule of each channel is less than entertainment programs, which account for more than half of all television programs. One of the crucial factors is that educational content is commonly judged as uninteresting content which cannot create commercial TV rating, meaning not able to reach the popularity from the audiences.

However, content is of crucial importance to this argument, because educational programming is correlated with learning outcomes in children, whereas exposure to entertainment content is associated with poorer cognitive development and lower academic achievement (Jensen, Martins, Weaver, & Ratcliff, 2016).

The results of Fisch and Truglio (2001) found that in the short-term, studies of three- to five-year-olds show that heavy viewers of children's educational television program have higher skills related to the alphabet, numbers, and shapes than do lighter viewers. In the long run, longitudinal studies show that exposure to educational programs in preschool is associated with significantly higher grades in English, math, and science in high school, even after statistically controlling for other known predictors of academic performance (e.g., language skills, family background). These studies also found that educational television viewing in preschool is associated with more leisure reading in high school.

Notwithstanding, in this digital age, more than 60% of the populations turn to prefer online exposure than watching traditional media likes television. It is predicted that by 2025, more than 50% of viewers under the age of 32 will stop watching television and 1 in 3 internet users are attracted by YouTube (Wittawin, 2019). Internet and online media have replaced educational television. Computer, smartphone or iPad is used as a babysitter. Thai children use an average of 6-10 Hours of internet per day, even more than a decade ago, most of the children watch online video from YouTube (The 2018 DQ Impact Study, 2018) while some play online game more than three hours per day (Komchadluek, 2019). The Pediatricians suggest more than two hours a day has been shown to have a negative impact on academic achievement. They urge Thai parents to limit their children to a maximum of two hours a day (Angwittayathon, 2017), even if that means that the smartphone or iPad may have to disappear on occasion.

It is no secret that the television media have a dramatic impact on children's ability to learn and their interest in learning. Yet the media have a mixed record when it comes to using their power to promote the executive function growth of children. In the television channel, while there have been remarkable success, including high quality signals and various programs, there have also been too many commercial that offers little positive support for learning. Children deserve the opportunity to see and hear message that will teach, encourage and inspire.

In Thailand, there have been little television channels that promote the social, emotional and intellectual growth of children. One of them is the *True Plookpanya channel*, a new type of television program to inspire and encourage youth to find ways to succeed with confidence and courage to change. The channel aims to develop knowledge and morality by creating content on education and all-round knowledge both inside and outside the classroom along with moral development ethics of children and youth, as well as interested audiences 24 hours a day. By using case studies from True Plookpanya channel, this research aims to give insights into the situation of current educational television programs in Thailand and attentively proposes the strategic practices for the channels to survive in this digital era.

Methodology

The research method for this study was documentary methodology. Essentially, method of this study involved critical interpretation by means of study, reflection, and generalization of a selected and classified body of information secured from the available literary and documents. Data were collected exclusively from the available and literary documents. Primary data were obtained from critical articles, statistics data, television channels and websites. Secondary data were taken from text materials.

The situation of current educational TV programs in Thailand

Television programs in Thailand at present do not promote children learning as they should. Television program management in Thai society often depends on the requirements and various limitations. For example, it is being determined by the product owner who is the program sponsor, by the lack of technology, by the Code of Ethics Journalism Profession and by consumers that are in accordance with current trends and tastes of the audiences. In addition, if we analyses from the Thai culture, the way of Thai people life is bound to love for fun. When it comes to television programs, one thing that clearly reflects this Thai culture is that Thai people like to watch fun things regardless of the format or content.

The television station in Thailand is a commercial system. The advertising time of the programs must be sold for profits, so it must be popular and well rated. Therefore, most of television channels in Thailand focus on entertainment. Educational programs have a little time to broadcast and not popular enough to motivate viewers. Most commercial television for children is inadequate at best and damaging at worst. Broadcasters program to children only when there is no more commercially attractive audience. Since kids generally do not have disposable incomes, television makes them alternate salespersons. They want something and tease their parents for it. Young children have great difficulty distinguishing between reality and fantasy, yet they advertise directly to them. While National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission of Thailand periodically sounds an alarm about the quantity and quality of children's television and its intense commercialization, interest and enforcement tend to up and down.

At first, National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission of Thailand set up the policy for digital educational channels to promote education and learning. The Guidelines asked for more programming for kids, youth and family, and mostly it did not carry commercials. The policy said the channels have to contain a proportion of

programs to promote education and learning for children, Youth and family at Primetime period between 4 p.m.to 10 p.m. at least 1-1.30 hours and during the hours of 7:00 am to 10:00 pm on Saturday – Sunday (Sittisaman, 2019). But as the matter of fact, the channels unable to follow the policy. Most of the programs offerings are for all demographic of audiences, just only 2 percent are for 3-6 years old kids with only 2 minutes per day (Marketeer, 2019) . To be concerned, the existing digital educational channels for young children mainly focus on the cartoons and further start to earn additional income from advertising or online shopping program, such as Channel 3 Family and MCOT Family Channel.

For the formal educational television programs, the contents in the programs have no different from the lessons in the classroom. They are only switched to television as a means of disseminating lessons such as programs of Ramkhamhaeng University, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University or Klai Kangwon School (eDLTV). Even the television for education of Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education (ETV, DLIT, OBEC) aim at the target group at the lower secondary school level, upper Secondary and higher Education. These television channels provide long distance learning via satellites and do not seek profitability and support from the government or private organizations. They show their social responsibility under the ethics involved in development for local communities and society at large, known as corporate social responsibility. Similarity, True Corporation Limited (Public Company) has established a project to grow intelligence True's Social Project that can return good things to society. By providing TV sets and set-top boxes and channels with quality educational content and learning named True Plookpanya channel.

The strategic practices for the channels to survive in this digital age

Although children's entertainment programs may have educational value (in a very broad sense of the term), we expect to see a reasonable amount of programming which is particularly designed with an educational goad in mind. There are many imaginative and exciting ways in which the medium can be used to further a child's understanding of a wide range of areas: history, science, literature, the environment, drama, music, fine art, human relations, other cultures and languages and basic skills such is reading and mathematics, which are crucial to a child's development. This research study proposes the list of strategic practices for the children's television channels. The practical practices must be adapted to keep up with the times. By using these proposed strategies that vary according to the environment, context, and limitations of each channel of education programs. It can be summarized as 7strategics as follows:

1. Creating a niche target group (Niche Market)

The educational channels are not possible to gain interest from all the audience groups. They thus should aim to a specific target group such as students and academics. This will help the channels gain insights of the needs of the audience in depth. Additionally, the channels must be ready to protect themselves from market-leading channels. They must create their own unique image for the audience to perceive the prestige or differences. Even if the market-leading channels try to get into this field of market, they cannot win us in terms of knowledge and expertise

because we have highly specialized in this field with direct responsive to the target audience.

2. Adjusting the program format to be an educational program in the form of entertainme

Since the needs of consumers are entertainment media, yet the entertainment programs have only focus on entertaining, not really care about including good life lessons for children. Therefore, the educational television program must bring both entertainment and knowledge together into their programs in the form of entertainment education TV Programs (Learning with Pleasure). The program will provide knowledge regarding the development of quality life with fun at the similar levels to entertainment programs produced for commercial purposes.

3. Hosting by an idol

The educational television channels will be able to gain interest and attention from the audience when the host of the channel is an idol. This idol must be a person who the audience most favorites. When this person presents as a content presentation of the program, the number of audiences increase. Still, the qualification of the idol must be cautious. The person who is able to be a host of the educational program has to have an adequacy that is suitable for modeling such as knowledge, reliability, good personality and language usage, not just a person with high popularity only.

4. Creating a new content or activity

Creating new contents or activities in the program will stimulate viewers to get involve with the channels. The activity could be a contest or competition or activities that help various societies. This new activities can be used to request support from new sponsors that are in line with the organized activities and also helped to bring more sponsors.

5. Having a professional production process

It can be noticed that the distance education channel of the government often has poor production, such as unclear pictures, inconsistent of images and sound, or unappealing design of the program. These can cause viewers to feel uncomfortable to watch. Therefore, it must be a new development in the production process. The educational program must have a quality production system comparable to commercial television channels, appealing more audiences to the channels.

6. Expanding the distributions of the channels

Since the audiences turn to access online media more than traditional media, the television channels therefore must focus on the responding of the consumers' lifestyle. The educational television channels must provide quick and easy access to their television programs wherever the audiences are, wherever the audiences are. The programs must be easy for the audiences to track and access the contents in many ways with a variety of technological devices. For instance, apart from the television channel, the educational media must be distributed through the website, airing live

from the online website together with the television program. In addition, various programs must be re-viewing on YouTube channel. Setting up Facebook fanpage is also very important. Facebook offers various news that relating to the channel, recommending various programs of the channel along with linking for enter to the website to view more programs.

7. Establishing a network and cooperate with government agencies

The educational television channels seem to be effortless than commercial ones if they want to establish the network and cooperation with the organizations related to nation education. The mutual supports from the government agencies provide various benefits for the channels. For example, it may help bringing famous and skillful teachers from prestige institutes to the programs or promoting various learning such as a learning museum, park or archives. By collaborating with the government agencies, good images for the educational television media along with great support from the government are highly perceived.

Conclusion

In a world with such extraordinary technological opportunities as ours, the media can and must do more to serve our children. The author encourages educational media professionals to link knowledge with entertainment more effectively, and to help parents and schools at every turn to challenge our young people to begin a lifetime of learning.

Since children learn from all media, especially now online. The question is what do they learn? No one can deny television's great potential. Therefore, children still deserve education and experience from television media channel that result in more than incidental learning. Media sparks curiosity and opens up distant worlds to children. Through its magic, youngsters can travel to the outer space, the bottom of the sea or inside a cell. They can visit old castles and climb highest mountains. They are exposed to history, science, technology, art-all with a finger. Let's use the exciting, almost unlimited potential of the electronic teacher to uplift rather than degrade. The promise is to enrich the lives of all children, to give them an exciting new window to the world. By so doing, we will improve the quality of education and, ultimately, help secure the future of the nation.

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