

Cultural Geography of News in Digital TV Age

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Abstract

The research “Thai News Cultural Landscape in Digital TV Era.” is the study of Thai news and current affairs landscape in Thai News television programmes relating to Thai reporters, way of life and digital media by using content analysis methodology since April 24, 2014 – April 24, 2015 that Thailand’s broadcast has been transformed from analogue to digital broadcasting for 1 year.

According to the findings, It appeared the new news making culture of Thai news television programmes in Digital TV Era. The reporters monitored and selected the popular clips, the most share and like, in social media to broadcast, etc. Facebook, YouTube and various websites. Reang Raung Chow Nee, the most popular news television programme in Thailand, has the part “Share of the Day” boardcasting the most popular clip of the day from social media. And found that the issues boardcasted were the violence in individual conflicts in society and were stimulating the emotion of audiences like a watching docudrama.

Keywords: Digital Television, Cultural Landscape, Thai News, Violence

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Introduction

Thailand's TV industry is undergoing a transition, as the introduction of digital TV system marks a milestone and requires media workers to embrace technological changes. The digital transmission of TV signal has the advantages of clear pictures and sound, as well as bigger data-transmission volume when compared with the analogue version. The digital TV system, moreover, is compatible with various other technologies. As a result, its use promises greater variety and greater cost effectiveness. The digital TV system has also combined information technology with telecommunications technology. With the synergy of technologies within the digital TV industry, TV news programs have to overhaul its management and strategy so as to create new services that respond well to viewers' needs. At the same time, the synergy has allowed media workers to create a greater variety of news content and forms in a more up-to-date manner.

Since a total of 48 TV stations started broadcasting their programs in digital system in Thailand on 24 April 2014, many new news programs have emerged in response to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission's (NBTC) regulation on programming ratio. The higher number of news programs means a fiercer competition for TV viewers. Most TV stations have paid much attention to their morning news programs, or the ones broadcast between 6am and 9am. TV stations have now tried to present current affairs in Thailand and the world in a new and different way, relying on new technologies, just as Voice TV Company Limited's president Mr. Songsuk Premsuk said,

“Today, it's not just about TV. It's about mixed media including in particular modern media like Internet and social media. We focus on content that new-generation people and modern media pay most attention to. Voice TV has placed an emphasis on news and inspiring stories” (Thai Broadcast Journalists Association, 2014, P.34)

Nearly one year after the launch of the digital TV services, Thailand's TV industry has undergone changes in various aspects. Some new stations have successfully established themselves in the market, thus directly affecting ratings of big free TV stations. These new successful stations have managed to attract many viewers away from Channel 3 and Channel 7. Channel 5 and Channel 9 have also faced direct impacts. They used to be the next most popular stations behind Channel 3 and Channel 7, but not anymore. Today, the younger station like “Workpoint” has managed to claim the No 3 spot. (Thansetthakij, 2015).

In light of such developments, the researcher has decided to conduct a research on the Cultural Geography of News in Digital TV Age. The purpose is to study tangible forms and content of news coverage in the Digital TV Age, which encourages the synergy of information technology and telecommunications technology. The research is done within the framework of Cultural Study Approaches, Media Convergence concept, and Media and social responsibility concept.

Methodology

TV news programs are analyzed with a focus on the coverage of current affairs in Thailand and the world. The research covers TV news programs that prove relevant to people, the Thai society and the international community. Their broadcasts between 24 April 2014, the first day of Thailand's digital TV service, and 30 April 2015 or over the period of about one year were examined. The researcher has chosen to study four TV news programs that go on air between 6am and 9am based on their popularity. These four programs, ranked in order of popularity ratings, are: 1) "Rueng Lao Chao Nee", which is broadcast on Channel 3 from Monday to Friday between 6am and 9.45am; 2) "Chao Khao Chad Social", which is broadcast on Thairath TV station from Monday to Friday between 6am and 9am; 3) "Kehtok Jak Nation" (Morning), which is broadcast on National Channel from Monday to Friday between 8am and 10am; and 4) "Voice News" which is broadcast on Voice TV from Monday to Friday between 6am and 7.30am. The research focuses on the content, the form and the source used by these TV news programs. However, this article presents only findings about the most popular morning TV news program, Rueng Lao Chao Nee.

Timetable: Rueng Lao Chao Nee

Rueng Lao Chao Nee is a news talk program. It goes on air on Channel 3. Produced jointly by BEC-Tero Entertainment Public Company Limited and Bangkok Drama, this news program was first broadcast as a 30-minute program on 2 June 2003. But starting from 1 January 2014, Rueng Lao Chao Nee's airtime has been between 6am to 9.30am from Monday to Friday. During the program, there is no seriously fixed section or fixed time for any particular news category. Airtime section for the whole content during the program can be rearranged all the time. The program usually presents crime news, provincial news, political news, social news, economic news, world news, sports news and entertainment news. Sometimes, its live TV program is broadcast outside its studio. Such broadcasts are made under the "Rueng Lao Chao Nee Sanjorn" program or "Mobile Rueng Lao Chao Nee", of which productions take place at various locations in Thailand and overseas. For example, there was the "Mobile Rueng Lao Chao Nee Live from Incheon, South Korea".

Mr. Sorrayuth Suthassanachinda, Thailand's most famous news teller, and Miss Pichayatan Chanphut are major co-hosts of the program. They are in the program from the beginning till the end every day. Other co-hosts appear only in some sections. For example, Mr. Ekarath Kengtuktang, a well-known football-match commentator in Thailand, co-hosts the program only during its sports section. During world-news section, there are three other co-hosts who take turns appearing on the program. During Entertainment Family section, seven actors and actresses from Channel 3 take turns co-hosting the program.

Program's Content Management

Rueng Lao Chao Nee is divided into 11 sections, with advertising breaks between them. (These sections do not get equal airtime. Their airtime is not fixed either. Each section can be short or long, depending on news flow on each day). These 11 sections are:

Section 1: Current Affairs: It starts from 6am (15 – 30 minutes)

On content, this section is devoted to current affairs and interesting happenings of the day. For example, Rueng Lao Chao Nee covered Nepal's big earthquakes, SEA Games' results, and updates about and efforts to control the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). On a dry news day, the program also highlights big political news stories such as constitutional amendments. Most news stories in the program are social news, crime news and disaster news. For example, the program featured a story of a truck hitting and instantly killing a motorcyclist, a story about the collapsing ceiling of a department store, and a story about a victim getting pierced by the pointed part of a fence.

On source, Rueng Lao Chao Nee relies on video recordings and audio recordings that are related to news prepared by Channel 3 news teams, provinces-based reporters, and foreign news agencies. In addition, Rueng Lao Chao Nee also uses video clips from Youtube, Facebook and Twitter, plus photos from Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Line. There are also video clips sent in by viewers.

Section 2: Rueng Lao Chao Nee for Kids

On content, this section presents news stories about children and various kinds of animals. These stories are fun and cute. For example, one story shows a kid crying out loud when stepping on doggy dung. Another story reveals a cat is watching a boxing match. There is also a story about a young kid with apparent taste for Rock music. Most these stories come from foreign countries.

The sources are video clips from Youtube and foreign news agencies.

Sections 3 – 9 (Their content is interchangeable. However, they are divided by advertising breaks and sponsor announcement just like other sections).

On content, Sections 3 to 9 contain SHARE OF THE DAY. This part presents video clips from social media that have the highest number of likes or shares in the day, with the co-hosts commenting on them and sharing their feelings. Most of these clips are about bad happenings like the use of violence over conflicts, teenagers' brawling, car crashes, and car overturning. For example, the "All Thrown Out Crash" clip shows how students in a school pickup were all thrown out when their vehicle collided with another automobile. Some of the students were killed and some others sustained serious injuries. The "Rowdy Monk" clip, meanwhile, shows a monk high on drug and throwing tantrums. The "Vocational Students Brawling" features the deadly fight among vocational students. Sections of social news, crime news and provincial news usually cover thefts and fatal brawls. On colorful news, most stories are something fun from social media. These sections also offer some positive news like Thai students winning top awards, and honest people returning money they have found. Section of intensive political news is often related to the prime minister, Cabinet members, politicians, policies, and charter drafting. On some days, Rueng Lao Chao Nee includes a section of insight economic news. This section features the country's economic policies and economic structures, as well as complaints from the program's viewers. On some days, Rueng Lao Chao Nee program presents highlight news in MV form. Such MV is a compilation of news photos and clips with a relevant song.

In addition, Rueng Lao Chao Nee spends about three to five minutes of the Sections 3 to 9 on a few pieces of PR news. The presentation form is exactly like the program's presentation of news. Co-hosts say what project is going on at which location. Video recordings about the project then appear on screen along with CG text giving

information on the project. The presentation of some PR news pieces includes the audio interview of the organizer plus the CG text. For example, the text says, “Buriram United Super GT Race 2015, 19-21 June 2015, International Circuit Racecourse. Tickets are available at All Ticket, 7-11 outlets. For more information, call 02 711 7788”.

On source, these sections rely on video recordings – some without voice or sound – from various sources. Among these sources are Channel 3 news team, provinces-based stringers, foreign news agencies (Vdo’s reporter bullet Thai News bullet English News), and social media namely Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Line. There have been contributions from the program’s viewers too. Rueng Lao Chao Nee has hardly used front-page news stories from newspapers as its sources now. This is far different from what used to be during the first three years of the program. In that period, the program relied on many Thai newspapers.

Section 10: Sports and World News, Additional Co-Hosts (9am)

On content, the program’s sports news cover matches that take place both inside and outside Thailand. However, most parts of the coverage are about world sports news and updates about foreign football players. The world news, meanwhile, are related to both politics and economy. For example, the program reports a US billionaire’s intention to run in the upcoming presidential race and North Korea’s drought problem. There are some light-news reports in this section too. For example, a clip shows Britons stampeding for discounts and another reveals an American found a mouse in his fried-chicken serving.

On source, the program relies on foreign news agencies and Youtube.

Section 11: Entertainment Family: Additional Co-hosts being actors/actresses associated with Channel 3 (9.10am -9.30am)

On content, the Entertainment Family section can be divided into two parts. The first part presents updates about Channel 3 stars, and the production of new TV series so as to inform the audience of which stars will play which roles. The second part is a live interview of singers or actors/actresses whose work is being on air or whose performance is about to take place. On some days, Rueng Lao Chao Nee features a new band. On some other days, it presents a band that is going to stage a concert. Sometimes, the program recommends new TV series or new TV programs of Channel 3. Guests will perform live performance such as singing or re-staging a TV scene for this section.

On source, the program uses video clips from Channel 3’s TV-series production team, live music performance, and live interview of guest actors/actresses.

Cultural Geography of News: Rueng Lao Chao Nee

Analyzing from the content and source in the program’s schedule, it was found that “Rueng Lao Chao Nee” focuses on social issues and crimes, as well as conflict and violence. This is the case in the sections of news, current affairs, regional news, Share of the Day section, as well as world news and entertainment news. Most of the content involved conflict, particularly between individuals. Such news had no impacts on society as a whole or involved social structure. Sources of the news were various. However, in this age of online social media, which has influence on the social mainstream, it was found that television chose to present what was going on in the online society, in order to respond to the interest of people in the contemporary

society. The news selection was based on the number of “likes” and “shares” in the social media.

A point worth mentioning involves the responsibility of the producers of “Rueng Lao Chao Nee” towards its viewers, regarding the program’s content. Public relations releases about different projects were treated as news in the program. And its “Special Story” sections introduced different concerts, dramas and programs of Channel 3, the broadcaster of “Rueng Lao Chao Nee”. Such information should have been treated as PR advertising pieces, rather than news reports of events.

Regarding the creation of program schedule and the flow of news in the program, William (1974) explained that it was planned flow. The experience and recognition of meaning, that had been completely separated, were put together into the program schedule that combined the different things into one. The flow of television and the viewer experience were interchanged, between “reality” and “deception”. It is therefore unusual to conclude that under the flow culture, the moods of the contemporary people are influenced by the television media.

This researcher notes that producers of TV news programs must be aware that although such programs are a cultural product, a man-made choice and a social activity with numerous factors, the television media have the duty of communicating truths through the language system, thought structure and ritual of consuming messages from TV on the daily basis. In fact, the communication technology is not just about television. It also refers to the online social media. At present, human knowledge does not come from direct experience alone. It also comes from learning through mass-mediated experiences, the recognition of social value, significance, power and awareness that Raymond Williams describes as “sources of cultural form” (Williams, 1974).

The “Rueng Lao Chao Nee” program’s Share of the Day section features video clips popular among social media users, judging from the number of “likes” and “shares” on that particular day. The detail and story behind the “most popular video of the day” is retold in the news program. The information is also spread through the program’s social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, Line, YouTube, as well as its own website. This inspired many people to shoot video clips and posted them on YouTube, and the TV program then talked about them, completing a circle.

This process of “recording” the culture and value is called “tradition of selection”. A fact worth mentioning is that about 80 per cent of the video clips featured in the Share of the Day section involved personal disputes, and not a story on social structure. Violence was used in dealing with the conflict.

There was a circle of recording (shooting videos) for distribution on YouTube, then sharing on Facebook, and broadcast on TV news programs. After that, the TV programs disseminate those video clips through their live broadcast and their social media channels.

This researcher notes that the viewers are consuming violence through the “Rueng Lao Chao Nee” program. Williams (1974) viewed that television is a mass medium that arranges the “rhythms” of thought and cultural pattern of the contemporary

people at the same time. Moreover, the fact that “Rueng Lao Chao Nee” allows viewers to vote for the “best” news of the day is an example of the selection and rhythm arrangement. This in effect is arrangement of the “rhythms” of thought and cultural pattern of the contemporary people in the form of shoot, post and share. Those challenges lead to convergence of media in the age of digital television.

From Television to Multiple Platforms

In the age of digital TV, all the television stations display their potential of blending social media technology with the contemporary culture. People today acquire news and information through online social media through digital communication technologies. Viewing of TV programs through the Internet in this age of online social media provides a new experience for consumers of the new media. There are three factors involved: 1. Important qualities of new media affect the experience of media consumption; 2. Diffusion of innovations effects consumption of the new media; 3. Digital technology helps encourage media convergence that results in new forms of media business.

Jenkins (2006), an American media scholar, explained about the advent of an age of technology convergence. He said it was convergence of media content from different platforms, as well as the behaviour of consumers. There is cooperation between different media industries. For example, they provide different telecommunication services, such as access to broadband Internet, television, telephone and mobile-phone equipment.

Straubhaar and LaRose (2000) said that media convergence refers to a rapid change towards Information Society due to the progress of computer networks and telecommunications. This leads to harmonious blending or convergence of different media, namely radio, television, motion picture, telephone and computer. It is difficult to separate them. Media convergence leads to many new services that rely on technology, such as long-distant telephony through Internet Protocol network (IP phone), Internet-based television (IPTV), online radio, video clips on such websites as YouTube, and mobile TV that can be viewed on phone screen. In addition to the services, there is also convergence of digital devices that are used to access different services.

“Rueng Lao Chao Nee” adopted the innovation of media convergence by broadcasting the program through multiple platforms. The program is broadcast live on TV Channel 3 on Mondays to Fridays between 6 am and 9.30 am. And there are also video recordings of the program available for later viewing. Here are the program’s multiple media platforms: 1. Audio broadcast through Ezy FM 105.5 MHz; 2. The program’s website <http://morning-news.bectero.com/v3/main.php>; 3. Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/MorningNewsTV3>; 4. YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/MorningNewsTV3>; 5. Twitter <https://twitter.com/morningnewstv3>; 6. Android app <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.bectero...hl=th>; and 7. Apple iOS app <https://itunes.apple.com/th/app/reuxng-lea-chea-ni/id530352082?mt>. The program also has a official Line account to inform the subscribers about news issues in the morning, five top news in the afternoon, and five top news of the week every Sunday. The items on the lists all have links to the full reports.

Conclusions and Implications

The broadcast of “Rueng Lao Chao Nee” in the form of media convergence may be analysed with George Gerbner’s theory about the qualities of television culture. It was found that in this age of digital TV, new communication technology has been adopted to help with the production and dissemination of television programs through multiple platforms. These include the social media such as YouTube and Facebook, as well as online television (for later viewing). The broadcast is no longer done through TV station alone. As a result, the qualities of television culture under George Gerbner’s theory, involving culture of time and path of communication as stream and interval, no longer exist. It is because the audience now can view the program content at any time or through any channel suitable for them. The viewers can select the time of viewing. With this, the viewers no longer have to be aware about the time. Also, they can choose to view their program with no advertisements. Later viewing gets rid of the limitation of television about intermittent intervals for advertisements.

The finding about the content of “Rueng Lao Chao Nee”, which consists mostly of social and criminal news as well as conflict and violence, Raymond Williams’ Cultural Theory may be applied to explain. Despite the technological changes as well as increase and shift in channels and sources of news and information, television still has two sides of the coin, being a form of technology and a source of cultural form that creates social value, meaning, power and awareness (Somsuk Hinwimarn, 2015).

There is a rapid development of digital technology and a substantial expansion of social media users. At present, there are an estimated 3 billion Internet users, an increase of 6.6 per cent from last year (<http://www.it24hrs.com/2014/itu-3-billion-internet-users/> as of November 26, 2014; the search conducted on June 25, 2015). In Thailand, there are 23.8 million Internet users, or 35 per cent of the population of 67.4 million. Thais have 24 million Facebook accounts, 14 million of them in Bangkok alone (<http://service.nso.go.th/nso/nsopublish/service/survey/ICT-HouseExc57.pdf>; the search conducted on June 25, 2015).

The figures are an important factor for television in this age of digital TV to adapt substantially. They have lost advertising revenue to social media. And the mainstream media’s influence in setting the news agendas has been challenged by the online social media. Several news issues that are widely interested and talked about all originate from social media, namely Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and the Pantip website. Television on many occasions had to follow up news from the social media on their media. This is compatible with this research study’s finding. It was found that news sources of all the morning news programs partly are the social media. They are hot issues on the social media on that particular day, measured by the number of “likes” and “shares”. “Rueng Lao Chao Nee”, the most popular morning news-talk program with the highest number of viewers, has shifted from talking about newspaper front-page news to the most-shared clip of the day, in its Share of the Day section. It may be concluded that the movement of news culture in this age of digital TV is determined by the expansion of online social media users. The social media have the dominant power in setting the topics of debate in Thai society, as well as the meaning and value of things. They have become a production source of “cultural form” that is relayed to the television media in this age of digital TV.

However, this researcher questions the news worthiness of the video clips from the social media selected for the digital TV's news programs based on the number of "likes" and "shares". The selection certainly did not take into account the 10 values of news, particularly the value on impact, as well as the five qualities of news -- balance, neutrality, completeness, fairness and presentness. Also, many of the video clips selected contained violence or featured personal conflicts in which violence was used.

In the age of digital TV, media outlets are capable of reporting news in a more quality way. They are helped by communication technology in improving the quality of news and increasing the potential of having expertise on content, in terms of depth and broadness. However, as it has turned out, what is happening is the opposite. The quality of digital TV has been questioned. The mainstream media organisations are no longer the main player in setting news agenda; the online social media have taken over that role. The mainstream media are just a follower now. They use communication technology in relaying information from the social media into the digital TV. In the end, television news programs simply act as a messenger.

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