

*The Content Analysis of Sex, Violence, and the Use of Language in Television
Programs Rated as G (General): For All Ages*

Arada Karuchit

Thammasat University, Thailand

0088

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Introduction

With an increasing number of TV channels and programs, it is hard for parents to monitor what their children are watching. Many parents are concerned about their young children watching programs with content that is more suitable for older children or adults. In recent decades, the television industry in Thailand has been facing controversies on media violence. There have been movements from many groups of parents, educators, media professionals and scholars to urge the government to legislate rules to control the suitability of television program for viewers. In 2006, the Television Rating System or "the TV Parental Guidelines," was officially used in Thailand. It was designed to give parents more information about the content and age-appropriateness of TV programs.

The Television Rating System was used as an effective tool to control the quality of the Television program in many countries for decades, such as the United States of America, United Kingdom and Canada. Those countries have their own television rating system and each country's rating process may differ due to local factors. Programs are rated by either the organization that manages the system, the broadcasters or by the content producers themselves. In Thailand, television programs are rated by the National broadcasters: Channel 3, Channel 5(Royal Thai Army Radio and Television), Channel 7, Modern 9 TV, and Channel 11(National Broadcasting Services of Thailand). The Guidelines appear on the screen at the beginning of TV shows, and in the lower left corner of the TV screen during the show, and appear again after commercials.

The television rating symbols in Thailand are as the as following:



This program is designed to be appropriate for children aged 3-5 years old. This program is not expected to frighten young children.



This program is designed to be appropriate for children aged 6-12 years old.



General viewing for all ages. It can be shown anytime on all channels. It contains little or no violence, no strong language and little or no sexual dialogue or situations. Air time: All day



PG-13+ Parental guidance suggested for children under 13 years of age. The content may call for parental guidance. The program contains one or more of the following: moderate violence, some sexual situations and some suggestive dialogue. Air time 9.00am-4.00 pm



PG-18 + Parental guidance suggested for children under 18 years of age. The content may call for parental guidance. The program contains one or more of the following: intense violence ,some sexual situations and some intensely suggestive dialogue.



This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults.

Although the television rating system has been used in Thailand for 6 years, the effectiveness is still being questioned. The research focuses only on the G :General viewing for all ages. The Program contains little or no violence, no strong language and little or no sexual dialogue or situations. As the G Program can be shown “anytime” on all channels, not like PG 13 which can aired only during 9.00 am-4.00 pm, the G-Rated programs can open the window for inappropriate content which is not rated properly to be put in prime –time. From the observation, there are many G-rated programs that are full of moderate to intense violence and strong suggestive dialogues. The research aims to find the information to develop the effective system and protect the children from the inappropriate content.

Research Questions

- RQ1.How much content of sex, violence, and the use of inappropriate language contained in G (General): for all ages television programs?
- RQ2. What are the differences of the content of sex, violence, and the use of inappropriate language in G (General): for all ages television programs among different channels, program genres, and air time?

Research Objectives

1. To study the content analysis of sex, violence, and the use of inappropriate language in television programs rated as G (General): for all ages.
2. To study the differentiation of the contents of sex, violence, and the use of language rated as G (General): for all ages in television programs among different channels, program genres, and air time.

Conceptual Framework

Television programs aired on six free-to-air national television stations in Thailand ; Channel 3 , Channel 5(Royal Thai Army Radio and Television), Channel 7, Modern 9 TV, Channel 11(National Broadcasting Services of Thailand) and Thai PBS (Thai Public Broadcasting Service) .	S- Sex L-Language V-Violence
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Scope of the Study

The sample comprises of 52 G-rated television programs aired on six free-to-air national television stations in Thailand ; Channel 3 , Channel 5 (Royal Thai Army Radio and Television), Channel 7, Modern 9 TV, Channel 11(National Broadcasting Services of Thailand) and Thai PBS (Thai Public Broadcasting Service) in 6 days on March 2010.

Definition of Terms

1. "G-rated program" is General viewing for all ages with little or no violence, no strong language and little or no sexual dialogue or situations.
2. S-Sex content is defined as the following expressions:
 - 2.1 Inappropriate sexual expression
 - 2.2 Inappropriate clothing the expresses sexuality
 - 2.3 Inappropriate sexuality
 - 2.4 Inappropriate sexual relationship
 - 2.5 Sexual discrimination
 - 2.6 Sexual harassment
3. L-Language is defined as the following expressions:
 - 3.1 Incorrect use of Thai language
 - 3.2 Use of aggressive language
 - 3.3 Use of derogatory language
 - 3.4 Use of vulgar language
4. V-Violence is defined as the following expressions:
 - 4.1 Violence to self
 - 4.2 Violence to others
 - 4.3 Violence to objects
 - 4.4 Psychological violence

Expected benefits

1. The research is expected to find patterns and quantity of the content analysis of sex, violence, and the use of inappropriate language in television programs rated as G (General): for all ages.
2. This research is expected to find the difference in quantity of the contents of sex, violence, and the use of inappropriate language rated as G (General): for all ages show in television programs different channels, program genres, and air time.

Literature review

Using content analysis, Lucksamee Konglarp (2009) found that the 54.95 percent of programs contains the violence contents. Those programs are cartoons and drama series. The violence is both physical and psychological.

Aut Kupongsak (2010) studied Free-to-Air Television programs in Thailand and found that nighttime drama series in Thailand, called "After- News Drama Series," are the main source of income for stations. The programs in prime time are produced for entertainment purpose only. These series are found to be full of violence, fiction, fantasy, melodrama, and sex issues. Sponsorship in television industry significantly affect the content of the programs.

The Television Rating System was used as an effective tool to control the quality of the Television program in many countries for decades, such as the United States of America, United Kingdom and Canada. Those countries have their own television rating system and each country's rating process may differ due to local priorities. Programs are rated by either the organization that manages the system, the broadcaster or by the content producers themselves. About the Television Rating System, in the United States of America, the guidelines indicate the contents as followings (<http://www.tvguidelines.org/ratings.htm>):



This program is designed to be appropriate for all children. Whether animated or live-action, the themes and elements in this program are specifically designed for a very young audience, including children from ages 2 - 6. This program is not expected to frighten younger children.

Directed to Older Children



This program is designed for children age 7 and above. It may be more appropriate for children who have acquired the developmental skills needed to distinguish between make-believe and reality. Themes and elements in this program may include mild fantasy violence or comedic violence, or may frighten children under the age of 7. Therefore, parents may wish to consider the suitability of this program for their very young children.



Directed to Older Children - Fantasy Violence

For those programs where fantasy violence may be more intense or more combative than other programs in this category, such programs will be designated TV-Y7-FV.

General Audience



Most parents would find this program suitable for all ages. Although this rating does not signify a program designed specifically for children, most parents may let younger children watch this program unattended. It contains little or no violence, no strong language and little or no sexual dialogue or situations.

Parental Guidance Suggested



This program contains material that parents may find unsuitable for younger children. Many parents may want to watch it with their younger children. The theme itself may call for parental guidance and/or the program contains one or more of the following: moderate violence (V), some sexual situations (S), infrequent coarse language (L), or some suggestive dialogue (D).

Parents Strongly Cautioned



This program contains some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age. Parents are strongly urged to exercise greater care in monitoring this program and are cautioned against letting children under the age of 14 watch unattended. This program contains one or more of the following: intense violence (V), intense sexual situations

(S), strong coarse language (L), or intensely suggestive dialogue (D).

Mature Audience Only



This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17. This program contains one or more of the following: graphic violence (V), explicit sexual activity (S), or crude indecent language (L).

Type of research

This study, titled “The content analysis of sex, violence, and the use of language in television programs rated as G (General): for all ages” is a content analysis research that analyzes inappropriate expression in the content of television programs rated as “G (General) : for all ages” in three dimensions : sex, language, and violence.

Population and sample

The sample comprises of 52 G-rated television programs aired on six free-to-air national television stations in Thailand ; Channel 3 , Channel 5(Royal Thai Army Radio and Television), Channel 7, Modern 9 TV, Channel 11(National Broadcasting Services of Thailand) and Thai PBS (Thai Public Broadcasting Service) in 6 days on March 2010.

Sampling method

To get the best and evenly distributed sample, the researcher design sampling method that can acquire television programs from all of the stations. The sample comprised of television programs aired in March 2010, through simple random sampling method, using www.randomizer.org. However, on March 15th 2010, there was no G-rated program on the government’s channel 11 due to the special coverage regarding political turmoil that happened that day, which continued for several months further. Therefore, the researcher decided to collect the missing data on the same date one year later, March 15th, 2011, to minimize bias. In total, fifty-two G-rated programs have been analyzed.

Research findings

The study found that the “G-rated” programs still contained inappropriate expression for children on the average of 2.63 times per program. The program genre that contains most inappropriate expressions was found to be entertainment series, both drama and comedy series, which were aired during prime time period (7.00-10.30 P.M.). Entertainment oriented programs of channel 3 and 7 contain more amount of the inappropriate content than other stations, while public-interest oriented programs of Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS), and the National Broadcasting service of Thailand (channel 11) contain least amount of inappropriate expression. Finally, it is concluded that even G-rated programs still contain inappropriate expression for children, indicating ineffective rating system for some of the stations, resulting in incongruent designation of the program’s symbol and the content it contains.

The study found that TV programs with “G General” classification which general viewers know that “it is appropriate for audience of all ages” and “without” inappropriate contents in term of sex, language or violence have shown approximately 2.63 times per program or 3.82 times per hour. In this scenario, there are programs

which have inappropriate contents about 20 out of 52 “G General” programs or 38.46 percent. For those 20 programs only, the average in the contents will be increased from 2.63 times to 6.85 times per program and 3.82 times per hour to 10.27. From the result, it has shown that even though rating level which does not indicate the sign for parents to give “guidance” in viewing as the rating level beginning with “Parental Guidance”, the children can be exposed to inappropriate contents if they watch “G General” programs without parents’ guidance.

Compared among three dimensions of contents which have shown in TV programs with “G General” classification such as sex, language and violence, the dimension of content which is the most inappropriate one is the violence. Its average is 1.46 times per program or 55.47 percent of the total expression. The most common violence is the violence to the others, which makes up 42.33 of inappropriate contents as a whole. Drama series and movies are main sources of violence in television, with 80.26 percent of the total violent expression. As such, the parents can apply these data to keep their children informed about the violence in their real world situations and help boosting the positive attitude for them.

The second content which has “G General” is the content with inappropriate language. It is 31.38 percent of the total expression. Instead of being the vulgar language, it is the insulting language which is most often found. It is 37.20 percent of the total inappropriate language found. The vulgar language come second with 34.88 percent. In term of sexual content, there is only 13.13 percent. The most part is about the inappropriate behavior which is not compatible with the gender of that particular person. Generally speaking, sexuality is not too worrisome as the other two dimensions of television content.

From comparison among the television stations, we will see that Channel 3 has more violent content and inappropriate language than other channels. It is 55.74 percent of total contents. Channel 3 also has higher inappropriate contents than other channels or 60 percent of all “G General” programs broadcasted by the channel. Channel 3 comes first with the average of inappropriateness at 7.60 times per program. Channel 7 comes second at 3.86 times per program which is almost half of Channel 3. The total of both channels is 75.17 percent. That is because those two channels have more G-rated dramas and movies than other channels or 85.71 percent totally. They are the group of programs that shows more inappropriateness than other groups of programs.

TV station which show least inappropriate contents is ThaiPBS. It has only one time from nine programs or 0.11 time per program. In addition, its proportion of inappropriateness is lower than any station or 11.11 percent of “G General” programs broadcast. Next to ThaiPBS is Channel 11 which has 3 times from 6 programs or 0.50 time per program. The main reason is because of their policy of programming, which contain no drama series.

The findings are in accordance with the studies of Surapong Sothanasathien (2008) and Aut Kupongsak (2010) which revealed that structures and policies of the TV stations have influence on program scheduling. For example, Channel 3 and Channel 7 which are operated by private companies emphasize the entertainment as the biggest source of income. That is why they have more inappropriate contents than other

channels. Comparing to ThaiPBS, it does not emphasize the entertainment but instead focusing on news programs.

When comparing about the contents categorized by the air-time, it shows that the period between 19:00 to 22:30 p.m. or prime time is the duration which inappropriateness are often found the most as it can attract more viewers than any other periods including the children. The average of expression is 5.20 times per program or 37.95 percent of the total expressions. The time period with second highest inappropriate content is between 6:00 to 16:00 p.m. at an average of 3.21 per program as it is also the duration that the children can view during their school holidays or public holidays. On the contrary, "G General" programs which contain less inappropriateness have been allocated in the period with least viewers, which is between 24:00 to 6:00 a.m. or an average 0.60 time per program. It is close to the fourth period between 22:30 to 24:00 p.m. or an average of 0.85 time per program. Both are durations which there are not many children to view as other periods.

When comparing by categorizing according to group of programs, it is found that the group which shows the inappropriateness most often is the group of dramas and movies with an average of 14.29 time per program, or once every 3 minutes. The violent behavior is the most often found with an average of 8.71 times per program. It is double of the inappropriateness language whose average is 4.43 times per program.

Interestingly, the group that comes second in the number of time on the total expression of inappropriateness is the program for children, with an average of 2.80 times per program. Almost all programs expresses violence even though its number is 5 times lower than the dramas and movies group. Most of them are the violence toward other people and the inappropriate sex. So it shows that even though it is a program for children, it does not mean that there is no inappropriateness. From the survey, it is interesting that the programs for children are the categories with more inappropriate sexual expressions than any other programs including dramas. It is also the genre with third most violence. Another interesting program is religion program, with the inappropriate expressions at an average of 2.33 times per program. It is also the program that contain more erroneous language usage than any other programs at an average of 1.67 times per program.

From the analysis, the conclusion is that "G General" programs still have the inappropriate contents especially drama and comedy categories. During prime time which Channel 3 and Channel 7 broadcast by emphasizing the entertainment, there are inappropriate expressions the most. Stations with less inappropriate content are ThaiPBS and Channel 11 whose policies emphasize public interests. As the inappropriateness are still present in "G General" programs, it reflects that the rating system is not suitable. So the data from this study can be used to support and to make the rating system more suitable. Related individuals such as academics, parents and children organizations can also use these data to improve the suitability for children media.

Recommendations

1. Rating system related bodies such as Ministry of Culture, the Office of Prime Minister or children and education related agencies such as the Thailand's Health Foundation or Children Media Foundation should set up the activities or

campaigns to encourage parents to take care their children while viewing television programs. Every program should be treated equally because even the "G General" programs still have inappropriateness due to the incompatibility between rating and contents, the business reason or the interpretation of rating manager of each station.

2. Related agencies mentioned earlier can propose these data to every station to enhance compatibility between rating and contents.
3. As of now, the station controls what goes on air and what rate each program get. As a result, the rating system doesn't work in reality. To get G rating means that the program is free to air on any time slot, including prime time. This study finds that a large proportion of prime time programs are G-rated programs, which contain violent content in varying degrees. The rating system in Thailand should be reconsidered because there is no clear guideline. In practice, there is little difference between a rated and an unrated program, and many programs are found to be having inappropriate rating, whether due to business reason or lack of understanding. The government must initiate positive policies to promote constructive and beneficial programs, such as tax relief for stations with good programs, or funding new production companies with good intention to enhance their capacity to produce positive programs.
4. The skill crucial for the audience is media literacy, which should be included in every level of formal education. Related parties, including the Ministry of Culture, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand's Health Foundation, and Children Media Foundation should actively promote parents to take care of young audience, no matter what rate the program they are watching, since this study finds that many of the G-rated programs contain inappropriate content for young audience. Furthermore, the findings of this study support that idea that the rating system should be reconstructed to get a more practical system that really reflect the content it contains.

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