

Meta-Research on Public Broadcasting: Case Study of European Union and Thailand

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Public service broadcasting (PSB) is considered an alternative type of broadcasting in addition to commercial broadcasting. AIBD (Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development) defined PSB as “a meeting place where all citizens are welcome and considered equals”—a forum where information and education are transmitted to all people of any social and economic status, aiming particularly for information and cultural development. PSB, in this regard, is allowed to “appeal to imagination, and entertain...[but] with a concern for quality that distinguishes it from commercial broadcasting” (UNESCO, 2005, as cited in AIBD Website)

The legendary and renowned PSB organizations are BBC of the United Kingdom and NHK of Japan. Some other countries around that world also support the implementation of PSB—in Asia (e.g. Hong Kong, India, Korea), North America (Canada & USA), Oceania (Australia & New Zealand), and South America (e.g. Argentina, Chile). Some countries where PSB has not yet been practically implemented also stated their attempt and effort to establish a PSB organization, e.g. Turkey (Vural, 2011), Arab countries (Ayish, 2010), and Zimbabwe (Masuku, 2011).

In Thailand, public service broadcasting was founded in 2008 as the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS). The organization stated as its mission to “enlightening members of the society with its diverse educational and entertainment programs while strictly abiding by the code of ethics that ensures fair, balanced and impartial news coverage” (Thai PBS website). So far, Thai PBS has received a high acclaim from the public concerning its fast, thorough, and fair news coverage (Thai PBS Facebook)

As a newly-found PSB organization, Thai PBS has a lot to learn from its counterparts around the world, especially BBC and NHK, so as to serve the public with multi-needs and interests, and to gear its operations in a proper way of idealized public service broadcasting. Therefore, Thai PBS needs to gather information generated from a number of researches conducted about public service broadcasting in various countries.

Although BBC & NHK are the ideal public service broadcasting organizations, their long history and operations may set the path for Thai PBS to follow in the future, but may not serve the purpose at hand. The European Union, in particular, consists of member countries of multi-cultural and development aspects. The PSB operation in those countries may serve better as an exemplar for Thai PBS during its endeavor to gain acceptance and understanding among Thai audience.

The European Union has clearly declared as its principle to support public service broadcasting among its member countries. In this case, the member countries were encouraged to establish and fully support public service broadcasting so as to compete with commercial televisions, to provide alternative information to the public, to unite multi-ethnic groups, and to guarantee public participation in the democratic society. France, Spain, and Germany, for example, fully support the operations of public service broadcasting.

This paper, therefore, provides a comparative analysis of public service broadcasting in the EU countries and Thailand, regarding organizational structure, audience, effects, relationship, and programs & contents. This paper is a meta-research on public broadcasting, aiming to gather related information for further investigation to develop roadmaps and strategies for Thai PBS in the future. The narrative review approach was selected as a method to synthesize research papers in this field.

Analysis of Public Service Broadcasting

Public service broadcasting (PSB) and commercial broadcasting are distinctively different regarding broadcasting goal, program quality and focus, content and financial independence, and audience participation (AIBD website), aiming particularly at creativity, learning, and citizenship (McCulloch, 2001). Their operations, however, are basically similar as a media organization. In this regard, McQuail (2010)'s analytical framework of a television organization is applicable.

According to McQuail (2010), a television organization can be analyzed in five aspects:

1. Organization analysis—analyzing organizational structure, administrators, roles and operations, budget, personnel, as well as organizational culture and goals.
2. Relationship analysis between the organization and its stakeholders—analyzing the relationship with society, audience, producers, community, as well as other public and private organizations.
3. Program and content analysis—analyzing program types and objectives, content formats, language, presentation and presenters.
4. Audience analysis—analyzing audience in terms of demographics, psychographics, media usage, lifestyles, cultures & values, opinions & needs & expectation, as well as satisfaction.
5. Effect analysis—analyzing in both macro & micro levels. Micro level means the effects of television broadcasting on individuals (knowledge & understanding, attitude, desirable behavior, development of constructive viewpoints and quality lifestyles, etc.), while macro level means its effects on society (cultural change and positive value instillation)



Methodology

Key documents used in this research are of the following:

1. Research papers conducted in Thailand and overseas during 2001-2011 about Thai PBS in particular. Types of those papers are research reports, theses, and independent studies of college and universities.
2. Research papers conducted in Thailand overseas during 1991-2011 about public service broadcasting in the EU member countries.

In total, there are 47 research papers about Thai PBS, and 29 papers for EU public service broadcasting. Researches about BBC are excluded.

The issues of analysis consist of five aspects: organization analysis, relationship analysis between the organization and its stakeholders, program and content analysis, audience analysis, and effect analysis. The research instruments used in this analysis are code sheets to list down and categorize emerging themes.

The data were collected during August-September, 2011, and were analyzed during October-December, 2011. The data obtained were categorized in accordance with emerging themes, and analyzed thematically and inductively. The results were presented descriptively.

Results

European PBS

The analysis of research concerning European PSBs reveals both studies of PSB in an individual nation (e.g. Ireland) or group of nations (e.g. Nordic countries), and a comparative study of PSB operations in two or more nations (e.g. Greece & France). The European nations under analysis include, for example, Ireland, Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Greece.

The research papers conducted about public service broadcasting in European Union focused primarily on the PSB roles and management, relationship with society, and programs & contents. In contrast to the research papers conducted about BBC, however, those conducted in European Union did not focus on audience or effects of PSB on the audience and society.

Organization Analysis of European PSB: Roles & Management

Regarding roles and management, European PSBs were found to perform their roles as providing quality programs to the public (Meijer, 2003), with the focus on cultural diversity and public interest. In this aspect, entertainment is becoming a focus of European PSBs in order to attract more audience and to compete with commercial televisions. It was found by Tsourvakas (2004) that, in Greece, the public service

television has to develop their programs in the similar format as their commercial counterparts to boost up their competitiveness.

However, European PSBs, like their counterparts in other countries, are now facing various challenges e.g. intense competition with commercial broadcasting, intervention from government and interest groups (e.g. Catholic Church & Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in Ireland) (Sweeney, 2007), influence of broadcasting from neighboring countries (e.g. USA broadcasting on CNBC of Canada), the phenomenon of media concentrations, and cost effectiveness (Andreea, 2008). A bigger challenge, however, concerns the emerging of digital TV, whereby multi-channels are available for audience choice. The digital broadcast technology demands that EU PSBs need to adjust themselves in various aspects—organizational structure, program airing and policy (Iosifidis, 2007). The PSB of France, for example, is contemplating on using internet as a channel to reach its audience (Machill, 2008). Likewise, the Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI) of Italy reported the reform and development in RAI to prepare for the upcoming digital era (Hibberd, 2004).

Hence, European PSBs needs to adjust their roles and operations to meet the said changes. In this case, European State Aid Policy, or an EU aid fund provided to the member countries, has strengthened EU PSBs and help them adjust better to the approaching digital era (Donders, 2010)

Relationship Analysis between public television broadcasting and society

European PSBs still receive laudation from the public, when being compared with the commercial broadcasting. A study by Holtz-Bacha and Norris (2001) confirmed that the audience prefers PSB to commercial broadcasting, stating that they received more knowledge about politics from PSB, thereby having increasing social trust (Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010).

To better serve the benefits of the community, European PSBs need to be included as an essential element in community law (Saldaña, 2008) to generate fair competition among broadcasting operators, and guarantee quality operations to protect public welfare. In this aspect, European Union clearly supports the implementation to PSB among its member countries, since it serves as a forum to promote democratic goals, multi-ethnic and cultural aspects of EU, and public interest as a whole (Michalis, 2009). Daalmeijer (2004)'s study, for example, explores the public service broadcasting in Netherlands and found that the organization has been serving as a cultural forum of the nation, and still perform the idealized roles of the public service broadcasting.

The analysis of PSB in Nordic countries (2005) reveals its operation on a fair and quality basis, in which information freedom is supported, audience participation enhanced, arts/language/culture promoted, and children & minority programs constantly presented (Hawelleck, 2007). The findings were supported by Horsti and

Hultén (2009)'s study about PSB in Finland and Sweden, which supported the presentation of cultural and ethnic diversity.

Program & Content Analysis

The analysis of programs and contents of European PSBs revealed the focus on national identity and culture (Atzori, 2011). An interesting factor determining the programs and contents of European PSBs is the “post-multicultural” attributes, to which the PSBs need to set their program policy to respond to the said characteristics in European Union (Tittley, 2009)

Public service broadcasting in the European Union has also produced programs to counter strike the effect of popular media from other countries. The public service television in Norway (NRK SUPER), for example, has been producing and airing programs about Norwegian culture, serving particularly as a forum for quality programs for children (Enli, 2008).

Thai PBS

Research on Thai PBS during the 10-year period (2001-2011) explored basically the multiple viewpoints of media experts and professionals on the establishment of Thai PBS—the first public service television in Thailand— in 2008. Other focuses concern its organizational policy, roles & management, audience attitude, and program analysis.

A study by Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI, 2007) supported the establishment of Thai PBS as a media forum to provide the universal access to Thai audience. It was expected to provide quality programs to the audience and serve as a mediating forum between the public and policy makers. Similar supports were also found in other studies (see for example, Issarachai, 2007; Boonmeetrakul, 2008; and Suphadilok, 2009).

A research sponsored by Thai Research Funds (TRF) in 2004 stated that public service broadcasting in Thailand would provide an alternative to Thai audience, with the focus on quality programs, check and balance systems, and free from government intervention. The operation and budgeting of Thai PBS should be endorsed by law (TDRI, 2007). Henceforth, the annual budget of US\$ 65 million proportionate from the excise tax of tobacco and alcohol is assigned to Thai PBS.

Concern about the government intervention was reported in various studies. Wisessomwong (2007) generated viewpoints about public service TV in Thailand from professionals, experts, scholars, and social groups. In addition to their fully support of the establishment of Thai PBS, they also mentioned the necessary mechanism to guarantee its intervention-free operations. This mechanism is, therefore, stated in the Public Service Broadcasting Law, B.E. 2008.

Another concern is the public's lack of understanding in public service television. Issarachai (2007) indicated that Thai audience has been exposed throughout 50 years to commercial televisions. Therefore, Thai PBS will have to strive hard for building its own identity and distinctiveness as a quality media for Thai people. Promoting knowledge and understanding among the staff is of priority concern, so that they could readjust their attitude and working culture to fit with the missions of public service broadcasting (Thanakulpan, 2010). In addition, informative and education programs (e.g. documentary, history programs, and cultural-diverse tourism) need to be more addressed.

Organizational Structure: Roles & Management

The success implementation of Thai PBS requires the preparedness of staff and program producers, both in-house and independent. The producers have to shift their producing paradigm to focus on quality and audience benefits (Obsuwan, 2008). Cooperation with producers from other television channels will help reduce production costs.

The research on Thai PBS operation revealed its success on news program. A study by Kanjanaboonmalert (2009) found the news programs of Thai PBS to be “in-depth, fair, unbiased, intervention-free, diverse, and creative,” with more focus on regional news when compared with those of commercial TVs. The said success stems basically from many factors, e.g. legal, technology, social networks as news sources, competitors, public preference, financial support, operation, and check-and-balance systems.

Audience Analysis

Preliminary studies on audience opinion about the establishment of Thai PBS revealed the public's support (Sriwong, 2007). Later studies (e.g. Pimpipat, 2008) on public attitudes about Thai PBS also revealed their preference of its programs, especially education programs both in-house produced (e.g. World Travelling) or imported from abroad (e.g. Discovery), morning news, and children programs (Nuangchompoo, 2008).

The audience also indicated their satisfaction with Thai PBS programs (news, documentary, cultures) (Raksirisopa, 2010), resulting in Thai PBS image as the channel of news and children programs (Boonrak, 2009). The audience, in addition, revealed their high needs and expectations towards Thai PBS as a reliable news and information provider (Boontayapan, 2009; and Tongsom, 2010).

Program & Content Analysis

A number of studies have explored programs & contents of Thai PBS, along with their effects on audience, e.g. health program (Piboonpanuwat et al., 2009), family program (Watanahiranyasith, 2010), evening news (Iamrasamee, 2011), and children program (Chaiwitwiwat et al., 2011). Consensus findings were found—that Thai PBS

has been airing quality programs with the desirable effects (e.g. knowledge) on the audience.

Various studies conducted by the Media Monitoring Foundation (2007-2010) regarding media evaluation stated that Thai PBS ranked first in the following aspects: time dedicated to live broadcast of national election (in 2007); programs for public interest (2007); broadcast on political gatherings on fair, well-rounded, & depth basis (2008); news on media reform (2009); health programs (2008); music programs (2008); depth analysis on economics (2008); agriculture programs (2008); and science & technology programs (2009). In addition, while other free TVs (commercial TV) focus on entertainment (soap operas & game shows), Thai PBS has declared its standpoints on airing only quality educational programs (2010). Programs having inappropriate contents (e.g. vulgar language, violence) and advertorial programs (or at-home shopping) were not found on Thai PBS.

Comparison & Contrast of EU Public Service Broadcasting and Thai PBS

In a similar point, both organizations serve the public of diverse cultural and ethnic identity. This phenomenon can be clearly seen in the European Union, in which people of various cultures and ethnics exist within a single nation or across boundaries. As for Thailand, it can be clearly seen that, under Thai culture consist of various sub-cultural groups which, more or less, have been largely ignored by commercial TVs. Recent political confrontations in Thailand starting in 2006, for example, illustrated Thai people's differing cultural perspectives in terms of their political orientations.

Another similarity is the support from the public. The PSB organizations of European Union generally receive firm supports from the audiences; thereby guarantee their justification of existence and operations. As for Thai PBS, although its audiences are mainly those with higher education and white-collar jobs (Bangkok University Poll, 2012), the general public always turns to Thai PBS in time of crisis, e.g. during the big flood in 2011, for reliable and well-rounded news reporting (Thai PBS Facebook). Thai PBS aspires to reach a wider group of audiences in the future.

Another similarity is aim for quality and public interest. The PSB organizations in both Thailand and the European Union have stated clearly about their goals to promote public interest via contents that benefit to all, free from external interventions, operate for the betterment and strength of society, as well as guarantee public access and participation.

A major difference between the PSB organizations in Thailand and European Union is program orientation. While the PSBs of EU aim primarily at providing programs to promote their cultural identity, Thai PBS aims at providing in-depth news analysis, diverse news programs (regional, social, economic, environment, crime, live broadcasting during crisis) and social movements. Thai PBS is renowned for

providing news contents that are considered accurate, fair to all, free from intervention, and diverse.

Another different point is the operations of Thai PBS. The analysis of Thai PBS revealed its strengths in many aspects. Firstly, its existence and operations have already been stipulated and endorsed in the Public Service Broadcasting Act, 2008, that guarantees its fixed annual budget (US\$165 million) and free from external interventions. Secondly, Thai PBS has successfully formulated a firm network with various social groups, which invariably serve as its diverse news sources and justification for its operations and survival. As for the public service broadcasting in many EU member countries (e.g. France), the legal endorsement of PSB is not yet clear, not to mention its efforts in forming a relationship with various social groups.

Conclusion & Implication

Research studies on public service broadcasting in the European Union have reflected the diversity in terms of legal, social, economic and political aspects. This is due to the diverse nature of each member nations regarding the aforesaid issues. In addition to research on the adaptation of regulations, policy, and operational structure to facilitate the performance of PSBs in EU, one similarity, however, is their consensual recognition of the approaching of media technology that will inevitably affect their management, programs, and competitiveness with commercial media. Hence, a number of studies have clearly illustrated this point of concern that demands the adaptation of PSB organizations to these challenges.

Research on Thai PBS, on the contrary, focused primarily on its programs, contents, and audience feedback. This may stem from the fact that Thai PBS, the first public service broadcasting in Thailand, needs to gain public understanding and acceptance among Thai audience. Hence, it has to formulate its own identity, educate the audience about its distinctiveness from the commercial media, and, meanwhile, evaluate the audience responsiveness to its performances.

We can conclude that the PSBs of the European Union and Thai PBS of Thailand have recognized the importance of public service broadcasting as a tool to educate the public and to instill national cultures among the audiences. In this aspect, PSB serves as a mechanism to protect the vulnerable audience (e.g. children) from the commercial media.

A major phenomenon of multiculturalism of audiences in both the European Union and Thailand requires that the public service broadcasting be adjusted to reflect this attribute in its programs and contents. In the European Union, the multiculturalism exists both within and across the national boundaries. Hence, public service broadcasting of each member country has been operating under high expectation to reflect not only national cultural identity, but also to recognize the cultural distinctiveness of ethnic groups as well. In Thailand, however, multiculturalism is increasingly prevalent in the public's political viewpoints, social standings, beliefs,

and practices. So far, Thai PBS has been very cautious in impartially presenting voices from all parties concerned.

Regarding the programs and contents, entertainment has been recently adopted as a strategy for the public service broadcasting, so as to attract younger audiences and to compete with the commercial media. Nevertheless, the entertainment program of PSB is expected to insert quality into contents, so that its principles and mission are still implemented.

It can be concluded that the public service broadcasting is widely recognized both in the European Union and Thailand, as a mechanism to illustrate democratic movements of the public in each country. This is due to the fact that PSB readily welcomes public participation and operates on a fair basis to ensure equal access of all social groups, as well as protect the vulnerable groups of the society. The analyses of research papers conducted on PSB in both the EU countries and in Thailand have confirmed the said practices.

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