

News Media Quality Rating in Thailand: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Changes in the media environment, have posed a challenge to news workers and journalists regarding the quality of news reporting. This media quality rating research aimed to develop the criteria for measuring the quality of Thai news programs. The study consisted of three stages and included both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The first stage was gathering words/phrases that identified the quality of news programs; data were collected from open-ended questions with 205 news viewers, focus group discussions with eight news viewers, and in-depth interviews with nine academics and media professionals. The second stage was developing the media quality rating criteria, which were indexes and tools for measuring the quality of news programs. The third stage was testing the developed criteria with four news programs. According to the findings from the first phase, the words/phrases identifying news program quality were divided into three dimensions including format and news content, moderators, and presentation techniques. Those words/phrases were consequently used to create a questionnaire to ask the opinion of 657 news viewers. The results were subsequently analyzed for the key attributes of each dimension. For the second stage, the validity of each item of the developed media quality rating criteria was evaluated by the index of item objective congruence (IOC) procedure. For the third stage, the findings from the media quality rating criteria test with 763 online and offline news viewers showed that the developed criteria were able to measure and indicate the quality of news programs.

Keywords: News Media Quality Rating, Quality Rating Criteria, TV Programs Quality

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Introduction

Media landscape today with the advancement of digital technology, TV news programs have been offered to the audience through various platforms, both push-program on TV network and pull-program on YouTube or any other OTT ((over-the-top)) platforms. Changing in the media environment, specifically, the platform shift and the growing competition, have posed a challenge to news workers and journalists regarding news report. News producers have to find ways to present their news programs to attract their viewers like, the fastness of reporting, news dramatization.

News media help people stay aware of the happenings around the world but they also have negative impact on individuals and society (Walma van der Molen & Bushman, 2008; Myrick et. al., 2014; Tandoc Jr. et. al., 2021) for example, increase levels of the stress or anxiety, disseminate fake news, violate of children rights, increase conflict in society, etc.

According to the normative theories of media, the theory describes an ideal way for a media system and explains how mass media should or are expected to perform or accomplish (Baran & Davis, 2020). Additionally, another theory that points to the role of media in society is the functionalist theory. The functional theory, or functionalist perspective, is a theory that helps explain the balance of systems by highlighting how each system has its own mechanisms and functions. This is similar to the role of mass media, which has its own set of functions and operations within the larger societal system, such as surveillance of the society, correlation of the part of the society, and entertainment (McQuail, 2020). Therefore, developing the quality of media services to meet ethical and professional standards is crucial for creating balance in society and providing public benefits. The development of quality measurement systems is essential as a tool for assessing the quality of media.

The media quality measurement system in Thailand still has limitations in terms of indicators and tools for measuring media quality. Criteria for evaluating the overall quality of media currently in Thailand have been co-created through the efforts of government agencies, academics, and media professionals. Thai Media Fund (TMF), a government organization that has one objective to promote and support the development of safe and creative media, proposes the criteria consist of six dimensions of content that should be promoted (+6), aside from the existing three dimensions of harmful content that should be restricted (-3), with an intention to promote high-quality media content (Thai Media Fund). In addition, in the Announcement of Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) on guidelines for determining age-appropriate TV content 2013, the six dimensions of content included the content that promoted 1) critical thinking, 2) academic and general knowledge, 3) moral and ethical values, 4) life skill development, 5) acceptance, understanding, and appreciation of diversity in society, and 6) family and interpersonal relationship development (Oranop na Ayutthaya, et. al., 2022). However, these criteria are not yet in the form of standardized metrics for use in evaluating every program.

On the business side, currently, the rating measurement system is mainly dominated by Nielsen. A TV rating system like Nielsen, that was developed by A.C. Nielsen in 1950, measure the popularity of a program, in term of the number and proportion of viewers. This rating system is crucial for the commercial broadcaster to charge more for advertisement slots. However, this TV rating system may not reflect the quality of the program.

In other countries, there are efforts to assess the performance of media organizations. For example, NHK in Japan has established the NHK (Assessment Committee from the Audience Perspective) to evaluate outcomes from the viewers' and listeners' standpoints. The assessment considers expectations, satisfaction, and the value of each content type, incorporating a framework of two main criteria and eight baseline standards to examine the audience's trust. Therefore, audience research is a reflection of the needs and interests of viewers and listeners obtained directly from their viewing and listening experiences. Based on the reasons mentioned, this study would develop a system to evaluate program quality from the perspective of viewers.

This project aimed to propose an alternative method for supporting good TV news programs by assessing the exposure, perception, and opinion of news program viewers, both online and offline. The study started with a pilot trial of the program quality measurement system from news programs. The result from this pilot study will provide precise indicators and guidelines for measuring media quality which is also important for creating a suitable media system.

Methodology

The project was divided into three phases. Phase 1 was gathering and determining news program quality attributes. Phase 2 was developing quality rating criteria, which were indexes and tools for assessing the quality of news programs. Phase 3 was testing the quality rating criteria and reporting the results, including interpreting lessons and creating a quality rating criteria manual.

Both Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study. In phase 1, desk research was used to study previous literature on news quality for developing quality criteria and quality index. In addition, data were collected from open-ended questions with 205 news viewers by using the question - What are the characteristics of quality news? Focus group discussions were held with eight news viewers and in-depth interviews with nine academics and media professionals.

From the characteristics of the news program quality gathered from the first step, in phase 2 the quality rating criteria were developed by organizing the collected data into three dimensions, including format and news content dimension (54 words/phases), moderator dimension: news moderator (38 words/phases) and field reporters (38 words/phases), and presentation technique dimension (11 words/phases). Those words/phrases were consequently used to create a questionnaire for asking the opinion of 657 news viewers nationwide, aged 13 or above. Then, the indexes for evaluating the program quality, which included factors and items, were developed using an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) technique for data reduction. The result of creating an initial measurement tool is an assessment form for the quality of programs based on the factors and indexes of high-quality program attributes.

In phase 3, four television news programs were selected as samples for testing the program quality measurement tool. The news programs in this evaluation were selected from those that received high rating (Neilson rating) at the time. Three news programs came from commercial digital TV channels and one news program was public broadcasting TV. The opinion survey with a sample group of 763 online and offline news viewers was conducted to rate the four selected news programs with the quality measurement tool.

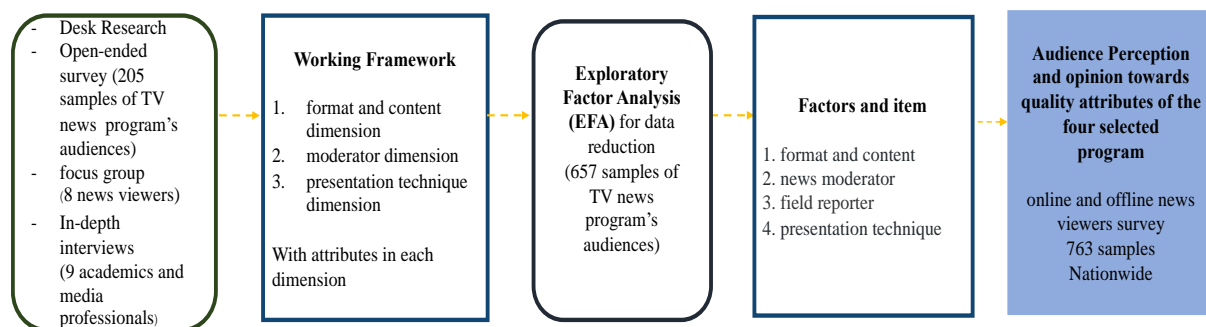


Figure 1: The process of data gathering

Findings

The objective of this research was to explore and develop indicators and assessment tools for evaluating the quality of television news programs in Thailand. The study began with searching for and collecting words or phrases that expressed the characteristics of quality TV news program to categorize them into separate dimensions, including format and news content dimension, moderator dimension: news moderator and field reporters, and presentation technique dimension. Subsequently, the data was extracted to obtain components within each dimension. This information was then used to create a quality measurement tool for program evaluation by the viewers. This quality assessment survey is a questionnaire that gathered the opinions of viewers regarding the news program, asking them to rate the attributes and items in each dimension with a 5-level Likert scale, including 'Strongly Agree,' 'Agree,' 'Neutral,' 'Disagree,' and 'Strongly Disagree,' respectively. Four news programs were used in the study for trying out the developed media quality rating indexes and tools.

The findings showed that the indexes for measuring the quality of TV news programs comprised three dimensions, and each dimension contained factors and items that were indicators of program quality. Quality rating criteria for news programs were as follows:

1. The format and content dimension, which consisted of four attributes (journalistic standard; respect for legal rights; production of interests, inspiration, and participation; news selection and presentation)
2. The moderator dimension, dividing into news announcers and field reporters, which consisted of four attributes (professional ethics and professional expertise; language use and resourceful communication skill; respect and honor for others; personality)
3. The presentation technique dimension, which consisted of two attributes (technique to make content easy to understand; technique to create novelty and variety of news presentation)

Table 1: Factors and items of Quality TV News program

The format and content dimension	
Factors	Items
1. journalistic standard (e.g. provide complete information, objectivity)	11
2. respect for legal rights (e.g. reporting news without violating the law, protecting the privacy of the news source)	5
3. production of interests, inspiration, and participation (e.g. providing new and interesting content for society, giving informative and beneficial content)	4
4. news selection and presentation (e.g. novelty/oddity, proximity)	7
News moderator dimension	
Factors	Items
1. professional ethics and professional expertise (e.g. unbiased, well-informed)	9
2. language use and resourceful communication skill (e.g. pronounce correctly, energetic)	5
3. respect and honor for others (e.g. respect for those appearing in the news, not discriminatory against others)	2
4. personality (e.g. dress appropriately, good personality)	4
Field reporter dimension	
Factors	Items
1. professional ethics and professional expertise (e.g. listening to diverse opinions from those involved in the situation, well-informed)	8
2. language use and resourceful communication skill (e.g. pronounce correctly, energetic)	5
3. respect and honor for others (e.g. respect to those appearing in the news, not discrimination against others)	3
4. personality (e.g. dress appropriately, good personality)	3
Presentation technique dimension	
Factors	Items
1. technique to make content easy to understand (e.g. use interesting illustrations or graphics, high-quality visuals and audio)	5
2. technique to create novelty and variety of news presentation (e.g. opening up space or providing additional information, quality and of the technical production)	5

The quality scores of the program from the collected data metrics were calculated based on the overall average opinion score of each dimension. The benchmark that was used to verify the media quality is 2.6 mean score. It meant that if the program had an average score of 2.61 or higher, it would be considered to meet the media quality rating criteria. The interpretation of the average opinion score was as follows:

- 1.00 - 1.80 represents a program with very poor quality
- 1.81- 2.60 represents a program with poor quality
- 2.61 - 3.40 represents a program with acceptable quality
- 3.41 - 4.20 represents a program with good quality
- 4.21 - 5.00 represents a program with very good quality

From the results in Table 2, it was evident that all four programs meet the quality criteria with an average score of at least 2.61 in all factors. There was one program that had an overall score at a very good level (4.24), and the rest were at a good level.

Table 2: Quality rating result for TV news program

Program	Dimension	The format and content dimension	News moderator	Field reporter	Presentation technique	Overall Score	Result
A (commercial TV)		4.14	4.34	4.28	4.23	4.24	Pass
B (commercial TV)		4.03	4.13	4.13	4.08	4.08	Pass
C (commercial TV)		4.11	4.22	4.17	4.17	4.16	Pass
D (public broadcast TV)		4.05	4.19	4.18	4.18	4.13	Pass

When considering the results of the quality assessment of the program in each dimension, it was found that Program A had the highest average score in the dimension related to the news moderator, field reporter, presentation technique, and news content respectively. Program B had a highest average score in the dimension of news moderator and field reporter. Meanwhile, Program C and D had the high average scores in terms of program format and content dimension.

The results from the assessment using the quality measurement tool indicated that the tool was capable of classifying the quality of television news programs. The scores obtained could help the individuals involved in news reporting of all four programs to improve their work in each dimension.

Conclusion & Suggestion

After conducting the news program quality assessment, the group discussion was held to gain lessons from using the quality assessment criteria in collaboration with media professionals, media producers, media organizations, media scholars, and regulatory organizations. The development of the measurement tool still needs ongoing improvement and refinement.

The suggestions received from the group of stakeholders, as mentioned above, can be categorized into policy recommendations and recommendations for further study of the media quality rating system in Thailand.

Policy suggestion:

1. The continuous and sustainable development of the media quality rating system should be one of the policy goals to support the quality rating system improvement.

2. There should be cooperation between stakeholders such as private companies that operate audience rating systems and television stations that utilize data from online platforms.
3. Positive reinforcement should be provided to encourage producers of television media as well as media on other platforms to participate in the quality rating system.
4. The quality rating system should become a tool for media producers to rate their work as well as their peer's work; it should also be used as a tool to create recognition and promote media literacy among people.

Suggestions for future development of the media quality rating system:

1. Respective weight score should be given to each dimension of media quality; the most important weight should be given to the content dimension, followed by the moderator dimension and the presentation technique dimension, respectively.
2. There should be two sets of rating indexes, which are the core indexes for measuring the quality of news program in general and the additional indexes for measuring the quality of each specific news program type for example, infotainment news program, and investigative news program.
3. A media quality rating project that utilizes data from audience surveys should take into account the sufficiency of the sample group in representing the actual audience of the media program; data should also be collected from people who know the program but have never watched it and people who used to watch the program but no longer watch it.

The continuity and sustainability in the development of media quality assessment systems, including gaining acceptance from stakeholders in the media industry, requires collaborative coordination with the business sector, government agencies, and media professional associations. Although media quality rating helps promote a good media environment in society, the challenge is to encourage media producers, both television and other platform producers, to participate in the media quality assessment system. Positive motivation, such as providing rewards, reducing licensing fees, or even creating a distinctive image for media that meets the media quality rating criteria, should be considered. Finally, if the news program quality assessment system can be practically utilized, it will serve as a tool for media producers to examine their performance and lead to the improvement of the quality of media that is prevailing in today's society.

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