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RESEARCH ARTICLE

USER GENERATED CONTENT AND IT'S EFFECTS ON NEWS ROOM IN THAI BROADCASTING MEDIA

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Abstract

News consumers have changed to be prosumers (producers plus consumers), generated their contents and publicized through the internet and social media; called user-generated content or UGC. The increase of UGC on the internet and social media, also has effects on newsroom, especially broadcasting journalism. This article intends to explore the broadcasting newsroom in Thai media industry affected by the change of media landscape and the increasing of UGC. Since the shift from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting in 2015 led Thai broadcasting media industry to increase numbers of TV operators from 6 channels to 24 channels; meaning the increase of market competition. Competition for viewership (TV rating) is also a key indicator to allure advertising revenue. Thus, almost every channel tries to focus on dramatized news and human interested coverage drawing from UGC. For example, clips from Facebook or Facebook page, Twitter, and popular web board became main news sources and popularly seen on TV. Some newsrooms reorganized its structure to have a section responsible for monitoring some popular social media in order to find news stories from that sources. Dramatized and human interested stories evidently help increasing television rating (e.g. drawing higher numbers of viewership). Some journalism professionals start questioning that watchdog role and gatekeeper role of Thai media has worsened. In contrast, UGC expanded the opportunity of minority groups and laypersons to voice out their issues through this online public sphere. And their problems gained attention from other publics and the state.

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Introduction:-

Advanced information technology nowadays allows viewers connect to the news anytime anywhere, and have sometimes control over the news they consume. They are now even becoming a part of the production process. News consumers have changed to be prosumers (producers plus consumers), generated their contents and publicized through the internet and social media; called user-created content or user-generated content (UGC). The increase of UGC on the internet and social media also has effects on newsroom, especially broadcasting journalism. With the technological advancement from web 1.0 to web 2.0 our society has experienced over the last several years, user-generated content has become a popular way for television stations to gather news. This article intends to explore how Thai broadcasting stations used user-generated content in their news programs and how the newsroom in Thai media industry was affected by the change of media landscape and the increasing of UGC. The following topics will

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explore Thai broadcasting media landscape, define UGC in Thai media context, and analyze usage of UGC in Thai broadcasting news room.

Thai Broadcasting Media Landscape:

Before the digital switch-over (DSO) in April 2014, Thailand had six free-to-air analogue terrestrial television stations with nationwide coverage (Ch3, Ch5, Ch7, Ch9, NBT and Thai PBS), and just over 1,000 cable and satellite channels. The shift from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting led Thai broadcasting media industry to increase numbers of free TV operators from 6 channels to 24 channels; meaning the increase of market competition.

The digital TV license auction in 2014 with a combined winning price of 51 billion baht has been criticized as a failure because several TV stations struggled to operate. Multiple digital TV operators have suffered losses due to a combination of the high costs of winning the digital licenses and multiplex expenses, limited take up of the digital TV boxes, the slowing economy forcing advertisers to reduce spending and declining audiences as a result of technology disruption. These factors resulted in two digital television channels—Thai TV and Loca—to close within only one year after digital TV broadcasted, while many cable and satellite channels have also folded. The remained 22 digital TV channels consisted of 4 main categories: 1) Children and family, 2) News, 3) Standard Definition (SD), and 4) High Definition (HD). (CONC, 2018)

Viewership and advertising revenue:

At the end of 2018, there were 25.9 million television households in Thailand, representing a television household penetration of 98.8 per cent, with digital TV reaching 95 percent of the population. The analog switch off, which started at the end of 2015, has seen all but one of the traditional channels switch off their old analogue signals. Channel 3 remains the only broadcaster that continues to simulcast on both analogue and digital systems and is expected to complete the analogue switch off in 2020. (Scrimgeour, 2019).

Thai broadcasting business has gained their revenue mainly from advertising, air-time selling and sharing, and other related businesses (i.e. home shopping, organizing event, media production). Advertising is main source of digital TV's revenue and it has been slightly worrisome in the past 5 years from 124 billion baht in 2014 to 119 billion baht in 2018 in response to economic fluctuations, deceleration of purchasing power, and a shift in consumer behavior towards TV substitutes and online media, such as YouTube, Netflix, LineTV, AISplay. (Wanichprasertporn, 2019)

	2017		% change	2018		% change	2019		% change
	Bt. M.	%		Bt. M.	%		Bt. M.	%	
Digital TV	62,781	56%	-7%	66,000	57%	5%	66,000	57%	0%
Cable & sat.	2,692	2%	-22%	2,400	2%	-11%	2,100	2%	-13%
Total TV	65,473	59%	-8%	68,400	59%	4%	68,100	58%	0%
Radio	4,468	4%	-25%	4,600	4%	3%	4,370	4%	-5%
Newspapers	7,704	7%	-45%	6,100	5%	-21%	4,880	4%	-20%
Magazines	1,980	2%	-38%	1,300	1%	-34%	975	1%	-25%
Cinema	6,815	6%	25%	7,100	6%	4%	6,319	5%	-11%
Outdoor	6,391	6%	13%	6,800	6%	6%	6,664	6%	-2%
Transit	5,878	5%	10%	5,900	5%	0%	6,490	6%	10%
In-Store	946	1%	35%	1,100	1%	16%	1,100	1%	0%
Internet	11,418	11%	24%	15,348	13%	34%	17,863	15%	16%
Total	111,073	100%	-8%	116,648	100%	5%	116,761	100%	0%

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Table 1:- Advertising budget spending among different media

Source: <https://www.mediaagencythai.com/index.php/adex/in/277-2019-industry-update>

Thai digital TV industry has encountered pressures from both revenue and cost perspectives leading to a downward trend in operating margin. A survey research done by Media Agency Association of Thailand revealed that even advertising spending on television was the largest portion (58-59%) but declined 8% from 2016 to 2017, and still no growth in 2019, while ad spending on the internet had been gradually increased. The same amount of money in

advertising, sharing between 6 channels for many years ago, is to share between 22 channels after digital TV started (see Table 1).

Four years after shifting from analog to digital TV, the business has been increasingly challenged by innovative platforms such as over-the-top media that snatched up to 90% of advertising revenue from traditional media. The National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC), the independent state regulatory body, acknowledged that some channels faced net losses as high as 10 billion baht over the last four years. Finally, on June 2019 the NBTC allowed another 7 digital TV stations to return their licenses and exit the business, leaving only 15 channels on the air (News, SD, HD) (Tortermvasana, 2019). This also sadly led to vanish of children and family channels.

User-generated Content:

There has been an increased level of access granted to news consumers, as they can comment via social media, and/or e-mails to express their opinions. With the emergence of new technology, blogs, and increased citizen interest, the flow of information is also on the rise. We live in a 24/7 news cycle where it is always possible to access news, and it is becoming increasingly common for citizens to produce news. The idea of citizen journalism, widely accepted to have been started after the events of September 11, 2001 (Gillmor, 2004), continues to grow rapidly, leaving traditional news outlets with no other options but to quickly adapt. That is starting to rapidly change because news production, reproduction, and distribution are getting so easy. It is to the point where anyone with a smart phone can be a publisher or broadcaster, which opens the lines for two-way communication (Colistra et al., 2017).

Even user-created content has been increasingly disseminated thru internet and social media; however, there have been no finite definitions of UGC. Particularly, one key question is who “the users” are, since anyone with internet connection could express their opinions, share stories and experiences, or even report news. Also not every of them are classified or play their roles as citizen journalists. Therefore, the users who could create or generate content and distributed through internet and social media might include (1) corporations/organizations (state, private and non-profit) with public relations purposes; (2) celebrity and well-known influencers using social media to express their idea and activities, also, for public relations purpose; (3) laypersons or amateur viewers creating or publishing stories in various forms with diverse purposes. This article would like to focus on the last one, UGC creating by laypersons and being widely used in digital broadcasting news programs.

According to NBTC (2016), these audience contents could be classified in three kinds: audience news footage, audience stories or experiences, audience comment.

Audience news footage is a video clip either taken by their phones or retrieved from CCTV or from car dash camera. It could be used together in reporting news. For example: car accidents, crime. Some of them were sent to the broadcasting stations by the creators, and some of them were monitored and taken from social media by the news staff, which will discuss in the next section.

Audience stories or experiences could be voice record, video clips, pictures or text created by the users. It could later become a news report after analysis and investigation, or it could be used to support a current news issue from audiences' viewpoints. For example: several pictures on social media showing various kinds of bags and containers (i.e. sacks of fertilizer bags, bucket, cart) using by many shoppers at the first day of banning plastic bags in supermarket and convenience stores. These became news coverage of how Thai people reacted to the policy.

Audience comment, mostly in form of text, could show public opinion about the current issues. It was usually seen in SMS or Twitter or Hashtag, sending to internet and social media of the broadcasting stations. All these three styles of UGC have been utilized in digital TV news program in various ways, which will be elaborated in the next section.

Utilization of UGC in Broadcasting Newsroom:

A survey done by Media Agency Association of Thailand in 2018 showed that within diversity of digital broadcasting contents Thai viewers consumed news and current affairs at the most (89.3%), followed by series (80.9%) and variety programs (51.7%) consecutively (see Figure 1).

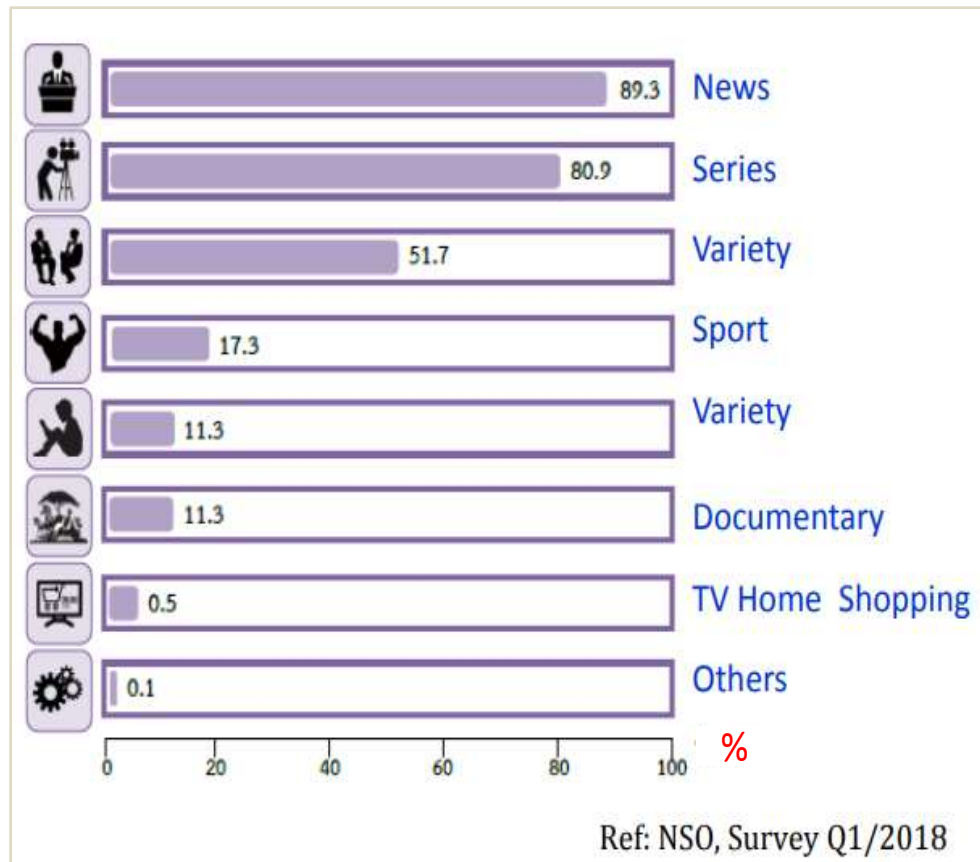


Figure 1:- TV content viewed by category

Source: <https://www.mediaagencythai.com/index.php/adex/in/277-2019-industry-update>

However, their news consumption did not limit to TV set anymore. A study from Hootsuite & We Are Social (2019) showed that mobile subscription of Thai people was 133% and internet penetration was 82%. Thai users also spent around 9 hours per day on the internet and 3 hours per day on social media. The 6 most active social media platforms were: Facebook (93%), Youtube (91%), Line (84%), FB Messenger (72), Instagram (65%), and Twitter (52%).

Due to these social media consumption of Thai audiences, many digital broadcasting news programs have to draw attention from their audiences. Almost every broadcasting newsroom is being forced to react to issues pertaining to UGC newsgathering, verification and dissemination. They adapt their news gathering, producing, and reporting to accommodate the influx of user-generated content (Gillmor, 2004).

Some digital TV restructured their newsroom. For example: assigning a team to be responsible for UGC reports, dissolving news desks (local news and crime) to create a news section monitoring and following UGC. Every commercial digital TV has a part of news programs, especially evening news slot, providing UGC issues (such as “share of the day,” “clip of the day,” “stories from our audiences”)

According to NBTC (2016), the digital broadcasting news room has used UGC in three forms: monitoring, crowd sourcing, and citizen co-operation or participation journalism.

Monitoring:

The most commonly used UGC were video clip, pictures and text posted on social media (Facebook, Twitter) or popular web boards (Pantip.com). News staff was assigned to monitor these media platform, especially those have large numbers of followers or their clips were shared by hundred thousand of users (such as Drama-addict, E-jeab, E-chan, Want to be in limelight come here). The stations used them as news sources. But after monitoring and screening the issues, the news staff has to investigate the issues in depth, including contact the owners of the video

clip or the pictures and ask for interview or go to the site to get in-depth story. This process is to get rid of copyright problem and to confirm the evidences that it is not fake news.

Crowd sourcing:

There were two styles of crowd sourcing. First, the broadcasting stations open every media platform to let any audience sending their content. Most contents the media outlet got were mainly complaints about government officials, public utilities, traffics, etc. Second, in some incidents news anchors announce in their news program asking audiences to send the pictures or the video clips to join the news program (such as an annular solar eclipse occurred on December 26, 2019 visible in Thailand).

Participation journalism or citizen journalism:

The last one is less used by many broadcasting stations, since those who participated need to be trained. It was found in ThaiPBS station, a public broadcasting. ThaiPBS has civic journalism program training occasionally, and the station provides a 30-minute news programs every Monday afternoon for citizen journalists to report news and feature stories from their communities.

Any kind of UGC coming thru the stations goes through similar systems at television news stations, with policies, as well as news directors/executiveproducers acting as gatekeepers, deciding what pieces of user-generated content they will accept and what pieces they will reject. The news stations trying to adapt to the ever changing technology, as to not lose viewers to other media like the Internet and mobile applications. For many stations UGC is viewed as a key news gathering source and it certainly has proven itself as helpful because the contents are closed to ordinary people and catch human interest. However, news selection from UGC is widely based on human interest, oddity, violence, sex, and dramatization, which are the popular topics among netizen; and this reflects in acceleration of viewership or TV rating.

Conclusions:-

Technological advances have made it easier for people to gather news and information, and it is a part of many peoples' daily routines. The technological advancements society has seen over the last several years have played an important part in the way television news has changed. People no longer have to be at home, stationed in front of a television set, to get the news. Now, news is at the world's fingertips at any time. The lack of constraints around news has made it much easier for people to gather and share news with others, including television stations.

Although UGC has been widely used by broadcasting news program, a crucial role played by broadcast journalists is harvesting and checking these contents. The stations exercise extreme caution whendetermining if they're going to use UGC, and those cautions are taken because of concerns about accuracy and credibility. News organizations may question the quality of the user-generated work. Motives for producing UGC could also be seen as skeptical, as news organizations are still adjusting to how to use these pieces in their broadcasts (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2010).

Pros of UGC utilization by broadcasting media outlet are that: it helps balancing news sources, which previously focus on government officials and private sectors. It also mirrors the current interests of public about a particular issue. This creates a place where news is discussed openly and often, in other words, a public sphere. Under this ideal, the hope is that citizens would come together and act as one entity, one public, when they are dealing with topics that are of particular importance to them (Habermas, 2000).In contrast, broadcasting stations should be aware of cons when using UGC in their news programs, particularly, accuracy, quality and credibility of the contents. Monitoring and crowd sourcing are just the first step. Scrutinizing and fact checking are the must before using the contents.

The argument can be made that user-generated content is aiding in the shifting of traditional journalism, but there are still many questions left unanswered about if, and how, it could be incorporated into traditional journalism. One major sticking point in this transition is the fact that there is not one universally accepted definition for user-generated content. Some journalism professionals start questioning that watchdog role and gatekeeper role of Thai media has worsened (Rungfapaisarn, 2019).).In contrast, UGC expanded the opportunity of minority groups and laypersons to voice out their issues through this online public sphere. And their problems gained attention from other publics and the state.

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