

Community television in Thailand: The new challenge of community media in an online world

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Abstract:

The Broadcasting and Telecommunications Research and Development Fund for the Public Interest (BTFP) affiliated of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) granted three community televisions (CTVs) in 3 regions to conduct research about their services and operations and introduced as CTV prototypes. The grant comes with conditions such as having to comply with the guideline for community television principles, but interestingly, the CTVs have to find the broadcasting channel by themselves. Therefore, CTVs have adopted the 'Go online' approach to pursue their broadcasting activities. This is an ongoing challenge for CTVs to use an online platform to broadcast physical community contents. This study found that the CTV prototypes frequently use online manners, such as Post and Share, more than traditional TV broadcasting manners. Most of the sources are from CTVs own production and the outside community, while contents are dominated by community happenings and community warnings and security more than community identity and community business. The official sources are used more than ordinary people sources. There is a very limited of interactions from the CTVs prototypes toward their audiences. The limitations of the operations of CTVs to represent their communities' identities and values. This might limit the establishment of a sense of place and engagement to audiences, particularly those ordinary or voiceless members.

Keywords: community television; community media; online community media; online television; Thailand

INTRODUCTION

The concept is in accordance with principles of community media; either offline or online. Community media should not be for profit, localize its service to a specific community area, and emphasize community engagement and participation. Also, to promote the role of community number in representing and expressing themselves in the media by their own and balancing media landscape in the society (Rodriguez, 2001 cited in Carpentier, 2011, p.99). Being independent of the influence of state and capitalist, and providing services in a specific area (Waltz, 2005 p.2 cited in Carpentier, 2011, p.98). Looking at a social-centric perspective, community media should act as alternative media that focus on voice for the powerless, or ordinary people. They act as a medium to promoting the rights and alternative view in addition to those of mainstream media (Girard, 1992 p. 2 cited in Carpentier, 2011, p. 98). According to the principles and concepts of community media, it shows common characteristics of community media, policy frameworks or media philosophy. Those provide services to communities in a specific area, operates by varying forms of participation from community members as audiences, producers, and managers, reflect the voice of the community and consequently bring about changes and development on the quality of their lives.

Due to the restrictions of laws in access and own broadcasting frequency together with technological changes and the increasing number of online social media users, the CTV practitioners have been forced to go alternatively go to online to serve both community in real world and virtual in the same time. (Bingmann, 2014, Burarak, 2020, Commit to Community television, 2014). Therefore, the emergence of

online media transcended and endlessly extended beyond its physical boundaries, is a new challenge for community TV's practitioners. (Rosenberry, 2012). The operational restrictions and existence, community TV is also challenged by the new world of which the physical boundary of communities is in flux. It apparently affects several aspects of community TV's operation. For one, it requires a business model and a management scheme that are suitable for building senses of place and a feel like home among audiences in both physical and virtual worlds. At the same time, community TV has an obligation to adhere to its philosophical value of community media by involving communities at all levels, the voice for voiceless people, maintaining connectedness with audiences, never neglecting its relations with physical communities. Such philosophical aspects of community media determine whether the community TV is a genuine community-based media or just mirrors a mainstream media (John, Johnson, and Nah, 2014).

The situation of community TV in Thailand, the regulator is the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) specifies that the community sector shall be permitted to use the spectrum for public and community interest purposes. The use proportion of not less than twenty percent of the spectrum that allocated for broadcasting all over the country. (Digital Broadcasting Bureau office of NBTC, 2018). As a result, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) specifies the number of digital television channels in the category of community broadcasting services. There are 12 channels out of 48 digital television channel (12 channels for public broadcasting services, and 24 channels

for commercial broadcasting services) covering 39 main sites digital service areas across the country. However, until the present (2020) the NBTC is still unable to frequency allocate and licensing to the community service sector. They only approved the grantor is Broadcasting and Telecommunications Research and Development Fund for the Public Interest (BTFP) granted to study community TV prototype. Consequently, community TV in this situation is considered as a group of communities that received research grants, so call 'community TV prototype' and become the subjects of study under the community TVs framework of NBTC. There are only three CTVs in three regions in Thailand that take part in this project. They are Phayao community TV for the north, Ubon Ratchathani community TV for the north-eastern, and Andaman community TV for the south of Thailand.

The grant is conditional on certain operations; including that the grantees must operate community TV by complying with the concept and framework of community television specified by the NBTC. It means the grantees must seek to become a public broadcaster at the community level and find their own ways of broadcasting. It shall adopt the core principle that community TV is owned, controlled, and operated by the community. The operation should not be for profit. (Digital Broadcasting Bureau office of NBTC, 2018, pp. 101-102). As a result, the three community TVs prototype opted for online media on Facebook to introduce and present their contents in Thai society. Subsequently, community TVs have to emerge in the online world where the community is no longer defined by physical boundaries. Instead of operating over broadcasting frequency and reaching their audiences via terrestrial television sets for free.

This article aims to study the operation of community TV prototypes that were funded by the regulator. It attempts to address the 2 questions on how community television operators utilize online channels to be as community media. And whether or not they are able to operate in online media platforms and conform to the philosophy and principle of community media. If yes, then how.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of modern digital technology results in a revolution of community and community media. This affects the operations of community media that the term community has not only referred to the physical and geographical community but also now includes the virtual where connects people who live in and out of geographical communities together. So that, the crucial challenge are maintain and generate specialized knowledge of the land in various dimensions and extended beyond the geographic area as well. The community media operators should concerned that their production not only are shaped by geographic territory but also are shaped by the borderless social space in which they exist. (Hess and Waller, 2014)

The study on PATCH.COM, an online community journalism platform could be judged community media. The research review Patch's works to facilitate a sense of community connection with its readers. It could be judged as

community media through a thematic analysis of local news on the Patch sites; story types sourcing, linkages, and interactivity. The implementation of the Patch site shows that its stories displayed a very constrained operation of community journalism. The study concluded that, patch's tendency toward embracing some aspects of traditional journalism routines. Passive of interactivity both editor and reader very few posts to story, strong reliance on official sources. Patch's heavy use of internal links, it means that media cannot go beyond the physical community. (John, Johnson, and Nah, 2014)

The principal role of community media is to establish a relationship and closeness between community members as well as providing a means of local representation by presenting the local community's content. Using online media potentially builds a coordination space that helps promote the sense of place to both physical and virtual community members. (Rennie, 2016, Robinson, 2014, p.117). Therefore, using online, the community media have to build the audience motivations and community media engagement by, for example, providing viewers with opportunities to share and comment on the end of the content.

This practice may, in turn, establish a sense of place to the viewer. (Rennie, 2016, Robinson, 2014, p. 117). The keys responsibility of community media are; to monitor the virtual boundaries for the community, to promote the sense and skills of being desirable community citizens of both the physical and virtual world and to enhance the connection between the members of both worlds through online communication (Robinson, 2014, p. 118). Therefore, community media is expected to be the place to connect members of both worlds under a sense of place and sense of belonging (Robinson, 2014, p. 118). Furthermore, the adopted concept of citizen journalists of community media especially which run on the online platforms can encourage the people in the community to get involved and contribute with the media. The study of the community media in Indonesia- pumu.co is an example of using digital technology also enables the citizen to spread and share their ideas with the media. (Sukmono, Junaedi, 2019) However, the academic (Friedland, 2012 cited in Robinson, 2014, p. 14) points out that the virtual world may cause of reduction of the connection between community members and their physical community. Cause, they are becoming responsive to the virtual community audience. Furthermore, using the digital platform of community media is less likely to present the content of the physical community and this introduces a distance between community members and their physical community. This is a distinctive role of community media using digital platforms in contrast to the original role of community media (Franklin, 2000 cited in Robinson, 2014, p. 114).

The main consideration of community media, either offline or using online platforms, is to create and maintain the connection between the operators and the physical community members. This consideration is recognized as being the core aim of community media since it was established. Moreover, the community media operators have

to remember that community media is a part of the community. They should prioritize and act as a member of the community by, for example, participating with the community's activities. They can then act as the reporter or the supporter of the community as a second priority. (Rennie, 2016, Robinson, 2014).

There are suggestions the effective use of online media for the community media's operators should create the online media space which can foster participation and promote the sense of belonging to community members. Also play attention on interaction with the content producers in order to create the motivation for and maintain the connection and have instant responses and interaction to viewers' feedback in order to create the motivation for and maintain the connection between each other. Lastly, the media organization should directly and consistently communicate and coordinate with the community media and/or content's owners or producers (Robinson, 2014, p. 117).

Therefore, the community media should be a moderator who helps connect the community and the virtual world beyond the definition of the boundary's limitation. (Hess and Waller, 2014). It is a connected community comprised of both the physical and virtual community. Its role is to use media to build and maintain a sense of belonging to a home (Robinson, 2014, p. 115) for both the real and virtual worlds. The concepts and conceptual framework have emerged from the literature and are used as guidelines and criteria to analyze the operations of the online community TV prototypes in Thailand.

Methods

The qualitative approach was adopted for this study. It begins by analyzing contents on Facebook fan pages run by

three CTVs prototypes including www. Facebook. com/ phayaotv/ (Phayao TV) www. Facebook. com/ securedandamancommunitytv, (Andaman Community TV), and www. Facebook. com/ TvChumchonubon (Ubon Ratchathani Community TV). The analysis focuses on community TV's' online contents presented during the 1st – 15th of January 2019 and considers 6 related aspects; which are community areas appeared in the story, the story types, sources, sources of contents, audiences' interaction and community TV's responsiveness. Data were collected in a content analysis form designed and completed by well-trained researchers. The key findings were then compiled, categorized, analyzed, interpreted, and discussed for the implication of community media.

RESULTS

Community TV online exploration

The average online usage of the Facebook page of community TVs prototypes from the beginning to present (January 2019) is 44.60 months and the average usage of Facebook live is 33 months. The total number of audiences (likes) is 102,743, and there are 114,845 followers. Both numbers respectively accounted for 3.00 percent and 3.35 percent of the total population (3,422,181) within community service areas in 5 provinces covering 51 districts (data as of the year 2017). To elaborate, Phayao TV covers one province consisting of 9 districts. Ubon Ratchathani community TV covers one province consisting of 25 districts. Andaman community TV covers three provinces (Krabi, Phang Nga, and Phuket) consisting of 18 districts.

Table 1. Numbers of online community TV viewers, populations, and coverage service areas.

CTV	Physical community scope		Virtual community scope							
	Population*	Area (km ²)	Liked			Growth rate (%)	Followed			Growth rate (%)
			June 2017	Jan 2019	Increase		June 2017	Jan 2019	Increase	
Andaman CTV**	1,075,448	13,449.90	1,010	3,997	2,987	395.75	1,057	4,547	3,490	430.18
Phayao CTV	477,100	6,335.06	26,313	54,220	27,907	206.05	27,088	60,756	33,660	224.29
Ubon CTV	1,869,633	15,774	25,436	44,526	19,090	175.05	26,479	49,542	23,063	187.10
Total	3,422,181	35,558.96	52,759	102,743	49,984	194.74	54,627	114,845	60,218	210.23

*Population in 2017. **Andaman CTV covers 3 provinces.

With regard to the physical community presented in the contents of community TV prototypes, this study found that community contents were covered in 15 districts accounting for 29.41 percent of all 51 districts. The number of stories derived from within service areas is higher than that derived from outside service areas (239: 50 times). Areas most presented in community TV's content are based in urban

districts of each province, particularly where community TV main stations are located. Contents from outside service areas were presented as a result of activities or persons who lives in the physical community; for instance, representative athletes from Ubon Ratchathani took part in a competition in Bangkok. Apart from that, the contents of outside service areas are in the extension service plan.

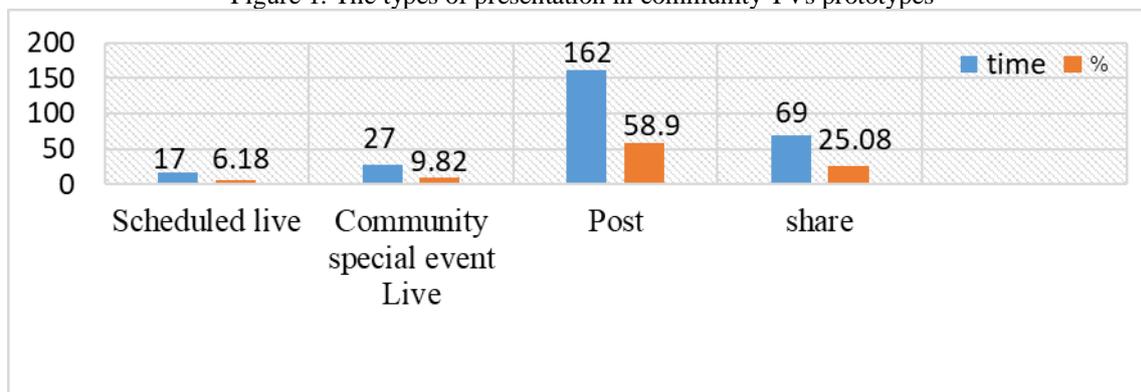
Table 2. Frequency of community service areas have been covered in community TV content

community TV station	Andaman TV	Phayao TV	Ubon TV	Total
The covered areas				
Inside service area				
urban districts	15	58	62	135
Others	12	56	36	104
Outside service area				
Inside country	17	14	15	46
Outside country	0	4	0	4

There are two types of presentation in community TVs prototypes which are traditional TV feature. This type is conducted in two manners. One is scheduled live resembling to program schedules in traditional TV; for example, Phayao TV is scheduled to go live every Tuesday between 12.00 pm to 16.00 pm. Another manner is online community special event Live; for example, live

broadcasting traditional and cultural events occasionally organized in the community. Both are considered typical broadcasting manners in traditional TV channels. Meanwhile, the online feature such as Posts and Shares are presented without specific schedules. They mostly depend on the situation and editors in each community TV.

Figure 1. The types of presentation in community TVs prototypes

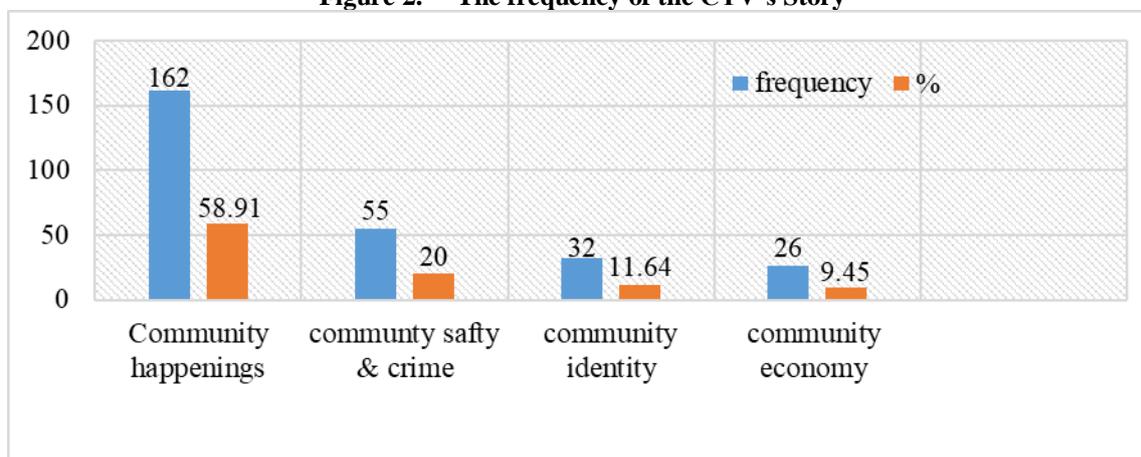


Story and its obtained

The analysis of contents broadcasted by three community TVs prototypes during the 1st – 15th of January 2019 reveals that they presented 275 stories which can be classified into four types. Firstly, community happenings

are the most broadcasted content, community safety/crime and warning stories, community identity, and community economy. The data shown that the story about community happenings are the most broadcasted.

Figure 2. The frequency of the CTV's Story

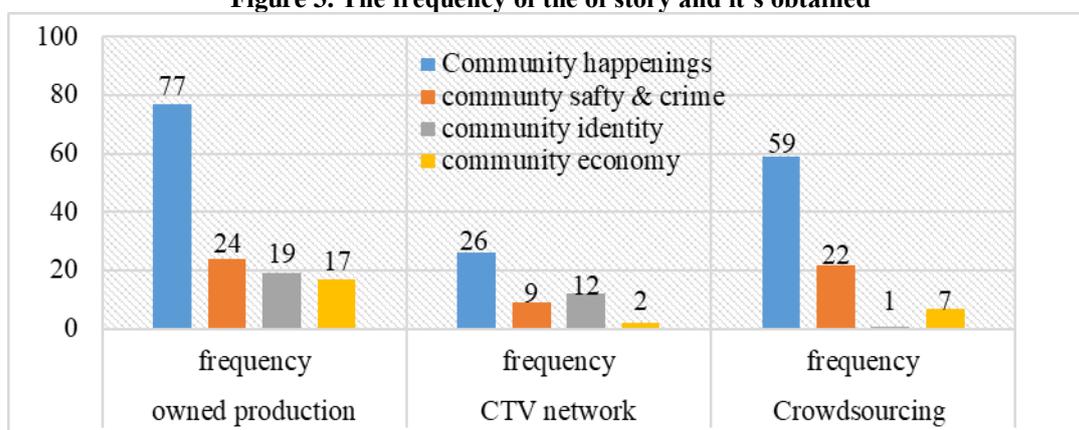


As for the stories were obtained, community TV acquires its stories from three sources, including the community TV own production, community TV networks, and groups/organizations outside the community. It found that the most of sources that the community TV obtained is reliance on their own production. While the stories that come from community TV's networks is lowest.

Analyzing the type of story and its sources, this study found that the type of 162 stories which labelled as community happening stories near a half of the story produced by itself (77 stories) , followed with produced by the outside community (59 stories) and produced by community TV networks (26 stories) respectively. The 55 of communities'

safety/crime and warning stories are the most produced by community TV own production (24 stories), followed produced by the outside community (22 stories), and produced by community TV network (9 stories) respectively. Meanwhile, the stories labelled in community identities 32 stories are mostly produced by community TV itself (19 stories), followed produced by community TV networks (12 stories), and only 1 story produced by outside community source. While 26 stories of labelled in community economy stories are mostly produced by CTV itself (17 stories), followed produced by the outside community (7 stories), and 2 stories are produced by community TV networks.

Figure 3. The frequency of the of story and it's obtained



Interestingly, the story that is produced by the community TV network fallen in the lowest in every type of story but community identities. They raise up to second level (12 stories across to 32 of community identity stories). The finding reveals that community TVs prototypes reliance more on their own production and outside sources than giving their networks and community members' opportunities to participate in the production. However, as ratio of combination of the stories from community TV own production and community TV networks is accounted for 67.64 percent. The percentage required by laws that specified a proportion of no less than 50 percent of contents must be created by its own with coordinated with its community numbers.

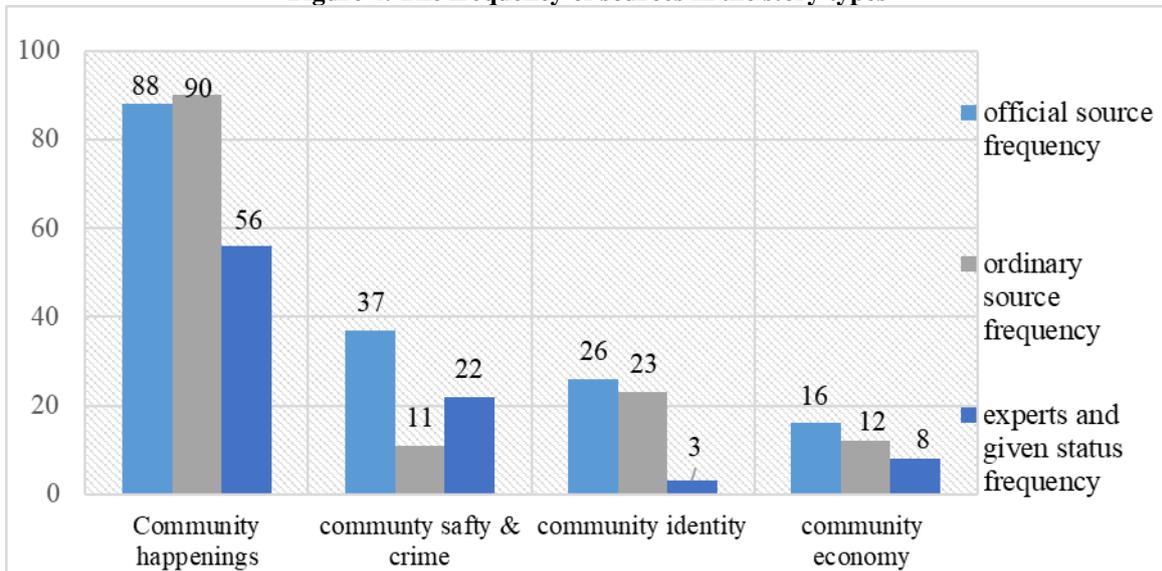
Nonetheless, all types of stories are acquired from community TV own production and outside the community. It is interesting to find that community networks have produced more stories related to community identity than other types of stories. Community TV and community networks then tend to have specific capacity suitable for producing contents related to community identities such as traditions, cultures, and local ways of life more than other contents.

Source in community TV's prototypes story

The examine the sources mentioned in community TVs stories that are in accordance with the basic principle of providing spaces for ordinary people, and the voiceless to voice their concerns in community media platforms. It found that the sources were mentioned 392 times in 275 stories proportionally accounted for 1: 1: 43 ratio. The official source such as local government official, university and school officials are the most mentioned (167 times). While, the lowest mentioned source is experts, private organizations, and famous persons from within and outside the community (89 times).

The types of stories and sources that were mentioned analyzing show that the community happenings stories are the most frequently mentioned sources (234 times) from ordinary people (90 times) followed by the officials sourced (88 times) and experts respectively (56 times). The community safety/crime and warning story mentioned the sources 70 times from the officials (37 times) and experts (22 times), and lowest is ordinary people source (11 times). Meanwhile, the community identity story, mentioned the sources 52 times from officials (26 times), ordinary people (23 times), and experts (3 times). The community economy story mentioned source 36 times from officials (16 times), ordinary people (12 times), and experts (8 times).

Figure 4. The frequency of sources in the story types



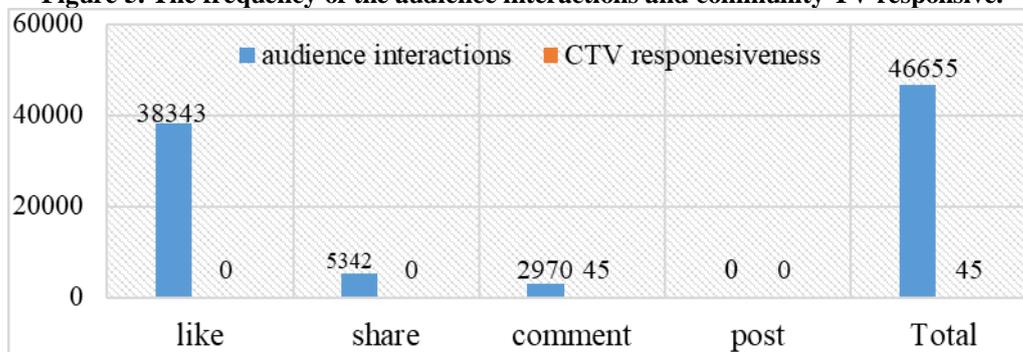
It can be concluded that stories related to community happenings mentioned the most on ordinary people. Meanwhile, the other three categories (safety/ crime and warning, community identity, and community economy) mentioned more on officials than those from ordinary people. Even though the community identity stories are supposed to be derived from ordinary people sources, this study found that they interestingly rely more on officials. Consequently, the stories on community identity presented in CTVs might be largely influenced more by the local official' s perspectives than its ordinary people in the community.

Audience interactions and community TV responsiveness

There are 46,655 times of interaction from audiences towards community TV's 275 stories, including 38,343 likes, 5,342 shares, 2,970 comments, and no posts. The community TV's Post gained the most interaction frequency

(29,938 times) from the audience, follow with shared stories from outside community sources on community TV (8,981 times, then, community special event lives (6,970 times), and lastly, is scheduled lives (766 times). Meanwhile, community TV replied very few is only 45 times to 46,665 times of interaction and to 2,970 comments of the audiences. The types of presentations that received the highest level of community TV responsiveness are similar to the audience's most comments that are community special event lives (19 times) The scheduled lives followed (12 times), then the post (10 times), and shares contents from outside sources (4 times). These findings show that community TV responded the most to audience interaction on contents presented in the type of community special event live. The result shows that such the type could more create an audience's engagement and a sense of belonging to home and toward on community TVs online platform than others.

Figure 5. The frequency of the audience interactions and community TV responsive.



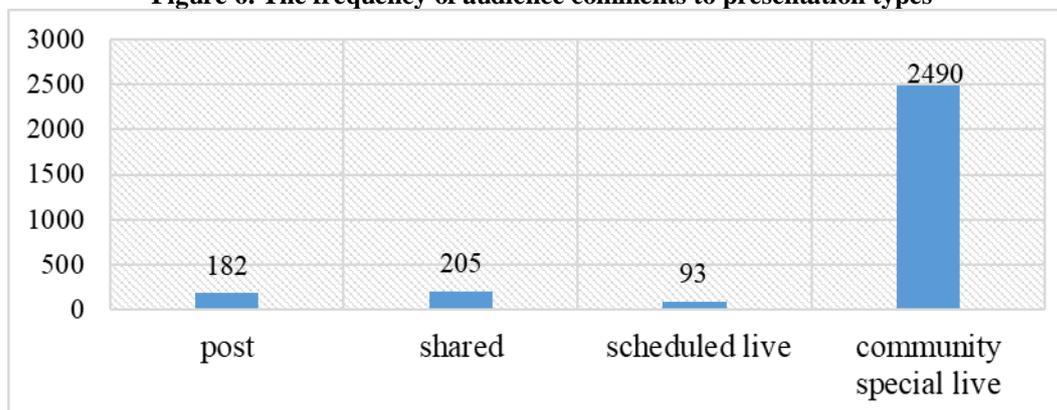
The comment at the end of the story is a form of interaction that is considered to better reflect the sense of citizenship. In 275 stories, there are altogether 2,970 comments or 10.8 times per story on average. They can be classified into two

types including comments with contents and comments with emoticons (2,813: 157 times). The audiences gave the highest number of comments on community special event lives to 2,490 times. The others are; shared posts from

outside sources had 205 comments, posts of stories by own community TV itself received 182 comments, and scheduled lives had only 93 comments. It shows that the audiences would like to express their views towards to physical community rather than to appear in community TV space only. Furthermore, the highest number of audience's

comments on community special event live type indicates that the audiences have a high level of connecting to the physical community. They are expressing views towards community issues and activities in presentation form which the agenda was set up by the community.

Figure 6. The frequency of audience comments to presentation types



Unfortunately, no posts from the audiences on the community TV's sites have been found in this study. The community TV prototypes do not open for its audiences to post any content directly. They encourage the audience to submit to community TV editors instead. The community TV needs to verify the submitted stories before presenting with stated sources/authors original.

It is important to note that the community TVs' operators should recognize the importance of being responsive immediately to all comments. They also need to listen and implement those comments to improve their content production and operations. This may increase the number of community comments, in particular comments with contents, from both the physical and virtual communities. Ultimately, this will enhance the community connectedness and sense of place or belonging to their community TVs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The community TVs prototypes emerged in online media for a period of more than 44 months and utilized Facebook Lives to present their stories in the manner resembling visual and sound broadcasting on televisions for a period of 33 months. They emerge with a capacity to present stories derived from 29.41 percent of all community service areas.

The story presentational type or the broadcasting manner of community TV prototypes mostly imitate the manner of online media (Post and share) rather than that of conventional media (lives and scheduled program) . However, it has been neglecting the relational aspect and capacity of online media as there is a very low rate of responsiveness towards its audiences' engagement. Such direct responsiveness is, in fact, a particular feature of online media that traditional media like TV is incapable of. The interactions from the audiences actually need to be recognized so that there would expectantly be more demand for exchanging and discussion with others especially with the

media teams or organizations. Even though community TV prototypes are able to create a communicative space for the audiences to express their views towards physical community and enhance the sense of belonging and sense of place (community) (Rennie, 2016, Robinson, 2014, p.117), its achievement is fairly limited due to their low rate of responsiveness towards the audiences' interactions and comments. While the number of views and interactions from audiences towards community TV prototypes in the manner of online media are higher than that in the manner of traditional television, the expression of attachment and views towards stories shows more emphasis on the stories related to physical community as seen in the community special events lives which are more effective in weaving the connectedness between people of the physical community and those of the virtual community than scheduled lives controlled by the community TV itself. The failure to recognize audiences' interaction may result in community TV becoming just a community media that operationalizes through an online platform for the purpose of news distribution rather than communication or making dialogue within their space. Moreover, community TV prototypes presented fewer stories produced or presented by the community members than stories produced by community TV and outside the community. They also do not open for the audiences to post on community TV online space. Hence, the only option for community TV nurture and build community engagement and sense of belonging is to comment at the end of the story. The rate of community TV responsiveness towards their audience in online platform is important to factor for strengthening relationships and connections with their audience, which are the community media should be done, whether online or offline media. (Robinson, 2014, p.115).

More than 73.59 percent of all stories related to community happenings and warnings or crimes presented in online

community TV were produced by the community TV itself, and less were produced with the community people's participation or ownership. It indicates that community TV prototypes play a role of mainstream media or local media rather than act as an alternative media for the powerless, the underprivileged or ordinary people to express their alternative views differing from those of existing mainstream media. (Girard, 1992, p.2 cited in Carpentier, 2011, p.98). As a communicative tool for change makers in the civil society sector, community media should be owned by the people, mobilized by the citizens' power, aimed at making transformative changes, and emerged to disrupt the media landscape in the society. (Rodriguez, 2001 cited in Carpentier, 2011, p.99, Sukmono, Junaedi, 2019)

However, the stories presented in online community TV in this study indicate that community TV prototypes still emphasize the physical community as being the anchor to connect both the physical and virtual community members. These operational practices of community TVs provide physical community members with opportunities to view themselves and to introduce a pride in their community. It also promotes a sense of place and connectedness with their hometowns for the virtual community members (Rennie, 2016, Robinson, 2014). This finding is inconsistent with the concept which asserts that when bringing the community into the virtual world, the physical community members become less likely to commit and engage with their communities. They may become responsive to the virtual community and are more likely to engage with the people from the virtual community. Ultimately, the physical community becomes less important. (Franklin, 2000 cited in Robinson, 2014, p.114, Friedland, 2012 cited in Robinson, 2014, p. 114). Thus, considering principles of community TV that it should be owned, controlled and, operated by the community with the framework of community participation in media for strengthening their community. It could say that community TV's achievement is still far behind. They tend to act more like local media in accordance with Patch.com (John, Johnson, and Nah, 2014) as elaborated in the following. Firstly, community TV prototypes provided more space for the officials and experts and privileged than ordinary people. Secondly, community TV prototypes emphasized more of the mainstream media roles such as informing and community surveillance than of the community media's roles such as promoting communicative democracy and strengthening people and community. Thirdly, community TV prototypes pay less attention to interaction and responsiveness with their audiences, it could be affected by a sense of belonging among audiences. Fourthly, Community participation in community TV's production is very limited in comparison with the number of stories sourced by community TV and outsider community organizations. Lastly, community TV provided links mostly presented to audiences as if they were community TV's own contents rather than used to expand the view of the physical community into a virtual one. The study indicated that community TV in Thailand is facing not only ignored by laws but also struggles to maintain the medium in an online space such as audience connectedness, building a sense of

place, and reserve the community media philosophy as well. There are factors that put new challenges forward to both community TV practical and regulation policy.

However, please note that three community TV prototypes in this study are still under the phase of the project of study. They are still facing and struggling to identify the possibility of operational within limit any resources and to insist on the community broadcasting service ratified by law. They work under a period of hardship; the supporting from the legal and regulatory side still little and ignored and inadequate the understanding of community TV in Thai society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to this study, there are recommendations for community TV operators and those who interested in community TV. Firstly, community person, groups and networks are key to the production of community TV. So the community TVs should promote community participation in its production and demote its dependency on the outside community. Secondly, community TV should emphasize on principles and philosophy specially to act as a media for communicative democracy. It could help for the position itself as alternative media for community people, and to empower ordinary people to spread and share their own perspectives and demands. Lastly, it is important to note that the community TVs' operators should recognize the importance of being responsive to its audience. They also need to listen and implement those comments to improve their content production and operations. This may increase the number of community numbers comments, in particular, quality comments, from both the physical and virtual communities. This will enhance the community connectedness and sense of belonging to community TVs.

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The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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