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TRANSNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND ITS IMPACT ON THAILAND'S PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAMMING

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Bangkok, Thailand

Within the past decade, Thailand has witnessed a rapid growth of new media technologies, especially direct satellite broadcasting, and cable television service that have been enormously affecting the media environment in Thailand.

Prior to the launch of THAICOM I Satellite in 1995, Thailand has been renting channels from neighboring satellites such as Intelsat, Palapa for its telecommunication and entertainment TV broadcasts.

Thailand’s satellite TV broadcast has come to a great step when THAICOM I and II were launched in 1995 and 1998. Services available through these satellites are:

1. Broadcast of educational programs on Thailand TV Channel 11 and on THAICOM I (Educational Channel 1)

2. 24-hour service Cable TV programs on
   - 5 IRC Channels, and
   - 5 Thai Sky Channels

These channels will be increased in number when the THAICOM III and IV are launched.

Apart from these, the Universal Cable TV Network Cable TV Group (UTC) has recently launched in Thailand a fiber optic cable TV service for residents of metropolitan Bangkok area. UTC is broadcasting on 2 channels of various types of TV programs. In addition, UTC is also providing interactive TV service, i.e., Video on Demand, Pay-per-View, Teleshopping, Video Game, and Home Banking. IRC and Sky TV are also developing plans to expand into Interactive TV service in future.
The following are some information on current satellite and cable TV services in Thailand (as of 20 Sept. 1995):

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<th>THAI</th>
<th>LTV</th>
<th>THAI AY</th>
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<tr>
<td>- OPERATORS</td>
<td>SHINAWATRA</td>
<td>UNIVERSAL TELECOM</td>
<td>SALE BITE CO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BOUNIETR</td>
<td>CABLE TV ASIA</td>
<td>NETWORK PUBLIC CO.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- MS DBL SUBSCRIBERS</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- MONETRY FEE</td>
<td>26 baht</td>
<td>26 baht</td>
<td>26 baht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ENTRAMATION FEE</td>
<td>3000 baht</td>
<td>3000 baht</td>
<td>3000 baht</td>
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<tr>
<td>- SIGNAL DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM</td>
<td>NSS</td>
<td>NIN</td>
<td>NSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SPECIAL SERVICE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>-</td>
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Via two national broadcasting, Thai viewers have got access to a greater choice of programmes from abroad. These programmes are being broadcast over Asia and the Pacific region. Such programmes are Star Movies, Prime Sports and BBC World programmes from STEP TV. Apart from this, Thai viewers have other choices of programmes from HBO, Discovery Channel, News from CNN International, sports coverage from ESPN, and cartoons from the Cartoon Network.
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONAL BROADCASTING

Satellite services from abroad have received mixed responses from Thai viewers. The programmes are usually popular with younger audiences, while the older generation worries about the impact on culture. There has been a growing concern about the potential erosion of indigenous traditional and cultural values and the loss of cultural identity. It is evident that exposure to modern media has caused some weakening effects on our traditional foundation of family cohesion, societal stability, and cultural identity.

To this vital issue, Dr. Sippamanda Ketudat, a great academic of Thailand, stated in his assessment that "education holds the key, not only in the teaching of necessary knowledge, but perhaps more importantly, in the cultivation of ethical and moral principles among Thailand's new elite."

THE NEW ASIAN AUDIENCE AND HOW PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAMMES ARE MEETING THEIR NEEDS

The phenomenal economic growth in the region is bringing about an improved standard of living. The ways of life of people and their economic, social, political, and other institutions have changed rapidly. This phenomenon has consequently raised the expectations of Asian consumers including those in Thailand, especially the residents in Bangkok and urban dwellers.

The new communication technologies have broadened the media choices of consumers. Nowadays, Thai viewers with access to satellite and cable TV channels of transnational broadcasts have a much greater choice of programmes for viewing. Hence, a growing demand for quality programmes.
Evolving Role of Public Service Programming

Amid the current changing media environment in Asia and the Pacific region, where the public service broadcasting organizations are competing directly with the multiplicity of private broadcasting channels and new media such as direct broadcast satellites and cable TV, the public service programming will have, and have to find the best feasible ways to respond to growing competition from local and abroad. The following are some recommendations on various topic items:

Policies and Regulations
- There should be clear and precise policies for the development and implementation of public service programming;
- Careful regulations on various topics and practical monitoring systems must be made to enable smooth operations of broadcasting services, both for public and private broadcasting organizations;
- Special emphasis should be given to the extent of the policy to be applied against violence, horror, and sex in cable and satellite television;
- Since Cable TV is a selective market, care has to study carefully whether we will be more flexible or more strict with the policy for cable and satellite TV.
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONAL BROADCASTING

- A strategy to prevent undesirable social and cultural impact might be possible through the provision of media literacy for viewers, enabling them to be selective to programmes with useful information or harmless entertainment.

THE OVERALL IMPACT OF PRIVATISATION

In Thailand, the privatisation of the public service broadcasting has resulted, as in many other countries, both in positive and negative changes in the broadcasting environment.

POSITIVE CHANGES:
- more variety of programme content and format of presentation;
- more choices of programmes for viewers;
- more creativity in terms of production techniques;
- more budget free commercials to invest in production facility.

NEGATIVE CHANGES:
- consumption habit having been cultivated among audience;
- most of the time, top priority has been given to commercial success rather than to the real values that the audience should get from the programmes.
With approximately 40 years of public broadcasting service in Thailand, it is vital that we keep up to date in media science and know-how, especially at the time when competition with the private broadcasting organizations is very high. As the result of such competition, various operators in broadcasting service, especially those in private sectors are taking an aggressive approach to holding audience share over the domestic private networks.

According to such high competition, the public broadcasting service certainly have to find certain strategies to improve its programming service both in term of quality and quantity, such as

- expanding transmission coverage;
- increasing visual quality of the reception;
- developing programme content and format of presentation through creativity and reliability;
- producing quality programmes that really help upgrade quality of life of the people;
- staff development for more effective performance;
- broadening programme service tailored for interest and need of specific audience groups e.g. programmes for farmers, children and youths, elderly viewers ...
- providing a proper balance of education, information and entertainment programme segment for various viewers groups.