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

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Within the past decade, Thailand has witnessed a dramatic 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 THAIKOM I Satellite in 1993, 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 leap when THAIKOM I and II were launched in 1993 and 1994. Services available through these satellites are:

1. Broadcast of educational programmes on Thailand TV Channel 11 and on THAIKOM I (Education Channel 1)
2. 24-hour service Cable TV programmes on
 - 8 IEC Channels, and
 - 9 Thai Sky Channels

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

Apart from this, the Universal Cable TV Network Company (UTV) has recently launched in Thailand a fiber optic cable TV service for residents of metropolitan Bangkok area. UTV is broadcasting on 9 channels of various types of TV programmes. In addition, UTV is also providing interactive TV service, i.e., Video On Demand, Pay-Per-View, Teleshopping, Video Game, and Home Banking. IEC and Sky TV are also developing plans to expand into interactive TV service in future.

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The following are some information on current satellite and cable TV services in Thailand (as of 20 Sept.1995) :

	HBO	UTV	THAI SKY
- STARTING DATE	Sept.1989	June 1995	April 1990
- OPERATORS	SHINAWATRA SATELLITE CO.	UNIVERSAL CABLE TV NETWORK PUBLIC CO.	TELECOM ASIA
- NO. OF SUBSCRIBERS	150,000	-	60,000
- MONTHLY FEE	US\$ 32	US\$ 32	US\$ 32
- INSTALLATION FEE	US\$104	US\$104	US\$104
- SIGNAL DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM	MMDS & DTH	Fiber Optic	MMDS & DTH
- SPECIAL SERVICE	-	Interactive TV Service	-

Via free 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 PBC World programmes from STV 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 response 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 mass media has caused some weakening effects on our traditional foundation of family cohesion, societal stability, and cultural identity.

To this vital issue, Dr. Sippaononda 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 ethics 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 phenomena 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 the 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 home 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 of various topics and practical monitoring systems must be made to enable smooth operations of broadcasting service, 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 to cable and satellite television ;
- Since Cable TV is a selective market , thus we have 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 programming 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 term of production techniques;
- more budget from commercials to invest in production facility

NEGATIVE CHANGES :

- consumerism 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.

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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 viewer groups.
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