

Guidelines for News Coverage of Beliefs and Superstitions

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ABSTRACT

As a multicultural society, Thailand embraces a variety of cultural beliefs. Furthermore, common practices of Thai people are characterized by beliefs and superstitions that confer their own distinctiveness; this is the other side of the coin that virtually reflects the act of violence. Thai society is afflicted with numerous detrimental effects caused by news coverage on superstitious beliefs. These include gambling, frauds, and exploitation of goods and services. The Thai media should offer a balance between presenting cultural diversity within the context of these beliefs and superstitions that still exist in society. Accordingly, as a watchdog, the content relating to beliefs and superstitions should be screened in order to eliminate the harmful effects on society. This study thus seeks to formulate comprehensive guidelines for mass media entities regarding the presentation of belief-relevant content. In accordance with methodologies, this involves a comprehensive analysis of relevant documents and television content, as well as focus group discussions. The findings of the study demonstrated that there are six aspects of media ethics that can be used to regulate programs of news reporting on digital television to be presented to the media regulation body of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) in Thailand. The six aspects are exhibited within the framework of the following principles: accuracy, objectivity, human rights, diversity, balance and fairness, and social responsibility.

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Introduction

“Each hour of the morning news program is devoted to superstitious news content for approximately 2.23 minutes” (Media Alert, 2021).

In Thai society, media depicting diverse beliefs and superstitions is highly popular. Frequently, when a superstition-belief program appears on television, it states, “This is a personal belief. Please use your own discretion.” On the one hand, this narrative discourse contributes to acceptance of the content of superstition-belief programs in the media. Consequently, the news programs use this strategy to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the content of their stories. In addition, the media pushes the responsibility onto the viewers to use discretion when viewing diverse content (Media Alert, 2021). There is an issue here since elements of superstition and belief are not restricted to entertainment media; instead, they are often woven into factual programming, such as news broadcasts and documentaries. A blending of superstition and factual reporting in coverage of accidents, crimes, and disappearances could lead individuals to erroneously interpret these beliefs as factual. The concept of superstition has a significant disparity with fact, to the point of being almost incompatible with reality, based on its societal impact and responsibility.

As a matter of fact, the topics of belief and superstition fall under the categories of “oddity” and “human Interest” when evaluated against the principles of news value within journalism. Nevertheless, these principles have been heavily critiqued in contemporary academic discourse for fostering confusion, proving unproductive, and contributing to social responsibility issues. The advancement of modern communications technology has blurred the boundaries between superstition-belief programs and other factual programs, which has led to an increased severity of these problems. News programming has undergone significant changes, particularly with regard to the types of news. A former priority was given to presenting factual information and public issues related to current events. However, the current trend in news presentation is to focus on topics relating to social trends and public interest,

often without taking into account the potential benefits of these reports to society.

Currently, news presentations go beyond simply reporting various events to an audience. At the same time, these reports have increasingly incorporated elements of belief and the supernatural, which are often unsupported by empirical evidence and scientific research. The content may be related to spirits, ghosts, spirit possessions, fortune-telling, mysteries, talismans, lucky charms, and objects believed to be connected with sacred entities. Further, rituals originating from certain group beliefs, fortune-seeking behaviors, numerological interpretations, and risk-taking activities are frequently exhibited. Providing such content to the public carries risks of creating confusion and possibly influencing attitudes and beliefs regarding the conduct of life. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that these topics have been closely woven into Thai culture and lifestyle for a very long time. Moreover, they are capable of capturing an audience's interest and attracting them to follow along.

Moreover, it has become increasingly popular for news reporters to incorporate beliefs and superstitions in their stories in order to create a point of difference. In spite of the fact that public attitudes, beliefs, customs, culture, and religion hold value, the media can present them in a factual manner without creating dramatic issues that would lead people to believe that these beliefs are primary concerns. Instead of reporting on case progress, early prevention, or comprehensive coverage of all aspects of crime, this often results in deflection from crime news to superstitions and lottery interpretations.

As traditional media organizations are challenged by new digital competitors, such as social media platforms, web boards, and websites, the phenomenon of selecting and intensifying the presentation of superstition-related topics has escalated. It is due to the greater freedom provided by these platforms in the presentation of news that many audiences have turned away from traditional media and decided to choose digital media over traditional media because of their preference for the volume, diversity, and “spice of the presentation” related to

superstition. The traditional media is, on the other hand, strictly regulated by ethical standards and regulation. As a result of this phenomenon, traditional media and online media are competing in presenting superstition-related topics in increasingly intense, emotionally provocative, and sensational ways in order to gain market share in their respective businesses, often neglecting the social implications of the topic.

Although the presentation of superstition and gambling contents in news programming is not illegal, it can lead to a deviation in the attention of the audience. As a consequence, the scientific approach to inquiry and the verification of facts, as well as other structural issues within the reported story, may be marginalized, not discussed, or not receive the societal attention they deserve. Meanwhile, it could establish work standards or guidelines for successful news reporting that frequently associates news with superstition and good fortune in order to capture the attention of viewers. Consequently, this leads to an endless cycle of media consumption, along with societal attitudes and behaviors regarding superstition for the sake of engaging in gambling (Media Alert, 2021).

In the past, Thailand's Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has fined television stations for allegedly violating Article 37 of the Broadcasting and Television Business Act of 2008. As well, the commission has written letters to licensed operators to request cooperation or to warn them to be cautious when presenting anything related to lottery predictions or that gravitating towards superstition. Nevertheless, some media channels still produce content based on superstitious disciplines and belief systems. It is often difficult for them to distinguish between fact and opinion in their presentations. Although Article 37 is the primary regulation that governs program content, the reality is that law enforcement or penalties cannot be applied to every case. The practical issues arising from different social contexts make it difficult for television operators with broadcasting licenses to understand and follow relevant laws. As a result, the public may be misled or confused by their presentation of content. Although

news related to beliefs in superstitious disciplines can sometimes be deemed "content that must not be broadcast", it does not necessarily constitute such content unless explicitly stated that it guides or incites viewers to take actions that interfere with peace or violate good morality. For example, hints on lottery numbers can be included or gambling can be promoted. In light of this, it is imperative for Thai society today to formulate guidelines for news coverage of beliefs and superstitions. As an intermediary, the media needs to follow these guidelines to fulfill its obligations to society without adversely impacting Thailand's diverse cultural roots.

Research Objective:

To develop guidelines for presenting beliefs and superstitions content in news coverage.

Literature Review

Definition of Superstition

Based on the definition provided in Royal Institute Dictionary (Ratchabandit tayasathan, 2011), the term "superstition" refers to "beliefs in spells and incantations that are believed to have originated in Brahmanism, particularly the Atharva Veda. The practice of these rituals is intended to bring about good fortune, to protect oneself from harm, or to cause harm to others." The term "belief" refers to a deeply ingrained sentiment that humans have towards influential and supernatural entities. Human behavior can be influenced by these beliefs in a variety of ways. In the history of humanity, belief has been present since the dawn of time, gradually transforming into clearly defined belief systems over time. This refers to the notion of "Super Naturalism", which is the belief that forces beyond human control exist and that their power is accepted. In addition, beliefs are regularly manifested through respect, worship, rituals, and behaviors that conform to the norms perceived to be appropriate for this particular belief system. Most beliefs are passed down from generation to generation

and might be influenced by the social context of the time.

In the study conducted by Attakorn (1977), beliefs and superstitions were classified into 11 distinct categories: 1) Personal Beliefs, such as those related to naming, spirits, birth, and death; 2) Environmental Beliefs, which pertain to various events, such as patterns and omens; 3) Divine Beliefs, involving deities, angels, magic, and spells; 4) Gender-related Beliefs; 5) Health and Well-being Beliefs, such as the notion that individuals with large ears will have a long life; 6) Luck-related Beliefs, for instance, fortune indicated by the croaking of a lizard or the calling of a crow; 7) Dream-related Beliefs, such as perceiving an embracing snake in a dream as indicative of finding a partner; 8) Amulet and Talisman Beliefs; 9) Ghost and Spirit Beliefs; 10) Heaven and Hell Beliefs; and 11) Astrological Beliefs.

As can be seen from the above definitions, the term “superstition” is closely related to beliefs and their acceptance as truth in the absence of empirical validation through scientific methodology, thereby identifying it as supernatural in nature. Such acceptance is comprised of thoughts and emotions, which may be referred to as faith, exerting a predominant influence over human cognition and actions. Thus, superstition manifests in aspects that relate to human psychology, for instance, beliefs regarding ghosts, but also extends to objects and phenomena, such as talismans, amulets, and incantations.

The role of belief in superstition within Thai society does not rest upon a necessity for empirical validation but rather constitutes a form of belief that endeavors to establish itself amidst the societal context and serves as a social regulatory norm. The belief in ghosts and supernatural powers, firmly rooted in ancient culture, remains prevalent in society despite technological advancements. In contrast, as technology advances, it is increasingly used as “a medium” to “reproduce” such beliefs (Oitekkeng, 2021). The narratives surrounding luck-related or superstitious beliefs are often captivating and piqued individuals’ curiosity due to their supernatural, enigmatic, and yet, congruent nature with deeply held beliefs in Thai society. In addition to repeatedly

reiterating such content, mass media reinforces and perpetuates these beliefs, making them a part of the Thai culture as a whole. In addition, Ajarayutt (2018) investigated the reproduction of issues related to beliefs and the presentation of numbers for fortune-telling to recipients in online newspapers. The study identified that such content could be delineated into seven principal issues: 1) Accident-related issues; 2) Issues concerning plants with abnormal characteristics; 3) Animal-related issues; 4) Issues pertaining to legends; 5) Ghosts and spirit-related issues; 6) Direct presentation of numbers; and 7) Other issues. All of these are included in the news component of peculiar phenomena.

Popularity of Superstition Programs in Thailand

Media Alert (2021) conducted a study on four morning news programs between May 31, 2021, and June 4, 2021, as well as between June 14 and June 18, 2021. The study found that issues related to superstitious beliefs were featured as follows:

1) A total of 102 news items contained content related to superstition, amounting to approximately 218 minutes. The program *Morning News Talk Channel 8* had the highest number of superstitious news items, totaling 48, accounting for 119.47 minutes. Conversely, *Morning Story Today* had the least superstitious content, with 10 news items totaling 10.47 minutes. Upon examining the content of the 102 news items on superstition, it was found that 77 news items, constituting 75.5% of the total, were related to numbers and gambling. Most of these items were hints about lottery numbers, both directly and indirectly, especially on days preceding and following the announcement of the government lottery results. Post-lottery announcement days typically featured reports on jackpot winners, accompanied by their origins and methods of gambling, often linked to superstitious beliefs.

2) There was a significant news coverage related to superstition (with at least 10 news items) on the days when the government lottery results were announced (June 1 and June 16, 2021). This was followed by the days preceding the lottery result announcements (May 31, 2021) and the days immediately after the announcement of

the results (June 17, 2021). The trend indicates a heightened focus on superstitious beliefs in relation to lottery events, suggesting a correlation between these events and the increase in superstitious news reporting.

3) The most common type of superstitious news content involved sacred objects and places that were created and enshrined for reverence and worship. Examples include shrines to local gods and goddesses, Naga serpents, and Golden Child spirits, etc. Such news, often centered around rituals of worship to seek blessings or fortune, accounted for 31 items. This was followed by news featuring amulets, talismans, and sacred objects, along with content about animals exhibiting unusual characteristics/behaviors and rituals or beliefs of specific groups, each of these categories comprising 15 news items. In contrast, content related to fortune-telling and predictions was the least common among these categories, with only 3 news items.

Another case frequently reported by the media and associated with superstition involves news of missing persons, often interlinked with superstitious beliefs. The pursuit of missing persons can also be impacted by superstition. The families of missing persons may seek psychological refuge and answers through alternative means when they do not receive regular updates from police officials. As a result of media coverage that is not factual, but rather opinionated, perpetrators can be stigmatized as supernatural beings. Occasionally, predictions based on beliefs can divert officials' search efforts (Lumchomkae, 2021).

Media Theories Analyzing Beliefs and Superstition in News Coverage

As another aspect of the rendering of superstitious and mystical content as credible and seamless, to the point where the distinction between reality and simulated reality is blurred, visual techniques such as virtual reality or immersive graphics are used to simulate events in a lifelike manner during news and documentary reporting. This process involves not only the simulation of events based on narratives, but also the incorporation of predictions from

fortune-tellers, dreams, omens, beliefs, and luck into the process. As defined by Baudrillard (1994), a postmodern theorist, simulation refers to a sign system that creates a false sense of reality through media and digital technology, producing a model of reality that is simulated and becomes more real than the entity being replicated, producing a state of hyperreality. Thus, this state of hyperreality becomes a form of illusion as it becomes truer than true. A simulation process becomes compulsive when it appears in the realm of reality, as in news and documentaries. Thus, beliefs and mysticism presented in the media develop a sense of hyperreality. By this means, modern humans are unable to discern what truth actually is, since they live in a world of "simulacra," where images and symbols are presented as "truth" instead of reality.

Furthermore, the theory of media reveals the concept of media framing as the organization of news using specific methods of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text. (Entman, 2002). The narratives or events presented through a particular frame of thought, belief, ideal, or objective might not always reflect the actual occurrences. Instead, they are often constructed from certain events, embellished, emphasized, and framed to assume significance in society (Kaewthep, 2009). Considering the intense competition in the media, as well as the proliferation of presentation platforms and the diverse interests of the audience, a significant amount of news becomes agenda-driven, shaped by a variety of factors, often deviating from the truth. Emotions and sentiments are becoming increasingly important in order to capture ratings and engagement across a variety of platforms. The integration of superstitious beliefs into news programming can be viewed as a degradation of the ethical standards of news, which traditionally play an important role in setting societal agendas.

Through examining causality from the perspective of the Political Economy of Communications (Kaewthep & Hinwiman, 2017), it becomes evident that economic necessity is an important factor motivating

media organizations to develop operational structures and organizational cultures that facilitate the presentation of occultism in this manner. The modern media industry is primarily supported by advertising revenue and supporting income derived from audience popularity. As a consequence, media organization executives tend to choose topics related to occultism that are “marketable” and “low-investment” (meaning they are popular among people and also have low costs in terms of information gathering, filming, and news reporting). By using a variety of techniques designed to attract the audience’s attention, such as vibrant language, emotional arousal, dramatic narration, simulating images that seem real, emphasizing numbers that are easy for the audience to interpret, etc., ratings and income can be guaranteed with minimal risk.

Regulation of Media Presenting Superstitious Beliefs Content in Thailand

A recent analysis by iLaw Freedom (2019) indicates that the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) coup d'état of 2014 has significantly changed the regulations of media in Thailand, particularly the role played by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC). It was emphasized to oversee content related to politics and control government criticism, while prioritizing stability issues. Thus, other media issues, such as superstition, overly exaggerated advertisements, or vulgar language, will be left unsupervised and uncontrolled. In comparison with political news, the NBTC did not prioritize and did not violate Section 37 of the Broadcasting Act of 2008. While the coup was taking place, the media attempted to avoid reporting news related to government politics or criticizing the work of the government, instead choosing to report on other issues. These included news related to occultism, fortune, sacred objects, and creating excessive belief because there was a large following. Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, which occurred during a time of relatively depressed economic conditions, job losses, and income shortages, caused the public to seek emotional support, emphasizing the importance of gambling, trying their luck, and wearing

amulets during that period. In response to these factors, the media have presented more emphasis on occultism and belief in order to satisfy the needs of the people while neglecting their ethical obligations.

In the year 2018, the National Press Council of Thailand endorsed and implemented guidelines on the presentation of news and images concerning superstition, numerology, and lottery gambling. Media outlets have increased their presentation of information, news and images about superstition and beliefs in occultism, as well as offering information supporting the prediction of government lottery numbers. The Ethics Committee believed that presenting news in such a manner might violate the Newspaper Profession Ethics Regulations of the National Press Council of Thailand, 2016, which states that “newspapers should avoid disseminating advertisements that may be interpreted as attempting to deceive readers into believing in superstition.” When considered in conjunction with the current guidelines of the national press council of Thailand on presenting news and images regarding superstition, numerology, and lottery gambling (National Press Council of Thailand, 2022), The National Press Council of Thailand believes the impact of presenting superstition-related topics and linked gambling is consistent with the results of the study by Media Alert (2021) in two important aspects, namely: 1) up to 75.5% of news reports related to superstitions are associated with lotteries and luck-chasers, and 2) the amount of news coverage about superstitious beliefs increases on days when government lottery results are announced, followed by the days leading up to the announcement. A significant portion of this involves direct and indirect lottery hints as well as media reporting on prize winners in the days following the announcement of the lottery results.

The National Press Council of Thailand’s guidelines indicate that media should refrain from reporting personal news content involving dreams, spirits, supernatural phenomena, or religious beliefs. It is also recommended that media outlets exercise caution when reporting phenomena involving mass pilgrimage to sacred places, as well as reports claiming that individuals

possess supernatural powers linked to mysterious supernatural entities., as follows: (National Press Council of Thailand, 2022).

- Avoid presenting news and personal information about those who have won gambling lotteries, or information on obtaining numbers and methods, especially dreams, spirits, supernatural phenomena, or personal beliefs.
- Be cautious when presenting information about phenomena involving mass movements to sacred sites, encouraging gambling, purchasing lottery tickets, or promoting superstitious beliefs that cannot be verified.
- Be cautious about presenting news from individuals who claim to have special qualifications related to information on occult beliefs and predicting gambling outcomes.
- Include scientific explanations or verifiable evidence in news stories that deal with supernatural phenomena, miraculous effects, or strange occurrences.

The conclusion can be drawn based on an analysis of the literature regarding the presentation of superstitious beliefs related to gambling numbers. Despite the National Press Council of Thailand's guidelines on the presentation of superstitious beliefs in media professional organizations, these guidelines do not cover all aspects and lack a systematic monitoring and inspection mechanism. Despite the existence of a mechanism for receiving complaints, no reports were found regarding the results of the investigation or the determination of measures to suppress media behavior that violated the agreement or ethical regulations. It is important that the regulatory mechanism of the agency with authority to regulate the media function effectively in conjunction with guidelines that can be applied to the media in practice.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to formulate guidelines for the portrayal of superstition and belief systems in news coverage. The process involved reviewing relevant documents to understand the current situation and the impact of news coverage on superstitions within Thai society. A content analysis method was used to study the content of news programs that presents stories about beliefs and superstitions between July 2022 and September 2022. The sample was selected from five broadcast stations: Channel 3HD, Channel 7HD, Workpoint, Thairath TV, and Amarin TV. It consisted of the highest rated news programs that discussed beliefs and superstitions, both morning and evening.

Moreover, focus groups were constituted of digital terrestrial television operators in the commercial sector as well as public service operators. In order to conduct the research, focus groups were conducted with a variety of stakeholders. A total of 129 participants were involved in the focus group discussions, comprising: 1) 30 individuals from terrestrial digital television commercial service operators, 2) 37 individuals from terrestrial digital television public service operators, 3) 30 stakeholders such as consumer networks, media watchdog groups, and civil society members, and 4) 32 academics and experts in relevant fields.

Findings: Guidelines for News Coverage of Beliefs and Superstitions

From synthesizing data through document analysis, content analysis, and group discussions, it was found that the principles of media ethics in presenting content on beliefs and superstition, as well as the practices of journalists in news programs, should converge to respect cultural diversity and the role of mass media. Therefore, the approach to presenting content on superstitious beliefs in this report should be guided by six ethical frameworks, as follows:

1. Accuracy

Superstition and belief systems should be accurately presented by the mass media. To accomplish this, data had to be represented comprehensively and impartially without distortion, embellishment, or replication of misconceptions that could lead to erroneous perceptions about these topics. It was important that the content was designed in a way that enabled the audience to distinguish between the factual elements of superstition and belief systems from ingrained false stereotypes. It was important to provide the audience with options and to assist them in exercising judgment when determining the validity of facts related to superstition and belief systems from various academic disciplines, such as science, religion, sociology, and anthropology, among others.

Guidelines for News Coverage

1.1 A comprehensive and thorough investigation of information was required before presenting content associated with beliefs and superstitions.

1.2 A presentation of content concerning beliefs and superstitions should not have included misinformation that deviated from the facts or distracted viewers from essential truths by substituting superstition-related narratives for them. For instance, the redirection of crime news to superstition themes, such as fortune-telling or lottery predictions, could in certain cases have impeded the proper investigation of crimes.

1.3 Content concerning beliefs and superstitions needed to be presented in a way that facilitated viewers' distinction between factual elements and myths or misconceptions incorporated within the event.

1.4 Presented content related to beliefs and superstitions should have incorporated interdisciplinary data, including information from science, religion, sociology, social science, and anthropology, among others, as tools and perspectives for demonstrating and examining these beliefs.

1.5 It was recommended that content relating to beliefs and superstitions be reviewed by experts from various disciplinary disciplines prior to dissemination.

1.6 Mass media needed to exercise caution in presenting beliefs and superstitions content that leaned towards sensationalism and novelty. The type of content typically included in these types of stories typically had to do with the interpretation of numbers for luck, ghost stories, supernatural occurrences, mysteries, horror, or plants or animals that displayed abnormal characteristics. It was essential that mass media provided a space for multidisciplinary verification of factual information.

1.7 Mass media had to exercise caution when simulating images or scenarios related to beliefs and superstitions to make them appear realistic or tangible. The result of this could have been a distortion of facts, especially if simulations involved dreams, predictions, or narratives.

2. Objectivity

Media coverage of beliefs and superstitions needed to be impartial, free of prejudices based on love, hatred, fear, or ignorance. Furthermore, it was essential that personal opinions and feelings did not interfere with the accurate reporting of these facts. The media should not have judged, criticized, labeled, or evaluated individuals and events related to beliefs and superstitions.

Guidelines for News Coverage

2.1 In reporting on beliefs and superstitions, the media needed to avoid including news elements that tended to evoke shared emotions such as sympathy, joy, sorrow, love, hatred, anger, fear, excitement, or amusement, since these could mask underlying biases. A more neutral presentation of beliefs and superstitions could be achieved by presenting content under other news components.

2.2 The media needed to exercise caution when promoting activities related to beliefs and superstitions, such as providing numbers for speculation, urging participation in merit-making activities, encouraging prayer, or promoting the purchase of items. As a result of these invitations, personal opinions could have interfered with the objective reporting of facts regarding beliefs and superstitions.

3. Human Rights

The media, at all stages of their operations, recognized the dignity of individuals who became the subjects of news, acknowledging their inherent worth as human beings. In terms of beliefs and superstitions, the media tended to connect these topics with other news subjects such as crime, social issues, or education, which involved individuals who needed to be protected, especially in terms of their right to privacy and the right not to be interfered with. An individual's rights were violated when private information associated with various numerals was revealed. Moreover, reporting on matters of belief and superstition in a manner intended to evoke emotions could intensify victims' trauma. In this instance, human dignity might have been violated. It was inappropriate to present personal data derived from numbers and instances of chance in order to gain economic advantage.

Guidelines for News Coverage

3.1 The media refrained from disclosing any personal information that could be associated with various numerals, such as vehicle license plate numbers, dates associated with the individual, or house numbers.

3.2 The mass media refrained from presenting content that incited interest in beliefs and mysticism, since this could adversely affect the emotions of those involved and those related to them. As a result, such conduct was considered to aggravate the damage to those affected.

4. Diversity

Mass media embraced cultural diversity and differences. It was acknowledged that each culture was different and had its own intrinsic rationale. It was considered inappropriate to judge one culture by the standards of another or by prevailing social norms. By creating a space that recognized and appreciated this diversity and difference, knowledge was generated with discernment and it fostered a closer relationship between truth, justice, and society as a whole.

Guidelines for News Coverage

4.1 There was a need for mass media to be pluralistic, reflecting a variety of perspectives, especially those pertaining to cultural beliefs and spiritual practices, which constituted the basis of society's knowledge. This presentation emphasized the important role that cultural beliefs played in structuring society, providing psychological and spiritual support to the population, and their role in economics. The diversity of cultures and lifestyles in society reflected the coexistence within society and fostered a peaceful environment through the representation of differences in the media.

5. Balance and Fairness

It was important for mass media to achieve a balance between spatial and temporal dimensions in their reporting. Television programs had to have balanced access to diverse content. In cases where belief and spirituality were both the main topic in one news report and a secondary topic in another report, media organizations carefully evaluated the balance between time and space of their presentations, ensuring they did not overshadow other content that was important to the audience. Additionally, in terms of fairness, it was necessary to provide justice to all parties affected by news related to beliefs and spirituality, and allow anyone involved in the event to express their own viewpoint.

Guidelines for News Coverage

5.1 It was important for media organizations to strive to provide a balanced representation of content related to beliefs and spirituality. They avoided devoting excessive time and space to the presentation of this content to the extent that other subject matter was not adequately represented, thus limiting the audience's access to a variety of topics. When determining the proportion of time and space that should be devoted to news programs that featured beliefs and spirituality as the primary topic and those that did so as a secondary subject, caution was exercised.

5.2 The media ensured fairness by acknowledging all parties affected by news regarding beliefs and superstitions. The use of this approach facilitated the opportunity

for all individuals involved in the incident to express their views and narratives.

6. Social Responsibility

Significant consideration should be given to the societal impact of mass media operations. They refrained from communicating or reproducing content related to beliefs and behaviors that were uncreative and unsocial. It was the responsibility of the media to report on the implications arising from matters related to beliefs and superstitions. This included risks such as gambling addiction, deception by unscrupulous individuals, and the use of unjust products and services that exploited a person's faith and beliefs. The media should not overemphasize stories regarding beliefs and superstitions beyond cultural perspectives but rather linking these dimensions to social, economic, and political considerations. In this way, society was able to collectively take responsibility and develop solutions for problems resulting from potential impacts of beliefs and superstitions, rather than leaving it solely up to the individual viewer.

Guidelines for News Coverage

6.1 In reporting events related to natural disasters, accidents, emergencies, or various crimes, the media should not overemphasize the significance of beliefs and superstitions associated with the event. The consequence of this was the loss of essential prevention-oriented reporting about natural disasters, accidents, emergencies, or various types of crimes.

6.2 Media reports needed to emphasize the consequences that might result from beliefs and superstitions, including risky gambling, deception by charlatans, or unfair products and services that exploited consumers' faith and beliefs.

6.3 Hence, the media should go beyond purely cultural coverage of beliefs and superstitions and should be able to connect the social, economic, and political dimensions. In order to achieve this, it was imperative that society as a whole took responsibility and sought solutions to problems arising from the impacts of beliefs and superstitions, rather than merely leaving interpretation and judgment to the audience.

6.4 Providing analytical reports on beliefs and superstitions was equivalent to instilling critical thinking among the audience. In a nutshell, this was a reflection of the media's social responsibility, which did not solely shift the responsibility of judgment to the viewers.

6.5 Incorporating a cautionary message encouraging viewers to exercise discernment was essential. Whenever there is content related to beliefs and superstitions, the media should make sure to provide advisory statements such as "Please exercise discretion while viewing" regardless of whether the content is presented directly, incorporated as a secondary component, or subtly embedded.

6.6 The mass media should not use news programs and other content related to beliefs and superstitions as a platform for promoting primarily business ventures, in particular those associated with the process of obtaining lottery numbers and selling goods and services related to beliefs, both explicitly and subtly.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is generally accepted that Thai society is a pluralistic society, with a diversity of beliefs that include spiritual beliefs, beliefs associated with Brahmanism, and beliefs related to Buddhism. In spite of the adoption of scientific principles into the contemporary lifestyle, which has resulted in the development of a variety of technological tools, these traditional beliefs remain. Despite this, superstitious beliefs continue to be integrated and even proliferated with the advancement of technology. The more technology advances, the more it is utilized as a "medium" for the "reproduction" of these beliefs. The digital media, which are characterized by their ease of accessibility and widespread distribution, are not only used for entertainment or information dissemination, but also reinforce these traditional beliefs. Nonetheless, it also plays a role in reproducing and perpetuating cultural narratives related to occult beliefs, which have supernatural undertones and an intriguing mystery that appeal curiosity and interest among viewers. The narratives often reflect deeply ingrained

beliefs within Thai society. Mass media frequently recycle such content, repeatedly presenting it, thus allowing luck and superstitious beliefs to be reproduced. This reinforcement eventually solidifies these beliefs as a fundamental part of Thai culture.

On the basis of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1963) theory of media's social responsibility, it is argued that mass media must become more aware of their roles, duties, and responsibilities within a framework of professional ethics. There are three fundamental principles: 1) the public should have the freedom to participate in and choose the news they receive, 2) the media must maintain independence and freedom in presenting news, and 3) the media must be aware of the benefits society will derive from its operation. In this context, superstitions are incorporated into the people's way of life. The development of policy proposals for media regulation by Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) should be anchored on the balance between "beliefs and superstitions" as a form of cultural diversity, and "the responsibility of the media" in safeguarding society from turning "beliefs and superstitions" into a form of "violence" in the name of gambling, deception, and exploitation through the creation of goods and services. In society, beliefs and superstitions play a significant role. This requires the media to find a balance between presenting this cultural diversity while simultaneously serving as a mirror, lantern, and watchdog for society.

Since "superstitious beliefs" act as soft power, they can contribute to economic growth as cultural commodities. In addition, human worldview is a tool used to explain existence and life in the world and that it involves constructing varying realities across cultures. Therefore, worshiping the sacred can be viewed as a worldview that creates its own reality, analogous to the empirical testing that occurs in science. In indigenous societies, the belief in forest spirits, mountain gods, and ancestral spirits does not fall under the category of irrationality; rather, it falls under the category of a worldview in which humans perceive various elements in nature as "persons" capable of giving and receiving punishment. Through respect, worship, honor,

responsibility, and self-restraint, sacred entities in nature teach humans about moral systems. It is important to remember that humans are not masters of nature. The beliefs about spirits in nature thus serve as the "knowledge" underpinning human survival (Bird-David, 1999, as cited in Daungwiset, 2017). Those aspects of life that cannot be proven by science, also known as ethereal aspects, are defined by cultural beliefs and supernatural lore. A societal system is characterized by the interaction between subcomponents, as well as the belief people hold about supernatural elements associated with power and knowledge, which are utilized to negotiate and construct social identities (Spiro, 1966, as cited in Duangwiset, 2017).

Furthermore, the belief systems and superstitions that are presented in the media reflect the economic disparities engendered by the popularity of supernatural-themed programming in Thai society. Public interest in deities, spirits, or supernatural entities is often fueled by the belief that they may be able to influence their well-being in a positive way. According to a study of the popularity trend of supernatural-themed programs featured in the mass media, there is an association between the overarching socio-economic disparities and the popularity of supernatural-themed programs. The function of this is to act as a mirror, reflecting the problem of pervasive inequalities in Thai society, on both a vertical and horizontal scale. As such, the state imposes a top-down structural inequality on the citizens under the mechanism of modern capitalism. According to Thitadhammo (Arayanarakul) (2021), the economic factors in Thailand, influencing the cost of living as well as the prices of various commodities, have had substantial repercussions on low-income individuals who bear the burden of rising costs. Since those individuals could not rely solely on government assistance, many turned to the supernatural. It was therefore common for people to turn to the supernatural as a last resort to alleviate their emotional distress and they hoped that divine intervention would lead to better fortunes and success. This phenomenon could be seen in daily news trends, where people were seeking unusual ways to improve their fortunes.

Under the influence of capitalism driving Thailand's economy, "superstitions" has been transformed into a "Commodification of Culture." Increasingly, superstitions are appearing in mass media, which enhance its narrative appeal. Moreover, Thai economy is largely driven by commercial superstitions, which has become a very popular phenomenon. In view of this, one culture should not be judged by another or by mainstream societal norms when defining approaches to present belief and superstitious content. Each culture has its own valid reasons and contexts. In order to correct the misunderstandings of outsiders, it is necessary to gain knowledge from within the culture. It is possible to broadcast the voice of minority cultures by presenting content related to magic in an unbiased, factual manner. Due to the diversity of cultures and the inherent rationality of each, one culture should not be compared to another or to mainstream societal norms.

The perspectives of political economy of media theorists suggest that consciousness is not the only factor that contributes to the survival of different media. Nevertheless, economic factors determine the long-term survival of these media. Using quantitative ratings enables the commodification of the subject of "beliefs and superstitions." All media undergo the process of being converted from general use to market value, and then becoming exchangeable. As a result of television programs being produced and sold as commodities of beliefs and superstitions, people's perceptions of world events may be influenced by media consumption, affecting thoughts that can have various impacts, as evidenced by gambling and deceptive purchasing practices.

The process of censoring superstitious content has always existed within all media organizations. Increasing competition and declining revenue shares in the media industry have led media organizations to reduce their censorship of superstitious content in order to maintain their ratings. Despite the existence of a suitable mechanism for self-regulation of the media, such a mechanism has not been widely effective in Thai society as concrete penalties have not been implemented. In its place, it consists primarily of warnings and requests for cooperation.

Consequently, the confrontation between the belief in superstitions and the tradition of culture as a social heritage, as well as their various effects, constitutes an ethical gray area. This implies a space where judging right and wrong is challenging, especially when relying on contextual analysis and a diversity of evidence. While freedom of the media must be affirmed, the principle of social responsibility should also be taken into account. In accordance with these aforementioned principles, mass media outlets should adhere to key practices regarding their social responsibility. Firstly, the media must report events in an accurate, comprehensive, and thorough manner. Secondly, the media should provide a platform for the exchange of ideas, as well as serve as an intermediary between the public and the media. It is imperative that the media reflect the entire spectrum of society, emphasizing the values and goals of all segments of society. As well, it discusses the primary duties of mass media: to seek truthful information and to convey it accurately, comprehensively, and neutrally.

General Policy Recommendations for Media Regulation

Media regulation must be enacted as a "process," derived from the political economy perspective that does not consider media only as products, but rather as ongoing processes. In order for media regulation to be successfully implemented, attention must be directed from the establishment of regulatory systems to the process of reporting to society following the completion of the consideration process. A critical aspect of this "process" is the relationship and power dynamics among the groups involved, including NBTC, professional media associations, media organizations, media practitioners, investors/sponsors, consumer networks, and audiences.

1. The establishment of a self-regulation system should be universal, accepted by professionals, and represent a collaborative effort between professional organizations and media. Self-regulation cannot be accomplished by the media in isolation.

2. The creation of an effective and sustainable fund, with the collaboration of various agencies, is of vital importance. Fund activities should support the reporting of beliefs and occultism as a means of promoting cultural diversity and preventing such reporting from negatively affecting society.

3. The determination of professional ethics involves the development of Guidance Notes for members to facilitate operations concerning belief and superstition.

4. In order for the organization to establish credibility, complaints regarding beliefs and superstitions must be handled with integrity, alacrity, and efficacy.

5. The establishment of a complaint review committee should be conducted neutrally and without interference from the state, capital, or any other organization. Transparency, speed, and verification must be the hallmarks of its operations.

6. Superstitious-oriented content should be governed by explicit standards, without legislation due to the delicate nature of the issue and the possibility of over-regulating it. An effective measure for preventing violations would be the issuing of warnings to media outlets that are at risk of violations. In the event that non-compliance occurs, the severity of penalties may be escalated and effective actions might be taken against violators. The NBTC must exercise its authority to implement measures, ranging from mild to severe, if self-regulation is ineffective or if content presentation negatively impacts news work, a program, the media environment, and society.

7. A systematic follow-up and scrutiny of media oversight should be in place, which might include checking based on the type of media or examining issues related to beliefs and superstitions.

8. The provision of readily accessible and widely recognized complaint channels for viewers, which are accessible and available via a variety of platforms.

9. As part of lifelong learning, viewers are encouraged to become aware and up-to-date about media, beliefs, and superstitions, enabling them to access information judiciously. A variety of channels are available to viewers for the submission of complaints.

10. The scope and boundaries of superstitious-oriented content should be clearly defined. As superstition is a subject very close to the public as well as an integral part of the village's way of life, media outlets have difficulty omitting topics that are of public concern. Additionally, there are some superstitious elements that overlap with religious beliefs and rituals. Therefore, a distinction needs to be made between superstitious content that fosters superstition and cultural aspects of society.

11. The media should place particular emphasis on the audience identified as "children or youth," and media outlets should exercise extreme caution in presenting stories related to superstition or mysteries to prevent misunderstandings or the promotion of superstition.

12. The production of superstitious content can also include the use of Soft Power, which serves as a mental refuge, intertwining rituals, teaching life lessons through natural phenomena, environment, and traces of different cultures. Moreover, it can generate income for local communities, attract tourists, and negatively affect consumers. In the media, superstition, intellectual complacency, and superstitious products may encourage consumers to follow dramas, shows, news, and influence the popularity of products.

13. Assessing public complaints and developing a framework for future program operations, including establishing a public council to examine and propose policies on media coverage of inappropriate superstitions.

14. Adopting positive, creative measures to encourage media to report on beliefs and superstitions in a constructive way, such as awarding honors or reducing the use of digital televisions.

15. Developing standards of collaborative work with central government agencies, such as the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES).

16. Establishing a continuous communication system as well as reporting the results of media oversight in terms of beliefs and superstition continuously to society, so that it becomes a culture of regular monitoring of media work in Thailand.

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