

Exploring Journalistic Practices amongst Disaster Journalists in Thailand's Digital Age

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การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอแนวปฏิบัติของผู้สื่อข่าวด้านภัยพิบัติในยุคดิจิทัลของไทย โดยศึกษาว่าเทคโนโลยีในยุคดิจิทัลมีอิทธิพลต่อกระบวนการทำงานของนักข่าวด้านภัยพิบัติในประเทศไทยอย่างไร โดยอาศัยวิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ ที่เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกและการสังเกตการณ์การอบรมด้านการรายงานข่าวภัยพิบัติ ที่จัดขึ้นโดยสมาคมนักข่าวหนังสือพิมพ์แห่งประเทศไทย นักข่าวไทยจำนวน 12 คน ที่มีประสบการณ์ในการรายงานข่าวด้านภัยพิบัติทางโทรทัศน์ห้าปีขึ้นไป จะได้รับการสัมภาษณ์และใช้การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยการวิเคราะห์เชิงแก่นสาระ (TA: thematic analysis) ผลการวิจัยมี 2 ส่วนหลัก ได้แก่ ส่วนของรูปแบบ และส่วนของเนื้อหา ในส่วนของรูปแบบมี 4 ประเด็นหลักที่น่าสนใจ ในส่วนเนื้อหา มี 5 ประเด็นที่หยิบยกขึ้นมาเสนอในบทความนี้ และในส่วนของการค้นพบทั้งรูปแบบและเนื้อหาของการทำงานข่าวภัยพิบัติในยุคดิจิทัลนี้สะท้อนว่า ยุคดิจิทัลมีอิทธิพลต่อกระบวนการทำงานข่าวด้านภัยพิบัติอย่างมาก ซึ่งสอดคล้องกันกับสาระหลักของแนวคิดของสำนักเทคโนโลยีเป็นตัวกำหนด นอกจากนี้ การศึกษายังพบว่า สภาพการณ์ของตลาดสื่อที่มีการแข่งขันกันสูงในยุคดิจิทัลตลอดจนนโยบายขององค์กรสื่อแต่ละแห่งก็มีผลกระทบอย่างมีนัยสำคัญเช่นเดียวกันต่อปฏิบัติการของนักข่าวภัยพิบัติ ซึ่งมองในมุมนี้อาจกล่าวได้ว่า ปรากฏการณ์นี้สะท้อนแนวคิดเทคโนโลยีเป็นตัวกำหนดแบบอ่อน (soft technology determinism) ที่มีมุมมองว่า แม้เทคโนโลยีจะเป็นปัจจัยหลักที่มีผลต่อโอกาสและความสามารถในการทำงานในแวดวงสื่อ

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แต่ปัจจัยอื่นที่มีความสำคัญต่อการเปลี่ยนแปลงนั้นร่วมด้วยก็คือ ปฏิสัมพันธ์จากกลุ่มสังคมหรือชุมชนที่มีต่อเทคโนโลยีด้วยเช่นกัน กล่าวคือ แม้เทคโนโลยีดิจิทัลจะไม่ได้เป็นปัจจัยที่เข้าควบคุมทุกสิ่งทุกอย่าง แต่เราก็ไม่อาจปฏิเสธได้ว่าเทคโนโลยีดังกล่าวมีความสำคัญอย่างมากต่อการเปลี่ยนแปลงแนวปฏิบัติของผู้สื่อข่าววิทยุพิบัติไทย

คำสำคัญ: ผู้สื่อข่าววิทยุพิบัติ วิทยุพิบัติ ยุคดิจิทัล ผู้สื่อข่าวไทย แนวปฏิบัติผู้สื่อข่าว

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the influence of digital technology on disaster journalistic practices in Thailand, while also examining how disaster journalists adopt digital technologies in the disaster news production process. The study used qualitative data gathering through in-depth interviews and observation of a training workshop regarding disaster reporting organized by The Thai Journalist Association. Twelve Thai journalists with experience in reporting disasters on TV for more than five years were interviewed, employing the thematic analysis (TA) method. Two main categories were identified; the first being the journalistic format practices employed in the Thai media, comprised of four main aspects. The second category is the journalistic content practices, comprised of five facets. These findings reflect that the digital era has provided major influential changes in technology that have affected the news production process covering disasters, akin to the concept of technological determinism. Additionally, the highly competitive environment or market-driven state of the Thai media sphere and corporate policy has contributed significantly to changes in journalistic practice in both news content and presentation format. In this sense, it reflects the idea of “soft technological determinism”, which suggests that technological advancements can present new opportunities and capabilities. However, the extent of their influence on society also depends on how communities interact with these technologies. At this point, it can be argued that while digital technology may not exercise absolute dominion over all aspects, we cannot disregard its substantial impact on shaping the field of disaster journalism.

Keywords: disaster journalist, disaster, digital age, Thai journalist, journalistic practice

1. Introduction

Many disasters causing huge losses in human life and property have occurred in the last two decades. The 2010 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti killed more than 220,000 people (Nesbitt and Miks, 2020). In 2008, an 8.0 magnitude earthquake struck Sichuan, China and its neighboring regions in which 17,923 people went missing and 374,643 were injured (Xinhua, 2008). The final official Chinese government estimate was almost 90,000 people counted as dead or missing and presumed dead. In 2009, Taiwan was hit by typhoon Morakot, which caused the death of approximately 700 people and over 4.7 billion in economic losses (Ge et al., 2010). The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, one of the top five most destructive earthquakes ever recorded, triggered a massive tsunami that flooded coastal land with waves estimated to be as high as 38 metres, causing the death of 15,848 people with billions in property damage (World Health Organization, 2012). Similarly, Thailand was struck by a tsunami in 2004 that devastated coastal areas of Phang Nga, Phuket, Ranong, Krabi, Trang and Satun provinces, causing approximately 5,400 deaths and 8,000 injuries (Silpawattanatham, 2020). In 2011, a major flood affected 69 provinces in Thailand, causing 680 deaths and total damage and loss of USD 46.5 billion (Poaponsakorn and Meethom, 2013: 1-2). In 2017, major flooding occurred in Bang Saphan District, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, due to rain brought by a tropical depression (Rujivanarom, 2017). Many international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Commission and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), have constructed information centres to manage disaster events, along with continually strengthening various dimensions of disaster

management. Therefore, it is clear that major natural disasters are not an issue for individual nations, but are global issues.

In every disaster event, both international and national, journalists from news corporations report the events as major news, acknowledging the newsworthiness of such events (Cottle, 2013). These are significant stories that generate significant human interest (Pew Research Center, 2010; Sood et al., 2006). Disaster news reporting is also crucial for journalists as a public service (Thorson, 2012) in order to inform the public of the disaster (Su, 2020). Communication from disaster journalists during the stages of mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery substantially helps to relieve the situation of the victims, as well as bridge many social sectors allowing civilians to cope with the adverse effect of the disasters. Accordingly, it can be concluded that journalists are a key element in the ecosystem of disaster communication and disaster management cycles (Houston et al., 2019; Spialek and Houston, 2018; Veil, 2012).

The digital age has been characterized by significant technology innovation (Franklin, 2015), which has also provided significant opportunities in the immediate communication of information on events that can be presented in a highly visual manner. Media scholars refer to a number of characteristics enabled by digitization, for instance, multimedia and media convergence (Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Deuze, 2004; Quinn, 2006). This situation has inescapably affected the news production process in significant ways (Hermida, 2013; Misra, 2019; Pavlik, 2000; Pérez-Seijo et al., 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016), particularly for specific issues such as disaster news (Tong, 2017). Hermida (2013), for example, raised an interesting point when he referred to journalistic

format practices that have emerged in the digital era that now engage social media through personal accounts with personal recognition and branding rather than on institutional accounts. An article entitled “The Future of Journalism” (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016: 810) set forth a number of risks, threats and opportunities in the journalistic landscape brought about by technological change. Such risks and threats have affected journalistic practices and the profession in matters of quality of reporting, as well as journalistic ethical practices:

“Technology has facilitated a de-professionalisation of journalism with many economic, quality related and ethical questions raised as a consequence—alongside opportunities for greater participation.”

The opportunities for “greater participation”, as suggested in this comment, include the promotion of greater participation of often marginalized groups of people from remote areas. This can be achieved by publishing their stories and promoting the work of citizen journalists through digital media platforms (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). Tong (2017), for example, illustrated that during disaster events, social media has been widely used by many media sectors. For disaster journalists, social media has helped compile numerous eye-witness accounts, as well as report on relevant activities, people and parties involved or affected, and incidents of interest to a wider audience.

The concepts presented by these previously cited authors can be viewed in terms of technology determinism as proposed by McLuhan (1967). Generally, this concept, which is rooted in objectivism, suggests

that technology both impacts people's lives directly and individually, as well as plays a significant role in society at large. Objectivism acknowledges that external factors determine individual behavior (De la Cruz Paragas and Lin, 2016). As McLuhan (1967: 66) asserted:

“It is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.”

Örnebring (2010) stated two main reasons that make the concept of technological determinism prevalent in the journalistic field. The first is that journalists are working with rapidly evolving technology. The second reason is that the historical background of journalistic work is entangled with technology. By using the concept of labor as an analytical lens, Örnebring presented two themes that are connected to technology and the changes in journalistic work practice; first, the use of technology to increase productivity, and second, the deskilling of journalists as labor.

Therefore, the impact of changing technology in the digital era can be studied by investigating the influence of information and communication technology on disaster journalistic practices in Thailand, along with examining how this technology is engaged in the disaster news production process. The objective of the present study was to explore such issues. The findings and analysis presented in this paper acknowledge Thai journalistic practices in the area of disaster news are based on comments and opinions from professional journalists working in this contemporary environment. The findings and analysis are presented as a descriptive report that reflects the thematic analysis approach taken.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research method and approach. The study utilized purposive sampling using in-depth interviews that were conducted with twelve Thai disaster journalists. The interviews took place between November 2020 and June 2021. During the study period, there were no journalists who solely focused on disaster reporting. However, there were journalists who were involved in news coverage related to disasters or closely related topics. These individuals were consistently assigned to cover news on disasters. In the context of this study, the term “disaster journalists” refers to journalists who fall into this category. The data for this study was gathered from those who have more than five years of experience in reporting disaster news on TV coverage and who were currently working in the field of disaster news reporting. A number of potential research participants were identified and approached, the snowball technique was then followed in order to identify other possible participants, who were then approached.

Further data was derived from observing the annual training workshop on “Reporting in Disaster and Conflict versus Safety”, organized by The Thai Journalist Association, which was recorded and analyzed. The workshop was recommended by a number of key informants since it is a significant event in the field of disaster and conflict news reporting. This workshop was established in 2010 and has been held annually for the intervening decade. The training staff is comprised of news editors and senior news reporters, as well as executive news directors, from various news corporations in Thailand, e.g., Thai PBS, PPTV, Thairath, Thansettakij, MCOT. The tenth workshop was held on 20-23 June 2019, which was the same period as when the data for this research was being gathered.

This workshop was supported by many organizations, including The Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC), The National Institute for Emergency Medicine (NIEM), Thai Media Fund (TMF), Nation Union of Journalist, Thailand (NUJT), Online Thairath, PPTV HD36 and Doi Kham Food Products Company, Limited, and the Heart to Heart (Jai Taung Jai, in Thai) Voluntary Rescue Team. The researcher was permitted to observe the activities from the planning stage of the workshop until the end.

Thematic analysis (TA) has been used as the main analysis method. TA identifies themes within data by applying an inductive approach. Both data from the in-depth interviews and from the observations of the training workshop were transcribed into written format that was then analyzed in a process with six main phases: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017).

3. Results

3.1 Journalistic Format Practice

There are four main journalistic format practices. First, disaster journalists use a number of technologies in the disaster news production process. In the *pre-production phase*, they use technologies such as online platforms to gather information related to geographical and statistical data of disaster areas. For instance, during a flood, disaster journalists will search for information about the affected area, such as rainfall, water level and a hydrological map. This can be done through official websites and online social networks of related departments, such as the Royal

Irrigation Department and the Department of Water Resource. In the case of a pandemic, disaster journalists regularly use data about the affected areas that may include residential areas, markets, local government locations or municipalities, or other locations. This information will be used for fieldwork preparation. Most of the research respondents (RR) affirmed this, as shown in the comments from RR01 and RR11:

“I regularly use online platforms to gather information in affected areas before entering there. It would let me know what damage has occurred and how severe that is? ... and if there are any accessible communication facilities available? If I enter the site, will there be any communication channels to contact my office? Or if I entered there, how could I engage in the sources of the problems. Yes, something like this.”

(RR01, interviewed November 2019)

“Recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was assigned to the affected area. Before going to the site, I researched information from digital online platforms. I would say are brilliant as channels of information for us, the journalists, to gather relevant data. You know, I have never been to Samut Sakhon province...it was my first time there. In the past, I had just passed through this province; I never stopped by. The online digital platforms helped me gather content such as contact list of local media agencies, local FB Page such as local government, local NGOs, and so on. I could send in-box messages asking some questions and, yes, the data from these channels could connect

me to the stories and people there when I was on the site.”

(RR11, interviewed February 2020)

In the *production phase*, research participants explained how they employ digital media in four main ways. Social platforms are used to communicate with the editorial team to analyze the situation. Within this phase the editorial team would give significant authority to the disaster journalists because they are in the field. They are witnessing the real situation; hence, it is expected that they can gauge the situation clearly. Subsequently, before reporting, they utilize official websites and official Facebook pages of credible sources, for instance, government agencies or experts who are responsible for managing the disaster event. In doing so, they can evaluate the precision of the data in their hands and predict reporting direction. Also, they construct “LINE social media groups” among journalists who are working in the affected areas to share information and thoughts, and also access the LINE groups of those government agencies that are responsible for managing the disaster event to avoid disinformation and fake news that regularly emerges during a disaster. Notably, employing such social media sites in these ways was identified as new practices different from the way disaster news reporters had been able to work collaboratively in the field and the difficulties often experienced in the past when attempting to utilize governmental information resources. In the contemporary digital era, however, finding and sharing useful information can be accomplished easily due to technology, such LINE or Facebook, or other forms of online social networking. During the *post-production phase*, digital technology is utilized to connect with individuals affected by the disaster. Before

leaving the areas affected by the disaster, the news sources can be provided with details of the personal social media, Facebook, and LINE interactions and collaborations of the affected individuals. Accordingly, the journalists can follow and continually update the information regarding the situation. This can also help them generate ideas for disaster news topics and related issues in the future. As well, virtual drives (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox) have been utilized to organize data, such as videos and pictures, for their work in the future.

The second major difference seen with social media and available communication technology is that it enables multi-platform-oriented working practices. Disaster journalists are now able to publicize their reports on many platforms. For example, they now can concurrently use online platforms, e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or LINE, to present disaster news content, as well as make reports on the usual television news services. RR05 provides one good example of this issue:

“Now it is the digital era, we are digital journalists. With only a smart phone or tablet I can film news videos for my news station and then, after sending them to the station, I can take photos and then publish them online together with short video clips through social media.”

(RR05, interviewed February 2020)

The journalists also indicated that they regularly publish the content on both their affiliated official online and TV platforms and their own personal online platforms. Some news corporations encourage their journalists in these practices by initiating policies that give rewards for

journalists who gain the highest number of viewers/followers. Some news corporations strategize the use of online media for disaster news reporting. For instance, they used Twitter for checking audience attention or the popularity of disaster news issues and topics. In this case, the “hashtag” (#) feature is regularly utilized. They also employ the LINE application for gathering information and then make use of Twitter or Facebook, together with television news programs, to disseminate disaster news content.

Another important development, enabled by modern video and communications technology, is that TV news stations are permitting more low quality disaster news videos to be shown, creating an aura of greater immediacy and personal involvement. The disaster news video files from digital equipment, such as smart phones and GoPro cameras, which are lower in quality than video files from satellites, are accepted. Disaster journalists film the situation in the affected area and then sent the film to their editorial team through digital platforms. LINE has been shown to be popular among the participating disaster journalists. LINE is also used as an “information hub” between the journalists who are in the field and the editorial team at the news station. Using online platforms allows the immediate transfer of disaster news pictures and videos through the 4G network. These journalistic format practices allow the journalists, and their corporate news organizations, to broadcast “on the spot” news coverage swiftly on television and online. Disaster stories then have become up-to-the-minute news reports.

Verbal forms of news presentations are now complemented by digital graphic works in a way not previously possible in disaster news reporting. Journalists apply infographics and immersive graphics to their

disaster news. Drawing upon research data, journalists can simplify complicated disaster data and make their broadcasts more informative and helpful to people involved in the disaster, as well as the public at large. In the case of floods, for instance, water courses likely to be subjected to flooding and imminent rainfall can be shown in the format of infographic presentations. For pandemics, different levels of severity in affected areas and affected timelines can be presented through infographic work.

3.2 Journalistic Content Practices

Five main journalistic content practices were mentioned by the participating journalists. The first is reporting on content related to loss and damage in affected areas. Such content can include statistical data, such as the number of victims and the cost of the damage. This type of content is a basic element in disaster news reporting. Prior to the digital period, such data was obtained by phoning government departments that were responsible for managing the disaster event. Also, official documents would be sent by the journalists to the various government departments requesting the information. However, in the contemporary digital age, this information can be obtained through official websites or Facebook pages of the government departments. This type of content is often illustrated by the presentation of graphs and graphical images.

Second, during the response phase, content related to humanitarian aid operations is reported upon with descriptions of activities organized by various sectors, such as government, private sector and non-profit organizations, as well as foreign aid for disaster relief. Before the digital era, this type of content was broadcast on scheduled news programs throughout the day. However, in the digital age, such content can be

circulated immediately and frequently through online platforms, usually by being published on the disaster journalist's personal online ID and their affiliated official online platforms.

Third, in-depth analysis of the disaster event is reported, either from on-site of the disaster or from the studio discussing videos showing the situation in real-time. The disaster journalists can investigate the cause of the disaster, analyze and discuss other information about the disaster event, such as possible causes and how the disaster developed. This type of content is determined by: (a) their own eye-witness evidence from the field, (b) interviewing disaster experts and (c) searching official sources of information online. In flood situations, current and past information, such as statistical data regarding water levels and water routes, can be given as the historical background of the event. Forecasts of events in the affected areas will also be given. This type of content can be presented and simplified through graphs. This analysis can act as warnings to officials and residents in at-risk areas.

The fourth type of content informs and educates people about long-term prevention and risk mitigation to enhance the audience's understanding of disaster cycles and the causes of a particular disaster, and can be widely disseminated by both online blogs and commentaries, as well as broadcast on-air in the usual way. Although the research participants mentioned this type of content, they also indicated that it is difficult to promote because it involves long-term prevention or preparedness, which is essentially a post-disaster activity creating preparedness for the next event, but is unlike the content about the immediate losses, damage and humanitarian aid that is more essential and popular among the audiences. RR02's statement is one example:

“Stories during the emergency or response phase is in the public’s attention, and definitely yes in the journalists’ attention. But stories about preparedness and post-disaster recovery are less attractive. It’s not an easy task to do; but as a journalist I try my best to sell the idea to the sales department.”

(RR02, interviewed February 2020)

Finally, content that articulates public emotions was identified as being of interest and newsworthy. This type of content has appeared more frequently in Thai digital media as it presents more emotional content through stories and scenes that draw in the audience’s engagement and thereby increases ratings. This technique is exploited competitively in the digital market. As one research respondents, RR03, recounted:

“Our channel doesn’t have resources like Thai PBS (Thai Public Broadcasting) has; and, yes, if we were Thai PBS it would be good because it has a clear mission. But our channel must balance our direction. Particularly in this era, rating from the audience must be of concern. During the disaster time, in affected areas, community people who need help...their sensational stories...yes, we try to capture these themes as one part of news reporting.”

(RR03, interviewed February 2020)

However, the research data suggests that the application of this technique depends upon each individual news corporation’s position or philosophy. As an example, RR04 narrated:

“In this digital era, I would say that it is a highly competitive situation. No time for less important or urgent news. So, during field reporting, popular topics are, unavoidably, sensational issues...perhaps, it can be called ‘over’ realistic. It happens currently because this type of content could increase rating scores. Sadness...pitifulness...yeah they were used to create audience’s emotions. [...] I think that I am a lucky one because my channel doesn’t focus on sensationalism as its primary theme but wants to present an overview of the situation as well as some different or unique issues...factual and false?; however, drama-scenes that are based on fact, yes, are still on demand.”

(RR04, interviewed February 2020)

According to most of the research respondents, some news corporations attempt to strike a balance between fact and emotion, while some news stations concentrate mostly on emotions. The news stations that fall into the second category regularly present sensational scenes, such as emotional interviews with the victims, scenes of injured people at the site of the disaster or visuals of ruined landscape. Some news corporations are well aware of the repercussions of over-emotional presentations and this is reflected in their regulations and policies.

4. Discussion

A number of interesting points can be seen from the feedback from the participating journalists. It is obvious that in disaster journalistic format practices, digital technology is instrumental in driving changes to the style and source of information presentation. It is also evident that the

disaster news production process, referred to as the 3Ps--pre-production, production and post-production--has been changed. For example, in the pre-production stage, digital technology influences information gathering practices. Instead of having to formally request information through a letter to the responsible government agency and wait for a response (as aforementioned in the Result Section), the digital era has significantly facilitated access to information through technology. This development has significantly transformed the landscape of information accessibility. Digital devices, tools, and platforms have played a crucial role in “empowering” disaster journalists to gain access to comprehensive datasets that can support efficient and well-informed spatial planning. This shift has had a profound impact on the readiness of disaster journalists themselves. Consequently, they are better equipped to analyze and report on disasters, going beyond mere event reporting based on data from government officials or expert sources. In this sense, it can be viewed that digital-era disaster journalists have gained more negotiating power in shaping the meaning that will be presented in disaster-related news production process.

In the production stage, a paradox is presented in that digital platforms often distribute misinformation and fake news, while disaster journalists make use of digital platforms to ensure the accuracy of the disaster news content. In the post-production stage, digital platforms can be used to maintain connections with the informants after the journalists have left the disaster affected area. In this study, the changes within the 3P process reinforce numerous media scholars who have indicated that the emergence of digital platforms, such as social media, have altered journalistic practices and norms (e.g., Hermida, 2013; Misra, 2019;

Pérez-Seijo et al., 2020; Pivlik, 2000; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). The findings in the current study also suggest that multi-platform-oriented reporting in the disaster news sphere has become a routine format since it can circulate news content to the largest possible audience. This routine format, furthermore, has broken down the boundary between the “work” and the “private” spheres of disaster journalists during their reporting through digital platforms. As is evident from the above journalistic format practices, the disaster journalists published disaster news through both their online private ID and their affiliated formal online platforms. All these facts prove that the journalist’s practice is becoming more multichannel and integrated during the digital age (Garcia-Orosa et al., 2020). These journalistic format practices clearly demonstrate the “digital-technology-driven” state of disaster journalism. This conforms to the core concept of technology determinism that states that changes in technology affects and determines social entities. Technology is a key mechanism to social consequences that regularly shapes an individual’s worldview and practice (Dafoe, 2015; McLuhan, 1967; Wyatt, 2008).

Similar to journalistic format practice, journalistic content practice also echoes the notion that digital technology has had a great influence on the disaster news field. It is clear that digital tools, infographics and graphical images in news presentations are becoming a significant part of disaster news content. The phenomenon signifies that the dissemination of news content pertaining to disasters in the digital era need not be restricted solely to conventional news sources, which conventionally convey information through tangible depictions of the impacted regions, such as physical wreckage or firsthand testimonies from the actual site of the calamity. Nevertheless, journalists engaged in disaster coverage within

the digital age possess the capacity to broaden the expanse of news presentation by devising visualized compositions that facilitate enhanced comprehension for the audience. It can be said that this digital age has empowered disaster journalists to communicate the meaning of disaster news more effectively. This position concurs with Simon Cottle (2012: 3), as he argues that throughout history, the role of eyewitnesses has held significant importance in shaping the professional identity and authoritative stance of disaster journalism. However, over time, there have been notable changes in how the journalism profession constructs its news reports, defines its roles, and utilizes advancements in communication technologies. In addition, fact checking by journalists is done through online credible sources. This instance reaffirms what Pavlik pointed out that technology alters journalistic content (2000: 231):

“Technology also has exerted **a profound influence on the content of news**. Writing and language are, in fact, technologies and as such reporters have always depended on them for the reporting or storytelling of journalism.” (my emphasis shown in bold)

Another interesting aspect of journalistic content practice observed in this study is regarding the content that creates emotional states in the public, it has been a significant “ingredient” of disaster content that all research participants are aware of and tend to comment on. As previously mentioned, such content is intentionally used to attract a larger audience. This finding indicates that disaster news content production in the digital age is profit-motivated and market-driven. This issue reflects what Beckett and Deuze have argued that economics is one of the main factors driving

emotional content in the journalistic field, particularly in the age of digital technology (Beckett and Deuze, 2016: 3):

“The first is economic. Competition has never been more intense. The Internet means that your rivals are everywhere and endless. Distraction away from news is more immediate and accessible to your audience than ever before. As advertising revenues plunge, journalists have to fight harder than ever for every eyeball or ear. Tugging at the heartstrings is a tried and tested way to get attention. As the marketing world loves to talk about ‘points of engagement’ between a brand and a (potential) consumer, journalism should consider emotion to create the experience of involvement with the news.”

However, the final outcome varies according to the standpoint of the news corporations, irrespective of the amount of “emotional ingredient” that has been added to the disaster news menu. This situation reveals that in the highly competitive environment of the digital age, Thai disaster journalists have adopted a wide spectrum of dramatizing strategies throughout their disaster news content. In other words, corporate policy, as well as digital media market, play a crucial role in Thai disaster journalistic content practice. It can be said that while technology plays a significant role in shaping social structures, values, and practices (here is the journalistic content practice), it is not the sole determinant of these changes. A reciprocal relationship between technology and corporate policy as well as digital media market, wherein they mutually influence and shape each other. This scenario apparently

echoes the concept of “soft technology determinism”. According to this concept, technological developments can offer new possibilities and affordances, but their impact on society is not that radical because it is also contingent upon how communities engage with them (Gunkel, 2003; Hauer, 2017). At this point, one could posit that while digital technology may not exert complete control over everything, we cannot dismiss its considerable influence in shaping the journalistic practice.

5. Conclusion

The article has argued that, on one side, technology has habitually formed, as well as transformed, our society (Dafoe, 2015; Wyatt, 2008) and the everyday working practices of journalists (Pavlik, 2000). This concurs with Brian McNair's assertion in his book *The Sociology of Journalism* (McNair, 1998: 125): “the form and content of journalism is crucially determined by the available technology of news gathering, production and dissemination.”

This circumstance can be seen through the findings in this study; technology is clearly integrated into and impacts journalistic practice (Misra, 2019; Örnebring, 2010) and has accelerated change in the journalistic field (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). Furthermore, in the age of digital media, changing technology has a significant influence on how disaster news journalists work, which is akin to McLuhan's concept of technological determinism (McLuhan, 1964). On the other side, the highly competitive environment generates the market-driven state of Thai journalism and the philosophy and policy of news corporations remains as two important components working cooperatively with technology in shaping the format of disaster journalistic practices and the content

of disaster reporting. This scenario embodies the concept of “soft technological determinism,” indicating that technological progress can bring forth fresh possibilities and capabilities. Nonetheless, the degree of their impact on society is contingent upon how communities engage with these technologies. At this stage, it can be argued that although digital technology may not possess complete control over every aspect, we cannot ignore its significant influence in shaping the field of disaster journalism.

6. Recommendations

1. From the study, it was found that the practice of disaster journalism in the digital age has undergone changes due to technological advancements, leading to modifications in various formats and content, as mentioned above. The researcher perceives these changes to be predominantly positive, both in terms of formats and content. In terms of formats, accessing information and building communities through technology has allowed for work to surpass previous limitations and create higher-quality work opportunities. For instance, there is increased speed in accessing information, data verification, and more. If disaster journalists can derive additional value from the benefits generated by technology, such as data-driven work for database creation, analysis, or predicting disaster situations, it would enable their work to extend beyond the response phase. Additionally, technology could assist in disaster preparedness, contributing to reducing both human and property losses in vulnerable areas and countries.

2. Concerning the content practice, an important issue that emerged in this study reflects how market mechanisms in the digital

age, driven by intense competition and corporate policies, influence the creation of disaster news content that requires emotionally engaging narratives to generate engagement. The researcher emphasizes the critical need for disaster journalists to find a balanced approach in presenting such content; otherwise, the role of disaster news may veer towards sensationalizing and focusing on selling the spectacle of loss rather than fulfilling its duty to assist and cover the needs of the affected individuals. Furthermore, disaster journalists should also fulfill their role as watchdogs by examining the root causes of disasters and providing early warnings to better prepare for future incidents.

3. In future studies, it is recommended to employ theories and concepts related to digital news coverage. This will contribute to a clearer research framework.

4. In future research, it is advisable to broaden the study's focus to encompass additional news media subjects. This will lead to a more comprehensive grasp of the media landscape and enable a clearer comparison of practices across various types of news media.

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