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"TV Ratings"

Adults' Responsibility toward Young Viewers



In an era when the majority of TV programs are produced for adult entertainment, it is of great concern that young viewers who spend 3-5 hours a day watching TV may be surrounded by inappropriate content that may lead to inappropriate behavior. It is about time that TV ratings were put into place to help parents and guardians protect children from low quality "material," motivate producers to increase the number of programs for children, and adjust programming schedules so that programs geared for adults air at more appropriate times.

The beginning of TV ratings

The "TV rating system" classifies programs that are broadcast on TV according to their appropriateness for different age groups. This is not something new as 30 countries across the world, such as Great Britain, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, China, Vietnam, and Malaysia, have used TV ratings to classify TV programs for a long time.

Thai TV viewers were first introduced to the TV rating system in December 2006 after all TV channels collaborated with the Public Relations Department's Office of the National Broadcasting Commission to do a trial classification of TV programs. The TV programs were classified into 7 types as follows :

1. Programs for preschool children aged 2-6 years using the Kor "ป" (P) and smiling face symbol
2. Programs for children aged 2-12 years using the Dor "ด" (C) and jigsaw symbol
3. General programs for all ages using the Tor "ท" (G) and house symbol
4. Programs that require parental guidance using the Nor "น" (PG) and check mark and X symbol

5. Programs that require parental guidance, unsuitable for children under 13, using the Nor13 “๑13” (PG13) and check mark and X symbol
6. Programs that require parental guidance, unsuitable for children under 18, using the Nor 18 “๑18” (PG18) and check mark and X symbol
7. Special programs for viewers aged 18 and above only using the Chor “๑” (S) and lightning symbol

During the trial period, the Public Relations Department asked the TV stations to consider the ratings of programs by themselves as well as to provide an opportunity for family, child, and youth networks to monitor the appropriateness of the ratings assigned by the TV stations by sending in their comments.

After 6 months of the TV rating trial period, Khunying Dhipavadee Meksawan, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office at the time, revealed that the ratings assigned by the TV stations varied. As a result, the Public Relations Department promptly produced a TV program rating guidebook for the TV stations to use in evaluating the content and quality of the programs.

Reactions from society

At the beginning of June 2007, the Cabinet agreed with the drafting of the TV program rating guidebook, which would include a system to evaluate the content quality, a system to categorize the content according to age, and guidelines for determining the time period appropriate for broadcasting each type of TV program.

Less than one month later, producers and people related to the television industry opposed the draft of the TV program classification guidebook. The majority agreed with the TV rating system, **but disagreed with using TV program ratings to determine airtime.**

Takonkiet Viravan, a famous soap opera producer, worried that soap operas shown at 8PM would be moved to the 10 PM-4 AM slot if there were any fighting or killing scenes.⁶ Meanwhile, Pravit Maleenont, Channel 3 Executive, worried about the problem of future interference with the media.

The opinions of people in the TV industry greatly differed from those of the viewers. An ABAC poll conducted by Assumption University from June 30 - July 2, 2007 on the behavior and opinions of children, youth, and parents towards TV ratings and violence on TV found that among

2,486 responses, 88 percent agreed with assigning TV ratings. More than half the children aged 3-12 watched TV during the 6-8 PM time slot, while more than half those aged 13-18 watched TV between 8-10 PM.

The 8-10 PM and 6-8 PM time slots are the two time slots with the most TV programs containing violent content considered inappropriate for children, accounting for 69 percent and 23 percent of the programs in these slots, respectively. Eighty-six percent of the people think that programs with the most violence and inappropriate content are soap operas.

Dr. Yongyuth Wongpiromsarn, one of the members of the Safe and Creative Media Committee, said that this issue is a case of dictatorship but a concern for everyone in society and noted that a TV rating system is in place in many countries worldwide. He was confident that if TV stations and producers receive correct information, this incidence would not occur.

Meanwhile Dr. Panpimol Lortrakul, a member of the government's TV rating panel, explained that the rating system will still allow TV dramas to be aired. Dramas that teach about goodness and ethics can be broadcast during the times most children watch TV. TV soap operas with scenes of violence and rude language could aired after 10PM in order to protect children from imitating the bad behavior of the TV characters, since children have different levels of maturity and perception.

Khunying Dhipavadee Meksawan confirmed that classification of program content and stipulation of air times for certain types of programs must go hand in hand. The opinions of all parties were to be presented at a meeting of the TV rating committee as input for the drafting of the TV program rating guidebook.

TV program rating guidebook

After being improved to be more effective and suitable practical use, the new TV program rating guidebook from the original version. Trial use of the new version at the end of 2006 with changes as follows :

- (1) Three forbidden criteria were established, called “-3,” including sex, language, and violence, which will be assessed from pictures, content, camera angle, production, and sound in order to classify the program content suitable for different age groups.

- (2) Knowledge in 6 areas was added, called "+6," including academic knowledge, logical thinking, ethics-morals, living skills, social variety, and family relationship development. This will be used to consider the quality of the content and how it educates the viewers.
- (3) Change from the Kor "ก" programs for preschool children aged 2-6 years to the Por "ป" programs for preschool children aged 3-5 years since the research of the International Pediatric Association advises that children below 3 should not be allowed to watch TV as it affects their brain development.
- (4) More definite airtimes for the Nor "น" and Chor "ฉ" programs were established. Nor "น" programs for children aged 13-18, which require parental guidance as they might contain inappropriate content relating to sex, language, and violence, can be aired from 9 AM-4 PM and 8 PM-5 AM. Chor "ฉ" programs for adults older than 18 can be aired from 10 PM-5 AM only.

Stipulating airtime of programs for children and youth according to their viewing behavior is an international concept which many countries use as a tool to protect children and youth from viewing programs inappropriate for their age. For example, in Great Britain, programs inappropriate for children under 15 cannot be aired before 9PM. In the United States, programs inappropriate for children under 14 must be aired after 9PM and programs for adults must be aired from 10PM onwards.

- (5) Viewers have an opportunity to review the quality of the program content and evaluate the appropriateness of the program after it is broadcast. This is referred to as post-rating.

At first, only the producers and TV stations were responsible for considering the appropriateness of the program content, called "pre-rating." At present, post-rating by the public works in parallel with pre-rating. This will lead to information exchange and accommodation by both sides so that their rating standards fall more in line with each other. In addition, the public will become stronger and will be able to keep up with the tactics of the media. Those interested in post-rating can send in their comments anytime via SMS at 4863333 or the

internet at www.me.or.th.

During the trial stage of implementing the TV rating system, Mahidol University's National Institute for Child and Family Development, in collaboration with the Communications Faculty of 12 other institutions, the Northern Youth Council, the Southern Youth Council, and the Network of Volunteer Families to Monitor Media established a program post-rating project in order to promote "information exchange" between viewers and producers in using the TV program rating guidebook. The project discovered 3 facts, as follows :

- (1) There were very few Por "ป" and Dor "ด" programs, especially between 4-6PM. From all six stations examined, Monday to Friday, Por "ป" and Dor "ด" programs accounted for an average of only 1.6 percent of the time slot, compared to 25 percent, as stipulated by the Public Relations Department.
- (2) The majority of the programs were Tor "ท" programs that target the general audience. The main target audience was not children.
- (3) The main difference between pre-ratings and post-ratings centered on sex, especially the values and customs related to sex. Almost all of the programs that elicited different pre-ratings and post-ratings were soap operas.

The second step and following steps

The new draft TV program rating guidebook has already been in trial use for 4 months (September – December 2007), without stipulating the airtime for each type of program.

Pramote Ratvinij, Director-General of the Public Relations Department at that time, signed a new Public Relations Department decree regarding TV program ratings on January 18, 2008, to go into effect on February 19, 2008. (See table, p.74)

Bavorn Techa-in, chief of the National Broadcasting Commission, said that the announcement required TV stations to categorize programs in terms of appropriateness according to the regulations issued. Violations will result in a warning, and an official warning letter will also be sent, or the station may be asked to stop airing the program altogether. However, there is no fine or threat of imprisonment. In the past, an official warning letter to the TV station director has been effective in receiving cooperation.

**Airtime appropriate for programs with different ratings
according to the TV program-rating decree dated
January 18, 2008**

Program Type	Airtime	Airing Days
1. Por "ป" and Dor "ด"	4-8.30 PM	Everyday
2. Nor13 "น13"	8.30 PM-5 AM	Everyday
	9 AM-4 PM	Monday - Friday, except public holidays
3. Nor18 "น18"	9 PM-5 AM	Everyday
	9 AM-4 PM	Monday - Friday, except public holidays
4. Chor "ฉ"	10 PM-5 AM	Everyday
	9 AM-4 PM	Monday - Friday, except public holidays

Source : "Public Relations Department issues 2 announcements 'TV ratings - Snack advertising control' effective 19 February," Krungthep Turakij. 25 January 2008

Establishment of TV ratings and stipulating airtimes for different types of programs in line with the viewing behavior of young TV viewers is an important mission that should help improve the quality of the "material" that is broadcast via the TV screen. In addition, such a system should help children's intellectual development more than in the past.

In the next step of TV ratings, the Public Relations Department, the government agency responsible for this matter, has to follow up and evaluate whether the content of TV programs has improved in essence. The Public Relations Department should cooperate with civil groups such as family-consumer networks, which are the main force in post-ratings. It should also quickly create understanding of the TV rating system among the general public, increasing campaign continuity along with the present coverage. These measures will help to improve the quality of Thai TV programs. At the same time, it will improve the status of viewers from merely "consumers" to "citizens" who can voice their real needs with regard to TV programs.

Under the TV rating system, which consists of +6 gauges, there has been an in programs that promote education and learning for viewers in Thai society. These programs should be supported so that they might increase in number and improve in quality. Therefore, government and state enterprise support and the establishment of the creative media fund in order to support programs in the +6 group should not be neglected, hindered, or overlooked.

Finally, TV ratings are merely a tool for adults to choose programs appropriate for children of different age groups. **Providing advice while children watch TV is still the responsibility of parents and guardians.** If adults at home do not change their behavior and let TV be their children's babysitter or do not care to sit and watch TV with their children, the TV rating system, established with good intentions and efforts for two years at this point, will not achieve its desired results.

Producers, production houses and people in the television industry should use the television media in a creative way and consider the benefits for viewers. Even the advertising agencies, an important variable, should change their concept in supporting programs by not just using quantitative ratings but also qualitative ones.

All this is to create support for programs that enhance learning for Thai society, especially for viewers who will grow up to be tomorrow's adults and upon whom our nation will depend.



Symbol



Thai TV Ratings

The Thai program rating guidebook classifies programs into 6 types, as follows:

1. **Por “ป” programs** are TV programs for preschool children aged 3-5 years. These programs must have content that promotes multiple intelligence development, is age-appropriate, teaches morals and ethics, promotes understanding of differences, promotes the learning of skills necessary for development at each age, and instills love among family members. Inappropriate content related to sex, language, and violence is prohibited as children this age can quickly absorb and copy inappropriate behavior.
2. **Dor “ด” programs** are TV programs for children aged 6-12 years. These programs must have content that promotes multiple intelligence development, provides academic knowledge for development, teaches morals and ethics, inspires children to behave morally and ethically, promotes understanding of differences and living in harmony, and promotes the learning of necessary living skills and the importance of the family institution and one's role in the family. Inappropriate content related to sex, language, and violence is prohibited as children this age can quickly absorb and copy inappropriate behavior.
3. **Tor “ท” programs** are TV programs for the general audience aged 3 and above. These programs must have content that supports the development of systematic and logical thinking, provides integrated academic knowledge, and teaches morals and ethics as well as inspiring children to behave morally and ethically. Content should also promote understanding of differences, living in harmony and solving problems arising from differences, and the learning of necessary life skills, the importance of the family institution and one's role in the family. Inappropriate content related to sex, language, and violence is prohibited.
4. **Nor13 “u13” programs** are TV programs for audiences aged 13 and above and require viewing discretion. For children under 13, these programs require parental guidance. The content of these programs must support knowledge in 6 areas, called “+6”. These programs may contain low to mid levels of inappropriate content related to sex, language, and violence. In the case of demonstrating the effects of bad behavior, the presentation must be well balanced, and the cause and effects of the behavior must not be too far apart.
5. **Nor 18 “u18” programs** are TV programs for audiences aged 18 and above and require viewing discretion. For audiences under 18, these programs require parental guidance. The content of these programs must support knowledge in 6 areas, called “+6”. These programs may contain inappropriate content related to sex, language, and violence.
6. **Chor “ฉ” programs** are TV programs for adults older than 18. Children and youth should not watch these programs. The content of these programs must support learning and knowledge in 6 areas, called “+6” for adults as well as present appropriate guidelines to solve problems. These programs may contain high levels of inappropriate content related to sex, language and violence.