

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is extremely different from the past centuries as we have stepped into a New World called “the information era”. This is a result of a leap and bound development in the information technology development, which brings changes into the world in many areas, especially, culture and society.

Communication is not only a tool for the expression of ideas and opinions, but also a catalyst for development and change. Conventional media such as newspapers, radio and TV have been utilized for this purpose, and increasingly new electronic platforms such as the Web, and mobile phones. As Asia confronts massive poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, social inequity, and regional disparity, among others, debates abound about the role of information and communication in pursuing development in the region.

The discourse has become intense because of the changing communication environment in the region. The advent of new technologies and media convergence are generating new opportunities for people to get more connected in the information society. Some press systems are opening up, allowing for more creativity, more choices and access to information critical to the demands of development. Amidst stiff competition, changing audience preferences and inroads of trans-national media companies, profit is assuming more precedence over public service. Even public broadcast entities given less government subsidy for their operations find themselves in this situation.

Commercial or private broadcasting provides programs designed primarily for profit from advertising revenue and is owned and controlled by private individuals, or by commercial enterprises. However, community broadcasting is a non-profit service that is owned and managed by a particular community, usually through a trust,

foundation or association. It is similar to public service broadcasting, but serves a community rather than the whole nation. In addition, a community in this sense is referred to a group of people who share common characteristics and/or interests, such as sharing of a single geographical location (living in the same town or village), sharing of economic and social life through trade, marketing, exchange of goods and services, and so on (Fraser and Estrada, 2001: 3).

In Thailand ownership of radio and television stations, the principal components of broadcast media, rests generally in the hand of the state, principal components supervision of the Public Relations Department (Prime Minister's Office) and the Ministry of Defense (Muntarbhorn, 1998: 13)

Prison society is a small community which is not accepted in the mainstream society. Thus the Thai Department of Corrections has the main duty of improving the prisoners' behaviors to prepare them for their return to the mainstream society after leaving jail.

To change the prisoners, behaviors, attitudes, values, and beliefs for emotional recovery is very difficult and challenging. Although there are many services for the prisoners such as educational support, religious teaching and welfare, the prison development through the present circumstances is one of important things that the prisoners should receive.

The establishment of cable television station at Bang Kwang Central Prison (north of Bangkok), known as Bang Kwang Prison Cable Television or BKP Cable TV Station, is the latest in a series of measures to try and ease tension among inmates at Thailand's overcrowded prisons.

The BKP Cable TV started broadcasting last September 5, 2004. It features news, movies and music, sports and entertainment shows. Moreover, there is a weekly one-hour live show with the prison warden talking with inmates about their complaints. Among those mentioned features, the BKP Cable TV used the convicts to introduce the programs, and eventually produce shows for the station. It is interesting that despite of its function and role, Bang Kwang Prison Cable Television Station managed to receive prisoners' participation and act proactively for participatory communication.

Problem Statement

One of Thailand's main prisons will begin operating an in-house cable television station that will feature news and entertainment shows hosted by inmates. The management and system of BKP Cable TV (staffs, producers, and even products of Bang Kwang Prison Cable Television Station) of this project is an interesting subject to study because this case is a new thing for the Thai society. It has significant impact on the operation of the station which aims to create and distributing programming to the inmates.

BKP Cable TV appears to be a new innovation of cable TV operation. There still prevail a lot of unknowns regarding its operation and participation of prisoners. In this regard, there is a need to know how does this new innovation work, how will it be operated since the participants are prisoners in Bang Kwang Central prison, and what is the extent of the prisoners participation. In knowing all of these, one will be able to determine if BKP Cable TV would be able to achieve its goals.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To define the level operation of BKP Cable TV station.
2. To determine the participation of the prisoners who produce BKP Cable TV Program.
3. To collect suggestions on the improvement of BKP Cable TV Program.

Expected Outcome

The results of this study could be used as the guides in developing in-home cable TV systems in other prisons in Thailand.

Limitation of Study

This research aimed to study in Bang Kwang Prison Cable Television operation and participation of prisoners. It only employed the analysis of the secondary and primary data on BKP Cable TV operation from a very limited and exclusive target group of respondents (a prison director, 3 prison officials, and 9 prisoners). The non-participant observation and in-depth interview were specifically utilized to seek for information on the operation of BKP Cable TV and the participation of prisoners from these selected target groups including the prison director, prison officials and prisoners producing the BKP Cable TV programs.

Definition of Terms

Bang Kwang Central Prison referred to a prison that would be a case study of this research.

Bang Kwang Prison Cable Television (BKP Cable TV) referred to the TV program which was provided an opportunity for inmates to participate in producing the TV program.

Broadcasting program referred to on-air programs of BKP Cable TV.

Prisoners referred to the people who were imprisoned in Bang Kwang Central Prison.

Operation of BKP Cable TV referred to the opinion of prison officials and prisoners who produced BKP Cable TV towards the operational plans, programs, and staff development of BKP Cable TV. Operation was defined into 4 categories. Those were high, moderate, low, and none.

Participation of prisoners in producing BKP Cable TV referred to the opinion of prison officials and prisoners who produced BKP Cable TV towards staff recruitment plans, and participation activities which included idea expression, decision making regarding plans, Cable TV programs evaluation, and administration supports.

Television referred to a kind of mass media appearing daily and containing entertainment, news, and education.

The Role of Television referred to reporting the fact and entertainment issues to the audiences.