

Ethical Issues in Thai Community Newspaper

Anick Thavichachart

Communication Arts, Graduate School, College of Communication Arts, Rangsit University, Thailand
Corresponding author, e-mail: anick@rsu.ac.th

Abstract

This research aims to investigate and monitor the community newspaper publishers' operational process systematically in morality and ethics which are based upon the Newspaper Profession Ethical Regulation, Code and Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016. The researcher applied the ideas from mass media role and duty, concept of community newspaper, citizenship and newspaper duty, Hate Speech and Agenda-Setting in order to provide the knowledge models, understanding and mass media ethical deep-inspection to be more correct. This study is qualitative research which collected the data from the following 2 categories; Textual Analysis: the researcher had analyzed the data from 6 community newspaper agencies for a month through data tabulation as the categorized inspection, and In-Depth Interview: the newspaper professions, journalists and those who related to community newspapers agency were interviewed.

The results of the study from 108 issues of 6 community newspapers revealed that the majority of the presentation, content, comments and images had followed the ethical regulations. These ethical regulations could be divided into 2 categories: General Ethics and Operation Process that had been declared that the ethical news content should be presented with correctness and facts, public utility, balance and fairness, informed source and data acquisition concealment. The minority of presentations that might be near the edge of unethical issues were involved in the earlier area and also not respect to private right and human dignity and misleading advertisement.

The main factors involved the difference among these community newspapers would be influenced by principle of practice and working process of each agency. The result might inform that newspaper profession is the main factor who will select different news content presentation. The researcher realized that the ethical media should reflect their professional operation through working process ethically in order to instruct the consumers to build the value of selecting good and correct news content.

Keywords: *media ethics, local newspaper, media monitor*

1. Introduction

Community newspaper is the newspaper which is produced to respond directly to community demands and not to individual intention. Especially, content in the community newspapers will be directed from community members to understand situations, phenomenon, problems, emotion, culture, traditions and customs that occurred in the community. However, it may rarely contain some different contents which affects the community society. The community newspaper is the closest media due to its easy access and low cost. Therefore, media production in the form of community newspaper will distribute the occurrence of situations and problems, opinion, criticized articles and also their problem solving strategies. This information can be presented in news or articles to encourage community members awareness and participation in order to improve or develop their community. Community newspaper plays an important role of the community society in communicative, developmental, socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects. According to this role diversity, the community newspaper is considered as a mechanism of important growing factor for further development of the community (Chittraktham, 2002).

Especially nowadays, there is more governmental decentralization so each local government sector will have more power and budget. Only the central media cannot be able to monitor all nationwide local government sectors so we have to rely on local media in monitoring the operation among these local governmental sectors' operation. As the local media role mentioned above, it will strengthen local community. However, the current situation of newspaper business is in trouble and the community newspaper agencies are facing many factors both inside and outside the organization and affecting complicated impact (Namcharoen et al., 2015).

In addition, news presentation to community members has to be monitored and checked by many related sectors before distribution and also lastly by readers. From this matter, the newspaper journalists

will do their duty usefully for the community and now they pay more attention to professional ethics than in the past so they are socially accepted (Bunphra, 2010).

This research had been approved and selected as one of the “Media Ethic Watch” project representatives. The researcher was supported the budget from The National Press Council of Thailand to investigate and monitor the community newspaper operation. The researcher used the concepts of mass media duty and role, concepts of community newspaper, citizenship and newspaper role, Hate Speech and Agenda-Setting as guidelines in order to construct knowledge and understanding model to investigate media ethics more carefully and correctly. In addition, the categorized data tabulation was conducted for monitoring and investigating according to Newspaper Professional Ethical Regulation, Code and Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016. These data tabulation had been approved from The National Press Council of Thailand before the researcher used as the systematical analysis framework.

2. Objective

1. To systematically investigate and monitor community newspaper agencies operational process based on their moral and ethical operational frame under the Newspaper Profession Ethical Regulation, Code and Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016.

2. To find factors involved in the process of presentation of the near edge of unethical news and their problem solving strategies of each agency.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 This study is a qualitative research which comprised of textual analysis and in-depth Interview. The data was collected from two sources as follows:

3.1.1 Data source from community newspapers: the researcher selected 6 community newspapers that are members of The National Press Council of Thailand, non-weekly and regular printing. These are 6 community newspaper agencies are Thai News Chiangmai Newspaper, Chiangmai News Newspaper, Korat Khon Isan Newspaper, Siangtai Newspaper, Phak Tai Focus Newspaper, and Trang Time Newspaper. Data collection collected from news contents, headlines, pictorials and captions. The duration of investigation and monitoring was a month from 1st March 2017 to 31st March 2017.

3.1.2 Personal source: this method is in-depth interview from 6 community newspaper agency representatives or persons who worked in production process. Some data under newspaper ethical regulations following Code and Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016, have to rely on interview information in order to complete investigation and monitoring.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Primary Data was collected from the community newspaper directly by investigating and interviewing newspaper professions or related persons from the community newspaper agencies in order to complete the data according to the objective.

3.2.2 Secondary Data from revision, studying and observation which was focusing on associated academic documents, articles and researches from various sources such as libraries, information centers organizations and other electronic sources.

3.3 Data analysis

The researcher used qualitative analytic method. The researcher performed the data analysis using the ethical regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016, as the operation tool criteria and combined with the interviewed data in order to consider the ethical process and community newspaper conduct.

3.4 Data presentation, the researcher presents in Descriptive Analysis form.

4. Result and Discussion

The result of investigations of operational process among community newspaper under Newspaper Ethical Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016. We found that the majority of news content, opinion expression and images were presented under ethical frame and conduct. There were only some presentations that had been near the edge of unethical issues.

4.1 Each community newspaper agency presents the information, news content, headlines, pictorials and captions under ethical frame and conduct. According to Code and Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016, which was divided into these following 2 categories:

4.1.1 General Ethics

4.1.1.1 Correctness and Facts: The researcher found the most common correct ethical issue was under “the newspaper should be monitored and should not add any incorrect or exaggerated contents from the facts” which conformed to the interview of C Community Newspaper stated that “In case of correctness, if the newspaper journalists conducted the survey by themselves or from the local journalists, they will be further investigated about the facts of those news in order to get the correct and complete information” (Editor of Community Newspaper C, 31st May 2017).

4.1.1.2 Public Interest: The researcher found that the most common practical ethical issue in this area was “Newspaper journalists should present news, pictorials, opinions and any contents with awareness and focus on the importance and advantage of news to the public and did not present the propaganda or emotional contents that might be disadvantage for the public” which conformed to F Newspaper editor interview; “We presented any contents based on the situations affected the community, (the researcher had expanded the interviews and viewed from the local members to observe their opinions) no contents of lotteries and illegal draws. We also publish the quality contents for everyone without any inglorious issues”, (Editor of Community Newspaper F, 31st May 2017).

4.1.1.3 Balance and Fairness: The researcher found that the most common ethical issue was “Newspaper tries firmly to provide fairness to every party” which conformed to the speech of E Newspaper editor “The most important issue of journalists or mass media communicators was when presenting the news contents to the audiences, journalists had to distribute the facts to public along with reality and neutrality, positive and negative issues, direct contents and without hidden agenda” (Editor of Community Newspaper E, 31st May 2017).

4.1.2 Operation process principle

4.1.2.1 Informed sources concealment: The researcher found the most ethical issue was “Newspaper journalists will not present any vague news contents without quoted sources. They should openly mention the interviewees who inform news contents except reasonable ground to conceal the information for the safety of informed sources and the news should provide advantages obtaining to the public”. This speech conformed to the interview of A Newspaper managing director which stated that “To conceal the secrecy of the informed sources, newspaper journalists should investigate and check the formation correctly before their contents distribution in order to ensure that information is correct as well as concealing these informed sources for their safety” (Managing director of Community Newspaper A, 31st May 2017).

4.1.2.2 Data acquisition: The researcher found the most ethical issue was “Newspaper journalists should inform informed sources where they have been coded besides they have already asked the permission”, it conformed to A Newspaper managing director interview which stated that “If the mentioned contents in the article referred to other persons, the editor should re-write, check, and cut some contents in order to be the most safety and to ensure that articles will include the exactly referral sources” (Managing director of Community Newspaper A, 31st May 2017).

4.2 Each community newspaper publisher presented the information, news contents, headlines, pictorials and captions that were approaching near the edge of unethical issue according to Code and Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016 in 2 categories as follows:

4.2.1 General Ethics and Morality

4.2.1.1 Private rights and human dignity observances: The researcher found that the most common non-ethical issue was “Newspaper should omit to violate the private rights and human dignity except for the public interest”.



Figure 1 From D community newspaper, this picture revealed the face of the suspect and properties in dispute



Figure 2 From E community newspaper, this picture revealed openly the condition of dead body

From the pictures 1 and 2 of D and E Community Newspaper publishers, they distributed the contents which violated the private right of those mentioned and did not provide any benefits to the public for example: Kratom-leaf arresting, the picture clearly showed the face of the suspect and properties in dispute as well as the news of the gun-fire murder with the face of mentioned people. Even they showed the picture of arresting addicted drugs, the journalists should respect the human rights and human dignity by covering up the face of the suspect or dead body even though that person had already died. Journalists should give their respect to that person or realize their family feeling as well. The interview of D Newspaper editor stated that “Sometimes to present the pictorials might rely on the situations and working experience to instruct us about the dangerous, wrongness and mistakes since the journalists present their contents without perfect analysis” (Editor of Community Newspaper D, 1st June 2017).

4.2.1.2 Correctness and facts: The researcher found the most common information near the edge of non-ethical issue was “Newspaper will be investigated and will not be added any incorrect or exaggerated contents”.



Figure 3 The headline of D community newspaper mentioned with misunderstanding and exaggerated contents

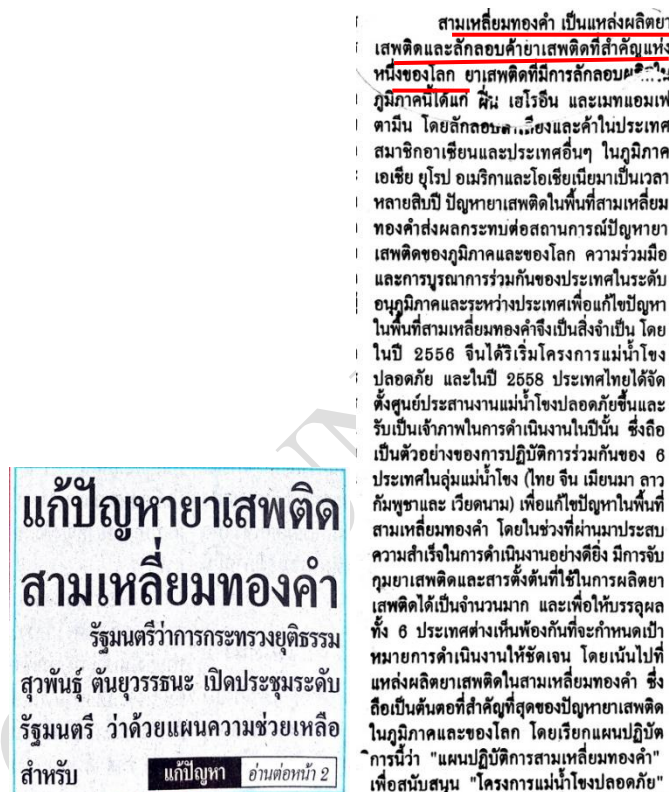


Figure 4 The headline of A community newspaper mentioned with misunderstanding and exaggerated contents

From Pictures 3 and 4, of D and A Community Newspaper publishers, they distributed the news contents that were approaching non ethical issues because those contents had been incorrect and exaggerated. For example, of the headline which mentioned about finding many illegal hotels in Krabi Province and also mentioned that the Golden Triangle area (within Chiangrai Province) was one of the main manufacture of addicted drugs and illegal distribution areas of the world. These information might cause some misunderstanding with exaggerated contents. From the interview of A Community Newspaper managing director “We always check our contents in the newspapers and do not put the over eye-catching contents. We usually let our re-writers to do their duty. Do we make any mistakes? Yes, we do but, we try to make it happen as less as possible. So, if the obvious mistakes happen, we will correct it immediately. If the mentioned parties be shameful, they will claim or mention about what are the causes of their shame so we will do our investigation and correctness immediately as well. We will correct the contents until the sufferers have their satisfaction” (Managing director of Community Newspaper A, 31st May 2017).

4.2.1.3 Public Interest: The researcher found the most common non-ethical issue was “Newspaper will present the news contents, pictorials, opinions and any contents by focusing on the importance and advantage of news to the public and we will not distribute any wrong persuaded and misleading, emotional arousing contents without non-public interest to attract the readers”.

คู่มือสลากกินแบ่งรัฐบาลงวดประจำวันที่ 1 มี.ค. 60 กุมภาพันธ์ **เป็นการคำนวณไม่ควรยึดถือเป็นหลักเกณฑ์**		
เต็ม 9 5 4 155 391 459 599 951 194 351 453 593 954 เต็มต่าง 2 3 23 25 27 29 34 35 37 39 เต็ม 5 1 3 195 239 643 859 894 193 245 035 854 834 เต็มต่าง 2 8 21 23 25 27 41 43 45	47 81 83 85 87 91 93 95 97 เต็ม 7 1 719 817 911 918 175 547 เต็มต่าง 9 8 92 93 95 97 82 83 87 89 เต็ม 4 3 5 349 547 964 389 967 543 เต็มต่าง 8 0 82 83 85 87 02 07 08	เต็ม 3 2 7 135 427 736 924 079 475 519 714 เต็มต่าง 2 5 20 23 28 29 52 53 58 59 เต็ม 7 9 5 095 473 549 974 079 185 369 975 เต็มต่าง 2 4 23 24 26 28 43 46 47 48

Figure 5 The contents of D community newspaper included wrong persuaded contents, non-public interest



Figure 6 The contents of B community newspaper included non-public interest

From pictures 5 and 6 of D and B Community Newspaper publishers, they presented content near the edge of non-ethical issue to attract the readers about the risk-making or gambling lucky methods as well as mentioned the birth date of celebrities and posted the contents about the hotel marketing director birthday ceremony that might not in the public interest. The interview of D Community Newspaper editor mentioned that “We clearly separate specific pages as well as screen the advertising contents before posting for our both irregular and regular customers” (Editor of Community Newspaper D, 1st June 2017).

4.2.1.4 Balance and fairness: The researcher found that the most common non-ethical issue was “Newspaper should give opportunities to the suspects to express their facts after they were concerned that might affect to related persons or organizations or let them show their fairness attempts”.



Figure 7 The headline of B community newspaper alluded and attacked to the related persons or organizations (published on 1st March 2017)



Figure 8 The headline of B community newspaper alluded and attacked to the related persons or organizations (published on 2nd March 2017)

From picture 7 of B Community Newspaper publisher, its headline was the content about youth pregnancy presentation through unfair or did not offer the sufferer an opportunity to express her opinions or facts based on the duty of people information broadcaster. The content which posted on 1st March 2017, was not the fact and picture 8 of the same Community Newspaper which posted on 2nd March 2017, was edited and the details were incorrect and did not present any apologizing content.

4.2.2 Operational process

4.2.2.1 Informed sources concealment: The researcher found the most common non-ethical issue was “Our newspaper will not post any aimless news contents without the sources. We will clearly specify the name of interviewees except for the reasonable ground to protect their safety and should have the advantage to public to recognize the news contents” For example of the A Community Newspaper posted the news contents without any informed sources and also openly mentioned the name of interviewees. About the amphetamine arresting news, even the publisher concealed the name of informed source but they still revealed the car license of the informed source which might be risk to the informed source to be dangerous. From this issue, the managing director of A Community Newspaper mentioned that “The editor was the one who chose and rechecked one more time before printing the pictures. Although we provide the head of news department to choose or recheck the appropriate pictures, however, there were some inappropriate pictures but the local members did not like to sue us. We have got the monthly reminders from The National Press Council of Thailand which suggest us to keep perform along with their regulations. As the practitioner, we try our best to protect and do not violate the suspects’ rights” (Editor of Community Newspaper A, on 31st May 2017).

4.2.2.2 Data acquisition: The researcher found the most common non-ethical risk issue was “Newspaper publisher should inform the sources of any copied texts besides they have already asked

the informed sources permission” like the article in D Community Newspaper which posted about healthy content without its informed sources reference. In addition, in the foreign news column, they also did not refer the informed source to the public.

4.2.2.3 Non occultation, hidden and misleading advertisement contents: The researcher found the most common non-ethical issue was “Newspaper agency should clearly show the texts which describe about advertisement and announcement section purchasing without any occultation news or opinion expression leading contents” like A Community Newspaper that posted about the Buddha image statue bathing ceremony with added advertisement content. They announced to find the sponsors who would be able to support the temple budget in this news. As well as B Community Newspaper, they attached the advertisement on the news ending. These cases were found from the popular newspapers of many Buddha image traders. At the news ending, the address and telephone numbers of the owners were posted in order to let those who might interest to contact with them. From this issue, A Community Newspaper managing director stated that “We should verify the context of this news. If it is the worrisome, help needed content we will post the news and contact numbers in order to be helpful” (Editor of Conommunity Newspaper A, 31st May 2017).

5. Conclusion

This research aims to investigate and monitor the community newspaper agencies on their operational according to the ethics and conduct under Newspaper Publisher Profession Ethical Regulation, Code and Regulation of The National Press Council of Thailand, 2016. The investigation in both categorized methods was only a part of community newspaper agency operational processes which the researcher found both correct and incorrect issues according to Newspaper Publisher Profession Ethical Regulation. Result from the investigation of 108 issues of 6 community newspaper agencies found that the community newspaper agencies operated their process and production under ethical frame so the majority presented news followed the ethical regulations. There was some different area of presentation that had been approached near the edge of non-ethical issues and from different community newspaper agencies. The researcher are not able to identify which community newspaper had presented most frequently risk issues and also are not able to identify which agency is the best ethical practitioner due to different policy of each agency. For examples F Community Newspaper agency stated that they preferred to not publish many murder news contents so that might say this newspaper focused on urban society, local or regional living life style.

Examples from the investigation and in-depth interview have shown some non-ethical issues in all area of general ethics: correctness and facts, public interest, and balance and fairness. Operational process principle: informed sources concealment, data acquisition, private rights and human dignity observances. The researcher found that the main factors involved the presentations influenced by the newspaper profession who will select news contents and working process under the policy of the newspaper agencies. After they found those no intention information that had been near the edge non-ethical issues they tried to correct or apologize by different strategies.

From this study, we are not able to draw the results from both aspects (ethical and non-ethical) to judge the entire studied community newspapers. Therefore, the occurrence of news contents was both ethical and non-ethical under the frame used as a guideline in investigation. However, ethics and conducts are not legal aspects that judge the right or wrong so suggestions to both sides are to strengthen the community newspaper agencies to operate under ethical frames and conduct and to educate media literacy to the consumers in selecting good and correct news contents.

6. Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to appreciate The National Press Council of Thailand for their research budget support. Prof. Dr.Bubha Boonsomsuk, the specialist, who always gives some useful advice and suggestions and let this research be completed. The Digital Journalism Department and Radio and Television Department, College of Communication Arts, Rangsit University students and give last appreciation to Prof. Dr.Nuntika Thavichachart M.D., the important supporter, who always carries this research forward until it was finished completely.

7. References

- Bunphra, W. (2010). *Newspapers in Today's World*, Retrieved 15th March 2017, from <http://ad51123303031.blogspot.com>.
- Chitrakam, S. (2002). *The research of the affected factors of local newspaper adoption within the area of Songkhla Province*, Songkhla: Songkhla Rajabhat University.
- Community Newspaper A, Managing director, interview, 31st May 2017.
- Community Newspaper C, Editor, interview, 31st May 2017.
- Community Newspaper D, Editor, interview, 1st June 2017.
- Community Newspaper E, Editor, interview, 1st June 2017.
- Community Newspaper F, Editor, interview, 31st May 2017.
- Namcharoen, N. et al., (2015). *The ethics of local mass media, media ethics, ideas, theories and cases study*, p.241-265, Bangkok: Charansanitwong Press.

RANGSIT UNIVERSITY