The Responsible rule of Media and Media Literacy in Strengthening Communal Harmony between Buddhists and Muslims in Thai Society

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Abstract

Media as a potent tool and play an outstanding role to promote social, religious and communal harmony for the betterment of the society, the nation as well as the all humanity. Beside the communal disharmony and conflict are fueled by the fear, suspicion and hatred which frequently spread by transmission of different channels. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the media environment and to gain media literacy how the mass media operate and how they affect peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance in the society. Thailand is the religious diverse country of southeast Asia. Buddhism is the majority of Thailand yet other major world religion like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are active and generally they can all be found living together in peace and harmony. Media plays a vital role to strengthening communal harmony between Buddhist and Muslim in Thai society. But frequently mass of media transmission conflicting news specially, southern part of Thailand where the relation between Buddhist and Muslim coming under going pressure. This paper will study the positive and negative impact of media on communal harmony between Buddhist and Muslim in Thai society. Moreover, it will study the importance of Media literacy to promoting peaceful coexistence in Thai society as well as Modern society.

Keywords: *Media; Media Literacy; Communal harmony; Buddhism and Islam and; Positive and Negative Impact*

Introduction

Media is a powerful and unique feature of Modern society. The Mainstream media of 21st century like TV, News Paper, News Channels, Magazines, Radio, Journals and most importantly internet and email which sphere of influence increasing day by day. It is commonplace for the religions to develop specific and particular relationships to the mass media. The major religious issues and trends which are so important today cannot be fully addressed or comprehended without attention to the media. As a religiously diverse country religions of Thailand also immensely influenced by the media. It can be seen the media of Thailand have been involved in presenting religion through journalism.

However, Media plays a significant role in strengthening communal harmony between Buddhist and Muslim in Thai society. Media coverage many news on reducing conflict and misunderstanding, as well as a potential role in strengthening interfaith relations between Buddhists and Muslims. But, frequently mass of media transmission conflicting news especially, the southern part of Thailand where the relation between Buddhist and Muslim coming undergoing pressure. According to the report of Royal Thai Embassy, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the conflict in southern provinces stem from neither religious conflict nor the infringement of religious freedom. But the government of Thailand believes that cultural diversity and religious pluralism can serve as a constructive force in social development.[1]

The Thai government tries to control any act which may create a problem with religious, cultural and traditional sentiments of Thai Muslims and Buddhists and other religion to established communal harmony in the society.

Methods

This study used a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This method is carried out by collecting various sources of literature by reading and analyzing then processing the research material that has been obtained. Data collection is done by doing research first and then review the contents of the journal that is considered appropriate. The data analysis technique in writing this research is to analyze the contents of the journal to ensure its suitability and this kind of analysis is used with the aim of obtaining a valid source of material according to the stages and fields.

Result and Discussion

Religious Demography of Thailand

Thailand is ethnically, culturally and religiously homogenous nation. Religion has become very important in the lives of Thai people. The Constitution of the country believes religious freedom and gives all citizens the right to choose and provides security to practice the religion of their own choice.

According to the U.S government report the total population of Thailand 68.6 million (July 2018, estimate). The 2010 population census indicated 93 percent population of the country are Theravada Buddhist and 5 percent Muslim. On the other hand, NGO, academic and religious groups indicated that 85 to 95 percent population is Theravada Buddhist and 5 to 10 percent Muslim and others less than 5 percent of the population include animism, Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, and Taoists.

Most Buddhists integrated with Hindu and animist practices into their worship. Theravada Buddhism has two schools Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika. The former is older and more prevalent within the monastic community.

Islam is the second-largest religion in Thailand and they are mostly concentrated in four of the five southernmost provinces ((Narathiwat, Yala, Satun, and Pattani) near the Malaysian border. Those who

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[1] Muslim in Thailand, http://www.thaiembassy.org ,Accessed on 23/09/2019.

belong to this religion are both Thai and Malay descent. Thailand has a long history of Christianity. Christianity first introduced in Thailand as early as the mid-sixteenth century by European missionaries. The majority of Christians community is Roman catholic and Ethnic Chinese.

Most of the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese follow either Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism. And also many ethnic Chinese is a Mein hill tribe, also practice Taoism.

Buddhism in Thailand

Thailand is often called the "*Land of Buddhism*". It is considered as a world most heavily Buddhist country and about 93 percent of people are Buddhists. Buddhism in Thailand belongs to Theravada or southern Buddhism which is prevalent in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. Buddhism is so revered in Thai culture because it is the philosophy of life of Thai people for more than thousand years and significant influence upon the character, the mind and way of the life of Thai people. Thai Buddhism incorporates with animist and Hindus elements into their worship and has two schools *Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika*. According to Historical evidence, Thai started to follow different schools of Buddhism as well as animism and Hinduism beginning around the A.D. 13th century.[2] For Thai people, there are three sacred institutions which highly respected by the Thai people: 1. The King; 2. Thai nation; 3. Buddhism (or religion). These are symbolized by the three colors in the national flag. The red stands for the Thai nation. The white stands for religion. The blue stands for the king.

In the period of Ayudhya (17th century) Buddhism was institutionalized as a sacred object of worship. The monarchy of Thailand always has a special place in the hearts of the Thai people. The traditions of the Royal house of Chakri have to follow by observing and applying Buddhist virtues to the administration of the country. The Royal family referred to the 10 guiding principles and virtues in Buddhism. The ten virtues are 1. Dana, or giving both tangible and intangible; 2. Sila, or observing the Buddhist precepts; 3. Pariccaga, or Sacrificing; 4. Ajjava, or Honesty; 5. Maddava, or gentleness in manners and spirit; 6. Tapa, or austerity; 7. Akkodha, or freedom from anger; 8. Avihimsa, or non-violence; 9. Khanti, or patience; 10. Avirodhana, or non-deviation.[3]

However, the king and government very active in their Buddhist role and obliged by the constitution to protect and support Buddhism and other religions in the kingdom.

Islam in Thailand:

Islam is the second-largest religion in Thailand which comprise as much as ten percent of the Thai population. According to Omar farouk Bajunid (1999- 221), Muslim has been in Thailand since ancient times.[4] They are not a newly established community they have settled as early as the ninth century in Malakka, Accha and Melayu peninsula including the area that was then the southern part of Siam. The Muslim in Thailand divided into three major groups: the first groups is Malay Muslims, the second group comprise Thai Malay Muslim ethnicity who speak Thai and reside in the upper southern provinces, the last group is origin from myriad of different groups of Muslims reside in central Bangkok such as Bangkok, Ayudhaya, and other provinces of the country.

Islam is most popular in southern Thailand about eighteen percent of Thai Muslim live within the southern provinces of Songkhla, Satun, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, who are primarily of the Malay, Javanese and Acehnese origins, agricultural-based, that follow the "Malay" culture. Most of

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[2] Religion in Thailand, http://factsanddetails.com, Accessed on 26/09/2019

[3] Ven. Mokesh Barua, *A Righteous King (Dhammaraja): His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Buddhism,* Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC) Vol. 4 No 2 (2018), P. 4.

[4] Penchan Phoborisut, *Understanding the identity of the Thai Muslim Community of Kudi Khao in Thonburi, Bangkok*, MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities, Special Issue No.16, 2008.

Thai Muslim is following the Shaffie school, although there can be found a small number of Hanafi, and Shiites around the Thorn buri area.

The central Islamic council of Thailand provides funding for Islamic education, the building of mosques, and participation in Hajj. There are approximately hundreds of primary and secondary Islamic schools throughout the country which offering Islamic education with the national curriculum. But the government did not Approve: traditional pondoks, or private Islamic day schools, offering Islamic education according to their curriculum to students of all ages; and tadika, an after-school religious course for children in grades one through six, often held in a mosque.

However, the Ministry of justice allows the practice of sharia law for the Muslim residents especially for the deep south of Thai Muslim residents.

Media and Religion:

"If we think about the digital things we make as kinds of human expression […] Religion is just one mode of human expression, but it too is a mode of encounter, a set of processes or programs that shape us and that we also program for ourselves". – (Wagner 2012, 14)

Initially, Media was believed to be deeply rooted in history but the contemporary notion of media can be a canvas to the development of the Modern era. It also to be noted that media was not merely a technological occurrence because, it was also characterized by important economic, structural and political attributes. Most significantly the printing revolution laws were the main roots of the development of media industries which were automatized center of power and which were also capable of bringing about change in the existing political and social systems. Apart from the political
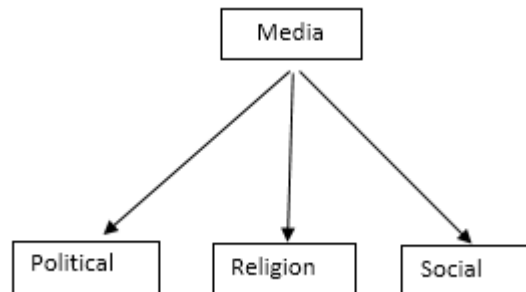
and social affairs media also effected religion immensely.

I would like to say that apart from being associated with the protestant reformation, printing also played a very important role in the counter-reformation and in subsequent religious evolutions all these different religious movements become a part of democratized religious cultures of north America and they have all depended in some way or the other on Media technology. It is considered some religions developed specific and particular relationships with the mass media by the 20th century. According to a report, in an average week, one-in-five people of the U.S.A share their religious faith online, and tune in to religious talk radio watch TV programs or listen to Christian music.

However, In the U.S.A television once carried a few programs with religious or spiritual themes, and religion has become a staple of commercial television since the 1990s in the U.S.A.

The Role of the Media in the field of religion in Thailand:

The mass media played as a primary mechanism role for national development and ideological; conformity in Thailand. The rapid increase of media reform is at the heart of the development of public sphere in Thailand. According to the media anthropologist Unbonrat the media reform parallels the democratic and cultural transformation of contemporary Thai Society. In this transformation, various

kind of social forces tried to get media space to set their agenda for public attention. Anthropologist Unbonrat claim that because of media expansion middle class strength are growing, but it doesn't signify freedom of peasants or workers.

1.1 Community Media:

Media technology has been reached nearly every parts of Thailand. The people has enabled to use small-scale of media such as community media, printing media, radio, video, film, brochures and pamphlets. The Community media is a small-scale media which is emerging in the space between the state and globalization. It's play a very significant role to transport very efficiency and very rapidly political, cultural and religious contents and assists to the spread cultural identity. Therefore, Community media is a very unique formation of cultural identity. The impact of community media to increasing importance of the public sphere in southern part of Thailand and which allows to give a new space for small producers whose production and distribution of small-scale media lies at the heart of the mobilization of the movement. However, In the bellow has given summarized of competing community media and compared in Table 4 within the framework of social movement:

Community Media	Content	Religion	Language	Location
Core radio, Pamphlets, brochures, Journal, slides	baan koet campaign, education on political reform	Than Bhuddhadhasa (homepage www.suanmokkh.org)	Southern Thai dialect	Bangkok, Songkla
Islamic Media, tapes, books, video-tape	Social virtue, Islamic lifestyle	Scriptualist Islam	Patani Melayu dialect, Jawi	Malaysia, Kelantan
Chinese, video, television	Chinese ritual, Chinese identity	Kwan Im cult	Thai	Bangkok, Taiwan, Singapore

6.2 Buddhist Media:

Buddhists are using media to propagate Buddhism in Thailand. According to the research result, the Buddhist religious leaders in Thailand started to using educational Media and technology 1999-2014, more than during 1946-1998. As an example, A Buddhist monk named Luang phor panya Mantha Bhikkhu started giving sermons in 1960 on television and radio. There are many other channels such as the Dhamma media channel television station established by 2010, and the world Buddhism television at yannawa monastery, MCU TV (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University). According to the office of the education council (2009), the Buddhist monasteries propagated Buddhist teaching 56 percent by the broadcast tower and 25 percent by radio. It is considered that from 1999 to 2011, the rapid growth of information technology. Buddhists are propagating Buddhist teaching into new channels through the internet and now can be found many websites, radio and television stations on the internet.

the print media also most popular in Thailand. According to the Educational Council report (2009) 36 percent of monasteries using print media in various ways such as books, journals, calendars, brochures.

6.3 Muslim Media:

Muslim people as well as engaged to propagate Islamic teaching by mass media. The Muslim media TMTV is a satellite television station from Bangkok, Thailand, providing Islamic religious education. It is also known as Thai Muslim TV. TMTV produces videos as well as Muslim lifestyle shows. Muslim people also use social media, newspaper, and printing for propagating Islamic education in Thailand.

2. Media's contribution to promoting communal harmony between Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand:

seldom makes a headline. - Silas Bent

Media is one of the best potent and effective medium having a wide reach and penetration to influence public opinion. To maintain and strengthen communal harmony between Buddhists and Muslims media plays a significant role in Thailand. Media of Thailand try to coverage consistently highlighted most peace and anti-war campaigns through television, magazine, radio, literature, music, art, films and through various other cultural activities.

7.1 Media reporting to times of harmony:

The reporting in times of communal harmony is a long term investment in keeping intact the communal fabric of the country. The media of Thailand constantly try to report on communal harmony between Buddhists and Muslims through television, magazine, radio, etc. A news report by the Bangkok Post a Buddhist monk leads donation drive to promote religious harmony in southern Thailand. The Buddhist monk name is Phra thepsilwisudh he is well known for his efforts to serve as an intermediary between Buddhist and Muslim communities in southern Thailand and promoting communal harmony between Buddhists and Muslims in the Thai society.
Media reported many news in the U.S.A government policy and engagement to reduce conflict and misunderstanding between Buddhists and Muslims in southern Thailand as well as throughout the country. The U.S.A Ambassador met with supreme patriarch and president of the sangha supreme council Somdet phra Maha Muneewong regarding controlling the conflict and promoting peace between Muslims and Buddhists in South Thailand. To promote tolerance and establish peace in society embassy and consulate officials regularly met with the Mulsim and Buddhist religious leaders. Media also cover the news of interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution discussion, an interreligious workshop on peace in Pattani province with a well-known U.S.A speaker on interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution which organized by the Embassy.

The Embassy organized the program as well in Yala province and Chiangmai province with the Muslim, Buddhist, and Christians communities for discussion on religious pluralism and Muslims in America, and advancing religious freedom and tolerance. The media CNA Daily News reported that on April 12, 2016 "The minority groups Christian and Muslim in Thailand gather to promote harmony and peace". The catholic officials attended the inauguration of a mosque in Bangkok. The deputy secretary-general of Thai bishops, Monsignor Andrew Vissanu Thanya Anan, told to the CNA in the conference that, "we need to build more solid bridge and destroy many walls of hatred and prejudices." Further, he said, the differences of religious and traditions should not be a cause of conflict, and the quest for peace is the responsibility of all believers. The Catholic and Muslim communities committed themselves to strengthen the bond of friendship and to work for peace, harmony, and development of Thailand.

7.2 Media Reporting in times of Conflict:

Media reporting news frequently contributes to escalating a conflict. It's plays a very significant role in spreading images, -- Images of threats, acrimony of others, people often involve conflicts who do not know each other directly. The private mass media of Thailand sometimes reporting "Sensational report". In this way media assists to the escalation of conflicts. The new social media also contributing to spread conflicts all around the world. My observation and experience through the social media many act of violence happened all around the world. Because some of the extremist religious groups spreads the religious sensational news, and threaten new by social media and used to mobilize people to commit acts of violence. The incident which is concrete example of conflict happened by social media is Cox's Bazer, Ramu Violence 2012. Some extremist religious group attacked Buddhist temple and house at Ramu, cox's district in Bangladesh.

The reason of this incident was, a Buddhist man called Uttam Barua is a user of Facebook and he was tagged with an image and link was shares in his wall. The link desecrates the holy book of Islam- The Quran. But Uttam Barua said he doesn't know anything about it, it came from another Facebook user.

According to report of Bangkok Post, A controversial Buddhist monk try to create a movement on social media for instigating hatred against Islam in Thaiand. This Controversial monk proposed that every time Buddhist monk is killed, a mosque be razed and he posted this message on his Facebook page. The sangha council ordered to him to stop this kind of activities against Islam and warned all user of social media to use their discretion before sharing or liking the content that insults other religion. Because, many extremist groups trying to use social media as weapon to spreading communal disharmony in Thai society these days.

7.3 Media: Reportage about Southern Thailand conflict:

Historically, Muslim and Buddhist communities have lived peacefully side by side for centuries in Thailand. But, in the few years, Thailand has been experiencing conflict between the government and the Malay Muslim in the south part of Thailand. The total Thai Muslim population today about 8-10 million are experiencing ethnic, lingual, cultural and political conflict. In the deep south incidents were particularly severe from January 2004 to January 2010. From the database of deep southern Thailand, over the past 73 months, there was a total of 9,446 incidents of unrest, as a result approximately 4,100 deaths and 6,509 injuries. The total casualties result from this unrest over the past six years has been more than 10,609 individuals.

However, according to report of International Religious Freedom report in Thailand 2018, In the Deep South watch, insurgency related violence from January to August resulted in at least 146 died among them 128 Muslims and 18 Buddhists. And also reported 196 persons were injured during that period 91 Muslims and 105 Buddhists. Deep south watch reported 187 Muslims, 64 Buddhists and 12 unidentified persons were killed in the 2017. According to the Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf," The unrest in Thailand is rooted in historical grievances and the rise of the ideology of Malay ethno-religious nationalism leading to the rise of mass-based insurgency," Michael K. Jerryson suggests "Some southern Thai Buddhists perceive the conflict in their villages as a product of the conflict between radical Islam and Thai Buddhism; conversely, many southern Malay Muslims perceive the conflict to be between Malay Islamic separatism and a hegemonic Buddhist State.[5]

However, the Thai press has been very emphatic about reporting the incidents in deep south of Thailand as largely an internal matter. The international Muslim media has largely reported the conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in southern Thailand. There have been many reports about the south Thailand conflict in the outside the AEAN region. The Canadian based "Muslimedia International,

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[5] Veerachart Nimanong, *Customs in Dialogue for Peaceful Co-existence in Southern Thailand*, Journal of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University Thailand, Vol. 13, P. 291-307

Popular Muslim website "islamonline.net" and some others popular Media coverage the news regarding the violence of south Thailand.

3.   The Significant role of Media Literacy to promoting Communal harmony in the Thai society:

Media literacy cannot be limited. A person is never going to be cultural and literate enough to take in all messages that media provides. There is always space for improvement in the media literacy world.[6] Generally, media literacy has been described as the ability to analyze and read various forms of media in society. Being media literate allows you to evaluate what's being produced, why it's being produced and how it either accurately or inaccurately reflects what's happening in society. It is as a key that unlocks the meaning behind the messages that we see and allows us to be more thoughtful and deliberate as we create our messages such as, those we create and share on social media.

The center for Media Literacy in New York defines media literacy as the capacity of communicating information through print or electronic means and the people's ability to analyze images, words and sounds and how it helps them to interpret real messages and have a better understanding of ideas.[7]

3.1 The Lessons of Media Literacy:

The difference between media messages and media effects is the most important lesson of media literacy. Media messages are the values and ideas that are promoted by the media, the things that get put into them. Media effects are their influences and consequences on audiences. But talking about media is the term of these inputs and outputs in a way, way too simple. In daily life, everyone interacts with multiple media. It can be difficult to determine whether we're consuming important and relevant information. Media doesn't just broadcast one easy to understand message straight into our brains and readers and viewers don't just agree with whatever they say and move on with their lives. The producer experiences and environment affect everything they create, and we consumers have our baggage, which determines how we react to and interpreting messages. Media scholars, cultural critics, and plenty of other very smart academic types have long understood that we need to think about messages effects in a far more nuanced way.

Media consumers, we are not just a helpless sponge, absorbing all kinds of messages without a second thought. We uniquely interpret messages, which means we also can see what messages are being thrown to us, and decide whether we want to catch them, pass them or drop them completely. This also leaves plenty of room for miss-communication, and messages getting lost in translation. Of course, scholars, educators, parents, and consumers have always debated to what degree media affects its consumers. Questions of whether media can truly harm or benefits us have led to media literacy education in schools, media regulations (like movie ratings and the labeling of advertisements) and tons of research into media effects. Moreover, these days we get two-thirds news from social media and some of that can be "fake" news – we constantly have to ask "what information can I truly trust? "

Answer to questions like these is not always obvious whether we are skeptical of social media role in our political views, questioning the power of tech companies to control our newsfeeds or just trying to get our messages out into the world. Learning how to navigate the media landscape is tough, but possible with the right skill set.

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[6] Ibid

[7] 14 Royal Van Horn, "Sex, Potato Chips, and Media Literacy," *Journal of Technology* (September 2002): 2.

3.2 How Important is Media literacy to build communal harmony between Buddhists and Muslims in Thai Society?

The Media is an ever present part of our daily life which influence us greatly whether we are aware of it or not. How can we utilize this media in appropriate way a better understanding of media literacy will help answer this question. The media especially social media hits many religious issues which are absolutely unexpected and unpredictable. There are various religious groups and communities in Thailand frequently try to create communal disharmony by social media They spread fake and hatred news through the social and mass media and doing a lot of injustice to religion. As a result, social media has great effect on religion. Therefore, media literacy is very crucial for the Thai society to eliminate communal disharmony from the society.

The importance of media literacy, the need for raising media awareness and how media literacy can be implement in Thai society. The objectives of the Media literacy which can be used as implement to build a bridge of communal harmony in Thai society. The one of the main objectives of Media literacy is to promote people skills, knowledge, and ability how the media works, how it targets audiences, how it persuades educates and influences, and how it omits information and more.

The another purpose of Media literacy is to help encourage people to think critically and healthy skepticism. And furthermore it would help to create awareness of the power of media. However, there is widespread concern among policymakers that the technical infrastructure, regulatory framework and media literacy of the Thai people are not adequate for the digital age. Therefore, being literate in media is very important for the Thai people. It would help to Thai people learn to think critically. As They are able to evaluate media, and decide whether the messages make sense, why certain information was included, what wasn't included, and what the key ideas are. They are to use examples to support their opinions. Then they can make up their own minds about the information based on knowledge they already have.

It also helps to become a smart consumer of products and information. Media literacy helps people learn how to determine whether something credible. It also helps them determine the "Persuasive intent" od advertising and resist the techniques marketers use to sell products. Furthermore, it would help to recognize point of view, identify the role of media in culture, understand the Authors goal. Therefore, to become a media literate is very important as a citizen of the country. That's why UNSCO considered the media literate people are better citizen.

Conclusion

"There are only two forces that can carry light to all the corners of the globe… the sun in the heaven and the associated press down here."

_____ *Mark Twain*

conclusion can be drawn that the media influences virtually every aspect of our lives. It is responsible for harmony, peace, and happiness and at the same time responsible for the war, conflict, and violence. The religiously, culturally or traditionally, pluralistic and tolerance of Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand immensely influenced by the media. The media and media literacy plays a significant role in Thailand in promoting communal harmony which based on mutual respect for the diversity of pluralistic harmony between two religions. And also plays an important role in promoting national unity. The greatest strength of Thailand is its diversity whereby the focus is on unity and not uniformity, cohesion and not fusion, integration and not assimilation. Politically neutral, socially responsible, psychologically mature and culturally tolerant media is the best instrument to carry this

message far and wide and promote communal harmony. Arthur Miller has been pointed out that, "A good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself."

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