

Moral Panics and COVID-19: Are We Panic Ourselves or Do Media Make Us Panic?

ความตื่นตระหนกทางจริยธรรม และโควิด-19: ความตื่นตระหนกของประชาชน หรือสื่อทำให้ประชาชนตื่นตระหนก

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Abstract

People's new normal has begun, i.e. how panic people are during the current period of emerging infectious disease COVID-19 outbreak. According to a moral panic theory developed and created by Stanley Cohen, there are several stakeholders putting people in struggle. Also, one of them who is really powerful and influential is communication and media people. It was, therefore, curious of whether or not media persons create people's moral panics about COVID-19 and how media persons make people panic about COVID-19. Printed newspaper headlines were selected and analysed by collecting them from IQNewsClip online database available between 12 January and 10 March 2020 on Bangkok University online database. There were 2,213 cases that met the requirements. However, 1,704 cases or 77.00 per cent passed the test of intercoder reliability. The results of the findings revealed that it was media persons who created moral panics about COVID-19 among the publics. They had presented ways of calling the outbreak, confirmed cases and death and negative effects of COVID-19 on diverse circumstances. Altogether with this, writing style through the uses of words, sentence arrangement, and marks created more moral panics. This study contributes for media persons to rethink and reconsider their roles and responsibilities and also for people to reconsider perceived information and facts and not to be susceptible to media reports.

Keywords: *Moral Panics, COVID-19, Folk Devil, Media Persons, Crisis, New normal*

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บทคัดย่อ

วิถีชีวิตใหม่ของประชาชนได้เริ่มขึ้นแล้ว กล่าวคือ ประชาชนมีความตื่นตระหนกอย่างไรในภาวะปัจจุบันของการแพร่ระบาดของโรคอุบัติใหม่ หรือโควิด-19 ทั้งนี้ ตามทฤษฎีความตื่นตระหนกทางจริยธรรมซึ่งได้รับการพัฒนา และคิดค้นขึ้นโดยสแตนลีย์ โคเฮน มีผู้มีส่วนได้เสียหลากหลายที่ทำให้ประชาชนต้องเผชิญหน้ากับความยากลำบาก ซึ่งแน่นอนว่าหนึ่งในผู้มีส่วนได้เสียที่ทรงพลังและมีอิทธิพลมาก คือ การสื่อสารและสื่อ ดังนั้น ผู้วิจัยจึงตั้งข้อสังเกตว่าสื่อสร้างความตื่นตระหนกทางจริยธรรมเกี่ยวกับโควิด-19 ให้เกิดขึ้นกับประชาชนหรือไม่ และอย่างไร ผู้วิจัยใช้และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากพาดหัวข่าวจากหนังสือพิมพ์ซึ่งเก็บรวบรวมมาจากรฐานข้อมูล IQNewsClip ของมหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพ ระหว่างวันที่ 12 มกราคม ถึงวันที่ 10 มีนาคม 2563 พาดหัวข่าวหนังสือพิมพ์ที่เป็นไปตามข้อกำหนดของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีทั้งสิ้น 2,213 ชิ้น โดยผ่านการทดสอบความเชื่อมั่นจากการลงข้อมูลพบว่า มีจำนวน 1,704 ชิ้น หรือคิดเป็นร้อยละ 77.00 ผลการวิจัยพบว่า สื่อ คือ ผู้มีส่วนได้เสียที่ทำให้เกิดความตื่นตระหนกทางจริยธรรมเกี่ยวกับโควิด-19 ให้เกิดขึ้นกับประชาชน ไม่ว่าจะเกิดจากวิธีการเรียกโรคโควิด-19 จำนวนผู้ติดเชื้อและเสียชีวิต และผลกระทบเชิงลบของโควิด-19 ในสถานการณ์ต่าง ๆ ในขณะเดียวกัน ท่วงท่าและลีลาการเขียน โดยผ่านการใช้คำ การจัดเรียงประโยค และการใช้เครื่องหมายต่าง ๆ ย่อมก่อให้เกิดความตื่นตระหนกทางจริยธรรม งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้สร้างประโยชน์ให้กับสื่อมวลชนในการคิด พิจารณา และทบทวนบทบาท และหน้าที่ความรับผิดชอบของตนเอง และยังเป็นประโยชน์แก่ประชาชนในการพิจารณาข้อเท็จจริง ไม่ตื่นตระหนก และอ่อนไหวไปกับการนำเสนอของสื่อมวลชน และยังชี้ให้เห็นว่า การเมืองและศาสนาหลักมีบทบาทต่อการให้ความสำคัญในค่านิยม ดังนั้น อาจเป็นไปได้ว่าการที่ผู้ปฏิบัติงานให้ความสำคัญค่านิยมแตกต่างกันนั้น เป็นผลจากวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่นนั้น ๆ อันนำไปสู่การสร้างรูปแบบค่านิยมในระดับอนุภูมิภาค

คำสำคัญ: ความตื่นตระหนกทางจริยธรรม โควิด-19 ปิศาจร้ายของประชาชน สื่อ วิฤติ วิถีชีวิตใหม่

Introduction

Have you ever watched Train to Busan and World War Z? Have you imagined that this situation is going to happen and getting worse in our society? Personally, I do not think so. I believe that people have watched these two scary movies for the purposes of making them enjoyed and entertained only. Eventually, a nightmare emerges when there is a gradually serious widespread of COVID-19, or previously so-called Coronavirus or Wuhan virus- its original place is in China. It does not make people turn to be a zombie. However, deadly, up to now, it kills 1.2 million people and more and also makes people infected approximately 45 million people around the world (Worldometer, 2020). Its danger is spread out to about one thirds of the

world (Anonymous, 2020), and that leaves many countries around the world with political and economic downturns and suspension. People who are threatened by this outbreak have the similar symptom as a normal flu, i.e. having a flu, together with coughing, sore throat, sweating, or gasping (Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, 2020). The new normal manners including wearing masks, social distancing, washing hands frequently and applying alcohol gel regularly, and so forth, are, therefore, highly encouraged and recommended.

Unsurprisingly, COVID-19 has been surveilled, talked, and reported by global media because this is a global health crisis and has provided huge effects on not only humans', but also animals' lives (i.e., just recently, it is confirmed that a dog

is attacked by COVID-19 and that is transferred from his owner, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Up to now, people are starting to hurriedly stock food and stuff (Lufkin, 2020). My question is: "Are we really (over) panic?" One concept / theory developed and created by Stanley Cohen that comes into my mind is moral panic, and that I would like to apply to find out an answer for this study. According to Jasper (2001), the emerging advent of moral panic is revealed when all people in British and American societies are expected to be equal, no matter which classes people are from.

In other words, this study targeted to examine what media have said about COVID-19 and in extent to which and how media make people panic about COVID-19. The major research questions for this study were:

1. Did media persons create people's moral panics about COVID-19?
2. How did media persons make people panic about COVID-19?

Literature Review

Moral panic

The concept of moral panic was developed and created by Stanley Cohen and, conclusively, there are four issues including 1) crisis or society disorder, 2) stakeholders involved, especially media, 3) responsible media and media standard, and 4) framing/priming and news values.

Crisis or society disorder

From the reviews of previous literatures and studies, I would say that a moral panic is a crisis. Basically, a crisis is something that puts people and society in an unexpected, unstable, chaotic, and disordered challenge, especially when a rumour is spread out. Unsurprisingly, a physical and psychological fear and panic can be

the expected result. According to Bonn (2015), more apparently, it is said that moral panic can be created when an "objective threat," for example, racial, ethnic, and social issues, is perceived more considerable and fearful by an intended, happening-before-something-else limit of society than it should be, and that is addressed by someone and some groups at the beginning. The involved stakeholders indicated a level of public fear and concern. While one of the important folk devils is mass media persons, people and the government are those who are under fears and over-exaggeration. In terms of mass media persons, moral panic is invented and developed by a so-called twist strategy. In other words, media professionals turn a good and positive matter to the negative counterpart either by intentionally or accidentally. In reality, the government and people themselves can also play an important role to create public fears and over-exaggerated practices (Bonn, 2015).

More interestingly, Bonn (2015) and Critcher (2003, as cited in Luce, 2013) agreed in two dimensions of moral panic. The first dimension is that moral panic is a fluctuated, swung process. This moral panic process is, secondly, similar to the one in issue and crisis management lifecycle proposed by Regester and Larkin (2008) as being developed and applied from the studies of Hainsworth (1990) and Meng (1992). The very close similarity between the moral panic process and the issue and crisis lifecycle can be discovered as follows. At first, a crisis comes from an issue and a moral panic is resulted from "objective threat"- conflict/unusual situation. Next, both of the crisis and the "objective threat" place people in society in public concern, panic, fear, and chaotic conditions. Eventually, the crisis and the moral panic situations are suddenly and

extremely resolved. The difference is, however, found in speed of danger and horror. That is to say, in the case of moral panic, the situation becomes worse immediately and spontaneously. It is vice versa for the crisis because it can possibly take some times to turn an issue to be a crisis.

Stakeholders involved, especially media

As highlighted, there are several stakeholders creating and arousing public fears and concern among people in society. Stanley Cohen (as cited in Bonn, 2015) and Jasper (2001) posed that these various stakeholders are so-called “folk devils.” Simply speaking, they are a group of people who put people in society in negative psychological conditions including fears, concern, and panic. As agreed by Bonn (2015) referring to the idea of Stanley Cohen and Jasper (2001), folk devils include the authorities from public and governmental sectors (for example, public employees, politicians, and so on), interest and judicial groups, religious organisations playing an important role to communicate and convey core teachings to public, private sectors, people themselves, and media organisations, in particular. This study would focus more on the media as a part of the discipline of media and communication. This study is, furthermore, presenting a good marriage of the psychology and media and communication disciplines and also investigating how public fears, concern, and panic are created by media persons, especially in the digital world, as suggested by Falkof (2018). Likewise, Jasper (2001) clearly underlined that moral panic is heavily created by press, in the forms of distorting, exaggerating, turning positive to negative impacts, modifying, etc.

Responsible media and media standard

In relation to the first two points, it can obviously be seen that media persons give

huge impacts on creating public fears, concern, and panic. This can be reasoned by several factors. The majority of revenues in media organisations come from advertising and that news reporting, especially news headlines should be commercialised in order to attract audiences and compete with competitors. Moreover, there is a blur in media roles and objectives in reporting news when emotion and feeling are being shared and involved by reporters and media persons unavoidably while presenting factual news (Luce, 2013). Luce (2013) further summarised that media persons must always be responsible for media reports and practice media rules and standards so that moral panic can be avoided and lessened. Relatively, this scholar warned that greater impact on people’s feeling and lives must be concerned from moral panic created by media persons (Luce, 2013).

Framing/priming and news value

Furthermore, Bonn (2015) explained that moral panics are created by employing a concept of news value and implementing framing and priming concepts. In short, leading and/or misleading about an issue can be influenced by media persons. In the case of COVID-19, according to Kazuhiro (2020), publics will not be much fearful, concerned, panic, and even frightened if media persons provide them with information that is truthful, beneficial, and useful as well as easy to digest. That is to say, the information to keep them away from COVID-19 infection, or get them acquainted with the new normal manners, i.e. how to make hands and body clean, should be emphasized. In contrast, the information about creating panic, concern, and fear, for instance, an over-number of people who are infected and dead caused by this pandemic disease and a shortage of consumer

products that create people's over-action and non-sense behaviour should be avoided and lessened. Kazuhiro (2020) underlined that "[i]t's critical that coverage be balanced and easy to comprehend ... providing grisly data on patients and mortality rates is fine, but such details should be accomplished by the number of people who have recovered so the public understands that the situation, while serious, is not hopeless". Otherwise, publics are effected by media persons' (mis) interpretation (Kazuhiro, 2020).

I have directly proposed such quote and statement of Kazuhiro (2020)'s because what Kazuhiro said is practical and tangible to evaluate moral panics presented through the COVID-19 news headlines sampled and these news headlines are very important and beneficial for the data analysis. The details of the evaluation criteria are presented in the methods section.

In summary, moral panic is something that shakes a normal and stable status of people in society to be overwhelmingly panic, concerned, and fearful and that leads them to behave irrationally. Such circumstances are predominantly created by media persons because they are playing a main role of reporting news. Although factual information must be morally presented by media persons, distortion, exaggeration, and positive and/or negative interpretation can be the expected result.

Methods

The main four keywords covering "COVID-19" (in English), "kovid" (or COVID-19 in Thai), "Wuhan" (in Thai and both disease and city), and "little ghosts" (or illegal immigrants in Thai) were searched from a software so-called IQNewsClip and these four keywords must be included in news headlines. Otherwise, they were discarded.

Altogether with these, the other words that were related to these four main keywords were included. These were Rokh rabād (disease/pandemic), Rokh pxd xākseb (pneumonitis), Rokh pxd (lung disease), Pxdbwm (pneumonia), Wīṛas̄ (virus), Sāy phanṭhū' hīm (new specie), Cheṭṭ wīṛas̄ sāy phanṭhū' hīm (a new strain of virus), Rokh xubāti hīm (emerging disease), Wīṛas̄ priṣṇā (anonymous virus), Rokh rāy (dangerous disease), Rabād (outbreak, both in the forms of noun and verb), Cheṭṭ (disease), Rokh rāy(ræng) (severe disease), and Suppexr' s̄ per dde x̄r (super spreader).

Furthermore, the search period was between 12 January, which was the starting period of the widespread, and 10 March 2020, which was the date of collecting the data. Likewise, this was the period that COVID-19 was turning from an issue to be a peak crisis. Figure 1 exhibited analytical data about COVID-19 between 12 January and 10 March 2020.

Accordingly, the raw results for the four main keywords were 4,361 news headlines which could be divided in details as follows: 69 headlines for "COVID-19" (in English), 287 headlines for "COVID-19" (in Thai), 3,616 headlines for "Wuhan", and 389 headlines for "illegal immigrants." In total, however, 2,213 headlines met the criteria and were considered as no repetition.

Moreover, numbers of COVID-19 headlines per day and of headlines in the sampled newspapers were revealed in these two figures. It was important at this stage that several studies had used news headlines for data collection and data analysis in the case study of COVID-19 (Aslam, Awan, Syed, & Kashif, 2020; Pennycook, McPhetres, Zhang, Lu, & Rand, 2020). Referring to the study of Taylor and Asmundson (2004)'s

and Nicomedes and Avila (2020)'s, it was news headlines that arouse the feelings of heavy

concerns and worries among people about their health and well-beings.

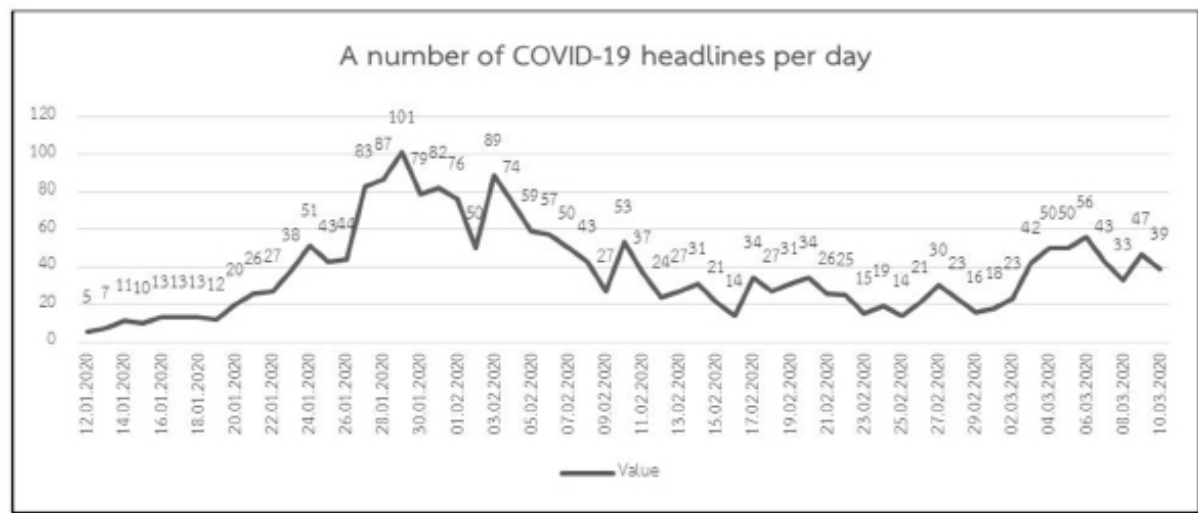


Figure 1 A number of COVID-19 daily reports

Source: Researcher

As seen in figure 3.2, although the COVID-19 situation was getting worse around the globe, especially in Thailand, surprisingly, mass media steadily declined to pay their attention to report

COVID-19 news from 5 February to 10 March 2020. The coma point was, nonetheless, found in the period of end of January and beginning of February 2020, on 29 January 2020, in particular.

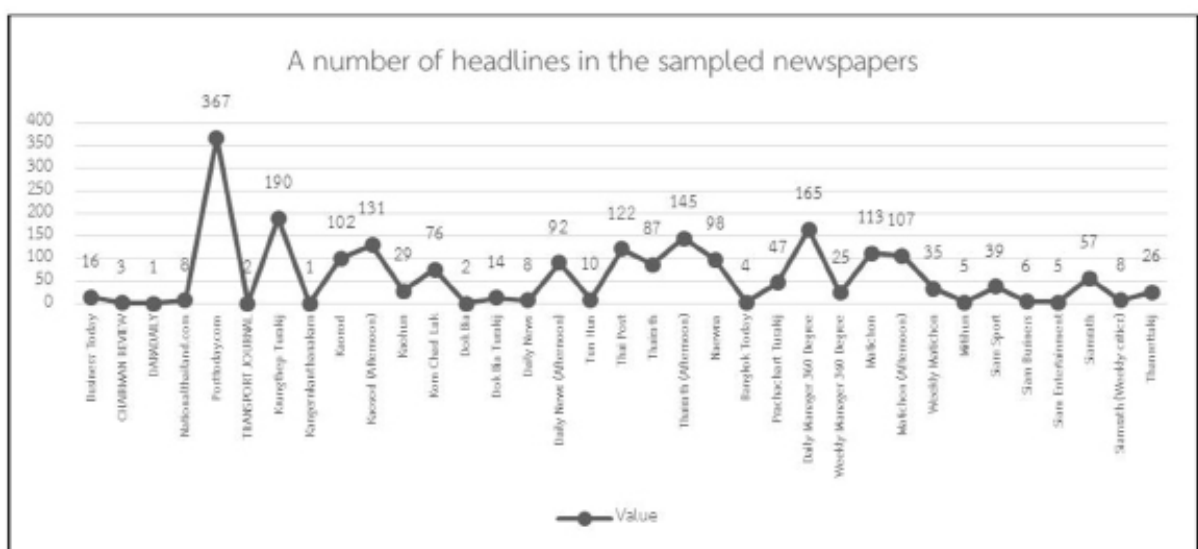


Figure 2 A number of headlines in the sampled newspapers

Source: Researcher

From the total searches, 31 newspapers were included. Posttoday.com was the source reporting COVID-19 most. It was followed by Krungthepturakij and Daily Manager 360 Degree. The pandemic was not of high interest in entertainment newspaper like Daradaily and even in economic and financial business newspapers including Dok Bia and Kangerkanthanaka.

As for the evaluation criteria, I should draw and apply the ideas of Bonn (2015) and Kazuhiro (2020). That is, the news headlines would contain created public fears, concerns, and panics in the conditions as follows:

1) If a negative result was presented, e.g. a number of confirmed cases and death, a presence of negative consequences, and the like. In case that a positive outcome and a hope was shown altogether, the news headlines could be regarded as “not creating moral panics.” Nonetheless, a phrase, word, mark, and sentence arrangement, altogether with comparing between a number of confirmed cases and death and those of

recoveries that were presented would be considered as moral panics.

2) If such news headlines did not provide useful and beneficial information. Together with these, the use of a phrase, word, mark, and sentence arrangement is of necessity.

3) If such news headlines provided negative feelings. Again, a phrase, word, mark, and sentence arrangement used in the news headlines would be included.

As a means to achieve the reliability of the stated evaluation criteria, the intercoder reliability, or an agreement of data analysing between two coders, was taken into consideration. The intercoder reliability was calculated as a per cent derived from having a total number of agreement between the two raters divided by a total number of data collected, multiplied by 100 (Glen, n.d.). Also, Glen (n.d.) specified that a general rate of acceptability and reliability was 75 per cent and above. The details were described below.

Table 1 Intercoder reliability

Criteria	Judge 1	Judge 2	Agreement
Moral panic	1,514 (68.41 per cent)	1,304 (58.92 per cent)	1,154 (67.72 per cent)
No moral panic	699 (31.59 per cent)	909 (41.08 per cent)	550 (32.28 per cent)
Total	2,213 (100 per cent)	2,213 (100 per cent)	1,704 (77.00 per cent)

Table 1 indicated that moral panic was coded and outnumbered its counterparts, i.e. no moral panic, no matter for judge 1, judge 2, or the number of agreement. Considering the number of agreement, furthermore, the reliability of the evaluation criteria used for data analysis in this study was acceptable, i.e. 1,704 samples were agreed by two coders or 77.00 per cent

of agreement. Likewise, this results would be addressed and given in the results of the research.

Because the majority of the news headlines were in Thai, the researcher tried to translate them in English to be as similar as the original. An original Thai manuscript was also attached for better understanding of the contents.

Results

The results of the study were revealed, according to the research objectives and research questions as follows.

Did media persons create people's moral panics about COVID-19?

Following the question asked in this research article, i.e. moral panics and COVID-19: Are we panic ourselves or do media make us panic? The answer was that it was the media that created public panics, fears, and concerns. Of all the 1,704 news headlines, there were 1,154 news headlines or 67.72 per cent regarded as moral panics whereas 32.28 per cent or 550 news headlines could be seen that the media persons were reporting factual news, without emotional involvement. Follows gave the details of how the media persons made publics frightened and concerned, i.e. ways of calling COVID-19, issues, and language uses. As for issues presenting moral panics among publics, there were COVID-19 confirmed cases and death toll and negative effects of the pandemic disease. Altogether with these, media persons had employed various words, sentence arrangement, and also marks.

How did media persons make people panic about COVID-19?

In order to understand how media persons make people panic about COVID-19, the findings were reported in terms of the ways of calling the pandemic, COVID-19 confirmed cases and death toll, negative effects of the outbreak, and languages used by the media persons.

Ways of calling COVID-19

The way of calling COVID-19 could make the public frightened and panic. Instead of calling the disease as Corona virus and COVID-19,

media persons named the disease as the deadly disease. In Thai words, however, there were a variety of words referring to deadly, i.e. Mr̥ṇa, Mvtyū, Lāṅglok. The examples were: The deadly disease causes 'Pataya' worse, Tours from China-other nationalities cancelled, The government must raise confidence [translated from ไวรัส ฆาตกร 'พญา' เด็ดงสนิท ทัวร์จีน-ชาติอื่นยกเลิกจอง จักรวรรดิความเชื่อมั่น, Prachachart Turakij, February 3, 2020]; The deadly virus The 21st century [translated from ไวรัสฆาตกร ศตวรรษที่ 21, Business Today, February 3, 2020]; From nourishing food to the deadly virus killing humans [translated from คอลัมน์ โลก คน เมือง: จากอาหารบำรุง ถึงไวรัส ฆาตกรชีวิตคน, Krungthep Turakij, February 4, 2020]; The deadly virus reflects Thai society [translated from คอลัมน์ คาบูกคาบดอก: ไวรัสฆาตกรสะท้อนสังคม ไทย, Thairath (Afternoon), February 5, 2020]; The deadly virus, the virtual game [translated from คอลัมน์ สาร 1000 เกมมิ่ง: เกมจำลองไวรัส ล้างโลก, Kaosod (Afternoon), February 6, 2020]; ['10 quarantined placed for the little ghosts disclosed, Big Tu [Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha] manages [this place] by himself, 'War room' set for fighting the deadly virus [translated from 'เปิด 10 ค่ายกักกันผีน้อย บิ๊กตุ๋นเอง ตั้ง 'วอร์รูม'สู้ไวรัส ฆาตกร, Daily News (Afternoon), March 6, 2020]; [COVID-19 corpse identified, Liver mutation found from the deadly virus, translated from ผ่าศพเหยื่อ โควิด-19 ไวรัสฆาตกรกลายพันธุ์ในปอด, Daily News, March 6, 2020] and the like.

COVID-19 confirmed cases and death toll

The first type of the news headlines that made the publics concerned and panic was about the number of confirmed cases and death toll. Most of the media persons reported and presented information of how many people were hit and probably effected by COVID-19 and also how many people were found dead from this

pandemic disease. These were some examples: Thailand finds first ‘medical professional’ hit by ‘COVID-19’ [translated from ไทยพบ ‘จนท. การแพทย์’ ติดเชื้อ ‘โควิด 19’ รายแรก, Krungthep Turakij, February 16, 2020]; First medical staff infected-heavy widespread of COVID [translated from ทีมแพทย์ไทยติดเชื้อมาก-โควิดหนัก, Kaosod (Afternoon), February 17, 2020]; ‘COVID’ crisis need to be prepared globally, ‘WHO’ warns heavy pandemic-Deaths found outside China increases, ‘Iran’ is the highest [translated from ‘โควิด’ วิกฤติ สักทั่วโลกรับมือ ‘ดักบลิเวชโอ’ เตือนระบาดหนัก – เสียชีวิตนอกจีนพุ่ง ‘อิหร่าน’ มากสุด, Krungthep Turakij, February 26, 2020]; Thailand is turbulent!, 3 more confirmed cases by COVID-Granddad-Grandma travelling from Japan spreads out the disease [translated from ไทยปั่น! ติดโควิดเพิ่ม 3 ปู่-ย่ากลับญี่ปุ่น แพร่เชื้อ, Thai Post, February 27, 2020]; Bangkok finds 55 COVID-19 confirmed cases in Phraharuthai Donmuang School [translated from กทม. พบผู้สัมผัสใน ร.ร. พระพุทธยอดดอนเมืองเสี่ยงติดโควิด-19 สูงถึง 55 ราย, Posttoday.com, February 28, 2020]; WHO seriously warns, More COVID-19 confirmed cases in Thailand [translated from อนามัยโลกเตือน สูงสุด ไทยติดเชื้อโควิด-19 อีก, Daily News, March 1, 2020]; Confirmed cases in China expected to surge 1,700 [translated from คาดยอดผู้ป่วยไวรัสจีน ทะลุ 1,700, Matichon, January 19, 2020]; Wuhan virus infected people reach 1,700, Its widespread was more than expected [translated from ผู้ติดเชื้อไวรัสอู่ฮั่นอาจถึง 1,700 คน มีโอกาสไวรัส แพร่กระจายมากกว่าที่เปิดเผย, Posttoday.com, January 19, 2020]; Wuhan confirmed cases increase-be afraid of human-to-human transmission! [translated from ติดเชื้อ ‘อู่ฮั่น’ พุ่ง-หว้นแพร่คนสู่คน!, Kaosod, January 20, 2020]; Heavy pandemic, South Korea confirms first Wuhan virus infected [translated from ลามไปใหญ่ เกาหลีใต้ยืนยันพบผู้ติดเชื้อไวรัสอู่ฮั่นรายแรก, Posttoday.

com, January 20, 2020]; 62 people infected by ‘Wuhan virus’! [translated from ‘ไวรัสอู่ฮั่น’ ลามหนักป่วยพุ่ง 62 คน!, Kaosod (Afternoon), January 21, 2020]; Wuhan flu kills 3 people, South Korea found confirmed cases [translated from ไข้หวัดอู่ฮั่นคร่าแล้ว 3 โสมใต้เจอป่วย, Kaosod, January 21, 2020]; New confirm cases surge 200 [translated from ผู้ติดเชื้อไวรัสใหม่พุ่งเกิน 200, Thai Post, January 21, 2020]; China accepts the widespread of Wuhan virus to other cities [translated from จีนรับไวรัสอู่ฮั่นเริ่มระบาดสู่เมืองอื่น, Daily Manager 360 Degree, January 21, 2020]; It is too difficult to control the new flu, It is spread out in China [translated from คุณเข้มไม่ไหวหวัดพันธุ์ใหม่ระบาดทั่ว ‘จีน’, Daily News, January 21, 2020]; 3 more deaths from ‘the virus’, more than 200 infected, China finds confirmed cases outside the country-South Korea finds 1 infected [translated from ‘ไวรัส’ ตายเพิ่มเป็น 3 ป่วยกว่า 200 จีนพบผู้ติดเชื้อนอกอู่ฮั่น-โสมขาวเจอ 1, Daily Manager 360 Degree, January 21, 2020]; The fourth death from Wuhan virus found, China confirms “human-to-human” transmission [translated from พบเหยื่อไวรัสอู่ฮั่นตายรายที่ 4 จีนยืนยันระบาด “คนสู่คน” แล้ว, Posttoday.com, January 21, 2020]; Wuhan virus spread out in China, Lots of confirmed cases in South Korea [translated from ไวรัสอู่ฮั่นลามทั่วจีน ทะลักเกาหลีใต้ติดเชื้อ, Daily News (Afternoon), January 22, 2020]; Chinese confirmed cases heavily increase, ‘Wuhan’ found in Korea! [translated from จีนป่วยพุ่ง ‘อู่ฮั่น’ โผล่เกาหลีใต้!, Kaosod (Afternoon), January 22, 2020]; China accepts the human-to-human transmission –more deaths and confirmed cases [translated from จีนยอมรับโคโรนาไวรัส แพร่จากคนสู่คนได้-ตายเพิ่มติดเชื้อพุ่ง, Naewna, February 22, 2020]; Hospital concerns about lack of masks for doctors, The 43th case confirmed [translated from หมอก็ขาดหน้ากาก รพ.ชก่วนพบรายที่ 43 ติดเชื้อ, Khaosod, March 3, 2020]; and the like.

Although some news headlines provided good news of people who were recovered, a later phrase and sentence was worsened and gave a bigger impact. For instance, it was announced that: 137 people were found with no COVID-19, unfortunately, Director, Wuhan Infirmary attacked by this disease and found dead [translated from ‘137 คน’ เฮได้กลับบ้านวันนี้ ผอ.รพ. อุ้ยันติต ‘โควิด 19’ ดับ, Matichon, February 19, 2020]. This news headline was regarded as moral panic because even being a medical staff, he was hit by the dreadful disease and also he was a key person of healing and solving the COVID-19 crisis since Wuhan is an original place of COVID-19 outbreak and he was one of the medical persons who detected the widespread of COVID-19. In spite of the fact that there was one ‘COVID-19 victim’ who was recovered, unfortunately, Italy was ordered to close down to prevent 50,000 effected [translated from ‘เหยื่อโควิด 19’ กลับบ้านอีก 1 อิตาลีปิดเมืองสกัดคน 5 หมื่น, Thai Post, February 23, 2020]; Thailand succeed in healing another infected Chinese, COVID kills 2 people in ‘Italy’ [translated from ไทยรักษาชาวจีนหายอีก 1 ‘อิตาลี’ โควิด 19 คร่าแล้ว 2, Matichon, February 24, 2020]; and the like. It seemed that there was a hope, a small hope though, because a bulky number of people were waiting with unknown and unconfirmed conditions.

Negative effects of COVID-19

The majority of the news headlines presented a negative effect of COVID-19 on economic circumstances including stock and financial markets, small-medium enterprises, medical problems, hotel and tourism businesses, sports business, and also political issues and discrimination. As for stock and financial markets, the negative impacts were exhibited

and discussed in both micro and macro scales. The examples were as follows: Kasikorn expects to grow only 5%, heavily effected by COVID-19-need immediate supports [translated from กลสิกรา ลดเป้าจีดีพีโตแค่ 0.5% อ่วม COVID-19-จีแรง พยุง, Manager 360 Degree, March 6, 2020]; Central bank worries virus impact drag growth below 2 per cent [Nationthailand.com, February 14, 2020]; Stock futures sink deep into red as oil prices plummet and coronavirus fears spread [Nationthailand.com, March 9, 2020]; BoT fears that the virus lowers down “GDP” at 2% the prolonged situation impacts cash flow-“employment” shaken [translated from รพท. หวั่นไวรัสสุด ‘จีดีพี’ ต่ำ 2% ห่วงสถานการณ์ ยืดเยื้อกระทบสภาพคล่องธุรกิจ – สะเทือน ‘จ้างงาน’, Krungthepturakij, February 14, 2020]; COVID-19 shakes supply chains, ‘13 industries lack raw materials imported from China’ [translated from โควิด-19 ป่วนซัพพลายเชน ‘13 อุตฯ’ ส่อขาดวัตถุดิบจีน’, Krungthepturakij, February 24, 2020]; danger of COVID-19 worsens economics, The government urgently asked for control to build confidence [translated from พิชโควิด 19 เศรษฐกิจทรุดหนัก เร่ง รัฐคุมการระบาดฟื้นเชื่อมั่น, Thai Post, March 9, 2020]; ‘Wuhan virus’ assaults tourism stocks, Be afraid of effects during Chinese new year [translated from คอถัมน์ STOCK GOSSIP: ‘ไวรัสอู่ฮั่น’ เล่นงานหุ้นท่องเที่ยว หวั่นกระทบช่วงตรุษจีน, Krungthepturakij, January 22, 2020], Confirmed cases continuously increasing, Money exchanges started heavily around Asia [translated from ผู้ป่วยไวรัสสายพันธุ์ใหม่ เพิ่มต่อเนื่อง เริ่มเกิดแรงเทขายในตลาดการเงินทั่วเอเชีย, Kaohun, January 22, 2020]; 1% interest, lowest in history BoT agrees to reduce the interest 0.25% to maintain economic status and to fight ‘Wuhan’ [translated from ดอกเบี้ย 1% ‘ต่ำสุดประวัติศาสตร์’ กนง. เอกฉันทัน 0.25% พยุงเศรษฐกิจสู้ไวรัส ‘อู่ฮั่น’, Krungthepturakij, February 6, 2020]; and the like.

Even in small-medium enterprises and agriculture and farming, huge losses could entirely be the expected results. For example: Shrimp entrepreneurs concern Covid-19, Chinese markets shut down, shrimp exports slowed down [translated from ผู้เลี้ยงผวาไวรัส Covid 19 ชัตดาวน์ จีนลดส่งออกกุ้ง, Prachachart Turakij, February 17, 2020]; “COVID 19” spits!! China slows down orange orders from Pichit unspecifically [translated from “โควิด 19” พ่นพิษ!! จีนชะลอสั่งซื้อส้มพันธุ์พื้นเมืองพิจิตร ไม่มีกำหนด, Posttoday.com, February 20, 2020]; Asks for reduce rental cost, economic slows down due to-COVID 19 [translated from ขอลดค่าเช่าแผง ศก. ทुरुค-โควิด 19, Matichon, March 1, 2020]; and Durian farmers seriously concern, COVID-19 effects on exports, Chinese consume Durian less [translated from เกษตรปลูกทุเรียนกุมขมับ เชื่อโควิด-19 กระทบส่งออก ยอดชาวจีนบริโภคลด, Posttoday.com, March 10, 2020], and so on.

The rest would go to medical problems. For instance, Medical supply fails to meet demand as virus alertness grows [Nationthailand.com, March 4, 2020]; hotel and tourism businesses, for example, ‘Boeing’ concerns effects on global airline business [translated from ‘โบอิง’ ห่วงไวรัสระบาด กระทบอุตสาหกรรมการบินโลก, Krungthepturakij, February 13, 2020]; Corona breaks tourism 2.5 hundred billion [translated from โควิดนาทูปท่องเที่ยววูบ 2.5 แสนล้าน, Kaosod, February 14, 2020]; Virus danger decreases those travelling with Thai Airways [translated from พิชไวรัสบินไทยลูกค้าหด, Daily News, February 15, 2020]; Heavy pandemic of COVID-19 ... Sangkhla abandoned drastically, Numbers of tourists decrease [translated from ลามไม่หยุดพิชโควิด-19 ... สังขละแทบร้าง นักท่องเที่ยวลดฮวบ, Daily Manager 360 Degree, March 5, 2020]; sports business, for instance, Napoli [Football Club] shocked of COVID-19, strictly checks all Bazaar [Barcelona

Football Club] members when arrive [translated from นาโปลีผวาโควิด 19 ตรวจเข้มสมาชิกบาร์ซ่าทุกคนที่มาถึง, Siam Sport, February 25, 2020]; ‘Big snake’ [Inter Milan Football Club] closes football field to prevent ‘COVID-19’ [translated from ‘งูใหญ่’ ปิดสนามป้องกัน ‘โควิด 19’, Kaosod, February 26, 2020]; Virus danger shakes boxing! and intends to put off Olympics qualifying match [translated from พิชไวรัสชกมวย! จ่อย้ายศึกคัดโอลป., Daily News, January 16, 2020]; ‘Corona’ shakes Olympics qualifying match -Manut suddenly and immediately returns Thailand [translated from คัดมวย ोलป. หวั่น ‘โคโรนา’ -มนัสแผ่นกลับไทย, Kaosod, January 22, 2020]; and the like.

Not only economic but also political attacks could be seen from this pandemic outbreak. The examples were: ‘Hubei-Wuhan key persons’ fired because of COVID19! [translated from โล๊ะ ‘บิ๊กหูเป่ย์-อู่ฮั่น’ ปมโควิด 19!, Kaosod, February 14, 2020]; lots of Wuhan public officers dismissed because of COVID 19 [translated from ปลดอีก ะนวนา ขรก. อู่ฮั่นเช่นโควิด 19, Kaosod (Afternoon), February 15, 2020]; Ying Noi [Sudarut Keyuraphan] blames the government’s failure in helping Thais living in ‘Wuhan’ [translated from หญิงหน้อย อดรัฐบาลล้มเหลวช่วยคนไทยใน ‘อู่ฮั่น’, Posttoday.com, January 29, 2020]; and so forth.

Last but not least, the widespread of COVID-19 came together with the widespread of racial discrimination issue. For instance, “Corona Virus” makes “fear” and “ethnic discrimination” widespread [translated from คอรัณน นอกหน้าต่าง: “เชื้อไวรัสโคโรนา” ยังทำให้ “ความกลัว” และ “ลัทธิเหยียดผิว” ระบาดออกไปทั่วโลก, Daily Manager 360 Degree, February 5, 2020]; Corona virus and ‘racial’ discrimination Bias that (the world) must equally know [translated from โควิดไวรัส กับ การเหยียด ‘เชื้อชาติ’ อคติที่ (โลก) ต้องรู้เท่าทัน, Matichon (Afternoon), February 10, 2020];

‘Wuhan’ the heart of China/The world appeals Thai people to love Chinese people [translated from ‘อู่ฮั่น’ หัวใจจีน/โลกวอนคนไทยอย่ารังเกียจ, Dok Bia Turakij, February 10, 2020]; and the like.

Language uses

Language uses included the use of words, sentence arrangement, and marks. The media persons did mostly employ fancy, emotional-, panic-, and fear-arousing words. Those made publics more panic and frightened. These words could be grouped into a group of very unexpectedly surprised and crazy about an unpleasant and unsatisfied situation, a group of bulky number of people hit and killed by the pandemic disease and huge losses, a group of increasing numbers of people and losses, and a group of adjectives and adverbs that created greater impacts and losses.

As for a group of very unexpectedly surprised and crazy about an unpleasant and unsatisfied situation, the examples were: P̄hwā [Shrimp entrepreneurs concern Covid-19, Chinese markets shut down, shrimp exports slowed down, translated from ผู้เลี้ยงกุ้งไต้หวัน Covid19 ชัดดาวนเงินอุดส่งออกกุ้ง, Prachachart Turakij, February 17, 2020]; Ra s̄ā [Doctors shaken-‘COVID-19’ patients overflow [translated from หมอจีนระส่ำ-คนไข้’โควิด 19’ล้น, Kaosod (Afternoon), February 14, 2020]; Pwn [Thailand is turbulent!, 3 more confirmed cases by COVID-Granddad-Grandma travelling from Japan spreads out the disease, translated from ไทยปั่น! ติดโควิดเพิ่ม 3 ปู่-ย่ากลับญี่ปุ่นแพร่เชื้อ, Thai Post, February 27, 2020]; Stars disordered from deadly virus, people quarantined if traveling from COVID 19 widespread places, Bella-Pooklook confirm not infected by COVID-19, translated from ดารากระเจิงไวรัสสมหทัยกักตัวใหม่บินมาจากแหล่งโควิด 19 เบลล่า-ปุกถูกยันปลอดภัย, Siam Entertainment, March 4, 2020]; ‘Corona’ shakes Olympics qualifying match-Manut suddenly and immediately returns Thailand [translated from คัดมวย อลป. หวั่น ‘โคโรนา’ -มนัสแผ่นดินไทย, Kaosod, January 22, 2020]; Kum Khmāb [Durian farmers seriously concern, COVID-19 effects on exports, Chinese consume Durian less, translated from เกษตรปลูกทุเรียนกุมขมับ เชื้อโควิด-19 กระทบส่งออกยอดชาวจีนบริโภคลด, Posttoday.com, March 10, 2020]; ‘Anuthin’ has no plan for the little ghosts who parade to escape from death of COVID-19, translated from ‘อนุทิน’ ไร้แผนรับมือผีน้อยแห่หนีตายโควิด-19, Thairath, March 4, 2020]; Virus danger thrills shopper, Big stores abandoned, “Convenient stores” conversely grow, translated from พิชไวรัส เขย่าขวัญนักชอป ห้างใหญ่ร้าง “คอนวีเนียน” พลิกโต, Daily Manager 360 Degree, March 9, 2020]; X̄ūng [Japan is struck dumb and finds Wuhan-infected patients, translated from ญี่ปุ่นอึ้งพบคนไข้เชื้ออู่ฮั่น, Kaosod (Afternoon), January 18, 2020]; and the like. Hence, it could be seen that informal, colourful, and playful words were always employed and that could build up a ripple, a small wave in society.

In terms of a group of bulky number of people hit and killed by the pandemic disease, it included: Kh̄rā [Covid-19 kills 2,000 people, the second death found in Hong Kong, translated from Covid-19 คร่าชีวิตเกิน 2,000 คน ฮองกงพบตายเป็นที่สอง, Posttoday.com, February 19, 2020]; Wuhan flu kills 3 people, confirmed cases found in South Korea, translated from ใช้อู่ฮั่นคร่าแล้ว 3 โสมใต้เจอป่วย, Kaosod, January 21, 2020]; S̄en [1 Chinese patient killed by the deadly pneumonia, translated from คอมลัมน์ ย่อโลก: จีนเช่นปอดบวม มรณะ 1 ศพ, Kaosod, January 12, 2020]; Thrud [COVID 19 danger destroys economics heavily, ask the government to control the pandemic to recover confidence, translated from พิชโควิด 19

เศรษฐกิจทรุดหนัก เร่งรัฐคุมการระบาดฟื้นเชื่อมั่น, Thai Post, March 9, 2020]; and the like.

A group of increasing numbers of people and losses was also presented. For example, Lām [Virus spread out heavily-Ministry of Commerce reduces something to drive conomic growth, translated from ไวรัสลามหนัก-คลังจ่อปรับลด ศก. เดิบโต, Khaosod, February 28, 2020]; ‘Wuhan virus’ spread out heavily, Confirmed cases surge 62!, translated from ‘ไวรัสอู่ฮั่น’ ลามหนักป่วยพุ่ง 62 คน!, Khaosod, January 20, 2020]; Heavy pandemic of COVID-19 ... Sangkhla abandoned drastically, Numbers of tourists decrease translated from ลามไม่หยุดพิษโควิด-19 ... สังขละแทบร้าง นักท่องเที่ยวลดฮวบ, Daily Manager 360 Degree, March 5, 2020; Wuhan virus spread out over China, Confirmed cases in South Korea flooded, translated from ไวรัสอู่ฮั่นลามทั่วจีน ทะลักเกาหลี ติดเชื้อ, Daily News (Afternoon), January 22, 2020]; Phùng [Confirmed cases heavily increase-be afraid of human-to-human infection!, translated from ติดเชื้อ ‘อู่ฮั่น’ พุ่ง-หวั่นแพร่คนสู่คน!, Khaosod, January 20, 2020; Confirmed cases in China heavily increase, ‘Wuhan’ people comes to South Korea!, translated from จีนป่วยพุ่ง ‘อู่ฮั่น’ โผล่เกาหลีได้!, Khaosod (Afternoon), January 22, 2020]; ‘WHO’ raises up to the top, Heavy increase of COVID-193, More confirmed cases found in Thailand, translated from ‘อู่’ ยกระดับขั้นสูงสุด หยุดไม่อยู่ คนไทยติดเชื้อเพิ่มอีก, Daily News (Afternoon), March 2, 2020]; Bangkok finds up to 55 cases possibly infected by COVID-19, translated from กทม. พบผู้สัมผัสใน ร.ร. พระพุทธยอดเมืองเสี่ยงติดโควิด-19 สูงถึง 55 ราย, Posttoday.com, February 28, 2020]; and the like.

A group of adjectives and adverbs that created greater impacts and losses covered Coronavirus testing widened as California case makes containment more urgent [Nationthailand.

com, February 28, 2020]; Hnāk [First medical staff infected by COVID-19-Heavy widespread of COVID, translated from ทีมแพทย์ไทยติดเชื้อคนแรก-โควิดหนัก, Khaosod (Afternoon), February 17, 2020]; Xīk u[‘WHO’ raises up to the top, Heavy increase of COVID-193, More confirmed cases found in Thailand, translated from ‘อู่’ ยกระดับขั้นสูงสุด หยุดไม่อยู่ คนไทยติดเชื้อเพิ่มอีก, Daily News (Afternoon), March 2, 2020]; Ræk [Thailand finds first ‘medical professional’ hit by ‘COVID-19’, translated from ไทยพบ ‘จนท. การแพทย์’ ติดเชื้อ ‘โควิด 19’ รายแรก, Krungthepturakij, February 16, 2020]; 1% interest, lowest in history, BoT agrees to reduce the interest 0.25% to maintain economic status and to fight ‘Wuhan’ [translated from ดอกเบี้ย 1%’ ต่ำสุดประวัติศาสตร์ กนง. เอกฉันทัน 0.25% พยุงเศรษฐกิจสู้ไวรัส ‘อู่ฮั่น’, Krungthepturakij, February 6, 2020]; and the like.

Sentence arrangement

For sentence arrangement, media persons were likely to place an exciting and emotional-arousing phrase and statement at the beginning of a sentence. For instance, Entire Trang shaken, Chinese man with high flu visits pub and quarantined for COVID-19 check [translated from วุ่นทั้งเมืองตรัง ชายชาวจีนมีไข้สูงเที่ยวผับถูกนำไปกักตัวตรวจเชื้อโควิด-19, Posttoday.com, February 27, 2020]; First in Thailand, Chinese man hit by Corona Virus [translated from รายแรกในไทยชาวจีนติดเชื้อไวรัสโคโรนา, Naewna, January 14, 2020]; First victim in Thailand! MoPH finds Chinese traveler hit by new Corona Virus [translated from รายแรกในไทย! สธ. พบนักท่องเที่ยวจีนติดไวรัสโคโรนาพันธุ์ใหม่, Posttoday.com]; Heavy pandemic, South Korea confirms first new Corona Virus case [translated from ลามไปใหญ่ เกาหลีใต้ยืนยันพบผู้ติดเชื้อไวรัสอู่ฮั่น รายแรก, Posttoday.com, January 20, 2020]; Sad! one-month infant hit by Wuhan Virus Corona,

The pandemic spread out and finds 400 dead and 20,000 confirmed cases [translated from สลด! ทารก 1 ด. ติดไวรัสอู่ฮั่น โควิดลามแดนมังกรตายทะลุ 400 ป่วย 2 หมื่น, Siamrath, February 5, 2020]; 4 confirmed cases found in Thailand, 138 Thai people from Wuhan already arrive [translated from พบไทยติดเชื้อเพิ่มอีก 4 ราย 138 อู่ฮั่นกลับถึงแล้ว, Khaosod, February 5, 2020]; and so forth.

Marks

The marks that were found most were an exclamation mark (!). This was a symbol showing and representing emotional involvement of media persons of how suddenly surprised and shocked about a situation. It also made the news content much stronger, greater, and heavier than could it be. The examples could include: Sad! one-month infant hit by Wuhan Virus Corona, The pandemic spread out and finds 400 dead and 20,000 confirmed cases [translated from สลด! ทารก 1 ด. ติดไวรัสอู่ฮั่น โควิดลามแดนมังกรตายทะลุ 400 ป่วย 2 หมื่น, Siamrath, February 5, 2020]; I am not the virus!! Please Thai people stop bullying and supporting not to accept ‘Chinese people’ [translated from ฉันไม่ใช่ไวรัส!! เตือนสติคนไทย หยุดปิดป้ายร้านไล่ หนูนปิดประเทศจาก ‘ชาวจีน’, Daily Manager 360 Degree, February 5, 2020]; Dangerous virus, Chinese economic heavily destroyed and worse than SARS! [translated from ไวรัสพ่นพิษ ศก. จีนพังกว่าซาร์ส!, Khaosod, February 6, 2020]; Pei Panwad informs about the drama! after being complained because of being not quarantined [translated from เปี้ย ปานวาด แงงดราม่า! หลังโดนชาวเน็ตถล่มกลับจากญี่ปุ่นแต่ไม่ยอมกักตัวเฝ้าระวังโควิด-19, Posttoday.com, February 29, 2020]; “COVID 19” spits!! China slows down orange orders from Pichit unlimitedly [translated from “โควิด 19” พ่นพิษ!! จีนชะลอสั่งซื้อสัมพันธู์พื้นเมืองพิจิตรไม่มีกำหนด, Posttoday.com, February 20, 2020]; and so forth.

Likewise, some media persons loved to use single and double quotation marks (‘...’ or “...”), and that emphasised the writers’ emotional involvement to be happier and even sadder. For instance, ‘Chinese’ boy with cerebral palsy ‘found dead,’ abandoned after his dad’s quarantine [translated from เด็กหนุ่ม ‘จีน’ สมองพิการ ‘ดับอนาถ’ ไร้คนดูแลหลังพ่อถูกกักกันโรค ‘ไวรัส’, Daily Manager 360 Degree, February 5, 2020]; Doctors confirms ‘Corona’ treated by symptoms shown, Anti-HIV medicine to be confirmed [translated from แพทย์ย้ำ ‘โคโรนา’ รักษาตามอาการ ยาด้านเอชไอวีต้องรอผลการศึกษาชัดเจน, Kom Chud Luk, February 5, 2020]; “Corona Virus” makes “fear” and “ethnic discrimination” widespread [translated from คอลัมน์ นอกหน้าต่าง: “เชื้อไวรัสโคโรนา” ยังทำให้ “ความกลัว” และ “ลัทธิเหยียดผิว” ระบาดออกไปทั่วโลก, Daily Manager 360 Degree, February 5, 2020]; “MoT” gives rewards to those who identify “the little ghost” coming from the risky places and refusing to be COVID-19 tested [translated from “คมนาคม” ตั้งรางวัลชี้เป้า “ผีน้อย” กลับจากพื้นที่เสี่ยงเสี่ยงตรวจโควิด-19, Daily Manager 360 Degree, March 10, 2020]; and the like.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research paper examined if media persons create moral panics among the publics and how media persons created moral panics about COVID-19 among the publics. The sampled news headlines were collected and analysed. It was firstly questioned if media persons create moral panics about the pandemic among people. It was found that media persons had predominantly called scary and unpleasant virus and provided ‘fear and disbelief’ content. Altogether with this, people gained more panic, concern, and fear because of the words, sentence arrangement, and marks employed by media persons. It is very important when the press

and media persons have reported news about the virus because people believe in what they perceive through their eyes and ears (Kazuhiro, 2020). Later on, an unexpected behaviour and outcome could be the result. People should, hence, be dependent on their own, not the folk devil like media persons. Gilman (2010) referred to the statement of Margaret Chan about the H1N1 influenza and published on May 21, 2009 that ‘... influenza A (H1N1) was not going to become a pandemic. Not because of any epidemiological rationale but because the very term “pandemic” was feared to trigger global panic’. Every single word contained an intended meaning and that could create moral panics.

Media persons, both offline and online media and even citizen journalist, play an

important role in reporting and presenting factual and informative content. However, addition, diversion, exaggeration, and so forth seem not to be avoided when media people had done their jobs. In the light of the infectious outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Muzzatti (2005) highlighted that it is media professionals who cannot be a reliable and trustworthy source of information for the publics because the media persons do not give facts and information about the disease and, thus, could not create trust among the people. In the midst of COVID-19, there is a word called ‘infodemic’ as Peckham (2020) cited the statement of World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adahanom Ghebreyesus, presented at the Munich Security Conference that:

“we’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic. ... In an infodemic, the engine of panic is social media. The online world can all too easily flip into a vast misinformation machine. People are no longer able to tell fiction from truth. Everything is fake news if you don’t like it.” (cited by Peckham, 2020; see also Zarocostas, 2020)

Ahmed and colleagues (2018) confirmed that social media like Twitter empowered negative and strong emotions about the widespread of infectious diseases. The Director of Infectious Hazards Management of the World Health Organization’s Health Emergencies Programme, Sylvie Briand (cited in Zarocostas, 2020), furthermore, articulated that all people are in the digital media that all things can go spread more widely and easily, “[s]o it is not only information to make sure people are informed; it is also making sure people are informed to act appropriately.” Nicolson (2020), likewise, shared his opinion by comparing between the HIV/AIDS crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis

that, although COVID-19 prevention strategies can be learned from the HIV/AIDS case, the current pandemic outbreak particularly poses an infodemic and misinformation challenge. This is mainly caused by a power of social networking media. Not only the government, but also media persons should, hence, disseminate reliable and trustworthy health-related information appropriately and practically.

The second research objective and research question was how media persons make people panic about COVID-19. It was discovered that moral panics were created and developed by writing style through the uses of words, sentence arrangement, and marks. This could be reasoned

that media persons were likely to play with fear-arousal languages, words, sentences, and phrases and such fear cues were catchy (Ketchell, 2020).

Such discussions and arguments, eventually, spotlighted and brought about the concept of health literacy with which people should be skilled, equipped, and experienced, not only functional health literacy at the initial stage, but also interactive and critical health literacy at the second and the third stages of the health literacy concept, addressed by Don Nutbeam, a father of health literacy (2000). In a greater detail, Nutbeam highlighted that health literacy does not limit to a sense of seeking for information and having communication skills so that people are able to be aware of and understand what happens in society and that they can make appropriate health-related decision. Nonetheless, the further key message goes to the ability to retrieve health-related facts and to apply them in practices. Hence, media persons should play a role of giving and presenting information and facts to people in order to help them be aware of, know, understand, and have proper attitude to promote their good health status and outcomes and prevent themselves from unwanted diseases so that they can stay safe and healthy.

Future studies should pay attention to examine how other stakeholders including the government, the public, and so forth create moral panics regarding COVID-19 and other health-related issues. Also, a level of panic and fear among the public after being exposed to media reports through sentiment analysis should be studied.

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