

Journalistic Role Performance of the Thai Press on the Issue of Transgender Rights

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This article investigates the journalistic role performance of *Bangkok Post* about the issue of transgender rights in Thailand. Methodologically, corpus-assisted discourse analysis is employed. It amalgamates quantitative computation (the identification of significant keywords) into qualitative analysis. Findings indicate that the role is performed in 6 dimensions: intervention, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic. Although transgender rights in certain aspects such as marriage, employment, and blood donation are touched upon, the rights of other seemingly subaltern transgender communities, including inmates and sex workers, are not fully articulated. Suggestions for asserting transgender rights on a more comprehensive basis are offered.

Keywords: corpus-assisted discourse analysis, journalistic role performance, online newspapers, Thailand, transgender rights

Transprejudice refers to “the negative valuing, stereotyping and discriminatory treatment of individuals whose appearance and/or identity does not conform to the current social expectations or conventional conceptions of gender” (Winter, 2009, p. 23). Such a social phenomenon is well-documented in a range of contexts including sport participation (Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, & Haycraft, 2017), the use of sanitary facilities (Colliver, Coyle, & Silvestri, 2019), and being the target of verbal abuse by means of inappropriate pronoun usage (Reisner, Moore, Asquith, Pardee, & Mayer, 2020) and directly expressed vitriol (Chib, Nguyen, & Lin, 2021).

To overcome various forms of transprejudice and raise the visibility of this particular population, several studies have explored the issue of transgender rights from the perspectives of several factions in society such as nongovernmental organizations (Mount, 2020), law enforcement officers (Wolff & Cokely, 2007), school leaders (Hart & Hart, 2018), and trans people themselves (Zimman, 2019).

With respect to the press, the representation of trans people is observed to show evidence of transprejudice including negative stereotypes, trivialization of transgender identity, and delegitimizing language (Åkerlund, 2019; Billard, 2016; Morrison, Parker, Sadika, Sameen, & Morrison, 2021).

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Nonetheless, such investigation does not directly pertain to the issue of transgender rights protection. In addition, the media that have been academically explored are primarily within a Western context.

Thai trans people receive scholarly attention on an international basis (Winter, 2006). However, previous studies have examined them from the aspects that are not directly related to the protection of their rights, such as factors predisposing them to imprisonment (Jeffries, Thipphayamongkoludom, & Chuenurah, 2022), substance use and HIV (Nemoto et al., 2012), the negotiation of gender and identity in sex work (Ocha & Earth, 2013), transnational cultural flows (Käng, 2014), sex-reassignment surgery, and medical tourism (Enteen, 2014). In a similar vein, to what extent the media portray them in a way that safeguards their rights has not thoroughly been examined. Hence, the current study seeks to redress such a research gap by investigating how the Thai press perform a professional role in asserting transgender rights in Thailand.

Theoretical Framework

To investigate the aforementioned role, the current study employs a framework known as the journalistic role performance. It can be conceptualized as an array of practices that journalists adopt to perform their functions in society legitimately and meaningfully (Hanitzsch, 2007). It is comprised of six dimensions: intervention, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic (Mellado, 2015) as encapsulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Six Dimensions of Journalistic Role Performance.

Dimension	Objective	Performance
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - express the journalist's opinions/judgements/interpretations - propose/demand changes to an event/topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use qualifying adjectives - use first-person pronouns
Watchdog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inspect official behavior - decry what is perceived as illegal or irregular concerning those in power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - question the validity of those in power - express disagreement with a particular action/policy - voice third parties' criticism against those in power
Loyal-facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defend actions of de facto powers - enhance national prestige/promote patriotism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use positive adjectives when referring to the actions - make a comparison with other countries
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - solve readers' personal problems - foster promotional culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - offer advice on how to tackle problems that readers have in their environment - provide information pertaining to available products/services

Dimension	Objective	Performance
Infotainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - entertain or thrill readers - satisfy readers' curiosity about something unusual or unexpected - evoke emotional responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use exaggeration, hyperbole and dramatic superlative adjectives - make explicit references to feelings/acts of violence, crime or sex scenes - report scandals/private life of public figures
Civic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - make ordinary people's voice heard - trigger citizen deliberation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - include citizen's opinions/concerns/enquiries in a news product - present information on citizen activities

Note. Adapted from Mellado (2015).

Within the context of gender, this framework has been applied to analyze the coverage concerning the #MeToo Movement in Denmark and Sweden (Møller Hartley & Askanius, 2021). The current study, therefore, attempts to test the theory in novel contexts of Thai journalism, and the issue in question is transgender rights.

Methodology

Mellado (2015) argues that the journalistic role performance can be investigated through either a news production process or a news product. Studies within the first strand (e.g., Møller Hartley & Askanius, 2021) adopt methods such as interviews with journalists, editors, and activists together with participant observation. Meanwhile, research within the second strand (e.g., Hellmueller & Arias, 2020) revolves around quantitative content analysis.

This study situates itself in the second strand. However, unlike quantitative content analysis, the method used to examine the news product was corpus-assisted discourse analysis. It amalgamates quantitative computation (the identification of statistically significant keywords) into qualitative textual analysis. One of its advantages is that it offers researchers a practical guideline on where to begin the textual investigation rather than cherry-picking any chunk of text that corresponds to their preexisting assumptions. Based on Motschenbacher (2019), the following steps were taken.

Step 1: Corpus Collection

Among a limited number of English newspapers in Thailand, *Bangkok Post* was chosen for detailed analysis. Established since 1946, it is the longest-running national daily newspaper. Its online circulation reaches over 2,800,000 users who are based in Thailand and overseas alike (*Bangkok Post*, 2019). Most are Thai, American, British, Australian, and Canadian who are formally educated (*Bangkok Post*, 2019). The percentage of Thai and international readers who enter higher education is 89% and 64%, respectively

(*Bangkok Post*, 2019). Given its readership, the coverage is supposed to focus on an issue in Thailand that is of international prominence.

The content was retrieved from the newspaper's website (www.bangkokpost.com). The search word was *transgender*. Altogether, the corpus consisted of 72 articles with a total number of 77,185 words. The period of publication ranged from 2012 to 2021. All of the content could be accessed without a need for a paid subscription. The data was subsequently converted into a machine-readable format and processed by AntConc 3.5.8w (Anthony, 2019).

Step 2: Keyword Analysis

Keywords are words that occur in a particular text on a salient basis when compared with another reference text (Baker, 2008). In this study, the reference corpus was compiled with several parameters nearly identical to those of the corpus in Step 1, including the period of publication (2012–2021), the topic (trans people in Thailand), and the number of words (76,550). To put it another way, the reference corpus was the news coverage focusing on trans people in Thailand. It was created by other English newspapers in the country within a similar period as *Bangkok Post* did. Because of such comparison, it was anticipated that the keywords would reflect the particular emphasis that *Bangkok Post* tended to place on the issue.

Two statistical measures were employed: log-likelihood (LL) and %DIFF. Log-likelihood indicates the significance of a keyword. The cut-off LL score was established at greater than 6.63, equaling $p < .01$ (Gabrielatos & Marchi, 2011). Meanwhile, %DIFF indicates an effect size. Moreover, based on Mautner (2016), only content words were selected for the analysis in the subsequent step.

Step 3: Qualitative Analysis

This step built on the previous one by expanding the analysis from a word level to a paragraph level. In other words, the investigation was conducted with the parts of the coverage that contained the statistically significant keywords derived from the previous step. It was theoretically structured around the six dimensions of the journalistic role performance.

Results and Discussion

This section reports the findings pertaining to keyword analysis and qualitative analysis. Further discussion in relation to those findings is also initiated.

Keyword Analysis

The top 100 keywords, arranged by the LL score, are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Top 100 Keywords.

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	LL	%DIFF
1	Sansiri	51	70.30	10016.08
2	rainbow	99	58.81	416.76
3	Jimmy	42	57.89	8230.89
4	drag	55	44.96	809.12
5	season	37	38.01	1734.78
6	love	78	36.22	286.79
7	life	134	34.54	146.10
8	series	42	33.00	733.08
9	marriage	124	29.78	136.49
10	Netflix	21	28.94	4065.44
11	character	25	27.37	2379.43
12	title	41	26.39	480.89
13	month	102	25.31	140.85
14	art	37	24.61	511.59
15	Worawalun	17	23.43	3272.02
16	Taiwan	21	22.20	1982.72
17	Jakkaphong	16	22.05	3073.67
18	performance	16	22.05	3073.67
19	queens	16	22.05	3073.67
20	colors	20	20.92	1883.54
21	civil	62	20.84	192.80
22	organizations	26	20.73	759.53
23	Weeraya	15	20.67	2875.31
24	Tunyawaj	14	19.29	2676.96
25	pandemic	34	19.14	381.71
26	pride	119	18.57	93.47
27	characters	13	17.92	2478.60
28	artist	30	17.27	395.88
29	LGBTQIA	17	17.10	1586.01
30	race	25	16.76	519.85
31	equality	118	16.55	85.76
32	donors	12	16.54	2280.25
33	Kritipat	12	16.54	2280.25
34	proud	41	16.54	238.85
35	textbooks	12	16.54	2280.25
36	Yollada	22	16.16	627.30
37	Kaona	26	15.41	415.72
38	body	43	15.23	204.61
39	recognized	11	15.16	2081.90
40	business	37	14.66	233.59

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	LL	%DIFF
41	conduct	15	14.59	1387.65
42	colorful	10	13.78	1883.54
43	Sukit	10	13.78	1883.54
44	drama	17	13.43	743.00
45	audiences	14	13.34	1288.48
46	release	14	13.34	1288.48
47	employees	21	12.54	420.68
48	struggles	9	12.40	1685.19
49	cisgender	9	12.40	1685.19
50	blood	27	12.40	282.54
51	dysphoria	16	12.28	693.4184
52	different	61	12.27	116.0648
53	trans women	18	11.77	495.0638
54	films	24	11.42	296.7092
55	genre	8	11.02	1486.8368
56	teach	8	11.02	1486.8368
57	content	21	10.46	316.5447
58	gender	386	10.16	27.6081
59	controversial	12	10.88	1090.1276
60	books	12	10.88	1090.1276
61	realize	12	10.88	1090.1276
62	inspired	14	10.03	594.2411
63	relationship	24	9.72	240.0365
64	universe	34	9.55	159.3868
65	Thammasat	18	9.52	346.2979
66	screen	11	9.67	990.9503
67	worse	11	9.67	990.9503
68	financially	7	9.65	1288.4822
69	mister	7	9.65	1288.4822
70	burger	7	9.65	1288.4822
71	wedding	7	9.65	1288.4822
72	evaluation	7	9.65	1288.4822
73	staff	34	9.55	159.3868
74	transphobia	13	8.92	544.6525
75	married	21	8.70	247.1206
76	diversity	45	8.74	112.5228
77	advocacy	19	8.59	276.8737
78	inclusive	19	8.59	276.8737
79	winner	19	8.59	276.8737
80	sign	17	8.56	321.5035

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	LL	%DIFF
81	Tiffany	17	8.56	321.5035
82	katoey	31	8.54	156.208
83	storyline	10	8.47	891.773
84	attack	10	8.47	891.773
85	commitment	10	8.47	891.773
86	Parith	6	8.27	1090.1276
87	portrayed	6	8.27	1090.1276
88	contemporary	6	8.27	1090.1276
89	episode	6	8.27	1090.1276
90	show	69	8.20	75.4675
91	orientation	32	8.13	144.1287
92	miss	62	8.06	80.8527
93	flag	22	8.03	211.7001
94	family	84	7.89	63.3508
95	actress	12	7.84	495.0638
96	silence	12	7.84	495.0638
97	remains	20	7.84	230.591
98	COVID	39	7.75	114.8842
99	vulnerable	18	7.69	257.0383
100	experienced	18	7.69	257.038

Notably, some of the keywords have a semantic/collocational relationship with one another as summarized in Table 3. They are categorized according to an emerging semantic theme.

Table 3. Significant Keywords Grouped According to a Semantic Theme.

Theme	Keyword
Proper Thai names	Sansiri, Worawalun, Jakkaphong, Weeraya, Tunyawaj, Kritipat, Yollada, Kaona, Sukit, Parith Tiffany, Thammasat
Nonbinarism	LGBTQIA, rainbow, trans women, gender, diversity, katoey, orientation, flag
Cultural products	drama, series, films, storyline, episode, show, genre
Disease	pandemic, COVID, vulnerable
Title	title, mister, miss
Personal ties	marriage, married, wedding, relationship, family
Calling for fairness	equality, advocacy, inclusive
Unpleasant incident	transphobia, struggles, attack, controversial

The proper Thai names consist of animate beings and inanimate objects. The former includes the names of individuals from various professional backgrounds such as politicians (e.g., Yollada), activists (e.g., Parith), and businesspeople (e.g., Jakkaphong). Meanwhile, the latter refers to a property developer (Sansiri), an educational institution (Thammasat), and a cabaret venue (Tiffany).

What can be witnessed in the “nonbinarism” theme is hypernyms (gender and orientation) of which the meaning includes that of hyponyms (LGBTQIA, trans women, and katoey). In particular, the latter, a variant of katoey, is a Thai word that can be used to refer to either male-to-female trans people or cisgender men whose behavior is perceived as effeminate (Matzner & Costa, 2015). A rainbow flag is a transnational symbol denoting diversity, tolerance, and LGBT-friendliness (Klapeer & Laskar, 2018).

The remainder of the themes pertain to transgender rights in various aspects. The keywords *drama*, *series*, and *films* may be associated with the absence or presence of trans people in Thai show business and, in the latter case, what kind of role they perform. Moreover, in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, trans people might be put in a particularly vulnerable position to receive medical care. Even without the pandemic, the issues of title change according to an authentic gender and marriage equality remain critical and necessitate legal amendment. All in all, the newspaper may report transphobic incidents in various contexts, including Thai entertainment industry and medical access. Since this step concerns a word-level analysis, it is compelling to examine in detail how the newspaper would perform its journalistic roles about these issues in the subsequent step.

Qualitative Analysis

This subsection examines the coverage through the lens of the journalistic role performance. It is divided into six dimensions. In all of the extracts, the italicized words refer to the significant keywords.

Intervention Dimension

An indicator of this role is proposing or demanding changes with respect to any event or topic (Mellado, 2015). The following extracts exemplify the newspaper’s call for change about the issues of marriage equality (1), public perception (2), and media portrayal (3).

Extract (1) explicitly demands major amendment to marriage law through an auxiliary *must*. Moreover, the use of a qualifying, *gender-neutral* adjective suggests the realization of the diversity embedded in such a legal relationship. Although marriage between transgender and cisgender individuals may be a familiar story, the one between trans people is not hitherto unheard-of (Na Ranong, 2013). Hence, by using such an adjective, the newspaper asserts the rights that transcend heteronormativity and cisgenderism. Such a positive attitude is in contrast with that of Thai-language newspapers, wherein trans people are commonly depicted on a negative basis such as being a threat to Buddhism and a deviation from the accepted norms and values (Fongkaew et al., 2019).

(1) The wording of the law that must change is to allow *marriage* between “a man and a woman” to “person and person.” This will open *marriage* up to anybody regardless of their sexual *orientation* and *gender* identity and make it a *gender-neutral* concept. (Mahavongtrakul, 2020a, para. 4)

It should also be noted that marriage engenders other rights, including child adoption, inheritance, and, in the case of trans men, postoperative pregnancy. The latter case is evidenced in that a transgender

man decides to be pregnant several times even after undergoing sex-reassignment surgery (Riggs, 2014). Consequently, to perform this role about the issue of marriage on a more comprehensive basis, the newspaper needs to take into consideration the rights that surround such a legal relationship.

Unlike the previous extract, (2) implicitly proposes change through a string of what can be regarded as rhetorical questions. Such change seemingly pertains to the public perception and action that fail to embody the real essence of trans identity. In other words, the newspaper appears to remind the public about the centrality of nondiscriminatory treatment given to trans people and the realization of their identity rather than glorifying inanimate objects such as pride products or rainbow flags.

(2) When companies *release Pride* products, do they also *release* policies to employ and treat LGBTI people fairly and equally? Do they promote the *advocacy* in any way? And would people care if they do or don't? People take selfies on *rainbow* roads and enjoy the celebratory mood but what exactly are they celebrating? And what's a *rainbow flag* to people anyway? (Mahavongtrakul, 2021a, para. 2)

Arguably, restricting trans women to a comical role, as depicted in extract (3), reifies rather than destabilizes "the heteronormative storylines that typically underpin Thai mainstream media" (Baudinette, 2019, p. 118). Consequently, what the newspaper articulates here is indicative of its attempt to subvert such a norm in Thai mass media.

(3) Even TV *series* and *films* today rarely give the character of a transgender woman a go, let alone a *proper storyline* to see their role and *relationship* developing into anything more than that of the supporting jokester on the side. (Mahavongtrakul, 2019a, para. 11)

All in all, the newspaper performs the *intervention* role by means of various linguistic features including an auxiliary, a qualifying adjective, and a rhetorical question. This seems to reflect the newspaper's perspectives that several facets in Thai society are in need for change if equal transgender rights are to be enjoyed. They include the legislation that is dominated by heteronormativity and cisgenderism; the public perception and action that remain superficial; and the show business, which trivializes trans women.

Watchdog Dimension

This role is performed by questioning the validity or veracity of what those in power say or do (Mellado, 2015). The constellation that is condemned is law enforcement officers as exemplified in extract (4). Through a phrase *an excuse to suppress*, they are criticized for using the pandemic as a pretext for launching a crackdown on activists, whom the newspaper regards as having the full rights to demand what they find lacking in society on a nonviolent basis.

(4) Twenty activists involved in the Nov 28 protest to call for *marriage equality* at Ratchaprasong intersection were summoned for questioning by the authorities. The police claimed the protest was against government *Covid-19* restrictions. Well, it's nothing new they're using the *pandemic* as an excuse to suppress free speech and right to peaceful protest. (Mahavongtrakul, 2021b, para. 4)

Mellado (2015) argues that this role can be performed not only by journalists but also by a third party as their institutional partners. In this context, as shown in extract (5), one of the potential partners include Nachale Boonyapisomparn, the cofounder of the Thai Transgender Alliance (Thai TGA) and coordinator at the Asia Pacific Transgender Network, whose viewpoints are given the floor.

(5) As the entire country has to go through the *pandemic* together, I (Boonyapisomparn) would like to ask the authorities how accessible are present government schemes for Thai LGBTI? And just what is being done to educate *civil* servants and medical *staff* to serve the public, which includes us, with impartiality? (Bohwongprasert, 2021, para. 19)

All in all, what can be captured from extracts (4) and (5) is that the *watchdog* role is performed within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the authorities that are criticized, and the focus of attention are different. In (4), the police are the target, and the focus is on the newspaper's disagreement with their infringement of activists' rights. In (5), the government and those in the public-health sector are the target, and the focus is on the concern over the rights of gender-expansive individuals to equal healthcare services. This is consistent with what Nitpolprasert and colleagues (2021) discover that the Thai government policy during the pandemic is a matter of concern to HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) because it requires them to reveal personal information on a contact-tracing app. Such requirement gives rise to the trepidation of HIV status disclosure. The authors conclude by highlighting the need to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of the "vulnerable populations" during the crisis, signifying that their rights are not adequately safeguarded.

Loyal-Facilitator Dimension

This role is characterized by the content that enhances the national image (Mellado, 2015). It is manifested in extract (6) as readers are cognizant of the state's pilot project which does not coerce transgender officers to dress according to their sex assigned at birth: (6) Pioneered in Chanthaburi province, a few provincial authorities are now allowing their *civil* officers to dress according to their *gender* identity. (Mahavongtrakul, 2020b, para. 3)

Despite this positive sign, the newspaper must be alert to other principal components surrounding the dress code policy. They include the use of sanitary facilities and linguistic communication in the workplace. Since the top 100 keywords do not appear to contain statistically significant terms pertaining to both issues, it can be inferred that they are not given considerable emphasis from the newspaper. Therefore, the current study aims to highlight their importance as follows.

A gender-neutral toilet is not easily available in Thai government offices. As a result, will their rights remain acknowledged if trans women, who are allowed to dress as a female, need to use the men's toilet during office hours? On the contrary, would they be perfectly welcome in the women's one as it has been documented elsewhere that female colleagues are not entirely comfortable with such a practice (Brewster, Velez, & Tebbe, 2014)?

The linguistic aspect plays a pivotal role in constructing transgender identity (Jones, del Pozo de Bolger, Dune, Lykins, & Hawkes, 2015). In the Thai language, the particles expressing politeness are firmly placed within the context of gender binarism. A male speaker finishes his utterances with *khrap*, and a female speaker with *kha*. Notably, it has been evidenced that the right of Thai trans people to use the particles according to their authentic gender is infringed in a Thai government office like a correctional institution. In particular, a prison officer corrected a female-to-male transgender inmate who had used the male particle and "strictly ordered" him to use the female particle instead (Pravattiyagul, 2022).

Moreover, unlike in English, the Thai first-person pronouns that are typically used in a formal situation are marked by gender. The pronoun *phom* is used by a male speaker, and the pronoun *dichan* by a female speaker. Semantically, if trans women insist on not using the particle, their utterances remain comprehensible. In contrast, if they decide to omit the pronoun usage altogether, it can possibly lead to a breakdown in communication.

The same is true for female-to-male trans people, who are virtually absent in the coverage. While being on duty, are they allowed to dress in a men's outfit? Which toilet are they supposed to use? To what extent are they permitted to express their identity through the Thai linguistic features?

Accordingly, it is important to ensure that the policy is aimed at protecting the rights of transgender officers on a comprehensive basis, not only the way they dress while on duty but also the way they maintain their identity through language use in the workplace.

All in all, the newspaper should take into consideration a broader range of transgender population and other vital factors surrounding the issue of dressing. If the state is making progress in these respects, the newspaper is supposed to inform readers about it.

Service Dimension

Indicators that typify this role include fostering promotional culture and solving problems (Mellado, 2015). The former refers to showing the latest product/service trends in the market, while the latter refers to offering advice to the public about the difficulty they could potentially encounter (Mellado, 2015). In extract (7), the newspaper fosters promotional culture by informing readers about the innovative product called Pride Burger. Through the lexical item *rainbow-colored* that connotes LGBT-friendliness (Klapeer & Laskar, 2018), the newspaper represents this product as following a trend associated with gender diversity.

(7) If you're hungry for some really mean *burgers*, head to Bad *Burger* and Witch Craft Bangkok and ask for their *Pride Burger* [. . .]. Instead of the standard buns, you get a sparkly *rainbow-colored* bun to go with your homemade *burgers* and craft beers. (Tanskul, 2019, para. 13)

Although promotional culture is evidenced, what is seemingly missing is the vital function of solving personal problems. For example, it has been demonstrated that Thai trans people, as opposed to cisgender counterparts, experience "significantly higher family rejection, lower social support, higher loneliness, higher

depression [. . .] and higher negative risk factors related to suicidal behavior" (Yadegarfar, Meinhold-Bergmann, & Ho, 2014, p. 347). Furthermore, the social oppression against their gender identity is one of the key factors predisposing certain Thai trans people to substance use to alleviate their misery (Sakunpong, 2018). Accordingly, to perform the *service* role on a more all-embracing basis, the newspaper can provide them with practical guidance on stress management together with reliable sources from which they can seek professional help.

Additionally, the personal problems that confront some subgroups of Thai trans people are much more acute. Take trans people living with HIV as an example. It has been reported that the infection leads to stigmatization and discrimination even by the transgender community itself (de Lind van Wijngaarden & Fongkaew, 2021).

All in all, there are other crucial aspects that the newspaper should consider to perform this role on a more adequate basis. They include functioning as an information source that materially assists trans people in handling their personal problems.

Infotainment Dimension

One of the characteristics of this role is the delivery of sensational reports, such as those pertaining to acts of violence, unsavory incidents, crime, or sex scenes, to arouse readers' emotions and capture public attention (Mellado, 2015). In the following extracts, the unsavory incidents of Thai trans people are vividly described regarding employment discrimination (8) and a discriminatory blood donation policy (9).

Extract (8) articulates a dramatic twist in the life of a trans woman. The twist seems to be intensified through the markers *however* and *worse*, which enunciate a conflict situation between her academic qualification and her gender identity.

In fact, Taweekarn's ordeal concurs with the previous findings indicating that Thai trans women can hardly gain access to jobs in the formal sector. The options left for them are "stereotypical" occupations, such as cabaret performers, makeup artists, and sex workers (Suriyasarn, 2016). Moreover, job prospects for trans women in rural communities are even more limited as they need to be contingent upon manual or low-paid jobs such as family workers, irregular hired laborers, and spiritual mediums (Suriyasarn, 2016). This is presumably because those "stereotypical" jobs are prevalent only in urban areas. Notably, the subtle nuance about the underemployment of trans women in urban and rural settings appears to be missing from the newspaper coverage.

Moreover, extract (8) clearly indicates the opposition coming from educational institutions against transgender candidates. It has been documented that although school leaders realize the benefits of employing them, there are "concerns about a lack of community tolerance for differences" (Hart & Hart, 2018, p. 130). Therefore, apart from the *infotainment* role, the newspaper can perform the *civic* role by expressing the opinions of various stakeholders such as parents, students, and community members. What can be anticipated is a mixture of opinions. For those who are against transgender candidates merely because of their gender identity, the *service* role can also be performed to provide them with additional information so that mutual understanding

can hopefully be fostered. In this case, performing a combination of roles about a particular issue squares with the observation that these six dimensions can possibly overlap in practice (Mellado, 2015).

(8) *Worawalun* Taweekarn had always wanted to be a teacher and her teaching degree should make her a qualified candidate. However, the only thing that bars her from getting her dream job is that she is a *transwoman*. The second runner-up of *Miss Tiffany's Universe 2018*, *Worawalun* has been trying to find a job as a teacher over the past two years. [. . .] *Worawalun's* applications were rejected. [. . .] *Worse*, a certain institution explicitly told her she is better off working as a showgirl or beautician, all because she dresses and looks like a *Miss*, while her ID card says *Mister*. (Mahavongtrakul, 2019b, paras. 1–2)

Extract (9) portrays the offensiveness against Thai trans people who are prohibited from donating blood because of their gender identity. Besides, readers' feelings appear to be sharpened by a string of negative lexical items such as *unwelcome*, *turned away*, and *at-risk population group*, which vividly portrays trans people falling victim to the system.

(9) A shortage of *blood* supply amid strict *COVID-19* measures has resulted in widespread calls for donations. However, *blood* from gay and *katoey donors* remains *unwelcome*. Recently, a *transgender woman* who wished to donate her *blood* was turned away by *staff* at the Thai Red Cross Society due to her *gender* identity. The reason given by the staff was that she belongs to an *at-risk population group* *vulnerable* to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Even if the *donor* was to provide a *blood* test result that can prove they're totally clean, the Red Cross won't accept their *blood*. (Mahavongtrakul, 2020a, para. 7)

Notably, such a lifetime deferral is not a universal phenomenon. In Canada, two approaches are adopted to determine transgender donors' eligibility (Goldman, Butler-Foster, Lapierre, O'Brien, & Devor, 2020). First, an individual risk assessment or individual conversation with a medical practitioner is conducted. Potential risks include injection drug use and HIV infection. Second, donors are assessed by screening staff based on standard work instructions. Despite incorporating criteria specific to trans people, they are relatively akin to those of other donors, meaning that "many trans people will be eligible and able to donate" (Goldman et al., 2020, p. 1086). All in all, it is evident that if transgender individuals are declared ineligible, it is not because of their gender identity but their risky behavior. Furthermore, what can be construed is that the latter is not intrinsically bound with the former.

Apart from the role currently being discussed, the newspaper can also perform the *intervention* role. Drawing upon the progress achieved in Canada as an example, it can demand change in Thailand by urging the relevant authorities to consider applying the eligibility criteria according to the sexual behavior rather than the gender identity.

Civic Dimension

Disclosing information about citizen acts such as campaigns and collective actions is one of the characteristics of this role (Mellado, 2015). Here activities of several factions in society are reported. They include activist groups (10)–(11) and a private company (12).

Extract (10) concerns a civic call for the right to change honorific titles after sex-reassignment surgery. In particular, the fact that the Lift foundation supports *legal gender recognition* implies that such a call specifically targets the amendment of formal documentation according to the authentic gender. Although the surgery is used as a threshold determining such amendment, it should be noted that several trans people elect to transition by other means including psychiatric diagnosis or hormone treatment without proceeding to the surgery (Couch, Pitts, Croy, Mulcare, & Mitchell, 2008).

Hence, it is reasonably plausible for the newspaper to consider performing its role in demanding the rights for this segment of trans people. Apart from voicing their opinions and concerns, it can perform the *service* role that includes providing expert advice for trans people who are seeking information about nonsurgical means for transition.

(10) This *month*, the movement for transgender legal recognition took a leap forward when a group of transgender women led by *Jakkaphong* Jakrajutatip, CEO of JKN Global Media, introduced their newly founded *Life Inspired [f]or Transsexuals (Lift) Foundation* to advocate for an *inclusive* society free of *gender*-based barriers and to support legal *gender* recognition of transgender people. Representatives of the group visited parliament last Thursday to push for a bill that would allow transgender people to change their *title* after they undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS). (Mahavongtrakul, 2019c, para. 2)

In addition to reporting the citizen activity, extract (11) voices the citizen opinion by means of an indirect quotation. Overall, it resonates with the previous findings that demonstrate that sexuality education in Thai public schools fails to tackle LGBT issues on an effective basis and may result in augmenting internalized stigma among LGBT-identified students (Shrestha et al., 2020).

(11) Having felt that Thai *textbooks* caused misunderstanding and bias with regard to *gender diversity*, *Parith*, together with Supanat Aneknamwong [. . .] submitted a letter of complaint to the Foundation for Sexual *Orientation* and *Gender* Identity Rights and Justice (FOR-SOGI) to ask the Committee on Unfair *Gender* Discrimination Complaints Group for a modification of health-education *textbooks* for grades 1–12 whose *contents* fail to deliver proper knowledge and understanding regarding transgenderism, which could result in **gender** discrimination and possible sexual violence. Some of the content in the *textbooks*, for instance, defines transgenderism as a sexual deviation which, according to *Parith*, rips human beings of dignity and value. (Ocharoenchai, 2018, para. 4)

Contrary to the situation in (8), extract (12) depicts an employment opportunity in a private sector for LGBT candidates. This social progress is undeniably impressive. Nevertheless, given the newspaper's international readership and that several Thai corporations are conducting business operations abroad in locations such as China, India (Chareon Pokphand Foods, 2020), Myanmar, Vietnam, and Indonesia (PTT Exploration and Production, 2019), the newspaper is supposed to place this issue within the international context.

A three-level model that multinational corporations (MNCs) can consider using has been proposed (Bross, Houdart, & Tripathi, 2018). At the lowest level, they simply conform to local law even though this can translate into transgender rights being affected. At the subsequent level, they create an in-house environment that is transgender-friendly, with a realization that any vigorous action beyond the workplace would be subject to a range of restrictions. At the highest level, they strongly advocate transgender rights within the country they operate. According to this model, the newspaper should realize which journalistic roles it is supposed to further perform concerning transgender rights within Thai MNCs. For instance, performing the *intervention* role can possibly mean that it is in support of a particular level, presumably not the lowest one. In case certain Thai corporations abroad fail to achieve at least the second level, the newspaper may perform the *watchdog* role to inspect what internal or external factors contributing to such failure. However, given that overseas operation is subject to local regulatory requirements that may not be transgender-friendly as exemplified in the case of Indonesia (Bross et al., 2018), the newspaper must consider the fragile balance which Thai MNCs need to sustain between conducting the business without contravening those regulations and safeguarding transgender employees' rights.

(12) *Sansiri* steps up support and takes affirmative action for LGBTI rights by eliminating workplace discrimination, kicking off "Everyone is Family," an awareness campaign during *Pride month* with inspiring *art* installations, an *inclusive* corporate culture and home loan privileges in a display of support and solidarity with the LGBTI community. (Public Relations News, 2020, para. 2)

Conclusion

This study has examined the journalistic role performance of *Bangkok Post*, a leading English newspaper in Thailand, on the issue of transgender rights. Findings indicate that the role performances are manifested through several themes, including legal impediments, social discrimination, and progress achieved in Thai society.

Legal impediments pertain to obstructions in the law, which fail to recognize transgender rights. For instance, Thai marriage law defines marriage within the exclusive context of heterosexuality. Hence, the newspaper performs the *intervention* role to demand lexical change in the law that would lead to marriage equality for all Thai individuals irrespective of their gender and sexuality. Moreover, the *civic* role is performed to publicize citizen activities about their call for trans people to be able to legally change their honorific title after undergoing sex-reassignment surgery.

Social discrimination against trans people, as the coverage has unveiled, remains blatant in certain contexts. For example, transgender individuals, despite being properly qualified, are barred from a teaching career. In addition, their blood donation endeavor is permanently deferred notwithstanding the evidence demonstrating that the blood is clean. In Thai textbooks, trans identity is not defined as diversity but rather deviation. To assert the rights concerning these issues, the newspaper performs the *infotainment* role, which is contingent upon an affective narrative, by vividly portraying the ordeals endured by those trans people. Such portrayal is anticipated to compel public attention (Mellado, 2015). The *civic* role is also performed to make the public cognizant of a civil movement in opposition to the dehumanizing definition in educational materials.

Although transgender rights, in many respects—as illustrated in the aforementioned themes—are inadequately protected, progress toward transgender rights promotion is somewhat discernible. Such advancement is expressed through the *loyal-facilitator* and *civic* roles. The former includes the authorization from certain government offices about the rights of transgender officials to dress according to the authentic gender, while the latter refers to the coverage focusing on better job prospects and fringe benefits for trans people in a private company.

Given that *Bangkok Post* is a national newspaper of which the editorial stance on the issue of gender is relatively liberal (as exemplified in Tangsathaporn, 2022), it is supposed to account for the rights of various transgender populations across Thailand. The findings in the current study reveal that considerable emphasis is placed on trans women. It must be reminded that Thai society consists of other groups of trans people. For example, a transgender man bemoans that he faces a verbal onslaught from government officers when he renews his ID card, being interrogated about his male genitals and “whether it’s really possible to become a trans man” (Human Rights Watch, 2021, para. 5). Additionally, incarcerated trans people face challenges in accessing basic services and suffer sexual harassment by other inmates (United Nations Development Program, 2019). In particular, transmale inmates are required to remove their chest binder, wear their hair “like schoolgirls,” and discontinue gender-affirming hormone use (United Nations Development Program, 2019). Moreover, because of restrictions imposed on their gender identity, some trans people feel obliged to resort to sex work as a means of subsistence (Davis, Miles, & Quinley, 2019). Such an occupation entails heightened stigma, physical abuse, and dehumanizing violence (Davis et al., 2019). All in all, these instances pose enormous challenges for the newspaper about the journalistic role it is supposed to perform to safeguard the rights of these seemingly subaltern transgender communities.

Furthermore, taking its international readership into account, the newspaper should find a connection between the current situation in Thailand and international practices. Such a discovery may help broaden its role performance concerning transgender rights promotion in Thailand along with disseminating the spheres in which Thailand is making progress in the expectation of opening constructive dialog between public agencies, commercial organizations, and civil society in Thailand and elsewhere. For instance, in the United Kingdom, transgender inmates are capable of contacting external agencies to ask for a charitable donation of clothing and makeup (Suhomlinova & O’Shea, 2021). Furthermore, they establish written communication with national prison newspapers as a channel to recount their experiences (Suhomlinova & O’Shea, 2021). Targeting specific groups of readers, the newspapers proclaim that their role is “to provide informative articles to help prisoners with all aspects of prison life” (Jail Mail, 2021, para. 1). Arguably, such a role broadly corresponds to the *service* dimension.

To the best of the author’s knowledge, this kind of publication is nonexistent in Thailand. Therefore, *Bangkok Post* may perform the *intervention* role by publicizing their stance toward this issue. In other words, does it agree or disagree with the inauguration of a prison newspaper in the country and to what extent would its presence or absence affect the rights of transgender inmates?

Meanwhile, some of the findings reveal certain facets that are beyond the scope of the present study and thus merit further investigation. For instance, while the English-language newspapers in Thailand like *Bangkok Post* make a positive effort to safeguard transgender rights, the Thai-language counterparts

produce the coverage that is far from LGBT-friendly (Fongkaew et al., 2019). Hence, future studies may ascertain contextual factors that contribute to such a difference and how it probably reflects multilayered attitudes in Thai society.

Additionally, about gender-expansive groups, which are exemplified in the initialism LGBT, the major focus here is on the letter *T* (transgender). It has been revealed that they are marginalized in Thai mass media by being depicted chiefly in a comical role. This seems to conflict with instances of other groups. For example, the *L* (lesbian) and *G* (gay) are portrayed in Thai mass media, including in TV series and films, on a more progressive basis to the point of achieving domestic and international popularity (Baudinette, 2019; Cheng, 2021; Pravattiyagul, 2014). Interestingly, referring back to the aforementioned work (Fongkaew et al., 2019), it can be construed that the disparity exists not only in the media portrayal of each gender-expansive group (*T* versus *L*, *G*) but also the media types (Thai-language newspapers versus Thai TV series, films). Therefore, future studies may examine sociocultural contexts giving rise to such disparity.

Finally, as Billard and colleagues (2020) observe that scholarship pertaining to transgender media representation is largely Euro-American centric, this study makes a theoretical contribution by illustrating the applicability of the journalistic role performance concept in the context beyond the Western world. In other words, through an interdisciplinary combination of the communication and corpus linguistic frameworks, the current study is capable of revealing various roles that the newspaper discursively performs to assert the rights of Thai trans people.

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