A Study of COVID-19 Contents of Thai Public Health Practitioners as TikTok Influencers

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate COVID-19 contents released on TikTok by Thai public health practitioners behave as TikTok influencers using a content analysis approach. These videos were gathered between January 2020 and July 2021. As a result of the research, we discovered that the influencers used similar content formats, with an average video length of 00:14 to 01:85 minutes. There were five themes: societal crisis management, disease knowledge, anti-stigma/anti-rumor, personal precaution, and work report. Furthermore, based on the number of shares, their audiences were slightly drawn to factual content, particularly news and oral speeches.

Keywords: COVID-19, content analysis, TikTok application, online influencer, social media

1.   Introduction

The COVID-19 disaster has affected people across the world, impacting their socioeconomic conditions, particularly public health services. In Thailand, the number of people infected with COVID-19 is rapidly increasing every day, despite the government's rigorous commitment to pandemic zones and isolation to prevent infections. (Department of Disease Control, 2021). However, one of the present obligations of public healthcare providers is to give individuals with updated information, which includes intervention. As a result, social media plays an essential role as a platform where online influencers can share COVID-19 information with their fans, and others can write comments to discuss the concerns in a two-way communication in online communities. (Katz, Lazarsfeld, & Roper, 2005; Kay, Mulcahy, & Parkinson, 2020). In practice, such influencers usually develop advertising content on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok which is referred to it as the influencer marketing, in order to persuade audience to purchase the goods and services for which they were contracted. (Kuldilok, 2020). TikTok is a new popular social networking application that includes a video maker. In a pandemic condition, the majority of Thai millennials enjoy making TikTok dance challenges (Ranida, 2020; Saiseesod et al., 2020), but some of them enjoy encouraging others with COVID-19 intervention, primarily public health practitioners (e.g., doctors, pharmacists) who have knowledge and credible information. This ability empowers them to be TikTok influencers in the future (Ngangom, 2020).

Several factors significantly associated user engagements (e.g., likes, shares, and comments). Influencers make videos on encouraging and recognizing those who involve caring for infected patients, this will lead to be high level of engagement, for instance (Chen, Min, Zhang, Ma, & Evans, 2021; Li, Guan, Hammond, & Berrey, 2021). Furthermore, the content has an influence on audiences who have learned about personal safety and have applied it to their bodies and health in everyday life. This was referred to as biopower. (Mahanarongchai, 2020). Therefore, COVID-19 content from online influencers has an impact on people who live in both the digital and physical worlds. Yet, a little number of studies has been focused on Thailand context to describe COVID-19 contents of public health practitioners as TikTok influencers. (Jeungsamanukul, 2020; Ranida, 2020; Thongbai, 2020). As a result of this study problem, we came up with the question "What are the contents that Thai public health practitioners released on TikTok application?".

We employ the COVID-19 content analysis approach (Li et al., 2021) as a framework to study the video phenomenon of public health practitioners as TikTok influencers that were published in Thai and answer the research question. The content analysis consists of video formats, narrative tactics, themes, and emotion/cognition. Additionally, the most popular comments from their fans will be included and described. Thus, scholars and researchers who would like to discover more about how those public health practitioners created COVID-19 videos on TikTok can benefit from this contribution. Furthermore, public sectors in Thailand are using health communication, especially Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health to promote Thai people's health and prevent COVID-19 infection risk can use our research findings as empirical evidence in their work.

2. Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study that used COIVD-19 content analysis (Li et al., 2021) to examine videos about the COVID-19 crisis created by Thai public health practitioners as TikTok influencers. Each video contains content elements such as the format described video length, text/auditory messages, caption, and background music. We also looked up narrative approaches (e.g., acting, oral speeches, news, dance). A theme in each video described a core idea with emotion and cognition, revealing what COVID-19 contents were released by the public health practitioners.

In research sampling, we established content inclusion criteria that were examined in the research as we progressed through the data collection steps. To begin, we used both hashtags #covid19 and #tiktokfightscovid to identify Thai public health practitioners on TikTok with over 100,000 followers as macro online influencers (Kay et al., 2020). Between January 2020 and July 2021, Thailand was experiencing a COVID-19 crisis, so, we gathered 97 videos with COVID-19 content from 8 public health practitioners. Then, we coded the information and entered it into our data collection sheet.

Finally, we compared the content elements that each Thai public health practitioner used. In addition, we synthesize themes as an analytical description to determine the types of COVID-19 content that were released.

3. Results

According to the data collection, there are six doctors and two pharmacists with followers ranging from 125,500 to 972,200 as an attribute of micro influencers. We gathered 97 COVID-19 related videos from their TikTok accounts published between March 24, 2020 and July 30, 2021. There are several levels of engagement, including the number of views (77,200-4,008,000,000), the number of likes (162-610,000,000), the number of comments (8-28,300), and the number of shares (4-122,100). Furthermore, the content analysis results were divided into two groups: elements and themes as follows.

3.1 Elements of COVID-19 contents

As an analysis result, we demonstrated the COVID-19 content elements of TikTok videos in Table 1 and including explanations of the phenomenon below.

Table 1: COVID-19 content elements

Public health practitioners	No. of followers	Narrative tactics	Avg. of video length	Themes	Avg. of shares
Doctor 1	972,200	Animated infographic, Documentary, Oral speech,	00:45 mins	Anti-stigma/Anti-rumor, Disease knowledge, Personal precaution	1,632.14
Pharmacist 1	648,100	Acting, Animated infographic, Dance, Oral speech, News,	00:42 mins	Anti-stigma/Anti-rumor, Disease knowledge, Personal precaution	1,412.65
Pharmacist 2	592,100	Acting, Animated infographic, Dance, News, Oral speech	00.43 mins	Personal precaution, Societal crisis management, Work report	1,281.17
Doctor 2	433,200	News, Oral speech	01:85 mins	Anti-stigma/Anti-rumor, Disease knowledge, Personal precaution	1,9791.00
Doctor 3	383,000	Animated infographic, Dance, Oral speech,	00:14 mins	Personal precaution, Societal crisis management	109.00
Doctor 4	290,200	Acting, Dance, Pictorial slideshow, Oral speech,	00:28 mins	Disease knowledge, Personal precaution	171.89
Doctor 5	270,100	Animated infographic, Dance, Documentary, Oral speech	00:32 mins	Societal crisis management, Personal precaution	272.00
Doctor 6	125,500	Acting, Animated infographic, Documentary, Oral speech	00:66 mins	Disease knowledge, Personal precaution, Societal crisis management	1,606.83

The most of TikTok influencers used similar formats, such as adding text to videos, inserting music when making dance videos, and writing captions with hashtags for searchable videos. According to Table 1, Doctor 2 is the well-known influencer with the highest average of shares. This means that audiences are slightly drawn to factual content without opinions,

particularly news and oral speech. Even so, his average video length is the longest when compared to others. Furthermore, content themes may increase engagement rates; for example, there were three or more themes related to anti-rumor, disease knowledge, and personal precaution. Doctor 3, on the other hand, has the lowest engagement because he only had two themes focused on societal crisis management, which is more personal feedback to the government. Even the contents of personal precaution he conveyed are very useful to his large number of followers.

3.2   Themes of the COVID-19 contents

We analyzed and synthesized the COVID-19 contents as a result of data analysis to answer our research question by theme, as shown below.

3.2.1   Societal crisis management

The societal crisis management is a core idea which describes management works of Thai government dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. As pharmacist 2 acted the role play of listening to the news on television about the Prime Minister's three-month salary suspension but realizing that it was news from Malaysia instead of Thailand, causing he expressed dissatisfaction and immediately stopped eating. This is entirely a comedic performance.

Doctor 5 mentioned to the monitoring of unfair Pfizer vaccine allocations based on US donations. He expressed concern about the Thai government's capacity to handle this issue in a video with a picture of the vaccine storage facility in the background.

Doctor 6 stated that cross-brand vaccination had not been approved by the WHO, and there had been no research to determine the vaccine's effectiveness. Thailand was the only country that injected drugs into its people. In response to the audience's comments, there were research studies demonstrating the effectiveness of injecting AstraZeneca vaccine in combination with other brands. Doctor 3 also reported that the WHO issued a statement warning of the dangers of injecting dangerous brands. Because there had been no research to confirm side effects on the body.

After strict adherence to the COVID-19 treatment guidelines, As of April 17, 2021, everyone could go home and live a normal life after spending 14 days in the state hospital as prescribed by the Department of Disease Control, but they should still wear a mask. And, if you notice any unusual symptoms, make an appointment with a doctor right away. Later, doctor 6 popped up to add another clip stating that as of April 24, 2021, be treated in the hospital for at least 10 days and when there are no symptoms of infection, people could leave to quarantine at home for another 14 days, causing doctor 6 to feel perplexed at the Thai government's management.

Doctor 4 took on the role play of staying at home and comfortably playing with dolls in order to participate in the policy campaign "#Stop spreading to help the nation" for the Thai Songkran Festival. He also released a video of himself dancing and using effects to make

adjustments for a fun Songkran water play. There are also clips of jumping with music and acting to check teddy bears (patients) at home, it demonstrates the campaign to stop spreading

3.2.2   Disease knowledge

Pharmacist 1 provided information that how long can COVID-19 stay in different places in our daily lives. These videos are role-playing and dancing to music with a message indicating the duration, such as COVID-19 stays in the air for 5 minutes, adheres to doorknobs for up to 8 hours, adheres to clothing for up to 12 hours, and so on. Also, Doctor 2 added that spending more than 15 minutes in confined spaces increases the risk of contracting COVID-19. Particularly when saliva and sweat droplets are trapped in the air.

Doctor 1 gave a speech in which he discussed how anyone could become infected with COVID-19, even after having received the vaccine. This was common among doctors and nurses who worked closely with COVID-19 patients. Doctor 6 also mentioned that pets could get COVID-19 but it could not infect humans.

According to Doctor 2, research had shown that coronavirus infection raised blood sugar levels as well. It got people a chance to evolve diabetes. Regardless of COVID-19's recovery or they were already diabetic, they must take diabetes medication for the rest of their lives.

3.2.3   Anti-stigma and anti-rumor

Pharmacist 1 addressed the myth that patients suffering from post-vaccination pain should only take paracetamol. It's the same medication as Sara and Tylenol, so you can take any brand. Taking the contraceptive pill before the vaccination has no negative effects on the vaccination. Doctor 1, on the other hand, denied that people had no symptoms or a fever following vaccination, it did not indicate that there would be increased immunity to COVID-19.

Doctor 6 explained the history of each covid strain's name, which indicates the country's name. This stigmatized various countries, they thus had a new name, such as Alpha, Delta, etc. to reduce the stigma. He also advised against using the Rapid Antibody Test, which is a blood test for COVID-19 immunity. It was not a COVID-19 test.

3.2.4   Personal precaution

The following are among the sub-themes of personal precaution in the COVID-19 video contents of public health practitioners.

3.2.4.1 Quarantine and self-examination

Doctor 6 discussed the importance of self-examination regarding travel history in high-risk areas and close contact with infected people. Doctor 2 also discussed practical guidelines for coronavirus self-monitoring "How should you act if you have been infected while waiting for the hospital to come pick you up?". For example, lying on your stomach to avoid

putting pressure on your lungs and breathing more difficult. Moreover, Doctor 5 explaind how to quarantine those infected with COVID at home which was a segment of people who had minor symptoms.

3.2.4.2 Everyday life

Mothers infected with coronavirus could breastfeed as Pharmacist 1 mentioned. However, they must use self-defense principles to prevent the infection from spreading to their children. There was a documentary film of doctor 1 that showed how to protect yourself by always wearing a mask. Even when the barber trims the hair around the ear. Doctor 6 warned about the dangers of smoking during coronavirus, stating that it was highly spreadable to others. As a result, you should stop smoking right away, and Doctor 2 recommended getting enough sleep and avoiding stress to help build immunity against COVID-19.

3.2.4.3 Herb and medicine

Doctor 2 discussed how to take Andrographis paniculata without causing liver damage after COVID-19 recovery and the properties of Kaempferia, which aided in the treatment of COVID-19. In contrast to doctor 6 and pharmacist 1, research results showed that Andrographis paniculata had no effect on preventing or treating COVID-19. Also, eating fruit or acid-alkaline products, it might not be effective in preventing the virus.

Pharmacist 2 spoke to educate about the ineffectiveness of anthelmintic drugs in preventing COVID-19 by utilizing images of research works. At the same time, other studies indicated that effective protection exists, but a very high dose was required in order to prevent infection before it entered the lungs and might have side effects. Doctor 2 also explained that the substance Propolis in the parasitic drug suppressed the virus before it entered the lungs, but it was in the experimental stage for further study.

3.2.4.4 Vaccination

Doctor 2 discussed vaccination preparation and risk groups who should not be rushed to vaccinate, such as people with diabetes. Caffeine, according to Pharmacist 1, should not be consumed before and after vaccination for those who did not drink it frequently coffee or tea. This could result in palpitations and high blood pressure. And everyone should abstain from alcoholic beverages prior to vaccination. Moreover, Pregnant women could be vaccinated after 12 weeks of pregnancy if they had not previously experienced an allergic reaction to the vaccine including taking birth control pills prior to vaccination had no negative effects on the vaccination.

Doctor 2 also talked about the effectiveness and side effects of each vaccine brand. And doctor 6 discussed post-vaccination symptoms in the same way that doctor 1 did for AstraZeneca and Sinovac. In addition, pharmacist 1 demonstrated how to use drugs to treat post-vaccination pain. Stroke symptoms, according to doctor 6, might occur after vaccination

Doctor 1 stated that the spacing of AstraZeneca injections between the 1st and 2nd doses. Also doctor 2 provided additional practical information when vaccinating with Moderna after other brands of vaccination.

3.2.4.5 Face mask

Pharmacist 1 showed how to put on a mask and how to look at it. Showing the inside and outside of the mask, including green, blue, black, and white. There was also a dance that alternates with the wearing of all four masks, as well as a message that describes the characteristics of each type. Doctor 6 demonstrated how to fold the mask tightly to help prevent 20% more to COVID-19, as well as how to fold the mask to reduce the gap and prevent germs from entering the body. And a paper clip could be used to solve the problem of wearing a mask and causing ear pain. Doctors 5 and 6 demonstrated the issue of wearing a mask that is larger than the face as well.

However, Pharmacist 1 showed how to apply two layers of face masks, a paper mask and a cloth mask. At the same time, doctor 1 showed how to put on a double-layer mask and discussed the risk of infection from re-wearing the mask. Furthermore, Doctor 6 performed a role-playing comparison of proper mask removal and incorrect mask removal.

3.2.4.5 Cleaning supplies

Doctor 6 discussed how to use an alcohol solution to damage COVID-19. Coronavirus could be removed from clothes and surfaces using Haiter's bleach and Dettol cleaners. Furthermore, pharmacist 1 talked about using a rubbing alcohol product instead of hand sanitizer to prevent COVID-19, and doctor 5 had filmed a documentary demonstrating how to wash your hands to prevent COVID-19.

3.2.5   Work Report

Pharmacist 2 performed a simulation of his own operations. Reservations for vaccines could not be made due to a large number of people requesting them. As a result, a call was received to contact the hospital about the problem. The person who answers the phone is a pharmacist. Thus, he demonstrates the job's difficulty and chaos. In another case, when a new wave of coronavirus was discovered in Thailand, his colleagues in hospitals performed a dance to relieve stress.

COVID-19 contents, according to the theme analysis, are divided into five categories: societal crisis management, disease knowledge, anti-stigma/anti-rumor, personal precaution, and work report. Some influencers created similar content, but some content is contrasting, particularly precautionary guidance. Despite the fact that the majority of themes do not convey a core idea about encouraging and recognizing doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers, all influencers referred to our Thai public health practitioners as the best people who always stand in front of COVID-19 barriers and keep striving to do their work.

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

As a result of data analysis, Thai public health practitioners primarily created videos about personal precaution and intended to reflect how the government was dealing with the crisis. Furthermore, they used a variety of formats for each video based on its themes and storytelling techniques. Moreover, audiences are drawn to factual content, particularly news and oral speeches, even the video length is long and detailed. According to Charoenfung and Pornsakulvanich (2019), the number of shares can reveal how followers express their brand engagement and loyalty on social media. In contrast to Saiseesod et al. (2020); Thongbai (2020), a small amount of acting and dance content was discovered in the research. The findings can help us answer our research question about what COVID-19 contents Thai public health practitioners released. In the future, we can investigate which factors may influence engagement rates, as many studies have claimed that positive content has an impact on fan response (Chen et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). However, we must strongly confirm the phenomenon in the context of Thailand. Furthermore, the behind-the-scenes of those videos should be researched. This could explain how TikTok influencers create their own videos, which include audience responses obtained through in-depth interviews. And to fully understand why people accept precautions for their health (Mahanarongchai, 2020). Thus, the contribution will benefit the Department of Disease Control and other public organizations that use it for their work.

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