The Impact of Spooky Entertainment in Thailand on Gen-Z Audiences
ผลกระทบของสื่อบันเทิงสยองขวัญในประเทศไทยต่อผู้รับสารเจเนอเรชันซี

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Abstract

This research examines the impact of spooky entertainment on Gen-Z audiences by exploring their perception of spooky topics/stories narrated in the programs, the key takeaways audiences obtained, and how audiences turn obtained knowledge into practice in their daily lives. It provides knowledge for media professionals in delivering moral knowledge through popular media products and fills a body of knowledge in researching the link between spooky Thai entertainment and Gen-Z audiences.

This qualitative research employed focus-group interviews with audiences as the main research method, followed by in-depth interviews with selected participants to gain additional insights. The 48 focus group participants, divided into four main groups of specific spooky programs' audiences, include audience groups of *The Shock*, *The Ghost Radio*, *the SathaneePhiDu*, and *the AungKarnKhumPong*.

The results show that Gen-Z audiences are interested in spooky topics, including haunted ghosts and the afterlife, amulets and talismans, black magic, haunted places, ghost hunting, and stories related to Buddhism and traditional Thai beliefs. The key takeaways gained from watching/listening to the programs include the concepts of avoiding recklessness in danger, Karmic Law, doing good things and avoiding bad things, and avoiding breaking a legal regulation. Gen-Z

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audiences turned moral knowledge learned into practice in the three stages of application: 1) the stage of self-learning and being aware of the key takeaways, 2) the stage of warning themselves to behave well and avoid misbehaving, and 3) the stage of warning and educating others, including their close friends and families.

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มุ่งศึกษาผลกระทบของสื่อบันเทิงสยองขวัญในประเทศไทยต่อผู้รับสารเจเนอเรชันซี (Generation Z) โดยศึกษาการรับรู้ของผู้รับสาร ประเด็นความรู้ที่ได้รับจากการรับชม/รับฟัง รวมถึงการนำความรู้ดังกล่าวไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการดำรงชีวิต งานวิจัยนี้สามารถเพิ่มพูนความรู้แก่แวดวงวิชาชีพสื่อในด้านการนำเสนอความรู้เกี่ยวกับศีลธรรม ทั้งยังเพิ่มเติมช่องว่างของความรู้ในการวิจัยสื่อบันเทิงสยองขวัญและผู้รับสารเจเนอเรชันซี (Generation Z)

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) ผู้รับสารเจเนอเรชันซี (Generation Z) สนใจเรื่องสยองขวัญที่เป็นเรื่องราวเกี่ยวกับผีเฮี้ยนและชีวิตหลังความตาย เครื่องรางของขลัง ไสยศาสตร์ บ้านผีสิง การล่าท้าผี และเรื่องราวที่เกี่ยวข้องกับพุทธศาสนาและความเชื่อดั้งเดิมของไทย 2) ประเด็นความรู้ที่ผู้รับสารได้รับจากการรับสื่อ ประกอบด้วยหลักคิดเกี่ยวกับความไม่ประมาท กฎแห่งกรรม การทำดีละเว้นความชั่ว และการไม่กระทำผิดกฎหมายบ้านเมือง และ 3) ผู้รับสารส่วนใหญ่ได้นำความรู้เชิงศีลธรรมที่ได้รับจากการชม/การฟังรายการ มาประยุกต์ใช้ในการดำรงชีวิตใน 3 ขั้นตอน ได้แก่ ขั้นที่ 1 การเรียนรู้และตระหนักรู้ ขั้นที่ 2 การเตือนตนเองให้ทำความดีละเว้นความชั่ว และขั้นที่ 3 การตักเตือนและสอนผู้อื่น (เพื่อนสนิทและคนในครอบครัว) ให้ทำความดีละเว้นความชั่ว

1. Research Background

There are various reports showing that the level of morality in Thai society has decreased significantly. According to the National Institute of Development Administration (2023) which conducted research regarding crime rates in Thailand, most participants (52.32%) believed that there was a high level of crime. The rates were highlighted as a result of ignoring morality, ethics, and social norms. Lertsahaphan and PhrakhruPariyatidhammawong (2021) pointed out that the four pillars of a society (including good health, education, morals, and technology) shape a younger generation to develop the country. According to Bisanjariyakorn and Prawatdee (2020), it is difficult to solve a problem of morality; however, it is not too late for a new generation. In particular, Generation Z is deemed as a fast adopter/learner (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Generation Z Thais have highly consumed media content via online platforms. The survey results on media consumption among Thai audiences (Thammasat University Research and Consultancy Institute, 2019, p.14) revealed that 82.7% of Generation Z Thais consume television programs and video content via online platforms, and "advertisements via online media have a growing trend towards influencing the younger generation's decision-making".

Focusing on the link between media consumption and people' learning, one of the essential tools for audiences in gaining knowledge from media products and applying useful things to their lives is the use of media consumption (McQuail, 2010). According to Statista's Global Consumer Survey in the USA (Fleck, 2022), horror digital content is the most watched by Gen-Z audiences reaching at 49 percent whereas Gen-Y, Gen-X and baby boomer who consume it at 43, 37, and 23 percent respectively. Moreover, the horror contents filmed in 2022 reached for the higher incomes ($644,774,976) than the previous years in the sense that "younger generations are increasingly interested in horror and thriller films" (Lindner, 2022). It was evident that Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia including Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei have a similar trend, according to Ainslie (2016). Ainslie also maintained that Thai horror films have gained high popularity due to its qualities of special effect (SFX) in production, a storytelling with *mise-en-scene*, and a content in line with audiences' lifestyles. Moreover, Johnson (2013) implied that

the horror films could offer audiences with an emotion of ghostly fear which is the most successful part. One of the popular ways of ghost representation in the Thai entertainment industry is the stories around the return of ghosts in revenge for the unfair consequences of death (Chutikamoltham, 2015). Although the Thai media representation of ghost stories is primarily created for entertainment purposes, it has also played a role in circulating and encouraging Thai social values. Wilailoy (2015, p. 229) stated that "the meaning of ghosts (in Thai ghost films) is constructed and reproduced to form social ideology that can be adopted by society". The Thai haunted screens have played a meaningful role in circulating moral teachings among Thais. For instance, *Nak's* ghost narratives in the Thai film *Nang Nak* can reflect the important role of Buddhism in the Thai context (Fuhrmann (2009) and convey a sense of Buddhist teachings to the audiences (Panyasopon, 2003). In the field of academia, there is a gap in studies regarding the relationship between Gen-Z viewers and their attitudes and behavior after consuming spooky entertainment in Thailand. Thus, this study investigates the impact spooky entertainment media exposure has on Gen-Z audiences and how they apply knowledge gained from such media use into practice in their everyday lives.

2. Objectives

2.1 To examine the Gen-Z audiences' favorite spooky and culturally related topics represented through the popular spooky Thai entertainment.

2.2 To investigate the key takeaways that Gen-Z audiences obtain from watching/listening to popular spooky Thai entertainment.

2.3 To explore how Gen-Z audiences turn knowledge gained from watching/listening to spooky Thai entertainment into practice in their everyday lives.

3. Literature Review

Generation Z

People, born in the 1990s and grew up in the 2000s, are deemed as Generation Z in which they are surrounded by technology and new media, e.g., Internet, smartphones, social networks, and so forth (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

This enables them as a fast learner to search all the things on the Internet with ease of use and quick access so that they rely on technology and knowledge shared via their online communities (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). The result of an online survey titled *GEN-Z Religion Statistic and Trend in 2024* shows that "nearly 40% of Gen-Z adults consider themselves 'spiritual'… (in which) they are more open to alternative forms of spirituality than their predecessors" (Gitnux, 2024). Bridges (2015) suggests that Gen-Z people do believe what they learn from their real experience. Djafarova and Foots (2022, p. 26) claimed that "generation Z wants peers and employees to perceive their social image as positive and unoffensive online". In addition, PrakashYadav and Rai (2017, p. 112) noted that social media platforms are helping in "strengthening the family and friendship bonds and taking care of rest of the ancillary socializing needs, which augments Gen-z's self-prestige".

Media Exposure

Media exposure refers to the way audience members "have encountered specific messages of classes of messages/media content" (Slater, 2004, p. 168). Audiences are able to select their media choices based on their interest (Sun & Guo, 2014). Klapper (1960) notes that most audiences spend their time consuming a media product in accordance with their 1) skills and experience, 2) attention, 3) perception and interpretation, and 4) retention. Those four are labelled as gratification – a state of feeling pleasure, increasing their relaxation, and/or giving some value to audiences when they watch (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

Use and Gratification Theory (UGT)

UGT is a framework for discussing how Gen-Z audiences utilize specific media content for particular purposes and their goals (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Audiences watch a media product for many reasons. McQuail (2010) makes a list of five functions of media use: 1) to be informed/educated, 2) to inspire, 3) to entertain, 4) to enhance social interaction, and 5) to escape from the stress in everyday life. Additionally, media use is employed as a meaningful tool in navigating and exploring everyday knowledge (Ytre-Arne, 2023) and can also become everyday practice.

This study employed the concept and theories mentioned above as a conceptual framework. The concept of Generation Z was applied to be a criterion for the sample selection and a frame to investigate the link between the audiences' spooky entertainment exposure with relevant spirituality - the quality of being connected with religious beliefs and the human spirit. Media Exposure and UGT are employed to frame an understanding of Gen-Z audiences' interest, perception, and application of takeaways knowledge to practice in everyday lives.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopted qualitative research methods to achieve the objectives, employing focus-group interviews with audiences as the main research method, followed by in-depth interviews with selected participants to gain additional insights for answering the third question. Firstly, focus-group interviews, a beneficial method for obtaining groupthink, were employed to collect the perspectives of Thai audiences by using open-ended questions and video recording as a research tool. In selecting participants, this study used *purposive sampling*, a non-probability form of sampling. The participants were recruited based on the criteria: 1) Buddhist Thai people who are Gen-Z, and 2) those who had watched/listened to the selected spooky Thai programs at least once. The selected programs included *The Shock* (broadcasted on FM 104.5 MHz along with its YouTube channel title 'The Shock 13'), *The Ghost Radio* (on the YouTube channel titled 'TheghostradioOfficial'), the *SathaneePhiDu* (on the YouTube channel title 'Thairath Online'), and the *AungKarnKhumPong* (on the YouTube channel titled 'Atime'). Once the recruitment was accomplished, details of the focus group meeting were circulated through personal emails and phone calls. The technique of *snowball sampling* was employed to find participants by asking sampled participants to recommend other people.

Tsindos (2023, p. 125) suggested that a focus group should "include 6-10 participants [per group]" which could give a clear consensus. Guest et al. (2016, p. 1) noted that "three focus groups were also enough to identify all of the most prevalent themes within the data set". In this study, the focus group participants consisted of 48 Gen-Z Thai audiences (aged 18-21) of the selected

programs mentioned above. They were divided into 4 main groups (12 participants per group) categorized by each program viewership. These 4 main groups, therefore, included *The Shock* audience group, *The Ghost Radio* audience group, the *SathaneePhiDu* audience group, and the *AungKarnKhumPong* audience group. Within each program viewership group, the participants were divided into two sub-groups of 6 male and 6 female viewers to compare responses across genders within this cohort. This is considered not only a way to obtain clear data on different genders' perspectives but also a way to explore further findings in addition to survey results by Pew Research Center (2016) which revealed that "women and men display roughly equal levels of religious affiliation". The presentation of the sample for the focus group interviews is illustrated in Figure 1.

Focus-group interviews participants (48)

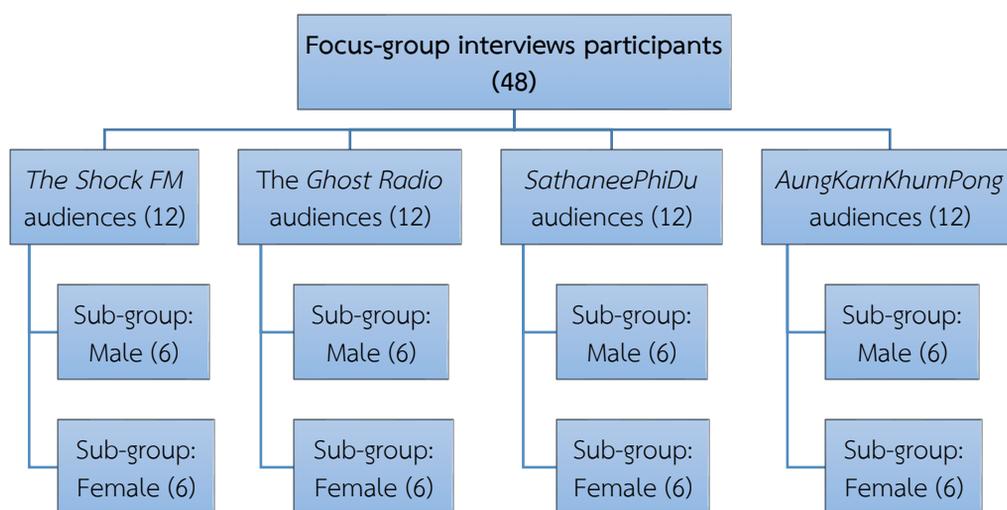| *The Shock FM* audiences (12)	The *Ghost Radio* audiences (12)	*SathaneePhiDu* audiences (12)	*AungKarnKhumPong* audiences (12)
Sub-group: Male (6)	Sub-group: Male (6)	Sub-group: Male (6)	Sub-group: Male (6)
Sub-group: Female (6)	Sub-group: Female (6)	Sub-group: Female (6)	Sub-group: Female (6)

Figure 1: the structure of focus-group interviews

When focus-group interviews finished, the in-depth interviews with 8 selected focus group participants were employed to gain additional in-depth data for answering the third research question by using further questions developed from their responses in the focus groups. The criteria in selecting interviewees included 1) those who had consumed the program more than 10 episodes and 2) those who could explain ideas clearly and thoroughly.

In analyzing data, this study used *thematic analysis* – a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Boyatzis, 1998 cited in Braun & Clarke, 2003, p. 79). The data analysis involved identifying themes, and ideas arising from the texts and developing categories. Additionally, data were thematically counted in order to seek the frequency and size of each aspect.

5. Results

Part 1: The Gen-Z audiences' favorite spooky and culturally related topics represented through the popular spooky Thai entertainment.

The data gained from the research results revealed audiences' most favorite spooky and culturally related topics represented in the programs, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

Spooky and culturally related topics	Female (frequency)	Male (frequency)
Haunted ghosts and the afterlife	6	4
Amulet and talisman	5	3
Black magic	4	2
Haunted places	3	5
Ghost hunting	3	6
Stories related to Buddhism in Thailand	1	1
Stories related to traditional Thai beliefs	1	2
Others (e.g. haunted used car, used clothes)	1	1
Total	24	24

Figure 2: The main topics and their popularity among female and male audiences.

Figure 2 indicates that the topic of haunted ghosts and afterlife is considered as the most interesting among the female audiences, while the topic of ghost hunting is the most favorite among male audiences. Both male and

female participants shared the same idea in the sense that they would love to watch and listen to spooky stories, which could make them much more frightening and terrifying. The sense of scary things during consumption can offer lavish entertainment to them. They added that no other program that could provide the same feelings as the shows can do. Moreover, the research results revealed that the consumption of scary media was a way to escape stress from the world they have faced in everyday life.

The topic of haunted places was ranked the second most favorite among male participants because they needed a form of entertainment and excitement from such a narrative. Female participants took a vote on the topic of amulet and talisman at the second place. The data revealed that the majority believed in sacred objects which could bring them good luck and protect evil things coming into their lives, although they realized the fact that those stories represented in the shows were not the truth and were difficult to be proved through a scientific viewpoint. Compared with females, only a small number of male participants were interested in the topic of amulet and talisman. The majority of males asserted that they did not believe in amulets and talismans since they lacked no scientific proof for them. This indicates that the male audiences tend to draw a scientific reason to make sense of such a topic more than females, whereas the female audiences tend to connect such a topic with their own beliefs in sacred things.

Surprisingly, even though most participants perceived that the ghost stories in the programs were mysterious things usually narrated by drawing the aspect of traditional beliefs and Buddhist principles in Thailand, the topics of stories related to Buddhism and traditional Thai beliefs were less interesting among both male and female audiences. They emphasized that the story of ghosts related to such topics could not be explained and proved by scientific methods. Moreover, they added that social beliefs about ghosts and spirits, cultivated in the Thai minds from generation to generation, could increase a level of fear of ghosts. The feelings of fear could be increased more if they consumed and learned much more about ghost stories based on Buddhism and local folklore which they already knew about – for example, the punishment in Hell and *Pret* ghosts. That might be a reason why the ending of Thai ghost

stories in the programs is usually explained from the viewpoint of Buddhist teachings, as some participants pointed out.

Part 2: The key takeaways that Gen-Z audiences obtain from watching/listening to the popular spooky Thai entertainment.

The research results showed that most participants could comprehend the Buddhist messages represented through the programs, and some of them turned such knowledge into practice in their daily lives, whereas a minority of them watched/listened to the programs merely for entertainment (this will be further explained in part 3). During the focus group interviews, the participants were asked to suggest a taken-away message they perceived as essential for them. Their responses were sorted by ranking, respectively, as shown in Figure 3.

Key takeaways perceive by the participants	Ranking (1st= the most essential, 5th= the least essential)	
	Female	Male
The concept of avoiding recklessness in danger	1st	4th
The concept of Karmic Law	2nd	3rd
The concept of doing good things and avoiding bad things	3rd	1st
The concept of avoiding breaking a legal regulation	4th	2nd
Other concepts (e.g., do not get involved in black magic, tricks, and tips to avoid seeing a ghost)	5th	5th

Figure 3: Audiences' key takeaways

According to Figure 3, the data gained from a consensus of the female participants demonstrate that the concept of avoiding recklessness in danger is ranked number one in their perspectives. Focusing on the concept translated from Pali to English by Kelly et al. (2005), it was a moral teaching to warn people about inappropriate manners leading to a circumstance in danger, e.g.,

increased quarreling, never being satisfied, resentment, crimes, and becoming someone with destructive people. Most participants admitted that they did not know the message derived from the Buddhist teaching before. They thought that it was just a Thai proverb. For instance, the participants explained this issue regarding the program *SathaneePhiDu* – a talk show representing a paranormal story by inviting people (guests) to share their uncanny experiences, which visually depicts and simulates the existence of supernatural apparitions. When the guests told their own stories about how they were clumsy in an attempt to devalue a spirit house, they consequently got a bad result. The participants disclosed that most stories narrated in the show frequently had an ending as a punishment for people who avoided the concept of recklessness. The majority of the participants noted that they were concerned about a bad circumstance which might be caused by their incautiousness. One participant stated, "*...that's why I use the concept of recklessness to warn my friends when they try to do something crazy in a haunted place*". This indicates that the presentation of such a concept is not only for entertainment but also a warning message for the participants.

The concept of Karmic Law is a Buddhist teaching rated second by females and the third places by male participants. According to Finnigan (2022), the Karmic Law is an accumulated action of merit and demerit debt in which they need to pay their debts unavoidably. People do bad things, so they will get a bad thing in return. On the other hand, people get good results if they do a good thing. The Karmic Law is an endless cycle of karma which cannot be escaped (Humphereys, 1969). Although sinners have died, their karma will be attached to the next life, called the Karmic Law (Kirsch, 1977). The data gained from the focus group interviews indicated that most participants believed in the Karmic Law. When the participants were asked how well they understood such a concept, they explained it clearly. Many audiences could explain the key idea of this concept by drawing their knowledge gained from personal experience and learning from the shows. Both female and male participants pointed out that this concept was familiar to them because they had been cultivated through their schools, families, and media consumptions. They emphasized that paranormal media products were outstanding in underlining the concept of

Karmic Law. One of the cases raised by the participants was the *AungKarnKhumPong*. The guest, who was invited and interviewed through phone calls in the program, narrated the story about his near-death experience when he had been in a coma for a week. During the coma, he dreamt that he was in a court where a karmic jailer punished sinners who stole valuables by cutting their hands brutally. He remembered that they were trying to beg for forgiveness, but the officers denied their requests. Then, he was frightened and woke up afterwards. At the end of this story, the guest admitted that he was a thief (when he was a teenager); he was a pickpocket. Moreover, many participants shared more stories in relation to karmic punishments they had consumed through the *AungKarnKhumPong* and other programs. They revealed that they could imagine the way in which sinners were punished while listening to the spooky content. Watching/listening to the karmic punishments could make them fear the Karmic Law.

In terms of karmic punishment in the afterlife, Buddhists assume that a form of life after death will be determined through the Karmic Law (Igunma, 2013). A minority of participants did not believe in karmic punishment in the afterlife. They asserted that it was difficult to prove the existence of an afterlife, although there were several types of media products in Thailand trying to portray a path which could go into either heaven or hell based on Buddhist lessons. Importantly, there is no one from the death coming back to tell a story of what kind of karmic punishments are imposed on sinners and how they are tortured religiously. Besides, there has been no reliable evidence to confirm that the Karmic Law is real. This is the reason why some participants disbelieve karmic punishment in hell.

Focusing on the concept of doing good things and avoiding bad things, ranked as the most essential for males and as the third for females, the research results revealed that spooky entertainment had an indirect impact on audiences in the sense that it could persuade them to do good instead of bad things. Participants believed that they were not penalized if they behaved appropriately in a similar way to obeying a state law which all the citizens must comply with. They believed that the consumption of spooky entertainment was an indirect way to reduce crimes since it contained a message to warn them of

misdeeds. Moreover, it also led them to warn their friends and/or families who had an attempt to make a mistake. In response to the question of how often they employed the key takeaways extracted from the programs in their daily lives, the majority of audiences employed moral teachings into practice in their daily life, as noted in the following paragraphs.

Part 3: How Gen-Z audiences turn knowledge gained from watching/listening to spooky Thai entertainment into practice in their everyday lives.

Based on the audiences' perceptions and understandings of the key takeaways, both female and male participants put such knowledge into practice in their daily lives. The results of the in-depth interviews depicted the three stepped stages of audiences' application of the key takeaways to practice, as demonstrated in Figure 4.

Majority of the participants (39 participants)

- **Stage 1**: Self-learning and being aware of the key takeaways

14 participants who passed the Stage 1

- **Stage 2**: Warning themselves to behave well and avoid misbehaving

3 participants who passed the Stage 2

- **Stage 3**: Warning and educating others, including their close friends and families

Figure 4: Three stepped levels of audiences' application of the key takeaways to practice

In Stage 1, most participants (39 participants) perceived and interpreted the key takeaways by drawing their own knowledge and experience about Buddhist teachings, especially the Karmic Law. The research results demonstrated that their cultural background played a significant role in interpreting the key teachings embedded in Thai ghost stories. Although the

participants were members of Generation Z and grew up with modern technology, they had still been cultivated about religious lessons by their family members and elder relatives who lived in the same house. In particular, parents and elder family members have played a leading role in teaching moral lessons. One of the in-depth interviewees stated, *"I remember that I (when I was young) really enjoyed listening to bedtime stories about Heaven and Hell in Buddhist dogma narrated by my grandparents. They were so fantastic, and it was hard to guess what the ending of the stories was. ... I mostly recall the stories because of my grandparents in which they have passed away".* In addition, some interviewees explained that, when visiting their elder relatives living in the countryside, a Buddhist community, they learned from participating in Buddhist activities with elder relatives, especially by making merit, chanting, and listening to sermons.

After understanding the Buddhist teachings from the first stage, another 14 participants continued to reach the second stage, where they warned themselves to behave well and avoid misbehaving. The focus group data revealed two main reasons why the participants were concerned about and how to avoid misdeeds in their lives. First, they needed a positive social image to be accepted by society. Second, they tried to be good people to make their close friends and families proud of them. During the in-depth interviews, both female and male participants admitted that earning esteem and acceptance from their friends and societies was very important, especially on social media platforms. They were trying to keep their looks and to prevent themselves from being blamed or accused. In the focus groups, some participants added that it sometimes was not enough to have self-esteem; they needed appreciative comments and responses from their close friends and families as well. One of the participants stated that "*it has been easy to have more money but has been quite hard to make them [parents] proud of being a good person in a society in recent years. ... So, I will try to take care of their feelings and do not want to regret what I have done".*

Stage 3 is the last step for the participants who have already passed the second stage. Surprisingly, only 3 participants reach this final stage. Participants took action by warning their close friends and families (who had

the intention to do misdeeds) and also educating them with Buddhist thoughts. The focus group results revealed that they expected to see a better Buddhist community – a community where people fully understand Buddhism's core and apply Buddhist teachings to their lives to enhance their morality and social behavior. They added that the Buddhist community members should not misuse Buddhist principles, especially changing the meaning of Buddha's image to be a commercial and devaluing Buddhism due to inappropriate manners. From their perspectives, Buddhism in Thailand had been devalued and diminished due to misuse. As one of the in-depth interviewers pointed out, "*you can see many news reports about Buddhist monks who have had inappropriate manners such as drug addiction, sex abuse, and fraud. … Moreover, sacred objects are sold in Buddhist temples and sometimes are represented as magic items, which include a sacred power inside, described by Buddhist monks. … In my opinion, this could be the decadence of Buddhism in Thailand*". In this respect, a few focus group participants discussed this problem. They suggested a way for Thai Buddhists to enhance the Buddhist society: 1) educating people more with the core of Buddhist teachings, 2) reducing a priority to a sacred thing, and 3) being critical before believing in a misled idea about Buddhism. In the groupthink exhibited in the interviews, they shared their views towards people who had faith in sacred objects instead of the core of Buddhist teachings. They viewed such a group of people as not caring what Buddha said but caring about mysterious luck dominated by debunked beliefs. The participants emphasized that people needed more education regarding the core of Buddhism. One of the participants stated that "*… there are a few people who understand the core of [Buddhist] lessons which has possibly led to a part of crimes in recent years*". The results of this analysis show that Gen-Z audiences can employ religious knowledge from entertainment consumption to social practices.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that spooky entertainment has a significant impact on Gen-Z Thai audiences' perceptions of Buddhist thoughts and moral-related social behaviors. Spooky entertainment has played a meaningful role in

not only providing enjoyment, which is Gen-z's key purpose of consuming this kind of program, but also promoting and encouraging religious/social values among Gen-Z generation of Thais. The results indicate that Gen-Z audiences draw the religious/moral knowledge gained from their own experiences to make sense of religious teachings and social values embedded in such kind of entertainment. All the participants obtained moral teachings related to key takeaways. In terms of everyday-life application, most of them turned such knowledge into practice in the self-learning and awareness stage, and only some applied it to more intense levels, including the stages of self-warning to avoid misbehaving and warning/educating others.

7. Discussion

Fundamentally, Gen-Z audiences consume and use spooky Thai entertainment to gratify themselves as leisure because it can provide them with a unique experience that is hard to find in other media contents. It is not a surprise that ghost stories are clearly deemed as activities for leisure. As Handley (2015, p. 18) pointed out, "these philosophical discourses had a transforming influence on the status of ghost stories as instruments of instruction and sources of entertainment". Katz and Foulkes (1962, p. 379) claimed that "they turn to the dreamlike world of the mass media for substitute gratifications".

The results of this study correspond with Katz and Foulkes (1962), who claimed that viewers could take many benefits from media consumption and could turn them into valuable skills in their lives, more or less. Based on the results of this study, among consuming, the representation of moral teachings in spooky stories is implanted in the audiences' minds simultaneously without feeling any pressure or discomfort to watch/listen to the shows. As a result, all audiences could perceive and obtain moral knowledge from the spooky programs, and ultimately, most of them could utilize it by applying such knowledge to practice in their daily lives.

According to the Office of the Basic Education Commission (2022), there are many subjects which need to be developed and removed from the school curriculum, but this is not the case for Buddhist subjects. The Buddhist subject needs to be continued as a class of active learning. For example,

schools encourage students to attend religious ceremonies to learn the fundamental ideas of Buddhism. The main objective is to increase the sense of public morality and enhance solidarity and social behavior in Thailand, which is determined by a governmental policy. In other words, Buddhism is a part of the national belonging that most people in the country have shared. According to the *Thirteenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027)*, the government implements a policy to strengthen "the population's morality and ethics" to get a greater impact on Thainess (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2023, p. 115). Although it is difficult to confirm that spooky entertainment in Thailand can completely solve the problems, the study confirms that the central role of spooky entertainment in encouraging moral knowledge and awareness among Generation Z audiences, which is hoped to strengthen the population's morality and ethics.

8. Limitation

It was challenging to gather all the participants to attend an on-site focus group due to the spread of COVID-19 in Thailand during the data collection. This study, thus, used an online focus group via Zoom Meeting instead of the on-site. Moreover, this qualitative research merely obtained the data from a small sample size of Thai Gen-Z audiences. Adding the quantitative method to broaden the sample size may help gain additional data for this study

9. Recommendations for Practical Use and Further Research

In addition to audience study, this study recommends future research to examine the aspects of production and distribution. For example, it recommends in-depth interviews with the key figures in the media industry, especially the program producers and staffs in the related fields, to achieve an answer of why they produce and distribute the media products to help promote and circulate moral knowledge and Buddhist teachings among Thais. Moreover, it is worthwhile to explore broader applications in different genres and forms of mass media, especially haunted films, TV dramas, and streaming media contents, which have been widely consumed by Gen-Z audiences. Furthermore, future research should explore the potential challenges/factors

associated with using entertainment media to promote moral values among Thais. Based on these recommendations, it will provide essential findings not only for academia, especially in media and communication studies, but also for media professionals who aim to create and distribute entertainment media to promote and encourage moral teachings among Thais.

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