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Thai transgender women in mainstream and local news media: A critical study of language and journalism

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Abstract

This study critically examines the representation of Thai transgender women (TGWs) in online Thai English-language news media in the comparative baseline of mainstream and local outlets—the Bangkok Post (BP) and Pattaya Mail (PM), respectively. Combining critical discourse studies within van Leeuwen's social actor approach and Halliday and Matthiessen's transitivity analysis and critical journalism studies within Billard's legitimacy indicators for transgenderism, this study explores how journalistic language and practices shape public perceptions of TGWs. Findings reveal that BP's formalized style emphasizes professional contexts but often foregrounds gender identity unnecessarily, while PM's localized, sensationalist focus reinforces stereotypes through crime and entertainment coverage. The study underscores the necessity for inclusive media standards in Thailand, including consistent terminology, diverse sourcing, and balanced representation beyond heteronormative frames. These insights emphasize the role of language and journalistic choices in either supporting or marginalizing TGW identities in media.

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Introduction

Modern Thai society has witnessed increased visibility of Thai transgender women (henceforth TGWs), referring to individuals assigned male at birth who live as women, regardless of surgical status (Ocha, 2023). TGWs are often associated with diverse domains, such as cabaret, cosmetics, entertainment, and advocacy for transgender rights (Chonwilia, 2012). However, heteronormativity constitutes a hegemonic system of norms, discourse, and practices legitimizing discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals across social institutions, exemplified by stereotypical media representations (Robinson, 2016). In the Thai context, media representation continues to reinforce stereotypes of TGWs as sexually provocative—frequently conflating their identity with sex work through the label ladyboy (Käng, 2012). Furthermore, such portrayals perpetuate an exoticized image of TGWs. This exoticization can be due to the traditional Thai Buddhist belief that kathoeys are associated with karmic consequences of having committed adultery in a previous life (Jackson, 2016).

Of heteronormative binary opposites, TGWs have been categorized since the 1970s into "high class" indicated by wealth and "low class" by poverty (Jackson, 1999). This matter seems to align with a spectrum of attitudes ranging from "transacceptance" to "transprejudice," reflecting positive and negative stereotyping dimensions (Winter, 2009). It can be further argued that TGWs are accepted conditionally. Trakulkasemsuk et al. (2024) corroborate such conditional acceptance of TGWs that entertainment industry representation remains restricted to established figures, compelling transgender people specifically to develop autonomous institutions for industry access. Additionally, media outlets seem to shape narratives concerning TGWs' conditional acceptance in beauty competitions (Chuaikun & Wijitsopon, 2023), establishing implicit boundaries around their inclusion.

As such, this problematic coverage reflects broader issues in journalism where it traditionally strives for balanced, ethical reporting (Deuze & Witschge, 2018), especially when, in the current climate, reporting on transgender individuals, identifying them as such only when relevant, using their public name; avoiding discussing transitions or surgeries unless essential; using "sex or gender assigned at birth" terminology; referring to individuals as "transgender men/women" (never as "a transgender"); and only mentioning deadnames when necessary (The Associated Press, 2024). However, journalists often reinforce societal consensus and stigmatize deviance (Hallin, 1986, as cited in Billard, 2016). Worse yet, this internal bias (Hamborg, 2023) can mislead news consumers, many of whom lack the literacy skills needed for critical analysis (Hango, 2014).

While the previous studies investigated TGW representation in Thai media, they have typically approached this subject from either a purely linguistic perspective (Klomkaew & Kanokpermpoon, 2020; Ninpanit, 2020), or a journalistic framework (Kijratanakoson, 2023; Rungswang and Jimarkon, 2023), with limited efforts to integrate these complementary analytical lenses. Linguistic analyses have identified problematic patterns in lexical choices and grammatical structures but often overlook the journalistic practices that produce these patterns. Conversely, journalistic analyses examine media framing and source selection but may not fully account for how specific linguistic choices construct and reinforce these frames.

Moreover, the concentration on TGWs is not directed relative to LGBTQ+ individuals as a broader category (Chuaikun and Wijitsopon, 2023; Fongkaew et al., 2019; Kijratanakoson, 2023; Ninpanit, 2020; Rungswang and Jimarkon, 2023; Trakulkasemsuk et al., 2024), and studies have not adequately examined both mainstream media, such as the Bangkok Post, and local publications. Beyond this arena, this study takes on Heider et al.'s (2005) need for localized news addressing community issues. Beyond mainstream news media's role in reflecting and shaping dominant beliefs (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009), communities value local news that addresses contextual issues (Heider et al., 2005).

This study addresses these gaps by arguing that the interplay between language and journalistic perspectives forms a news-discourse bond crucial for understanding "media language production and discursive outcomes from the perspective of journalists" (Cotter, 2010, p. 16). This integrated approach recognizes that linguistic choices in news media are not merely stylistic but reflect journalistic practices, editorial policies, and broader sociocultural contexts that shape how TGWs are represented to the public.

Building on Billard et al. (2020), it adopts a global lens to advance non-Anglophone analysis of TGWs' media representation. By examining both mainstream and local publications, this study further illuminates how different journalistic contexts influence TGW representation. The mainstream Bangkok Post and local Pattaya Mail represent distinct approaches to news production, with varying orientations of audience, editorial policies, and reporting practices.

To be noted, although this study excludes Thai-language news sources, focusing solely on English-language media is academically justified, as TGWs' representations reach global audiences primarily through English as the dominant international language. This study examines how these media construct TGWs through linguistic and journalistic frameworks, analyzing how international discourse shapes global perceptions and revealing how linguistic choices either challenge or reinforce existing stereotypes and power relations surrounding TGWs.

In doing so, this study follows three research questions to guide the analysis as follows:

RQ1: To what extent do mainstream and local online Thai English-language news articles linguistically depict TGWs within the frameworks of the representation of social actors and transitivity analysis?

RQ2: To what extent are representations of transgenderism legitimizing versus delegitimizing between mainstream and local online Thai English-language news articles?

RQ3: How are TGWs represented in mainstream and local online Thai English-language news articles from the perspectives of language use and journalists?

This study bridges Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and journalism studies through a complementary theoretical framework. From CDS, this study applied van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor approach and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity analysis to examine how language constructs representations of TGWs, revealing how specific linguistic choices position TGWs vis-à-vis social actions, attributes, and other actors, reflecting underlying power dynamics. From journalism studies, this study employs Billard's (2016) legitimacy indicators for transgenderism—specifically addressing how journalistic practices manifest in language that either validates or delegitimizes transgender identities. This framework recognizes that journalistic choices—including source selection, story framing, and terminology—directly influence how transgender individuals are represented in news discourse.

The integration of these approaches allows this study's analysis to examine not only what linguistic patterns appear in TGW representation but also why these patterns emerge from specific journalistic practices and editorial policies. This dual focus is essential for understanding media representation as both a linguistic and social phenomenon produced through institutional practices that reflect broader cultural attitudes toward gender diversity.

This integrated theoretical approach addresses what Cotter (2010) identifies as the need to understand news discourse as both a linguistic product and journalistic practice—two aspects that have often been analyzed separately but are fundamentally interconnected in shaping how marginalized groups are represented in public discourse.

Methodology

Data Collection

Following Dubrovskaya et al. (2015), this study utilized two ideologically different Thai English-language news outlets—the mainstream *Bangkok Post* (henceforth BP) and the local Pattaya Mail (henceforth PM) —to minimize sampling bias and ensure data representativeness. BP, established in 1946, is Thailand's longest-running national daily with 2.8 million users globally and a highly educated readership—89 percent of Thai readers with higher education (Bangkok Post, 2019). In contrast, PM, founded in 1993 as Pattaya's first English newspaper, maintains a community focus with approximately 40,000 local readers and coverage prioritizing Eastern Seaboard issues and developments (Pattaya Mail, 2005). News articles were selected based upon six criteria: (1) the English language, (2) inclusion of key terms ("Thai transgender women," "ladyboy," or "*kathoey*," or "transgender" with relevant visuals), (3) publication during 2019‑2024, (4) free accessibility, (5) high audience engagement, and (6) real-time opinion sharing capabilities. These publications, despite both serving Thailand's English-language media landscape, operate with distinct institutional agendas that naturally shape their coverage of TGW issues. BP's national perspective and educated readership contrast with PM's community focus, creating different contextual frameworks through which TGW identities are filtered and represented. This study, hence, acknowledges these divergent editorial lenses as integral to understanding the full spectrum of media discourse surrounding Thai transgender women. Relevant news articles were then complied into separate Word files. A detailed breakdown of the dataset is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Breakdown of BP's and PM's news articles (2019–2024)

Year	BP Articles	BP Word	PM Article	PM Word
2019	10	3,609	4	1,053
2020	9	5.411	11	2,254
2021	4	972	8	1,493
2022	28	10,705	11	2,273
2023	3	1,333	6	1,181
2024	10	3,360	3	897
Total	64	25,388	44	9,152

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted through a systematic process with four distinct phases (see Figure 1). Phase 1 analyzed linguistic perspectives (RQ1), looking at TGWs' references through, first, social actor representation—particularly vis-à-vis nomination and categorization and, second, their experiences through clause structures of transitivity process types. Phase 2 entailed the investigation of delegitimizing and legitimizing languages across two publications and their distribution of news framing. Since Phases 1–2 included statistical analysis, Phase 3 determined the statistical significance of the differences in linguistic choices using a chi-square (χ^2) test and assessed the relationship between news framing and legitimacy indicators using the measure of correlation coefficient (r). Phase 3 integrated the previous phrases to address RQ3, providing a holistic analysis of TGW representation.

Intercoder Reliability

To ensure reliability and minimize bias, intercoder agreement was calculated using Percent Agreement (McHugh, 2012) following Landis and Koch's (1977) kappa guidelines. Two coders analyzed a subset of 24 news articles (12 from each publication), with sample clauses from three articles each for social actor representation and transitivity analysis and full articles for legitimacy indicators for transgenderism. Reliability was highest for transitivity analysis (88.8%, 32/36 agreements, "almost perfect" range .81–1.00), with "substantial" agreement (.61–.80 range) for social actor representation (23/36) and legitimizing language (78.7%,85/108), enhancing the findings' credibility.

Results

RQ1: To What Extent do Mainstream and Local Online Thai English News Articles Linguistically Depict TGWs within the Frameworks of the Representation of Social Actors and Transitivity Analysis?

Linguistic representation of TGWs

Social actor representation

Table 2 and Table 3 show the distribution of social actor representation strategies across both publications. In these tables, italicized entries in the Category/Pattern column indicate combined patterns where multiple categorization strategies occur together, while non-italicized ones represent single counterpart types.

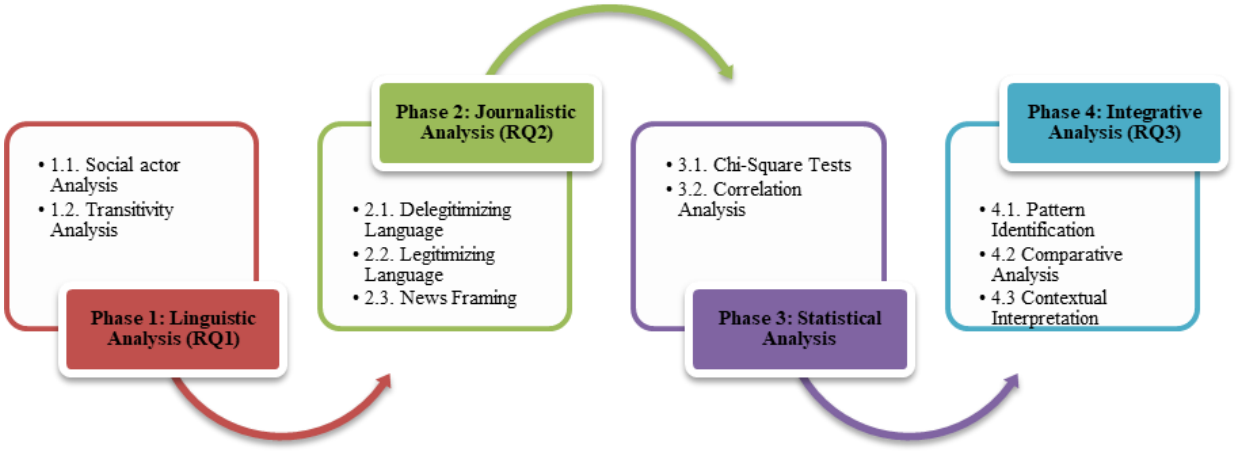


Figure 1 Process of the analysis of TGW representation in Thai media

Table 2 Distribution of main categories and dominant combined patterns (*italicized*) of nominations and categorizations in BP's news articles

Category/Pattern	Number	Percent	Example
Relational identification	121	25.9	Her new political role, Her company's business model and capabilities, Her arrest by Special Branch police
Classification	105	22.4	Transgenders, Ladyboy, Transgender woman
Informalization	92	19.7	Thiraphong, Anne, Maggie
Functionalization	54	11.5	A CEO and sports promoter, The suspect, Influencer
Formalization	40	8.5	Ms Jakkaphong, Ms Phoomraphee, Mr Aniwat
Classification + Functionalization	18	3.8	Transgender students, First transgender prime minister, A 26-year-old defendant
Semiformalization	10	2.1	Pinit Ngarmpring, Chaowalit Charoensuk, Poodle Yuppadee
Appraisement	10	2.1	Queen of Indian Content, Nara Crepe Katoey, Anna TVpool
Semiformalization + Classification	7	1.5	Uthai Nanthakhan, 43, Karnklao Klomkan, 30, Saranrak Thongsin, 29, a transgender woman
Classification + Functionalization + Semiformalization	5	1.1	Kathoey critic Kochaporn Saengchan, transgender politician Pauline Ngampring, transgender influencer Aniwat Prathumthin
Physical identification	3	0.6	The body (3 occurrences)
Functionalization + Informalization in the middle of semiformalization (given name + nickname + surname)	3	0.6	Chief executive Jakkaphong "Anne" Jakrajutatip
Total	468	100	

Table 3 Distribution of main categories and dominant combined patterns (italicized) of nominations and categorizations in PM's news articles

Category/Pattern	Number	Percent	Example
Classification	89	34.8	Transgender women, Thai transgender women, Pattaya ladyboys
Functionalization	52	20.3	The Miss Tiffany's Universe winner, Public relations ambassadors, Thieves
Relational identification	39	15.2	Her father's spirit to the afterlife, Her fellow ladyboy gang members, The body of Thiraphong Lamluea, 31
Informalization	33	12.9	Pauline, Lizzie, Yiam
Classification + Functionalization	17	6.6	A transgender robber, The transgender performers, Ladyboy gold snatcher
Physical identification + Classification	9	3.5	A drunk transgender woman, Sticky-fingered transgenders, Disorganized ladyboys
Semiformalization + Classification	7	2.7	"Frame", the transgender woman, Nattapong Thongnak, 18, Panatchai Noojit, 29 of Yasothorn
Semiformalization	7	2.7	Kwanlada Rungrojampa, Metawee Thongthaitae, Nattakorn Rungroj
Appraisement	3	1.2	A political trailblazer, Nong Rock, Beauty moms
Total	257	100	

Chi-square analysis confirms that these differences in social actor representation between BP and PM are statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 12.90$, $p < .001$ for classification; $\chi^2(1) = 12.90$, $p < .001$ for relational identification, indicating distinct representational strategies rather than random variation.

BP's predominant use of relational identification (25.9 %) positions TGWs primarily through their relationships with other entities, particularly professional institutions, achievements, and legal situations. This representational strategy reflects the publication's formal orientation and concentration on

institutional contexts. The high frequency of classification (22.4 %) and informalization (19.7 %) creates a pattern where TGWs are simultaneously categorized by gender identity and individualized through personal names. This approach constructs what we term "categorized individuality," recognition of individual identity but consistently marked by transgender status.

The statistical predominance of classification in PM (34.8 %) reveals a more categorical approach to TGW representation, where gender identity consistently takes precedence over individual identity. Combined with the high frequency of functionalization (20.3 %), this creates a representational pattern where TGWs were primarily defined by both their gender identity and specific social roles, particularly in entertainment and crime contexts. This functionalizing classification reinforces social expectations about appropriate TGW roles and activities.

The significant difference in formalization between publications (8.5 % in BP *vs* 0 % in PM) reflects distinct editorial approaches, with BP's more formal honorific usage constructing greater social distance and institutional recognition, while PM's absence of formalization creates more casual, sometimes sensationalized, representations.

Transitivity analysis

Table 4 and Table 5 present the distribution of transitivity process types in both publications. In these tables, this study highlights the participants (bold) and the verbs (italic) that realize these processes to demonstrate how linguistic choices construct TGW experiences and actions.

Table 4 Distribution of transitivity process types in BP's news articles

Clause-Type	Number	Percent	Example
Material	407	50.6	Anne *received* the Asia Media Woman of the Year award. Transgender influencer Nara Crepe Katoey *has been arrested* in Ayutthaya.
Verbal	200	24.8	Ms Koko *urged* the government to endorse transition leave. Ms Jakkaphong *said* the company had tried its best to negotiate.
Relational	116	14.4	Anne *is* the third richest transgender person in the world with an estimated net worth of US$210 million. Until three years ago, Ms Pauline *was* Mr Pinit: a father of two, a reporter-turned-businessman who *became* well known by founding a soccer fan association that became influential in Thai sporting circles.
Mental	73	9.0	Pauline *thinks* the Future Forward Party is the answer. Charisa *feels* that asking students to submit a psychological evaluation is unnecessary.
Existential	6	0.7	There *were* 15 Filipinos and six Thais.
Behavioral	2	0.2	The transgender woman *resorted* to the robbery.
Total	804	100	

Table 5 Distribution of transitivity process types in PM's news articles

Clause-Type	Number	Percent	Example
Material	305	63.5	1 of 3 ladyboys *arrested* for necklace theft. Now 20, "Nong Rock" *took* what she learned and *beat out* 29 other contestants at Saturday night's contest at the Tiffany Theatre.
Verbal	85	17.7	Supoj *told* police that she used to be a young and beautiful ladyboy with a steady boyfriend, but he dumped her as she got older. Yiam *admitted* to being involved in the fight with Muulan, citing disrespectful comments and beer splashing as provocation.
Relational	61	12.7	Supoj *fell into* alcoholism and at one point ended up in the news for living on the side of the road in Sattahip.
Mental	26	5.4	It is open to all transgender women who *may* or *may not have gone through* sex reassignment surgery. Pattaya's women-of-the-second-category *are learning* how to stay home and bake cookies.
Behavioral	2	0.4	Kunikas *partied* with bargirls at ladyboy bars on the Pattaya's Soi Buakhao using funds siphoned regularly from Thiraphong's bank account.
Existential	1	0.2	There *are* around 5,000 Thai transvestite and transsexual persons in Pattaya
Total	480	100	

Chi-square analysis confirms significant differences between publications in material processes ($\chi^2(1) = 20.39$, $p < .001$) and verbal processes ($\chi^2(1) = 8.94$, $p < .01$), but not in relational or mental processes.

The dominance of material processes in both publications (50.6% in BP and 63.5% in PM) indicates a concentration on TGWs' actions and experiences. However, this study's analysis reveals pivotal differences in participant roles and agency within these material processes. In BP, TGWs frequently appeared as active agents in professional contexts ("received the Asia Media Woman of the Year award") but also as passive participants in legal/criminal contexts ("has been arrested"). This creates a representational duality where agency is context-dependent.

In PM, the significantly higher proportion of material processes (63.5% *vs.* 50.6%, $\chi^2 = 11.43$, $p = .001$) combined with the predominance of passive constructions ("arrested for necklace theft") positioned TGWs as objects of action rather than active participants. When active agency did appear, it frequently related to entertainment contexts ("beat out 29 other contestants"), reinforcing traditional associations between TGWs and particular social spheres.

The higher frequency of verbal processes in the BP (24.8% *vs.* 17.7%, $\chi^2 = 5.08$, $p = .024$) reflects a greater representation of TGWs' voices and perspectives. Notably, these verbal processes often involved professional statements or advocacy ("urged the government"), constructing TGWs as authoritative speakers. In contrast, PM's verbal processes predominantly occur in crime contexts ("told police") or entertainment settings, limiting the domains in which TGW voices were represented.

This transitivity analysis revealed how grammatical choices construct TGW experiences differently across publications. BP's more varied process types and participant roles construct a more multidimensional representation, while PM's concentration on passive material processes in limited contexts reinforces more restrictive social roles.

RQ2: To What Extent are Representations of Transgenderism Legitimizing Versus Delegitimizing between Mainstream and Local Online Thai English-Language News Articles?

Journalistic Strategies and Media Bias

Legitimizing versus Delegitimizing Language

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the distribution of delegitimizing and legitimizing language indicators across both publications. This study's statistical analysis reveals significant differences in how these publications employed language that either validates or undermines TGW identities.

The statistical analysis reveals distinct journalistic approaches to TGW representation across publications. BP's higher frequency of legitimizing language, particularly in pronoun usage (variance = 169) and appropriate term application (variance = 72.2), reflects more consistent adherence to professional journalistic standards regarding transgender coverage. This approach validated TGW identities through linguistic choices that respected gender identity and employed accurate terminology.

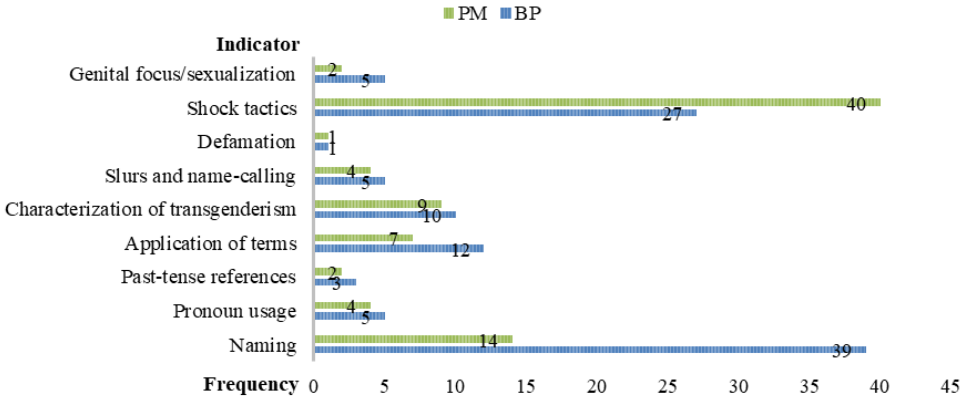


Figure 2 Variation of delegitimizing language in BP and PM.

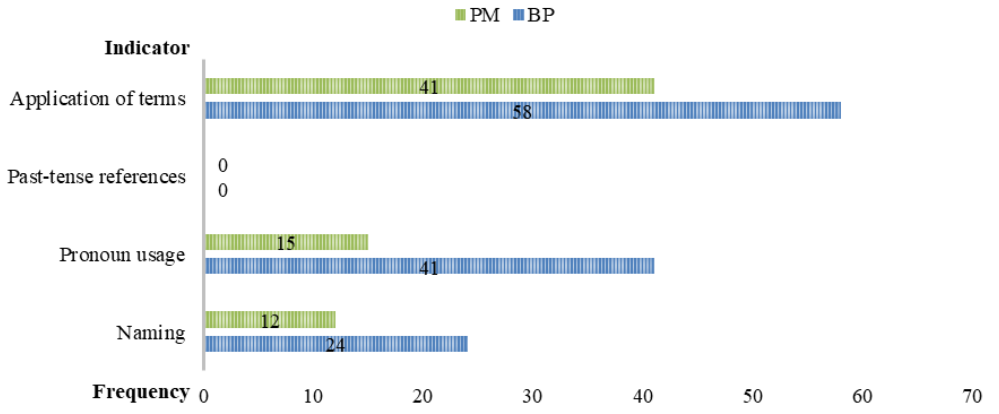


Figure 3 Variation of legitimizing language in BP and PM.

However, BP's relatively high frequency of deadnaming (39 instances *vs.* PM's 18) indicates a contradictory practice that undermines this legitimizing tendency. This pattern suggests the so-called idea of bureaucratic delegitimization—the prioritization of institutional record-keeping and formal identification over respect for chosen identity. This practice appears most frequently in crime reporting and formal profiles, reflecting the publication's emphasis on official documentation even when it conflicts with respectful representation.

PM's significantly higher use of shock tactics (40 instances *vs.* BP's 15, variance = 84.50) reveals a more sensationalistic approach that treats transgender identity as a newsworthy attribute regardless of relevance. This practice creates a transgender spectacle, where gender identity becomes a sensationalistic hook rather than a respectful attribute ("Thai party fields transgender candidate for prime minister").

News Framing and Content Type: Contextual Influences on Representation

This study's correlation analysis reveals significant relationships between news framing contexts and linguistic choices, as shown in Table 6.

The strong positive correlation between professional framing and legitimizing language indicators (r = .61 for appropriate term usage; r = .58 for respectful pronoun usage) reveals how journalistic context significantly influences linguistic choices. This pattern demonstrates that when TGWs appear in professional contexts, they are more likely to receive respectful, legitimizing representation regardless of publication type. Conversely, the strong positive correlation between crime framing and shock tactics (r = .68) and negative correlation with legitimizing language (r = -.45 for appropriate term usage) indicates how crime reporting contexts frequently trigger delegitimizing representational patterns. This finding is particularly significant for understanding PM's representation patterns, as the publication features a higher proportion of crime reporting involving TGWs.

The differences in news content focus between publications—with BP featuring more professional/political coverage and PM concentrating on local crime and entertainment—partially explain the different representation patterns. However, even controlling for content type, significant differences remain, indicating that editorial policies and journalistic practices influence representation beyond story selection. The correlation analysis supports our central thesis that journalistic context and practices directly influence linguistic representation. The interaction between news framing decisions and linguistic choices creates distinctive representation patterns that either validate or undermine TGW identities.

RQ3: How are TGWs Represented in Mainstream and Local Online Thai English News Articles from the Perspectives of Language Use and Journalists?

The representation of TGWs within the comparative baseline of the mainstream BP and the local PM online Thai English-language news media reveals distinct approaches shaped by both linguistic patterns and journalistic practices. These differences emerge clearly through the integration of social actor representation, transitivity analysis, and legitimacy indicators for transgenderism.

The nuanced narratives of TGWs: A comparative analysis of BP and PM

BP professional and advocacy contexts; BP's coverage demonstrates a consistent pattern of legitimizing representation

Table 6 Correlation analysis between news framing variables and legitimacy indicators

Variables	Professional Framing	Crime Framing	Entertainment Framing	Shock Tactics	Appropriate Term Usage	Respectful Pronoun Usage
Professional Framing	1.00	-0.42*	-0.37*	-0.53*	0.61*	0.58*
Crime Framing	-0.42*	1.00	0.12	0.68*	-0.45*	-0.37*
Entertainment Framing	-0.37*	0.12	1.00	0.47*	-0.26*	-0.21
Shock Tactics	-0.53*	0.68*	0.47*	1.00	-0.59*	-0.48*
Appropriate Term Usage	0.61*	-0.45*	-0.26*	-0.59*	1.00	0.72*
Respectful Pronoun Usage	0.58*	-0.37*	-0.21	-0.48*	0.72*	1.00

through both linguistic and journalistic choices. The outlet's preference for relational identification (25.9%) and classification (22.4%) in social actor representation aligns with its higher frequency of legitimizing language, particularly in pronoun usage (41 instances compared to PM's 15) and appropriate term application (58 *vs.* 41). This is exemplified in coverage of successful TGW entrepreneurs, especially Anne Jakkaphong, where material processes (50.7% of total processes) position TGWs as active agents in professional achievements, as demonstrated in "received the Asia Media Woman of the Year award." BP's formal style emphasizes TGWs' professional accomplishments through positive categorization while maintaining respectful gender representation through consistent pronoun usage and appropriate terminology. In contrast, PM's representation reveals a more restricted and often delegitimizing approach, particularly in crime and entertainment contexts lexicalized heavily through the approaches of classification (34.9%) and functionalization (20%) in social actor representation, combined with the highest frequency of shock tactics (40 instances) among delegitimizing indicators—constructing a narrower view of TGW identity. In addition, material processes, comprising 65.1 percent of all processes, predominantly appear in passive constructions related to crime reports ("arrested for necklace theft") or entertainment coverage ("beat out 29 other contestants"). These linguistic choices, paired with sensationalist journalistic practices, reinforce stereotypical roles and associations.

Theoretical reflection: Integrating linguistic and journalistic frameworks

The theoretical integration of van Leeuwen's social actor approach, Halliday's transitivity analysis, and Billard's legitimacy indicators for transgenderism reveal how multiple linguistic and journalistic mechanisms work together to shape TGW representation. When BP employs relational identification in professional contexts, it typically combines with material processes that showcase agency, supported by legitimizing language choices in pronoun usage and terminology. This creates a representation that validates TGW identities while emphasizing their professional achievements. Conversely, PM's combination of classificatory social actor choices, passive material processes, and delegitimizing shock tactics constructs a narrative that often reinforces traditional stereotypes and limitations. These differential approaches reflect broader societal attitudes and editorial priorities. BP's more formalized, profession-focused coverage aligns with mainstream journalistic practices that increasingly recognize the importance of respectful representation. However, even within this more legitimizing framework, the paper sometimes unnecessarily foregrounds gender identity in professional contexts. PM's localized perspective, while providing important community context, often relies on sensationalist framing that can perpetuate marginalizing narratives about TGWs. The outlet's emphasis on crime and entertainment stories, combined with casual or colloquial language choices, reinforces limited social roles for TGWs.

Discussion

In BP, TGWs are often depicted within professional contexts, aligning with the outlet's formalized and mainstream approach. However, these representations frequently foreground gender identity unnecessarily, even in contexts where it is not relevant. This tendency reinforces a "conditional legitimacy," where TGWs' contributions are acknowledged but remain tethered to their transgender status. Such framing inadvertently perpetuates societal biases by continuously positioning TGWs as "other" within their professional roles. Regarding the professional roles, these can perpetuate conventional markers of success facilitating TGWs to get qualified for "transacceptance" or perhaps not qualified may fall into "transprejudice" (Winter, 2009). Of course, this finding can resonate with Jackson's (1999) observations of hierarchical categorization in Thai media, in this context, the hidden heteronormative dichotomy between "high class" and "low class" TGWs based upon their socioeconomic status. This study

contends that this deed may potentially lead to the propagation of an ideology in the TGW community that mainstream media visibility and societal acceptance are exclusively contingent upon achieving demonstrable success or even being with sociopolitical spirit—advocacy for transgender rights (Chonwilia, 2012).

Conversely, PM focuses on sensationalized narratives, often emphasizing TGWs' involvement in crime or entertainment. This localized approach underscores a different editorial priority, where TGWs are functionalized and classified in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes. By concentrating on deviant or exoticized aspects of TGW identities, PM appears to limit the broader understanding of TGWs and perpetuates reductive societal views. Moreover, the term "ladyboys" appears more frequently in PM, reinforcing the traditional associations with indecency (Käng, 2012), entertainment (Chonwilia, 2012) or crimes (Fongkaew et al., 2019; Ninpanit, 2020). Tellingly, it is crucial to acknowledge that the TGWs' experiences parallel those of cisheteronormative individuals in their diversity. The term "ladyboy" should function as an identity that marginalized groups can reclaim with pride as a self-referential designation rather than an externally imposed label.

Interestingly, the stereotypical portrayal of TGWs in the lens of media linguistics may be influenced by traditional Thai Buddhist beliefs associating kathoeys with karmic consequences (Jackson, 2016) and reinforced by heteronormative systems that legitimize discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals through institutional discourse and practices (Robinson, 2016). This cultural-religious framework potentially contributes to media representations that exoticize TGWs and validate their acceptance only when conforming to established social expectations.

This study demonstrates that while frameworks like social actors (van Leeuwen, 2008) and transitivity analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) are deemed predictable for analyzing marginalized group representations, they offer considerable analytical value when combined with specialized frameworks like Billard's (2016) legitimacy indicators for transgenderism. This integration provides a comprehensive analytical confluence for understanding a media-language production of journalistic authority (Cottor, 2010) in shaping TGWs and narratives.

Furthermore, beyond mainstream news media's role in reflecting and shaping dominant beliefs (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009), communities value local news that addresses contextual issues (Heider et al., 2005). When measured against ethical journalism standards such as the AP Stylebook (2024), both publications demonstrate significant inconsistencies. BP shows partial adherence through consistent pronoun usage (41 *vs.* PM's 15 instances) but contradicts these standards through frequent deadnaming (39 instances). PM's higher frequency of shock tactics (40 instances) and consistent use of potentially stigmatizing terminology like "ladyboy" without qualification indicates even less alignment with established guidelines. Neither publication appears to implement comprehensive editorial policies for LGBTQ+ coverage that consistently reflect international best practices. These findings highlight the urgent need for more equitable media practices to diminish internal bias (Hamborg, 2023). Consistent and respectful terminology, avoidance of sensationalism, and broader coverage of TGWs' diverse identities and roles are essential to denaturalize available images and meta-narratives and foster acceptance in Thai society. The integration of historical perspectives and modern journalistic approaches further emphasizes the evolving but still problematic nature of TGW representation in the media.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The analysis of 108 online Thai English-language news articles (2019–2024) reveals how mainstream and local media shape public perception of TGWs through distinct linguistic and journalistic practices. BP demonstrates "conditional legitimacy," emphasizing professional achievements through relational identification and legitimizing language practices, though complicated by deadnaming, while PM's representation shows more limited patterns through classification and shock tactics, reinforcing traditional stereotypes.

This study's findings have significant implications for journalistic practice. While the mainstream BP strives for balanced reporting, its frequent deadnaming and unnecessary emphasis on gender identity reflect persistent biases that contradict professional standards outlined in guides like the AP Stylebook (2024). These practices highlight the need for specific improvements in media coverage: (1) develop style guides addressing transgender terminology, prohibiting deadnaming, and mandating respectful pronoun usage; (2) implement source diversity requirements beyond entertainment and crime contexts; (3) establish editorial review processes for TGW narratives; and (4) track representation metrics to transform "conditional legitimacy" into comprehensive recognition.

As this study investigates only English-language news content, future research should examine non-Anglophone Thai-language sources. Moreover, longitudinal trends and the impact of these representational patterns on public attitudes toward transgender women in Thailand should be observed.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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