



Thailand's Sports Broadcasting Landscape: Policy, Progress, and Prospects

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Over the past several decades, Thailand has undergone significant transformations in sports media policy, driven by shifts in national governance. The transition from conventional sports broadcasting to digital sports media has introduced several key challenges for Thai society. As the government plays a crucial role in the development of sports at the national level, public policies have a substantial impact on how the population consumes sports media. These policies influence the broadcasting of sports, the availability of sports content to audiences, and the overall structure of the broadcasting marketplace. Given the importance of public policy in sports media, the present research aims to investigate current issues and challenges in sports broadcasting through multiple mini-case studies of football-related event broadcasting in Thailand. Utilizing a documentary research design and multiple mini-case study analyses, the study provides a historical landscape of sports broadcasting in the country to contextualize these contemporary challenges. The article concludes with an academically grounded discussion and offers practical insights for informing future public policy in sports broadcasting.

Keywords: Event Management; Public Policy; Sports Event; Sports Management; Sports Policy



INTRODUCTION

Sports broadcasting has continually evolved from its origins to the present day. It began with radio in the early 1920s in the United States before expanding to television and, later, internet streaming, significantly enhanced audience reach and the overall viewing experience (Chutipongdech, 2026). Szymanski (2006) noted that the 1970s and 1980s marked a pivotal technological revolution in sports broadcasting, driven by digital advancements that led to the proliferation of channels and transformed the industry.

Technological advancements have profoundly transformed sports broadcasting, allowing audiences worldwide to access sports content from virtually any location (Hull, 2025; Hutchins et al., 2019; Solberg & Gaustad, 2022). Since the early 1990s, the growing demand for sports broadcasts has driven a sharp rise in broadcasting rights fees (Dietl & Hasan, 2007; Noll, 2007; Taylor & Thomass, 2017). This, in turn, has impacted viewing costs for audiences (Chutipongdech & Ploychankul, 2023), particularly for major events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, which command some of the highest broadcasting rights fees (Gratton & Solberg, 2007).

The growing prevalence of sports broadcasting across various countries has raised concerns for governments, necessitating solutions to emerging challenges. These include the cost of accessing broadcasts (Noll, 2007), unauthorized retransmissions, illegal online streaming of sporting events (Mondello & Fortunato, 2022), copyright infringements (Evens & Smith, 2024; Kariyawasam & Tsai, 2017), and monopolistic practices in the industry (New & Le Grand, 1999).

As a result, governments have taken on the responsibility of developing laws and regulations through public policies to ensure economic benefits and fair competition. Regulating sports broadcasting is a priority for many nations, as they seek to balance the interests of broadcasters, sporting organizations, and public engagement with sports media (Rowe et al., 2023). The implementation of these policies significantly shapes how people consume sports media by establishing the framework for sports broadcasting across various media channels.

In the Thai context, sports have long been an integral component of the national culture, with successive administrations emphasizing sports development as a means of promoting social progress. Over the past decades, the Thai government has introduced various sports broadcasting policies to foster industry growth. However, with the rapid emergence of digital transformation in the sports industry, the landscape of sports broadcasting in Thailand has become increasingly complex.

One of the most prominent issues has risen in football-related broadcasting, where debates continue over the appropriate roles of state authorities in managing sports broadcasting programs, ensuring fairness in the broadcast rights allocation process, determining the justification for resource allocation to specific types of sports events, addressing the rising costs of sports viewership, and responding to shifting viewer preferences in sports consumption. Given these dynamics, Thailand serves as a compelling case study offering valuable lessons for refining sports broadcasting policies in other Southeast Asian countries.

Given the critical role of public policy in shaping sports broadcasting – and the limited research in this domain, particularly within the Southeast Asian context – this study aims to examine the current issues and challenges in Thailand's sports broadcasting landscape. Employing a documentary research design with multiple mini-case study analyses, the research examines the historical evolution of sports broadcasting in Thailand by analyzing relevant gray literature. Specifically, the study focuses on the broadcasting of football-related events in Thailand to draw lessons and provide insights into existing challenges and their implications for future policy development.

This study is organized as follows: The next section presents the theoretical framework that underpins the research. This is followed by a review of gray literature and an exploration of the evolution of sports broadcasting in Thailand, highlighting key milestones that have shaped its development. The subsequent section outlines the research methodology, including the case study setting, research design, data collection, and analytical methods. Next, the findings are presented and discussed, focusing on the challenges and issues related to sports broadcasting in Thailand. Finally, the article concludes by summarizing the study's significance and its contributions to the sports broadcasting literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

When addressing issues related to resource allocation aimed at maximizing societal benefits, the concept of public economics is widely applied (Chutiphongdech & Ploychankul, 2023). This

framework helps examine how governments should engage in producing or distributing public goods and services, including managing sports broadcasting, to generate the greatest benefit for communities (Gratton & Solberg, 2007; Poort & Baarsma, 2016; Solberg, 2007, 2008).

Richard Abel Musgrave (1958) explained the concept of public goods as goods and services typically provided by the government because they are non-excludable, non-rivalrous, and generally unprofitable for the private sector to produce. Examples include national defense, international relations, and certain public services such as broadcasting sports events that do not generate sufficient revenue to attract private investment (Stiglitz & Rosengard, 2015).

The production of goods and services is generally governed by market equilibrium through the market mechanism. However, for goods and services that provide broad societal benefits – such as merit goods – reliance on the market alone can result in undersupply, a condition known as market failure. To mitigate this, government intervention becomes essential to ensure sufficient production and distribution to meet public needs. Such intervention is particularly warranted for merit goods, which governments promote due to their positive externalities for society.

Merit goods are public goods that the government produces and distributes to stimulate consumption and ensure an adequate supply to meet societal demand, even though these goods could also be produced by the private sector (Fiorito & Kollintzas, 2004). Externalities refer to the unintended outcomes of consuming goods and services, which can be positive or negative, and are not reflected in market prices (Gratton & Solberg, 2007). When consumption generates positive externalities, market prices tend to be too low due to market failure, creating insufficient incentives for private producers and resulting in under-provision. Consequently, to maximize public welfare, governments must intervene in producing or facilitating the provision of such goods (Noll, 2007).

Several systematic reviews and empirical studies (e.g., Annear et al., 2019; McVinnie et al., 2023; Murphy & Bauman, 2007; Kinoshita et al., 2024; Oshimi & Kinoshita, 2025) have further demonstrated that watching and participating in sports events creates positive externalities. When a significant share of the population watches these events, it fosters conversations, creates shared experiences among viewers, and can even encourage increased participation in physical activities. Notably, these discussions often reach individuals who did not watch the events themselves, resulting in spillover effects that extend the impact beyond the direct audience (Poort & Baarsma, 2016). Given these positive externalities, many governments have prioritized allocating resources to ensure the broadcasting of sports events for public benefit, including Thailand.

Evolution of Sports Broadcasting in Thailand

Over the years, Thailand has experienced both progress and challenges in developing sports policies, particularly in relation to sports broadcasting. Sports broadcasting through television in Thailand first operated in 1952, making it the first nation in Asia to engage with television (Hassan & Intratat, 2003). This was followed by the first commercial radio service in 1954 and the first television service in 1955 (Piromnum, 2022). Thailand's first sports broadcast occurred in 1955 with a recording of a football match from the FA Cup in England, which aired on the Star Soccer show on Thai Television Channel 4 (TTV) (Surapibul, 2013). TTV, Thailand's first television and radio station, was established on June 27, 1954, and was the first to broadcast in black-and-white (Punyapiroje, 2023).

In the first era of sports broadcasting, the broadcaster was monopolized by the state, which later allowed private sectors to auction digital TV broadcasting rights in 2014. Today,

the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) represents the state in the facilitation of spectrum management and oversees the licensing and regulation of broadcasting, television, radiocommunications, and telecommunication operations in Thailand (Kumthorncharoen, 2016; Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, 2025).

In 1966, Thailand experienced a significant development in sports broadcasting through a collaboration among state broadcasters. During this period, Thailand hosted the 5th Asian Games. Consequently, Thai Television Channel 4 (TTV) and Royal Thai Army Radio and Television (TV5) – a Thai public television network operated by the Royal Thai Army, which commenced broadcasting in 1958 – collaborated on the live broadcast of this sportsing event. This marked the launch of Thailand's first TV Pool.

In the 1970s, Thailand began acquiring foreign sports broadcasting rights, enhancing the popularity of many sports. A significant example was TTV's acquisition of wrestling program rights from England, which familiarized the Thai audience with worldwide sports entertainment (The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, 2020). The procurement of foreign sports licenses led to increased popularity of sports in Thailand, including the airing of Japanese film series featuring sports themes, which significantly enhanced the appeal of activities such as swimming, judo, and volleyball among youth. The 8th Asian Games in 1978, held in Thailand, also solidified the nation's burgeoning prominence in sports broadcasting, garnering significant international media interest.

The 1980s introduced novel methodologies in sports programming. In 1987, Channel 7 produced a variety-format sports show, adding a new dimension to Thailand's sports programs. Channel 7, previously known as Bangkok Broadcasting & Television Company Limited, is a privately-owned Thai free-to-air television network that commenced operations in 1967. It was the first color television channel transmitted in Mainland Southeast Asia and is currently owned by Bangkok Broadcasting & Television. Also in 1987, it marked a significant advancement in tennis broadcasting, as Channel 9 obtained the rights to air The Championships, Wimbledon, Thailand's first live transmission of a premier tennis event (The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, 2020).

The 1990s saw a surge in sports viewing, propelled by prominent football tournaments. Channel 7 broadcasted the UEFA Euro 1996 live, which led to a football fever in Thailand in 1996. Following these live broadcasts, foreign football has long enjoyed high popularity. Furthermore, Thailand demonstrated its sports broadcasting proficiency by hosting the 13th Asian Games in 1998, thereby reinforcing its capacity to adhere to international live broadcasting standards.

The 2000s marked a new era of private sector participation in sports media broadcasting. The 2002 FIFA World Cup was the first occasion on which a Thai business entity – Thai Beverage Public Company Limited – secured broadcasting rights, indicating a shift toward corporate investment in live sports transmission.

In 2008, the Football Association of Thailand (FA Thailand) established the Thai Premier League Company Limited – recognized by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) – to administer and manage Thai professional football matches in the Thailand Premier League (TPL). In 2017, the organization was restructured as Thai League Company Limited to oversee the league in a European system. The competition experienced rapid growth, driven by heightened interest in professional football sparked by televised broadcasts of England's Premier League (Anuntasuk, 2013). Moreover, the sale of broadcasting rights paved the way for both cable and free-to-air coverage, further enhancing accessibility for football enthusiasts.

The shift to digital broadcasting became prominent in 2014 when the NBTC initiated trial digital TV transmissions. This transition, coupled with the escalating expenses of live sports rights, presented a new challenge for broadcasters (The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, 2020). In 2014, the FIFA World Cup was the inaugural sportsing event transmitted via digital television, with RS Public Company Limited acquiring the broadcasting rights, signifying Thailand's preparedness for a digital shift in sports media. Table 1 delineates the significant milestones in the history of sports broadcasting in Thailand.

<i>Years</i>	<i>Significant events</i>
1955	Live broadcast of Thai boxing from the Rajadamnern Stadium.
1966	TTV and TV5 collaborated on the live broadcast of the 5th Asian Games.
1968	Beginning of the first TV Pool of Thailand.
1970	Beginning a purchase of copyright for foreign sports programs to be broadcast in Thailand.
1978	Thailand hosted the 8th Asian Games, a sportsing event featuring news from major media around the world.
1987	Produced the variety-format sports shows which was a new dimension of Thailand's sports shows.
	Purchase of copyright to the live broadcast of The Championships, Wimbledon, from England.
1996	Broadcasting lives the UEFA Euro 1996.
1998	Thailand hosted the 13th Asian Games in Bangkok.
2002	Live broadcast of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which is the first time in Thailand that the private sector owns a competition copyright.
2013	Beginning a sale of the copyrights to live broadcast the Thailand Premier League tournament on both cable and free TV.
2014	Beginning to experiment with digital television broadcasting.
	The live broadcast of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

Table 1. The timeline for the development of sports broadcasting in Thailand. (The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, 2020).

Since 2014, the Thai television industry has been transitioning from analog to digital broadcasting, gradually increasing the number of channels. As a result, competition has intensified. To attract viewers, digital television operators are investing in high-quality content. In addition to dramas and variety shows, sports programming has become a key strategy for boosting channel ratings (Kuljitjuewong, 2016).

In Thailand, Piromnum (2022) identified four distinct formats for sports television programs on digital TV: news presentation, variety show presentation, demonstration or experimental presentation, and live broadcasting. It is evident that sports programs are highly popular among Thai audiences. Kuljitjuewong (2016) noted that the availability of various sports types allows viewers to choose content based on their interests, fostering continuous engagement throughout competitions. Additionally, Jitrngam and Worakullatthanee (2018) found that most audiences now access sports media online, particularly via platforms like Facebook. This shift has significantly influenced viewer behavior, especially in relation to live sports broadcasts.

Moreover, Srichitcham and Satawedin (2020) highlighted a notable example, Workpoint Entertainment, a leading media company that secured the rights to live broadcast the 2018 Asian Games. This acquisition enabled the company to diversify its digital TV channels and offer Thai audiences more viewing options. The games were broadcast not only on traditional television but also via live streaming on Workpoint's Facebook and YouTube channels, expanding accessibility across multiple platforms. The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (2020) further reported that the 2018 Asian Games achieved its highest rating during the women's volleyball match between China and Japan. Notably, this was the first time a women's volleyball program without Thai athletes garnered such a high viewership rating.

The rise of digital television has been accompanied by a growing demand for live sports broadcasting rights. Globally popular sports, such as football and boxing, continue to attract significant audience interest, intensifying competition among TV operators for broadcasting rights, primarily due to the substantial advertising revenue generated by media companies holding these rights (Srichitcham & Satawedin, 2020). As a result, the cost of these rights has risen significantly.

METHOD

Case Study Setting

Despite recent advancements in sports media, Thailand continues to face significant challenges that extend beyond the rising costs of accessing sports content. To investigate these issues, this article adopts a documentary research design with a multiple mini-case study approach centered on the broadcasting of football-related events, such as Thai League, English Premier League, and the 2022 FIFA World Cup – a high-profile event that exposed structural and policy-related shortcomings in the Thai sports broadcasting landscape (Matheson, 2024).

Thailand presents a particularly compelling case for analysis for several reasons. As a prominent Southeast Asian nation globally recognized for its tourism sector and growing portfolio of local and hallmark sporting events (Chutiphongdech et al., 2025; Fakfare et al., 2022), the country occupies a position in the regional sports and media landscape. The transition from analog to digital broadcasting has fundamentally reshaped this landscape, creating both opportunities and challenges in terms of regulation, access, and equity. These dynamics underscore the importance of examining how government policies navigate the intersection of technological change, market forces, and public interest.

Furthermore, the controversy surrounding the broadcasting of football-related events exemplifies these tensions and serves as a critical lens for evaluating policy effectiveness and governance in sports media. This situation sparked widespread public debate and revealed significant policy challenges concerning broadcasting rights, funding mechanisms, and audience accessibility. Consequently, this documentary research, with multiple mini-case studies, not only provides insights into Thailand's sports broadcasting landscape but also offers broader implications for policy frameworks in emerging economies undergoing similar transitions.

Research Design

To examine the current issues and challenges in sports broadcasting, this research involves comprehending phenomena through the examination of several cases (Käss et al., 2024) and mapping the historical development of sports broadcasting in Thailand through documentary analysis.

A multiple mini-case study research design incorporating document analysis was deemed appropriate for this study, as it enables the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon through documentary evidence, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly delineated (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022; Yin, 2018). Specifically, it enables an in-depth exploration of the current issues and challenges within Thailand's sports broadcasting landscape. Employing multiple mini-case studies provides evidence-based insights and a detailed understanding of how policy was implemented. This method is widely employed in the social sciences to explore the interplay between a phenomenon and its context, enabling a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena within a research setting (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Käss et al., 2024).

Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data on the current issues and challenges in sports broadcasting through the mini-case studies on football events and to trace the historical development of sports broadcasting in Thailand, this research compiled and reviewed documents dating back to 1932, when the country transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy and the king assumed the role of head of state. This political transformation marked the beginning of formal sports policies in Thailand.

A range of gray literature related to sports policy, particularly sports broadcasting, was gathered. This involved retrieving documents relevant to sports policy from the 1932 regime change to 2024. Online sources with clear and credible origins available in the public domain were reviewed, including policy statements from the Council of Ministers, national development plans, government white papers, laws and legislation, national strategic plans, annual reports, budgeting documents, academic papers, industry reports, and sports media portals.

The data analysis process followed the steps of identification, selection, evaluation, and synthesis of information extracted from these documents, as outlined by Bowen (2009). After collecting the data, the authors familiarized themselves with the materials through scanning, thorough reading, and interpretation. Once the relevant documents were compiled, content analysis was conducted to extract information and construct thematic findings related to the landscape of sports broadcasting and the challenges facing sports broadcasting in Thailand.

Content analysis is a qualitative analytical tool used to interpret insights from relevant documents. It is a flexible and effective research strategy for gaining a deeper understanding of the attributes and scope of gray literature (White et al., 2006). This approach systematically classifies textual data to identify specific contents and concepts (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). It enables researchers to examine the presence, significance, and interrelationships of particular terms, leading to generalizable findings (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Content analysis can be conducted using either inductive or deductive approaches. Deductive content analysis is typically applied when research objectives are predefined, and the elements to be examined are clearly understood (Rathnayake et al., 2024). Given that this study had a clear understanding of the expected themes – namely, the challenges associated with sports broadcasting in Thailand – a deductive content analysis approach was deemed appropriate for examining existing knowledge within these domains.

FINDINGS

Current Issues Related to Sports Broadcasting in Thailand

The landscape of sports broadcasting in Thailand faces several complex challenges, which significantly affect Thai sports fans' access to live events. This section presents the findings from the deductive content analysis and discusses several interrelated challenges in contemporary sports broadcasting in Thailand, as illustrated by the multiple mini case studies of the football-related events.

The analysis revealed several key themes regarding issues and challenges in the country's sports broadcasting sector: the role of government agencies in managing sports broadcasting programs, the escalating costs of sports viewership, and the limited availability of research on viewer preferences in sports consumption – an essential component for evidence-based policymaking.

The 2022 FIFA World

The roles of government agencies in managing sports broadcasting programs remain a primary concern in Thailand. These challenges typically involve securing and managing legal permissions to air specific content across various platforms, including television, radio, and online streaming. A notable example of this challenge was the uncertainty surrounding whether Thai viewers would be able to watch the 2022 FIFA World Cup and how they would experience the live broadcast.

Acquiring broadcasting rights for major international sports events such as the World Cup, the Olympics, and the Asian Games requires substantial financial investment, placing a burden on both the public and private sectors (Solberg, 2008; Solberg & Gaustad, 2022). The allocation of government budgets for purchasing these licenses often faces criticism regarding its cost-effectiveness and the impact on taxpayers' money (Chutipongdech & Ploychankul, 2023). Moreover, commercial interests, including the sale of sub-licensing rights to other broadcasters and sponsorship deals with private enterprises, further complicate the broadcasting landscape. These factors often lead to conflicts over transparency and public accessibility.

Accordingly, these challenges typically involve securing and managing legal permissions to air specific content across various platforms, including television, radio, and online streaming. The live broadcast of the 2022 FIFA World Cup serves as a clear example of the roles of government agencies in managing sports broadcasting programs in Thailand. Although the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) – a government agency responsible for comprehensively promoting sports within the country – secured the broadcasting rights, issues arose when True Corporation, Thailand's largest cable TV provider, was granted exclusive rights without an open and transparent bidding or competition process (Thongmeensuk, 2022). This lack of transparency led to public criticism, with concerns over unfair access to the World Cup for Thai viewers (The Nation, 2022).

During the FIFA 2022 broadcasting rights allocation process (Figure 1), Tortermvasana (2022) reported that Thailand was charged 1.6 billion Thai baht (THB) by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) for the 2022 World Cup broadcasting rights. The governor of the SAT stated that, although FIFA agreed to slightly reduce the cost, the final amount still exceeded the authority's budget of 1.1 billion THB, making it unaffordable. Furthermore, the broadcasting rights fee offered to Thailand was reportedly higher than that charged to its neighboring countries.

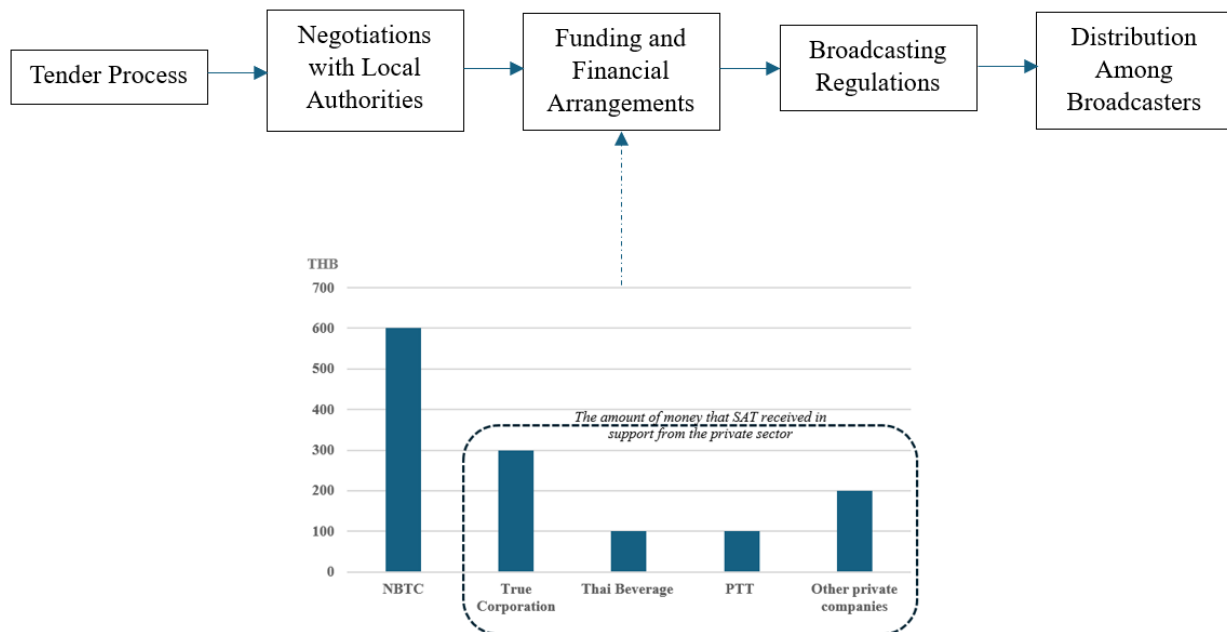


Figure 1. FIFA. 2022 broadcasting rights allocation process in Thailand. (Inside FIFA, 2024; Thongmeensuk, 2022).

Ounboriboon (2022) further highlighted that Thailand's issues with acquiring broadcasting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup stemmed from both late acquisition and the constraints of the two must rules by the NBTC – a government regulatory agency in telecommunications in Thailand. The must-have rule was the regulation created with the intention of reserving public rights to universal content. According to the NBTC's 2012 must-have rule, the broadcasting of the FIFA World Cup would be free of charge to the public through government-mandated free television channels. Additionally, the must-carry rule requires that NBTC-certified television platforms air free TV on all media outlets without blacking out (The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, 2012). Both regulations discouraged private companies from investing in broadcasting rights, as any company subject to these rules would need to cover the costs of the rights not only for themselves but also for free TV channels.

Due to the lack of incentive for private companies to invest in the World Cup rights under these outdated rules, the NBTC decided to contribute only 600 million THB of the required 1.6 billion THB (Thongmeensuk, 2022). Consequently, this shortfall forced the SAT to seek additional funding from private entities, including True Corporation, Thai Beverage, PTT Public Company Limited, and other private companies (Figure 1).

However, the distribution of broadcasting rights during the allocation process was widely criticized for lacking fairness, as True Corporation was granted the privilege of selecting 32 key matches. This arrangement led to dissatisfaction among members of the Association of Digital Television Broadcasting (Thailand), which represents broadcasters in the country, who considered the decision inequitable and inconsistent with the NBTC's mandate to serve the public interest (Association Of Digital Television Broadcasting (Thailand), 2023; BBC, 2023). The critique ultimately led True to agree to share the World Cup live broadcast with digital TV broadcasters for 16 matches, simultaneously with their own channels.

Following the criticism, the NBTC removed the FIFA World Cup from its must-have rule, leaving the broadcast rights in the hands of private holders, who now have the discretion to

decide whether to air it for free. According to a recent report by The Nation (2024), the NBTC board justified this decision by noting that no Thai team has ever qualified for the World Cup, thereby reducing the need to use public funds to support free broadcasts.

However, this exclusion raises ongoing concerns about whether access to major global sporting events should be considered a fundamental public service, particularly for citizens who cannot afford pay-TV services. Fans hoping to watch the World Cup may now face higher costs associated with subscribing to pay-TV providers or streaming platforms that hold the broadcasting rights. While financially pragmatic, this decision has intensified worries about the potential exclusion of lower-income viewers from major international sports events (Tjernström & Tjernström, 2008). This shift could create a financial barrier for many supporters, limiting their ability to experience one of football's most significant tournaments.

English Premier League and Thai League

Building on the discussion of the government's role in managing the FIFA 2022 broadcasting, the rising cost of accessing live sports broadcasts has become a critical issue in Thailand's sports media landscape. In recent years, these costs have increased significantly due to several factors, including the soaring prices of media rights, the rapid proliferation of streaming services, and the growing fragmentation of viewing options across multiple platforms.

Football has become a highly popular sports in Thailand and a major source of mass entertainment. However, Thailand is one of the Southeast Asian countries where audiences pay the highest fees to watch English Premier League broadcasts (Premier League, 2024), which are exclusively aired by True Visions, a pay-TV subsidiary of True Corporation (Sirisabsombat & Assawavichairo, 2025). In other words, True Visions was a rights holder for the FIFA World Cup 2022, specifically broadcasting the Premier League content in Thailand. According to Connect the Dots (2024) and True Visions Partner (2025), Thai fans must pay 5,490 THB for a 2024/2025 season pass to watch the English Premier League on True Visions NOW, a price that has doubled from the previous year's 2,710 THB.

At the same time, True Visions holds the primary broadcasting rights for football in Thailand, including the Thai League, the country's top domestic football competition. The season pass for the Thai League on True Visions NOW has risen sharply to 1,799 THB, up from just 500 THB last season, representing a threefold increase (Connect the Dots, 2024; TrueID, 2025). This surge in subscription fees highlights the growing financial burden on Thai football fans who wish to watch live sports broadcasts.

If government agencies aim to support sports viewership by investing in broadcasting rights, the justification for government intervention in the private sector's trading of sports broadcasting rights should be to serve the public interest. Furthermore, sports event broadcasting should align with the nation's cultural preferences. If a particular sports is widely enjoyed by the public, it should be accessible free of charge. Therefore, public agencies must understand the evolving preferences of sports fans, shaped by the dynamic landscape of sports broadcasting (Karg et al., 2019). Consequently, another key challenge in the country is the changing patterns of sports media consumption among Thai audiences.

Drawing lessons from the football-related events, an important question related to the government's role in managing broadcasting arises: To what extent did the decision-making process align with the country's sports consumption demands? With the transition to digital media, audience behaviors have shifted dramatically. In Thailand, changing viewer preferences in sports consumption pose a significant challenge for sports media providers, particularly in an era of rapid technological innovation and increased access to diverse platforms.

Understanding the profile of sports viewership is essential not only for developing effective sports broadcasting policies but also for informing strategic decisions by sports media enterprises.

However, domestic research on sports media consumption among Thai audiences remains scarce. Comprehensive studies employing rigorous, consensus-based data collection methods are extremely limited, despite their critical role in guiding government investments in sports broadcasting. Although numerous studies have examined micro-level sports event media consumption, most findings pertain only to specific sports associations and contexts due to small sample sizes (Thaijo, 2025). Consequently, Thai sports policymakers face challenges in formulating effective policies to support the country's sports enthusiasts. Moreover, inefficiencies in sports broadcasting investments overlook the potential benefits of sports events, which generate positive externalities by promoting physical activity and thereby reducing health-related expenditures (Poort & Baarsma, 2016; Solberg, 2007).

DISCUSSION

After the emergence of digital transformation in the sports industry, the landscape of sports broadcasting in Thailand faces several complex challenges. These include the roles of government agencies in managing sports broadcasting programs, rising costs of sports viewership, and limited research on viewer preferences in sports consumption to guide policymakers.

This section provides a critical analysis of the current issues, situates the findings within the theoretical discussion, and examines sports broadcasting in other countries through the lens of public economics, presenting implications for policymakers. It also offers recommendations for future advancements grounded in this framework and outlines directions for future research to address persistent challenges in the field.

Theoretical Discussion on Thailand's Sports Broadcasting Policy

According to current issues in sports broadcasting in Thailand, one notable challenge during the 2022 FIFA World Cup was the black screen problem, which prevented viewers from watching live international sports on free-to-air television (Thongmeensuk, 2022). This issue occurred when True Corporation, the official copyright holder for FIFA 2022 in Thailand, filed lawsuits against several Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) box providers. These providers had relied on the must-carry rule to broadcast World Cup matches without obtaining True's permission. In response, the Intellectual Property Court issued a temporary protection order, blocking the unauthorized live broadcast of the tournament (Thongmeensuk, 2022). As a result, IPTV box users experienced black screens during the event. This incident highlights the broader challenge posed by exclusive broadcasting rights held by private companies, which can limit public access to major sporting events – a challenge that originates from the roles of government agencies in managing sports broadcasting programs.

In this case, although several government agencies invested vast sums of money to acquire broadcasting rights from FIFA, questions have arisen regarding the transparency of broadcasting rights allocation and the benefits to sports audiences in the nation. If government agencies aim to support sports viewership through such investments, these decisions require careful consideration.

In fact, government agencies play a key role in formulating public policies to ensure the equitable dissemination of information as a public service (Suppadilok, 2008), with the objective of maximizing societal welfare. According to Lupien (2017), as the institution responsible

for safeguarding the common interests of the people, the government must actively promote pluralism in sports broadcasting, ensuring coverage of diverse sporting events, such as competitions for people with disabilities and sports featuring female athletes, while maintaining operations free from political influence.

Additionally, Cwynar (2017) suggests that the government should support the transmission of sporting events beyond those driven by the private sector. This approach helps establish a social stance by fostering cultural values, diversity, and equality in public media access. However, the current landscape of sports broadcasting in Thailand appears to fall short of this ideal.

When addressing government spending to maximize societal welfare, the principles of public economics provide a widely accepted framework for determining the government's role in producing and distributing goods and services (Stiglitz & Rosengard, 2015). In line with this perspective, and similar to the argument by Gratton and Solberg (2007), this framework extends to the management of sports event broadcasting programs to ensure the maximization of public benefits.

According to the theory of public economics, sports event programs are considered merit goods – products that the government produces and distributes to stimulate consumption and ensure that supply meets societal demand (Fiorito & Kollintzas, 2004). These programs generate positive externalities; for example, sports competitions can inspire viewers to exercise, ultimately promoting better health, enhancing quality of life, and increasing workplace productivity. Additionally, Gratton and Solberg (2007) and Poort and Baarsma (2016) added that sports can foster a strong national identity and promote unity. Furthermore, government intervention in sports broadcasting should prioritize sports broadcasting programs that yield societal benefits. Similarly, Chutiphongdech and Ploychankul (2023) argued that this approach can lead to broader advantages such as promoting education and enhancing social equality.

If the government enacts public policies that diverge from the intended rationale of benefiting civil society, the implementation may lead to excessively high costs. Allocating a significant portion of the budget to acquiring expensive broadcasting rights for sporting events is unnecessary when the private sector can fulfill this role. The government's involvement in managing sports broadcasting rights using substantial public funds contradicts the principles of public economics theory. This is because such investment incurs opportunity costs – resources allocated to purchasing broadcasting rights could instead be used to produce goods or services that yield greater societal benefits and generate positive public impact. This paradigm highlights the need for a balanced approach that protects the public interest while fostering private sector investment.

State agencies should not compete with the private sector but instead focus on presenting sports programs in a non-commercial manner, allowing the private sector to lead in allocating broadcasting rights. Additionally, the state should act as a facilitator to ensure fair competition within the private sector. Therefore, its involvement in broadcasting sports activities without clear evidence of societal benefits is not appropriate, and given the state's limited budget, allocating the entire budget to such activities is not advisable.

Moreover, Chutiphongdech and Ploychankul (2023) suggested that the government's role in sports program broadcasting should be that of a regulator rather than an operator managing the rights itself. Diverting government agencies from their core operational objectives towards direct involvement in broadcasting may raise concerns about the efficiency of public budget utilization. For instance, in the case of the allocation of broadcasting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, managed by the SAT, questions arose regarding the request for funding from the NBTC and the subsequent granting of exclusive broadcasting rights to a single private entity.

Additionally, when government agencies engage in investments alongside the private sector, such joint ventures should aim to lower the cost of sports activities for the public. Moreover, the government should prioritize the promotion of sports activities that align with public interest but are not commercially marketed by the private sector.

However, according to Malkawi (2006), granting a single private entity exclusive rights to broadcast popular sports events can diminish overall societal welfare, as the costs imposed on the public may exceed those determined by market mechanisms. Ultimately, the production and broadcasting of sports events may also generate negative externalities, such as reinforcing values and behaviors that encourage copyright infringement.

Therefore, if the government can empirically demonstrate that these events are in high demand among the majority of society, are culturally significant, and are closely tied to national identity, it should take responsibility for identifying sports events of public importance.

Sports Broadcasting in an International Context

In an international context, sports broadcasting management varies significantly across countries, shaped by governance structures, funding models, and cultural priorities. Although no universal approach exists, several common patterns and challenges can be observed. For example, Singapore, recognized as one of the Southeast Asian countries with comparatively effective sports broadcasting policies (Chutipongdech & Ploychankul, 2023; Thanee, 2018), has introduced an Anti-Siphoning List to safeguard public access to major sporting events (Media Development Authority of Singapore & Singapore Sports Council, 2012).

Singapore has implemented an Anti-Siphoning List policy for major sporting events, similar to Australia's approach. However, it has primarily adopted the United Kingdom's model, particularly in the categorization of sporting events, to align with public viewing preferences and the country's cultural characteristics (Media Development Authority of Singapore & Singapore Sports Council, 2012; Ritchie, 1996). The purpose of this list is to safeguard Singaporean viewers' access to events of public interest and national significance.

Australia's Anti-Siphoning List designates specific sporting events as important to the public, ensuring they are not monopolized by private entities (Noll, 2007; Solberg, 2008). This regulation guarantees equitable access to these events for the Australian public. Similarly, the UK enforces the Listed Events Legislation, preventing any single private entity from monopolizing the broadcasting of major sports events (Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2015). The UK ensures that sports programming reaches the majority of the population by selecting events accessible to at least 95% of viewers and broadcasting them free of charge on Free-to-Air Television (Thanee, 2018). Sporting events in the UK are divided into two categories:

- Group A: Events with full live coverage protection, ensuring they are broadcast live for free. These include the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup finals, UEFA European Championship finals, Wimbledon finals, and more.
- Group B: Events with secondary coverage protection, allowing exclusive live coverage on pay-TV but ensuring free delayed broadcasts.

Singapore's Anti-Siphoning List, influenced by both Australia and the UK, similarly classifies events into two categories (Media Development Authority of Singapore & Singapore Sports Council, 2012):

- Category A: Subscription TV licensees cannot acquire exclusive rights – whether live or delayed – to broadcast all or part of the program.
- Category B: Subscription TV licensees can acquire exclusive live rights but not exclusive delayed rights.

This policy imposes restrictions on exclusive broadcasting rights for private sporting events (Thanee, 2018). The selection of events on the Anti-Siphoning List is based on thorough studies, with domestic viewership as a key consideration (Channel News Asia, 2022). To ensure public access, the government allows Mediacorp to broadcast selected events live at no cost. Notable events available for free-to-air viewing include the Asian Games, the F1 Singapore Grand Prix, and select FIFA World Cup matches.

These policies share a common rationale grounded in public economics principles – to maximize societal welfare by ensuring equitable access to culturally significant sports events. For Thailand, where the 2022 FIFA World Cup sparked public controversy over high costs and exclusive rights granted to a single provider (True Corporation), these international examples underscore the importance of regulatory frameworks that prioritize accessibility over monopolistic practices. Unlike Singapore, Thailand's removal of the World Cup from its must-have rule has shifted the cost burden to consumers, creating barriers for lower-income viewers and undermining the merit good rationale of sports broadcasting.

Implications for Policymakers

Adopting a modified Anti-Siphoning approach, tailored to Thailand's cultural context, could mitigate these challenges. For instance, Thai policymakers could develop a dynamic event classification system – similar to Singapore's Category A and B lists – that identifies which events should remain freely accessible due to their cultural importance (e.g., FIFA World Cup matches, Asian Games, and popular domestic leagues like Thai League). This strategy would not only prevent excessive reliance on public funds for rights acquisition but also reduce inequalities in access by ensuring that high-demand events remain available to all viewers.

Furthermore, the government must ensure that key sporting events remain freely accessible while preventing private entities from obtaining exclusive broadcasting rights, which would otherwise increase the cost of access for sports fans. In doing so, government agencies can leverage sports event programming to generate ongoing positive externalities by supporting the production of merit goods. Additionally, the selection of these events should be modern, transparent, and regularly updated to accurately reflect societal needs, following the approach implemented in Singapore.

In this context, Thailand consecutively faces emerging interrelated challenges in shaping its sports broadcasting policy. A key issue arising from the allocation of sports broadcasting by the Thai government is determining which types of sports programs broadcasting government agencies should invest in.

With the ongoing digital transformation influencing sports fan behavior, the lack of empirical research on Thai audiences' sports media consumption preferences poses significant challenges for policymakers, as highlighted by Thaijo (2025). Since government-managed sports broadcasting is intended to function as a public good that delivers positive societal impacts, these programs should reflect the nation's cultural characteristics, as suggested by Fujak et al. (2024) and Li et al. (2025). If the majority of the public enjoys certain sports, these events should be made freely accessible.

However, public demand for sports programs is diverse, as advocated by Nalbantis and Kühne (2024). Studying audience preferences will enable the government to develop public policies with a broad societal impact. Balancing the reality of public demand with the ideal objectives of government agencies – ensuring sports broadcasting aligns with majority preferences while maintaining economic value – remains a complex task.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the current issues and challenges in sports broadcasting in Thailand through multiple mini-case studies of football-related events, supported by a historical review of sports broadcasting policy developments. Using a documentary research design with deductive content analysis, the study identified several challenges stemming from persistent structural and policy-related gaps, offering lessons and insights that can inform future policy development.

The document analysis revealed several key themes regarding issues and challenges in the country's sports broadcasting sector: the roles and responsibilities of government agencies in managing sports broadcasting programs, the escalating costs of sports viewership, and the limited availability of research on viewer preferences in sports consumption – an essential foundation for evidence-based policymaking.

Drawing on these findings and in response to the current issues and challenges, the study argues that state authorities should position themselves primarily as facilitators or regulators rather than as market actors investing substantial public resources in sports broadcasting rights, and that all policy decisions should be grounded in strong evidence. Such evidence should include assessments of the market structure of sports broadcasters – particularly to prevent monopolistic practices that could further drive up prices for viewers – along with analyses of the types of sports events that align with citizens' interests and cultural contexts, and empirical data on viewer preferences and consumption behaviors. Strengthening the evidence base in these areas would significantly enhance the development and refinement of sports broadcasting policy in Thailand.

By framing these findings within the public economics perspective, this research contributes to the sports broadcasting literature through its integrated approach, combining historical policy analysis with case-based insights to uncover both long-standing and emerging challenges in the digital era. The study highlights the socio-political and economic dimensions of broadcasting policies and provides a nuanced understanding of how government interventions, market dynamics, and technological shifts interact in shaping sports media consumption.

Beyond the Thai context, the findings hold broader relevance for countries facing similar policy dilemmas in balancing public access with commercial interests in sports broadcasting. Lessons drawn from Thailand's experience can guide policy development in other developing nations transitioning to digital broadcasting ecosystems. In doing so, this study not only enriches academic discourse on sports media governance but also offers implications for policymakers and industry stakeholders seeking to promote fairness, sustainability, and accessibility in sports broadcasting.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. While the research provides an overview of the current issues and challenges in sports broadcasting in Thailand, the use of documentary analysis carries inherent limitations. These include restricted access to certain

documents and the inability to capture active participation or real-time perspectives from policymakers.

Future research could adopt additional qualitative data collection methods – such as in-depth interviews with policymakers, regulators, and private-sector stakeholders involved in sports broadcasting – to obtain richer insights into the issues identified. Incorporating such approaches would supplement and deepen the evidence base, thereby strengthening future research and supporting more informed policy decision-making in the field.

Furthermore, future research on Thailand's sports broadcasting landscape should prioritize consensus-based studies to assess sports media preferences at a macro level, as recommended by Fujak et al. (2024) and Karg et al. (2019). Investigating preferences in sports media consumption is essential for understanding the dynamics of the sports industry. By analyzing the motives, limitations, and behaviors of sports media consumers, academics can offer insights into sports consumption and how it might be enhanced for both economic and cultural advantages. Such research assists stakeholders, including broadcasters, sports organizations, and marketers, in customizing their strategies to efficiently address customer expectations.

In particular, these studies provide clear guidance on the role of government agencies in managing sports program broadcasting to reduce the cost of accessing sports event programs for the public, allowing the positive externalities of these programs – such as improved health and increased physical activity – to be realized (Tian et al., 2023). From a policy perspective, research findings can influence decisions regarding broadcasting rights and financial support for sports programming. Understanding the content preferences of sports enthusiasts helps right-holders create optimal engagement strategies, potentially boosting revenue through sponsorship and advertising. Examining sports media consumption across demographics helps identify trends and preferences, informing policy-making agencies on efficient content investments and promotional strategies.



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