

**Construction and Implications of Cannabis Discourse in Thailand's Cannabis
Legalization: A Comparative Study of English-language Traditional and New Media**
การประกอบสร้างและความหมายโดยนัยของวาทกรรมกัญชาที่ปรากฏในการทำกฎหมาย
ในประเทศไทย: กรณีศึกษาเปรียบเทียบสื่อดั้งเดิมและสื่อสมัยใหม่ที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ

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ABSTRACT

Although news reports about cannabis legalization in Thailand were published on medical cannabis, several different discourses appeared on the legalization within traditional and new media sources. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to examine how English-language texts in both newspaper reports and social media posts were constructed linguistically to either support or oppose the legalization of cannabis in Thailand found in both newspaper reports and on social media posts. This study used qualitative research in the form of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main theoretical framework in which texts were analyzed using a linguistic analysis tool. The finding suggests that cannabis discourse has been constructed around it being an economic crop, a national property protected for only Thais, a benefit to patients, a traditional medicine, and a commodity to be normalized within the pro-movement sources. These include both the Bangkok Post Newspaper and the Highland Network Page, within which the discourses are related to economic, social, cultural, political, and scientific dimensions. Regarding the representation of cannabis as a traditional medicine, there exists an outstanding discourse in the Thai context, which had rarely been found in previous studies. However, the Highland Network Page tends to provide only the positive side of cannabis and cannabis legalization. Although the negative implications of cannabis were mostly found in the Bangkok Post, anti-movement content was not explicitly reported. The construction of cannabis discourse also reveals the movement of social actors. These include patients and activists campaigning against hegemony, farmers in an unfair economic system, healthcare system problems, and stigmatized cannabis users in Thailand.

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บทคัดย่อ

แม้ว่าข่าวการทำให้กัญชาเป็นสิ่งที่ถูกต้องตามกฎหมายในประเทศไทยได้ประกอบสร้างขึ้นโดยเกี่ยวข้องกับกัญชาทางการแพทย์ แต่ยังมีวาทกรรมอื่น ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการแก้ไขกฎหมายนี้ทั้งในสื่อดั้งเดิมและสื่อสมัยใหม่ งานวิจัยนี้จึงมุ่งเน้นเพื่อศึกษาด้วยทฤษฎีวาทกรรมที่พบในหนังสือพิมพ์และสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ว่ามีการประกอบสร้างทางภาษาเพื่อสนับสนุนหรือต่อต้านการทำกัญชาให้ถูกกฎหมายในไทยอย่างไร งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้เป็นงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพที่ใช้การวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมเชิงวิพากษ์เป็นกรอบทฤษฎีหลัก ซึ่งใช้เครื่องมือทางภาษาในการวิเคราะห์ด้วยบทความ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ในการเคลื่อนไหวสนับสนุนการแก้ไขกฎหมายที่ปรากฏทั้งในหนังสือพิมพ์บางกอกโพสต์ และสื่อสังคมออนไลน์เพจไฮแลนด์เน็ตเวิร์ก กัญชาได้ประกอบสร้างให้เป็นพืชที่มีคุณค่าทางเศรษฐกิจ ธรรมชาติของชาติที่ต้องปกป้องให้คนไทยเท่านั้น สิทธิประโยชน์ของผู้ป่วย ยาแผนโบราณ และสิ่งที่เป็นปกติ ซึ่งวาทกรรมต่าง ๆ นี้มีความเชื่อมโยงกับมิติทางเศรษฐกิจ สังคม วัฒนธรรม การเมือง และวิทยาศาสตร์ นอกจากนี้กัญชาที่นำเสนอในฐานะที่เป็นยาแผนโบราณเป็นวาทกรรมที่มีความโดดเด่นที่พบในบริบทของไทยซึ่งแทบจะไม่พบในงานวิจัยก่อนหน้านี้ อย่างไรก็ตามสื่อสังคมออนไลน์เพจไฮแลนด์เน็ตเวิร์กมีแนวโน้มนำเสนอกัญชาและการทำกัญชาให้ถูกกฎหมายไปทางบวกเท่านั้น ถึงแม้ว่ากัญชาที่มีความหมายโดยนัยไปทางลบจะพบในหนังสือพิมพ์บางกอกโพสต์ แต่ไม่พบเนื้อหาที่ต่อต้านอย่างชัดเจน การประกอบสร้างวาทกรรมที่เกี่ยวกับกัญชายังเผยให้เห็นถึงการเคลื่อนไหวของผู้กระทำการทางสังคม เช่น ผู้ป่วยและนักเคลื่อนไหวที่รณรงค์ต่อต้านอำนาจที่ครอบงำอยู่ เกษตรกรในระบบเศรษฐกิจที่ไม่เป็นธรรม ปัญหาระบบสาธารณสุข และผู้ใช้กัญชาที่ถูกตีตราในประเทศไทย

Introduction

Today, cannabis is legal for medical purposes in Europe, South America, Australia, Canada, and 29 states in the US. Furthermore, some countries have legalized it for recreation, such as Uruguay (Sanyanusin, 2018). With academic studies revealing that marijuana extracts can be used as medical treatments for some symptoms, there was an attempt to amend Thailand's 1979 Narcotic Drugs Act. In May 2018, both the Cabinet and the Prime Minister's Office of Narcotics Control Board supported the amendment allowing human testing of medical cannabis ("Bangkok Post: Tiny step in drug reform," 2018). The amended 2019 Narcotics Act was finally endorsed and published in the Royal Gazette on 20 February 2019, resulting in the legalization of marijuana for medical purposes and research ("Pot amendment signed into law," 2019). However, cannabis remains illegal, and recreational purpose is still prohibited in Thailand. Along with the movement to amend the Act, some social groups have called for full cannabis liberalization to harvest and use it domestically. Although most news reports of the law amendment in Thailand are constructed on medical cannabis, several discourses in traditional and new media are associated with supporting and opposing cannabis legalization.

Historical and political background of cannabis in Thailand

According to the article "History of Cannabis Use and Anti-Marijuana Laws in Thailand," Blair (2011) explained the history of cannabis as known as "*ganja*" in Thailand through cultural and political dimensions. He claimed that cannabis had been used as a part of Thai culture for a long time. It could be found in the forms of an ingredient, a condiment in Thai dishes, a traditional medicine, and a source of fiber. He also cited the Thai Institute of Healing Arts, which described cannabis as an "analgesic and sedative to control pain" (p.1). With these properties, cannabis had been historically used among traditional Thai practitioners to treat several symptoms.

Cannabis used for recreational purposes is historically associated with the Vietnam War in the 1960s in which the United States military used Thailand as the primary base for its American soldiers. Blair (2011) stated that US soldiers had been smoking marijuana since their arrival in 1963. Although there is no documented proof of cannabis use among American soldiers based in Thailand, there are reports that US soldiers serving in Vietnam had a taste for cannabis. Consequently, it is conceivable that Thai entrepreneurs served their demand for cannabis. Because of the popularity of cannabis use in the US, hundreds of tons of “Thai stick,” a cannabis product, were globally distributed from the late 1960s through 1988 (p.2). The influence of cannabis use among the US soldiers reflected through slang vocabulary remaining in today’s mainstream contexts. For example, it is believed that the word “bong” is originated from Thailand’s Northeastern dialectic word “baung,” a term used to refer to a device for smoking marijuana. Similar to other countries at that time, Thailand had no laws prohibiting cannabis use or possession. The Narcotics Act BE 2465, Thailand’s first anti-drug law, was introduced in 1922 due to the League of Nations International Opium Convention of 1912, for which Thailand was one of the original signatories.

Cannabis Discourse

In previous studies, cannabis discourse has been constructed in relation to the gateway drug theory, cannabis addiction, adolescent cannabis use, medical marijuana, cannabis legalization, juridical discourse, economic discourse, and recreational discourse. The mentioned discourses are based on Levine’s book (Levine, 2018) entitled *Cannabis Discourse: Facts and Opinions in Context* and other studies reviewed for this research.

1. The Gateway Drug Theory

The gateway drug theory or the gateway drug hypothesis, as it is called by some scholars, is one of the main claims from the anti-cannabis movement, which assumes that people will experiment with harder or more dangerous drugs if cannabis is legalized. However, Osborne and Fogel (2017), with supported from earlier studies, disagreed with this gateway drug theory. Similar to alcohol and tobacco, they claimed that there is no pharmacological property causing cannabis users to seek harder drugs.

2. Cannabis Addiction

There are pro- and anti-arguments regarding cannabis addiction. As for the pro-movement, alcohol is always compared with cannabis, which is less dangerous and does not have withdrawal symptoms of alcohol. In addition, Sanberg (2012) stated that alcohol is frequently compared with cannabis because “alcohol is the legal risk with most in common with cannabis and thus an effective comparison” (p. 379).

3. Adolescent Cannabis Use

In today’s cannabis discourse, all agree that marijuana use must not be allowed among adolescents. Furthermore, they should be prevented or delayed from using marijuana until their brain develops to maturity. This claim is similar to Månsson’s study (2016) on discourse construction in newspapers published in 2002 and 2012. It was found that cannabis had been constructed as a social problem in which “cannabis use is part of a “bad life story” usually starting in adolescence” associated with drug use, which cannabis works as a gateway drug and crime (p. 275). The pro-side argues that teenagers still have multiple opportunities for accessing cannabis for consumption. However, there are strict prohibitions causing teenagers to gain criminal records and leading them to serious problems in the future.

4. Medical Marijuana

The term “medical marijuana” is interpreted in various ways. It can refer to the use of marijuana for alleviating medical conditions and symptoms. In addition, it includes cannabis products or potent and synthetic cannabis products developed by licensed pharmaceutical companies. The term is also interpreted as “cannabis prescribed by the doctor” (Levine, 2018, p.145). Medical marijuana has become an interesting issue for society because it is believed to

replace several medicines in the pharmaceutical market. Compared with recently prescribed drugs, a growing number of people believe that it is safer. In addition, the term “medical marijuana” is always discussed with the chemical compounds in cannabis, THC and CBD. Tetrahydrocannabinol, abbreviated as THC, is the main psychoactive chemical compound causing the high, a state of altered consciousness. THC is used to alleviate certain symptoms, for example, pain, asthma symptoms, glaucoma symptoms, and insomnia. On the other hand, cannabidiol or CBD is a non-psychoactive chemical compound used for several medical conditions, for example, anxiety, depression, and cancer.

5. Cannabis Legalization

There is an anti-argument that harder drugs such as cocaine and heroin will be legalized soon after if marijuana is legalized. To prevent that consequence, the argument is that legalizing marijuana should be stopped in order to prevent it from becoming the starting point. On the contrary, Osborne and Fogel (2017) found that most of their participants claimed that they would not increase their cannabis use after the legalization of cannabis because of “their lifestyle controls” and several other activities they would engage in (p. 22).

6. Juridical Discourse

According to Månsson’s study (2016), cannabis is portrayed in print media as relating to “illegal activities (drug dealing, smuggling, illegal consumption) and policing (drug raids, arrests, legal proceedings)” (p. 273). He emphasized that a juridical discourse is used to construct and define cannabis as a problem related to arrests and criminal offenses, according to newspapers published from 2002 and 2012.

7. Economic Discourse

Cannabis is described with the economic benefits emerging as a “new” discourse. Economic discourse is used to construct cannabis users as “customers and actors of a free market” and describe the substance as “an agricultural commercial product” which provides job and business opportunities for growers, distributors, and retailers (Månsson, 2016, p. 278). Similarly, Osborne and Fogel (2017) cited Mulgrew to confirm the benefits of cannabis legalization, which were portrayed that the government could gain tax revenues and economic opportunities similar to alcohol and tobacco.

8. Recreational Discourse

Some studies found that cannabis use is related to recreational activities. Sandberg (2012) found that cannabis users negotiated their stigmatized position by describing their drug use as “sensible” and “recreational” (p. 373). In another study, Hellum (2010) discussed the relationship between cannabis and the backpackers’ discourse. Recreational drug use in this study related to individual experiences and the formation of experiences through discourses in “different narratives such as books, talks, and movies” (p. 169).

9. Normalization Discourse

Dumbili (2020) studied illicit drug normalization in Nigeria and found that risk denial can be viewed as evidence of drug normalization. As for the perception of safeness, referring to cannabis as a “natural” and “harmless” substance is a dominant discourse among participants of the study (p.13).

Cannabis Discourse in Thailand

Cannabis is rarely mentioned in Thai literature. In the article, “Marijuana in the Thai Way of Life: Information from Some Literature,” Chokeyivat (2019) examined some ancient and contemporary Thai literature, including historical documents, documentaries, and semi-documentaries, to find evidence of cannabis use as a part of the lifestyle of Thai people. According to his data, Chokeyivat found that cannabis in Thai literature and historical documents was used among lower-class people. It was represented as a bad thing. In other words, a person using it can be considered a bad person. One significant piece of evidence was found in the *Sepa Khunchang-Khunphan*, classic Thai literature written during the reign of

King Rama II of the Rattana Kosin Period. In the story, with a length of 1,160 pages, cannabis is mentioned as 5 pieces of evidence in the story. All were related to the representation of cannabis users as bad people. In contemporary Thai literature, the researcher emphasized, 'Rong Wongsawan, a well-known Thai writer who explicitly called himself, "a marijuana lover" (Chokevivat, 2019, p. 548). In his autobiographical book *Menu Ban Tai Vang* (literarily means Menu at a House at the Back of a Palace), the writer asked his grandmother whether his neighbor was a good man. Still, she replied that he was emotionally unstable because of being addicted to cannabis. Apart from 'Rong Wongsawan's books, Suwannee Sukhontha, a well-known magazine editor and writer, also wrote a story about his son, who was a victim of drug use in her book, *A story of Namphu*. According to Chokevivat's review, he found that Namphu was first arrested while he was smoking marijuana with his friends.

Thaikla, Pinyopornpanish, Jiraporncharoen, and Angkurawaranon (2018) studied the trends in online information about cannabis and kratom on Facebook in Thailand, where there was discussion regarding cannabis legalization. The data were collected by searching for cannabis and kratom Facebook pages in the Thai language via common search engines from April to November 2015. The data were analyzed by content analysis and categorized by the tone of the post, whether it was positive, negative, or neutral. For the result of this research, it was found that "posts with positive tones and neutral tones were found for both drugs, but none had negative tones" (Thaikla et al., 2018, p. 3). To follow up in the latter year, the tone of the posts was the same. The researchers also found that the sampled Facebook pages provided only positive aspects of cannabis and kratom without giving information about possible negative side effects.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The researcher employed Richardson's method from the book *Analyzing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (2007). Choice of lexis, grammatical structures, rhetorical devices, overall organization, and control of information in the text were analyzed and used as linguistic analysis codes at the text level. Analyzing only texts does not reflect the relationship between texts and society. Consequently, a CDA approach was utilized to find out the relations of texts, hegemony, power, and social relations in discourse through an analysis of three levels of CDA: texts, discursive practice, and social practice. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is a CDA approach used to examine language used as a social practice that constructs "social identities, relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 66).

Fairclough (1992) proposed that the three-dimensional concept of discourse combining three traditional ways of analysis, which are "the tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics, the macrosociological tradition of analyzing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or microsociological tradition of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared commonsense procedures" (p. 72). In other words, there are three dimensions of language used as a communicative event, which are texts, discursive practice, and social practice.

1) Discourse as text

Text analysis and the analysis of discursive practice cannot be separated. When analyzing texts, it is unavoidable to refer to text production and interpretation. However, text analysis can be focused on four main linguistic elements, including "vocabulary," "grammar," "cohesion," and "text structure" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 75).

2) Discursive Practice

Discursive practice can be viewed through the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption which are influenced by social factors. A newspaper article is an example revealing how texts are produced in a specific complicated way in specific social

contexts. The stages of production include “accessing sources such as press agency reports, transforming these sources (often themselves already texts) into a draft report, deciding where to place the report in the newspaper, and editing the report” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 78). In addition, text consumption varies in different social contexts from a simple distribution such as a casual conversation to a complex distribution.

3) Discourse as Social Practice

Discourse as social practice is related to ideology and power, in which power is viewed as hegemony, and power relations can be evolved to a hegemonic struggle. Language is endowed by ideology in several ways at various levels. Fairclough (1992) noted that “ideologies built into conventions may be more or less naturalized and automatized, and people may find it difficult to comprehend that their normal practices could have specific ideological investments” (p. 90). As for the concept of hegemony, Fairclough utilized Gramsci’s analysis of western capitalism and revolutionary strategy in western Europe and defined the term of hegemony as “leadership as much as domination across the economic, political, cultural, and ideological domains of a society” and “the power over society as a whole of one of the fundamental economically-defined classes in alliance with other social forces” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 92).

To summarize, there are three dimensions of language use as a communicative event, which are texts, discursive practice, and social practice. As a result, language should be analyzed through linguistic construction of texts, the creation and perception of the text as discursive practice, and the broad social practice to which the communicative event is associated.

Methods

Data

This study focuses on English-language news reports in the *Bangkok Post* and posts on the *Highland Network* Page. The researcher chose both types of media to compare how language was used to promote opinions toward cannabis legalization in different media platforms, both traditional media and new media. As for printed media, this study’s data focuses on news reports from the database iQNewsClip, which contain the term “cannabis” and “marijuana.” Only 250 news articles were selected from 429 articles because some are not related to cannabis in Thailand or keywords appearing in the synopsis of movies or series in the entertainment columns.

Compared with *Bangkok Post*’s data, most data from the *Highland Network*, Facebook page, were from several domestic and international sources in support of the pro-movement as the aim of the group. In addition to the group’s actions or activities as reported in the content, language use also reflects how they are defined or referred to outside the group. Specifically, they were mentioned as a “cannabis advocate group” (Tun-atiruj, 2018) or “the pro-legalization group” (Quinley, 2018). The data collected included 189 posts on the Facebook page. The posts contained multimodal texts, including written texts, pictures, and VDO clips. However, only verbal texts were analyzed in this study.

As for the period of data collection, the researcher focused on news reports and postings published from February 2018 to February 2020. The mentioned period was chosen because it was the one-year period before and after the amended Narcotics Act was endorsed. This study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) How were English-language texts linguistically constructed to support or oppose cannabis legalization in social media and newspaper reports? (2) What are the differences between cannabis discourses constructed in both platforms? (3) What discourses were used to construct texts in supporting the opinions of both sides? (4) How do social contexts influence text production?

Procedures

The collected data were coded in Atlas.ti, a qualitative data processing program. Codes were analyzed according to discourse relation. As for the data set of the *Bangkok Post* and posts on the *Highland Network*, each article or post was coded in terms of dominant theme of the article or post. The themes and brief descriptions are shown in the following table.

Table 1 Codes of themes assigned for news articles of *Bangkok Post* and postings of *Highland Network*

Theme	Brief Description
Amnesty	Amnesty granted to patients, doctors, or researchers who possess cannabis
Criminological	Crimes related to cannabis, penalties related to cannabis consumption or selling, cannabis mentioned in crime scenes
Event	Cannabis-related events organized by <i>Highland Network</i> or other organizations
Hemp	Hemp collocated with cannabis; hemp described as <i>Cannabis Sativa</i>
In-house Activity	Informal in-house activities of the <i>Highland Network</i>
Legalization	Law amendment, legislation, legalization, liberalization
Medical Cannabis	Activities related to medical cannabis, medical research, medical benefits
Patent-commercial	Patents requested by big companies, patents that commercially benefit applicants, cannabis commercialized by companies
Political Campaign	Campaigns related to cannabis during the election period, campaign or policy proposed by political parties or their members
Product Promotion	Products explicitly or implicitly promoted on the newspaper or page
Side-effect	Risks of cannabis use, negative experiences of cannabis use
Traditional Medical	Cannabis mentioned as traditional medicine, history of cannabis as medicine, cannabis in culture
Other	Articles or posts that do not match any themes.

As for content analysis, written texts were analyzed in detail by coding sentences with forty-seven specific codes as shown on the following tables. Most content codes were created to examine texts based on the reviewed cannabis discourse and other circulated discourses around the term “cannabis” with the expectation that the researcher possibly found certain discourses similar to previous studies.

Table 2 Codes of content analysis assigned for both sets of data

Content Code	Brief Description
Amnesty	Amnesty granted to patients, doctors, or researchers who possess cannabis
Anti-movement	Statements or opinions opposed cannabis legalization
Big company	Companies that attempt to gain benefits from cannabis legalization
Business opportunities as an economic crop	Cannabis constructed as an economic crop that is expected to provide business opportunities
Cancer claim	Cannabis claimed to cure or treat cancer symptoms
Cannabis addiction	Cannabis represented as an addictive drug
Cannabis related to hemp	Cannabis collocated with hemp

Table 2 (Cont.)

Content Code	Brief Description
Cannabis related to other drugs	Cannabis collocated with other drugs
Cannabis represented as an illegal drug	Cannabis represented or mentioned as an illegal drug
Celebrity involving drugs	Famous people mentioned in news reporting as suspects involving cannabis as an illegal drug
Commercial purpose	Cannabis benefiting for commercial purposes
Comparing or referring to other countries	Cannabis legalization in other countries, cannabis use in other countries
Comparing with alcohol	Risks of cannabis compared with alcohol, comparison of law restriction applied with cannabis and alcohol
Debating	Arguments or different opinions regarding cannabis legalization or advantages of cannabis
Educational purpose	Cannabis used for educational purposes
Event	Reports or announcements about commercial and non-commercial events related to cannabis
Farmer opportunity	Cannabis represented as opportunities for farmers
Farmer related to cannabis	Cannabis related to farmers or activities of farmers
Foreigner involving drug crimes	Foreigners reported in illegal activities
Government	Statements or comments of government, actions of the government, the government mentioned in news reporting
Harmless drug	Cannabis represented as a harmless substance
Hemp	Hemp mentioned in news reporting, hemp collocated with cannabis
Herb	Cannabis represented as an herb
Historical claim	Cannabis related to history, cannabis as a part of history
Law	Law amendment, legislation, legalization, liberalization, legal restriction, penalties
Medical cannabis	Cannabis represented as medicine
Not farmer opportunity	Cannabis represented as not providing opportunities for farmers
Other disease claims	Cannabis claimed to be able to cure or treat other diseases
Other interpretations of cannabis	Other interpretations or representations of cannabis
Patent	Patent requesting, activities against patent requests of companies
Patient benefit	Cannabis represented as patient benefits, cannabis needs of patients, activities protecting patient benefits
Political involvement	Involvement or intervention of government, political parties or party members, movements done by political actors
Post-legalization	Actions that occurred after legalizing medical cannabis
Pro-advocates & movement	Actions or activities done by cannabis advocates, opinions, or statements of cannabis advocates
Product	Product sales content, posts showing products for sale

Table 2 (Cont.)

Content Code	Brief Description
Recreation	Recreational cannabis, activities implying cannabis used for recreational purposes
Relation to other drugs	Cannabis mentioned with other drugs, cannabis collocated with other drugs
Research purpose	Cannabis used for research purposes
Scientific research support	Cannabis benefits supported by scientific research
Side effect	Risks of cannabis, negative experiences caused by cannabis
Social actor	Anyone who engages in intentional action of cannabis movement
Sponsor	Posting that promotes sponsors of the page
Thailand's healthcare	Healthcare policy related to cannabis; cannabis involved healthcare system
THC vs. CBD	Cannabis described or defined as THC and CBD, effects of THC and CBD, chemical actions of THC and CBD
Traditional medicine	Cannabis represented as traditional medicine, cannabis in history, cannabis in culture
University	University involving cannabis projects or research
War on drugs	War-on-drug policy, activities involving war-on-drug policy, government actions following war-on-drug policy

As for this study's linguistic analysis, the researcher employed Richardson's method in the book *Analyzing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. Choice of lexis, grammatical structures, rhetorical devices, overall organization, and control of information in the text were analyzed at the text level. Codes used for linguistic analysis are listed in the following table.

Table 3 Codes of linguistic analysis assigned for both sets of data

Linguistic Analysis Code	Brief Description
Lexical Analysis: Naming & Reference	Naming or labeling a person(s) in a social category such as "a father" and "a foreigner"
Lexical Analysis: Predication	Predicational strategies used to describe the values and characteristics of social actors; for example, a specific form of reference, attributes, predicates, and collocation
Sentence Construction: Syntax and transitivity	The use of noun phrases, the verb phrase, adverbial and prepositional phrases to represent the relationship between participants and their roles
Sentence Construction: Modality	The use of modal verbs; for example, may, could, should, will, and must
Presupposition	The use of certain words; the definite article and possessive articles; wh-questions; and noun and adjective to convey presupposed meaning
Rhetorical tropes: Hyperbole	A word or phrase used to exaggerate for rhetorical effect

Table 3 (Cont.)

Linguistic Analysis Code	Brief Description
Rhetorical tropes: Metaphor	A word or phrase metaphorically used such as “tiger economies”
Rhetorical tropes: Metonym	A word or phrase used to substitute for another to which it is related
Rhetorical tropes: Neologism	A word newly created or coined, or an existing word or phrase given a new meaning
Rhetorical tropes: Pun	The humorous use of a word or phrase
Narrative	The use of a narrative technique for news reporting

Data Analysis and Findings

The following section reveals how language is used to construct cannabis discourse in print and online media.

The construction of cannabis in Bangkok Post’s news reporting

According to the data from *Bangkok Post*, it is found that the number of news articles implying pro-movement is far more than ones implying anti-movement. There are no news articles explicitly reporting from the side of anti-movement. Most news articles reporting about cannabis in selecting data are devoted to the benefits of legalizing cannabis in Thai society. Only six articles emphasized the side effects of using cannabis. Although the pros and cons of cannabis legalization were unequally reported, the representations of cannabis in news articles are not totally positive. When categorizing news articles into specific themes, it is found that the word “marijuana” and “cannabis” can be mostly found in the criminological theme. Seventy-three of 250 news articles reported cannabis as an illegal drug in crime scenes. In this sense, the reader could perceive the negative implication of cannabis through news reporting cannabis as an illegal drug and its side effects. The number of news articles categorized by themes is shown in the following table.

Table 4 Number of news articles and percentage categorized by news themes

News Themes	Number of articles	Percentage
Criminological	73	29.20
Medical Cannabis	48	19.20
Political Campaign	40	16.00
Legalization	27	10.80
Patent-Commercial	22	8.80
Other	11	4.40
Traditional Med	10	4.00
Hemp	8	3.20
Side-effect	6	2.40
Amnesty	5	2.00
Event	0	0.00
In-house Activity	0	0.00
Product Promotion	0	0.00
Total	250	100.00

Although the theme of each article can be considered by the dominant content, cannabis discourse in the texts is not constructed homogeneously. Several implications and discourses were found in a news article, and they were intertextual across news themes or genres. All reviewed discourses such as cannabis legalization or recreational discourse in previous studies were found in the data, but those discourses could be grouped how they were used to represent the term “cannabis” and “marijuana” positively and negatively. When analyzing in detail with content codes, the positive and negative implications of cannabis can be classified as the following table. It is crucial to note that news articles may contain more than one implication for cannabis. Furthermore, there are relations among content codes such as superordinates and subordinates, but only the content codes that dominate implications are shown in the table.

Table 5 Number of articles and related content codes categorized by cannabis implications

Cannabis Implications	Number of related news articles (250 news articles)	Related content codes (2,022 coded texts)
Positive implications		
economic crop	58 (23.20%)	Business opportunities as an economic crop (11/0.53%), Commercial purpose (110/5.30%), Farmer opportunity (19/0.92%), Farmer related to cannabis (16/0.77%)
national property protected for only Thais	31 (12.40%)	Big company (41/1.98%), Patent (57/2.75%)
patient benefit	116 (46.40%)	Cancer claim (65/3.13%), Medical cannabis (158/7.61%), Other disease claims (61/2.94%), patient benefit (123/5.93%)
traditional medicine	70 (28.00%)	Herb (23/1.11%), Historical claim (5/0.24%), Traditional medicine (152/7.32%)
normal thing	72 (28.80%)	Comparing or referring to other countries (84/4.05%), Comparing with alcohol (6/0.29%), Hemp (24/1.16%), Pro-advocates & movement (60/2.89%), THC vs. CBD (23/1.11%)
Negative implications		
recreational cannabis	53 (21.20%)	Celebrity involving drugs (15/0.72%), Foreigner involving drug crimes (10/0.48%), Recreation (64/3.08%)
gateway drug	60 (24.00%)	Cannabis related to other drugs (59/2.84%), War on drugs (32/1.54%)
cannabis addiction	9 (3.60%)	Cannabis addiction (10/0.48%)
negative side effects	23 (9.20%)	Side effect (41/1.98%)

Positive implications of cannabis in the pro-movement

In the data, the implications of cannabis in pro-movement are constructed as an economic crop, a national interest protected for only Thais, patient benefits, and a normal thing which are

related to an economic discourse, a medical marijuana discourse, and a normalization discourse.

1. Cannabis as an economic crop

Similar to Månsson's economic discourse (2016), instances of the pro-cannabis movement in Thailand found in news reporting include claims that legalizing cannabis can provide commercial opportunities for several parts of society, especially farmers. At the lexical level, cannabis is described or implied as an economic crop and providing business opportunities. Noun phrases found in news articles include "a new cash crop for the country," "an economic plant," and "the high value plant." Some words are also metaphors, such as "green gold" and "the green rush." In addition, some can be viewed as hyperboles such as "a new cash crop" and "the biggest opportunities for entrepreneurs." The economic benefits of cannabis can also be implied through predication; for example, "reap significant benefits from the export of medical marijuana" and "reap vast economic benefits from the weed trade."

The most significant implication in news reporting is that the benefit of cannabis legalization belongs to Thai farmers. In other words, it is the opportunity of farmers. News reporting usually emphasizes farmers as a social group that can benefit the most from cannabis legalization. The examples of noun phrases with the word "farmer" are "a new opportunity for farmers" and "new employment opportunities for farmers." There are also predicates stating cannabis benefits to farmers, for example, "tried many ways to find out solutions for problems of people, especially farmers" and "can make farmers rich!" It can be implied that law is the limitation that obstructs farmers from accessing opportunities for a better life.

2. Cannabis as a national property protected for only Thais

In contrast to economic discourse, this discourse is constructed around news reporting that foreign companies are attempting to patent medical formulas extracted from cannabis. It raises concerns of social groups that they could not access medical cannabis. Foreign companies could monopolize the market. As a result, they claim that cannabis should be perceived as a national property to be protected from non-Thai players. This can be found in predicates of sentences, syntactic structure, and conditional sentences. Example sentences include, "It may also prevent local research if the component being researched overlaps with the components that these companies are trying to patent" (Arunmas & Kongrut, 2018, p. 2). Also, the verb "prevent" was usually used in this context. Applying patents could "prevent" or "obstruct" Thai people from its benefits. This implication is emphasized through clauses, i.e., "patent rights may obstruct Thai researchers "studies on cannabis." Some sentences explicitly convey cannabis as a national property belonging to only Thai people. For example, "all benefits will go to the Thai people and the country" (Laohong, 2018, p. 2). The adjective "Thai" is used to modify noun phrases to emphasize a specific nationality as "us" against "others." Noun phrases implying foreign and big companies as "a threat" include "some big pharma companies that want to dominate our market," "greedy business operators," and "foreign firm's attempt to monopolize prized patents." According to the data, one can notice that the adjective "foreign" and "foreigners" were used to imply the sense of "us" and "the negative other." The proper nouns, including "US-based GW," "Otsuka," and "GW Pharma and Otsuka," were implied in the same sense as non-Thai things.

In news articles urging the rejection of patents requested by private or foreign companies, modalities were found such as "must," "can," "cannot," "should," and "might" which are used in recommendations and requests from activists and advocacy groups proposing how the government or authorities could act to protect the national interest. For example, "the other eight requests must be rejected as they might still violate Section 9(4) of the Patent Act" (Arunmas & Kongrut, 2018, p. 2).

3. *Cannabis as a patient benefit*

Medical cannabis discourse involves cannabis being portrayed as a new hope among patients who find alternative treatments or those who cannot access Thailand's healthcare system. The term "medical cannabis" is used repeatedly in Thailand's English-language newspapers. In this sense, the adjective "medical" has changed the perception of cannabis as medicine used to cure diseases. It is different from the perception of cannabis in the past, which was perceived as an illegal and addictive drug. Furthermore, medical cannabis discourse is constructed in relation to the benefits of patients. The word "patient" is described as a group of people who can benefit from cannabis legalization and need it as an alternative treatment for cancer and other diseases.

In the pro-movement, the critical claim of medical cannabis is that it is used to treat or cure cancer. The word "cancer" is used alone or with other diseases in the sentence. However, there is an ambiguity of how cannabis can be effectively used with cancer patients. According to the data, it is confusing whether cannabis could cure cancer or only be used for treatment. The problem is caused by using the term "cure," "treatment," and "alleviate," leading to ambiguity about how cannabis could be used as medicine. The language use can confuse the readers and may lead them to assume and generalize cannabis having the efficiency of curing cancer without any supporting evidence. In addition to cancer, cannabis is claimed to be effective with other symptoms and diseases; for example, anxiety, epilepsy, Alzheimer's disease, autism, chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, skin disease, hemorrhoids, stress relief, and sleep, including reducing fatigue, sleep anxiety, anti-aging, migraines, and insomnia. Plural noun phrases include "many types of symptoms," "other diseases," "some of the side effects of chemotherapy," "the treatable symptoms," "diseases," and "the advanced stages of illnesses" are used to imply universal benefits of cannabis.

Apart from stating symptoms and plural collective nouns, narratives are used as evidence to prove that cannabis could effectively cure diseases. News reporting usually referred to the personal experiences of cannabis users. They narrated how it made their health condition better. Naming and references are stated to assure the existence of cannabis users. The example of narratives in news reporting is excerpted as follows.

Among those who registered on the final day was a 24-year-old student who gave his name as Song. Song reported that he was in possession of 200 grammes of cannabis, which he said he had been taking for the past five months to help him cope with the two aforementioned problems, migraines and insomnia.

(ID 117:7, Reference: 2270 - 2580)

Although most pro-cannabis news articles portray cannabis as a universal medicine, a few news articles mention that cannabis cannot be used to cure all diseases. Comparing to the number of news articles explicitly or implicitly reporting cannabis as a medicine for several conditions, the number of warning statements is still far less.

4. *Cannabis as traditional medicine*

Cannabis as traditional medicine is an essential claim on which cannabis discourse is constructed in Thai context. It is different from medical cannabis discourse in the US and some countries referred to by previous research. According to the data, cannabis is referred to as "local wisdom," "Thai traditional medicine," "the main ingredient," and "key ingredient." It is claimed as a part of Thai traditional medicine formulas such as "traditional medicinal recipes" and "a key ingredient in Thai traditional medicine."

Along with the claim as traditional medicine, cannabis is represented that it is cultural and historical. The phrases mentioning the specific periods refer to it as a part of culture and history. For example, "the period of King Narai the Great (1656-1688) of Ayutthaya Kingdom"

and “writings from 5,000 years ago indicate that doctors in China...” It is used as a claim that cannabis was found and used in society as traditional medicine for several years back, but society has changed to view it as a narcotic drug. Another linguistic construction found in cannabis discourse as traditional medicine is that cannabis is considered to be an herb instead of a drug. The words “cannabis,” “marijuana,” or “weed” are referred to as herbal ingredients or placed to be understood as an ingredient in traditional medicine. The examples of noun phrases found in news reporting are “other herbal ingredients,” “a traditional herbal medicine,” “herbal medicine,” and “Thai traditional medicine and herbs.” There are also sentences explicitly stating that “They regard the cannabis plant as an herb, not a narcotic drug” (Karnjanatawe, 2019, p. 2).

In addition to the construction of cannabis as traditional medicine, it is found that patients are hopeless with ineffective modern treatment and the Thai healthcare system. Consequently, Mr. Daycha was represented in news reporting as a traditional medicine practitioner fighting against authorities for patients to have their rights to access an alternative treatment. Linguistically, naming and reference are used to construct him as a social actor. In news reporting, Mr. Daycha is referred to as “a traditional medicine practitioner,” “medical marijuana advocate,” “activist,” “a villain to a hero,” “a man with such great courage,” and “founder of the Khaokwan Foundation.” The stories of Mr. Daycha and Daycha’s oil, his cannabis oil, are narrated how he changed his negative perception towards cannabis, discovered cannabis oil formula, experimented with himself, found its effectiveness, and distributed his oil to help cancer patients and patients with other symptoms.

5. Cannabis as a normal thing

In the pro-movement, cannabis is normalized as a common thing perceived by people in several countries. Normalization of cannabis in news reporting is constructed by comparing with other countries, legalizing recreational use of cannabis, and supporting changes in people’s attitudes and opinions in society. In news articles, journalists usually referred to cannabis legalization by comparing it with other countries. Consequently, the reader can interpret that it is normal and similar to other countries worldwide to legalize cannabis. The example sentences are “But as more and more countries amend their laws to allow for medical cannabis” (Beatty, 2020, p. 1) and “In many Western countries, this now is common” (“Bangkok Post: Tiny step in drug reform,” 2018, p. 8). In addition to the noun phrases such as “more and more countries” and “many Western countries,” the names of countries as proper nouns are used to refer to developed countries where cannabis has already been legalized.

Compared with other countries where cannabis is fully legalized, news reporting convinces the reader that legalizing cannabis for medical purposes in Thailand is normal and less extreme than some countries legalizing cannabis for recreational purposes. In other words, legalizing cannabis for medical purposes is just a baby step for Thailand. Names of countries and states as proper nouns are used as developed countries where can go further than Thailand; for example, Canada, Uruguay, Colorado, and California. At the sentence level, the excerpt is quoted as follows.

Considering what is happening in Canada, it’s quite an irony that while we are struggling to have legal marijuana to help our miserable fellows, all adults in Canada can go far as to buy, grow and even consume the weed just for fun.

(ID 58:8, Reference 2351 - 2582)

Cannabis normalization is also constructed on the notion that the opinions and perceptions of people in society towards cannabis have already been changed. News reporting usually supports this point with statistical information from surveys or polls. They revealed that the majority of Thai people support legalizing cannabis for medical purposes. Although

supporting information was conducted from a sample group, it was generalized by the word “Thais” or “people.”

Similar to Dumbili’s study of illicit drug normalization (2020), another way to normalize cannabis is to represent it as a harmless drug. Linguistically, the harmlessness of cannabis is constructed by comparing cannabis with alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, viewing it in a scientific way as chemical components: THC and CBD, and parallelizing cannabis with hemp as the same crop. To illustrate the harmlessness of cannabis, the sources in news articles usually compare cannabis with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs such as morphine because cannabis is less intoxicating or harmful. It assumes that cannabis as a drug with a low rate of addiction could be legalized if society accepts alcohol or tobacco that is more harmful and addictive.

The view of cannabis through chemical compounds, THC and CBD, is another way to change the perception towards cannabis as a medical substance instead of a narcotic drug. When examining cannabis scientifically, cannabis is mentioned or described in relation to hemp as the same harmless plant. The notion of chemical compounds, CBD and THC, illustrates that marijuana and hemp are the same plants with different CBD and THC levels. In the texts, the word “hemp” is placed alongside the word “marijuana” or the scientific name, *Cannabis Sativa*, to lead the reader to the interpretation that it is the same plant. The phrases “similar to cannabis” and “the same plant family as cannabis” are also found in news reporting. It can be interpreted that if hemp is harmless, marijuana could be viewed the same.

When viewing the full picture of cannabis construction, negative representations of cannabis in print media are analyzed in the following section.

Negative implications of cannabis

According to the data, there are very few explicit anti-movement statements or strong evidence found in news articles. It reveals the presence of unbalanced information provided to the reader. Only the positive sides of cannabis legalization were reported in the media. Although the mainstream news reporting conducted during the period of data collection mainly focused on the pro-cannabis movement, implicit negative representations of cannabis can be found in some data related to some reviewed discourses, including recreational discourse, juridical discourse, the gateway drug theory, cannabis addiction, and adolescent cannabis use.

1. Cannabis as recreational cannabis

Although there is a movement for the full liberalization of cannabis, recreational cannabis discourse is constructed with negative connotations on the opposing side. Some social groups still feel the need to limit cannabis use to medical purposes. They believe that recreational use could lead to social and health problems. Consequently, news reporting usually emphasizes that using it for recreation is still illegal in Thailand. The negative portrayal of cannabis users for recreational purposes is also found in an interview of Thailand’s prime minister, Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha, as quoted, “this is not the time to allow people to smoke pot and laugh all day” (“Not all grass is greener,” 2018, p. 8). The quotation also links to health issues caused by recreational uses as stated, “cannabis should not be promoted or labeled as an economic crop for recreational use, as it can be destructive to people’s health” (Hicks, Arunmas, & Sangwongwanich, 2019, p. B2). In news articles, the effects of recreational use are not depicted as individual problems but problems for the society as a whole. It is related to a rise in traffic accidents, increased addiction, and an increase in crimes associated with domestic and international black markets.

Naming and references were also found as linguistic construction relating identities, roles, and characteristics of people in the news to drug trafficking. Thai celebrities such as former singers and actors were reported as suspects involving cannabis, an illicit drug. This can be implied that cannabis can destroy their fame, as well as ruin their lives. Apart from celebrities involved in the drug trade, foreigners as drug suspects were also reported in criminological news. They are described by predication strategy, in other words, using

adjectives to specify their nationalities; for instance, “police arrested a Lebanese national, who is a manager of a hostel, for allegedly possessing marijuana” (Kerdkaew, 2018, p. 4) and “Authorities have arrested an American-Thai teacher for selling marijuana extract oil online” (“Teacher nabbed for selling ganja oil,” 2019, p. 3). The use of adjectives implies people in the news as the un-Thai or the others. It leads to the assumption that recreational cannabis can open the door for foreigners as a threat to the country.

2. *Cannabis as a gateway drug*

When collecting the data with the keywords “cannabis” and “marijuana,” most news articles are found under criminological news. These news articles relate cannabis to Thailand’s war on drugs. In the news reporting about drug arrests, the word “cannabis” or “marijuana” is placed among other drugs, including methamphetamine, ecstasy, kratom, MDMA, cocaine, LSD, ketamine, heroin, crystal meth, and amphetamine. The illegal actions are also related to networks of drug traffickers. It can be assumed with the notion that cannabis is a gateway to harder drugs and illegal actions. In addition to the implication of a gateway drug, cannabis could be accessed by very young people who started trying drugs. In this sense, cannabis is still represented in the media as an illicit drug that is dangerous for people, especially young people.

3. *Cannabis addiction*

Cannabis legalization comes along with the public concern about the increase of cannabis addicts. Linguistically, the word “addictions,” “the high risk of addiction,” and “addicts” were found in data at the lexical level. As for the sentence structure level, the argument is supported by scientific evidence and personal opinions against full liberalization. Scientific shreds of proof claim that the use of cannabis can lead to health problems from addiction to mental illness; for example, “This heightened the risk of addiction and them later developing mental conditions” (“More than 80 kids’ break law’ each day,” 2018, p. 2). As for personal opinions, the interviewees tend to express concerns that fully legalizing cannabis would let everyone be able to access cannabis for recreational purposes leading them to addiction; for example, “If the country were to completely liberalize the use of the drug, the number of people addicted to it for recreational purposes would increase” (Wipatayotin, 2019, p. 2).

4. *Negative side effects of cannabis*

Although there are no news reports explicitly stating against cannabis legalization, a few social actors expressed concerns about the side effects of cannabis, causing individual health problems and social issues because of misusing it. The side effects were reported in cannabis use for both medical and recreational purposes. The quotations from experts as interviewees mentioning the side effects were found in the data as stated, “experts have warned after some studies have shown that cannabis can be a contributing factor to schizophrenia” (“Medical cannabis risks voiced,” 2019, p. 4) and “cannabis oil can come with unwanted side effects” (Pitsuthipan, 2019, p. 1). Apart from the experts’ quotations regarding the side effects of cannabis, narrations from people who experienced the risk of cannabis use were also found in news reporting as in the following excerpt.

By 3 am, Vasu had begun to hallucinate. He saw demons and had a double-vision alongside other symptoms such as a stiff tongue, speech difficulty, limb spasticity, nausea, vomiting and palpitations. In the end, he was rushed to hospital.

(ID 126:5, Reference 258 - 824)

In addition to individuals’ health, social issues, including abuses and accidents, were reported through side effects of cannabis. In news reports, the professionals’ primary concern focuses on a specific group of people, young people. The word “young” was found in the data; for instance, “He explained that cannabis can disrupt brain functions and send people who are

given it, especially those at a young age” (“Docs warn against pot use,” 2019, p. 3). Besides addiction, adolescents are viewed as a vulnerable group who can be abused by using cannabis for recreational purposes. The example of news reports using narration is excerpted as follows.

According to news reports, not long after the 26-year-old model ate the fudgy chocolate cake, she became severely hallucinatory, so much so she was rushed to a hospital in the province before being transferred to Buddhachinaraj Hospital in Phitsanulok. Later, it was found that the brownies were infused with marijuana.

(ID 203:3, Reference 271 - 1459)

The construction of cannabis in Highland Network Page

When examining each post’s general or dominant content, the number of posts is shown in the following table. It is found that the page usually shared articles from third parties and posted about events related to cannabis, such as conferences or events organized by cannabis advocates. Compared with the *Bangkok Post* data, significant content related to negative implications of cannabis, such as criminological news, is rarely found. There are four posts categorized in the criminological theme. However, only one explicit criminological news report was posted on the page. It is found that the majority of the content is related to legalization and commercial activities such as selling their products or tickets for events as found in the theme codes, “Event,” “In-house Activity,” and “Product Promotion.”

Table 6 Comparison between the number of *Bangkok Post*’s articles and *Highland Network*’s posts

News/Post Themes	Number of <i>Bangkok Post</i> ’s articles	Percentage	Number of <i>Highland Network</i> ’s posts	Percentage
Criminological	73	29.20	4	2.12
Medical Cannabis	48	19.20	27	14.29
Political Campaign	40	16.00	1	0.53
Legalization	27	10.80	65	34.39
Patent-Commercial	22	8.80	15	7.94
Other	11	4.40	1	0.53
Traditional Medicine	10	4.00	2	1.06
Hemp	8	3.20	4	2.12
Side-effect	6	2.40	3	1.59
Amnesty	5	2.00	2	1.06
Event	0	0.00	38	20.11
In-house Activity	0	0.00	14	7.41
Product Promotion	0	0.00	13	6.88
Total	250	100.0	189	100.00

Although posts and texts with content codes can be categorized into cannabis implications similar to *Bangkok Post*’s, implications of cannabis as “recreational cannabis,” “a gateway drug,” and “negative side effects” are not conveyed negatively. Due to the *Highland Network*’s pro cannabis angle, cannabis addiction is not mentioned in any posts. As a result, it is difficult to draw a perfect line distinguishing the positive and negative implications of cannabis in *Highland Network*’s data.

Table 7 Number of *Highland Network*'s posts classified by cannabis implications and related content codes

Cannabis Implications	Number of related posts (189 posts)	Related content codes (1,194 coded texts)
economic crop	91 (48.15%)	Business opportunities as an economic crop (36/3.02%), Commercial purpose (160/13.40%), Farmer opportunity (4/0.33%), Farmer related to cannabis (7/0.59%)
national property protected for only Thais	22 (11.64%)	Big Company (53/4.44%), Patent (37/3.10%)
patient benefit	53 (28.04%)	Cancer Claim (20/1.68%), Medical cannabis (73/6.11%), Other disease claims (14/1.17%), Patient benefit (20/1.68%)
traditional medicine	22 (11.64%)	Herb (5/0.42%), Historical claim (27/2.26%), Traditional medicine 15 (1.26%)
normal thing	80 (42.33%)	Comparing or referring to other countries (107/8.96%), Comparing with alcohol (1/0.08%), Hemp (10/0.84%), Pro-advocates & movement (56/4.69%), THC vs. CBD (11/0.92%)
recreational cannabis	28 (14.81%)	Celebrity involving drugs (2/0.17%), Foreigner involving drug crimes (4/0.33%), Recreation (51/4.27%)
gateway drug	30 (15.87%)	Cannabis related to other drugs (19/1.59%), War on drugs (40/3.35%)
cannabis addiction	0 (0.00%)	Cannabis addiction (0/0.0%)
negative side effects	4 (2.12%)	Side effect (8/0.67%)

Positive implications of cannabis in the pro-movement

1. Cannabis as an economic crop

Cannabis as an economic crop is a major claim found in the content posted on the page. Similar to *Bangkok Post*'s news reports, noun phrases were used to describe cannabis as a commercial opportunity, an economic crop. Interestingly, the noun phrase "the biggest cash crop" used to describe a specific purpose of cannabis use, recreational cannabis as the quotation of Mr. Anutin stated, "recreational marijuana in time could become the biggest cash crop in a country that vies with India for the title of the world's largest rice exporter" (Ehrlich, 2019, para. 12). Although there are fewer coded data relating to benefits of cannabis for Thai farmers comparing to the data from *Bangkok Post*, phrases including "farmers who have struggled with drought, floods and unstable prices on rice, rubber, and other crops," "Thai farmers," "other small-scale farmers," and "a grassroots cannabis industry" indicate a specific group of social actors that can benefit cannabis as an economic crop.

2. *Cannabis as a national property protected for only Thais*

The discourse of cannabis as a national property for only Thai people is one major issue posted on the page. It is constructed on protests against cannabis patents requested by foreign companies. The negative consequences expected by social groups, including *Highland Network*, can be viewed through expressions of social actors using modalities. The negative representation of foreign companies and corporate pharmaceutical companies is portrayed through predication. Furthermore, foreign companies' actions were compared with colonization. At the lexical level, the words "dominate," "control," and "squeeze" represent the actions of those companies negatively. The sense of "other" as a national threat can be implied by using the adjective "foreign," adjectives of nationalities, and proper names specifying foreign-language names of non-Thai companies. In this sense, cannabis is portrayed as a national resource threatened by the other. Consequently, there were voices from social actors to stop the requests of those companies. Social attitudes and comments toward this issue are examined through the use of modalities in sentences.

3. *Cannabis as a patient benefit*

The depiction of cannabis as a patient benefit is related to the use of cannabis to treat or cure cancer and other diseases, similar to *Bangkok Post*'s data. The term "medical cannabis" was frequently found in the content posted by *Highland Network* page. Medical cannabis found in the data posted by the *Highland Network* focuses on medical cannabis use for cancer. Scientific studies, experience from users, and confirmation through patents were used in news reports or articles to convince readers of the efficiency of cannabis to treat or cure cancer. The word "studies" was generalized as concrete evidence that the efficiency of cannabis has been scientifically proven. Also, it was used as a verb in the predication. The word "study" can be presupposed that the provided information is reasonable and trustable. The word "evidence" is another word used to confirm the efficiency of cannabis with cancer and other diseases. However, some quotations state that studies have been done in the laboratory, which may not prove the efficiency of cannabis in human beings. Narratives from the experiences of cannabis users are another way to confirm that cannabis can be used for general medical purposes. It is noticeable that the narratives are not first-hand experiences.

Compared with the data from *Bangkok Post*, there are no news articles or contents explicitly mentioning that cannabis cannot be used to cure all diseases. Furthermore, the negative side effects of cannabis use were rarely found in the data. In other words, the *Highland Network* tends to provide only the positive side of medical cannabis.

4. *Cannabis as traditional medicine*

Similar to *Bangkok Post*, cannabis depicted as traditional medicine is related to culture and history. Moreover, *Highland Network*'s contents were related to religion, which was not found in *Bangkok Post*'s data. As for cultural and historical claims, it was usually related that cannabis had been used as a part of Thai culture and way of life before the intervention of the war on drug policy enforced by the United States. In other words, cannabis is represented as culture taken away. It is noticeable that the page's content relates cannabis as traditional medicine with Thailand's culture and history and includes recreational cannabis as a normal thing. Relating cannabis to beliefs, specifically Christianity, represents a significant amount of content found in *Highland Network*'s data. The following text is an example of how cannabis as a traditional medicine is related to Christianity.

There are further references to the use of topical cannabis treatments in ancient Mesopotamian documents that suggest that Christians used "Holy Oil" to treat a variety of ailments in the centuries directly following AD according to research by Dr. Ethan Russo.

(ID: 387:10, Reference: 6369 – 6968)

Perceiving cannabis as an herb instead of an illicit drug is another way to view it as traditional medicine. The words used to refer to cannabis or other plants mentioned with cannabis are “an herbal stimulant,” “the herb,” “their legal herb,” and “herbal product.”

5. *Cannabis as a normal thing*

According to the data of *Highland Network*, cannabis is not only normalized through medical benefits in the name of medical cannabis, but it has also become a normal thing because of political intervention. A substantial amount of pro-movement content posted on the page emphasizes recreational cannabis. Similar to the *Bangkok Post*, comparing or referring to other countries or states in the US where cannabis is legalized was found in the pro-movement content of the *Highland Network*.

In addition, recreational cannabis is related to political intervention in that a campaign during the election of a party promoted full legalization of cannabis. After the election, the *Bhumjaithai* Party, as a part of the government, voiced its desire to amend the law to open the door for cannabis use. Referring to another country where recreational cannabis is legalized was the way the party illustrated the possibility of legalizing cannabis in Thailand. Although cannabis was finally legalized for only medical purposes, some social groups are still hoping for recreational cannabis, similar to other developed countries where recreational cannabis use is normalized as a common and legal activity.

Medical legalization “is a huge win but it definitely isn’t the end of the road,” said Chopaka. And as for recreational pot? It has a chance of eventually becoming legal, Chopaka said, but “we need to take things one step at a time.”

(ID: 364:16, Reference: 5789 – 6022)

Negative implications of cannabis

When comparing with *Bangkok Post*, most of the content on the *Highland Network* page supports the cannabis pro-movement. As such, negative representations of cannabis on the page are rarely found. It is undeniable that the page is created and used by a specific social group to promote their belief and ideology. This can reveal differences and similarities between traditional and new media.

Although the discourses of recreational cannabis, a gateway drug, and side effects were found, they were not used to construct negative implications. Furthermore, cannabis addiction is not mentioned in any posts. Only four posts contained content mentioning side effects. Three of them were not significant parts of the texts. Only one of them explicitly focused on the negative effects of cannabis use on the female sexual organ. The post may be used only to attract the attention of the reader. Also, negative representations of cannabis as recreational cannabis are rarely found in the data of the *Highland Network*. Instead, it is represented positively in the liberalization of cannabis in other countries and hopes for liberalization in Thailand.

There are very few news articles with criminological themes. Although news articles about crimes related to cannabis were posted on the page, these articles were used as cautions for readers that selling or consuming cannabis is still illegal in Thailand. They do not function to stigmatize cannabis users or sellers. Those news articles posted on the page are usually anchored by texts produced by the writer of the page; for example, “Just another reminder that Cannabis is still ILLEGAL in Thailand.”

Although it is represented as an illegal drug in terms of law restriction, recreational cannabis is constructed with positive and optimistic tones. It can be perceived that the notion of cannabis as an illegal drug is not a solid fact, which could be changed in the following excerpt.

But some campaigners are optimistic, arguing that recent developments show changing attitudes, and hope that the movement will continue to gain momentum toward legalization.

“I think Thailand will legalize cannabis for recreational use within five to eight years. It is something I believe is inevitable, especially with more countries around the world legalizing recreational cannabis use for adults,” said cannabis advocate Chopaka.

(ID: 433:21, Reference: 41 – 42)

Instead, the text producer revealed their standpoint that negative perceptions towards cannabis should be changed. As for the following excerpt, it can be interpreted that cannabis is just a normal thing, but it is propagated to be an illegal substance that causes consequences of social problems.

Today, I had a wake up call as to how a simple word can cause fear, victimization and stereotyping. The word that was uttered in a busy coffee shop, while the speaker looked left and right as if they were checking that the road to action of voicing a word were empty was, “กัญชา/Gancha,” or “Marijuana,” in English.

Let me first set the mood for those that are not aware, Marijuana is illegal in Thailand, and that just happens to be the country where the conversation took place. Thailand is a country where drug traffickers usually get executed, where hefty jail time can be dished out just for consumption. So with that set as a background the words seems to somehow has weight, but in a tainted propagandist way.

(ID: 270:3, Reference: 7 – 7)

It can be concluded that *Highland Network* Page was created for a specific purpose to explicitly promote their ideology, cannabis legalization, so it is obvious that negative representations are rarely found. News reports with negative implications regarding cannabis are used on the page to argue for or clarify their reasoning or opposing opinions. It is an excellent example of how a group of social actors created their own texts and use third-party content to support their social movement and refute existing negative discourses and perceptions. This also reveals how intertextuality is constructed in new media. Different sources and multimodal texts provide creditability to the page instead of a point of view from only one source in the same way as traditional media. All content used on the *Highland Network* Page explicitly shows their standpoint, that they support the legalization of cannabis.

Discussion and conclusion

Cannabis legalization in Thailand reflects how attitudes towards the plant have changed. Language use in media is a linguistic construction that can be analyzed to examine the relationship between language and social change. Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, a CDA approach, is applied to answer the research questions of this study by viewing language use as a communicative event, including texts, discursive practices, and social practices.

At the text level, cannabis discourse is constructed by lexical choices, sentence structure, presupposition, rhetorical tropes, and narrative based on Richardson’s work. Most linguistic elements, which Richardson proposed to investigate newspaper texts, are found in this study’s data. As for discursive practice, the construction of cannabis discourse integrates other discourses similar to Levine’s cannabis discourse and other discourses studied in previous research; for example, economic discourse, juridical discourse, recreational discourse, and

normalization discourse. However, juridical discourse is the dominant discourse constructing the negative implications of cannabis.

All discourses are related to economic, social, cultural, political, and scientific aspects. According to data analysis, it is interesting that the science discourse used as a part of normalization discourse plays a vital role in changing attitudes towards cannabis from an illicit drug to a medicine with useful chemical substances. Cannabis constructed on economic discourse is frequently found in news articles with a political theme. Similar to cannabis discourse in Månsson's study (2016), the researcher found that "cannabis is described to be an agricultural commercial product that is important for the economy" and "the substance thus becomes a provider of new jobs and new business" (p. 278). As for the perspective of people in society towards cannabis as an economic crop, Osborne and Fogel (2017) found that participants of their research believed that growers, distributors, and retailers would benefit cannabis legalization in terms of job opportunities, as well as tax revenues, which would provide for the government similar to alcohol and tobacco. In addition, cannabis represented as a traditional medicine is an exceptional discourse found in the Thai context, which was rarely found in previous studies.

As for social practice, cannabis discourse or text production in both media is influenced by the social context. According to the data analysis, it was found that global context plays an essential role in normalizing cannabis as a legal substance. By comparing the Thai context with that of other countries reflects how it is normalized through outside factors. When examining the local context, cannabis as a traditional medicine is constructed on the basis of culture and history in which cannabis is sometimes represented as an herb. Also, cannabis is represented as a chemical substance that changes perspectives as influenced by the science discourse. In addition, scientific facts are claimed to construct cannabis as a medical substance.

The pro movement can also be viewed as a movement of social actors such as patients and activists acting against hegemony. The pro movement can be found calling for cannabis legalization and the ban of patent requests by big companies. As for the economic viewpoint, farmers portrayed as a group of poor people in society who are enslaved by the unfair economic system and dependent on government policies. Cannabis discourse also reflects the healthcare system problem in Thailand, which does not provide equal access and effective treatment for all patients. Although there are positive changes in the cannabis discourse, negative implications towards recreational cannabis tend to remain. Apart from using cannabis for medical purposes, recreational cannabis users are still stigmatized by society relating it to discourses of a gateway drug, addiction, negative side effects from excessive use, and drug trafficking. In other words, it reflects the othering of cannabis users. According to Chokevivat's study on Thai literature (2019), cannabis users were depicted as "bad people," and smoking cannabis was regarded as an unacceptable behavior in Thai society. Similar to the article "The privileged normalization of marijuana use – an analysis of Canadian newspaper reporting, 1997–2007," the researchers found that Canadian mainstream newspaper reporting tends to stigmatize cannabis users, especially ordinary people, with "a somewhat moralistic 'us and them' tone" (Haines-Saah, et al., 2014, p. 59).

Finally, this study also reveals the agenda-setting roles of the media. According to Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2008), agenda setting is "the process of the mass media presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others" (p. 147). According to the data, it is undeniable that the *Highland Network* Page tends to provide only the positive side of cannabis and cannabis legalization similar to the previous study about cannabis and kratom on Facebook pages in Thailand (Thaikla et al., 2018). Though the negative implications of cannabis were found in *Bangkok Post*, anti-movement content was not explicitly reported in both media. These two media as examples of traditional and new media tended to repeatedly

present positive implications of cannabis. In other words, the more positive implications cannabis receives, the more important and acceptable they are to people. With relaxed regulations, there is a tendency that media, especially new media, will continue their agenda-setting roles to push the legal barrier from medical to recreational cannabis, full liberalization. In addition, limited groups of people possessing authorized power to access cannabis resources will be another group expected to set an agenda against hegemony in the near future.

Limitations

This study focuses on only two sources with the *Bangkok Post* newspaper serving as an example of traditional media and the *Highland Network* Page serving as an example of new media, so there are limitations to this study providing possibilities for further research. The data from the two sources are English-language texts, which can be viewed as a suitable set of data for investigating how the English language is used to reflect Thai society or how Thai society and social issues are represented to outsiders globally. However, Thai-language sources probably reflect a more precise picture as a native language of the people in society. Consequently, further research analyzing Thai-language data could close this gap.

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