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# Online Newspapers In Asia: Computer-Mediated Press And The Flow Of News

*Based on a content analysis, this article claims that on-line newspapers in Asia provide a diversity of information to a world audience. Through the selection process of news to be reported, the online newspapers have provided an Asian perspective to the flow of information. Unlike the traditional Western approach to news, Asian on-line newspapers present a more positive orientation to the way Asia is represented but generally also to the way that the rest of the world is covered as well. The research findings provide a framework to examine, in part, new channels of news open to the world as an alternative to the Big Four news agencies.*

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Historically, the West has dominated the flow of international news. A great deal of literature indicates that four Western news agencies carry the bulk of the world's news. Between them, the four agencies send out "34 million words per day and claim to provide nine-tenths of the entire foreign news output of the free world's newspapers, radio, and television stations" (Smith, 1980, p. 73). One scholar has noted that this is more than enough to overwhelm the developing world's press (Gauhar, 1981, p. 172). The AP produces about "2 million words a day in English and 50,000 in other languages" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 22). Reuters, the world's biggest news provider, "processes up to 5 million words a day through editing centers in London and Hong Kong" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 21). Agence France-Presse has five news sites in English which each carries between 50,000 and 120,000 words a day (Rampal, 1995, p. 43). As a result of this Western flood of news, the rest of the world has found itself in the awkward position of looking to Western nations for stories about itself as seen through the eyes of journalists and gatekeepers in New York, Paris, and London (Rosenblum, 1979, p. 245; Rampal, 1995, p. 47).

In the 1990s, the world's communication flows have been deeply affected by new technology. Satellites, optic fibers and new

uses of older means of communication have increased the potential for access to information. Particularly interesting in this regard is the potential for access to news via the Internet. There has been an explosive growth of newspapers available on the World Wide Web over the past few years. And while the numbers of these on-line newspapers are greatest from North America and Europe, newspapers from other parts of the world are becoming increasingly accessible. Asia, for example, boasts a substantial number of on-line newspapers. The amount varies according to different listings but some sources compile as many as 263 different electronic newspapers from this part of the world. (See the INES Profile at HYPERLINK [www.inesmedia.com](http://www.inesmedia.com) ) for one such listing.

While the style and content of these electronic newspapers vary greatly by country and by newspaper, each does have the potential to open a window on the different worlds they represent to a global audience. Online newspapers have the potential "to bypass the chokehold that the global media giants have on political discourse" (Mowlana, 1997, p. 105) by allowing different and diverse voices to be heard by an ever-increasing audience. As one study on the development of on-line newspapers notes, people reading news on the internet "gain immediate access to breaking stories, can log onto the Internet and access publications or news sources anywhere in the world from anywhere in the world, and can also access archives for past stories to provide a greater sense of historical understanding" (Hollihan and Riley, 1997, p. 5).

This research seeks to understand the Internet as a new vehicle for transmission of news from Asia to the world by examining a group of on-line newspapers from Asian societies. The research questions are: What is the content of on-line newspapers in Asia? Specifically, are the newspapers using this form making available local news or international news? Are the news items presenting positive or negative accounts of news? Topically, is there a variety of news or does it conform to the priorities set by the Big Four news agencies? Is the news story presented as an isolated incident or is it placed in context? Is the news provided by local sources or international ones? These questions attempt to understand how this new means of presenting the news is being used in an Asian context. These questions provide a framework upon which to examine, in part, new channels of news as an alternative to the Big Four news agencies.

A list of all Asian on-line newspapers indexed on the World Wide Web was compiled from several sources. From this list, one on-line newspaper was selected from seven Asian countries. These newspapers represented those that had the highest circulation

## **Research Method**

figures for their particular country and which offered an edition in English. The first requirement was deemed important because it limited the sample to a manageable number while offering the newspaper used by the majority of readers in the domestic context. The assumption was that this more likely represented the general sentiments and perspective of the country. The second criterion for selection was considered important because, given the diversity of languages across Asia and the general acceptance of English as the lingua franca used globally today (Stevenson, 1994, p. 91), an English-language paper was considered important to reach a world audience. As this research considered on-line newspapers as an alternative voice from Asian countries to the rest of the world, it was important that this voice be considered in the context in which it could be understood by the various peoples in that world audience. The following newspapers were selected for analysis:

**South Korea:** Chosun Ilbo - [www.chosun.com/](http://www.chosun.com/)

**Japan:** The Daily Yomiuri - [www.yomiuri.co.jp/index-e.htm](http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/index-e.htm)

**China:** China Daily - [www.chinadaily.net/cndy/cd\\_cate1.html](http://www.chinadaily.net/cndy/cd_cate1.html)

**Philippines:** Manila Bulletin - [www.mb.com.ph/](http://www.mb.com.ph/)

**Malaysia:** The Star - [www.thestar.com.my](http://www.thestar.com.my)

**Singapore:** The Straits Times - [www.asia1.com.sg/straitstimes/](http://www.asia1.com.sg/straitstimes/)

**Indonesia:** Kompas - [www.kompas.com/](http://www.kompas.com/)

Rather than selecting random days across a particular period of time, a continuous time frame was set to examine these newspapers. This was considered appropriate given the evidence that in the analysis of news, continuity and consistency of news presentation may not be apparent as readily in randomly selected days (Altheide, D. L., 1996, p. 19). Therefore, a fourteen-day time frame was set from December 28, 1997 to January 11, 1998. Newspapers were accessed via the Internet from 2 to 4 p.m. in the afternoon (Hong Kong time) and all hard news was downloaded and printed for content analysis.

A content analysis of the types of news included (national or international), the geographic nature of international news, positive/negative emphasis of news, news topic, context, and source of the news story. These categories were carefully defined from other news research (Elliott, 1996). A coding sheet of all the categories in this research was developed with clear definitions of terms. Coders were trained in the use of this guidebook and practised on sample articles. Using Holsti's formula (cited in Budd, et al., 1967, p. 68), intercoder reliability was determined to be 91.2%. This is well above the .80 generally considered the minimum level acceptable.

A total of 2,364 news items from seven different on-line newspapers were analyzed in this research. The number of news items presented to a world audience daily in English varied greatly among the seven newspapers. *Kompas* and *Chosun Ilbo* both had limited English news sections. Typically these two newspapers provided 3 to 4 news items a day in English. At the other extreme were the two globally oriented newspapers that presented quite a bit more in terms of frequency. *China Daily* had an average of 34 items per day and *The Straits Times* had a daily average of 70 items of news.

In gathering the data, a degree of inconsistency was noted in some of the newspapers in terms of updating the news each day. While most of these on-line newspapers prided themselves in exploiting the capability of easily updating the news, many did not have their news for the day on-line until very late in the day. In some cases, no news was available from one or two of these newspapers during the period each afternoon when material was downloaded for analysis (e.g. no issue of *Yomiuri Shimbun* was found on January 2nd, and no issue of *China Daily* was found for January 4th during the collection periods). So while the potential is great with these newspapers, consistency and full utilization of the advantages of this type of news delivery still is lacking.

One purpose of this research was to consider how the advent of on-line newspapers has affected the flow of news from Asia. The literature suggests a long history of grievances against the developed world's dominant position in the transfer of global information. These complaints have identified a series of problems about the flow of news that this study seeks to address in light of the potential offered by news via the Internet.

One problem that has been raised by developing countries about news flows has been the fact that there is too much news about the West and too little about the East. What is the content of Asian on-line newspapers in this regard? Specifically, are the on-line newspapers using this form making available local news or international news? Are these newspapers providing a world audience a window into their domestic world or are they attempting to provide their own global presentation of the news?

Table 1 shows the results of this research in this regard. For most of the newspapers analyzed in this study, news presented was predominantly local news. The newspapers from Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and South Korea all focused their news presentations on presenting their domestic news. This was found to occur in over 90% of all news items available in all

## Findings

## Orientation Of The News

these newspapers. Two of the papers examined here did not fit this general tendency. These two papers were the *China Daily* and *The Straits Times*. In both these cases, more international news than domestic news was found. In the case of the Chinese on-line newspaper, only 39% of all news offered electronically were news of China itself. In the Singapore newspaper even less domestic news was offered with 82% of all news available about the international scene. From the newspapers analyzed, two types were apparent. One was a newspaper acting in the traditional manner, that is, as a chronicle of local matters. The other was more globally oriented, reporting events from around the world and acting as an Asian newspaper of record for an international audience. Both types of newspapers have great value in the global flow of communication. One highlights the way of life of diverse groups of people while the other informs about the events in the global village.

**Table 1: Newspapers by News Type**

Paper	National	Internat'l	Row
Daily Yomiuri	172	20	192
China Daily	185	286	471
Kompas	40	2	42
Star	352	16	368
Bulletin	242	10	252
Straits Times	177	805	982
Chosun Ilbo	52	5	57
Total	1220	1144	2364

When Asian on-line newspapers do present news about the rest of the world, what international areas are prominent? Table 2 shows a breakdown by geographic region of the areas of international news covered by these newspapers. Using the two types of newspapers noted above is helpful in understanding the

Table 2: Newspaper Items by World Region

	Domestic News	Africa	Asia	Eastern Europe	Western Europe	South America	Middle East	North America	Oceania	Multiple	Row
Daily Yomiuri	172	1	10	1	3	2	0	2	0	1	192
China Daily	185	23	122	17	29	11	39	24	17	4	471
Kompas	40	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	42
Star	352	0	10	0	1	0	1	4	0	0	368
Bulletin	242	0	6	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	252
Straits Times	177	10	462	16	110	25	43	113	20	6	982
Chosun Ilbo	52	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	57
Column Total	1220	34	614	34	143	38	84	148	37	12	2364

Table 3: News Item Topics By Newspaper

	Daily Yomiuri	China Daily	Kompas	Star	Bulletin	Straits Times	Chosun Ilbo	Row
Military	2	36	2	4	11	47	1	103
Politics	14	65	3	6	4	55	1	148
Population	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	5
Domestic Gov't	31	59	2	27	77	86	2	284
Labor	0	12	4	17	5	32	1	71
Economics	36	29	19	61	26	78	30	279
Agriculture	1	16	0	34	3	32	1	87
Science	6	26	0	16	7	80	0	135
Education	8	13	0	38	4	19	0	82
Industry	4	5	2	15	2	10	5	43
Accidents	13	43	2	27	18	97	0	200
Legal	31	39	2	9	30	142	4	257
Energy	5	22	0	15	8	17	0	67
Housing	2	4	0	9	2	11	0	28
Communications	9	24	1	36	5	49	3	127
Sport	2	3	0	1	0	7	2	15
Arts	8	15	1	12	3	34	0	73
Religion	1	2	2	3	6	9	0	23
Ideology	0	3	0	4	2	0	0	9
Social	12	38	2	27	27	145	5	256
Weather	1	5	0	1	1	8	0	16
Sport Scores	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Finance Record	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Commentary	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	5
Safety	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Memorials	2	5	0	6	11	22	2	48
Column Total	192	471	42	368	252	982	57	2364



way international news was covered among these on-line newspapers. For the locally oriented on-line newspapers, most of the international news stories originate from Asia. Half of the international news from *The Daily Yomiuri* and *Kompas* was from Asia. For all the other locally oriented newspapers, the percentage of international news was over 60%. The rest of the international attention typically is spread across Europe and North America. What is important to see here is that newspapers with a local orientation in the presentation of predominantly national news seem to be consistent in that perspective even in their limited international offerings. These newspapers stay in the neighborhood of Asia and when they venture out, it is typically to report news from the developed world.

The other type of newspaper discussed, the global newspaper, was very different indeed in its presentation of international news. What is immediately apparent in Table 2 is the fact that news items are found from every region of the world. Asia still dominates in frequency of news items in both these cases giving support to the notion that proximity is a universal news value. In *The Straits Times*, 57% of all international news was from Asia while in the case of the *China Daily*, 43% of the international news was from Asia. However, it is striking to see a more balanced coverage across regions in these particular on-line newspapers. They are truly global in their consideration of the world while keeping their feet firmly planted in Asia.

Western journalism is oriented towards the negative and in news flows disputes, this has been raised as inappropriate for the context of some other parts of the world community. However, in the news provided by on-line newspapers from Asia considered in this study, this was generally not found to be the case. In all but one on-line newspaper examined in this study, there were higher percentages of positive news items than negative news items. For some, the difference was small, as in the case of the *China Daily*, which had 42% positive and 39% negative news items. A few had a great deal of differences in percentages of positive and negative news. *Kompas* and *The Straits Times* both had very large differences in the proportion of negative and positive news with more than twice as many positive news items presented as negative ones. Only one newspaper was found to have more negative news than positive and that was the *Manila Bulletin*. This newspaper had less than a third of all its news items positively oriented while 44% were found to be negative. This case is, as noted, the exception to the general tendency here. What appears to be the case is that

## Western And Asian News Frames

these on-line newspapers are presenting an alternative to the predominantly negative orientation of the Western style of news. And, since most of these newspapers are presenting local news, by extension, on-line newspapers are providing some relief to the historic problem in news flows of distorted images of Asian countries that come via the lens of negative news values favored in Western journalism.

Were the news presented in on-line newspapers giving predominantly positive or negative accounts of news about Asian countries? Did these Asian on-line newspapers present news about Asia in a distinctly different way from other regions they covered? When each region covered in the news was considered on the basis of the positive or negative emphasis of that news, what is found is a statistically significant difference between regions on this variable. However, this difference seems to be one of degree as all regions except Africa have higher frequencies of positive news than negative news. And for the case of Africa, this greater frequency of negative news is the result of only one more negative news story than the number of positive news stories.

In the case of Asia, it is true that 60% of the news stories by these on-line newspapers were positive. But, this was by no means the region with the highest percentage of positive news. The Middle East, South America and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific nations) all had greater percentages of positive oriented news than Asia. Asian on-line newspapers are not treating the news from Asia any differently for the most part from the news that is carried from the other regions of the world.

## News Topics

The Western definition of news "...tends to oblige Western journalists to seek the aberrational rather than the normal as the main criterion for selection; Western news agencies are, therefore, on the lookout for information concerning violence, war, crime, corruption, disaster, famine, fire, and flood" (Smith, 1980, p. 70). The former head of Associated Press says that the Western press situation traditionally emphasizes "the dramatic, the emotional, and the amusing--the coups and earthquakes syndrome--This is not only biased but detrimental to the national development process" (Rosenblum, 1979, p. 321). Topically, then, is there a variety of news in these on-line newspapers or does it conform to the priorities of Western journalism as is found in the information available from the big four news agencies? As seen in Table 3, the topic of newspapers in general was found to be economic news and domestic government news. This is not unusual given the fact that most Asian countries were experiencing financial problems which called this topic to the forefront of interest. As

governments sought to take stringent measures to deal with the economic woes besetting Asian countries, domestic governmental information was also frequently found. Both these topics accounted for 12% each of all news items found in the seven on-line newspapers. Second in frequency were two areas each accounting for 11% of all the news. These topics were legal/crime matters and social stories. All other topics were distributed across a wide range of different subject matter and none of these other categories accounted for more than 9% of the total.

Table 3 illustrates how news topics were distributed across the different newspapers. Most of the newspapers were found to present a diversity of news topics. Only *Kompas* and *Chosun Ilbo* had news items in less than half of all the potential topic categories. Perhaps this was due in part to the fact that these two newspapers on-line only offered limited English sections and thus had a narrower range of topics that were presented. All the other newspapers were found to present news in most of the content categories set in this analysis.

It is interesting to consider the topic of the news by the type of news offered, that is, how news topics were distributed in national news and international news categories. What was discovered in this regard was that the news most frequently found in the national category were items about the economy (17% of all national items), domestic government news (12% of all national news), social news (10% of all national news), tourism and transportation (8% of all national news), and legal news (8% of all national news). In international news, the most frequent news topics were legal news stories (14% of all international news), foreign government news (12% of all international news), social news (12% of all international news), diplomatic news (11% of all international news), and accidents and disaster stories (10% of all international news). A diversity of news topics was seen in the fact that both international and national news stories were found across more than 25 topical areas of news coverage.

More than half of the national news was found in five areas concerning social, political and economic aspects of life. Almost 60% of all the international news was found in five categories that were concerned with crime and legal matters, social and political matters and tragedies of life. Typically, the international news represented the dramatic and conflict oriented events of the day while national news focused on the way of life of a people. It appears that in the debate of news content in the flow of international communication these newspapers are presenting more diversity of information overall, but international news items still seem to focus on the aberrational rather than the normal.

## News Contexts

The developing world says that too much emphasis is placed on events instead of the context of the situation. In Asian on-line newspapers, is the news story presented as an isolated incident or is it placed in context? This research found that, overwhelmingly, what was evident was that news in context was an important part of the way news from these Asian newspapers on-line delivered information. Some newspapers (such as the *China Daily*, *The Star*, *The Straits Times*) contextualized their news in two-thirds of all cases while the others did so much more frequently. These high-end context newspapers (*The Daily Yomiuri*, *Kompas*, *Manila Bulletin*, and *Chosun Ilbo*) had news in context in 86-95% of all cases.

Across the board, news in context was evident. One reason for this may be the very nature of the medium itself. Newspapers on-line can easily install links from a present story to previous stories stored in their archives. And for the coverage of an important ongoing story, a background page can be developed and linked to the current story. This was the case for the *Silk Air* plane crash covered extensively by *The Straits Times*. Linkages to the story and corollary events were readily found. So, on-line newspapers can utilize hyperlinks to provide a richer news experience for readers. Asian on-line newspapers seem to be availing themselves of this and in the process, alleviating the problems of news in isolation that has been a sticking point in the flows of information debates of the past.

## Agencies As News Sources

The developing world has complained that because of limited resources, they "must depend on the big international agencies to get information about the world and even about each other" (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, 1980, p. 111). How much of the news presented in these on-line newspapers was from outside news agencies and how much was domestically produced? What is apparent is that most of the newspapers studied did not use outside sources of information. Only two, *China Daily* and *The Straits Times*, were found to do so to a great extent. These two newspapers were previously found to present large amounts of international news and so it seems likely that the international news carried in these Internet publications came from international sources.

Table 4 shows just what international sources were used. These can be considered by looking at the infrequent users of international sources and then those using outside sources much more frequently. Many of the papers studied in this research used outside sources of information in 10 news stories or less. Of these on-line newspapers infrequently using outside sources, two of

**Table 4: Newspaper Items By Agency**

	None	AP	Reuters	AFP	PTI	NCNA	Kyodo	Agencies	Other	Row
Daily Yomiuri	192	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	192
China Daily	169	1	0	0	0	108	0	147	46	471
Kompas	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	42
Star	359	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	8	368
Bulletin	242	4	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	252
Straits Times	459	6	131	179	1	4	7	69	126	982
Chosun Ilbo	56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	57
Column Total	1519	11	131	185	1	112	7	216	182	2364

the Big Four international news providers, AP and AFP, were found to be the agencies of choice for citation. In addition, *The Star* used a variety of other sources as well.

Among the heavy users of outside news sources, there are two patterns. *The Straits Times* used a wide diversity of outside information sources. Among these most often used were Reuters and AFP. Indeed, the numbers for these agencies is not as clear as it could be because both these agencies were part of the multiple agencies cited for some news stories and recorded in the 'Agencies' category. The other major user of outside sources of information was the *China Daily*. The pattern of use of outside sources of information here was quite different from *The Straits Times*. This on-line paper tended to rely on China's own news agency for the bulk of the information not gathered by its own staff. This was not only evident in those news stories which cited the New China News Agency as the source, but also in the fact that the other news agencies were used for information but always sorted and distributed by the NCNA. Thus, the category referred to as "Agencies" here refers to all news stories citing as the source of information "Agencies via Xinhua".

Three other interesting findings should be noted here. One is the frequent citation of *Bernama*, the national news agency of Malaysia, as a source of information. This may be due in part to the heavy emphasis on Malaysian news provided in *The Straits Times* (the newspaper that had the most news items per day in all news categories). But the high usage of this particular agency was found in other papers as well. Also interesting was the lack of influence Kyodo had in the newspapers across Asia studied in this research. Given the size of this news organization, it was unusual to find it cited as the news source in only 7 out of 2364 news items. Finally, the sources of outside information cited in the 'other' category here were most frequently other newspapers. Many of these were from the US (like *The New York Times*, *The L.A. Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*), but other Asian newspapers were often cited as well (for example, the *South China Morning Post* was frequently cited as a source of information about the bird flu crisis). So it is not only traditional news agencies that Asian on-line newspapers are using as information sources but other press organs as well.

The results of these findings indicate that the Big Four news agencies still have influence in providing international news. This influence may be direct, as seen in the case of *The Straits Times* use of Reuters and AFP for almost 40% of its international news items. Or, it may be moderated, as seen in the fact that these agencies were part of the conglomeration of sources used by China's *New China News Agency* to come up with its representations of

international news events. On the other hand, there were indications that many of these newspapers were using their own resources to gather international news. Local correspondents, based mostly in Asia, were often cited as the sources of international news. So, while for international information, the influence of Western news agencies seems to be continuing in some regards, there is evidence of changes in newsgathering to provide news from alternate sources.

The findings in this research show that on-line newspapers in Asia provide a diversity of information to a world audience. Some of these newspapers chronicle mostly local matters. Others are more globally oriented, reporting events from around the world. Both of these add an Asian perspective to the flow of information if only through the selection process of news to be reported. And unlike the traditional Western approach to news, Asian on-line newspapers are presenting a more positive orientation to the way Asia is represented but generally also to the way that the rest of the world is covered as well.

In terms of content, on-line newspapers are presenting a diversity of information overall, but international news items still seem to focus on the aberrational rather than the normal. A wide variety of topical areas was found in both domestic and international news presentations, though five specific topics of news in each was found to account for more than half of all news items.

On-line newspapers are presenting news in context. It appears that most were exploiting the unique nature of this new means of transmitting information to do so. Newspapers on-line can easily install links from a present story to previous stories stored in their archives and this was done effectively in many cases. These hyperlinks allow the possibility of context to a degree traditional print media have never been able to produce.

Most of the newspapers did not use outside sources of information. Those who did use outside sources of information most frequently were those committed to the presentation of a sizeable amount of international news. What is apparent is that when Asian newspapers distribute international news, they are still reliant on international news sources in direct and indirect ways.

On-line newspapers are using other newspapers for news sources in many cases. As well, *Bernama* was seen to be an important source of information for several on-line papers. While this may be an anomaly due to the time frame in which this study was conducted, more attention needs to be given to the changing

## Conclusion

role and influence national news agencies have in the new opportunities available via the Internet.

Overall, the on-line newspapers in Asia go far in providing an alternate form of news to potentially moderate the problems of news flows cited in this research. They are lifting local voices to the world. They are positive, diverse, and, on a national level, independent of outside sources of information. And while in international news the old limitations still appear to be relevant, there are indications that independence is developing in this regard as well.

This research begins to consider the impact a new form of technology has on old problems of information flow. It was, however, bound by certain limitations. A continuous time frame was used instead of a randomly selected sample of days across time. By randomly selecting days of news to analyze, other patterns of usage may become apparent. The newspapers selected here were chosen on a set of criteria that may have combined very different types of newspapers for comparison. Other on-line newspapers need to be studied to add to the knowledge this work begins. Stone (1997, p. 6) suggests that it is important to cover the local angles to foreign news. This would be valuable to pursue in regard to Internet newspapers to make sense of the way international news is selected and reported. Research about the senders of these on-line newspapers is another area that needs further investigation. The relationship between the print and on-line versions, as well as the choices made to select the news in each is important to understand.

Perhaps the most interesting line of research to pursue would be to explore the nature of the audience of these on-line newspapers. Are these newspapers indeed providing alternate information to a world audience or do the Big Four news agencies dominate cyberspace as well? In this regard it is important to know who is reading these newspapers, what they reading and how often they access the on-line press from Asia. In this way, a better understanding of whether the potential afforded by this new technology is being realized to deal with problems in the international flow of news. ■

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