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- TAPSALL, Suellen & VARLEY, Carolyn (eds) (2002)  
**Journalism: Theory in Practice,** Oxford University Press. ISBN 971-8686-34-7. 270pp.
- ROBIE, David (ed) (2001)  
**The Pacific Journalist: A Practical Guide, University of the South Pacific,** ISBN 9820103851. 372pp.
- SHERIDAN, Lynette (2002)  
**Understanding Journalism,** Sage Publications. ISBN 0 7619 7026 6. 177pp.
- HERBERT, John (2000)  
**Journalism in the Digital Age: Theory and Practice for Broadcast, Print and Online Media,** Focal Press, Boston. ISBN 0240515897. 349 pp.
- ALYSEN, Barbara; SEDORKIN, Gail & OAKHAM, Mandy (2003)  
**Reporting in a Multimedia World,** Allen & Unwin, Sydney. ISBN 1865089109 Pbk. 312pp
- HENG, Russell (ed) (2002)  
**Media Fortunes, Changing Times: ASEAN States in Transition,** Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. ISBN 9812301550. 252 pp.

Just as the American troops were building up their forces against Iraq in early 2003, a new and deadly virus was slowly beginning to make its rounds in Asia and beyond. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) had some media coverage before the Iraq war. But this was soon overwhelmed by the news on the war. Reportage on the SARS virus only became prime news after the focus on the war had subsided.

Since September 11, international news coverage in Asia has largely focused on the US war led on terrorism and Iraq. There were many voices of protests against the war. Some of it was shown over television. Others dominated websites and chatrooms. These show the power of the media and those who control it to set the agenda for world politics and democracy. This issue on *New Media and Journalism in Asia: Freedom of Expression, Censorship and Ethic* brings together research articles and commentaries on the implications of new technology and contemporary journalism on democracy.

*Terence Lee* looks at how the Internet has impacted politics in Singapore and how the state very quickly has taken measures to control the new medium. In Hong Kong, *Alana Maurushat* looks at the implication of the territory's new anti-terrorism ordinance on issues of privacy and free expression while *Judith Clarke* ponders on the state of press freedom five years since the handover of Hong Kong to China.

*Kasun Ubayasiri* shows how the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka were able to bypass state media censorship by going onto the Web. *Jonathan Woodier*, takes a regional perspective and examines the state of the media in post-September 11 scenario, while *Jurgen Rudolph* and *Lim Thou Tin* argue that the Internet has the dual potential of generating income as well as facilitating democracy.

In journalism often times ethics are overlooked. We are reminded how these are transmitted to young journalists in the *Singapore Straits Times* by *Beate Josephi* while *Hao Xiaoming* looks at the difference in values among mainstream and tabloid journalists.

The Internet's function as a public relations tool is explored comparatively by *Joy Chia* in Australia, and *Shirley Sun*, *TY Lau* and *Rebecca Kuo* in Taiwan.

We also get an insight into how journalism training and education are delivered in China and the South Pacific. *Arnold Zeitlin* shares his teaching experience in Guangzhou while *David Robie* records the case of online campus journalism in the *South Pacific*.

Finally, *Frank Morgan* shares his philosophy on the humanities and its contributions to professional media education.

- **James Gomez**  
Guest Editor

# New Regulatory Politics And Communication Technologies In Singapore

*Singapore's status as one of the most networked society in the Asia-Pacific region is rarely disputed, though not much has been written critically about the city-state's approach towards the regulation of information/communication technologies. This paper seeks therefore to disambiguate the social, cultural, economic as well as the political imperatives of such regulatory practices in Singapore. It begins by looking at the development of Singapore's Internet and info-communications scene, with highlights of political responses to key occurrences over the past decade. Taking on board the discourse of auto-regulation – that regulating the Internet and new media in Singapore is mostly about ensuring an automatic functioning of power for political expedience and longevity – this paper offers new insights into the politics of new communication technologies in Singapore, from its humble beginnings of censorship, surveillance and 'sleaze' control (1990s) to recent attempts at restricting information via new legislations governing foreign media and the stifling of online political campaigning and debates (from 2001/02). This paper concludes by looking at aspects of electronic government (e-Government), suggesting how the offering of e-Citizen services are likely to tighten Internet control in the future. It argues that although electronic spaces for political engagement are and will be limited, one needs to make full use of them whilst they are still available.*

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On 2 August 1999, Britain's largest selling tabloid *The Sun*, owned and operated by Rupert Murdoch's News Limited, published an editorial which encapsulates the hype that has emerged around the Internet since it became publicly available in the early to mid-1990s:

"The Internet is delivering power to the people. At last, the consumer is king. Communism has collapsed – but here is a force that is truly taking power from the few and transferring it to the many. It has happened in America. It will happen here [the UK]. Perfect information. Perfect democracy. Perfect competition.

Choice for all" (*The Sun*, 2 August 1999; cited in Gibson & Ward, 2000b: 25).

The rapid expansion of digitalised and new communication technologies had been heralded as having significant implications for the improved functioning of democracy in general and politics in particular. As a technology designed and founded on liberal ideology and concepts of freedom of access and information, the advent of the Internet brought about much hope and "power to the people", many of whom were – and still are – becoming socially, economically and politically disenfranchised (see Lee & Birch, 2000).

Over the past decade, the opening up of electronic modes of communication – including electronic mails (emails), websites, mobile telephony and the ever-popular short messaging service (SMS), as well as the rise of Electronic Government (E-Government) services – have enabled citizens to become more involved in politics and public administration. With the ability to access wider information and the opening up of space for more voices, "technologies such as the Internet are seen as offering potential for bringing government closer to the people, making it more responsive and relevant" (Gibson & Ward, 2000a: 1). Or in the words of Chadwick (2001), with the Internet, governments around the world have begun to put on an "electronic face".

However, the blue-sky vision of *The Sun* editorial may have been somewhat premature. As Shapiro points out, the notion that the Internet is inherently democratising is a myth that needs to be debunked. Indeed, the 'electronic face' of technology and its design will be at the heart of various power struggles in the digital age (Shapiro, 1999: 14-5). As Shapiro warns:

"We should not be surprised to see governments and corporations trying to shape the code of the Net to preserve their authority or profitability. But code is not everything. Even if we could lock in the democratic features of the Internet, the ultimate political impact of [communication technologies] must be judged on more than design. We must also consider the way a technology is used and the social environment in which it is deployed" (Shapiro, 1999: 15).

Willy-nilly, the 'perfect competition' brought about by a supposedly 'perfect democracy' is starting to resemble a potent power struggle within the highly contentious sphere of politics. As in off-line or pre-Internet politics, this struggle is mostly about winning the hearts and minds of the citizen-electorate either directly and openly or in a subtle fashion. To succeed, governments around the world would need to be actively involved in shaping both the design as well as the social environment in which the Internet and

other new media technologies operate.

Taking on board Shapiro's advice, this paper sets out to consider the way (and ways) in which new communication technologies, led most prominently by the Internet, has been and can be used within the context of the city-state of Singapore. With labels such as 'police state' and 'nanny state' constantly heaped on it, Singapore is well known – or to be precise, notorious – for being a highly regulated society. With toilet-flushing and anti-spitting rules, as well as laws banning the sale and distribution of chewing gum, it is not too difficult to understand the rationale for the many not-too-pleasing descriptions of Singapore's social and cultural environment. Indeed, much has been said about how the Singapore polity resonates with a climate of fear, which gives rise to the prevalent practice of self-censorship (Gomez, 2000; Tremewan, 1994). Against such a backdrop, it would be interesting to see how different groups in Singapore employ the Internet and new media to find their voice and seek their desired ends, whether these are social or political. Equally, if not more interesting, are the ways in which the omnipresent People Action's Party (PAP) government responds.

Despite the somewhat restrictive socio-political environment in Singapore, its status as one of the most networked society in the Asia-Pacific region is rarely disputed. This paper begins by providing an update of Singapore as the 'intelligent' networked island, using both statistical and anecdotal data. It then goes on to discuss the policy discourse of auto-regulation advanced by this author – that regulating the Internet and new media in Singapore is mostly about ensuring a panoptical cum automatic functioning of power for political expedience and longevity (Lee 2001a,b; see also Lee & Birch, 2000). It will suggest that the politics of new communication technologies in Singapore is about the ongoing struggle for power and legitimacy to control information flows (à la Castells, 2000). From its humble beginnings of censorship, surveillance and 'sleaze' control (1990s) to recent attempts (in 2001 and 2002) at restricting free flows of information via new legislations governing foreign media and the stifling of online political campaigning and debates, the Singaporean authorities have sought to minimise spaces for political expressions via new communication technologies. Although there are clear resistances to such resurgences of hegemony, the increasingly global fears of terrorism, caused largely by events of 11 September 2001, has provided a strong rationale for the long-term sustenance of such authoritarian practices. By examining possible uses – and abuses – of the Internet in Singapore, this paper aims to make sense of new communication technologies and its relationship to

democracy and political engagement in Singapore and beyond.

Singapore is undoubtedly one of the most well connected societies not just within the Asia-Pacific region, but also globally. Since the start of the new millennium, Singapore has attained the status of 'intelligent island', with 99% of households and businesses in the Central Business District (CBD) effectively connected to a nationwide hybrid fibre-optic network. This network, the result of a master plan entitled *A Vision of an Intelligent Island: IT 2000 Report* (National Computer Board, 1992), not only enables the delivery of both cable and must-carry free-to-air television channels via the majority government-owned *Starhub Cable Vision* (SCV), it makes every home ready for *Singapore ONE*, Singapore's much-vaunted broadband interactive site which promises a host of digital and multimedia services, including ultra high-speed Internet access. The Singapore government's proclaimed aim is to turn the country into an information technology (IT) hub so that it can be transformed into a knowledge-based economy (Kuo et al, 2002). Through agencies like the Info-communication (Infocomm) Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) and the forthcoming Media Development Authority (MDA), the government is constantly implementing strategies to spread and speed-up the use of computers in everyday life (Kuo et al, 2002). It is believed that for Singapore to achieve economic growth in the 21st century, rapid adoption and mastery of technology is paramount (Rodan, 2000b).

Statistically, the use of IT in Singapore is most impressive, especially for a population numbering less than 4 million. According to a survey of 1,500 Singaporean households carried out by the IDA in 2000, 66% of the population are knowledgeable on the use of personal computers, 61% of households have at least one computer, while 50% of homes are connected to the Internet in one form or another (IDA, 2001). This suggests that Singapore is more connected than developed countries like the United States (42%), Australia (37%) and Britain (35%) (Dawson, 2001a). The survey also found Singapore to be an 'e-inclusive' society, with strong personal computer ownership and Internet access across Malay, Indian and Chinese – the three main races in multiracial Singapore – households (Dawson, 2001b). In September 2001, mobile telephony penetration rate in Singapore reached 76.7%, with a broadband audience exceeding 400,000 and rising exponentially (IDA 2001).

A 2002 monograph published by the Singapore Internet Project (SIP) Team on Internet in Singapore reaffirms Singapore's high level of IT use, with about 46% of adults, age 18 and above, active users of the Internet. The number is markedly higher for Singaporean

## The 'Intelligent' Island

students, who are increasingly being IT-trained and exposed from day one, with Internet penetration at 71% and rising (Kuo, et al, 2002: 100). Even 'non-users' – defined in the report as people who do not access the Internet due to three key reasons: did not know how, no time and no interest – were found to be generally supportive of Internet use and development.

But in order to understand the significance of the SIP study, the notion of 'Internet use' needs to be put into perspective. The SIP team identifies the two main purposes of the Internet as "a source of information and as a tool for communication" (Kuo, et al, 2002: 8). The researchers found that emails and information search were by far the most popular Internet activities, followed by entertainment and online discussions. E-commerce activities, marked by online shopping and browsing for goods and services, were not popular due largely to concerns about security and privacy of information (Kuo, et al, 2002: 103-4). Closer analysis of these figures suggests, among other things, that the depth of technological know-how in Singapore remains fairly low. Although usage is relatively high, Internet 'expertise' is limited to emailing and other elementary personal and commercial functions. Sophisticated use comes in mainly at the 'youth market' level, with downloading of music, movies, graphics, online gaming and other multi-media tools the key applications.

The slow take-up of basic e-commerce activities by Singaporeans contradicts the expressed goal of the government for Singaporeans to embrace new technologies. This anomaly can be explained by looking at another aspect of the SIP report: the perception that the Internet has not led to a stronger sense of political empowerment (Kuo, et al, 2002: 111). According to the researchers, the percentages of users who believe that the Internet enables increased engagement on government policies and political issues are low (at less than 20%). This dismal result suggests that there is little hope for political change to be effected by harnessing new communication technologies within the confines of Singapore. Yet if one considers the global potential of the Internet and the fact that the Internet is often the first port of call when seeking uncontrolled and 'truthful' information, it would be too simplistic to write off the political possibilities of the Internet in Singapore (Gomez, 2002). After all, the Internet is, by design and by the many codes and regulatory guidelines, always-already a site of struggle and contestation. The next section of this paper continues along this thread by looking at how the Internet has been regulated in Singapore since its inception. It also considers how Foucault's mode of governmentality via 'tactics' of regulation – what I have termed 'auto-regulation' (Lee,

2001a,b,c) – has been applied on the Internet and other new media technologies in Singapore (Foucault, 1977; 1978). By looking at the different responses to auto-regulation, we may understand how new communication technologies can be used – and abused – for social and political ends.

[T]he major effect of the “Panopticon” [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. [...] It is an important mechanism, for it automizes and disindividualizes power (Foucault, 1977:201-2).

In recent years, the Singapore government has been actively promoting the attributes of creativity and innovation. The firm belief is that Singapore’s future prosperity is tied to its success applying artistic creativity and scientific innovation in various entrepreneurial goals (MITA, 2000), most prominently seen in the government’s aggressive attempts at turning Singapore into a biomedical hub as well as the nurturing of the arts and culture into ‘creative industries’ (Creative Industries Working Group, 2002). There are concerns, however, that an over-emphasis on a rigid and structured education system, along with a hitherto intolerant social, cultural and political censorship regime, has stifled the creativity and risk-taking initiatives of Singaporeans. At his annual National Rally Speech in 2002, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong signalled a possible directional change when he expressed a desire for various locales in Singapore to evolve into “little Bohemias” where people can “gather, soak in the ambience, and do their creative stuff” (Goh, 2002). Whilst the efforts are real, with the recent completion of Singapore’s new world-class arts venue, ‘Esplanade - Theatres By the Bay’, a commanding proof of the government’s commitment towards enhancing creativity, its long-term effectiveness remains questionable (Banks, 2002a: 3; Ong, 2002). Not least due to the fact that many of the tried-and-tested rules and regulations, often accompanied by harsh penalties, remain intact.

In April 2002, the Censorship Review Committee was reconvened by Acting Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts David Lim, to ‘update’ and ‘refresh’ censorship policies (Koh, 2002: 3; Tan, 2002). Minister Lim summarises the crux of the matter when he makes clear that “Singapore needs to be more playful, but that doesn’t mean we’re going to be naughty” (in Koh, 2002: 3). Minister Lim’s remark bears deep semblance to a commonly quoted phrase articulated by his predecessor Minister George Yeo:

## Internet Panopticon And Auto- Regulation

“Leave the windows open, but carry fly-swatters,” which cautions Singaporeans who may mistakenly conclude that a loosening of cultural censorship implies socio-political liberty (cited in Lee & Birch, 2000: 164). While it appears – with this latest declaration – that not much will change in the short to medium term, censorship reviewers will be forced to consider the impact that the Internet has made to cultural norms in Singapore. As Banks (2002a: 3) articulates (in the context of the current censorship review):

“It remains to be seen whether the review is simply a recognition that the Internet now makes it extremely difficult for governments to regulate what its people read, see and hear and therefore need some tinkering – or is a genuine attempt to liberalise the law.”

Certainly, there will be ‘some tinkering’ to censorship rules in the near future, but the extent to which is unlikely to be seen as ‘liberal’ in the true sense of the word. One needs to remember that censorship in Singapore is predicated upon the ‘symbolic’, that is, it signifies and affirms community values and political tolerance in Singapore (Lee & Birch, 2000: 150-1). Any attempt to liberalise censorship rules is likely to find widespread resistance in a society that professes moral and cultural conservatism, often to the point of emasculation (Banks, 2001: 5). This gives the authorities in Singapore a legitimate right to exercise ‘thought’ control, whether this is found in the management of ‘sleazy’ material and other undesirable practices or in the clamping down of oppositional political voices.

What most Singaporeans do not seem to realise is that in a climate of auto-regulation, where regulation is carried out ‘automatically’, both overtly and subtly at the same time, the preference to err on the conservative side gives the government and its statutory bodies immense power to craft new rules, laws and codes to tighten its already tremendous grip on social, cultural, ideological and political power (Lee, 2001c). Prominent Singaporean journalist Cherian George calls this consolidated power ‘central control’ (George, 2000; see also Ellis, 2001). Veritably, with auto-regulation, the government becomes the supervisory ‘central tower’ in Bentham’s Panopticon, a privileged position from which to exercise surveillance on citizens as ‘inmates’ (Foucault, 1977).

The notion of ‘auto-regulation’ embodies the key elements of the Panopticon in that one does not know when the ‘supervisor’, as the extension of the authorities, is really watching. As a result, regulation appears to be carried out automatically and with machine-like precision. As Foucault (1977: 201) puts it, “[the]

architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.”

In other words, auto-regulation works because it is a potent combination of all possible modes of regulation: application of legislations and regulations, state surveillance, direct policing, self-regulation, and so on. With modern technology, auto-regulation can be ‘automised’ and applied with even greater precision and subtlety (Foucault, 1977: 202).

Singapore’s approach to managing the Internet has become in many ways an epitome of auto-regulation. As Gomez points out, political control through Internet monitoring is technically easier due to the ability to intercept electronic communication messages at the point of departure or reception (2002: 43). In Singapore, the fact that all local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and broadband service providers are either government-owned or government-linked makes the business of electronic eavesdropping child’s play. Indeed, one of the most pertinent points of auto-regulation in Singapore is that no new technology escapes the watchful eyes of the state police.

Even Singapore’s official Internet content policy embodies aspects of auto-regulation. The Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) is empowered by its Act of 1995 to regulate Internet content. SBA’s Internet policy comprises a set of Industry Guidelines on the Singapore Broadcasting Authority’s Internet Policy (October 1997), an Internet Code of Practice (November 1997) and a Class Licence scheme (July 1996). These codes and guidelines combine to form the overall practice of Internet self-regulation in Singapore (Lee, 2001a,b,c). The Industry Guidelines explains the main features of SBA’s Internet regulatory policies and spells the rules for ISPs as well as Internet Content Providers (ICPs). Although the Internet Code of Practice is highlighted within the Industry Guidelines, it is essentially a separate document specifying details of ‘dos and don’ts’. In this document, ‘prohibited material’ is broadly defined as: “material that is objectionable on the grounds of public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony, or is otherwise prohibited by applicable Singapore laws” (SBA, 1997b, item 4 [1]).

The obvious problem with this ‘definition’ is that it leaves too much room for (mis)interpretation. What at any time constitutes ‘public’ or ‘public interest’ is not – and probably can never be – clearly construed. As many critics have pointed out, policy and/or political terms in Singapore are not transparent (see Rodan, 2000a;

Lee & Birch, 2000; Yao, 1996). The deliberate employment of ambiguous and arbitrary legal terms, interpretable only by state officials, is one of the key foundations of auto-regulation. A blanket Class Licence scheme is then applied to all ISPs and ICPs so that all who put up any content on the web are 'automatically' licensed without the need to actually apply for one. The only exception is that any website seeking to promote political or religious causes must pre-register. Up to 2001, the political aspect of the Class Licence scheme was rarely invoked.

In July 2001, notice was issued to the popular *Sintercom* (which stands for 'Singapore Internet Community') website to register itself as an Internet site "engaged in the propagation, promotion or discussion of political issues relating to Singapore on the Internet" (Goh, 2001). At that time, this move was seen by critics as bizarre given that the independent website, founded in 1994 and perceived by many as the beacon of civil society in Singapore, had been previously exempted. Up to July 2001, *Sintercom* had been one of the most innovative non-governmental website, set up to encourage candid discussions of social, cultural and political life in Singapore for local and overseas Singaporeans. A month later, Tan Chong Kee, founder of *Sintercom*, announced that the website was to shut in end-August 2001. Tan put the blame squarely on the arbitrariness of political terms within the Class Licence policy, adding that he believed civil society to be a 'lost cause' in Singapore (Tan, 2001; Lee, 2002). Although Tan stressed that his decision had nothing to do with *Sintercom*'s regulatory tussle with the authorities, it is apparent that SBA's Internet auto-regulatory framework has succeeded in crippling alternative and oppositional discourses. The automatic licensing approach of SBA's Class Licence policy instills a panoptic sense of power and fear, thus minimising the need for supervision or direct intimidation.

To date, Singapore's Internet industry players have not flouted any of SBA's Internet guidelines. While SBA claims that this is due to its transparent policies, it is apparent that the fine record of policy adherence owes a great deal to the application of auto-regulation at various times in Singapore's brief history of the Internet. In 1994, the year when public Internet access was first made available through *SingNet* (the ISP arm of local telecommunications conglomerate *SingTel*), at least two unauthorised scans – according to official explanations, to source for unlawful pornographic materials and viruses – were conducted on private users' email accounts. In November 1998, the local *Straits Times* daily reported that a section of the Singapore Police Force was set up to 'patrol the alleys of cyberspace' so as to keep

hackers and cyber-criminals at bay. And again in April 1999, SingNet was found to be conducting unauthorised scanning of its subscribers' web accounts, supposedly for deadly viruses. This latter case made the front-page news because the Ministry of Home Affairs, the parent ministry of the Singapore Police Force, was involved. *SingNet* had to issue a public apology – not on paper, but via mass e-mail (Lee, 2001a,b; Rodan, 2000a).

Perhaps the most significant auto-regulatory tactic employed by the SBA since October 1997 – in conjunction with the unveiling of the aforementioned Internet Code of Practice – is the censoring of 100 pornographic sites via proxy servers of the three main ISPs operating in Singapore: *SingNet*, *Pacific Internet* and *Starhub*, all with deep government links (Lee & Birch, 2000). SBA's rationale for censoring these 100 smut sites is to exhibit a gesture of pastoral concern for the moral values of Singaporeans (Tan, 1997: 27). This strategy of 'gestural censorship' exemplifies auto-regulation par excellence as it works to not only draw public attention to its new guidelines, it also: "reaffirm[s] the means by which the government of Singapore is able to enact the ideology of ... social control of the public sphere, demonstrating the means by which the habitus of controlled behaviour is still reinforced and able to be reinforced in Singapore" (Lee & Birch, 2000: 149).

The ability to block websites gives the impression that electronic 'snooping' is being performed by the authorities, so it becomes necessary for citizens to toe the official line by self-censoring (Gomez, 2000). Although SBA has repeatedly stated that it does not conduct online monitoring (see Lim, 2001), the fact that significant public attention were given to the scanning incidents – or 'scandals', as I have called them (Lee, 2001c) – are sufficient to warn users about the widespread power of auto-regulation. Whether or not actual file searching or surveillance is carried out becomes irrelevant in an auto-regulatory climate, the demonstration of a government's technical capability is far more potent and intimidating. Auto-regulation thus hinges on an ideology of control and surveillance with the sole aim of producing law-abiding, self-regulated and therefore, useful citizens – what Foucault refers to as 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977).

SBA has repeatedly emphasised that its Internet policy has been developed in consultation with the media and info-communications industry. This does not, however, negate dominant perceptions that a panoptic mode of surveillance continues to dominate in Singapore – if not physically, then ideologically. Auto-regulation works because the enclosed nature of a panoptic regulatory supervision "does not preclude a permanent presence from the outside" (Foucault, 1977:

## New Regulatory Politics

207). As Foucault points out, the general public is always welcome to inspect the central Panopticon tower by scrutinising the guidelines/codes (by downloading them from E-Citizen or government websites) or by examining other functions of surveillance (by visiting and/or speaking to the authorities). But because auto-regulation is a widely dispersed function, with each individual playing a vital role – in self-regulation, self-censorship and the condoning or acceptance of rules that appear to promote public orderliness – it is almost impossible to find fault with it. As a consequence, the authorities can claim to be objective, consultative and transparent. The auto-regulatory role of surveillance and policing thus strengthens rather than weakens. Auto-regulation, like the Panopticon, becomes as Foucault notes: “a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole” (Foucault, 1977: 207). What this also means is that the authorities are increasingly able to pre-empt and tighten the strictures of political control of new communication technologies in Singapore.

Singaporean gatekeepers have long been wary – even paranoid – of foreign media and international broadcasters engaging in Singapore’s domestic politics (*The Straits Times Interactive*, 10 March 2001; see also Seow, 1998). This fear has been the driving force of foreign media censorship since the 1960s. In July 1986, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA), the key legislation governing publications in Singapore, was amended to enable the government to restrict sales of foreign publications deemed to be interfering with Singapore politics. Following the passage of this law, many foreign media were taken to task for their reports of unsavoury aspects of the PAP system (Chee, 2001: 173). Foreign publications falling victim to this new law included the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Economist*, *The Asian Wall Street Journal* and *Asiaweek* (Seow, 1998: 148). In addition, in the past 30 years, global media players including *Newsweek*, *Reuters*, *The Times* (London), *The Star* (Malaysia), *Time*, and *International Herald Tribune* have had their editors and/or journalists hauled to court and sued heavily for publishing defamatory or libellous articles (Seow, 1998; Chee, 2001).

The muzzling of the foreign media was extended to the global broadcast media in April 2001. After a very brief debate in a one-party dominated Parliament, the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Bill 2001 was passed. Under this legislation, foreign broadcasters which meddle in ‘domestic politics’ – a term that only the Minister of Information,

Communication and the Arts is empowered by law to define – could be slapped with restrictions on the number of households which can receive their broadcasts through cable (operated by SCV); or worse, the broadcast channel could be ‘blacked-out’ altogether (*The Straits Times Interactive*, 23 April 2001). If such an action is effected, advertising and/or subscription revenue of the affected broadcaster will be severely affected. In his parliamentary speech on the new Bill, then Minister of Information and the Arts Lee Yock Suan revealed the Singapore government’s clear grasp of the business of the media industry:

“This Bill makes it clear to foreign broadcasters that while they can sell their services to Singaporeans, they should not interfere with our domestic politics” (Lee, cited in Latif, 2001).

Indeed, the touchstone of all commercial media is the market and as such any decision on regulatory compliance would thus be market-dictated and targeted. Undoubtedly, Singaporean law and policy-makers understand – and apply – this knowledge only too well. As journalist Eric Ellis of *The Australian* notes more cogently:

“Where [global media players] are all vulnerable to Singapore [laws and] justice is that each has an economic interest in Singapore itself. The city-state might have a tiny population but it is a wealthy, English-speaking one. Foreign titles print in Singapore because it guarantees efficiency. So, if the Government chooses, as it has done, to cut Singapore circulation, advertising and profits are threatened” (Ellis, 2002: 9).

The government further demonstrated its auto-regulatory abilities in the new media arena by tackling an online publication in August 2002. On 4 August 2002, the international news agency *Bloomberg* published an article by its US-based columnist Patrick Smith that described as nepotism the appointment of Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s daughter-in-law, Ho Ching, as Executive Director of Temasek Holdings, the powerful government-owned corporation that controls most of the government-linked companies in Singapore (Ellis, 2002: 9; *The Straits Times Interactive*, 30 August 2002). This article was published electronically on *Bloomberg*’s website and terminals, and appeared in print only in Malaysia’s *The New Sunday Times* on 11 August 2002. Upon knowledge of a possible defamation suit, *Bloomberg* retracted its article, apologised unreservedly to the Senior Minister, the Prime Minister as well as his Deputy Lee Hsien Loong, and offered damages amounting to S\$595,000. The apology and compensation was accepted and the case was settled in three weeks. *Bloomberg*’s quick settlement demonstrated a pragmatic understanding of political constraints of both media operations and Internet use in Singapore, and that the Singaporean authorities have

no intention of relinquishing its auto-regulatory control in the digital era. If anything, one is likely to see a further fine-tuning of rules and regulations.

Commentators and critics on Singapore have variously argued that the real intention of restricting access to websites is ideological, a term used broadly to imply that the agenda is always political. On 8 June 2001, whilst launching the official website of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that new regulations on how political parties may use the Internet at election time would be unveiled (Chua, 2001a: 3). It is interesting to note how the PAP government, being one of the most vociferous proponents of IT and the information communications industry, had taken such a long time to show its 'electronic face' (see Chua, 2001b: 12). This 'face', however, is somewhat limited as the website is essentially an exercise in public relations, featuring interviews with party leaders, most of whom, as cabinet members, receive sufficient local media coverage anyway. Gomez argues that absence of a discussion forum, along with the disclaimers found in the 'Conditions of Access' page on the PAP website, reveals the inherent anxiety of the PAP leaders to be "out in the open and in an interactive domain policed by the very laws that it has introduced" (Gomez, 2002: 28). But for a party that has dominant control of the apparatuses of government, such rules can be easily circumvented or revamped to its advantage.

On 13 August 2001, in clear preparation for the 2001 General Elections held on 3 November 2001, the Singapore Parliament passed an amendment to the Parliamentary Elections Act to regulate Internet campaigning and advertising during election time. The new Bill is essentially an extension and refinement of SBA's Class Licence scheme. Instead of leaving content providers to self-regulate, the Parliamentary Elections Act defines specifically what is allowed on political party as well as non-partisan political websites that are already registered with SBA. As a pre-emptive measure, even new communication tools like mobile telephones, along with data and text functions like short messaging services (SMS), came under the purview of this new law.

According to Minister Lee Yock Suan, the Act is to "keep political campaigning serious and responsible," and it is to be perceived as a positive step forward in terms of "liberalising the use of Internet" and communication technologies for political advertising (Ng, 2001; Editorial, 2001; Lim, 2001). Typically, terms such as 'liberalising' and 'political' remain equivocal, but nonetheless constraining. The ambiguity of such laws are likely to prompt oppositional political figures as well as non-political

activists to auto-regulate their online as well as offline activities. What is most baffling is that the law was passed with the complete set of rules still in a work-in-progress stage. The Minister did however 'assure' the House that the full list of Internet features which would be allowed on these websites would be released before the election (*The Straits Times Interactive*, 14 August 2001).

The rules were unveiled and subsequently made effective on 17 October 2001, about two weeks before polling day. Opposition political parties, most of which are already under-staffed and short-handed, had to make the necessary adjustments to their websites within the short time frame, whilst having to campaign and canvass for votes. As Rodan (2001: 26) observes, "Political competition in Singapore operates within tight strictures. Periodic refinements are meant to keep it that way and take the risk out of elections for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). [...] Adjustments include fine-tuning controls over electronic media. The PAP is accustomed to conducting election campaigns with media that promotes rather than question or scrutinise its message. That is not about to dramatically change."

If Rodan's words portend the future of politics in Singapore, what hope is there for genuine opposition to arise in Singapore? The work of Singaporean activist James Gomez – most conspicuously in the setting up of Think Centre, founded as a news events and publishing company devoted to raising awareness on political reform within Singapore and the region – suggests that there are yet frontiers of the Internet to exploit for the purposes of engaging Singaporeans (Gomez, 2000; see especially Chapter 1). Using the Internet to organise activities on the ground and openly publicising correspondences with the authorities, the Think Centre fast-forwarded 'e-politics' in Singapore in the sense that the authorities had less room to err in its decision and policy making processes. Accordingly in October 2001, the Think Centre was gazetted as a political society, with funding and other restrictions placed upon it. In his revealing book on Internet Politics in Singapore, Gomez (2002: 92) remains somewhat optimistic when he notes that: "Internet legislation in Singapore to date stands to cover websites and for election time covers political parties and organisations. It does not yet cover individuals and there has been no instance for the PAP to move against an individual."

If Gomez's intention was to alert individuals about the possible risk of overstepping political boundaries in private Internet postings, his response came shortly after. In July 2002, the police embarked on a criminal defamation investigation on Zulfikar Mohamad Shariff, the former chief of a Singaporean Muslim rights

activist website <[www.fateha.com](http://www.fateha.com)> who took the government to task in early 2002 on the rights of Muslim girls to wear their tudung (traditional headscarves) to schools. This racial cum religious encounter was particularly sensitive in the wake of the terror attacks on 11 September 2001 and the uncovering of the *Jemaah Islamiah* terrorist plot in Singapore in January 2002, but the investigation had a lot more to do with political annoyance than with social threat. As *The Straits Times* reported on 4 July 2002, Zulkiflar was being investigated for three articles posted on the website questioning Muslim Affairs Minister Yaacob Ibrahim's standing as leader of the Malay/Muslim community and criticising Ho Ching's appointment as Executive Director of Temasek Holdings (as in the case of *Bloomberg*) (Osman, 2002a). The probes intensified the next day when the police impounded the computer of another man, Robert Ho, for two articles that appeared in June in [soc.culture.singapore](http://soc.culture.singapore), a popular Internet newsgroup, that may have also criminally defamed government leaders and officials (Osman, 2002b).

Through this brief episode, the principle of auto-regulation was applied very swiftly, effectively warning would-be online offenders to watch their cyber-journeys and to avoid dabbling in political issues. Tan Tarn How, a veteran *Straits Times* journalist 'closed' the saga with a seemingly innocuous report that the Internet community was 'spooked' by these events, "with some users wondering if they would be targeted next" (Tan, 2002). The fear of falling victim to the widening electronic powers of the Singaporean authorities meant that individuals no longer had much laxity in the use of the Internet and other new media tools. Veritably, the task and function of auto-regulation is being rolled-out as rapidly as the uptake of new media technologies over the past decade. As the final section will suggest, the fast-developing array of electronic government (e-Government) services, exemplified more prominently by Singapore's e-Citizen portal website may set the scene for the restriction or gradual erosion of individual civil liberties along with political involvement and participation.

The Singapore government's next phase of Internet development comes in the form of an electronic-government (e-Government) vision. Globally, the concept of E-Government appeared in the 1990s, but was put into practice only at the turn of the new millennium. E-Government was widely heralded as a tool that would bring about greater democracy with the enhancement of political participation and the ability of citizens

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to vote online. Even so, most e-Government projects around the world are intended primarily to facilitate citizens' access to a great amount of diverse information put forth by government departments. Indeed, for the public, e-government means a simplification of their interaction with government via Internet connectivity; or in other words, a new way of governance (Netchaeva, 2002: 467).

In June 2000, the Singapore government made public its adoption of this new governance strategy when it announced a three-year S\$1.5 billion E-Government Action Plan which seeks to "develop thought leadership on e-government; build new capabilities and new capacities; encourage the spread of electronic service delivery; innovate with info-comm[unication] technologies; and finally be responsive and proactive" (IDA, 2001: 36).

This cryptically crafted Action Plan effectively requires all civil servants and government administrators to fundamentally rethink all aspects of governance and consider how technology can be used to improve internal efficiency and improve governmental interaction with individuals and businesses (IDA, 2000: 36). The ability of any government to move towards e-Government, according to Norris (2001), is partly a demonstration of its technological prowess and partly a fine-tuning of its ability to meet the administrative needs of citizens. In this regard, Singapore has received numerous accolades for its impressive implementation of government services online. For example, in June 2002, Singapore was presented an Explorer Award in recognition of its innovative online public programmes by the prestigious E-Gov organisation based in the United States (*The Straits Times Interactive*, 26 June 2002). In addition, Singapore has been recognised for being the second most mature e-government location in a worldwide study done by consulting firm Accenture (IDA, 2001: 36).

At present, Singapore's E-Citizen portal, <[www.ecitizen.gov.sg](http://www.ecitizen.gov.sg)>, provides the best illustration of Singapore's successes in e-Government. Launched in April 1999, the e-Citizen website offers more than 180 e-services grouped in 16 online units based on categories that address family life, health, housing, education, employment, transport and other day to day issues (IDA, 2001). In 2001, close to one-third of Singaporean taxpayers filed their income tax returns online, a figure that is reportedly one of the highest in the world. By the end of 2002, about 95 per cent of all official services are expected to be available via eCitizen (Dawson, 2002).

According to the IDA, the aim is to streamline administration such that citizens would not need to visit government offices at all (IDA, 2001). As at November 2002, E-Citizen gets an average of 4.2

million hits a month, which works out to about one in two persons using e-Government services in Singapore (Dawson, 2002). The Singapore government is also actively developing a nationwide electronic business transaction system known as the 'Government Electronic Business' (GeBiz). When operational, GeBiz will link all government departments with its suppliers, thus streamlining the often-cumbersome processes of issuing purchase orders, tendering and procurement of goods and services (IDA, 2000,2001).

It is noteworthy that the IDA, the main driver of e-Government in Singapore, has termed the entire electronic project a democratic aspiration towards a "citizen-friendly state" (IDA, 2000). Whilst the ability to carry out necessary bureaucratic tasks and to access comprehensive information about government policies, white papers, official reports and other abstruse documents are moves towards greater transparency, one needs to consider the implications of auto-regulation in an increasingly networked environment. Clearly, electronic linkage of citizens to government offices would enable greater direct scrutiny, thus a (further) loss of privacy along with surveillance that is more precise than ever before. In addition, a truly representative democracy requires not just information, but also a two-way communication process at regular intervals, beyond mere election time (Norris, 2001: 129-30). In short, the 'citizen-friendly state' envisaged by the government has a greater potential to marginalise rather than engage people. As Norris (2001: 130) articulates:

"E-governance is open to criticism that [government] agencies have been more willing to carry out traditional functions via electronic means, rather than using digital technologies to reinvent how they conduct business, to reconnect with citizens as customers, and to strengthen public participation in government."

It is debatable whether greater public participation is the primary or ultimate goal of the Singapore government. After all, the government has always clung onto the belief that control must precede openness and transparency, and that any participation in political life must be done within the geopolitical arena of Parliament (see Lee, 2002). Although the Singaporean authorities have embraced e-Government in a seemingly enlightened manner, the principles of auto-regulation remains fully enforced. Government-endorsed channels of communication, most notably the Feedback Unit within the Prime Minister's Office, have tended to steer clear of the Internet. Even the forging of links with Singaporeans residing overseas, managed by quasi-government organisations such as the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), are often carried out physically rather than electronically. Prior to

a recent online discussion session with Minister David Lim on 16 October 2002, the SIF issued an email news release explaining that “online chats provide an important channel for the Singapore government and political leaders to explain and elaborate policies and plans for the Singapore populace, [and to] gain immediate feedback” (Singapore International Foundation, 2002).

As the world moves towards global online exchange and e-commerce, it is certain that more rules will be enacted to guard against uses and abuses of the Internet and other new media technologies. With fears of terrorism caused by the events of 11 September 2001, as well as online sabotages in various forms, an increased threat to global security is likely to enhance the regulatory role of authorities around the world. On 29 September 2001, the Singapore Government reversed its decision to allow overseas Singaporeans to vote at limited centres globally, despite an earlier amendment to the Parliamentary Elections Act which would have allowed the first-ever overseas voting, due to security concerns in the aftermath of the terror attacks (Fernandez, 2001). Critics saw this as a political tactic aimed at minimising the possibility of voters’ backlash during uncertain times. But more importantly, this incident provided a case in point of how democracy can weaken rather than strengthen with advancements in technology, considering how overseas voting was to be a first of several steps towards the setting up of electronic voting facilities within Singapore and abroad.

The government’s ambivalence towards the Internet and new communication technologies is reflective of the political tactic and strategy of auto-regulation. It is, for one, blatant yet subtle; it is open yet surreptitious. It promotes strong economic growth whilst keeping social and political dissent at bay. It appears to embrace technological development, whilst making sure that its control over technology remains watertight. With the gradual and further tightening of political rules and legislations governing media and communications, the policing discourse of auto-regulation looks set to intensify as Singapore and the rest of the world move towards e-commerce and e-government. As Foucault puts it, “surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (Foucault, 1977: 201).

For the time being, there are yet possibilities via the Internet – although somewhat limited due to a refinement and enactment of new rules every now and again – to engage citizens and to challenge the social, cultural and political status quo, whether individually or collectively. There is no doubt, however, that an auto-regulated application of political expedience in the way electronic spaces are

## Conclusion

used today will have significant ramifications on the political and technological future of Singapore. How this future pans out would depend largely on the extent to which the government is prepared to review its role as arbiter in and of all issues, as well as the extent to which Singaporeans are prepared to embrace the causes of socio-political justice – not for economic or political gains, but for its own sake. Both scenarios, I suspect, would take a fair amount of time to materialise, if at all. ■

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# Hong Kong Anti-Terrorism Ordinance And The Surveillance Society: Privacy And Free Expression Implications

*This paper is a critical examination of the privacy and free expression implications of surveillance in the wake of new anti-terrorism law in Hong Kong. Surveillance has increased worldwide since the recent terrorist attacks. New technological modes of surveillance have become indispensable weapons in this 'war on terrorism'. The extent to which such surveillance technology impacts on privacy and free expression has been explored extensively in the literature both in Europe and North America. The issue, however, has received little attention in Asia. European and North American anti-terrorism laws are set within the framework of legislative safeguards – safeguards as to the permissible boundaries of State surveillance. Where anti-terrorism laws impede civil liberties, the legislation is relatively clear and transparent. The situation in Hong Kong may be differentiated with that in Europe and North America; there do not appear to be any legal safeguards in place to curtail surveillance, while the notion of transparency seems wholly lacking in the larger legal framework of surveillance.*

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The reverberations of September 11 and the recent attacks in Bali have been felt worldwide. These attacks elicited quick responses from legislative assemblies from around the world, including Hong Kong's. The legislative responses to terrorism have provoked challenges to democracy: to our views of civil liberties, to our legal systems, and to our conception of security.

The new Hong Kong anti-terrorism measures, while not as robust and intrusive from a civil liberties perspective as their North American and European counterparts, nonetheless have privacy and free expression implications. Prior to the enactment of the anti-terrorism measures in Hong Kong, the government had asked interested members of the community to submit any questions or comments pertaining to the draft provisions. Many submissions

to the Security Bureau highlight potential free expression problems: journalists' being forced to hand over confidential source materials; the broad wording of the definition of terrorism; the unrestricted ability to delegate authority; and the malleability of future governments bending to the influence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (BBC News, 2002). My primary concern, however, is not with the particular wording of specific provisions but rather with the aggregate of data collection and information used to obtain evidence against suspect terrorists and terrorist acts.

The aggregate of methods of data collection and information is a less politically charged way of saying surveillance. Surveillance often conjures images of the literary depictions of police-state societies in the works of Orwell, Kafka and Huxley when, in fact, surveillance is essentially about the collection of data and information. For this reason, surveillance will often be referred to in Hong Kong legislation as the "interception of communications" (legal perspective) or "data collection" (more neutral and corporate in perspective). Surveillance is either targeted at a particular person or organisation (personal surveillance) or it is used as a mass tool to identify certain patterns (dataveillance).

It is important to recognise that surveillance is neither inherently evil nor undesirable. It should be understood in the context in which it is applied and, more importantly, for the actual use made of the data once collected. Thus it may be the case that searching for communications which contain signals for bombs may be desirable, but using the same data for other unrelated purposes such as evidence in a minor crime of shoplifting may be wholly undesirable. Society must decide under what context it is appropriate to use surveillance techniques and, more importantly, what safeguards are necessary for the type of surveillance utilised. By safeguards I am referring primarily to legal safeguards such as legislation which targets and limits the use of surveillance. Technological safeguards (e.g. security mechanisms on Internet) and democratic safeguards (e.g. rule of law) are outside the scope of this paper. However, the legal safeguards that I will refer to are inevitably linked to notions of technological and democratic safeguards.

How does an individual or corporation become a suspect of terrorism or linked to an act of terrorism (this would include threats of violent action as well as more passive acts such as facilitating property acquisition for such groups)? Through a massive and indeed global collection of data and information. Conventional methods include wiretapping, searching premises, and using 'spies'. The reality, however, is that this data collection will increasingly be done through sophisticated and often undetectable technologies: web-sniffers such as Carnivore, satellite systems such as *Echelon*, remote surveillance software such as *Magic Lantern*, nano spy

## Surveillance And Dataveillance

technology, biometrics technology, face and voice recognition systems, Smart ID cards, and by requiring Internet Service Providers (ISP) to become deputised spies.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, I will analyse the privacy and free expression implications of surveillance. This will be achieved by looking at the concepts of surveillance and dataveillance and through a description and overview of some of the more prominent surveillance technologies. Secondly, I will suggest what types of safeguards should be required in the Hong Kong Anti-Terrorism Ordinance (and other related legislation) to ensure that civil liberties are not unnecessarily impaired. The Hong Kong Anti-Terrorism Ordinance is silent on matters of surveillance, unlike legislation in other jurisdictions such as Canada and the United States, which expressly outline measures relating to surveillance.

### The Concept Revealed

Surveillance has traditionally been associated with notions of physicality. So, for example, a prison guard would monitor prisoners, or a security guard would shadow suspicious consumers in a store, or a police agent may follow a suspect of crime. Increasingly, however, such surveillance is being done through physical enhancements such as cameras, audio equipment, and sophisticated technologies. Surveillance as a generic concept is described by Roger Clarke as:

“Surveillance is the systematic investigation or monitoring of the actions or communications of one or more persons. Its primary purpose is generally to collect information about him/her, their activities, or their associates” (Clarke, 1988: 499).

Surveillance has traditionally been understood as targeting a person for a specified reason. Dataveillance, on the other hand, is not targeted at surveilling a specific person; Clarke defines dataveillance as, “the systematic use of personal data systems in the investigation or monitoring of the actions or communications of one or more persons.” Dataveillance is a way of saying mass surveillance. It is “concerned with groups of people and involves a generalised suspicion that some (as yet unidentified) members of the group may be of interest” (Clarke, 1988: 499). The purpose of dataveillance is often to identify certain persons within a group who would later become the target of surveillance at a personal level.

Technologies operate under a similar premise. Surveillance technologies target a specific person who is suspected of exhibiting certain defined characteristics. Dataveillance technologies are a

mass tool in that they are directed at the public en masse for the purpose of singling out those individuals with the set of sought attributes. Dataveillance also has an important differentiating function from surveillance – as it is significantly less expensive, the economic constraints found in traditional surveillance methods are greatly diminished, thereby providing further incentive to use such dataveillance methods. The following is an analysis of both surveillance and dataveillance technologies, and their potential implications for privacy and free expression.

Technology has become a powerful and silent partner in the war on terrorism. Without doubt, surveillance has increased worldwide because of 11 September 2001. What remains doubtful is whether unanticipated types of surveillance will continue to proliferate for reasons purely associated with and restricted to terrorism. This begs the question of what types of surveillance are appropriate in a free and democratic society and what safeguards are necessary for the different surveillance methods.

It is not my aim to provide a comprehensive overview of surveillance and dataveillance technologies – such a task would be overwhelming due to the speed with which such technologies change. Rather, my aim is to provide sufficient technological detail to allow for a more robust understanding of the privacy and free expression implications of the use of innovative technology. The focus of discussion will emphasise the technologies that are most applicable to Hong Kong (either those already in use or those which pose a high risk for abuse) and will briefly outline emerging surveillance technologies.

### **Carnivore / Web-sniffers**

Developed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), *Carnivore* is a remote controlled web-sniffer technology. Just as dogs are used in airports to sniff through luggage in search of narcotics, web-sniffers are programmed to identify and locate specified types of information on the Internet. The software will be programmed to locate and track usage of key phrases and words through Internet communications. It cannot, however, decipher encrypted text. The technology is connected to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) network, and is designed to intercept data transmitted over the Internet in order to aid authorities in criminal investigation (Electronic Privacy Information Center). In the era of terrorism, *Carnivore* is readily used to track the electronic communications of terrorists.

Prior to the enactment of the Uniting and Strengthening

## **The Silent Technologies**

America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (the USA Patriot Act), *Carnivore* could only be used in the United States (US) when it was targeted at a specific individual under the direction of a court order followed by a court review of the information gathered. In this sense *Carnivore* resembles a personal surveillance technology.

The system was designed for specific and focused searches. However, its original design has been improved so that it is also capable of mass surveillance. This concept is called packet sniffing. Such use allows the technology to search emails for key words such as 'bomb'. Thus the only thing limiting *Carnivore* to a personal surveillance is in fact the court order specifying its parameter of operation. The type of court order and standard of proof varies in the US depending on the nationality of the suspected terrorist or criminal, those subject to domestic law enforcement and those subject to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Surveillance of those persons subject to domestic law enforcement, namely US citizens and permanent residents, requires a court order specifying the scope of the surveillance and the government must still prove probable cause. For those individuals who are not a US citizen or permanent resident, FISA applies allowing for a secret court to authorise US intelligence agencies to conduct surveillance without proving probable cause.

Additionally, under FISA, *Carnivore* surveillance may commence without a court order, authorities then have up to a year to obtain the required court order. For both domestic and FISA surveillance, court ordered specific targeting remains a requirement (either through the domestic or secret court), however, there is no longer any requirement for the court to review the information to ascertain whether it complies with the original scope of the court order. In effect, government agencies may now rove from communication portal to communication portal with significantly less restraints as to what and whom they are searching for (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2002).

On a final note, web-sniffing technology is deployed in many nations other than the US, most noticeably in China. Web-sniffing technologies currently require cooperation of ISPs in order to implement the software. It may be one thing where a court order requires a private ISP entity to install Government surveillance technologies (e.g. *Carnivore*), and yet quite another when an ISP is owned and controlled by the State, and installs its own (non-Government) surveillance technology which would allow it to circumvent any legislative provisions restricting Governmental surveillance. As it stands, *Carnivore* is limited to personal surveillance but has the technological capability of being used

for mass surveillance. Similar web-sniffer technologies used in other countries, where they are not legislatively confined to personal surveillance, are capable of mass surveillance.

## **Magic Lantern: PC Surveillance Software**

Like *Carnivore*, *Magic Lantern* is a remote-controlled Internet software. Where *Carnivore* is installed on the ISP's information system, *Magic Lantern* is a combination computer worm/Trojan horse. A worm or a Trojan horse is similar to a computer virus inasmuch as the effects are an unwanted intrusion into the 'private' sphere of one's computer or computer network. Worms or Trojan horses, however, differ from a virus in that they "propagate themselves from system to system without the use of an infected file or diskette [and] exist inside of other files and documents that are sent as attachments with the initial message" ([http://www.system-tech.net/support/virus\\_info/definition](http://www.system-tech.net/support/virus_info/definition)).

*Magic Lantern* is a software that installs itself on the target computer and allows for keystroke capturing or keystroke logging, enabling others to read your messages as you type. It was developed to allow the FBI to crack the encryption that is used by terrorists and other criminals (Electronic Privacy Information Center). Such keystroke detection technology is useful to decipher encrypted messages.

Unlike *Carnivore*, *Magic Lantern* is strictly a personal surveillance technology – it does not have the potential to be used as a mass surveillance tool. As a result, *Magic Lantern* is much more analogous to a phone tap than *Carnivore*. This tool is used to target an individual already suspected of wrongdoing and would be somewhat futile when applied randomly or en masse. Keystroke/web-sniffer technology in the wake of terrorist attacks is increasingly being used in remote control cross-border internet searches where one nation uses a 'sniffer' keystroke recording program to enter into computer systems of individuals resident in another nation often performed without the cooperation of enforcement officials in the targeted nation (Goldsmith, 2001). As such, government agencies are able to read any messages or searches typed in on your computer as well as 'sniff' for specific phrases, and names linked to terrorism.

## **Echelon / Satellite Surveillance**

Gathering information about *Echelon* is a difficult process as, according to US authorities, it does not exist. Let us, for the moment, assume that it does exist and afford credibility to those reports which claim its existence.

*Echelon* has been described as a net. It is reportedly a complex

web of radio antennae at listening stations across the planet to intercept satellite communications (see Electronic Privacy Information Center, Echelonwatch). British analyst Duncan Campbell (2000) prepared a comprehensive detailed report on *Echelon* for the European Parliament explaining the interception of communications ability of Echelon.

The surveillance capability of this technology, from the evidence adduced in this report, appears to be all-pervasive. According to the Echelonwatch group (2002):

*Echelon* is perhaps the most powerful intelligence gathering organization in the world. Several credible reports suggest that this global electronic communications surveillance system presents an extreme threat to the privacy of people all over the world. According to these reports, Echelon attempts to capture staggering volumes of satellite, microwave, cellular, and fiber-optic traffic, including communications to and from North America. This vast quantity of voice and data communications are then processed through sophisticated filtering technologies.

This type of technology certainly brings to mind the image of an Orwellian surveillance. The effectiveness of 'Big Brother' to meaningfully filter this data remains far from perfect, and turning raw data into intelligence remains difficult. As *Echelon* does not 'officially' exist according to US authorities, no legal safeguards operate to limit its surveillance use nor do the provisions in the Patriot Act apply to this 'non-existent' technology.

## **Biometrics Technology**

Biometrics technology consists of breaking down a person's body part, whether it be a face, retina or fingerprint, into digital components much like a compact disc records music in digital format as opposed to analogue (the first breaks the music wave into thousands of stops and starts undetectable to the ear while the latter records the actual waves generated by the music preserving the continuity). The digital components are broken down into such detail and then they are numbered and charted. Comparisons of the numbered chart pattern may then be compared with information in a database.

Digital face technology (captured by cameras) is already used in airports and in heavily trafficked areas in some public city spaces. The 2001 Super Bowl in Tampa, Florida used this technology to scan the faces of the football game attendees and then compared the images in a database of faces for the purpose of identifying potential terrorists and criminals. Similarly, closed-circuit camera monitors with digital face recognition technology

have been installed in the Lan Kwai Fong area of Hong Kong. Such technology is aligned with mass surveillance in that data is collected en masse and where certain sought attributes are identified, the surveillance is then targeted at specific individuals.

## Smart ID Cards

In Hong Kong, The Registration of Persons (Amendment) Bill will introduce and indeed mandate multi-application Smart Identity Card technology. A simplistic way of describing this technology is that it is a multi-function credit card sized 'plastic' card containing an integrated chip (Alder, 2002). One card will perform the functions that are currently performed by several cards. The current proposal is limited to four applications: National ID card, Driver's License, and Library card as well as what is called the Postal E-Certification function. Additionally, the Smart ID Card will utilise biometrics technology where a person's fingerprint will be digitally stored on the Card for identification purposes. New applications may be added to the card in the future.

The four applications of the Smart ID Card consist of four separate functions where the data contained in each section is segregated. The other essential component of Smart ID Cards is the reader of the card. The reader refers to the authorised technical device which reads the information on the card. The actual card, therefore, stores the data while the reader tracks it.

The collection of data in and of itself should not necessarily be construed negatively nor does it give rise to grave concerns. Smart ID Cards allow for more gathering of personal data for the construction of data profiles. It is potentially dangerous because the data collected is attributable to an individual, therefore allowing for personal monitoring and tracking in an unprecedented manner. The last point to be made is that technological safeguards require legal safeguards which restrain unwarranted and potentially abusive uses of the data gathered by these cards. This last point requires some elaboration.

Much of the debate on Smart ID Cards has been situated on the risk of technological interference with the data contained on the card. In other words, the risk is perceived as a technological one. In a submission to Legco on the proposed bill Professor Kwok-Yan Lam (2002) comments:

The MULTOS card operating system, which is adopted as the card platform of the smart ID card, provides built-in security mechanisms to segregate multiple applications resident on the chip of the smart card. It also provides mechanisms for securely loading and deleting applications to/from the chip at the post-issuance stage of the card. These security features ensure that the smart ID card

may support multiple applications without worrying about interference among on-card applications (interference refers to the situation that one on-card application accesses data belonging to another on-card application). Furthermore, future loading and deleting of on-card applications can only be conducted by parties authorised by the SMARTICS system.

The argument made is that the card has stringent access control mechanisms and utilises a number of security techniques to safeguard the integrity of the data contained on the card. Regardless of whether one agrees with the risk assessment on the security of the card, the important point to be made is that technological safeguards must be accompanied by a robust set of legislative controls and limits to the use of such data. While there may be a segregation of physical data and access to such data, the segregation of the use of the data is critical. Thus a key criticism of Smart ID cards is the potentially unfettered cross use by co-issuers such as separate branches of the Hong Kong Government.

### **Other Types of Spy-Ware Technology**

There is a growing list of innovative spy-ware being developed for surveillance. The following is a sample of some of these technologies: wave detectors, optic taps, window bouncers, nanotechnology, power surveillance, microchip implants, radiation analysis, and remote-controlled dust mites (Branigan, 2002). A detailed analysis will not be provided of such technologies as they are currently not in widespread use for surveillance or other purposes. On the less 'James Bond' side of things, traditional wire-tape on telephones, and Internet services are not to be forgotten.

As Charles Sykes once wrote, "Privacy is like oxygen. We really only appreciate it when it's gone" (Sykes, 1999). From my perspective, it would be equally appropriate to put freedom of expression in the same category as privacy, that is, as an under-appreciated liberty.

What is privacy? Is it a positive or negative right or is this characterisation more accurately portrayed as a convention that society has become accustomed to expect? As Simon Davies (2002) explains:

"Privacy is perhaps the most unruly and controversial of all human rights. Its definition varies widely according to context and environment to the extent that even after decades of academic interest in the subject, the world's leading experts have been unable to agree on a single definition... And, like the concept of freedom,

## **Privacy And Free Expression Implications Of Surveillance**

privacy means different things to different cultures. In France, it equates most closely to liberty. In America, it is an inseparable component of individual freedoms – particularly freedom from intrusion by federal government. Many European countries interpret privacy as the protection of personal data. Since the days of the huge campaign against the government's proposed ID card in 1987, most Australians view privacy as a measure of state power, while the government views it as a set of strictly defined legal rights."

Set against a background of competing definitions, it is difficult to ascertain what privacy means to citizens of Hong Kong. Perhaps the better question to ask is, in an era of extensive surveillance, what are citizens' expectations of privacy? When one makes a phone call on a mobile phone, or when one sends an email to a friend, or when one uses one's Octopus card (a small, plastic smart card without ID function) to purchase coffee at *Starbucks*, is there an expectation that these communications are privately communicated or do we expect such communications to be public in the sense that we are being watched and listened to.

Lisa Austin (2002) addresses the notion of the expectation of privacy noting, "The constitutional cousin of 'If you aren't doing anything wrong then what do you have to hide?' is 'What did you expect?' If we expect surveillance, then ... it is difficult to argue that this expected surveillance nonetheless violates our privacy." I would argue that this is an insufficient test to ascertain if privacy has been violated. If privacy is aligned with a human right then it should matter very little if the expectation is one of surveillance, the significance of the right remains unchanged. This pivotal point of whether an individual expects to have private as opposed to surveilled communication is one of behaviour alteration. If we do not expect privacy, we alter our behaviour and our discourse to reflect our environment. We engage in self-censorship under the pretext that our communications are not private. "The paranoia and fear of being monitored is as much a tool of censorship as the reality of the monitoring itself" (Liu & Wiggins, 2002). This presents the important question – what is the impact, in turn, on freedom of expression?

The right to freedom of speech may exist, but if the practice of surveillance becomes all-pervasive, there may not be rights after such words are freely spoken (Gan, 2002). Consider the following example: The Constitution for the People's Republic of China recognises "freedom of speech." This freedom of speech is rooted in the ideal of communal sharing of ideas and as an instrument to realise state objectives (Reed, 2000: 459). The limited scope of free expression is pitted against the omniscient prevalence of censorship, control and surveillance. If you want to send an email to someone

expressing your sentiments on the latest appointments to the leadership of China, ask yourself if you would deliberately alter or more carefully select your words when sending email from China as opposed to from Australia or Hong Kong? Your answer would likely be yes. Why? Because you expect your communications to be monitored in China. This geographic distinction of linguistic and ideological borders is, however, becoming less relevant in the wake of new surveillance technology. The technology exists to allow governments and corporate identities to monitor communications via innovative software such as web-sniffers, packet sniffers, and remote control computer monitoring software. Thus there are increasingly fewer technological impediments to surveillance. The impediments are no longer the limits of technology – it has no limits. The crucial factor will be legislative control of surveillance. Let us turn to surveillance legislation.

Fully ‘unpacking’ surveillance legislation in Hong Kong requires the dissection of a number of domestic Ordinances as well as legislation from other jurisdictions. For the purpose of this paper, I will limit my comments to the anti-terrorism measures and interception of communications measures in Hong Kong as well as highlight some international standards as they relate to surveillance.

### **United Nations (Anti-Terrorism) Ordinance**

The United Nations (Anti-Terrorism) Ordinance was enacted in Hong Kong in order to fulfill China’s obligations to the United Nations Security Council resolution against terrorism. The Ordinance is predominantly tailored to curtail the financing of terrorists.

#### **a) Defining Terrorists and Terrorist Property**

Section 4 of the Ordinance defines terrorists, terrorist associates and terrorist properties as those designated by a United Nations (UN) Committee. The UN Committee publishes a list of terrorists, terrorist associates and terrorist property (the list is available at [http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/releases/foreign/2001/fal85j\\_01.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/releases/foreign/2001/fal85j_01.html)). Due to the sensitive and important nature of this information (an assumption on my part), the process is highly secretive. The data collection and information sharing, and the use of such data to determine the list of entities appearing on such lists is shrouded. Additionally, once an entity finds itself on this list, the procedure to remove itself remains equally unknown. It

## **Legislation Affecting Surveillance**

is fair to say, however, that the information collected on such entities is done through both domestic and international surveillance of suspect individuals and groups, and that such information is shared between federal security bureaus in the international arena. It is furthermore fair to say that such surveillance inevitably utilises various forms of surveillance technology.

### **b) Obtaining of Evidence and Information**

Once an entity is listed on the UN Committee designated list of terrorists, the collection of additional evidence and information will be required. Section 19 (Regulations) of the Ordinance sets out the power of the Government to obtain evidence and information:

#### **Section 19 Obtaining Evidence and Information**

- (2) The Secretary may make regulations for the purposes of
  - (a) facilitating the obtaining of evidence in relation to the commission of an offence under this Ordinance
  - (b) facilitating the obtaining of evidence in relation to the commission of an offence under the Ordinance
- (3) The Secretary may make regulations for the purposes of authorizing public officers to perform functions or exercise powers under regulations made under this section.

This wording of these provisions is broad and grants virtually unrestricted powers to the Secretary to make regulations pertaining to the obtaining of evidence and information, which would include surveillance methods.

So far, the Security Bureau has yet to make regulations in this regard. It remains unclear whether such regulations would supplement or trump existing legislation relating to surveillance. Upon further investigation, we will see that the question of whether the characterisation is one of supplementation or replacement is somewhat misleading as the Interception of Communications Ordinance has not entered into force.

## **Interception of Communications Ordinance**

The Interception of Communications Ordinance is a most peculiar piece of legislation. It was a private member's bill enacted in June 1997, but some five years later has yet to enter into force. This piece of legislation was pushed through prior to the handover in 1997 out of a desire to restrict and prevent potentially abusive monitoring practices. Many concerns lingered after the bill was enacted. The Security Bureau represented that it would undertake to write a Consultation Paper on the matter. To date, this paper has not yet been written.

It is unfortunate that this Ordinance or a similar type of legislation has not become law and, as evidenced by the reluctance of the Security Bureau to move forward on the matter, looks as though it is not likely to become law any time soon. Further investigation reveals that this Ordinance contains many safeguards against unwarranted and abusive practices of surveillance. The following sections are examples of such safeguards:

#### **Section 4 Authorization for Interception**

- (2) An order shall not be made under this section unless it is necessary
  - (a) for the purpose of preventing or detecting a serious crime, or
  - (b) in the interest of the security of Hong Kong
- (3) In deciding whether it is necessary to make an order, the judge shall determine that
  - (a) there are reasonable grounds to believe that an offence is being committed, has been committed, or is about to be committed;
  - (b) there are reasonable grounds to believe that information concerning the offence referred to in paragraph (a) will be obtained through the interception sought
  - (c) all other methods of investigation have been tried and have failed, or are unlikely to succeed; and
  - (d) there is good reason to believe that the interception sought will result in a conviction.

#### **Section 11 Power to Obtain Information**

The Legislative Council may at any time require the Secretary for Security to provide, for any specified period, the following information, namely –

- (a) the number of interceptions authorized and denied;
- (b) the nature and location of the facilities from which and the place where the communications have been intercepted;
- (c) the major offences for which interception has been used as an investigatory method;
- (d) the types of interception methods used;
- (e) the number of persons arrested and convicted as a result of interceptions;
- (f) the average duration of each interception; and
- (g) the number of renewals sought and denied.

These provisions are a sample of the types of legal safeguards appropriate to the utilisation of personal surveillance methods.

There are additional legislative measures that impact on surveillance: Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance, Postal Ordinance and Telecommunications Ordinance. Without addressing the merit and substantive elements of these ordinances, the point to be gleaned from the analysis of multiple legislative measures is that the impact on civil liberties cannot be derived from the study of one particular piece of legislation; these legislative measures must be studied as a collective package both in terms of their interaction and the collective effects on safeguarding privacy and freedom of expression.

In order to effectively implement appropriate safeguards relating to surveillance, three points must be addressed. The starting point for this discussion is first to identify what types of surveillance are consistent with the values of a free and democratic society. A second point is that data collection may have ancillary effects. Information collected for one purpose will often become used in the context of some secondary purpose that is not necessarily known or understood at the time of its collection, otherwise known as data creep. And finally, silence does not necessarily mean compliance. The Hong Kong Anti-Terrorism Ordinance is relatively silent with respect to surveillance which begs the question of whether non-transparency (whether or not it is unintentional) raises further questions of privacy and free expression.

### **What types of surveillance are consistent with the values of Hong Kong society?**

Privacy and freedom of expression are fundamental underpinnings for a free and democratic society, and are recognised rights in Hong Kong. Surveillance is often justified by the need to protect national security. To the extent that such techniques are used to protect real 'national security' interests as opposed to 'regime' interests is a potential problem. In this sense, legal safeguards are required to ensure that surveillance is conducted in a transparent manner. Surveillance and transparency appear to conjure opposing values, the one of secrecy and the other of openness. These values, however, are not necessarily in competition with one another. Surveillance may be done secretly (arguably it is most effective when undetected) if the procedure to obtain permission to do so is transparent. Clarification in the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance is required to restrict the methods used to obtain evidence and information and to articulate in what context such surveillance methods should be used.

It may further be the case that certain types of surveillance should perhaps be barred from use. By its very nature, mass

## **Surveillance Requires Safeguards**

dataveillance is difficult to impose restrictions on. How, for example, does one obtain a court order to scrutinise every citizen's email within domestic borders? And within the international scene?

### **Ancillary effects of data collection and data creep**

Consider the following scenario: The United States Patriot Act allows investigators to obtain orders compelling booksellers or librarians to turn over private information about their customers and patrons. A bookseller could be ordered to turn over a list of the books a customer has purchased and a librarian can be compelled to report what books a patron has borrowed. This raises privacy and free speech implications concerning such searches.

The same information, however, could potentially be collected about a library patron through Smart ID Card technology. The technology is seen as a way to provide benefits and convenience to both the citizens and Government of Hong Kong. Instead of carrying multiple cards around, the Smart ID card combines multiple uses so that a person need only carry one card. Although the information collected on the Smart ID Card does not have as its purpose the ability to monitor what books a person takes out from the library, this is a potential secondary effect of its application. The data collected 'creeps' from one use to another, thus the term 'data creep.'

### **Silence is not compliance**

The United States Patriot Act gives broad powers of investigation and surveillance to its authorities. The Patriot Act clearly states that it overrides other legislation including those relating to privacy and restrictions on surveillance techniques. As one reads this Act, it is obvious that civil liberties are being compromised. However, when one reads the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance it would appear that, on its face, civil liberties are substantially less threatened. However, as I have demonstrated, non-transparency poses significant problems for potential abuses. And for that matter, the danger is that such abuses could go on undetected. The potential for abusive practice is further augmented by virtue of the lack of a prior framework restricting surveillance.

In this respect, it is imperative that the Government of Hong Kong either enact new legislation relating to the interception of communications or put into operation the Interception of Communications Ordinance.

## Dataveillance and mass tools of surveillance

Dataveillance or technologies which allow mass surveillance are likely to be outside the control of Hong Kong's Legislative Council. Without arriving at any conclusion on this point, it is relatively safe to speculate that data is currently being collected using technologies of mass surveillance. The uses of such technologies are also not confined to domestic borders; they are global in their reach. Information collected from beyond domestic borders is prolific and may require an international agreement at some point in the future.

All legislation related to surveillance should clearly delineate what types of surveillance techniques are appropriate and under what conditions, as well as what safeguards they should be subjected to.

Surveillance legislation is fundamental to safeguarding privacy and free expression. As such, it is important to establish boundaries to the scope of data collection for present and future governments as well as for private entities.

Establishing adequate legislative safeguards for surveillance will make this type of legislation less malleable for future governments bending to the influence of the PRC. This is particularly important given the contentious nature of the debate on Article 23 of the Basic Law (sedition, state secrets and subversion).

Civil liberties help to define a culture and its society. The gathering of private information dossiers on individuals has been heralded as "the badge of the totalitarian state" (Sir Nicholas Browne-Wilkinson, quoted in Norton-Taylor, 2002). If democratic values are to remain important in Hong Kong, then civil liberties must be championed.

Do members of society expect privacy in their communications or is the expectation one of being watched? This query may be extended one step further. Perhaps the expectation is a mixture of both elements. Under certain circumstances you expect your communications to be monitored while in other situations you expect privacy. When you speak on your cellular phone in public, you knowingly forfeit your right to a private conversation. In the comfort of your own home, however, you would expect your conversation to be confined to a more private space. Legal safeguards operate on a similar premise. The State may only use surveillance methods when a person is a suspect in a crime or terrorist act, and when these methods are defined and confined to

## Conclusion

their enabling legislation. In the absence of such legislation, however, it may be the case that privacy is more of an empty concept than a reality. If privacy has indeed ceased to exist, the malignant effect of such legislative short-sightedness is that free expression may descend the same slippery slope. ■

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# Hong Kong's News Media Five Years After The Handover: Prospects For Press Freedom

*This paper examines the current situation of Hong Kong's news media in the context of the development of Hong Kong's government and its relations with Beijing. Despite expectations that press freedom would be eroded under Chinese rule the news media remain very free and outspoken, especially in criticising the local administration. However, much of the ownership of the news media is already in pro-Beijing hands, and, with democracy declining and the role of the legislature and the opposition being eroded, concerns arise that restrictive laws already in existence as well as those due to be made may be used later to reduce the freedom of the press.*

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**F**ears that Hong Kong's liberal press system would be compromised under Chinese rule have proved unfounded: newspapers and magazines, as well as certain television and radio current affairs programmes, continue to be outspoken and often highly critical of the local government. However, the grounds for concern about loss of this freedom remain, and in some ways are more worrying five years after the handover than before as the Hong Kong government deals with the strain of maintaining a balance between local forces and Beijing while facing economic decline since the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. This paper examines the changes in Hong Kong that have affected the news media in the five years since the handover to discern the conditions that underpin the current freedoms and affect future development.

## **Background**

Before the handover to China in 1997 Hong Kong's news media covered a spectrum from mainland communist to Taiwan nationalist – ultra-leftist, leftist, centrist and rightist (Lee & Chan, 1990) – but the extremes had few customers and the mainstream local news was apolitical, apathetic and skilfully managed by the

colonial government (Lee & Chu, 1995). From the mid-1980s, spurred by the 1984 signing of the Joint Declaration arranging the colony's handover from Britain to China, the news media became more active and opinionated, turning into what Paul Lee and Leonard Chu call a Type II system, that is, relatively free (Lee & Chu, 1995).

In the 1990s up to 1997, when the last British governor, Chris Patten, instituted much broader elections to the Legislative Council (Legco), government-media relations developed into what Lee and Chu call a "reformist" model, identified by three characteristics: the media serve as a watchdog of government but are not hostile to it, the government makes no effort at suppression, and people support the media (Chu & Lee, 1995). A defining point of the new atmosphere was the appearance in 1995 of *Apple Daily*, whose founder, Jimmy Lai Chi-ying, was a strong critic of Beijing. The new paper broadened debate and boosted the sector by provoking a price war, pushing the mass circulation market into increasingly sensational coverage of crimes, scandals, accidents, suicides and the like. Television kept its staid news bulletins but instituted 'infotainment' programmes about sensational matters.

Despite the revitalisation of the news arena and the guarantee of press freedom in Article 27 of the Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, many were concerned before 1997 that Chinese government influence would restrict the press. Lee and Chu predicted that the Hong Kong media would move to Type III, that is, relatively repressive (Lee & Chu, 1995) and would after 1997 "legitimate the new master without feeling great discomfort", a trend that had started well before the handover (Lee & Chu, 1998). A colleague and I have pointed out that there are still some little-used repressive laws from the colonial administration despite attempts to update them with regard to human rights. These include the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, which allows for censorship under emergency conditions, and the Police Force Ordinance, under which police can obtain warrants to search the premises of news organisations, as well as the Public Order Ordinance (POO), whose controls on public meetings and rallies have been tightened up by the new administration (see below) (Clarke & Hamlett, 1995; Hamlett & Clarke, 1997).

Some commentators emphasised the grounds for optimism. Lo Shiu-hing argued that Beijing had an instrumental view of Hong Kong as a means to attract Taiwan back into the fold, and therefore would be likely not to stray from the Basic Law (Lo, 1998), while Frank Ching suggested that the Chinese government would respect Hong Kong's freedoms because the territory was an important showcase in its desire to achieve Western standards (Ching, 1999). Moreover, as Scollon (1997) noted, what was distinctive about local newspapers was "the variety of styles, points of view, and, indeed,

of separate publications and publishing companies", so that, unlike news media in the West, they had not been subsumed into huge corporations and "represent one of the world's most diversified theatres of public discourse." This has meant that the Internet, widely accessible in homes in the territory, has become more a tool for reading the local press than an outlet for criticism of the government.

Thus the news media system has remained 'Type II'. Although the range of opinion narrowed with the collapse of the Taiwan-sponsored press just before the handover and the movement of a number of news organisations to a pro-mainland stance, the news media still cover a broad area. The mainland-run press continues and is important in articulating Beijing's views, though its audience is still small, and, while the mass-circulation newspapers remain generally 'populist-centrist' without strong political opinions, local issues are hotly discussed and newspapers take different stands (Lee & Chu, 1998; Pan, 2002). *Reporters Sans Frontières*, the French non-governmental organisation that tracks press freedom around the world, recently placed Hong Kong at number 18 out of 139 countries and territories examined, the highest score in Asia (though Taiwan was not included) and one rank below the United States (US) and three ranks above Britain. Complaints about commercialisation and sensationalism abound, but these phenomena can themselves be seen as one result of a high level of press freedom in a free market economy.

Over the five years since the handover, however, Hong Kong itself has changed. Some democratic reforms initiated by Chris Patten, such as the POO, have been rolled back, and opposition voices increasingly sidelined. The local economy, facing recession, has become more and more integrated with and dependent on the mainland's. The news media may appear to be beyond government control but in fact are already largely in the hands of pro-government and pro-China interests. This paper argues that there is strong potential for danger to the freedoms enjoyed by the news media in Hong Kong.

The Basic Law prescribed an executive-led government and provided regulations for the election of the Chief Executive (CE) and the Legislative Council, but since the handover the leeway in interpretation has been exercised to increase the power of the executive at the expense of the legislative level.

After Patten's reforms produced a Legco that "was regarded as the most democratically elected legislature in Hong Kong's history" in 1995 (Chen, 2001), an appointed provisional Legco took over for a year from the 1 July 1997 handover, and for the 1998

## Changes In Government Since The Handover

and 2000 elections changes were made to electoral rules that favoured the pro-government and pro-Beijing groups rather than the pro-democracy parties that had become so popular under Patten (Newman & Rabushka, 1998; Chen, 2001). The latter groups now command fewer than 20 of the 60 seats, so that government legislation goes through easily. This has given rise to criticisms of the hasty passage of bills that have wide implications for all kinds of freedom. One was the United Nations (UN) (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Bill 2002, drafted in response to the UN's call for such legislation after the United States plane bombings of 11 September 2001. The legislation was passed in July 2002 amid complaints from pro-democracy Legco members that some provisions could trap innocent people (Leung & Li, 2002) and from the Hong Kong Bar Association that there were already laws that dealt with terrorism and that the bill had been hurried through when there was no urgency (Hong Kong Bar Association, 2002). There were criticisms of too much haste also in the passing of a bill setting up the "ministerial" system in June 2002 (see below) (Cheung et al., 2002) and another to cut civil servants' pay in July (Yeung, 2002). The composition of Legco and the methods of election can be changed after 2007, according to the Basic Law, but any new procedures will require a two-thirds majority in the body itself and the consent of the CE (Annex II: II III), so that in current circumstances any move towards democratisation is hardly likely to succeed.

In 2002 Tung Chee-hwa, selected as CE before the handover, came up for re-election to a second five-year term. Well before the due date he had gathered 700 supporters among the 800-strong selection committee, making it clear that no one could stand against him, despite independent polls showing his popularity to be declining. He was allowed HK\$9.5 million for election expenses even though he proved to be the sole candidate. His first act in his new term in July was to revamp the executive level of government with what was termed an "accountability" system. The existing formulation, inherited from the colonial era, had an Executive Council appointed by the CE to advise him, while civil servants were appointed as secretaries of the government departments. This structure was replaced by a single layer of highly-paid "ministers" appointed by the CE and who could resign or be sacked (though in what circumstances was not made clear).

Answering criticisms of the system, officials have pointed to ministerial systems in other countries without noting the role there of democratic election and legislative scrutiny. Some continuing appointees, such as Secretary for Justice Elsie Leung Oi-sie, had been unpopular in the earlier administration. The system was tested soon after it began when in July the Hong Kong Stock Exchange issued a consultation paper suggesting the de-listing of "penny

stocks", causing a massive market dive the next day.

An inquiry panel found that government officials and market regulators were not to blame, but there was so much public antipathy that eventually the new Secretary for Financial Services, Frederick Ma Si-hang, made a public apology and his ultimate boss, Financial Secretary Antony Leung Kam-chung, admitted that he himself "could have done better" (J. Cheung, 2002). Then in October the new Secretary for Education, Prof Arthur Li Kwok-cheung, announced that two universities, one of which he had headed in his previous job, would merge, when neither had been fully consulted on the matter. Many academics and others in fact deplored the plan. The "ministers" involved in these controversies remain in place.

The new methods of election and selection at the legislative and executive levels have served to entrench supporters of Tung as well as to nurture relations between Hong Kong's ruling élite and the Chinese government. Fu Hualing (2001: 77) finds that Beijing has substantial influence over the CE, other officials and law makers, as well as local business, and says, "The unholy alliance between Beijing's top Communists and Hong Kong's richest capitalists provides the most effective channel for Beijing to influence Hong Kong's political and legal development." In a way this situation provides a safeguard for stability because it ensures that anti-Beijing activity, while not stifled, can do no more than provide informational input to policy decisions, yet on the other hand the lack of effective outlets for dissenting views may force opposition groups to seek non-formal and less orderly means of expression.

While it must be acknowledged that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government has had a difficult task in implementing one-country-two-systems in a time of recession, the administration has not distinguished itself in dealing with crises. Its reactions have been characterised by ad hoc measures, occasional backtracking on policy announcements, and overtly favouring the business sector, which also supports Beijing. Some of these cases will be briefly examined.

- **Right of abode:** Some mainlanders sought right of abode under Article 24 of the Basic Law based on the residency of their parents, though these parents had not been Hong Kong residents at the time of the claimants' birth. When the applications were rejected, the claimants took their case to the courts and won in the Court of Final Appeal (CFA) in 1999. The government then obtained an 'interpretation' of Article 24 from the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress that overturned the

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CFA decision. The ruling prompted demonstrations and widespread concern because the Basic Law recognised the CFA as having “the power of final adjudication” in Hong Kong (Article 82). The right-of-abode claimants have continued to press their case through the courts as well as demonstrations, but most have been returned to the mainland, some after raids on their homes.

- **Public order:** Under the Patten administration the POO was liberalised, replacing the requirement that public gatherings get police permits with simple notification, but amendments passed in 1997 added the need for a police certificate of no objection a week in advance if there were to be 50 or more at a meeting or more than 29 at a demonstration. In August 2000 sixteen students were arrested after a rally in support of the right-of-abode seekers; seven were charged under the POO, and five of them were also later charged under the POO for an earlier demonstration. The charges were dropped amid public sympathy for the students (HKJA, 2001; HKJA & Article 19, 2001). In November 2002 three political activists were found guilty under the POO of an unauthorised rally earlier in the year, though the magistrate questioned the bringing of the case to court in the first place because of its possible political nature. Yet demonstrations by government supporters were dealt with more leniently.

In mid-2002 rallies by New Territories villagers, whose Heung Yee Kuk organisation is a staunch government supporter, and by famous figures in the film industry, neither of which had permits, did not attract police action. In another case, a charge of flag desecration was upheld by the CFA in 1999 despite an earlier appeal ruling that the laws used to prosecute were incompatible with the Basic Law, and two further prosecutions followed in 2002. Falun Gong members and US activist Harry Wu, who has investigated prison conditions in China, have been denied entry to Hong Kong in what seems like a nod to Beijing's sensitivities.

- **Manipulation of popularity polls:** In July 2000 Robert Chung Ting-yiu of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) alleged in an article in the *South China Morning Post* that Tung Chee-hwa's special assistant had placed pressure on him via the university's vice-chancellor and pro-vice-chancellor to end public opinion polls on the CE's popularity. A televised inquiry, set up by HKU, found the charge basically substantiated, calling the CE's aide a “poor and untruthful witness”. The two university officials resigned, but the CE's special assistant remained in place (HKJA, 2001: 4; HKJA & Article 19, 2001: 16).

- **Favouritism:** There have been several instances where the administration has appeared to act to help its supporters. In 1998 three employees of the *Hong Kong Standard* were found guilty of

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inflating circulation figures to advertisers, but the company's then owner, Sally Aw Sian, a supporter of the government and friend of Beijing since the early 1990s, was not prosecuted despite being named at first as one of the conspirators. In 1999, the government handed the last major vacant site on Hong Kong island without tender to PCCW, the local telephone company, which is headed by Richard Li Tzar-kai. Li is a son of Hong Kong's richest tycoon Li Ka-Shing, who is close to both the Hong Kong and Beijing regimes. PCCW remains the staple telecommunications company, despite moves to deregulate the market, and is the territory's main Internet and broadband service provider (though one of its main competitors is Hutchison, which is headed by the elder Li). The quiet reversal of the CE's initial policy to build 85,000 new flats a year and later measures to end government-built low-cost home ownership blocks and reduce the amount of land released for development have been seen as helping the big property companies weather the fall in house prices.

Ironically, the government's blunders are widely known because of the freedom of the news media. Indeed, there is little holding back on criticism of the CE and his administration. Yet the actions of the government mentioned above indicate that efforts are being made to establish controls for the future, and there are specific areas of the news where danger to press freedom lies.

### Journalists and the law

Several cases were handled in ways that drew criticism. In 1997 the mass-market *Oriental Daily News* (ODN) sent its paparazzi to harass a judge who had ruled against its parent company in a copyright complaint against *Apple Daily* for stealing a picture of a local star. Wong Yeung-ng, former editor of ODN, was sentenced to four months' jail in mid-1998 for contempt on the grounds of scandalising the court, a charge rarely used in modern times. Anne Cheung criticises the use of this charge because it is vague and fails to separate press freedom from physical harassment (A. Cheung, 2002: 207-209), while Tim Hamlett calls the offence "a serious hazard for the media in Asia-Pacific countries with a Common Law background" because judges decide on cases in which they themselves are involved (Hamlett, 2001). In another case the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) raided *Apple Daily* in 2000 in search of evidence against a reporter said to have bribed the police for information (he was later found guilty of this charge), and *Apple Daily* brought a case against the ICAC on the grounds that the search warrant was not valid. The

initial effort failed and the case was taken to appeal but disallowed at CFA level (HKJA & Article 19, 2000: 11-12). Anne Cheung takes the judiciary to task for not being more forceful in establishing the primacy of the Basic Law's guarantee of press freedom, finding that judges instead concentrate on points of Common Law because "deference to authority is valued higher than the respect of civil liberties" (A. Cheung, 2002: 192).

A main worry has been the government's proposal to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law, which requires the Hong Kong SAR to enact laws on treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government and theft of state secrets, as well as to stop foreign political groups conducting political activities in Hong Kong or establishing ties with local political groups. No time frame was set and many had hoped that it would be delayed indefinitely, Cullen (2001) and Fu (2001) among others believing that there is no need for further legislation because the area is well covered already. The HKJA & Article 19 (2002: 2) requested the government not to take action at all or at least to guarantee that any legislation passed would come up to international human rights standards.

In February 2003 the draft legislation was published and passed to Legco. Reassuringly, it addressed many of the major complaints. However, concerns remained. The Hong Kong Journalists Association noted that although the offence of "unauthorised access" to official information had been limited to that gained by criminal means, it was still a threat to journalists, who may not know that information they receive has been obtained in such a way as, for example, in the case of a letter posted to a newspaper. Moreover, the publication of information gained through criminal means may in fact be in the public interest, and this is not allowed as a defence; nor even is prior publication. The HKJA called also for the dropping of the offence of dealing with seditious publications, even though this has been clarified in the final version of the law. Other complaints include the empowering of the Secretary for Security to ban groups on national security grounds, including cases of local organisations subordinate to groups banned on the mainland on such grounds (Bale, 2003).

For the news media the proposals have a number of concerns. One is over the proposal for legislation on sedition. This revives a moribund law, last used in 1952, and gives no special protection to reporting. Official secrets legislation is also taken further than what exists, criminalising unauthorised access to protected information – a threat to any journalist who receives such information anonymously – with such areas to include relations between Hong Kong and the Chinese government, a clearly newsworthy subject. Misprision of treason, currently a common law offence and not used

in Britain for two centuries, is to be made statutory, punishing anyone who knows of someone else who has committed treason and doesn't report it. Journalists may come across such information in the course of their work and feel obliged to keep it secret, as happened during the 1989 Tiananmen rally and subsequent escape of participants after the army attack. The publication of the proposed laws would reassure the many who are concerned and allow for careful consideration of wording before the legislative process.

### **Regulation of the industry**

In June 2000 the Broadcasting Ordinance (BO) was passed to replace the former Television Ordinance, but it was not so all-encompassing as the omnibus bill mooted by the colonial government to bring all forms of broadcasting under one law. Yan Mei-ning expresses disappointment that the BO makes no provision for better quality programming and that the Broadcasting Authority set up to oversee the industry is not really independent of the government. She points out that the new law allows the CE more power to change regulations while reducing Legco's vetting power (Yan, 2001b: 13). An effort in an addition to the BO to diversify Hong Kong's television sector by offering five pay-tv licences seems to have flopped or at least stagnated, perhaps due to the recession, but it was riven with accusations of favouritism. One of the applicants was Galaxy, a subsidiary of the dominant terrestrial television broadcaster Television Broadcasts Ltd. (TVB), even though the rules forbade current licence holders to apply. After objections from Hong Kong Cable Television Ltd., the CE allowed Galaxy's application under his right to do so in the public interest, though with some restrictions. No explanation as to why the application was in the public interest was given. In the event three applicants dropped out and Galaxy was late in paying its bond (HKJA & Article 19, 2001: 21). As Yan points out, this indicates that, far from bringing about the diversity in television the government wished for, the market was likely to become even more concentrated in the same old hands (Yan, 2001b).

The BO makes no mention of the government's Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). The station's outspokenness has provoked criticism from pro-Beijing quarters. In mid-1999 RTHK's *Headliner* programme featured Taiwan's representative in Hong Kong, who stated the view of Taiwan's then-president Lee Teng-hui that relations with China should be approached on a "state-to-state" basis, a formulation akin to sacrilege in Chinese government circles. This drew strong criticism from Beijing, where it was thought that voicing such views was not appropriate in

Hong Kong. In October that year RTHK's director, Cheung Man-ye, a strong advocate of the station's independence, was posted to Tokyo, apparently her own choice, though some wondered if the move was connected to the incident (HKJA & Article 19, 2000: 6-7).

There was concern again in October 2000 when Tung Chee-hwa agreed with a pro-Beijing legislator who suggested that RTHK should be obliged to help explain government decisions. RTHK responded by stressing its editorial independence, though stating that it would explain policies and exchange views with the public over them in programmes (HKJA, 2001: 5).

The press has not escaped efforts to regulate it. In 1999 the Law Reform Commission's Sub-Committee on Privacy recommended that a statutory press council with the power to fine newspapers be created to regulate press intrusion according to a code on privacy. There was an outcry from the journalistic community (HKJA & Article 19, 2001: 27) and others (see, for example, Zeitlin, 1999). Eventually the Newspaper Society of Hong Kong, which represents publishers, set up the Hong Kong Press Council in 2000 to pre-empt a government-sponsored body. The new group comprised 15 members of the public and representatives from 11 newspapers, but *Apple Daily*, *ODN* and its sister tabloid *The Sun*, which are estimated to command 70-80 per cent of the market, did not join, nor did the respected *Hong Kong Economic Journal* and *Sing Pao* (HKJA, 2001: 5).

## Media ownership

Perhaps the most ominous indication of the potential for loss of press freedom is the increasing acquisition of the news media by pro-mainland interests. Robert Kuok, a Malaysian tycoon with businesses in China, owns the English-language *South China Morning Post*, purchased in 1993, and 33 per cent of TVB. Sally Aw Sian, proprietor of the once pro-Taiwan *Sing Tao Jih Pao* and English-language *Hong Kong Standard*, turned pro-China in 1993 and even published two short-lived newspapers on the mainland. The dropping of charges against her in the circulation inflation case mentioned above came at a time when she was beset by financial difficulties, and she had sold her whole business by early 2001. Sing Tao Media Holdings is now owned by tobacco tycoon Charles Ho Tsu-kwok, whose Global China Group Holdings Limited is in the multimedia business in China. *Ming Pao*, once owned by the writer Louis Cha, who became very supportive of Beijing in the 1980s, was sold twice in the early 1990s. A large part is now in the hands of the Indonesian-Chinese businessman Oei Hong Leong, who has business interests in China and publishes the pro-mainland *Wide Angle* magazine, and the rest is with the Malaysian-Chinese publisher Tiong Hiew King, who also does business in China.

C.C. Lee notes that *Ming Pao* became less strident in its criticism of China after this change in ownership (Lee, 2000). Sing Pao Media Group, publisher of *Sing Pao Daily News*, was sold in late 2000 to China Strategic Holdings, a conglomerate owned by construction magnate Charles Chan Kwok-leung, who also holds 10 per cent of *Ming Pao* and 54 per cent of *Wide Angle Press* (HKJA, 2001: 7) and is reported to be close to Li Ka-shing (Quak, 2000).

Lai Sun Holdings, the company of businessman Lim Por Yen, sold 51 per cent of second television broadcaster ATV in 1998 to two China-connected companies. One was *Dragon Viceroy*, owned by Liu Changle, a former Chinese army officer who part-owns the Phoenix satellite television station, which broadcasts to the mainland (HKJA & Article 19, 1998: 35-36). The Executive Council approved Liu and American-Chinese businessman Bruno Wu as owners of ATV even though both appeared disqualified under Hong Kong residence rules, and Liu also on grounds of cross ownership. Liu was required to pledge that he would not be involved in the day-to-day running of the station, but Wu became the effective manager (HKJA & Article 19, 1998: 37). In November 2002, after a failed attempt to buy in by one of Li Ka-shing's companies, ATV's chief executive, Chan Wing-kee, who had already bought 19 per cent of ATV, announced that he would buy Lai Sun's 32 per cent holding (Hui & Kwok, 2002). Chan is a National People's Congress Deputy and, according to the HKJA & Article 19 (2002: 22), supporter of Tung Chee-hwa.

Thus the great majority of the Hong Kong news media is in the hands of overtly pro-Beijing proprietors or businessmen whose interests in the mainland make content critical of the Chinese governments undesirable. While it is not necessarily the case that owners influence the content of the news media, they are in a position at least to set the tone for coverage and may take an active role in day-to-day operations. C.C. Lee (2000) says of ATV, "It may not be totally justified to impute a direct cause-effect relationship between media ownership and media content, but, in this case, concerns about possible erosion of editorial independence run deep."

The resignation of Willy Wo-lap Lam, a critic of Beijing, from the *South China Morning Post* was seen by many as brought about by proprietor Robert Kuok after a report by Lam that criticised a business delegation to Beijing of which Kwok was a member (HKJA & Article 19, 2000: 10-12). Lee and Chu (1998) link ownership with the ideology and structure of the news media. Chan (1999) worried "that the Chinese authorities may try to exert control through their stakes in the local press." Ching (1999) expressed concern that media owners were more susceptible to pressures from China because Beijing can provide or withhold

advertising, not to mention rights to publish and broadcast in China itself. Robert Stone (1998) points out that in Hong Kong newspapers are in the hands of more than 20 distinct groups, so: "... ownership on its own is insufficient to prevent a particular story from appearing in at least some papers [...but...] [t]he logic of the marketplace... tells us that owners have sole control over the recruitment and firing of news staff which vests them with the power to assemble journalistic teams which automatically take the owner's interests into account."

The tone of strident criticism of the government is set by the few news organisations whose owners are overtly not pro-Beijing, most notably *Apple Daily* and *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, but the Tung administration's high-handed ways and inefficiency have become a major news story at a time when Hong Kong is feeling the pinch of recession, and has become accepted in all but the Beijing-run media. However, the Chinese authorities are rarely criticised. With new laws like the Article 23 proposals coming into effect it will be easier to persuade owners that their news outlets should be brought into line on the Hong Kong government as well.

The sensationalism that has characterised the mass circulation press since the appearance of *Apple Daily* in 1995 has been a constant source of public concern. Ying Chan (1999) said the journalistic community was more alarmed over the media's "ethical lapses" than interference from Beijing. Cullen (2001) criticises "media recklessness", and C.C. Lee complains that the mass market newspapers "invade privacy, fabricate stories, and throw out the window the dos and don'ts of journalists' ethics" (Lee, 2000: 311). The fear that the government might wish to legislate to curb what it sees as excessive coverage seemed for a time justified when the Law Reform Commission recommended a statutory press council (see above).

The reason behind the sensationalism is to some extent the very freedom the news media enjoy, though this competition means that in Hong Kong's market many do not survive. Casualties of recent years include the dailies *Wah Kiu Yat Pao*, *Tin Tin* and ODN's English-language *Eastern Express*, the political magazines *The Nineties* and *Pai Shing*, and the regional English-language magazines *Asia Magazine* and *Asiaweek*. Yet some new entrants to the market have thrived. In 1999 *Oriental* opened *The Sun*, aiming for younger readers, and Swedish company Metro International S.A. started up a free newspaper, *Metro*, in 2002, and both are going strong. However, the economic crisis has led to staff reductions in most, if not all, news media, especially after the dot.com failure, and journalists' salaries have dropped dramatically.

## The News Media Themselves

## Self-censorship and censorship

The HKJA & Article 19 noted just before the handover that, with pressures from China growing, “[i]t is self-censorship, rather than direct intervention, that will more likely undermine freedom of expression” (HKJA & Article 19, 1997: 4). The HKJA & Article 19 annual reports since then have warned that self-censorship remains a problem, though a changing one. As noted, coverage of China is the main area where journalists hold back. Before the handover Chinese officials warned that “advocating” freedom for Tibet and Taiwan would not be tolerated, and journalists take great care when reporting on these subjects and probably drop stories that might be seen to be crossing the line.

In April 2000, after the election of the Democratic Progressive Party’s Chen Shui-bian as Taiwan’s president, his vice-president, Annette Lu, stated that the island had independent sovereignty.

A Chinese official told a seminar organised by the pro-Beijing Hong Kong Federation of Journalists that the Hong Kong news media should not report such stories as normal news items, and should be responsible in upholding the integrity of China (HKJA & Article 19, 2000: 6). Even President Jiang Zemin himself castigated Hong Kong reporters, angrily accusing them at a televised meeting with the CE in Beijing of being “simple and naïve” after one had asked him whether the apparent selection of Tung for a second stint as CE was “an imperial order” (HKJA & Article 19, 2000: 9). However, the incident was seen as an embarrassing faux pas in Hong Kong, where it was widely shown and reported (though not in China).

Reporters from Jimmy Lai’s Next Media publications *Apple Daily* and *Next* magazine are still not allowed to work on the mainland. Hong Kong journalists are supposed to apply for permits to report on the mainland, and, while the regulations are getting easier, many still go in without applying for permission. *Next Media* reporters have to do this though they face trouble if found out. Journalists still remember two pre-1997 cases where Hong Kong reporters were charged with stealing state secrets, one of them getting a jail sentence even though the supposed secret did not seem very important. According to the HKJA & Article 19, reporters remain within the bounds of what is published in the mainland because they “fear for their personal safety”. In Hong Kong, the report goes on, negative coverage of Li Ka-shing and his family is avoided and political news has been reduced in favour of “the tragic and the trivial” (HKJA & Article 19, 2002: 27).

In 1996 a survey of journalists done by the Chinese University of Hong Kong found that while only 5.2 per cent of respondents

thought journalists hesitated to criticise the Hong Kong government, 36.7 per cent thought that they hesitated to criticise large Hong Kong corporations, and 50.3 per cent thought they hesitated to criticise the Chinese government (So et al., 1996; Lee, 1998). Yet others poo-hoo any idea of self-censorship. In 2001 Arnold Zeitlin, then the Hong Kong representative of Freedom Forum, found that none was evident in the English-language and independent Chinese-language newspapers, which did not shy away from the main matters of the day in Hong Kong, the mainland and Taiwan (Zeitlin, 2001).

Cullen (2001) says that the rule of law needs an independent judiciary, a free press and a democratically elected government. All three seem somewhat fragile in Hong Kong. Anne Cheung (2002) criticises judges for not being independent enough and Yan finds that decisions on cases that involve the mainland are much less neutral than those that do not (Yan, 2001a), indicating that, while the judiciary remains professional, it takes a rather establishment stance. With Patten's sudden move towards democracy largely rolled back, the news media remain a very important factor in supporting rule of law and other freedoms. At present, they still conform to Lee and Chu's Type II, though they have moved on from the "reformist" model because, while they maintain their watchdog role over the government, they have become hostile to certain officials and the government has made some effort to suppress them, while the public have become rather disillusioned with the commercialism and sensationalism of the press (though they still buy the newspapers).

The lack of institutional safeguards such as a fully democratically elected legislature gives rise to concerns that press freedom could be limited at some point in the future. Hachten's "Western" concept of the news media requires: (1) a legal system that provides meaningful protection of civil liberties and property rights; (2) high levels of income, education and literacy; (3) the existence of legitimate political opposition; (4) enough capital to support the news media; and (5) an established tradition of independent journalism (Hachten, 1996: 18). Hong Kong can tick all five in current circumstances, but the analysis above shows that the first, third and fifth conditions may be under threat. Opposition voices remain but are being sidelined along with the legislature, and independent journalism is not a given in the current circumstances of media ownership.

The government has always stated its commitment to press freedom, but little has been done to confirm the rights of the news media. The HKJA & Article 19 (2002: 2) warns that, "The government is permitting an erosion of freedom of expression and associated rights by failing to take seriously their protection." Anne Cheung

## Conclusion

(2000) finds that press freedom is "heavily dependent on executive restraint not to prosecute the press, and on liberal judges who are willing to reconcile the inconsistent provisions in favour of the press." The Tung administration seems to have no overall policies, officials appearing at times to be reacting to situations, often in ways that help their supporters. This has led the Tung government into a number of blunders, and the news media have been there to publicise every mistake. This allows for valuable feedback, though often of a negative hue.

Freedom of the news media in Hong Kong depends greatly on Beijing. As C.C. Lee (1998: 56) points out, "China is conscious that a measure of editorial independence in Hong Kong is acceptable, even necessary, as long as it does not offend China's central concerns or objectives." The Chinese government's attitude is a function of its modernisation policy, illustrated when President Jiang followed up his criticism of Hong Kong reporters by saying they compared poorly to Mike Wallace, an American journalist with the current affairs programme *60 Minutes* who had impressed Jiang during an interview. The news media on the mainland are far freer than they used to be, but they remain tightly controlled on political coverage. A change in Chinese policy on Hong Kong, possibly even prompted by Beijing's displeasure at the news media, would present an opportunity to use the restrictive laws left over from colonial days, as was done in the case of the ODN harassment of a judge, and make use of new laws, especially those addressing Article 23, to curb press freedom. ■

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# Internet And Media Freedom: A Study Of Media Censorship In Sri Lanka And The Effectiveness Of Web-Based Rebel Media

*Sri Lanka, the former British colony of Ceylon, is the theatre for one of the world's longest and bloodiest civil wars. For more than two-and-a-half decades the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have fought to secure a separate Tamil state from the country's predominantly Sinhalese government. However, the reportage of the conflict has remained a monopoly of the government and the pro-Sinhala mainstream media. This paper argues that alternative media such as the Internet has given the LTTE and pro-liberation supporters a media outlet which is not easily censored, shut or distorted by governments and mainstream media groups. The alternative rebel media, however, does not imply an emergence of media freedom in Sri Lanka, and merely suggest the availability of an outlet for 'news' usually not supported by mainstream media. The paper does not necessarily support either the Eelam cause or the Sri Lankan government, and merely identifies the reasons for, and observes the successes and flaws of, web-based pro-Eelam media.*

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**I**n a post-modernist world where the logic of late capitalism is redefining the notion of statehood, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are fighting for Eelam - a separate State in northern Sri Lanka. Their concept of nationhood is rooted in modernist thinking and transcends geographic boundaries, and is inclusive of more than 50 million Tamil speaking people scattered throughout the world. Their diaspora is held together, and informed of the Eelam struggle, through an elaborate propaganda and information network which relies heavily on the Internet. This media network also plays a vital role in de-demonising the LTTE, and attempts to transfer its terrorist image on to the Sri Lankan government.

Traditional media outlooks and government regulations over the last forty years, have paved the way for both a pro-government

media which acts as a quasi-propaganda machine for the government, and a mainstream media which is not necessarily pro-government but is usually anti-Eelam. The political views of both groups have to a significant extent, determined the coverage of the Eelam war. In this climate, pro-Eelam groups have turned to the Internet, which provides them with effectively an uncensorable medium for both LTTE propaganda and pro-Eelam news. In most cases the pro-Eelamist's 'news' is as skewed as that of the government owned media, but nevertheless it offers an alternative news outlet to counter or respond to 'government propaganda'.

Sri Lanka the former British colony of Ceylon is home to more than 19.5 million people - 74% Sinhalese and 18% Tamil (Central Intelligence Agency, 2002). The country is also the arena for one of the world's longest and bloodiest civil wars - one waged between the predominantly Sinhala government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

While the roots of the conflict run deep, a key turning point was the country's ethnic rift falls in 1976 with the signing of the Vaddukoddai resolution (DeSilva, 1998). The resolution is central to the conflict in that with it, Tamil politicians led by Samuel James Vellupillai Chelvanayagam openly declared for the first time the need for a separate Tamil State – an Eelam nation. While Chelvanayagam himself was a pacifist, his concept of Eelam laid the ideological foundation for a number of youth groups which believed in 'fighting' for their state as opposed to 'demonstrating' for it.

The Tamil New Tigers, which later become the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), was one of many rebels groups formed in the 1970's following the Vaddukoddai resolution. By the mid 1980's the Tigers had become the dominant militant liberation group on the Jaffna peninsula (Swamy, 1994).

Today the LTTE is proscribed as a terrorist group in a number of countries including Australia (2001), Britain (2001), India (1991) and the United States (1997). The LTTE has been charged with assassinating heads of state in two countries - Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India and President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka. They are also alleged to have carried out more than 200 suicide bombings since the 1980's - the highest hit-rate for any terrorist group (Schweitzer, 2000).

## **Government control of the media**

Since the late 1950's Sri Lankan mainstream media has been heavily censored and controlled by the government. It was initiated

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after only a decade of post-independence press freedom, when Prime Minister Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (SWRD) Bandaranaike responded to the 1958 communal riots by imposing a State of Emergency, and with it, press censorship (Senadhira, 1996).

The 1956-1958 period is also considered by many political commentators as the starting point of the ethnic rift between the Sinhalese and Tamil people. The passage of Bandaranaike's controversial Official Language Act (1956), which is colloquially known as the 'Sinhala Only' policy, not only linguistically sidelined Tamil speakers in government service. It also sparked the first ethnic riots in post-independent Ceylon.

Following the 1958 ethnic riots Bandaranaike was able to secure parliamentary approval for a Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, and subsequently lifted both the State of Emergency and press censorship. But once unleashed, both racial violence and media censorship continued to plague the island nation for nearly half a century.

While SWRD Bandaranaike had perhaps the dubious honour of being father of press censorship in Sri Lanka, successive governments including that of his widow Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Junius Richard Jayewardene, tightened their grip on the nation's fledgling independent media through a raft of legislation including the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon (Special Provisions) Act of 1973, which legitimised government control of Sri Lanka's largest newspaper group.

### **Constitutional loopholes and Parliamentary bills which curb the press**

While Jayewardene's 1978 constitution guaranteed fundamental rights, including those relating to "freedom of expression", Article 15(7) of Chapter 3, contained a legal loophole stating that all rights may be restricted by law in "the interests of national security, public order and the protection of public health and morality, or for the purposes of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others, or of meeting the just requirements of the general welfare of democratic society."

Further still, Article 16 stated that all laws "written and unwritten" and in existence at the time, would remain valid regardless of whether they were consistent with the fundamental rights chapter (Law & Society Trust, 2002). Under Article 16, Sirimavo Bandaranaike's 1973 Sri Lanka Press Council Bill - which established a largely state-appointed media censorship and regulatory body - was duly incorporated to Jayewardene's legal and constitutional framework (Senadhira, 1996).

The Press Council Bill also included laws on criminal defamation – laws which have been used by successive governments since to persecute a number of newspaper editors including *The Sunday Times* editor Sinha Ratnatunga (in July 1997) and *The Sunday Leader* editor Lasantha Wickrematunga (in 2000). Both were given suspended sentences for defaming President Chandrika Kumaratunga (Freedom Forum, 2000).

A year after the 1978 Constitution was adopted supposedly enshrining fundamental rights, Jayewardene enacted the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act No. 48, legalising the arrest of any person with or without a warrant and permitting their detention for a period of up to 18 months without a court order. The act was used by both Jayewardene and subsequent governments to arrest and detain journalists.

Heavy-handed legislative controls, coupled with the forcible closure of newspapers, and the harassment of journalists, have made it very difficult for views opposed to those of the government to find an objective outlet in traditional media.

For the LTTE rebels, who are anti-government by their very nature, finding a forum to have political views heard has been virtually impossible. Government media control meant sympathetic (or even politically neutral) journalists were removed from areas in close proximity to the LTTE. Newspapers which had once been prepared to report on the LTTE perspective were shut down. The government stranglehold also saw many journalists interrogated and harassed for simply interviewing LTTE representatives, while other media personnel were banned from entering LTTE territory. Thus the LTTE who could not freely travel to the south of the country for interviews, could not even bring the media to them.

In July 1983, the first Tamil Tiger attack on the Sri Lankan military was followed by days of island-wide anti-Tamil ethnic violence. President Jayewardene's handling of the crisis was heavily criticised by Jaffna based Sinhala journalist and editor of *The Saturday Review*, Gamini Navaratne. In retaliation, the Jayewardene government banned *The Review* with immediate effect. Although the ban was later lifted, Navaratne was required to present all of his copy to the government censor before publication (Senadhira, 1996).

Jaffna also had thriving local newspaper culture in the early stages of the Eelam war. In 1987 prior to the Indian Peace Keeping Force's (IPKF) deployment in the Tiger-held north and east, Jaffna was home to four Tamil newspapers Murasoli, Eelamurasu, Uthayan and Eelanadu. Within a few months of the IPKF's arrival, Eelamurasu journalists were arrested and their office was destroyed

## Curbing The Jaffna Press

(Tamilnet, 2002a). A few years later, *Uthayan* and *Eelanadu*, the only two newspapers which survived the IPKF, were hit by a newsprint embargo imposed by President Ranasinghe Premadasa (1991). While *Uthayan* was able to successfully circumvent the newsprint restrictions the fact remains the embargo was a clear attempt to curb the Jaffna press. In 2000, *Uthayan* was banned by the Kumaratunga government for “acting maliciously and detrimentally in publishing information that is biased to the LTTE” (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2000).

### **Consequences of interviewing the Tamil Tigers**

On numerous occasions journalists have been accused of supporting the Tigers or are branded as sympathisers simply for interviewing the LTTE or for trying to balance government propaganda with rebel propaganda. In 2001 *Uthayan's* Deputy-Editor, M. Vithyathara, was interrogated by police and asked to reveal the names of those who helped him meet the LTTE hierarchy, following the publication of an interview with the LTTE chief negotiator the previous day (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2002a).

In January 2001, Lake House's Valampuri/Jaffna- based correspondent, Subramaniam Thiruchelvan, was arrested by the Terrorist Investigation Division under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2001a) for communicating with the LTTE. In the same year Dharmaretnam Sivaram, Editor of the on-line newspaper *Tamilnet*, and *Ravaya* journalist Vasantharaja were denounced in state media as being LTTE spies based on their coverage of the conflict. No formal charges were ever laid (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2001b).

In October 2000, Mayilvaganam Nimalarajan, BBC correspondent and a freelance journalist attached to the Tamil daily *Virakesari* and the Sinhala weekly *Ravaya*, was also arrested for “having links to the LTTE.” Twelve months later, Nimalarajan was murdered allegedly by pro-government Tamil militants of the Eelam People's Democratic Party. Despite a number of suspects being arrested, media watchdog *Reporters Sans Frontières* claims the investigation has been shelved. They claim two of the key suspects released on bail - David Michael Collins and ‘Vishua’ – are a high flight risk and yet have not have their passports impounded (*Reporters Sans Frontières*, 2002b).

### **Military restrictions on crossing the ‘border’**

Since the mid 1980's the government has controlled the movement of journalists into Tiger-controlled areas. Journalists

have been required to obtain Ministry of Defence (MOD) approval before crossing the border – approval which is frequently denied. As such journalists have been forced to cross the ‘border’ unofficially, risking prosecution and harassment by the Ministry on return.

In April 2001, Marie Colvin, a veteran war correspondent for London’s Sunday Times newspaper was severely wounded by Sri Lankan military gunfire while returning unofficially from the Tiger-held Wannu region (North Central Sri Lanka). The following day, the government issued a statement claiming Colvin had overstayed her visa and appeared to have “her own secret agenda with the LTTE.” Sri Lanka’s overseas missions were subsequently asked to be “cautious when recommending journalists for visas” (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2001). While Colvin’s charges of colluding with the LTTE were dropped, two local people were charged with organising her border-crossing.

For its part, the LTTE also has a long history of attempting to control and curb the media. Jaffna-based Tamil journalist Shanmugalingam, a reporter for *Eelanadu*, *Eelamurasu*, *Murasoli* and *Viduthalai* was periodically harassed from 1986-1989 by the Tigers for his anti-Tiger stance. In 1986 the LTTE successfully forced the Eelanadu management to sack him. On 6 November 1989, Shanmugalingam was abducted from his home by the LTTE and later believed to have been tortured and killed (Article19, 1992).

Dr Rajani Thiranagama, a Human Rights Activist with the University Teachers for Human Rights, was gunned down by the LTTE on 21 September 1989. Thiranagama the head of human anatomy at the Jaffna University was a co-author of *The Broken Palmyra*, a book which documents human rights violations by the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (Article19, 1992).

Despite denials, the LTTE is also accused of an attack on the Batticaloa based *Thinakkathir Newspaper* on 8 August 2002. The newspaper office was vandalised in the attack and equipment worth 1.2 million Sri Lankan rupees was stolen (Free Media Movement, 2002).

## Mainstream media biases on the Eelam struggle

While the government is regularly criticised by non-government news groups for its efforts to install a pro-government bias in the media, most mainstream media itself (which is predominantly Sinhalese-owned) has adopted a populist, anti-LTTE bias of their own. While this does not necessarily translate to support of the government, an ethnic-based bias against the LTTE, makes it

## The Tigers And Mainstream Media

difficult again for the rebels to receive fair coverage.

Content analyses of mainstream Sri Lankan media has revealed a Sinhala Nationalist bias in both the English and Sinhala media. During a key battle in November 1999, when the military was taking heavy casualties, the Sinhala press published a series of nationalistic and emotive articles along an “our brave boys” line – showing clear support for the Sri Lankan army. Meanwhile the English paper *The Daily News* decided to hold the story on the attack until something positive could be reported, eventually announcing: “Terrorist attack on Ampakamam repulsed”. In another case study, when government troops re-captured a Tiger stronghold *The Daily News* wasted no time in reporting “Vavuniya returns to normal” (Kandaiah, 2001).

Despite widespread media bias against the Eelam struggle, newspapers such as *Yukthiya* and *Ravaya* have attempted to report the conflict from a balanced point of view, and uncharacteristically these Sinhala newspapers employ Tamil journalists for an ethnically balanced coverage. *Yukthiya* and *Ravaya*'s impartial coverage is a solid step in the right direction for Sri Lankan free media, but from the Tiger's point of view, this neutrality limits the papers' usefulness in countering the strong government propaganda and anti-Eelam bias in other traditional media. For the LTTE, balanced coverage in a minority of media is not enough to counter the strong anti-Eelam bias in the majority. The Tigers have recognised that pro-Eelam coverage in traditional media will continue to elude them because of government restrictions, inherent media biases and even journalist's professional quest to be balanced.

In view of this, pro-Eelamists have developed a sophisticated web-based media network which makes no apologies for its overtly pro-Eelam bias. Their technically advanced global network aims to ‘level the playing field’, often offering a direct rebuttal to government and Sinhalese propaganda – but it is not without its faults. As this paper will discuss later, the pro-Eelamists often fail to make the most of their newfound media forum.

## **Eelam struggle and the rebel media**

During the initial stages of the Eelam struggle, rebel media took the form of traditional clandestine media, with pirate radio and television broadcasts. During this early period, the rebel groups fighting for Eelam relied on Indian government patronage, and used radio transmitters in southern India away from the Sri Lankan government's reach.

In 1984 the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) became the first Tamil militant group to launch their

own radio station – a service based at Ramanathapuram on the coast of India’s southern state of Tamil Nadu. The station was operated by Sherly Kandappa, who reported directly to the group’s leader Uma Maheswaran – a Tamil militant and former LTTE member (personal communication with Sivaram, 2001).

The LTTE was also using Indian-based transmission facilities around the same time, but after the Indo-Lanka Accord and more specifically after the LTTE was banned in India following Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination, the Tigers were forced to transmit from within Sri Lanka. Their transmissions have been limited to Tiger-held areas and are used mainly to communicate with people within the Eelam territory. Their listeners rely on dynamo-powered radios, as batteries are banned in the region under state embargo.

Despite its relatively limited reach, Voice of Tiger (VOT) radio is constantly targeted by the Sri Lankan airforce. The LTTE’s Nallur radio station was destroyed during Operation Riviresa in the mid 90’s, and a second transmitter was destroyed at Nedunkeni in the Wannu forest a few years later. In 2001 the airforce bombed VOT’s Oddusudan station (Military reports, 2002).

The Tigers also operated a television broadcast in the Jaffna peninsula in 1987 just prior to the IPKF deployment, and again in 1991-1993 after Indian troops were withdrawn. The station located at Kokuvil, Jaffna was destroyed in 1993 by the Sri Lankan Airforce (Military reports, 2002).

## The LTTE’s official media

The Internet has encouraged a shift in who creates, distributes and ultimately owns the news (Knight & Ubayasiri, 2002), and with that shift the Internet has broken or reduced government and the mainstream media monopolies on information. Groups such as Eelam nationalists who have previously struggled with small audiences, easily censored and suppressed media organisations and a predominantly anti-Eelam stance are now able to write and distribute ‘their own news’ through the web.

In two decades since their first communiqué in 1979, the Tiger’s web-based media network has developed into one of the world’s most advanced rebel media units. It is far more advanced than any web-based “counter-campaign that the Colombo Government has, hitherto, been able to organise” (Chalk, 1999).

What started as a communiqué, typed on Tiger letterhead by a supporter using a borrowed typewriter (Swamy, 1994), is now a high-tech multi-media operation encompassing digital technology, cyberspace and satellites.

## Eelam Struggle And Alternative Media

As an example of their development, by the late 1990's the LTTE's European quasi-diplomatic organisation headed by Velummayitum Manoharan, was receiving daily battlefield reports from the forests of Sri Lanka through satellite phone (Chalk, 1999). These reports were then written into official *Tiger* press releases, posted on-line and faxed to media agencies throughout the world. The communiqués were officially released by the Tiger secretariat in London, at 211 Katherine Road, and from Eelam House at 202 Long Lane. However since the LTTE's proscription in the UK (2001), the communiqués are now 'officially' issued from the Tiger's Wannai head office in Sri Lanka, although analysts believe the media office's true location is elsewhere. The Tiger communiqués have been available on the Tiger's official web page *eelam.com* since the mid-90's (Tamil Eelam Homepage, 2002).

Unlike unofficial pro-Eelam sites, the Tiger's official web site *eelam.com* is a relatively basic and unobtrusive homepage. Their online message to the international community is simple. Tiger leader Prabaharan is quoted on the site saying that: "The Tamil people want to maintain their national identity and to live in their own lands, in their historically given homeland with peace and dignity...these are the basic political aspirations of the Tamil people. It is neither separatism nor terrorism."

An analysis of *eelam.com* homepages from 1997 show the Tigers regularly present conflicting messages on-line. While the LTTE on the one hand talks of peace, the site regularly carries a photograph of Tiger leader Velupillai Prabaharan in military fatigues, and remembrances to fallen cadre which include Black Tiger suicide bombers. Since late 2000, the starting point of the current peace negotiations, the site has shifted its focus from LTTE as 'militia' to LTTE as a 'legitimate political organisation', by publishing photographs showing *Tiger* hierarchy rubbing shoulders with the Norwegian envoy Erik Solheim, the Canadian High Commissioner and Amnesty International officials. Even the standard militia image of the Tiger leader was removed in mid-2001, just prior to actual peace talks, and was replaced with one of him dressed in civvies.

### **Unofficial pro-LTTE websites**

The LTTE's unofficial websites are far more sophisticated than their official ones. These sites, which deny being affiliated with the militia, play a crucial role in the Eelam media network, in that they promote the pro-Tamil perspective as 'public information' or news, without the appearance of being strictly LTTE. "Propaganda has a negative connotation and public information has a positive one" (Carlson, 2001), or at least a neutral implication.

For example pro-LTTE websites which attempt to disassociate themselves from the rebel's official organs, can publish articles 'exposing human rights violations' by the Sri Lankan government, and attract a sympathetic audience without their message being marred or undermined by the LTTE's questionable politico-military or violent past.

One such website is *tamiltigers.net*, which focuses on the Sri Lankan government's human rights abuses or "state terrorism". It claims; "Sri Lanka has the second highest number of civilian disappearances in the world," arguing that only Iraq is worse. However the site makes no mention of the Tiger's human rights record, which many argue is equally as poor as the government's, and instead portrays the Tigers as freedom fighters.

Another website *eelamweb.com*, also purports to be committed to exposing the government's human rights violations, but also openly offers a comprehensive e-commerce section, selling the LTTE's monthly video Oliveechu. The videos include footage of all major Tiger attacks on Sri Lankan military and civilian targets, even those attacks, such as the Sri Lankan Airport (2001), which the rebels have not officially taken responsibility for. The site therefore acts as a quasi-LTTE website, collecting funds through the sale of items which, because they prove rebel responsibility for civilian deaths, can not be sold through official sites without undermining the organisation's political agenda.

## **Breaking the government and mainstream media's news monopoly**

The American-based *tamilnet.com* is clearly the forerunner in the Eelamist alternative news campaign – utilising familiar news-style and techniques to present 'news' with an underlying pro-Eelam bias (Tamilnet, 2002b). The site claims to provide "reliable and accurate information on issues concerning the Tamil people". While critics such as veteran *Sunday Times* defence columnist Iqbal Athas have branded the site an LTTE front organization (personal communications with Athas, 2002), the site's producers claim it merely serves the interests of the Tamil people. The site's editor, another veteran defence analyst Dharmaretnam Sivaram, a former journalist of the same newspaper group, makes no apologies for the website's stance, arguing that: "If the views of *tamilnet* are the same as that of the LTTE, let the Sinhalese government be damned" (personal communication with Sivaram, 2002).

Political agenda aside, *tamilnet* provides a solid coverage of the ethnic conflict, regularly including news from the north and east, which is rarely reported in traditional media due to political pressure and inherent biases. The website gathers news through

an extensive contributor network based throughout the island, including the Tiger-held north and east. Sivaram himself reports on major issues, and files his copy and digital images from the field via laptop computer. *Tamilnet* is also the only Sri Lankan news site which posts regular breaking news updates. As such, in terms of both currency and coverage *tamilnet* comfortably surpasses any web-based news-site owned by the Sri Lankan government or the traditional media.

While *tamilnet* occupies the technically sophisticated non-traditional end of Tamil nationalist media, *The Tamil Guardian* utilises the Internet's reach to distribute a more traditional media product – a hardcopy newspaper. Readers are able to subscribe to the hard-copy newspaper via the *Guardian* homepage, or read the latest issue online in pdf format. *The Tamil Guardian*, published once a week on Wednesday, operates out of three offices – one each in the UK, Australia and Canada.

While *The Tamil Guardian* and *tamilnet* have escaped media censorship and government control in Sri Lanka by locating offshore, their Sri Lankan-based contributors are still subject to political pressure. A number of journalists who have openly associated themselves with these news outlets, such as *tamilnet* editor Sivaram, are regularly targeted by opposition groups. It is for this reason that *The Tamil Guardian* and *tamilnet* refrain from printing reporter's bylines. It is a sharp reminder that despite alternative Tamil media's efforts to break free of government control, the continued need to protect reporter's anonymity is an indication they have not yet been fully successful.

## **On-line success of pro-Eelam media**

Being present on the Internet is not in itself an indication of success as an alternative media outlet. While there is no single way of judging the success of a particular website, there are a number of key indicators which can suggest 'success' in terms of readership and maximisation of the medium.

The first indication is how regularly a site is accessed. This gives an indication of how popular the site is with web surfers, particularly when access or 'hit' rates are compared with other sites of the same nature or of opposing views.

The second indicator is how sites rank on web browser search results using key words pertinent to their subject matter. Sites which rank higher on search results are generally those which have the greatest match to key word searches and are the most likely to be accessed by those surfing for information.

A third indicator, particularly for those sites deigning to be news and public information providers, is how credible a site is

considered by leading news organisations or at the very least how significantly and regularly they are deemed a relevant news resource. This can be ascertained either by a general survey of leading news organisations or more simply by noting if and how often those organisations link or reference the sites in question.

A fourth indicator is how well a group makes use of the Internet medium. The question is whether groups exploit the potential of the medium or whether they simply use it as a glorified newspaper or fax machine and thus fail to attract surfers who are generally looking for more sophisticated website features they cannot get from hardcopy publications. These web-specific features include: on-site searches, easy to access archives, immediacy of news/information coverage, relevant links to other sites - including hyperlinks within articles to background, analysis and on-line discussion and even immediate on-line shopping in relation to web theme.

Other indicators of success include the level of advertising a site attracts, including advertising revenues and the calibre of advertisers, and for sites which are accessed by subscription – subscription numbers. However in terms of the Sri Lankan government, traditional Sri Lankan media and Eelamist sites, these latter indicators are either not applicable (in that they are not subscriber-based or do not rely on advertising to survive) or are used by only a small percentage.

In all other respects – those four indicators applicable to all such sites, Eelamist media sites can be considered very successful, and as this paper will discuss, are considerably more so than their on-line traditional media and Sri Lankan government counterparts.

Each time a website is accessed, the access information is logged on the Common Gateway Interface (CGI) which provides an interface between the web server computer and the Internet. The information stored in the 'cgi/bin' is password protected and can only be accessed by the website owner or by an illegal computer hacker (National Centre for Supercomputing Applications, 1998). While some webmasters prefer to keep their 'hit rates' a secret, other incorporate counter programmes on their pages show the total number of times the page has been accessed. Counters, however, are rare in pro-Eelam web sites.

The prominent Canadian-based pro-Eelam website *tamilcandian.com* does not incorporate a counter on its homepage, but provides a detailed 'hit' record for itself and its news-based companion *News.tamilcandian.com* through a separate link. According to this record, during four weeks in December 2000, the two sites were accessed 2.4 million times, with 12.8 Gigabytes of information downloaded – although these figures cannot be verified

## Readership And Hit Rates

## Keyword And Search Results

independently.

By comparison, in the two years between 2000 and 2002, the Sri Lankan army media page (*army.lk*) was accessed only 230,033 times. On-line Sri Lankan newspapers and other official Sri Lankan sites such as the Department of Information do not have counters on their sites.

But putting *tamilcanadian.com*'s statistics in perspective further, the estimated number of Sri Lankan residents who had Internet connections at the time of the 2.4 million-a-month figures was estimated at just 50,000 - an extremely small percentage of the population but a massive increase on the 14,000 people two years earlier (*news.com*, 1998).

Most search engines use a program called a 'spider' which 'crawls' through the web cataloguing and ranking web sites. While the exact algorithm of each search engine spider is kept secret, most use a location-frequency algorithm to rank sites. In this manner sites are graded according to the location and frequency of a specific key word used. Therefore in most cases the sites that are most relevant to a particular key word are listed at the top of a search for that word.

As such the relative positioning of a web site on a search engine can be used as a measure of that page's success, since the listing shows that the pages at the top are considered more relevant by the search engine algorithms and have a higher chance of being read by any one who performs a search for that particular key word.

A search on three of the most frequently used search engines - *google.com*, *yahoo.com* and *msn.com* (Nielsen-Netratings, 2002), suggest pro-Eelam web-sites are relatively successful in ranking within the first few search results, but their success is marred by a number of missed opportunities.

Because most pro-Eelam sites focus on the conceptual state of 'Eelam' and generally do not refer to the civil war in 'Sri Lanka'. In doing so, they miss an opportunity to rank at the top of Internet searches for the words 'Sri Lanka' - which are arguably the commonest key words for any web search on the conflict.

In 2,840,000 google search results and 2,670,000 yahoo search results for the words 'Sri Lanka', pro-Eelam sites ranked extremely poorly, with Sri Lankan newspapers, the official Department of Information homepage and the Sri Lankan Army page ranking considerably higher - primarily because the words 'Sri Lanka' are inseparable from those web page's theme and subject matter. The first position of both searches was taken by Sri Lanka Web Server which provides links to on-line versions of five mainstream

national newspapers – *The Sunday Leader*, *The Island*, *Divaina* and the government-owned *Sunday Observer* and *Daily News*. The second listing was the Sri Lankan government site maintained by the Presidential Secretariat's Policy Research and Information Unit. While the Tiger's official site failed to enter the top 100 in both *Google* and *Yahoo*, it ranked 25th in *msn.com*, but again the government-owned *Daily News* came well ahead in fifth.

However the results changed dramatically when the key words were changed to 'Tamil Tigers', with *eelam.com* and *eelamweb.com* securing the top two positions – again because of the very nature of their sites. One anti-Tiger site, the Australian-based Society for Peace, Unity & Human Rights in Sri Lanka (SPUR) ranked well coming fifth. A key word search of 'Tamil Tiger' also proved overwhelmingly favoured pro-Eelam sites, but a page titled 'Eliminate Tamil Terrorism from Sri Lanka and the Rest of the World' - a mirror site of the anti-LTTE *sinhaya.com* – managed to make it to the top of 49,200 entries in *Yahoo* and 45,900 in *Google*.

Despite Sri Lankan Tamils constituting less than 10% of the world Tamil population, the word 'Tamil' also strongly favoured the Eelamists. *Tamilnet* came second and *eelam.com* third, closely followed by *tamilguardian.com* in sixth place out of 1,560,00 *Google* search results and 1,690,000 *Yahoo* results. The results were similar but less favourable for pro-Eelam sites on *msn.com*.

In a more specific word search, the key word 'Eelam', perhaps unsurprisingly delivered overwhelming success for LTTE and pro-Eelam propaganda sites - both ranking well at the top of 88,900 search results on *Google* and 87,500 on *Yahoo*. In both cases pro-Eelam news sites such as *tamilnet.com* and *tamilguardian.com* ranked significantly lower than propaganda sites such as *eelam.com* the tigers official site and *eelamweb.com*. Mainstream and government media failed to appear in the top 50 sites in both searches. Interestingly in a search using the words 'Sri Lanka Army' – *tamilnet.com* ranks third in the results.

## Eelam sites and the international press

The British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) on-line world edition regularly provides a links to *tamilnet.com* and to the Sri Lankan government's *priu.gov.lk*, and on some occasions to both *eelam.com* and *eelamweb.com*. In linking to these pages the BBC, which is one of the most frequently accessed news web sites, provides yet another opportunity for pro-Eelam sites to be viewed by readers of the mainstream international press.

Similarly CNN.com and Associated Press also regularly provide links to *tamilnet.com* and *eelam.com* as part of their coverage of the Sri Lankan conflict. Other sites which do not provide links, such as

## Master Of The Web

Agence France-Presse, Xinhua and Inter Press Service, still commonly make reference to *tamilnet.com* as the key pro-rebel media organisation – pitting it directly against the Sri Lankan government media machine.

While none of these international media services make a judgement on the credibility of the linked pro-Eelam sites – the fact they consider them an appropriate and relevant alternative to government news resources in relation to the Sri Lankan conflict, is an indication those sites are successfully attracting reputable news organisations to their pages and thus finding a broader forum for their views.

In terms of mastery of Internet technology, web design and the exploitation of the Internet medium, pro-Eelam news groups such as *tamilnet* and *eelamweb.com* easily outstrip the on-line news produced by the both the Sri Lankan government and the country's traditional press.

While traditional newspapers such as the *Daily News* and *The Sunday Observer* up-load selected news stories once a day and use the web-pages to mirror hardcopy newspapers, *tamilnet.com* has moved a step further, functioning almost as a wire service updating its site as news breaks. Non-Eelamist Sri Lankan sites have failed to maximise this feature of the Internet, so by recognising the possibilities the Internet offers in terms of immediacy, *tamilnet.com* producers are exploiting the medium far more effectively than their government or traditional media counterparts.

*Tamilnet.com* also exploits the interactive, data storage and retrieval capacity of the Internet in providing a detailed news archive from 07 June 1997 onwards. It also offers a key word search function within its archive – a function seriously lacking in mainstream media sites. The *tamilnet* archive is arranged according to the chronological order of the articles, allowing readers to browse through article headlines of a given month and open only the relevant pages. In contrast the government owned *Daily News* and *The Sunday Observer's* archives are akin to bundles of newspaper stacked in chronological order, meaning readers have to move from month to month forwards or backwards in a liner scale in a bid to find a particular story – the headlines of which are not even listed.

Another key area where Eelamist sites have successfully employed the Internet medium well beyond the efforts of their non-Eelamist counterparts, is in the inclusion of audio and/or visual elements on their pages. Perhaps the most striking example is *tamiltigers.net*, an unofficial LTTE site which offers readers a selection of CNN news clips. The clips showing Tiger related news,

attacks in Sri Lanka and battlefield footage add another dimension to the site. Similarly the unofficial site eelamweb.com makes good use of the Internet's audio facilities, offering sound grabs from many of Tiger leader Velupillai Prabaharan's key speeches. By contrast President Chandrika Kumaratunga's own web page (presidentsl.org) manages only text versions of her key speeches and photo stills. The same can be said for the Department of Information. On-line newspapers too have failed to expand beyond the traditional static format – utilitising the web merely as another way to read their standard hard copy product. The only major non-Eelamist site which uses audio is that of the Sri Lankan army which features audio links to army songs and sound bites from the army commander. However these links are currently unavailable.

Aside from its functions as an education or information tool, the Internet also has a social element which offers surfers an opportunity to browse, shop, chat and participate in on-line activities. Being able to tap into the social aspect is also an indication of effective use of the Internet – and again is one in which the Eelamist sites as a whole surpass their 'rivals'. *Eelamweb.com* is perhaps the forerunner in this area, offering on-line shopping and an on-line quiz centering around the Eelam theme. For sale are the LTTE's Oliveechu videos, Eelam flags, English and Tamil books on the conflict and music CD's. While *eelamweb.com* does not have a chat room or the like, a message board is present on the *tamilcanadian.com*. Comparatively none of the key government or mainstream media sites have either discussion, shopping or activities.

For terrorist, separatist, rebel and minority groups which have struggled for years to find sympathetic forums for their political views, the advent of the Internet was a gift. It heralded the arrival of what is effectively an uncensorable, uncontrollable information outlet with a global reach accessible by virtually anyone, anywhere with a home computer and a phone line.

In the case of the LTTE and pro-Eelamist groups, the Internet offered an opportunity to make up some of the ground lost in the Sri Lanka to the government propaganda machine and the anti-Eelam mainstream media. Within months of the Internet revolution in the mid-90's, the Tigers and their supporters were online – using new websites to deliver their separatist message to the world and to unite their scattered diaspora.

The Sri Lankan government eventually followed suit, as did the mainstream media, but even today, with perhaps the exception of *The Sunday Times*, pro-Eelam sites are more sophisticated, more user friendly and attract a wider audience.

## Conclusion

But while the Eelamists web-based media network easily surpasses its anti-Eelamist rivals at a global level, it does have its flaws – perhaps most strikingly the fact that it largely ‘preaches to the converted’. For all their efforts, pro-Eelam sites do not have a Sinhala language service.

Unlike the LTTE’s *Voice of Tiger* radio which transmits a Sinhala news bulletin targeted at government troops, the Eelamists on-line have failed to target the Sinhala speaking web users. Considering the aspects of psychological warfare associated with this type of conflict, the lack of a pro-Eelam website in Sinhala is truly a lost opportunity.

Similarly, while pro-Eelam sites are prolific on the web they seem to target those who are already relatively familiar with the civil war and run the risk of failing to reach international readers who are merely aware of the conflict but not its many nuances. In this respect the pro-Eelam groups’ use of the web is similar to many political and activist groups which use the web largely to reach and unite their supporters. Their failure to rank high in a browser search for the more used words; ‘Sri Lanka’ and their dominance of the top results in a search for the culturally specific term ‘Eelam’ is testament that they may not be capturing as wide an audience as they could with simply a few tweaks of wording.

While Eelamist sites as a whole have clearly proven they have grasped the potential and the technology of the Internet through their effective use of the breaking news updates and effective interactive searches, there are many sites which suffer from a lack of vision. Audio-visual elements, on-line activities and interactive discussion successfully used by some sites, could be more widely used by others with greater effectiveness. The same of course, could be said of the Sri Lankan government and mainstream media.

Credibility also remains a key barrier for the success of emerging news websites, particularly when the credibility of traditional media services such as newspaper and radio remains undiminished. What bolsters Eelamist sites’ reputation as a credible alternative news source, however, is the increasing number of well-established news groups recognising their news worth.

While the Internet offers a ‘level playing field’ where banned groups such as the LTTE, pro-Eelam sites, official Sri Lankan Government sites and even anti-conflict sites such as the University Teachers for Human Rights (*uthr.org*) are able to coexist on-line without persecution and censorship, it would be misguided to believe that those who contribute to those sites are equally free.

Despite the Government’s Chief Censor, Ariya Rubasinghe’s threats to crack down on web-based media (International Press Institute, 2000), on-line news-sites based outside Sri Lanka remain out of the government’s reach. The challenge now for those pro-

Eelam news-sites is how to similarly put their Sri Lankan-based reporters out of government reach while still maintaining their commitment to promoting the Eelam cause. As seen with *tamilnet* editor Sivaram, journalists working for on-line alternative media still remain targets of government and anti-Eelam groups in Sri Lanka.

For as long as persecution and bias continues in Sri Lanka's traditional media sphere, minority groups such as pro-Eelamists will always seek less prohibitive outlets for their views. The use of the Internet as such a forum has been a wise move, but has failed to impact the restrictive media system they were escaping from. The key aspect pro-Eelamists need to recognise now, is that by turning to the Internet to promote their heavily biased propaganda, they may well have given themselves a forum they were previously denied, but have also perpetuated unbalanced poorly-veiled publishing of propaganda. Their criticism of a lack of balance in a predominantly Sinhala-owned Sri Lankan mainstream media can now be equally applied to the Tamil media on the net. ■

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# The Disenchantment Of Southeast Asia: New Media And Social Change Post 9/11

*Although governments around Southeast Asia bemoan their failing ability to control the flow of news and information in the Internet age, the terrorist attacks on the US and, in particular, those in Bali in October 2002, are likely to provide a fillip for the region's hard-liners, and underpin surveillance states in the region. As culture becomes a major factor in national security and international relations, the role of the media and communications technology in political change has become ambiguous. The Internet allows the high-tech mobilisation of radical constituencies, and threatens to shake dominant political visions and cultural traditions to the core. Although technology has allowed a greater share of voice for the disillusioned, the dispossessed and the disadvantaged, it is also an effective weapon in the hands of the state. With Southeast Asia's silent majority prepared to sacrifice gains in democratic pluralism in return for security, the war on 'terror' will allow authoritarian governments to reel in many of the gains in freedom of speech only recently won and further alienate the Malay-Islamic communities, driving them into the arms of militant radicals.*

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When people talk of the freedom of writing, speaking, or thinking, I cannot choose but laugh. No such thing ever existed. No such thing now exists; but I hope it will exist. But it must be hundreds of years after you and I shall write and speak no more.

- John Adams, 1818 letter to Thomas Jefferson

I am smashing up the old Fada - I shall change everything and everybody in it. I am abolishing the old ways, the old ideas, the old law; I am bringing wealth and opportunity for good as well as vice, new powers to men and therefore new conflicts. I am the revolution, I am giving you plenty of trouble already, you governors, and I am going to give you plenty more. I destroy, and I make new. What are you going to do about it? I am your idea. You made me, so I suppose you know.

- Joyce Cary, Mister Johnson

## Disruptive Technologies: Change, Conflict, Breakdown

Southeast Asia is trying to come to terms with globalisation in its latest reincarnation, a blend of modernity and speed. Its societies are grappling with issues of governance, the shape of institutions like the media, and the possible ramifications of some of globalisation's general trappings that are seen to smack of the West: reactionary, decadent and deceitful. The search for answers has led to a tremendous richness in response but, as regional instability mounts in the wake of the 11 September attacks on the United States, it is a struggle the region may be losing in an irrevocable process of change, conflict and breakdown.

As governments in the region open up their economies in an attempt to reap some of the financial benefits of being part of the global information economy, they find themselves helpless in the face of the forces of change that are riding roughshod over their societies, with serious social and political ramifications. For while information technology has boosted productivity, growth and job creation in industrialised countries, its benefits have gone beyond the economic sphere. Its power has extended to politics as well. Despite the unequal distribution of the new communication technology, its falling costs mean that dissidents have increasing access to it to challenge established structures of authority. It is undermining established communities as it creates new ones, particularly where it "articulates a mood of dissent" (Sorlin, 1994: 33-35).

From satellite television and financial data to the 'emoticons' beloved of the *oyayubizoku*, the thumb tribes of Japan, and SMS, the information economy is ensuring "the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990:64). Information is racing round the world at "netspeed" (Friedman, 2000: 218). But rather than proving the ruling social science paradigm of an "inexorable liberal-democratic end of history...[where] economic progress inevitably presaged eventual liberalization and democratization" (Jones & Smith, 2001: 855), the collision of computing, always-on communications and physical mobility is ambiguous in its effects. It enables people power in the Philippines and the wherewithal for the rise of techno-terrorism just as easily provides for the rise of the "surveillance state" (Jones & Smith, 2002), and the erosion of privacy from the encroachment of government and commercial interests.

Where once the dissemination of information served as an integral part of nation building and political control, unfettered access and increasingly porous national borders are providing a challenge to established regimes in Southeast Asia. It is a development that has not been lost on the elites in the region. They are falling over themselves in the rush to contest and reclaim the media space, in an

attempt to control the changes sweeping through their societies. Governments and others have long been keen to control technologies such as the Internet through laws and regulations, just as the wrangling over data protection has been ongoing since the birth of information technology (IT).

Their success has tended to be limited and constrained both by technological ability and by the political culture in which the intrusions take place. The debate over individual privacy, while not new, has not only met difficulties such as problems of definition, but different positions on the relationship between the state and the individual. After the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre, however, the debate takes place against a changing political environment, in which a number of trends have been identified. These trends include increased communications surveillance and search and seizure powers; weakening of data protection regimes; increased data sharing; and increased profiling and identification. While none of these policies are new, it is “notable” the speed with which many of them “gained acceptance and, in many cases pushed through to law” (Privacy International, 2002).

Thus, the Internet can be added to the list of “collateral damage” caused by the general spate of security interests, as the anti-terrorism drive threatens Internet freedoms worldwide (*Reporters Sans Frontiers*, 2002). Many governments are using the pretext of the ‘war on terror’ to curb basic freedoms or crack down on their domestic opponents using the Internet, leading, it is claimed, to an “unprecedented abuse” of individual rights and freedoms (*Reporters Sans Frontiers*, 2002). But, as the blast from October’s bombs in Bali echoes around the region, governments seem unable to contain internal unrest amidst deepening economic troubles and a turbulent sea of social change, raising the question as to whether or not Southeast Asia’s models of authoritarian control can survive.

This paper, then, will consider the implications of the impact of the Information Age and its attendant communications technology on Southeast Asia. It will look at the sea change in mass media and communications in the region, such that the communication media is no longer a tool of national governments alone, but is now increasingly accessible to the ordinary citizen, with dramatic consequences for the political and social fabric of Southeast Asia.

It will consider how transnational crime syndicates bent on piracy or perfidy can use the globalised communication infrastructure. It will consider how the same technology networks terrorist and democratic movements, and how the ‘war on terrorism’ following the attacks of 11 September 2001, is giving governments in the region, an excuse to crack down on free

expression and political dissent on the Internet. Finally, in the face of a rise of the surveillance state, it will discuss how many citizens are prepared to exchange their hard won rights and freedoms for convenience and security, while frustrated minorities are being pushed into the hands of militant fundamentalists.

Those seeking to curb the flow of digital traffic are likely to find that they have growing support both internally, from the quiet majority seeking protection and, externally, from the West. Nevertheless, in the Information Age, modern global activism - from campaigns to save the world's oceans to those which seek the violent destruction of global capitalism and American hegemony - is intricately linked to IT, that is more accessible than ever before. The centrality of a globalised communications media in everyday life and the fact that the new media, in particular, enables those less constrained by the precedents of tradition to challenge established forms of power and authority, is leading in Southeast Asia to a compounding of the region's security dilemmas.

The beginning of 2003, brought the announcement of what was claimed to be the first terrorism research centre in the Asia-Pacific, to be set up in Singapore by the end of the year (Rekhi, 2003). This news marked the latest in a flurry of regional security meetings, discussions of intelligence sharing, even agreements on regional police forces (Sharma 2002), which followed in the wake of 9/11.

Before the 9/11 attacks on the US, progress with the institutionalisation of multilateral security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region had been "very slow, painful and frustrating" (Ball 2000). After the attack on the US, regional powwows took on a more urgent flavour. In Southeast Asia, the failure to recognise the extent of the coherence and cohesion of the politically radicalised Islamic opposition in their own backyard (Jones & Smith, 2002), brought the issue further to the fore, although substantive agreements still seemed tantalisingly out of reach (Christoffersen, 2002). The Bali bombs, which directly threatened both the economies and regime stability in the region and brought a previously recalcitrant Indonesian government to the 'war of terror' alliance, should serve to focus the mind yet further.

This preoccupation with the inner threat should be no surprise. Security is an overriding concern for Southeast Asia's elites, and a key consideration when explaining their behaviour (Ayoob, 1995: 191; Job, 1992: 66). They belong to relatively new states, many of which only became independent in the 1950's and 1960's. State building is still an ongoing process and internal security is an obsession. So, not only are the perceptions of the elites and the regimes involved in the state-building important in defining security

## **Information Economy As A Security Dilemma**

problems (Ayoob, 1995: 191), but there is also a blurring of the lines between state and regime security, and a “predisposition to conceive of national security as regime security” (Samudaranija, et al, 1987: 12).

A colonial inheritance of “discontinuities and distortions” (Job, 1992: 69), has often resulted in low regime legitimacy as well as deep fissures in the social fabric of the new states, causing “domestic insecurity” (Ayoob, 1995: 190). These fissures can be ethnic, religious, or economic, and they often coincide, further weakening national foundations.

These new states are also vulnerable to external pressures due to their relatively weak position on the global stage. Interference from institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (both dominated by the major industrial powers), as well as from the advanced industrialised states and multinational corporations, adds to the destabilising effects of the ideas and values bound up in the process of modernisation (Ayoob, 1995: 37).

Thus, their lack of autonomy and the permeability creates an environment of increased insecurity, preoccupying the elites with trying to counter these external pressures. In doing so, however, they face certain security dilemmas, particularly when regime legitimacy is linked to overall security and prosperity. The pursuit of economic development creates further instability: they have to weigh cross border information flows against information control; global advertising and consumerism against national financial needs; foreign ideas and values against traditional mores and beliefs. The porosity of the state increases, further diminishing its autonomy, as it becomes a part of the global economy (Samudaranija & Paribata, 1987: 12; Job, 1992: 4-5).

Moreover, just as global economic development is uneven, so different groups within the state prove more able and more prepared to embrace the changes this development entails. The social transformation results in challenges for the regime, from the emergence of new interest groups, internal migration, and a younger, more demanding, literate, educated and increasingly urban population. Many also feel dislocated and disenfranchised by the changes around them: uncomfortable and unsuccessful in the new and the modern, they turn back to traditional value systems, causing further conflict (Samudaranija, et al, 1987: 6-9).

The fact that the US and its allies are prepared to brush aside notions of national sovereignty in pursuit of ‘terrorists’ in the post 9/11 world, is a forcible reminder of these feelings of insecurity, as well as a further source of alienation for increasing numbers of the region’s youth. The Bali tragedy placed the war on ‘terror’ firmly on the doorsteps of Southeast Asia’s government and, all

the while, the media, in particular the new media, is seen as carrying change to the heart of these societies.

In the Information Age, where communications technology is available at ever-cheaper rates, a globalised mass media has reached its tendrils into the fabric of Southeast Asian society, with ambiguous and unpredictable consequences. Technological developments and the current round of global economic integration have further ensured that the communication media has become increasingly central in daily life in Asia.

In Southeast Asia, information was once the jealously-protected ward of the local elites and the mass communication media had a central role in nation building. Today, the international media giants, seeking profitability through economies of scale, have taken their place alongside local producers. They have extended their reach across Asia, eroding monolithic state ownership in an apparent profusion of choice and ownership.

There is a paradox here, however. Although many Southeast Asian governments might fear the links drawn by the modernisation theorists between capitalist market development, the free flow of information and the development of liberal institutions (Huntington, 1991; Diamond & Plattner, Berger 1986; Lerner, 1958), their worries in this area are generally unfounded. The elites in Southeast Asia regularly rail against the international media, but are proving that they can respond fairly effectively (Woodier, 2001; Atkins 2002; Rodan 1998, 2000), as they attempt to retain control over, or manipulate the flow of information flooding across their borders.

It is, however, the depth and pace of the changes swept in by a cultural firestorm, presaged in part by the explosion in the number and reach of international media products and aided by the proliferation of cheap communications technology, that has many governments in the region in damage limitation mode. The wider they open the doors to their economies in an attempt to reap some of the financial benefits of being part of the global information economy, the more they seem to fan the flames of modernity that are licking at the social and political foundations of their societies.

Indeed, the developing 'after image' of the attacks in the US, has not meant less globalisation. Where there has been a slow down in traditional measurements such as foreign direct investment (F.D.I.), a more nuanced portrayal of the situation shows an increase in levels of both political and economic integration. Beyond the economy, global integration actually deepened on several levels. The war on terrorism, for instance, is a key factor fuelling political integration, and 11 September looks to be a "symptom rather than

## IT And New Media Politics In Southeast Asia

a cause of the stresses inherent in global integration" (A.T. Kearney / *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 2003).

Despite the widely held fears of "the destruction of traditional culture and values (under the code of modernisation), and [the imposition of] a new kind of transnational, global consumer culture..." (Kellner, 1990: 88) the media is not simply an avenue down which march the imperial legions of cultural change (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1996: 132-133). But, even though the transnational content providers might be careful to ensure political pitfalls do not pepper their path to profits, these are still products that come with a built in slant.

As public spaces in Southeast Asian cities see a proliferation of skateboard-wielding youths in their baseball caps and baggies, it is clear that the message from the global media giants is MacWorld and definitely not *Jihad* (Barber, 1995). However, in the converging currents of media reception it is not a matter of MacWorld or *Jihad*: a member of *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) is just as likely to pick up a McDonalds, while the *burqhua* often hides a Nike 'swoosh'. After all, media production and reception is a process of "constant negotiation" (Macgregor, 1997: 53). The new media, in particular, is a disruptive technology, and its role in cultural transformation is both complicated and unpredictable (Thompson, 1995: 190). The media can be used to extend and consolidate traditional values, nourishing a sense of identity and sense of belonging (Thompson, 1995: 194), while also serving to "shake dominant political visions and cultural traditions to the core" (Lull, 1995: 114).

The mass communication media is at the centre of "new modes of image production and cultural hegemony, the political struggles of various groups and the restructuring of capitalist society" (Kellner, 1990: 129). Local elites see control of such a potentially subversive space as vital, yet media production and reception is subject to a growing "struggle for availability and for access" (Fiske, 1994: 4).

In this battle for control, the division of power and resources is unequal, weighed towards ownership of the means production. Yet other groups can negotiate access to media spaces, and are becoming increasingly good at it. Likewise, inequalities in terms of access to the global networks of communications have not prevented the emergence of local strategies of opposition, from local cultural production to piracy, providing a "complex syncopation of voices" (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996: 180), around the world. These new technologies are supporting both a concentration and a dispersion of power.

New media allow those on the periphery to develop and consolidate power, and ultimately to challenge the authority of

the centre. In this high-tech mobilisation of radical constituencies (Wright, 2002), the voices often speak in opposition to globalisation, fed by “its major discontents, nationalism, regionalism, localism and revivalism” (Tehrani, 1999: 81), challenging the authority of the centre and eliciting a response at an elite level.

In Southeast Asia, as regimes toppled in Thailand and Indonesia in the 1990’s, the global communication media was increasingly identified as an important cause of regional political upheaval (Atkins, 1999: 420; 2002). The burgeoning media industry does not sit easily with governments around the region, which are used to controlling the flow of information within and across their borders. Identified as a key variable in driving regional political upheaval (Atkins, 1999: 420), these governments have been keen to quarantine what many see as the source of a contagion of internal instability (Ayoob, 1995: 196).

The post-colonial state’s nation-building ambitions and control strategies have made Southeast Asia one of the most information sensitive regions in the world, yet the 1980’s saw a loosening of these controls (Atkins, 1999: i). With governments in the region just as keen to reap the rewards of being part of the global economy as they were to continue to control the flow of information across and within their borders, policy confusion led to general growth in the industry in Asia. But it has been the growth of the Internet in the 1990’s that has really complicated Southeast Asia’s government efforts to control the flow of information.

US government moves to establish the information superhighway marked an upping of the ante in the competition to be a winner in the global economy (Langdale, 1997: 117). In response, governments across the region have tried to put the Internet to use in developing their economies, as falling costs mean access has become a reality for many in the region’s more developed areas (Minges, 2001).

Despite the possible economic advantages, the perceived political implications of embracing the information age remain a concern to governments around the region. Even Singapore, a model for control and constraint, appears to be losing its grip in the face of recent technological developments, in particular, the growth of the Internet. The leadership of the seemingly indomitable ruling Peoples Action Party (PAP), recently threw up its hands, exclaiming that its sway over the communication media was slipping (Kuo & Peng, 2000: 420).

However, where Southeast Asia is concerned, Singapore is leading the way in successfully placing “strict restrictions on the flow or market exchange” (Wong, 2001: 3) of information related

## **The Rise Of Internet Opposition: The Battle For Control**

commodities and related cultural products such as news, movies and television programmes. There appear to be few cracks in a system of control that continues to provide and model for other authoritarian regimes in the region (Rodan, 2002:10).

Singapore has continued to compete at the highest levels. From the Government's "intelligent island" initiative (National Computer Board, 1992), to more recent e-initiatives (including the \$S1.5-billion *Infocomm 21* - <[www.ida.com.sg](http://www.ida.com.sg)>, the government sought to exploit IT for economic growth, while working to maintain its position as gatekeeper for information and media access for its citizens. Despite one of the highest computer and Internet penetration rates in the world (Chen, 2001, [SBA.gov.sg.com](http://SBA.gov.sg.com)), with a combination of technological, legal and policing strategies, it has also led the way in the region in working to control this new source of instability and dissent, and moved to secure its gatekeeping role over the flow of information across and within its border (Rodan, 2002: A11; Sesser, 1999: 1, 9; Gomez, 2002).

However, even in Singapore, the Internet is providing additional and less controllable space for political expression not necessarily sanctioned by the government. While the established local media and their international brethren know their place, globalisation and rapid progress in mass communications technologies, like the Internet, has provided "opportunities for communication among civil society groups on a scale and in a way which had not been possible before..." (Ooi, 2000: 192).

Lest the Singapore grip seems to slip too far, a criminal defamation investigation launched in July 2002, against Muslim rights activist Zulfikar Mohamad Shariff, was a clear indication by the government of its intention to maintain control over the Internet space. Any commitment to deregulating Singapore's media and entertainment industry is more about securing the wandering attention of Singapore's youth than a move towards a more pluralist system (*Agence France-Presse*, 2002)

Among Singapore's ASEAN neighbours, attitudes to Internet content tend to reflect the wider communication media environment. In the Philippines, the media is, by many established criteria, one of the most robust in the world (Zubri, 1993: 187). Discussion of the issues facing the Filipino media range from its overriding influence and the scrutiny of media ownership and control and its affect on editorial decisions, through the murder and imprisonment of crusading journalists and poor quality work and petty corruption, to sex selling the media and television news being repackaged as entertainment, with ratings driving production considerations. But these discussions also tend to mention the general health of the media, and positives such as the

use of the Internet to continue the experiment with libertarian and community journalism, and political debate.

Thailand and Indonesia both have a much less developed infrastructure than Singapore. Thailand's Internet population is seen as having the most potential growth within ASEAN, and is expected to exceed both Malaysia and Singapore in size. At present, however, access remains predominantly an urban phenomenon and confined to the capital (Nielsen, 2001). Given the apparent propensity of the country's Prime Minister (PM) to "emulate the slick authoritarianism of Singapore" (Rodan, 2002:10), similar moves to fence off the Internet are likely. Not only has the PM's Shin Corporation got significant interests in the communications infrastructure, but recent regulations imposed by the Ministry of Communications and Transportation ensure the state-owned Communications Authority of Thailand receives, free-of-charge, a 35% stake in all private Internet service providers (ISPs) (Swan, 2002: 21).

In Indonesia under Suharto, the Internet, which became accessible in Indonesia from 1995, allowed the relatively free flow of information in a tightly-controlled media environment. Post Suharto, the role of the Internet has weakened the regime's tight grip on the media. The Internet is seen as playing a major role in toppling the Suharto regime, and remains a technology of democracy in the public imagination. Its use in the 1999 election process served further to "authenticate the newly-emerging democracy in their eyes" (Hill, 2002: 5). However, the days of an unfettered Indonesian media are over, despite the 1999 law that prohibits censorship. Four years after restrictions on free speech ended with Suharto's fall, there are fears a recent government crackdown could signal a return to this nation's repressive past (Timberlake, 2002).

Given the propensities of its neighbours, one would expect Malaysia's policies, then, to be particularly restrictive. Malaysia has a western-style media in form but not content: "a sophisticated combination of legislation and ownership concentration [have] ensured the media remained under tight control" (Williams & Rich, 2000: 2). Malaysia, however, has probably been among the most liberal in its policing of the online world, at least until now. The desire on the part of the Malaysian authorities to encourage the development of its information industries and attract foreign players to the Multimedia Super Corridor, meant the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed promised in 1996, not to censor the Internet. As a result, the medium has become a focus for those dissatisfied with the bias of the local conventional media. And, despite one well-publicised court case (Ibrahim & Kaur 1998: 1), Mahathir's commitment not to censor the Internet appeared to hold

true, at least until a government raid closed online news daily Malaysiakini in early 2003.

Indeed, as part of the regional move to clampdown on the free flow of information, the Malaysian Home Ministry has drawn up plans to impose a “code of content” and a licensing system for website operators. These proposals would enable authorities “to discourage the abuse of the Internet by irresponsible users” and to address national security concerns (Laurie, 2002; Loone, 2002; *ABC Asia Pacific*, 2002).

Southeast Asian governments are not alone in working to control the Internet in the Asian region. China, in particular, shares their schizophrenic attitude to the Internet, hoping to harness its potential as a tool of state propaganda and to boost economic growth, while reigning its use for expression of political opposition. Beijing has also taken advantage of the international drive against terrorism to strengthen the machinery of government and control (*Reporters Sans Frontiers*, 2002).

China, which has some 45 million Internet users, about 3.6 per cent of the population (CNNIC, 2002; cited in Hennock, 2002), has seen a move to block foreign web sites, the creation of an Internet police force to monitor use, and the closure of sites with articles on corruption or critical of the government. Beijing has also been working to contain the growth of cyber cafes, closing more than 14,000 over the summer of 2002, and has detained some 30 Internet users for subversion, one of whom it imprisoned for eleven years for downloading articles from the Internet.

Beijing has also managed to get ISPs and web sites to sign self-censorship agreements. More than 300 organisations are reported to have put their names to a pledge to discourage the publication of ‘immoral’ or ‘dangerous’ material online. This included some celebrated agreements with US corporations such as Yahoo (Wong, 2002a; 2002b).

India also seems to have picked up this regional malaise. The role of the Internet and IT in rural development, as well as its contribution to broader economic gains, is well understood (Sharma, 2003). But the nationalist government of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), also clearly understands the threats posed by these disruptive technologies.

The ongoing troubles of online news portal, *tehelka.com*, highlight not only the government’s growing discomfort with criticism and awareness of the space provided by the Internet, but also form a lightning rod for the ongoing debate over privacy and the media. The website’s owners blame their current cash shortage on an alleged government campaign to deter potential investors. The campaign, they suggest, stems from a story it ran in March 2001, which led to the resignation of senior defence officials,

including a Cabinet minister and the chief of the BJP party. The site obtained the evidence by way of a 'sting operation', where they secretly recorded on video, army officers and politicians accepting bribes from journalists posing as arms dealers (BBC, 2002b).

Where its neighbours in South Asia have always had a fraught, if not downright nasty relationship between their elites and the expression of opposition and dissent, India has been known for its relatively liberal attitudes. There are mounting concerns, however, that the current government is taking a more authoritarian position. Reporting on political issues, for example, has become risky for journalists, particularly against a background of ongoing tensions over border disputes with Pakistan, and Islamic and Marxist separatists in the north-eastern states of Jammu and Kashmir (Ahmad, 2002).

Between the IT Act of 2000 (policed by the 'Cyber Crime Investigation Cell'), and the March 2002 Prevention of Terrorism Act, the government certainly has the legal wherewithal to intercept electronic communications. The planned Electronic Research and Development Centre, to develop new cyber forensic tools, is expected to ensure it has the equipment it might need for a crackdown (Privacy International & EPIC, 2002).

The hardening of attitudes towards the new media throughout the region should be put in context. "Larger, more diverse political systems will not be able to simply replicate a Singapore model of control...", something which would require "the development of a mutually reinforcing set of institutions comprehensively subordinated to ruling party interests" (Rodan, 2002: 10). Despite this, the Singapore model will continue to inspire, inform and guide authoritarian regimes in the region, particularly in the wake of 9/11 and the Bali Bombings.

### **Electronic surveillance: "Every move you make, every breath you take..."**

Admired though it is, the Singapore government is finding there are drawbacks to its approach. The government wants to differentiate itself from its neighbours in Asia, and attract international investors and global talent to help make its companies winners (Saywell & Plott, 2002). It wants to create an entrepreneurial culture, currently stifled, although the government would not use the term, by the aura of 'authoritarian capitalism'. This "...suppresses individualism and intellectual freedom and will greatly impair the formation of entrepreneurs... [and] in the long run...[is] unlikely to sustain the levels of high performance recorded in recent years" (Lingle, 1998).

Whilst the Singapore government is keen to encourage its

citizens to make money, it is not prepared to trust them with a more plural system. And, although Singaporeans have become increasingly noisy, at least in Cyberspace, the American 'war against terror' has provided Singapore's governors with a useful excuse for cementing over some of these cracks, as the moves in July 2002 clearly showed.

Indeed, at the state's recognition of the "premonitory snufflings of civil society" (Jones, 1998: 163), it seems to step in swiftly to ensure its political monopoly remains firm. In the post 9/11 world, this attitude might find some support from the most unlikely quarters. Asian values were once the talisman used by governments around the region to ward off what they saw as the worst effects of globalisation - the move towards liberal democracy and the undermining of their authority. The attacks on the US and the global financial fallout from both the telecommunications stock price meltdown and the Enron-inspired corporate scandals have tested the commitment of even the strongest proponents of globalisation. With many in the West now leery of its ramifications, the 'war on terror' is further reinforcing the garrison-state mentality, providing a fillip to authoritarianism and in conflict with global, open media policies of the 90's.

Of course, politics has not been the only context in which the region is witness to a resurgence of surveillance and scrutiny. As Southeast Asia's citizenry migrates into the digital world, it leaves its privacy behind in the analogue world, something that will only be reinforced by the use of broadband.

In the broadband age, commercial imperatives rather than political initiatives will drive much of the invasion into our privacy. Most of us seem to shrug off these increasing incursions as a small price to pay for convenience. Every purchase we make is an "electronic confession" (Dogg, 2001). Merely using a credit card allows a bank, and anybody else who obtains access to the data, to know where the credit card is being used. Likewise, advanced mobile telephony might appear to be a convenience, but it also means a user can be traced geographically, perfect for pushing an advert for the latest sale in a nearby shopping mall. Internet use is subject to increasingly sophisticated methods to watch what surfers are doing and to make e-commerce pay (Ward, 2002).

This is the stuff that oils the cogs of modern commercial life. Similarly, the efforts of governments to provide e-citizens with easy ways to pay bills, apply for licences and the like, mean that as we interact with the modern capitalist system, so we register our virtual existence on computers around the world. Thus, many of the innovations in communications technology come with huge opportunities for surveillance. There are no hiding places on the Net as governments around the world chase your data (Campbell,

2000).

This is of course, meat for conspiracy theorists, and myths abound about the abilities of governments to monitor our every electronic word. From *Echelon* - described by privacy groups as a global surveillance network that intercepts all kinds of communications for redistribution among the primary partners in a decades-old UK-US alliance that also includes Australia and New Zealand, to the FBI's *Carnivore* - an Internet wiretap that looks at packets and records those it considers suspect, the tools for almost Orwellian surveillance possibilities seem to be in place (Oakes, 2002; Poroskov, 2002; Darklady, 2002).

Most recently, reports have suggested the Pentagon is developing a computer system that resembles a vast electronic dragnet, trawling through personal information in the hunt for terrorists around the globe. The system is said to be being developed under the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). *The New York Times* named Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, the former national security adviser in the Reagan administration infamous for his role in the Iran Contra affair in the 1980's, as project director. Poindexter has described the system in Pentagon documents and in speeches as providing intelligence analysts and law enforcement officials with instant access to information from Internet mail and calling records to credit card and banking transactions and travel documents, without a search warrant (Markoff, 2002). DARPA (2002) brushed aside the story, in particular Poindexter's association.

Myth or reality, the row over encryption, including calls by the US authorities for a global ban on all encryption software, implies a thread of truth worming its way through the tales of *Echelon* and *Carnivore*. What is more tangible is the Homeland Security Bill signed by President George W. Bush on 25 November 2002, which "effectively drafted corporate America to serve in the war against terrorism—with Internet service providers among those on the front line" (Swibel, 2002). The law puts new burdens on ISPs to cooperate with the government. For example, law enforcement agencies won't need a court order to install pen register and trap-and-trace devices when there is an 'ongoing attack' on any computers used in interstate commerce or communication.

And, the ISPs got something in return: The new law makes it easier for the USA's 3,000 Internet service providers to volunteer subscriber information to government officials without worrying about customer lawsuits. Under the new law, they can release the contents of customers' communications to law enforcement agencies without a court order and without fear of a suit if they have a 'good-faith' belief that an emergency warrants it. Before, they had to have a 'reasonable' belief - a higher legal standard - that release was warranted.

But, it is not only digital communication that has risks for our privacy, the widespread deployment of other surveillance technology also has serious implications. We are monitored at work, and in the streets. Video cameras – used widely for urban surveillance in Great Britain – offer security in exchange for providing the state with ability to monitor movements and behaviour. With face-recognition software, it becomes possible to track the movements of every human being as they walk down the street (D’Elia & D’Ottavi, 2002).

And the current round of terrorist attacks have offered further encouragement to law-abiding citizens to trust their governments with ever increased powers of scrutiny. Vigorous debate goes on in the US about the scope of this authority, from the Patriot Act, the new ‘Office of Information Awareness’ (OIA), which is part of Homeland Security Act and Operation TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System). Despite this, the US has led the way in giving federal officials greater powers to trace and intercept communications both for law enforcement and foreign intelligence purposes (The Economist, 2002: 33; Doyle, 2002; Holtzman, 2003).

Director of the National Security Agency, Lt. General Michael V. Hayden, told US Congress that they could best help him by “going back to their constituents and finding out where the public wants to draw the line between liberty and safety” (Hayden, 2002). In the November 2002 elections, US voters appear to have given carte blanche to the Bush administration to draw the line where it wants – so long as they can sleep safely in their beds.

Of course, the use of IT is not just a one way street, cordoned off by the state and major corporations. There is also the obvious value of IT in enabling a terrorist attack: cell phones were used in the co-ordination of the attacks of 11 September, and to detonate the Bali bombs.

And then there is the even more important use of ever-cheaper, ever-more-powerful information technologies to mobilise constituencies, from Al Qaeda’s recruitment videos, to the new, unregulated satellite TV channels—notably Al Jazeera, founded in 1996— which are given an important role in the propaganda war between the US and Al Qaeda. The uncomfortable fact is that an unfettered media often “fuels antagonisms because people choose channels that bolster their biases” (Wright, 2002).

### **Asia’s Clampdown – the cudgel and the stiletto**

In Southeast Asia, the surveillance and interception of communications continues with impunity. Even *Echelon* is reported to be in action gleaning information from America’s allies

in the region (Hager, N., 1986, *Secret Power*, cited in Simbulan, 2000). Not that those allies have been slow to do their bit in the war on 'terror'. Malaysia and Singapore have arrested nearly 40 alleged Islamic militants since December 2001, most of whom are reported to have admitted belonging to JI (Shari, et al, 2002: 22).

In Malaysia, there are plans to tighten security laws after a judge ordered the release of an Islamic militant suspect, even though he was immediately re-arrested. A minister in the Prime Minister's department Rais Yatim, told the *New Sunday Times* newspaper the government was thinking of tightening the Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows indefinite detention without trial (BBC, 2002a).

The Philippines welcomed the help of US Special Forces in its battle against Muslim radicals in the south of the archipelago, and is considering a controversial identity card scheme (Baguiro, 2002: A1). Even Indonesia, slow to jump aboard given obvious conflicting internal interests, moved to arrest the alleged spiritual leader of JI, Abu Bakar Bashir, after the Bali Bombings.

There have been few questions raised against the clampdown, suggesting that some of the 'evidence' from Malaysian and Indonesian security agencies looks to have been manufactured for domestic political and diplomatic purposes, further "alienating an already sceptical Islamic community" (Arkin, 2002). But, where once the West might have argued the human rights agenda with Southeast Asia's authoritarian governments, now that its assets are threatened, it has been unusually quiet.

As for the local response, in Singapore, at least, there is little in the way of public outcry to the State's policies. Singapore's uncertain beginnings have given rise to a political culture "founded on political indifference mixed with high anxiety," and a middle class which does not demand a pluralist society, given that "...the selective cultivation of tradition high cultural values and passivity and group conformity, and their subsequent promulgation through universal education programs militate against individualism, the rule of law and critical public debate" (Jones, 1998: 163).

While it is not possible to tar the hole of Southeast Asia's citizenry with Singapore's cultural brush, most elements of pluralist democracy in the region have only emerged recently. Where the Southeast Asian state has not been technologically sophisticated in its surveillance, or its citizenry too unconnected to be electronically monitored, the military has often taken a more direct role in support of the surveillance state (Jones & Smith, 2002: 147).

Besides, memories of the chaos that infected their post-independence years are still fresh, and the stalwart burghers of Southeast Asia are all too happy to allow their rulers to draw a far more ambiguous line between liberty and safety. Whether these elites can provide the security their citizenry so desperately desire

remains to be seen. Few outside the region have much confidence that ASEAN will step up to the breach, given that regional co-operation in countering terrorism in the past has “not been well co-ordinated and has continued to be ad hoc due to the constraints of conflicting national interests and mutual suspicions” (Chan, 2002: 107).

## Conclusion

Consideration of the political economy of the communication media has provided a useful analysis of structures of ownership and control, as well as charting developments such as the growth of the media, the extension of corporate control, and convergence within the industry. Any understanding of the unfolding events in Southeast Asia, however, shows that a more nuanced approach is necessary, one that takes into account those who challenge the centres of power, whether inside institutions, countries or regions. Likewise, it is important to include their audiences and the technology itself, as analysing the way that “meaning is made and remade through the concrete activities of producers and consumers is ... essential” (Golding & Murdock, 1996: 15).

As Kellner suggests, the media it is not a tool of monolithic capitalist ideology, but “a synthesis of capitalist and democratic structures and imperatives and is therefore full of structural conflicts and tensions” (Kellner, 1990: 15). There is an ongoing struggle for the use and control of IT and for the space the new media, in particular, creates. There is an understanding in the region of the unique ability of the modern communication media to influence the daily construction of reality, and the assumptions that underpin it, those who might profit from its economic, political and cultural influence. Thus, the perspectives of technological determinism, cultural studies and the ideas of Thompson and Giddens, also form a valuable element of the warp and weave of the fabric of our understanding impact of IT and the communications media, as well as of the unintended consequences of technology.

Indeed, while the war on ‘terror’ is giving hardliners in Southeast Asia the backing they need to try to clamp down further on dissent within their communities, these actions will only serve to further undermine their own positions. Events post 9/11 have indicated that governments around the region need to allow more critical engagement with issues that are threatening regime continuity around the region, in particular the challenge that militant Islam represents to stability in Pacific Asia.

The limited coverage of alternative perspectives by the mass media, partly because of their preparedness to bow to local controls and partly because of a process of dumbing-down, clearly played

a role in the failure of both Singapore and neighbouring Malaysia to recognise the extent of the coherence and cohesion of the politically radicalised Islamic opposition in their own backyard. There are no signs of a more liberal attitude.

Rapid technological change in areas such as the development of broadband telecommunication services in East Asia is leading to more “complex bargaining relationships” (Langdale, 1997: 128) between global companies, local firms, citizens and their national governments. Around the region, “new responses to these technologies will be and are being crafted not only by the state, but also the media and society” (Ooi, 2000: 192). But, all too often, any liberalisation of freedom of expression is driven from above, and “democratisation thus involves the expansion of political participation and consultation within the limits defined by the state...” (Jones, 1995: 84).

The avenues through which the dispossessed and disenfranchised can vent their unease are increasingly choked. The region’s governments are inflexible on this point, even though their embrace of globalisation has given rise to groups which clearly believe their only resort is “a rabid response to colonialism and imperialism and their economic children capitalism and modernity” (Barber, 1995: 11). Control remains their strategy – even if it is a flawed one. The bombing in Bali in October 2002, has only served to harden their resolve.

We are witness to an unfolding drama around Southeast Asia. It is nothing less than the disenchantment of this world and the end of Southeast Asia’s ‘Age of Deference’, encouraged by the ideas carried by a globalised media and realised by the same communications technology upon which the media, itself, relies. As change and conflict lead to inevitable destruction, it remains to be seen just how widespread this will be, and what shape the region’s institutions will take. Given the continued strategic importance of the region, the US, in particular, is likely to show particular interest. The last time Southeast Asia suffered serious internal instability, in the years following WWII, the US played a major role in drawing the region’s political map. Interference this time is likely to drive more of Asia’s disaffected youth into the hands of hard-liners like JI and Al Qaeda, and hasten the demise of Southeast Asia’s surveillance states.

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# Can The Poor Get Richer And Freer?

## The Internet, Development And Democracy In Asia

*The combination of the Internet, development and democracy provide poor countries with new opportunities to get richer and freer. In using examples from Asia, we show that despite the Internet being no panacea tends to have a positive effect on both development and democratisation. Due to the linkage between economic and political development, the Internet's effect on political development will tend to be good for economic development, or vice versa. A digital divide exists, but so does a digital opportunity for developing countries, and the Internet's unique decentred structure makes it difficult for authoritarian regimes to comprehensively instrumentalise this technology. Essentially, all three processes (i.e. the Internet as an aspect of technological progress as well as economic development and democratisation) are interlinked with each other and tend to correlate positively. We also look at some meaningful measures, which are key in supporting the Internet's positive effects.*

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**T**wenty years after the creation of a rudimentary Internet and 13 years after the beginning of the World Wide Web, more than 6.7% of the world's population were logging on. The Internet is spreading around the world faster than the telephone had among richest countries a century ago. In 1998, only 12% of Internet users were in non-OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. By 2000, this proportion had almost doubled to 21% (Guest, 2001). The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reports that more than 50% of the total number of Internet users in the world are in Asia (ITU, 2002). The top four locations worldwide in number of Web pages viewed per person are South Korea (90 page views per person), Taiwan (76), Hong Kong (62) and Singapore (56) (Sidorenko & Findlay, 2001).

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In parts of Asia, many people live with an income lower than a dollar a day, isolating them from the economic and information benefits created by the Internet. 'The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.' This opinion is held by first a group of skeptics, with whose opinions we deal in this paper. Another group of naysayers claims that the Internet's economic effect may be similar to the tulip bubble in Holland in the 17th century.

Our paper argues that the Internet will facilitate development and democracy in poor countries. There is a linkage between economic and political development. In using a variety of examples from different Asian countries, we will show that despite the Internet being no panacea, it tends to have a rather positive effect on both development and democratisation. Essentially, we will show that all three processes vis-a-vis the technological progress, economic development and democratisation tend to correlate positively. In our conclusion, we will examine the benchmarks of the Internet's positive impact.

## **Development And Democracy**

A country's gross national product (GNP) measures the total value of goods and services produced annually, but can be misleading because it does not consider differences in the cost of living. Economic development is thus better measured by purchasing power parity (PPP) as it allows for more direct comparison of living standards.

Another useful indicator of a country's development is the Human Development Index (HDI), a United Nations-developed index, which is based on life expectancy, literacy rates, and whether average incomes are sufficient to meet the basic needs of life in a country.

In defining democracy, the fallacy of electoralism is common. A meaningful definition of democracy goes beyond the requirements of regular, free, and fair electoral competition and universal suffrage. In Diamond's (1999) definition of (liberal) democracy, executive power is constrained by the autonomous power of other government institutions such as an independent judiciary and parliament. Civil liberties (such as freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration, and petition) are effectively protected by an independent, non-discriminatory judiciary, whose decisions are enforced and respected by other centers of power. The rule of law protects citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture or undue interference in their personal lives.

Diamond's definition also encompasses associational freedom and the existence of a diverse array of autonomous associations,

movements, and groupings. Alternative sources of information must also exist, such as independent media to which citizens have ready access (Diamond, 1999).

There is overwhelming evidence that development and democracy are intrinsically intertwined. Economic freedom helps to establish the conditions for political freedom by promoting the growth of prosperous middle and working classes. Also, successful market economies require political freedom to provide a barrier against economic cronyism and other anticompetitive and inefficient practices (Karatnycky, 1999: 122). Even the comprehension of economic needs requires the exercise of political rights, especially those guaranteeing freedom of expression and discussion, without which informed and considered choices are impossible (Sen, 1999: 10-11).

Democratisation is hard to avoid as it seems to be exceedingly difficult to sustain authoritarian regimes for long. Waves of democratisation are contagious. The successful example of one country's transition establishes it as a model for other countries to imitate. Once a region is sufficiently saturated with democratic political regimes, pressure will mount, compelling the remaining autocracies to conform to the newly established norm (Schmitter, 1995: 347).

Also, authoritarian governments are undermined by both their economic failure and their economic success. Economic failure obviously makes them unpopular, while economic growth leads to increased demands for political participation. Democratic progress in the 20th century has been rather impressive. Franklin Roosevelt's four freedoms – of speech and expression, of belief, from want and from fear – are possessed by more people, more securely, than ever before.

There is also compelling quantitative evidence from a survey of post-WWII regimes that the level of economic development powerfully shapes the survival prospects of democracy, and affluent democracies survive without fail. Economic growth lays the foundation for successful democratic consolidation, and there is statistical evidence that the more prosperous a nation is, the greater the chances are that it will sustain democracy. With economic development, there is more equality of consumption, a growth of the middle class, more access to health care, more education and less illiteracy, and people are more likely to ask for increased political freedom (Lipset, 1995). On the other hand, democracy is much more likely to last when the economy grows rapidly, with moderate inflation. Research has shown that democracies are capable of implementing and sustaining economic reform (Przeworski et al. 1996; Diamond, 1999).

However, the hypothesis that economic development has to

precede political liberalisation is still in circulation. It is occasionally claimed that non-democratic systems of governance are better suited at bringing about economic development as they provide the necessary stability and discipline. This primacy-of-economic development rhetoric holds that civil and political rights introduce so many inefficiencies in government that they must be systematically infringed by a state seeking rapid economic development.

This liberty trade-off argument has been a mainstay of developmental dictatorships of all stripes. Nobel-prize winning economist Amartya Sen notes that it “is based on sporadic empiricism drawing on very selective and limited information, rather than on any general statistical testing over the wide-ranging data that are available” (1999: 6). Systematic cross-national statistical studies do not support the claim that there is a causal connection between authoritarianism and economic success. The industrialised rich nations are all democracies.

In addition to the positive correlation between economic growth and democracy, democracy has importance in itself. While democracy’s intrinsic merits may not convince authoritarian governments, there are two impressive statistical correlations. First, there is vast literature showing that democracies are generally “less warlike” as compared to other types of regimes (Diamond, 1999). Democracy produces stability, the supposed lack of which is sometimes held against it.

Second, in the history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press (Sen, 1999). Democracy protects the poor. Sen argues that the “positive role of political and civic rights applies to the prevention of economic and social disasters in general.” (1999: 8)

Technological progress can be painful. When humans first learned to make fire, some undoubtedly got burnt. And the Industrial Revolution involved huge economic and social dislocations, though most people (apart from Luddites and some others) would agree that the gains in human welfare were worth the cost.

Technology clearly helps development. For instance, the decline in mortality rates that took more than 150 years in the now-developed world took only 40 years in the developing world, in large parts thanks to antibiotics and vaccines. Although it is true that technology makes the rich richer, it also makes the poor richer. Average annual incomes in developing countries doubled between 1975 and 1998, from US\$1,300 to US\$2,500 (in 1985 dollars

## **Internet And Economic Development**

at purchasing power parity). In addition, technology makes the poor healthier, better-fed, and longer-lived (Guest, 2001). They have many more choices about how they want to live. The fact that rich countries push out new technologies at an unprecedented rate is good also for poor countries. Inventions eventually become cheap enough for poor countries to buy them. It still takes too long, but it is happening faster now than ever before.

It is axiomatic that technology is good for development. However, there is an ongoing debate as to how significant the invention of the Internet has been to the poor countries. Skeptics say that computers and the Internet are not remotely as important as steam power, the telegraph or electricity. In their view, information technology (IT) stands for 'insignificant toys', and its economic benefit will turn out to be no greater than that of the 17th-century tulip bubble (Woodall, 2000). On the other extreme, techno-evangelists have claimed the Internet as the greatest invention since the wheel, and the misleading term of the "New Economy" has been coined, implying that the old economics textbooks can be ripped up.

To the more impartial observer, the Internet has certain commonalities with the telegraph (which Tom Standage has called "The Victorian Internet"), invented in the 1830s. Both the telegraph and the Internet (like the Gutenberg press, postal services and the telephone) have brought a big fall in communication costs and increased the flow of information. This also lowers the cost of bringing together buyers and sellers, of making markets work, thus realising substantial efficiency gains in the process.

However, the Internet is bound to have a larger economic impact as the cost of communications has plummeted far more steeply than that of any previous technology, allowing it to be used more widely and deeply. Over the past three decades, the real price of computer processing power has fallen by 99.999%, an average decline of 35% a year. The cost of telephone calls has declined more slowly, but over a longer period. In 1930, a three-minute call from New York to London cost more than \$300 in today's prices. The same call now costs less than 20 cents – an annual decline of around 10% (Woodall, 2000).

In addition to plunging prices, computers and the Internet have four other noteworthy features: (1) IT is pervasive. It can boost efficiency in almost everything a firm does, from design to marketing to accounting, and in every sector of the economy; (2) IT helps to make markets work more efficiently, as it increases access to information; (3) IT is truly global. More and more knowledge can be stored and sent anywhere in the world at negligible cost. By reducing the cost of communications, IT has helped to globalise production and capital markets; (4) IT speeds

up innovation itself, by making it easier and cheaper to process large amounts of data and reducing the time it takes to design new products (see Woodall, 2000).

However, there is a danger that developing economies in Asia and elsewhere will become increasingly marginalised. Half the people in the world have never made a telephone call, and Africa has less international bandwidth than Brazil's city of Sao Paulo. In Bangladesh a computer costs the equivalent of eight years' average pay. The 2 billion people living in low-income economies (with average incomes below US\$800 per head) have only 35 telephone lines and five personal computers for every 1,000 people, and only one in 250 Africans is online (Woodall, 2000). There is one computer for every 9,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa. In India, between one and two million people have access to a computer in a population of 950 million (World Bank, 2000).

Gleave and Suliman (2002) report that the number of Internet hosts per 10,000 people averages 4.2 for all developing countries in the world. East Asia and the Pacific average 2.4 hosts and South Asia only 0.2 hosts per 10,000 persons, respectively. In terms of personal computer penetration, East Asia and the Pacific again average slightly higher at 17.0 units per 1000 persons, while South Asia averages a mere 3.2 units.

The International Telecommunication Union has highlighted the two most critical barriers to connectivity in Asia as income levels and cost of access. Gleave and Suliman's analysis indicates that for a per capita GDP of about US\$5,000, Internet penetration rates are between 1 and 2%. Internet penetration rates climb to about 9% when per capita GDP increases to US\$ 10,000. Beyond US\$ 20,000 per capita GDP, the Internet penetration leaps to over 30%.

In 2001, there were an estimated 332 million Internet users, which only equalled 5.4% of the world population. Of these 332 million users, 72% were located in Europe and North America. By comparison, there were 75.5 million in the Asia-Pacific, 13.1 million users in South America, and only 2.7 million in Africa (Abbot, 2001: 107-108). Table 1 shows the number of Internet users (millions) in selected Asian countries.

There are numerous possible benefits from the information superhighway including increased employment, improved international competitiveness and increased flexibility of production. The question is then whether developing nations can benefit from it or whether they will be left behind even further.

The digital divide is of strong concern to countries such as India, which has a large population with a high illiteracy rate. Sam Pitroda, the Indian chief executive of WorldTel, a telecom

**Table 1:**  
**Number of Internet Users (Millions)**  
**in Selected Asian Countries**

Country	No. of users	% of popn.	Date of survey
Australia	7	36.5	May 2000
Bangladesh	0.0007	0.005	Sept 1999
China	12.3	0.97	June 2000
Hong Kong	1.85	26	June 2000
India	4.5	0.45	March 2000
Indonesia	0.08	N/a	May 1998
Japan	27.06	21.38	May 2000
Malaysia	1.1	6	Dec 1999
New Zealand	1.27	33.25	May 2000
The Philippines	0.32	0.03	Sept 1998
Singapore	1.74	41.91	May 2000
South Korea	10	21.3	Dec 1999
Taiwan	4.79	21.6	Dec 1999

development company, commented that “until they solve the problem of illiteracy, they can’t solve anything” and the digital divide will remain an issue (Richman, 1999). Indeed, the poor are not only shunning the Internet because they cannot afford it: the problem is that they also lack the skills to exploit it effectively. So connecting the poor to the Internet will not automatically improve their finances. Universal literacy is thus perhaps more important than universal Internet access.

The developing countries need to be aware of the limitations of technology and not jump onto the bandwagon without putting a proper plan in place to achieve their long-term digital goal. They could overcome most of the problems associated with the digital divide through education to achieve higher literacy rates. Poor countries need more R&D and thus they need to increase their spending on higher education (but without a retreat from primary education). Private supply of higher education should be encouraged.

The Internet can of course play a major role in education as well. The Internet offers virtually free access to a huge amount of information and expert advice on subjects from engineering and plant cultivation to birth control and health care. A single Internet connection can be shared by many, giving schools access to the world’s top libraries when they previously did not even have books. Distance learning gives students the chance to be taught by better teachers (Woodall, 2000).

Fears that the digital divide will widen the income gap between rich and poor countries seem exaggerated and appear to be based on a misunderstanding of the nature of growth as well as of the nature of IT. IT can boost growth in rich and emerging economies. For emerging economies, however, deeper economic obstacles to development also have to be tackled. These obstacles will be discussed in the concluding section of our article.

Developing countries have huge scope to grow rapidly by buying rich countries' technology and copying their production methods. This allows them to grow faster than developed economies, even if they start with fewer computers. As latecomers, poorer countries do not need to reinvent the computer and can in fact avoid first-mover disadvantages (Drucker, 1994). They have to open their economies to ideas from the rich world.

The diffusion of technology and knowledge across borders to poorer economies has been fast. Computers, modern telecommunications and the Internet all reduce communications costs and break down geographical borders. OECD figures show that IT spending in developing economies has been growing more than twice as fast as in developed ones over the past decade (though of course from a low base) (Woodall, 2000).

Any task that can be digitised can now be done at a distance, which creates many opportunities for developing countries. Computer programming, airline revenue accounting, insurance claims and call centers have all been outsourced to developing economies. Connectivity through global telecommunications networks is shrinking our world and transforming the way businesses are being connected with implications for both developed and developing countries.

The new technologies are spawning concepts such as "weblogs" which provide "online publications of people's stream of consciousness" (Dawson, 2003: 4). Dawson argues that the convenience of the networks provides unmoderated discussions that are of immediate interest to the community. Other technologies like email, mobile telephony, Short Message Service (SMS), instant messaging, online forums, chat and videoconferencing are also changing the way people communicate and the way businesses are conducted. Mobile professionals now can perform remote tasks that traditionally could only be done from a land-line telephone link – such as accessing an office computer system or electronically transmitting faxes and e-mail – from any cellular coverage area in the world. Instant messaging has revolutionised the way people communicate by connecting through the Internet. Through the compilation of 'buddy lists' of communication partners around the world, anyone who is connected can communicate via Internet text messages. Short Message Services (SMS) are short, informal

and unintrusive messages that have become a means of sharing daily experiences and thoughts, besides being a powerful marketing tool (Bociurkiw, 2001).

As bandwidth cost continues to decrease worldwide, the opportunities for the development of new applications to support the ubiquitous network will lead to greater opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic development. Devices such as the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) or the pen tablet PC integrate both the wireless communications technology (e.g. Bluetooth, global system for mobile communication (GSM), or general packet radio service (GPRS)) and the primary information management functions (e.g. scheduling, note-taking). This has led to improvement in personal productivity as evidenced by the increasing number of freelancers, and it has reduced the costs of business and entrepreneurship.

Collaborative software to support decision-making is now bolstered by data, audio and video technologies. Tools in this segment combine technologies such as real-time chat and text-based discussion, audio-conferencing and Net telephony, data and document conferencing, and desktop videoconferencing. These technologies can be linked over a local network or used over the Internet. They also go beyond mere cost reduction, for instance saving on costly business trips, and greatly enhance business functions (e.g. sales demonstrations, telemedicine, remote security monitoring and job interviews).

Row (1997) contends that by including functions that signify presence, gestures and emotions, virtual places can mirror the physical work world closely. The future of global connectivity hinges on web services (extensible manipulation language (XML), simple object access protocol (SOAP), Web services description language (WSDL), and universal description discovery and integration (UDDI)) that have the ability to link organisation(s) to organisation(s) in a manner that will lead to "easy information exchange, reduced programming costs, improved connectivity and collaboration with partners and customers, and more" (CIO, 2002). In other words, web services in their perfected state will allow communications between businesses to go on without human intervention which would result in lower operational costs in a globalised connected world.

Globalisation has created many opportunities for developing countries. The Internet makes it possible for a tailor in Shanghai to hand-make a suit for a lawyer in Boston, then FedEx it to him. A woman's weaving co-operative in a remote village in Guyana is selling hammocks over the Internet for S\$1,000 each. Firms in Africa can now bid online for procurement contracts tendered by America's General Electric (Woodall, 2000).

Bangalore in India is a popular example of how IT can affect emerging economies. Largely due to the power of outsourcing, India's software industry has grown from almost nothing in the early 1990s into the most dynamic business on the subcontinent, employing 400,000 people and generating more than \$8 billion in sales in 2000 (Guest, 2001).

Inequality may, in some cases, be reduced thanks to the Internet. A software programmer in Bangalore can use the Internet to work for a software company in Seattle without leaving home, and can expect to be paid a quarter of what they would earn in the US. The effect is to reduce income inequality between people doing similar jobs in different countries (*The Economist*, 2000; Woodall, 2000).

An even better example of a low-income country that is wholeheartedly embracing IT may be China, which has four times as many telephone lines and Internet users per 1,000 people as India, and 18 times as many mobile phone users (Woodall, 2000).

Earlier in this section, we mentioned the impressive progress in health care. There is also an important connection between health care and the Internet. "The Internet is the quickest and cheapest way yet devised of disseminating medical research. Using websites such as Healthnet, doctors in poor countries can easily and cheaply keep up to the speed with the latest developments in their field" (Guest, 2001).

As current technologies get cheaper, they will spread. As the Internet keeps scientists in developing countries abreast of the latest developments in their field, they will start to produce more breakthroughs themselves. Cheaper communications mean more north-south collaboration, and indeed more south-south collaboration. "In 1995-97, American scientists co-wrote papers with colleagues from 173 other countries. Kenyans published papers with scientists from 81 other nations" (Guest, 2001).

For the Internet to make a mark beyond the top few percent of the population of developing countries, low-cost innovative IT solutions are a must. Indian scientists have produced a prototype of a battery-powered device called the Simputer – short for "simple computer" – that is expected to cost only \$200 a unit. The avowed goal of the Simputer is to bring the Internet to "the masses" in India and other developing countries (<http://www.simputer.org>, see James, 2001: 820).

In several fishing villages on the Bay of Bengal, for example, an Internet link-up allows a volunteer to read weather forecasts from the US Navy's public website and broadcast them over a loudspeaker. For fishermen who work from little wooden boats, knowing that a storm is looming can mean the difference between life and death. The Internet also lets them know the market price

for their catch, which helps them haggle with middlemen (Guest, 2001). The example of the Simputer also demonstrates that the Internet is a tool that helps developing countries to develop technology of their own. The makers of the Simputer used free open-software, which they downloaded through the Internet. For open-source software, the Internet is *sine qua non*.

A very current example of bridging the digital divide comes from Laos, one of the world's poorest countries. It is possible to make computers for the poor in countries without an electronic power grid. Villagers in a remote village of Laos that has neither electricity nor telephone connections are being wired up to the Internet. This is accomplished through the *Jhai PC*, a machine that has no moving, and few delicate, parts. It can be powered by a car battery charged with bicycle cranks. Wireless Internet cards connect each *Jhai PC* to a solar-powered hilltop relay station which then passes the signals on to a computer in town that is connected to both the Lao phone system and to the Internet. The system enables villagers to decide whether it is worth going to the market, which is 30 km away, and to talk to relatives in the capital Vientiane or abroad. The technology is expected to be operational at the time of writing, and groups working in Peru, Chile, and South Africa have expressed interest in this technology, which aids in bridging the digital divide (The Economist, 2002).

IT may also allow developing economies to leapfrog old technologies, for example, by skipping intermediate stages such as copper wires and analogue telephones. The design and manufacture of small-scale digital exchanges for rural areas in India is another important example of how low-cost information technology developed in and for developing (rather than developed) countries can help to lessen the digital divide. The goal was not only to leapfrog from mechanical to digital switching technology but also to make the latter suitable for Indian villages (97% of which in 1980 had no telephone at all) (James, 2001: 815).

Cass Sunstein, in his book *Republic.com*, (2001) has argued that the Internet will lead to a fragmentation of political discourse in America so severe that it will undermine American democracy. Sunstein's argument is not entirely new, as Mark Slouka had already six years earlier warned of the supposed anti-democratic tendencies of the Internet. Slouka argued that, instead of strengthening democracy, the Internet refracts the "information" in a million conversations. In addition, it does not empower its users, but the networks and their advertisers (Slouka, 1995). Cyber-pessimists also fear that the private sphere and corporate actors will achieve dominance over the public sphere and elected government (O'Laughlin, 2001: 598). Moreover, the Internet can be used for surveillance purposes and avail authorities of new

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information about individuals that can be used in refining political control strategies (Rodan, 1998). However, contrary to the skeptics, the Internet has so far proved more of a democrat's dream than a nightmare, as we will show in the following section.

When it comes to evaluating the democratic potential of the Internet, we essentially encounter two perspectives, a determinist and an instrumental perspective. A determinist perspective predicts that introduction of the Internet inevitably democratises government. In contrast, an instrumental perspective suggests that state authorities can wield the Internet to their own purposes, even using it to increase centralised control. We will argue that it does not appear possible to fully instrumentalise the Internet, and thus we tend more towards a determinist view. However, a government which has the political will towards (further) democratisation will get there much quicker than a government which is authoritarian in character.

The Internet has vastly increased the amount of information available to a quickly-increasing number of ordinary persons, who now have access to millions of public documents, academic papers, think-tank reports, scientific studies and political speeches which previously, only small numbers of people could easily obtain. For instance, there are an estimated one million human rights-related web pages (Abbot, 2001: 101). Due to these gargantuan and still rapidly growing amounts of web-based information, even in authoritarian regimes, people may find that they are able to challenge decisions, corrupt practices and undemocratic attitudes more easily, as the Internet provides them with both the ammunition to attack these practices and the means to mobilise against them (Ferdinand, in International IDEA, 2001: 9).

Certain governments have been able to limit political discourse online. Chinese citizens, for example, are encouraged to get on the Internet, but access to overseas sites is strictly controlled, and what users post is closely monitored. The banned *Falun Gong* movement had had its website shut down altogether. By firewalling the whole country, China has been able to reduce the Internet's democratising influence.

However, even in China, things may never be quite the same again. There is a growing number of cases, where the Internet has provided otherwise unavailable information in China. To provide but one example, after a fireworks explosion in a school in Southern China, the local government initially tried to explain it away as the work of a madman with a bag of explosives. However, as local people knew that children were making fireworks to earn money for the school, the Internet chat rooms started buzzing. The issue

went all the way up to the Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, who first supported the initial local government line but later had to retract it and announced there would be a fresh investigation of the incident by the central authorities (Straathof, in International IDEA, 2001).

More generally, filters and firewalls can be defeated by dialing out to an overseas Internet access-provider, and geolocation can be fooled by accessing sites via another computer in another country. Moreover, e-mail can be encrypted. Writers can distribute their work through the Internet outside repressive regimes. Burmese dissidents, for instance, use the Internet to communicate with the rest of the world. The most untraceable re-mailers (e.g. MixMaster) use key cryptography that allows unprecedented anonymity both to groups who wish to communicate in complete privacy and to whistle-blowers who have reason to fear prosecution if their identity became known (Akdeniz, 2002).

In the Internet age, seizing printing presses and jamming broadcasting frequencies is no longer a defence by authoritarian regimes against the flow of information. The Soviet Union's inability to control the flow of electronic information was seen as crucial to its demise. In the demise of regimes in Eastern Europe and the coordination of students leading up to the Tiananmen Square massacre in China, attempts by authorities to insulate locals from editorials and reports by the international media proved futile while dissidents had access to fax machines and satellite television (Rodan, 1998; Kalathil & Boas, 2003). The international diffusion of fax machines, camcorders, PCs, mobile phones, global television services, and above all, the Internet, will make it progressively more difficult for authoritarian regimes to control the political thought, expression, and behaviour of their citizens.

In the final years of the Suharto regime in Indonesia, the Internet became a focus for first, rumblings of discontent, and then plans for active resistance against Suharto, which eventually resulted in the President's fall from power in 1998 (Ferdinand, 2001; Kalathil & Boas, 2003). Anti-Suharto protesters coordinated their message through interactive forums such as news groups and chat rooms. E-mail discussion lists, often based outside Indonesia, became essential to political communication between critics of Suharto's regime inside and outside the country. E-mail lists helped non-governmental organisations share information with each other (Hill & Sen, 2001; Kalathil, 2001). The online news groups were a constant reminder that censorship could be circumvented and much that could not be said in the formal media could be circulated on the Internet. "This technological faculty of the Net to interconnect across the world was actively used in the final days of the Suharto regime by the student demonstrators"

(Hill & Sen, 2000: 130).

Another peaceful Southeast Asian regime change and the downfall of another corrupt president were also aided by information communication technologies (ICT). In January 2001, President Estrada of the Philippines was overthrown after a momentous week of mounting popular protest. In early 2001, the Philippines had roughly 2.5 million mobile phone users and they averagely sent up to 50 million text messages per day. In the week of Estrada's resignation, however, this rose to 80 million. Many of these messages served to organise mass public demonstrations at short notice, so that the authorities could not respond in time, even if they had wanted to. Estrada outwitted an attempted impeachment, but was overthrown in a bloodless coup after hundreds of thousands of protesters massed in Manila to demand his removal. The crowds were raised with the message: "Full mblsn tday Edsa", short for "full mobilisation today at the Edsa shrine in Manila". "Opposition leaders sent it to every mobile number they knew. Recipients buzzed it to every number stored in their handsets. Within minutes, millions knew what was afoot" (Guest, 2001). When Filipinos threw out an even worse president, Ferdinand Marcos, in 1986, it took months to organise rallies. But in 2001, "the messages were unstoppable, and their senders were untraceable. Most were using prepaid cards to charge their phones, which allowed them to remain anonymous" (Guest, 2001).

The protesters' ability to organise at short notice and in overwhelming numbers was key. Since the authorities could not keep track of all the messages, let alone use them to target individual opponents or respond to the challenges, their only option would have been to close down the mobile phone networks, a step which obviously was not feasible (Ferdinand, 2001).

These few examples must suffice and should show that the Internet and other ICT most certainly can play an important role in (further) democratisation. However, a word of caution is in order, as there are still relatively few academic studies on the Internet's democratising effects and as we are still in the early stages of the Internet-based phase of the information revolution.

## **Conclusion**

We have found positive correlations between three key relations, i.e. democracy and development, development and the Internet, and democracy and the Internet. Among many other arguments with regard to the linkage between democracy and development, we have seen that there is compelling quantitative evidence from a survey of post-WWII regimes that the level of economic development powerfully shapes the survival prospects of democracy, and affluent democracies survive without fail.

We have argued that the Internet holds plenty of potential for developing countries. There are some impressive examples of developing countries coming up with cheap and innovative technology that, against all odds, connects the poor and provides them with important practical information, thus immediately improving efficiencies. A digital divide exists, but so does a digital opportunity, as catch-up by the lagging economies is possible and there may even be an advantage for latecomers (Sidorenko & Findlay, 2001).

Lastly, we have argued for a more determinist perspective as the Internet's unique decentred structure makes it extremely difficult to comprehensively instrumentalise this technology. For those, who are less convinced by our determinist perspective, it is important to note that if they accept the arguments that (a) there is a linkage between development and democracy, and (b) there is a linkage between the Internet and development, then it follows that the process of democratisation is intrinsic to the Internet.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said that the "new technologies that are changing our world are not a panacea or a magic bullet. But they are without doubt enormously powerful tools for development" (quoted in Reuters, 2001). Indeed, IT is not a panacea that allows governments to avoid pursuing sound policies, which are necessary to reap the full benefits from IT. Some of these policies would include: stable fiscal and monetary policies; deregulation; free trade – opening up markets to foreign trade and investment; liberalising telecommunications; protecting intellectual property rights; improving education; ensuring an effective legal system; and ensuring efficient financial markets. Those economies that get left behind should blame themselves, not technology. And, taken as a whole, the developing world has one great competitive advantage that rich countries can never match. They can call on five times as many brains, and the gap is getting wider. ■

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# On The Cusp Between Global And Local: Young Journalists At The Straits Times

*This article portrays the induction process of young journalists into the newsroom at the Singaporean English daily, The Straits Times. The enquiry, part of an ongoing world-wide study, is premised on the fact that professional journalistic education is greatly influenced by the newsroom socialisation process. The Straits Times is bound to its parent company's editorial policy, which has as its "main concern the survival and continuing success of the Republic of Singapore". This editorial policy impacts on what and how the young journalists learn. Front-end controls make the young reporters work in close cooperation with their assigned supervisor. This way the young reporters are inducted into the style of the paper, and its ethical requirements. These, unlike at other researched papers, are learned on the job. However, within these perimeters, the young journalists feel no less ownership of their stories than do young journalists at other papers.*

**Beate Josephi**

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This study of the induction of young journalists into the newsroom at the Singapore *Straits Times* is one in a series which, by now, has been carried out at seven papers in three continents. The overall goal of this inquiry is twofold. The first question it poses – what do young journalists need to learn most when entering the newsroom? – provides answers for professional education. The second question, arising from a wider study into newsroom practices, aims at finding out how the process of integration into the newsroom is handled by the newspaper. It does so by analyzing the descriptions of this process given by the young journalists and also by senior staff.

In conducting this research at major newspapers in different countries and continents, the comparison between what the young journalists see as their main learning task and what each paper perceives as its main teaching task sheds light on how the newspapers go about cultivating their accepted style. Style, as used here, incorporates ways of writing, ways of reporting

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and the values informing them. The study, so far, has been carried out at *The West Australian* in Perth, Western Australia (May 1999), at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Germany (October 1999), the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong (November 2000), *The Straits Times* in Singapore (December 2000), Norway's national daily, *Aftenposten* (September 2001), the Swiss national daily, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (July 2002) and the Spanish national daily, *El País* (July 2002). Of these, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and *El País* are counted among the ten best papers in the world (FAZ, 1998: 12).

Given the size of the sample, it has become obvious that the similarities or dissimilarities between the induction processes at these papers do not occur along geographical lines. Instead they point to the lasting influence of various journalistic traditions, tempered by the paper's own style. Despite the differing political circumstances under which these papers are written, produced and published, the *South China Morning Post*, *The West Australian* and *The Straits Times* still bear to varying degrees the hallmark of the British journalistic tradition.

Of these, *The Straits Times* has to live with the most with restrictive media laws. As the "Singapore media are censored and regulated" (Ang, 2002: 80), the young journalists at *The Straits Times* have to contend with a world of many, one could say conflicting, values. However, their deliberate choosing of the journalistic profession is testimony to the fact that the job of journalists in Singapore is more complex and has more openings than often thought.

This paper touches on the theoretical areas of the question of the importance of the organizational sphere in shaping media content and research into professional education.

With regard to the significance of the organizational sphere, the research is premised on a variant of Shoemaker and Reese's layers-of-influence model, in which the individual sphere, the organizational sphere, the contextual sphere and the societal sphere make up the levels of impact on media content, (Shoemaker et al., 2000; Esser, 1998). However, the model used here conflates what, with Shoemaker and Reese, are two parts – routines and the managerial level. Routines, as shown in studies at *The West Australian*, are devised by the managerial level to obtain a certain product: they can be seen, as it were, as the long arm of the news organization and are an indivisible part in the mediation of control (Joseph, 2000: 123). This point was also convincingly argued in a much earlier study, Sigal's *Reporters and Officials – The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking*, which is based on observations at *The*

## Research Problem

*New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. His study goes a long way toward answering the question of why newspapers vary. Sigal demonstrates how this can be clearly traced to their “bureaucratic politics [which] can have important consequences for news content” (Sigal, 1973: 4). Similarly, Reese in his *The News Paradigm and the Ideology of Objectivity: A Socialist at the Wall Street Journal*, shows that the paper had sufficient ‘repair mechanisms’ in place to deal with copy outside its accepted news paradigm. “The primary defense within the journalistic community was to reaffirm the ability of the editorial routine to handle anomalies and to wring out any potential bias”, thus “minimizing the man and his message” (Reese, 1997: 432-433).

However, this is not to say that there is no room at all for journalists for individual scope. Numerous studies, such as Tuchman’s *Making News* and Schlesinger’s *Putting ‘Reality’ Together*, have shown that a journalist’s work can only be regulated to a certain point. Ericson, Baranek and Chan, after extensive research, have concluded that a “considerable equivocality” exists between editors’ struggle for control and reporters’ assertion of autonomy (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987: 348). This present study accepts their finding of a certain fluidity of control, and accordingly poses the question to young journalists about the degree of perceived autonomy. While a number of newsroom studies exist, notably Tuchman, Gans, Schlesinger, Roshco, Sigal, Ericson, Baranek and Chan, none of these has focused on the entry of young journalists into the newsroom.

With regard to professional education, journalism schools have been seen as a more or less thorough preparation for ‘real life’ as a reporter. But in many places the idea of ‘learning on the job’ still exists, often when beginning journalists hold a tertiary degree, but not necessarily one in journalism studies. *The Straits Times* was the first paper visited in this research series which did not offer cadetships. *The Straits Times* also differs in that it takes in reporters ‘mid career’, meaning that these journalists have pursued for a decade or so another career elsewhere on the basis of their degree, for example, in the humanities or in law. However, most of those joining *The Straits Times* will have done internships at the paper, usually during their university breaks.

Another feature of *The Straits Times*’ parent company, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), is that they – like other Singaporean companies – offer scholarships. An outstanding academic record, evidence of co-curricular activities and the passing of five rounds of a selection process are prerequisites to obtain such a scholarship, which entitle the scholar to pursue a degree in Singapore or overseas with nearly all expenses met by SPH. In turn the graduates will be bonded to SPH for four years,

if they studied in Singapore, or six years, if they studied abroad. Until 2001 the number of scholarship holders continually increased, from 22 in 1999 to 27 in 2001 (SPH 2001). Not all will work at *The Straits Times*, but also at SPH's Chinese and Malay papers.

SPH offers training programs, but not in a compulsory way. For those entering the newsroom with no journalistic knowledge there is a three-week introductory course. Short courses on, for example, T-line shorthand, basic reporting and interviewing are also available, but seem to be taken up only according to need. Learning on the job is therefore the norm for young journalists at the Straits Times, but their work at the paper does not differ substantially from the work carried out by cadets, and can be examined on a par.

## Research Method & Questions

The findings in this paper are grounded in one method of data collection – qualitative interviews. In each case, six young reporters or cadets and four to six senior staff were interviewed. To give the research a solid comparative basis, the exact same ten questions for young journalists and six for staff are used in each study.

The first two questions to the young journalists center on one of the two aims of this research, i.e. on finding out what young journalists need to learn most when entering the newsroom. They establish the young journalists' knowledge prior to joining their current newspaper, and what they see as their most important learning component since then. The responses to this wide open question provide answers as to what they see as their main challenge when entering the newsroom. The replies also reveal the influence of prior studies or work experience.

The subsequent questions pursue the second aim of this study of finding out how the process of integration into the newsroom is handled by the newspaper. The next two are aimed at the learning process itself, whether this was a structured process or whether it is learning by watching and/ or imitating. This gives an insight into which skills are acquired on the job, and how much imitating older colleagues is the path chosen by young journalists. Two questions are directed at ethical decisions, inquiring whether the young reporters had already brought their own notions of a journalist's ethics to the job, or whether these were shaped in the newsroom.

Since reporters, in order to perform their work, must learn to organize themselves to the point where their activities become habitualised (Ericson et al.,1987: 125), the next three questions aimed to find out how much the paper's established news routines

– from ways of writing to suggestions of news sources and the reading up of previous articles – determine a young reporter’s approach to a task. The answers provide an insight into the extent to which young reporters are molded by the existing ways of working. Given the necessity for the young journalists to provide copy that fits into the overall style of the paper, the last question asks how the young journalists apportion their individual freedom within the organization. The underlying assumption is that a journalist can create an autonomous space in which to practice his craft, but at the same time this research attempts to find out whether this is indeed the perception gained by young journalists.

The staff was asked a matching set of six questions. At the *Straits Times* questions were put to the supervisors of the young journalists. *The Straits Times* was the first paper in this research series not to have a cadet program. So each young journalist, whether coming directly from university or being a ‘mid career entry’ – that is changing from another profession into journalism – has a supervisor assigned to them, who is either the section editor or a senior journalist. The interviews were conducted with Chua Mui Hoong, then assistant editor of the *News* section, which covers Singaporean news, and supervisor of two young journalists in this section; with Sumiko Tan, then deputy editor and now editor of the *Life! Section*; Tammy Tan, news editor, *Money* desk (business section); Audrey Quek from the foreign desk and sports editor Yap Koon Hong. Yap Koon Hong and in particular Sumiko Tan are also well-known columnists.

Two questions focus on what young reporters have to learn most, and the ethical decision-making process. The staff are asked whether they are teaching the young journalists a way that suits their paper best or what could be considered good journalistic practice anywhere; whether views on politicians or business leaders are strongly conveyed to the young journalists; and how much journalism courses at university prepare young reporters.

Obtaining replies from both staff and young journalists allows for two scenarios to emerge, one of which describes the existing organization, its style and the values it tries to pass on. The other scenario illuminates the learning process. Taken together these answers provide a comprehensive picture of the induction process.

The Republic of Singapore was founded in 1965 after the merger with Malaysia, which had been attempted two years earlier, had failed. Since then Singapore has tried to forge its own identity and instil a sense of patriotism. Its citizen’s pledge reads, “We, the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united

**Context:  
Singapore  
And The  
Straits Times**

people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build a democratic society based on justice and equality as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation" (Singapore, 2000: 132).

No-one doubts the outstanding achievements of Singapore under the guidance of Prime Minister, now Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, towards prosperity and progress. However, the pledge towards building a democratic society has to be seen as lip service only. Though inheriting the Westminster system of government, Singapore's ruling People's Action Party (PAP), in power since the inception of Singapore, allows very few voices of dissent. This was justified by the need for a united people having to build their own national institutions and its own defence force after the British withdrawal in 1971.

The media's role was cast in similar terms of aiding nation building (Lee, 2000: 212-225), and among the laws passed to ensure the government's control over the media are: the Sedition Act, which prohibits behaviour including speeches, publications and distribution or circulation of publications with seditious tendency; the Undesirable Publications Act; the Internal Security Act, which prohibits the printing, publication, sale, issue, circulation or possession of a document or publication deemed prejudicial to the national interest, public order or society of Singapore; and the Newspaper and Printing Press Act, which concerns licensing of newspaper companies, periodicals and printing presses (Ang, 1998: 165).

The application of the Newspaper and Printing Press Act in particular has led to a press monopoly in Singapore. In 1971 Singapore had four English language newspapers, four Chinese dailies and one Malay paper owned by different companies and families (Turnbull, 1995: 287). Today most of Singapore's newspapers are entrusted in the hands of one company, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), which was founded in 1984 (Turnbull, 1995, 349). In 1987 Cheong Yip Seng, who had been with the *Straits Times* since 1963, became its editor-in-chief of the English and Malay newspapers, and Leslie Fong, with the *Straits Times* group since 1982, became its editor.

Since its beginning SPH has supported the national interest. This has been written into SPH's editorial policy, which says "[Our newspapers] have as their main concern the survival and the continuing success of the Republic of Singapore. They can best contribute to that objective by being informed and balanced in their coverage of news and views, by helping to form a national consensus, by accurate and fair reporting, by understanding their staff and raising the quality of their work, and by being always relevant to their readers" (SPH, 1995). The functions of informing,

explaining, stimulating and entertaining are then spelled out in greater detail. While the main aim of ensuring the success of the Republic of Singapore is reiterated in most of these four points, SPH all the same sees its role as engendering discussion by “questioning and commenting competently and constructively on national policies” and “by providing a forum for the exchange of views and reader responses” (SPH, 1995). *The Straits Times*’ editorial policy puts it in line with development journalism, which places dissemination of development orientated news and information first and which does not consider “democracy to be a critical or necessary element in the development process” (Shafer, 1998: 42).

*The Straits Times*’ then editor, Leslie Fong, now editor-at-large, took a similar line in his essay in the paper’s 150 anniversary supplement on 15 July 1995, when saying:

“I would rather not have the Straits Times imagine itself as a latter-day St. George chasing around for a dragon to slay, because there is no dragon that needs slaying ... Of course, the danger for the Straits Times is that working with rather than against the establishment can become such a habit of mind that it would not recognize the need to break ranks even when that stares it in the face ... But I would like to think that should the establishment turn rogue, the Straits Times will not be found wanting. It will do its duty” (Tay, 2000: 5).

However, to date little is done to alleviate the “negative perception towards political expression” (Gomez, 2000: 3). Former Straits Times journalist Cherian George describes the ruling party’s stance as that “the press should be independent, but subordinate to an elected government” (George, 2000: 70). The question of where exactly the out-of-bounds markers lie confounds not only journalists or critics but even members of the ruling People’s Action Party (Nirmala, 2002:17).

Concurrently, a discussion is being held as to whether extant media theory is too dependent on Western social theory (Chua, 2002: 119). Denis McQuail, in his keynote address to the 2000 IAMCR conference in Singapore, acknowledged, “we are still struggling to diversify the basis of normative thinking about media” (McQuail, 2000:11). In trying to find pathways towards an Asian media theory, John C. Merrill asked whether social stability and harmony could be named as the new mission for the press (Merrill, 2000: 33), a path also taken in the US by the new civic/public journalism.

However, Richard Shafer, in earlier comparing public journalism and development journalism as interventionist press models, concluded that both are open to forms of repression, whether political repression or corporate manipulation (Shafer, 1998: 49).

All the same, the *Straits Times* has to be seen as one of the important platforms of public discussion in as far as they exist. Prime examples are well-known Singaporean author Catherine Lim's critical commentaries published in the paper in September and November 1994. While her first article was tolerated, the second article earned her a severe rebuke from the Prime Minister's office for trying "to set the political agenda from outside the political arena" (George, 2000: 41; Tan, 2002: 48). To date, the *Straits Times'* contribution to public debate consists mostly of considered comments by its columnists.

Given the *Straits Times'* long history as a colonial paper – it was founded in 1845 – the paper still bears some of the hallmarks of the British journalistic tradition. Its characteristics are, in part, a strict separation of news and comment, but also an extensive use of direct quotes and privileging of authoritative voices and sources. It is the latter mode in particular, which can be described not so much as the preferred but the only way of providing national political information in Singapore.

The policy of being supportive of government has not harmed the fortunes of SPH as it underpins its monopoly position. The *Straits Times'* circulation in October 2000 was 383,542 copies, slightly down from its peak in August 1999 of 395,174. It also has since been affected further by the world-wide downturn in advertising revenue. All the same the *Straits Times* provides its parent company, SPH, with an enviable revenue base (SPH, 2000).

One of the tests to Singapore's policy of enforced harmony and limited public debate are the technological advances of the Internet. In an interview with the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT), Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew was asked, "The Internet age is one of openness. It simply isn't possible to control information in the ways governments have often tried to do. Is that posing a challenge for Singapore, where you believe that an orderly society is important?" To this SM Lee Kuan Yew answered, "There is no way we can stop it now. The answer must be credibility. ... To govern you must have credibility... It's like what the major newspapers try to establish – a certain reputation for having thoroughly investigated the sources and not making wild statements" (Lee, 2001: 8).

Yet the Singaporean government's sensitivity over 'wild statements' was felt most recently by the Bloomberg News Service who, on its website, had alleged that Deputy Prime Minister Lee's wife "won the top job at Temasek Holdings because of nepotism, rather than merit." Bloomberg settled the defamation charge for US\$340,000 (ST, 31 August 2002).

As the questioning by then IHT executive editor, David Ignatius, and Asia editor, Michael Richardson, indicates – openness

is not necessarily a notion associated with Singapore. But, as Simon C.T. Tay pointed out, there is “an absence of absolute, ideological thinking” (Tay, 2000: 5). Indeed, to the outsider, Singapore is a baffling conundrum of openness and restrictions. *The Straits Times*, of all papers researched so far, was the only one to give the researcher a magnetic card to have access to the premises for the week’s duration of the visit, and the researcher was left to spend as much time in the newsroom as she chose to.

The premises in Kim Seng Road, taken up in 1978, were decidedly old fashioned by Singaporean standards. Some sections of the paper, such as the *Life!* and sport sections, were on different floors from the main newsroom. As in Australian and American newsrooms, only the section editors have their own rooms. The non-hierarchical and very collegial atmosphere was emphasised by the fact that well-known journalists and columnists, such as Asad Latif, Chua Lee Hoong and Sumiko Tan, occupy workstations no different from other journalists.

The young reporters spoke openly about their experience of entering the newsroom, volunteering remarks such as that they self-censor. In trying to find out how young journalists, who often have been educated abroad, are inducted into the newsroom of a paper, which declaredly has chosen to be government supportive, one finds them on the cusp between global awareness and local laws. Latif has since reiterated this, pointing out that in the age of the Internet, “[newspapers] will [evolve], as they have done. But even as they do, newspapers will think in global terms, but will act in local terms” (Latif, 2001).

The background of the six young journalists interviewed varied considerably. Three of them had studied abroad – two on SPH scholarships. One had been to the University of Edinburgh, majoring in English Literature, one had been to the London School of Economics, and one had read management, Japanese and Indonesian studies at the University of Leeds. One of the young reporters was a ‘mid-career’ intake, applying to the *Straits Times* after a law degree at the National University of Singapore (NUS), and practicing with one of Singapore’s large law firms for five years and subsequently working in Customer Services with one of Singapore’s largest industrial landowning corporations. One held an English Honours degree from NUS, and had worked at another SPH and an on-line paper before joining the *Straits Times*.

Only one of them had majored in journalism at Nanyang Technical University (NTU). However, being the only interviewed in this series is no reflection on the number of journalism graduates joining SPH which offers – bar one – the only employment

## Findings: The Young Journalists

opportunity in Singapore to work at a newspaper, be it English language, Chinese or Malay. This young journalist mentioned “a mass recruitment from our school,” which was facilitated by the fact that senior Straits Times staff teach in the NTU program.

In difference to papers which offer cadetships and give their cadets stints in all sections, the young journalists at the *Straits Times* choose their desk and stay there. The two who held SPH scholarships first did a six months stint at sub-editing in their section before being assigned to a beat. All the others reported, ‘being thrown in at the deep end’ and – with exception of the one with the journalism degree – they all said that everything they learned was learned on the job.

Interestingly all of them mentioned that one of the most important facets of their learning was how to ask questions. As one put it, “If you don’t open your mouth and dare to ask questions, then it is to your disadvantage.” These questions ranged from practical things, like how to send in lines and how and when to commission artwork to getting help with sharpening news sense.

The other important learning curve was how to deal with deadlines and how to manage time. In their words, this requires them to be able to go to an interview or a press conference and there and then sizing up what is the point. Once the young journalist comes back into the newsroom they de-brief with their supervisor. De-briefing has to be seen first and foremost as a quality control measure, in which the supervisor checks whether the young journalist has got his or her news angle right. But the session also alerts the supervisor in the case of sensitive stories to make sure that the proprieties have been observed. Until the late 1970s the *Straits Times* was – like many British publications – a ‘back-end’ driven paper, with the night editor deciding contents and layout of the paper (Turnbull, 1995: 327). Under editor-in-chief Peter Lim it moved to a more consultative process, in which the “repair mechanism” (Reese, 1997: 443) has moved very much to the front end. According to the young journalists the sub-editors mostly only cut copy. All young reporters said that writing came easily to them. This seems to indicate that the *Straits Times*’ process favours good writing skills.

Though the term ‘de-briefing’ is somewhat daunting, the process is not as arduous as it may be imagined. One of the young journalists described it such, “You had to learn when to de-brief – when there is a window of time and they [the supervisors] are not too busy – and how to de-brief – do it quickly, tell them what the story is. One thing I realize is that it is up to you to make the news, because you are the one out there, and the supervisor relies tremendously on you to tell her what is the news. ... You see what

is going on and you start angling the story in your head. So you come back and tell her from your point of view what it is and usually she goes along with that. De-briefing is very important because you basically have to sell your story. She is on your side, but you have to sell it to her."

Other young journalists described the process in similar terms. "In the de-briefing with her [the supervisor] she helps you to sift through what is the important bit ..." Or, "[you] report back to him what has transpired and he will help you organize your thoughts. He also would give you ideas on how to get around a thorny or tricky situation."

From this it is clear that the supervisor is the most important person guiding the young journalist. However, the young reporters were reluctant calling their induction into the newsroom as being done by watching or imitating senior colleagues. All but one said that they had to go out and do their job on their own more or less from day one. During the internships there was a lot of handholding but not once they joined their desks as young reporters.

In the question of ethics, the young journalists said they learned on the job. SPH has clear guidelines regarding presents – pens, diaries and small gifts can be accepted – but larger gifts such as a palm pilots or mobile phones have to be declared. There is little wining and dining. One young journalists mentioned her supervisor's good advice that there is no such thing as a free lunch, and added from her own experience that once when she attended a lunch where she just could not pay for herself, her hosts were on the phone an hour later selling ideas. The young journalist working at the money desk made his own personal decision not to own stock, because he did not want to be compromised and undermine his credibility.

The young journalists were also clear about the fact that the question of ethics touches on the boundaries of reporting set by the government. As one of them said, "*The Straits Times* is slightly different from papers in other countries, in the sense that it is very closely watched and guided by the government. So especially when it comes to stories, which have to do with the ministries or government policies, you have to be very careful and they [*The Straits Times*] is very careful as well."

This means that they write stories in a way that would not have been his or her own choosing. If the copy, in the end, bears too little resemblance with what the young journalist would have wanted to write, he or she can ask to have her by-line removed. Others said that they, at times, can not be as critical as they would like to be, ask at press conferences questions they would like to ask or go with the angle that seems to them the most newsworthy.

One of the young reporters repeatedly said, “you self-censor yourself going to the ... desk, and tell them things you want to tell. That way I can make sure that my story can come up well.”

Ethical sensitivities not only touch internal political matters, but they can be about religious sensitivities – also involving photos – or at the foreign desk of how to report Singapore’s immediate neighbours. As one young journalist put it, they live in a schizophrenic world, having to negotiate between varying sets of values, and trying to get as much space for their own ideas and stories involves compromises. Yet there is a sense that they all – as part of the staff – bear responsibility for keeping the paper out of trouble.

Despite these parameters the young journalists feel that they are “quite happy how they [the stories] turn out”, and that “most of the time the stories are yours”. In allocating percentages in weighting individual input versus organizational and institutional practice in their work, they invariably out it as “60% mine, 40% theirs”.

## Senior Staff

The answers given by senior staff varied more than those of the young journalists, mostly due to the different nature of their sections. All the same, there was a high degree of agreement on what the young journalists needed to learn most. Those were; a concept of news; building confidence; instilling in them the idea of currency, objectivity and balance; and hoping that they bring a passion for the job and a strong sense of curiosity.

Chua Miu Hoong, then assistant editor and supervisor at the news desk, put it in even stronger terms:

“[Journalism] is more like a vocation, and you must abide by a certain code of conduct and by a certain code of ethics. Ethics – with this I mean everything from making sure that you report accurately, are fair to your sources, making sure that every story is balanced, making sure that you are never lying, never misrepresenting a quote, never inventing a quote, never making up information.” (12 December 2000).

On a more basic level, the young reporters are told about the standard operating procedures, such as what time they are expected to come in, how they are supposed to reply to supervisors’ queries and how they are supposed to brief the supervisor on stories. The de-briefing is at first often not understood by the young journalists.

Tammy Tan, supervisor at the money desk, said, “They don’t de-brief, they unload. So basically they just throw everything at you. And they don’t tell you the story ... they want you to tell them the story. Which is wrong.” She has to remind them, “I am

not finding the angle for you. I wasn't there. You tell me what was the most important thing that happened" (13 December 2000). Ever so often the desk has to crosscheck with the story that is flashed over the wires to make sure that the young reporter has not missed an important angle.

Of all the desks the money desk is most concerned with scoops such as mergers, acquisitions, retrenchments, closures and corporate moves. These stories are placed on the back page. Also the money desk is the one which has to contend most with being a very young desk. Many people have been there barely two years. Tammy Tan explains that this is due to the money desk being so bankable. "[We] have people who are so specialized that they become prized assets ... because we are in a situation where we meet top people. We are a lot more bankable than, let's say, an industry expert who has never met an CEO – not even his own CEO" (13 December 2000). For this reason the desk lost many people to the industry, to PR, the banks and stock broking. It also meant that one of the main tasks of the money desk is building up confidence in their young reporters to give them the assertiveness to follow through with questions and stories.

According to Tammy Tan, not all newsmakers are nice, and young reporters are not always a match, for example for American CEOs who are accustomed to a different media culture and a more aggressive exchange between newsmaker and reporter.

All supervisors agreed that what they teach young journalists is specifically the *Straits Times*' style. For sports editor Yap Koon Hong, "that begins with the surprise that most of them don't read the papers" (14 December 2000). Chua Miu Hoong confirmed the young journalists' assertion that the 'front end' makes sure that the copy fits into the paper:

Yes, here it is done by the front end... It is their [the copy desk's] job, as well as the supervisors' to make sure that the reporters' copy is clean, is clear, is bright and that it fits our paper's tone and style. That is one of the reasons why we maintain a quality of copy. (12 December 2000)

Chua would like to see the young journalists' copy sharper, more interpretative and more analytical, but acknowledges that this is a long process.

Sumiko Tan, editor of *Life!*, sees the main problem slightly differently: "I think what is most lacking in young journalists is a sense of curiosity ... Out of ten, maybe seven of them don't have a passion for journalism, a hunger for the story. These are gems when we do get them. ... We always tell them we rather not see them in the newsroom, because as a reporter you should be out finding things, getting quotes than using the telephone." (11 December 2000)

All supervisors emphasized the importance of research and reading up on previous stories, so to be certain what is new and what isn't. While there is a considerate approach to the newsmakers (T. Tan, 11 December 2000; Chua, 14 December 2000), and the danger of defamation is strenuously avoided, the money desk usually knows where it stands with its community. "Singapore is a very small country. Shady characters don't survive long or they made it so big that everyone knows that they got there because they were shady. It's just that the industry is so small that it is kind of public knowledge" (T. Tan, 13 December 2000). As far as newsmakers generally are concerned, "there is a lot of informal information being exchanged and traded. And that is very valuable" (Chua, 12 December 2000).

All supervisors emphatically agreed that ethics are learned on the job. According to Audrey Quek from the foreign desk, "we try to keep to the basic rule of asking, 'Am I being fair? Am I being truthful?'" (11 December 2000). Sports editor Yap Koon Hong adds to this:

"I find that a lot of my younger reporters come in ... and most of them are graduates – [and] they are aware of a culture of journalism where – probably because the historical basis of journalism is based in the West – questions of human rights, questions of freedom of the press [are voiced]. They have their own ideas of what we should do and what we should write. I would say, yes, increasingly I see them coming in with their own views of how any story should be seen. Whereas there was less of that ten years ago. Or when I first started twenty years ago. So I think it [ethics] is less a question of being taught or learned, more a matter of discussion." (14 December 2000).

Yap sees this linked to his task of making the young journalists understand the paper they are working for. "This is my fifth paper I am working for ... it is not the New York Times yet, but it is a pretty authoritative paper ... in the context of this country it is an institution" (14 December 2000).

## Conclusion

At *The Straits Times* the degree of concurrence in answers of senior staff and young journalists is high. Like at other papers looked at, the staff, however, pointed to the need for a passion for the job and a sense of curiosity and urgency – factors not mentioned by the young reporters. They are usually too much absorbed in the task of finding their foothold in a system which offers them some, but not too many, helping hands. This agreement can also be explained by the fact that they work at *The Straits Times* not as cadets but as young journalists with a particular beat, and therefore inhabit the same world as senior staff. Both

are caught in the conundrum of global awareness and local restrictions which characterizes Singapore.

Regarding the research series so far, the interviews at *The Straits Times* confirm the results of other visits – most importantly that the cadets or young reporters learn the ways of their newspaper via the newsroom practices. Irrespective of their previous degree of knowledge, the media organization has the greatest influence on shaping the young journalists' product. This is underlined by the fact that what they learn at each paper is different – partly due to the variances among the papers, partly due to the countries' differing political systems and media cultures. In Singapore this means accurate reporting of authoritative voices, and treading a fine line between curiosity and criticism. ■

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# Journalism Ethics: Mainstream Versus Tabloid Journalists

*Through a survey of 356 journalists working for various newspapers under the Singapore Press Holdings, this study shows that despite the influence of newsroom culture, journalists working for the mainstream and tabloid newspapers may not differ in terms of their professional values and ethical standards. It is the content orientation of their newspaper or their perception of it that leads them to act differently in covering certain kinds of news. In other words, the institutional influence does have an impact on the ethical decision-making process among journalists in their daily operations even though it may not determine the direction of their personal beliefs and ethical values.*

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Most daily newspapers are published in broadsheet format. Some, however, are printed in a format known as the 'tabloid', which is about half the size of a broadsheet newspaper. Because the early 'tabloid' newspapers tended to follow a sensational style focusing on celebrity gossips, scandals, human-interest features with 'sensational' twists, the term 'tabloid' is often used to denote a sensational style of journalism.

Featuring big, bold headlines and large photographs (Stephens, 1988), almost all the front pages of tabloid newspapers are devoted to crime and entertainment stories. The term 'tabloid reporter' conjures images of 'sleaze' personified: a slimy, pushy nuisance working in shabby offices, willing to do anything to dig up dirt and invent preposterous stories (Bird, 1992: 79). Tabloid journalists are seen as less mindful of ethics and professional journalism standards in the pursuit of stories (Time, 1972: 64).

Branded as a "disgrace to journalism" by many critics in the mainstream press (Buckley, 1981: 508), tabloid journalism, which refers more to the sensational style of journalism rather than the size of a newspaper, has nevertheless survived the test of time and continues to exist in almost every literate society. Even in a country like Singapore, where the government exerts heavy influence on the press, tabloid newspapers exist along their

mainstream counterparts.

With the exception of one free English daily newspaper, the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) enjoys a monopoly position by owning eleven newspapers, which can be divided into three groups. The mainstream group includes *The Straits Times* and *Lianhe Zaobao*, which are the national dailies in English and Chinese respectively. The tabloid group consists of *The New Paper* in English, and *Lianhe Wanbao* and *Shin Min Daily News* in Chinese, which are broadsheet in format but tabloid in content. The specialised group comprises *The Business Times* for readers of financial news, *Berita Harian* and *Tamil Murasu* for the minorities, and the Chinese *Friday Weekly* and *Thumbs Up* for school children. In addition, *Streets*, a new tabloid-size paper for free distribution at the subway stations, offers a light-hearted mix of serious news and entertainment. The counterpart of *Streets*, *Today*, run by Mediacorp, is the only daily newspaper outside of SPH.

Despite the sensational approach of the tabloid newspapers and public perception of journalists working for them, the tabloid journalists in Singapore do not necessarily differ fundamentally from their mainstream counterparts in qualifications and professional training as SPH has developed a one-for all recruitment and training policy (Turnbull, 1995). All SPH journalists, whether working for mainstream or tabloid newspapers, have to receive the same set of training in interviewing, writing, law and ethics, and adhere to the same standards of professionalism.

The SPH editorial training department incorporates journalism ethics as a part of its core program for training all journalists (Tan, 2001). Since 1991, senior journalists have been sent to the United States to attend ethical decision-making classes. In the meantime, in-house training courses on journalism ethics have also been offered on a regular basis (Tan, 2001). In all these training efforts, no discrimination has been given to journalists working for the tabloid newspapers.

In addition to identical recruitment policy and training programs, both the mainstream and tabloid journalists are subjected to the same restraints imposed upon them by Singapore's media environment. From time to time, the media are criticised and fined for sensational reporting by the government, which sees itself as a guardian of public morals.

Singapore's unique press system allows us to study the issue of journalism ethics with some special objectives. The first objective of this study is to find out to what extent journalists working in a monopolised and controlled media environment differ in their ethical standards for journalism practices. Considering the fact that journalists in Singapore need to subscribe

to the same set of media policies defined by the government and its monopolised media industry, would that lead them to think in a uniform way and subscribe to the same set of ethical standards?

The second objective is to find out to what extent institutional influence may affect individual journalists' ethical standards and ethical decision-making process. Since we know that SPH journalists are not specially chosen and trained to work for different orientations in news reporting, the differences in the content of mainstream and tabloid newspapers should be attributed to the readers' taste and newsroom policies rather than personal preference of the journalists. However, would journalists uphold different ethical standards for journalism practice as a result of self-customisation to work habits and institutional demands?

The third objective is to gauge to what extent the socialisation in the newsroom may affect the development of ethical standards among journalists. To a certain extent, the orientation of news content affects the interests and professional values of news workers. Journalists working for different types of newspapers tend to experience different newsroom cultures. Would the differences in newsroom culture affect the socialisation process in the newsroom? Would there be any differences between the mainstream and tabloid newspapers in terms of how their cub reporters are mentored? Do senior journalists and bosses in the newsroom affect journalists in the same way despite differences in the newsroom culture?

Few people admit to being passionate readers of the tabloids, but tabloid sales are in the millions. Day (1996) commented that the public's appetite for sensationalism affects both how stories are selected and the coverage they receive. For example, although the incident in which Lorena Bobbitt cut off her husband's penis is of little consequence when compared to various problems facing the world, it received substantial coverage by all the news media around the world.

Winch (1997) noted that although mainstream journalists condemn tabloid journalists for undesirable practices, cases of mainstream journalists doing likewise have surfaced. This blurring of boundary between the two groups of journalists, he explains, is due to the evolution of mainstream news into more entertaining mode. Journalists who consider themselves mainstream journalists say tabloid journalists make decisions about the newsworthiness of a story based on entertainment values, implying that they make, or should make, decisions about newsworthiness solely on the basis of informational or news value.

## Literature Review

Comparing six major tabloid newspapers in the United States, Hogshire (1997) found that due to the enormous pressure on the editors to maintain a high circulation figure, tabloid journalists violate almost every rule to sell their papers, sometimes even to the extent of making up stories or using tactics comparable to that of private investigators to spy on the private lives of the rich and famous. The biggest irony is, the mainstream newspapers behave like scavengers and eagerly pick up all the juicy news from the tabloids, at the same time denouncing the 'unethical practices' of these newspapers.

Journalism historians attribute the growth of human-interest and sensational style, rather than subject matter, reporting to the emergence of the "penny press" (Nordin, 1979), which began in 1833 with *The Sun*, the first mass market newspaper aimed at a growing mass of semiliterate working class urbanites who favored human-interest stories (Mott, 1963). *The Sun's* writing style and tone marked a novel turn in the development of American journalism (Whitby, 1982).

While traditional newspapers relied on formal documents such as court records to write their stories, *The Sun*, *The Herald*, and other penny papers began using 'legwork' reporting techniques including observation and interviewing to produce richly detailed stories (Francke, 1986). Penny press journalists also widely adopted 'sensory detail' styles, which often produced graphically detailed descriptions. The later half of the 19th century saw the evolution of the penny press into yellow journalism (Campbell, 2001), which reflected "the familiar aspects of sensationalism - crime news, scandal and gossip, divorces and sex, and stress upon the reporting of disasters and sports" (Mott, 1962: 539). Reporters from the 'yellow' papers further enhanced the reporting techniques that originated with the penny papers and concentrated on producing stories filled with detailed physical description and colloquial dialogue (Francke, 1986).

Like all professionals, journalists are guided by a role morality - the responsibilities, rights, ideals, and virtues especially germane to their role as professionals (Cohen & Elliot, 1997). The most fundamental theoretical task concerning morally responsible journalism is to clarify how journalistic ethics is related to ordinary morality. In turn, that task requires clarifying the ideas of professional ethics, ordinary ethics, and morality itself (Martin, 1981). There is much disagreement about the idea of 'special ethics' for journalists and for other professionals. All sides of the dispute grant that professionals have especially strong responsibilities, such as to maintain confidentiality, obtain informed consent, and zealously pursue the distinctive goods served by their profession (Cohen & Elliot, 1997).

Sensationalism is often denounced as an act that compromises journalism ethics. The blurring of the line between journalism and sensationalism worries many people. What is missing, they say, is judgment about what is newsworthy and what is just nosy (Day, 1996). "Tragic events may be newsworthy (the assassination of a president) or carry a message (a drunk-driving crash), but sometimes there is no larger issue (an interview with a man who lost his wife in a plane crash). These stories serve no purpose, except to capitalise on someone's tragedy" (Hulteng, 1985: 154).

For Stevens (1985), stories about murder, separation, and divorce force readers to reconsider moral boundaries. By stimulating community gossip, these stories lead to the public re-evaluation of a community's social values and moral boundaries (Nordin, 1979; Levin & Arluke, 1987). Francke (1986) argues that 19th century journalists filled their stories with sensory details in order to call attention to pressing social problems.

Critics of sensational news argue that these stories violate social boundaries of decency and respect (Dickson, 1988; Taylor-Flemming, 1992), relate to prurient interests (Nordin, 1979), and overshadow more important public affairs reporting (Adams, 1978). Focusing on the economic intent of sensational stories, Emery & Emery (1984) as well as Copeland (1992) argue that sensationalism is based on the media owners' drive for profits by satisfying their audience's desire for entertainment and titillation.

Social responsibility theory of the press holds that the news media are obliged to offer news that will enlighten the citizens of a democracy (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1974). Fulfilling this obligation may be compromised by the media's over-emphasis of sensationalist stories, which could deprive citizens of "information and discussion need to discharge responsibilities to the community" (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947: 56). Slattery (1994) argues that sensational news coverage should not aim to appeal to prurient interests but, rather, to point to a wrong, an injustice or to a social evil that requires the community's involvement.

In general, ethics deals with the foundations of decision-making, of choosing between the good and bad options on the basis of moral principles. Journalism ethics addresses problems concerning behavior of reporters, editors, photographers and any other professionals involved in the production and distribution of news. At the roots of this normative, philosophical study is the understanding that the profession fulfills a necessary function of society (Cohen & Elliot, 1997).

Citizens need to receive and share particular kinds of information to function effectively in their communities, and news organisations have pledged to provide that information.

Journalists therefore have an ethical obligation to tell the truth and report news accurately, fairly, and objectively (Cohen & Elliot, 1997) and truth-telling is a major criterion to classify news reports as good or bad (Kieran, 1998).

Another important ethical consideration centers around the issues of privacy, which has grown to encompass protection against surveillance by private or state security organisations, unauthorised access to private or confidential data and invasions of privacy by the press (Belsey & Chadwick, 1992). Various types of deception, including faking one's identity, undercover reporting, using hidden cameras, and breaking confidentiality promises to sources are also areas of debate for journalism ethics (for example see Cohen & Elliot, 1997; Fink, 1995; Jackson, 1992; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996).

While numerous studies have been done in other parts of the world to gauge the ethical standards upheld by journalists, there has been no published research on the Singapore journalists in terms of their ethical values. This study therefore will help to fill in the gap.

## Research Questions

Despite public criticism of tabloid journalism, much of the research on journalism ethics focused on journalists from the mainstream media, and so far no studies have been done to compare the tabloid and mainstream journalists in terms of their professional values and ethical standards. As a result, we are not clear to what extent the news content is influenced by the predilection of the journalists themselves or by their newsroom policies.

Although we can easily see differences between the tabloid and mainstream newspapers in content, we do not have much evidence to conclude if such differences are purely the results of efforts to accommodate readers' taste or they could also be attributed to differences between journalists working for the two types of newspapers in terms of their professional values and ethical standards. We don't know if the two types of newspapers tend to attract different journalists to work for them in the first place or if the institutional policies and newsroom culture lead journalists to practice their trade in different ways.

Although tabloid newspapers exist in almost all news-reading societies, it cannot be assumed that all journalists working for tabloid newspapers subscribe to a set of ethical standards different from those followed by mainstream journalists. As a pioneer study to examine the ethical standards upheld by journalists working for different types of media, this study seeks to answer the following questions

1. Do mainstream and tabloid newspaper journalists differ in their perception of the role of journalism and job satisfaction?
2. Do they subscribe to different standards of journalism ethics?
3. What demographic differences, if any, may affect journalists' ethical standards?

For this study, six newspapers owned by SPH were divided into two groups on the basis of their content orientation. The tabloid group includes journalists from the English *New Paper* and the Chinese newspapers *Lianhe Wanbao* and *Shin Min Daily News*. The mainstream group includes journalists from the English *Straits Times* and the Chinese *Lianhe Zaobao*. All the full-time editorial employees of these newspapers are targeted for this survey.

Using the SPH Staff Directory 2001, we obtained the names of 229 journalists from the *Straits Times*, 155 from *Lianhe Zaobao*, 55 from *Shin Min Daily News*, 56 from *Lianhe Wanbao* and 68 from *The New Paper*. A six-page questionnaire was hand-delivered to all the journalists selected in June 2001 and by the end of July 2001 we had 356 journalists returned their completed questionnaire, reaching a response rate of 63.2%.

The questionnaire included questions on perception of the role of journalism and duties as journalists, reasons for joining journalism, job satisfaction, acceptability of certain journalistic practices, and sources of influence on journalism ethics, etc. Three scenario questions were also included to see what decisions the journalists would make under different conditions.

Compared to other professions, Singapore journalists tend to be much younger. A typical Singapore journalist is likely to be in his/her mid 20s, has a local university degree and has worked from one to five years in journalism. The proportion of female journalists (55.4%) is slightly greater than that of the males (44.6%).

The majority of the respondents felt that journalism is a profession (63.6%), rather than a craft (17%), trade (9.4%) or just a job (6%). Most respondents (56%) feel satisfied or fairly satisfied with their job and only a small number of them (7%) think otherwise. Most journalists are willing to stay in journalism (87.6%) and would choose journalism again if they could restart their career (70.8%).

The excitement of the job, interest in news and current affairs, and flair at writing were the top three reasons for the respondents to become journalists, and factors such as attractive income and special privileges associated with the profession are furthest from

## Method

## Findings

the respondents' minds.

The respondents feel that breaking promises of confidentiality to sources is the most unacceptable practice among eight questionable reporting practices, followed by disclosing the name of a rape victim and using confidential documents without permission. On the other hand, using hidden camera/microphone during interview and repeatedly questioning unwilling witnesses are tolerated if not supported. Please see Table 1 for details.

**Table 1:**  
**Attitudes towards questionable practices**

<b>Reporting Practices</b>	<b>Mean*</b>	<b>Std Deviation</b>
Agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so	6.41	.923
Disclosing the name of a rape victim	6.14	1.348
Using confidential documents without permission	5.95	1.202
Dramatising news story with own imagination	5.76	1.415
Claiming to be somebody else	5.61	1.424
Paying people for confidential information	5.38	1.584
Repeatedly questioning unwilling witnesses	4.38	1.621
Using hidden camera and microphone	4.20	1.834

\*1= "Strongly Agree", 4= "Neutral" and 7= "Strongly Disagree"

Asked if they would go ahead and publish a story if one of their 'reliable sources' told them that a popular actor had been under investigation for an alleged rape but the police would not confirm it, more than half of the respondents (55.2%) indicated that they would go ahead and report the story, but withhold the identity of the actor. Majority of the rest (43.1%) said that they would not report the story until they could get confirmation from

the police. Only a tiny minority would report the story and reveal the identity of the actor without confirmation from the police.

However, when they were asked to step into the shoes of someone else, many changed their answers according to the role they were asked to play. Acting as reporters for the mainstream press, most of them (64.9%) would abstain from reporting the story. However, most respondents (67.2%) would go ahead and report the story if they were reporting for a tabloid newspaper.

On the other hand, majority of the respondents (63.3%) felt that as a member of the public, they would expect the story to be reported. The statistics presented in Table 2 seem to show that journalists tend to think they are more concerned about truthfulness of a story than the public, whose eagerness for sensational news tends to outweigh their concern about the veracity of the information. However, journalists also tend to see some differences between mainstream and tabloid newspapers if not between journalists working for them. Mainstream journalists are seen as more likely to exercise caution when it comes to unverified information than tabloid journalists.

**Table 2:**  
**Reporting on Alleged Rape by Actor**

Actions	As Mainstream Journalist %	As Tabloid Journalist %	As Public %
Report the story	33.5	67.2	63.3
Not report the story	64.9	30.0	33.6
Not sure	1.6	2.8	3.1
Total Respondents	319	323	289

When asked if they would report the story and reveal the identity of an opposition politician who was found dead in a hotel with a prostitute just before the general election, majority of the respondents (81.4%) said “yes”. Only 16.6% of the respondents said they would report the story but withhold the identity of the politician. No significant differences were found when the journalists were asked to answer the same question in different

capacities. Please see Table 3 for details.

**Table 3:**

**Reporting story of dead politician with prostitute**

Actions	As Mainstream Journalist %	As Tabloid Journalist %	As Public %
Report the story	95.1	95.4	93.9
Not report the story	4.0	2.1	3.8
Not sure	0.9	2.5	2.3
Total Respondents	328	326	300

When asked whether to publish the identity and photograph of a 10-year-old child who was the sole witness of a murder case, most respondents found problem with it. Many respondents (40.7%) said that they would publish the photograph of the child but mask his face, and another 47.5% of the respondents would not publish the photograph of the child, but would mention his presence in the article. Only 2.3% of the respondents would publish the child's photograph and reveal his identity. No significant differences were found when the respondents were asked to act in different capacities. (see Table 4)

**Table 4:**

**Handling identity of child witness of murder**

Actions	As Mainstream Journalist %	As Tabloid Journalist %	As Public %
Publish photo	22.6	29.8	25.3
Not publish photo	76.1	67.9	71.9
Not sure	1.3	2.2	2.4
Total Respondents	314	315	287

Day-by-day newsroom training is deemed the most important source of influence on the respondents' ethical standards. Majority of the respondents (66.4%) feel that day-by-day newsroom training plays a big role in shaping their thinking about journalism ethics,

and in addition, a quarter of the respondents also think that newsroom training has some influence in this area. The next most important source of influence is the editors, who are followed by senior reporters, co-workers and peers.

Mainstream newspaper journalists were found to be better educated than their tabloid counterparts. Of the tabloid journalists, 19.4% of them do not have a university degree, while only 9.1% of the mainstream journalists belong to this category. About 20% of the mainstream newspaper journalists have had postgraduate education, while only 7.3% of the tabloid newspaper journalists attained similar qualifications.

There are more veterans among the tabloid newspaper journalists, with 37.1% of them having more than 15 years of work experience, but only 21.7% of their mainstream newspaper counterparts have worked the same number of years. The average age of the mainstream newspaper journalists is also younger. Of the mainstream newspaper journalists, 48.2% are between 20 and 30 years old, while only 33.9% of the tabloid newspaper journalists belong to this age group.

To see if journalists working for the mainstream and tabloid newspapers tend to maintain different ethical standards for journalism practices, t-tests were conducted to compare their answers. The results (see Table 5) show that there are few significant differences between the two groups in terms of their tolerance of various questionable reporting practices. The only significant difference found between the two groups was their willingness to pay for information. The mainstream journalists are slightly more willing to do so than the tabloid journalists.

The two groups of journalists do not differ in terms of their perception of journalism as a profession, job satisfaction and sources of influences on their ethical standards. There was a slight difference between the two groups in terms of how they would report on the case of the actor accused of rape. The majority of those in the mainstream group (64.9%) were not in favor of reporting the case without confirmation from the police but the majority of the tabloid journalists (64%) were more in favor of reporting the case but withholding the identity of the actor.

When asked whether to report the case of the opposition politician found dead with a prostitute, the overwhelming majority of both groups (85.9% of the mainstream journalists and 90% of the tabloid journalists) indicated that they would report the case. No significant differences were found between the two groups in terms of their responses to the question whether they should publish the photo and reveal the identity of the child witness of a murder.

**Table 5:**  
**Mainstream vs. tabloid journalists on certain reporting practices**

Journalism Practices	Newspapers	Mean	Mean Diff	Sig.
Use of hidden camera	Main	4.139	-.175	.379
	Tabloid	4.315		
Disclosing name of rape victims	Main	6.191	.159	.290
	Tabloid	6.032		
Dramatising stories with own imagination	Main	5.827	.190	.229
	Tabloid	5.637		
Faking Identity	Main	5.584	-.225	.606
	Tabloid	5.667		
Paying for Information	Main	5.247	-.390	.027*
	Tabloid	5.637		
Using of documents without permission	Main	5.900	-.132	.326
	Tabloid	6.0325		
Repeatedly questioning unwilling witnesses	Main	4.286	-.279	.121
	Tabloid	4.565		
Revealing names of sources	Main	6.419	.032	.750
	Tabloid	6.387		

*Scale for measurement: 1= "Strongly Agree", 4= "Neutral", 7= "Strongly Disagree"*

To see the impact of the type of newspapers on journalists in their ethical decision making with various demographic factors under control, multiple regression analyses were carried out. The results (see Table 6) show that the type of newspaper a journalist work for indeed has very little influence on how he or she would react to various questionable journalism practices. The only significant difference found between the mainstream and tabloid newspaper journalists when other factors are under control is on whether journalists should dramatise a news story. Journalists from the mainstream newspapers are more opposed to the practice of dramatising news with their own imagination than their tabloid counterparts.

In addition, journalists working for the English newspapers were found to be more tolerant of dramatising news stories than journalists working for the Chinese newspapers. Male journalists are more likely to support the use of hidden camera/microphone than their female counterparts, whereas female journalists are more likely to oppose the practice of paying for information. Journalists with higher education are found to be more tolerant of using hidden camera/microphone.

More importantly, the grade or seniority of the journalists was found to be a major factor affecting the ethical decision making process. The more senior a respondent is, the more likely he or she would oppose the use of hidden camera/microphone, paying for information, using documents without permission, disclosing the name of a rape victim, faking identity and disclosing the name of a confidential source.

**Table 6:**  
**Factors affecting attitude on questionable reporting practices**

Factors	Hidden Camera	Paying Informant	Use of Docum.	Disclose Name of Rape Victims	Faking Identity	Dramatise Stories	Betray Sources
Newspaper	.025	.102	.048	-.001	.060	-.139*	.026
Language	.033	-.089	-.038	-.013	-.088	.189**	-.100
Grade	.236**	.153*	.178*	.185*	.259**	.122	.180*
Gender	-.181**	.167**	.066	.058	.094	.051	.017
Age	-.089	-.004	-.004	-.170	-.025	.048	-.176
Years	.084	.190	.061	-.023	.076	.018	.155
Education	-.169**	-.054	-.009	.038	-.034	.059	.029

\*p< .05, \*\*p< .01

## Discussion

Western commentators have often dismissed Singapore's newspapers as lackluster, obeisant mouthpieces of the establishment, unworthy of the sacrosanct role upheld by the profession (Asiaweek, 1980; Lent, 1984). They do not provoke the same degree of passion and controversy, sound and fury as the Western media, nor do they engage in tireless probes and

investigations, exposes and revelations, which have come to typify the role of the media in the West (Tan, 1990).

While it is debatable whether the Western model of the press is universally applicable, it has to be admitted that the Singapore media are not known for controversies and thought-provoking opinions. The prevailing notion that the press must support the government in its efforts for nation building as well as the newsroom policies adopted by the monopoly press do not seem to leave much room for individual thinking by journalists, which is crucial for ethical decision making.

Our findings show that as far as their motivations are concerned, journalists in Singapore do not differ much from journalists in other parts of the world. The most commonly cited reasons for Singapore journalists to start their career in journalism -- excitement of the job, personal interest in current affairs and writing ability - are all based on self-gratification.

A survey of American journalists conducted by Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) shows, although most journalists cited love for writing as their main reason for entering the profession, there was often a connection to more altruistic reasons such as making a difference or informing the public of what was happening. For the Singapore journalists, satisfying their own interests seems to be the overwhelming reason for them to enter journalism. Making a difference and serving the society do not feature as the most important reasons to enter the profession. Part of the explanation may lie in the fact that Singapore is a relatively stable and corruption-free society, and it lacks a tradition in muckraking journalism due to its unique press-government relationship.

Although Singapore journalists tend to enter the profession for self-gratification purposes, such self-gratification is based more on idealistic notions than monetary rewards or privileges as respondents to our survey tended to rate low factors such as attractive pay and entitlement to privileges like free trips and free memberships as motivations to become journalists. The fact most journalists feel satisfied with their job and would like to be journalists again if they could restart their career seems to tell us that their motivations based on self-gratification could be actually satisfied through their work, in spite of the various restraints imposed upon the profession.

One thing that bothers media critics about monopoly lies in its potential effects on the thinking and practice of journalists. For journalists working in the same news organisation, their independent thinking is subjected to the pressure of company policies and concerns, and more so within the context of a monopoly. In the Singapore context, the monopolised newspaper industry naturally leads to the concern that journalists may

become institutionalised and lose their power for independent thinking. Our findings seem to show that such a concern may not be well grounded. Despite the fact that journalists working for SPH go through the same kind of training and face the same kind of pressure in work, they still hold different views on how to handle certain ethical issues.

Unlike the situation with newspaper industry elsewhere, newspaper journalists in Singapore are recruited by SPH as a company rather than by individual newspapers. As a result, journalists working for various newspapers are not necessarily pre-oriented for the particular newspaper they work for. Although our data do show some differences between the two groups of journalists in terms of their age and education, etc., these differences are not great enough to contrast the two groups. This naturally leads to the question: Would the newsroom policy of a particular newspaper affect the way its journalists handle certain ethical issues? In other words, would the journalists be institutionalised in a uniformed way of thinking about ethical issues if they work on the same newspaper?

Our findings seem to tell us that the institutional effects on ethical decision-making may not outweigh individual thinking. In general, no significant distinction could be found between journalists working for the mainstream newspapers and those working for tabloid newspapers although journalists of tabloid newspapers tend to go for the more sensational stuff, especially when glamour, sex and crime are mixed. As far as their personal views are concerned, journalists of the two groups would more or less act in the same way when they have an ethical decision to make.

However, our respondents tend to change their mind when they switch their roles in reporting a sensational story. It is clear that journalists would act differently in covering certain stories if they work for different types of newspapers. Many of them would be quite willing to replace their personal view with the perceived orientation of the newspaper in making an ethical decision. For certain things they would not do for a mainstream newspaper, many would do for a tabloid newspaper. Obviously, the ethical standards for the mainstream and tabloid newspapers are perceived to be quite different and such a perception may well be the factor that actually leads journalists to act differently in handling ethical issues. In other words, the institutional impact may not affect what a journalist truly believes he should do under the circumstance as an individual, but it may affect his actual decision as the employee of a newspaper. Future studies should test if this is a phenomenon unique to Singapore, or if it is universally applicable.

The institutional impact on journalism ethics is also demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the journalists feel that the day-to-day operations in the newsroom have the greatest impact on their thinking about journalism ethics, similar to research findings about American journalists (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). In addition, editors were chosen as the next most important influence. Although it cannot be denied that a person's ethical values have a lot to do with his or her family background, schooling, religious belief, etc, ethical decisions regarding journalism practices are seen more as a result of newsroom training than personal values.

This study of Singapore journalists seems to tell us that institutional influence does have an impact on the ethical decision making process among journalists in their daily operations even though it may not determine the direction of their personal beliefs and ethical values. While the mainstream and tabloid journalists may not differ in their personal beliefs and ethical values, the content orientation of their newspaper or the perception of it may lead them to act differently in covering certain kinds of news.

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# Emails, Educators, Practitioners And Changing Professional Paradigms

*The management of relationships with stakeholders, key publics and clients is central to the practice of public relations. Maintaining relationships and valuing those that have been established between practitioners and their clients and between practitioners and other organisations, has become increasingly important to the practitioner. However within the changing communication environment of email and Websites can these relationships be managed effectively? Both the practitioner and the educator of public relations are communicating with virtual clients and virtual students through online discussion, email messages, chat rooms and organisational websites. This paper points to the way in which practitioners are adjusting to the changes in online relationship management both online and through traditional communication, and how this can be reflected in educators' response to online teaching of public relations*

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**I**n the 2001 Summer School of an external undergraduate public relations course at the University of South Australia, one of the students encountered a personal crisis that he detailed in a long and emotive email message to the course director. On the following day the student sent a further brief email message apologising for his blunt language and indicated that he had been very stressed when initially sending an email. The online communication continued throughout the two-month course resulting in open discussion that began with a personal issue and ended in intense online analysis of the public relations profession.

Undoubtedly, educator and student developed an understanding about each other online. The student coped well personally and educationally and the educator found the exchange rewarding. However, this was incidental in that the course was planned with specific objectives to develop understanding and knowledge about public relations and enhance communication skills for a large number of offshore and onshore students. This

student was one of many studying in a virtual classroom where online needs and expectations demand more than information and one-way education. As an increasing number of online tertiary courses and programmes are introduced, educators are faced with the difficult task of personalising and tailoring educational programmes so that the excellent online relationship in the case I have cited, can become the norm.

The Internet may be “people connecting with people” (Holtz, 1999: 73) but the individual customer or student online communicates through a virtual medium that at times seems very impersonal. In my current research on relationship management between public relations consultants and their clients, one of the aims is to ascertain how consultants manage, personalise and develop online relationships with their clients. It arises out of a preliminary qualitative study of 11 senior public relations practitioners from 11 different organisations (Chia, 2001).

Practitioners were selected from the South Australian Public Relations Institute of Australia database through the stratified sampling method and semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of three months at their respective offices. Preliminary study findings point to current changes for practitioners especially in relation to website management. Some practitioners had established websites as it seemed to be the trend or thing to do, but they are now revamping and reviewing both site content and the value of the site for customers. There was also evidence of increasing management of email messages through the development of policy guidelines pertinent to the sending and receiving of messages. The need for this had arisen out of endless emails clogging practitioners’ communication and adversely affecting the online flow of messages.

Practitioners described email as an online siege and often encountered conflict online when there was misunderstanding about what was being communicated. Practitioners therefore continued to place primary value on face-to-face communication especially when there was tension and dissatisfaction in their relationships with clients and other organisations.

Preliminary and current research on relationship management indicates that the new focus on the relational component of professional practice is slowly changing public relations practice. This paper, within traditional and new forms of communication, explores some of the implications of the new relational focus for practitioners and public relations educators.

Scholars such as Hunt and Grunig (1994), Hutton (1999), Lindenmann (1998) and Gronstedt (1997) assert that the core function of public relations has changed. They contend that public relations

is no longer a profession primarily focusing on publicity and promotion but emphasis is on valuing and building relationships with employees, other organisations, stakeholders and customers. In addition the concept of relationship management within public relations practice is central to the theory that moulds the profession (Dozier, et al, 1995) and is therefore critical to sound public relations practice.

The relationship-marketing paradigm which emerged during the 1990's has had an important influence on related professions such as public relations, with an emphasis on the maintenance and respect of established relationships between practitioners, organisations and customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Lindenmann, 1998; Kitchen, 1999). However, those pioneering relationship management in both marketing and public relations although acknowledging the need to foster relationships, have failed to develop synonymously understanding of the processes critical to sustain these relationships.

Initial research by Grunig and Huang (2000) and Ledingham and Bruning (2000) in this area (for public relations practice) was influenced by Ferguson's (1984) focus on the importance of a relational approach to public relations practice. Ferguson identified attributes of relationships: "dynamic versus static, open versus closed; the degree to which both the organisation and the public are satisfied with relationship; and the mutuality of understanding, agreement, and consensus" (Grunig & Huang, 2000: 28). These attributes signify recognition of the changing parameters for relationship management.

Even so, the understanding of the concept of relationship and relationship management within public relations practice is one that is still quite confusing for practitioners. Scholars including Seitel (1997), Esrock and Leichty (1998), Thomsen (1997), Ledingham and Bruning (1998), Hunt and Grunig (1994), Toth (2000), contend that there is often an implied understanding of what a public relations professional relationship is and includes. The lack of definition of a relationship and the varied emphases on different components, processes and outcomes of relationships are impeding theory development of relationship management in public relations practice (Broom, et al. 2000).

Contemporary practitioners and public relations educators need to be aware that, "liking people and valuing personal and human relationships and communication is a critical prerequisite to the real function and value of public relations in the realm of business" (Wilson, 1994: 341). Moreover the needs of customers, stakeholders and employees have changed, as "the purpose of communication is not necessarily to influence stakeholders, but to add value to them" (Gronstedt, 1997: 39). The new relational

focus in public relations practice to a great extent recognises that persuasion, manipulation and one-way communication have been practised in a pro-business environment at the expense of a more personalised approach.

Additionally, mass communication on the Internet is often one-way with greater emphasis on giving rather than sharing information. For the public relations educator therefore, adding value to a programme website where dialogue and discussion is encouraged, might mean that greater attention needs to be given to students to participate in the learning process. One way to achieve this is for students to be involved in course website initiatives, other practical ways to create online communication exchange such as online coffee corners will be discussed later in this paper.

However, establishing and maintaining a relational focus “between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, et al, 2000: 6) is difficult because of the increasing number and forms of communication used. This is especially evident when practitioners and educators develop online communication tools that tend to fit in and around traditional tools of communication. A public relations educator may develop in-class tutorials, post lectures on a website and communicate with students by email without clearly understanding the overall aims and expected outcomes of each medium of communication. Furthermore, the demands of new technology and the demands of a computer savvy generation place pressure on educators to upgrade skills and manage online education proficiently. In addition, the demands on the educator in terms of monitoring, responding and interacting one-on-one with students are considerable and resource intensive.

Thomlison (2000) rightly identifies the one thing that is certain is that the traditional mass media models of public relations lack the sophistication that is essential to understand how to nurture and maintain relationships. This is especially important in online communication and has presented a real challenge to me in managing online classes of 150 to 200 students. How do you personalise a website for so many students and build online relationships? Certainly a key goal for the educator is to retain students that are also satisfied students but doing so in the virtual classroom seems to call for new ways of thinking and planning education online. One-to-one tailored online communication may be critical to the nurturing of relationships (Swift, 2000; Marken, 2000; Sterne, et al, 2000) but educators are also confronted with the increased volume of work with students that takes place in the

## Managing Relationships Online

online environment. A balanced approach that caters to individual needs while building relationships with student groups seems a more plausible way to manage online education.

My postgraduate and undergraduate students have components of online assessment where students post their plans for managing a campaign such as a recycling campaign, as many times as they like within the assessment period. Active discussion takes place online as each student works hard to argue for their approach. During this process the sharing of ideas contributes to students getting to know each other and to appreciate the views of other students. My experience in teaching public relations online is that students appreciate that they are listened to but they are also empowered and begin to take control of their online education and build a relationship with the educator and with other students. This emulates the empowerment or the changing of power (by giving control in part to the receiver of message or information) in marketing relationship management that Kitchen (1999: 391) asserts is essential for a collaborative and satisfying partnership. Phillips (2001) describes this as e-enabling i.e. the practitioner and client enable each other to benefit from the online communication exchange.

If public relations educators adopt Kitchen's stance to free consumers "from the traditional passive role of receivers of communication" (1999: 396) to one where they are active participants, then educators can profit from the input of students who are IT-savvy and enjoy taking on a key role in making the online learning environment more rewarding. Conversely, over the last three years it has been evident in both my offshore and onshore public relations programmes that mass-producing material for large online audiences gives little idea of how the students are progressing or not progressing. This also encourages students to download information without engaging in the learning process and impedes the building of online relationships. Besides, mass production, especially in the growing offshore market, encourages market driven business ventures (Mickey, 1998: 336) where short-term for-profit strategies continue to be more prominent, overriding more important long-term relationship development.

If educators intend to adopt relationship strategies for online learning from the lessons learned by public relations practitioners, they will find that the understanding of how to achieve both online dialogues while building relationships on the web and through email is still embryonic. Scholars such as Bobbitt (1995), Hill and White (2000), Marken (1998), Esrock and Leichty

## Practitioners And Educators In Limbo

(1998), Coombs (1998), Heath (1998), and Swift (2001), have explored the opportunities of new technology and the characteristics of dynamic online dialogue. Kent and Taylor (1998: 321) in particular have pointed to the huge potential of building strategically managed online relationships between organisations and publics, but found that they are under-utilised by practitioners and have not been addressed by scholars as being important. Dougall and Fox also found that Australian practitioners had difficulties with managing online communication and that “the actual usage of new communication tools is quite low” (2001: 34). Educators face similar challenges.

In Australian universities a “recent study by the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, found that no university is offering virtual degrees” (Gibbons, 2001: 104), and that universities are using the Internet as a supplementary teaching tool. Further, the study indicated that there was a pattern of utilising the online learning facilities as additional tools for education rather than tailoring course and programme websites to the needs of the students. In the same way that practitioners have improvised and sort to manage their practice around new technologies, educators have been absorbed in seeking solutions to manage big classes, manage new technology and manage education online, at times lacking a strategic focus in this process. There is also certain fragility about managing online education as the potential for misinterpretation of communication can detract from the key objectives of online learning. Certainly other forms of communication such as video conferencing could assist in overcoming some of these problems, but a more strategic and creative approach is required if online education is to realise its full potential.

One of the ways in which I have personalised course websites, and ensured that they are more than a one-way communication exercise is to include a social meeting point or coffee corner on the website (informal communication discussion site for students in addition to the course discussion and chat room). Students can get to know each other and the educator can participate with students informally. This has been integral to a more satisfying online educator-student relationship, but also student-to-student relationship. It also exemplifies the two-way symmetric model of communication, as ideas, comments and discussion allow for constant development of understanding of all parties communicating online.

Moreover, it is important that online courses are flexible, speedy and encourage information-rich interactions that enhance relationships (Swift, 2001: 83). In two of my course websites I posted the launch of the Anti-Smoking campaign in Singapore and

Australia and students were asked to identify issues in launching and managing the campaign in each other's countries. This generated information-rich interactions about cultural differences and expectations, why shock tactics in advertising had limitations and how the campaign could be run more effectively. It also developed a close-knit online group between students of the two countries as they worked together while engaging in learning and information exchange.

### **Limitations and opportunities managing relationships online and offline**

Student feedback in my public relations programmes at the University of South Australia both offshore and onshore also points to the value of flexible programme delivery that balances offline and online education. This is imperative to valuing the student and personalising education and is a primary motivation to include, where possible, a component of face-to-face learning in public relations courses and programmes. Offshore courses are introduced online a month before my arrival and before the face-to-face seminars are conducted. Although my online programmes are tailored to cultural needs, e.g. by including case studies specific to the students' cultures, it is often in the face-to-face seminars that students develop understanding and test out their ideas in a more rigorous way.

If educators rely on online, virtual delivery of courses there can be some difficulties. Kruckerberg, for example, cautions that there will be a diversity of people "who will readily exploit technology to communicate with one another through time and space" (1995: 37) and who will use the Internet in ways that may be inappropriate. This is evident in some of the abrupt communication that takes place in my online courses where students send offensive emails and post offensive remarks on the discussion board. Some have apologised for communicating in a way that may offend but by this stage the message has been read by many other students. In part this is to be expected as the "Internet is very new, untested, misunderstood and developing rapidly. Its use for the media and the public is still ill defined, although this is gradually improving with time and better information" (Sherwin, et al, 1999: 46).

I would argue that educators have been too eager to embrace online education at a time when the medium of communication on the Internet has not been well understood. Further, in the same way that practitioners have only just begun to factor in, and plan for, value-added online communication, online education is in the

early stages of personalising online courses and valuing the 'virtual' student. More needs to be researched and understood about online relationship management.

Educators need to balance the continuing growth of online offshore and onshore programmes with a component of face-to-face delivery to cater to the needs of students and balance the strengths of offline delivery with online potential. This can only be achieved if, as part of the strategy for online and offline programme delivery, there are both short and long-term objectives to develop relationships along with the business of education.

### **Managing online relationships and value adding online education**

In one of the public relations courses, students found the topic of crisis management very challenging. A practitioner who managed a very complex crisis prepared a 'Walk Through' case study, which was posted online. It was written in a personal style with details about how the practitioner was challenged when the crisis escalated and how he and the Chief Executive Officer had been exhausted in the three days of intense crisis management. He even detailed what they ate and how they felt. In a sense the practitioner took the students on a journey through the highs and lows of crisis management. The entire case study ran for 32 pages and both the educator and the practitioner were available to students for discussion online and by telephone. Students' feedback indicated that they felt that they entered into the realities of the crisis and grasped what it really meant to manage a crisis. In addition the online case was better received than other cases presented in class in the previous year as students had time to evaluate the process while accessing recommended websites that added to the online case study and discussion. They could also discuss emerging issues with other groups of students online. This was a valuable experience for the students, educator and practitioner and added value to the education of this area of public relations.

Although websites and discussion facilities can be accessed at the students' convenience, specific online timeslots have been allocated prior to student assessments. The aim of this special time is that students know that the educator is available for a specific purpose. This more strategic approach has been invaluable as it is similar to the offline appointment system. It is also superior to the one-on-one email or to the general discussion and chat room communication where 24-hour access may be convenient but lacks the focus necessary for specific stages of educational development.

A special discussion site was set up for informal discussion,

## **Practical Approaches**

as cited earlier through the example of the online *Coffee Corner*. The site created an online social meeting point where the potential of the Internet as an interactive personalised tool could be realised.

An online debate about ethics and integrity in a public relations course led to the students setting up an ethics forum about ethics online. Students began to work through real issues, to challenge each other, and they also became very open about their views on ethics, truth and morality. For a short period the online discussion moved away from the specifics of public relations ethics but was essential to the students dealing with their mixed emotions on the topic as well as addressing professional issues. Certainly much of the discussion may have been similar to the offline tutorial discussion but the online forum moved to online sites on hacker ethics, ethics in cyberspace, online security and who might be invading their website. It was a valued added learning experience that enriched the discussion and learning about a very difficult topic. Again students used the *Coffee Corner* as 'time out' online when the debate became too intense.

These are just a few examples that are representative of online education being more than a one-way information tool; rather emphasis is on value adding education, knowing and understanding the student in the virtual classroom and developing a relationship between educator and student. The value of mixed-mode delivery however cannot be underestimated as online and face-to-face education especially in offshore public relations programmes makes possible the best of both forms of communication. Mixed mode delivery does not provide all the answers for educators who are pressured to move their courses and programmes online, but it provides some of the answers to the strengths of education in both online and offline forums.

## The Future

### The reality of relationship management

The reality for the public relations educator is that online courses and programmes necessitate considerable knowledge and understanding of students' needs, and knowledge and skills to manage new technology strategically. However, according to Coombs and Rybacki (1999), many educators are not sufficiently trained in new technologies. Furthermore, Sherwin and Avila assert that "the Internet represents only one facet of a public relations strategy" (1999: 46) so that being skilled online and utilising online resources represents but one component of public relations practice and public relations education. In addition, as the understanding of online and offline relationship management is still embryonic, it is essential that future research in this area identifies the parameters for successful long term relationships

between practitioners and stakeholders, clients and key publics and between educators and students.

My current qualitative research or work in progress is focusing on online and offline relationship management of consultants and their clients, in terms of the identified benchmarks of quality relationships (trust, openness, commitment, satisfaction) (Huang, 2000) that will be explored along with the changing context of this communication. It is anticipated that the benchmarks of quality relationships may not have been properly considered or planned for in either email or website communication. The challenge in my research will be to advance the concepts raised by Kent and Taylor (1998) and other scholars around web relationship management and progress relational theory to a point where it is applicable to both online and offline relationship management.

The greatest challenge for practitioners and educators will be to keep pace with the rapid change and demands of new technology. Certainly, avoidance of online communication and education is scarcely an option. Rather online communication has the potential to augment offline or traditional communication and enhance collaborative learning and exchange. ■

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# The Internet As A Public Relations Medium: An Exploratory Study of PR Professionals in Taiwan

*This paper seeks to explore the attitudes and practices of public relations (PR) professionals in using the Internet as a PR medium in Taiwan. Specifically, the paper addresses three research questions: (1) What do PR professionals think about the function of the Internet and the roles of online communication in comparison with those of offline communication in Taiwan? (2) Will IT-related corporations be more likely to have a wider scope of Internet applications than non-IT related corporations? (3) Do IT corporations perceive the role of PR differently from non-IT related corporations? Using a semi-structured questionnaire, we conducted in-depth interviews with eight corporations' PR and marketing department professionals in Taiwan from May 18-June 18, 2001. The findings show that (1) Although the Internet is widely used by PR professionals, it does not alter media strategies significantly; (2) PR professionals in IT corporations tend to practise more Internet communication functions than those in non-IT related corporations; (3) IT corporations are more likely to support the management role of PR professionals, as compared to those in non-IT related businesses. The study suggests that the applications of the Internet vary according to industry type, business strategies and roles of the PR professionals within an organisation.*

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Recent survey data show that the number of Internet users is growing significantly in Taiwan with 2.9 million Internet users in 1999 (Commonwealth Magazine, 1999). Yam.com, an important search engine company, provides detailed descriptions of users' online behaviours in 2002. They show that the Internet has become one of the major communications tools in Taiwan. Thus, many corporations in Taiwan have mobilised more online

resources to meet their public's needs. However, scholars pay little attention to the impact of the Internet on PR practices in Taiwan, except that some English academic literatures have examined cultural dimensions of professional PR practices (Huang, 2000; Wu et al, 2001).

Public relations scholars (e.g., Botan, 1992) suggest that international public relations are cross-border in nature, requiring corporations to formulate strategies to handle communications affairs. But due to regional variations, there is no universal way for corporations to respond (Vercic et al, 1996). Therefore, it is important to examine the effects of globalisation and the Internet and to identify restrictions and specific principles that might influence PR practices, especially using the Internet as a PR tool for subsidiaries of multinational corporations (MNCs) in different countries.

Because the Internet represents both many-to-one and many-to-many communication models (Ha & Lincoln, 1998), its application to PR practices is an important research question. The Internet also means users can initiate communication within a Web site, instead of being just 'passive receivers'. Some researchers indicate that web-based information is customised to the consumer's needs, and interactive features are mostly included to facilitate two-way communication (Capps, 1993; Holtz, 1999; Middleberg, 2001). They predict that new computer technologies will increase the power of users, and thus challenge monopolies and hierarchical structures in the status quo (Gilder, 1990; Coombs, 1998; Heath, 1998).

The Internet also alters the PR principles. It is considered as the first controlled medium in which the message disseminator has absolute control over the content that will reach the receiver (White & Raman, 1999). Many communication professionals advocate that the Internet is an ideal PR medium for two-way communication, therefore providing opportunities and challenges for organisations (Gleason, 1997; Holtz, 1999; Middleberg, 2001).

Studies concerning PR and the adoption of web-based communication reveal results that warrant further investigations. Interviews with persons who are responsible for making Website decisions indicate that competition and establishing an Internet presence are the driving forces leading to the development of Websites (White & Raman, 1999). Although PR practitioners anticipated benefits from using the Internet as a prominent communications tool, very few of them conduct formal research on their target publics before launching web-based communication campaigns (White & Raman, 1999; Hill & White, 2000). Hill and White's (2000) research indicates that some practitioners even regard web-based communication as a secondary task, and they hold a skeptical attitude toward the effectiveness of the Internet.

Taiwan, as an emerging economic power from the Pacific Rim, has attracted many MNCs to set up their subsidiaries over the past

few decades. Compared to local firms, many MNC subsidiaries serve as the forerunners of Internet communication. Based on the rising needs of using the Internet as a PR medium, this paper will explore and describe the current practices of MNC PR professionals using the Internet in Taiwan. Specifically, the following research questions (RQs) are:

*RQ1: What do PR professionals think about the function of the Internet and the roles of online communication in comparison with those of offline communication in Taiwan?*

An analysis of business Websites in the United States indicates that different industry types show different preferences for Web formats (Ha & Lincoln, 1998). Other researchers suggest that industry type is related to the organisational performance in terms of web-based communication (Esrock & Leichty, 1998). Many studies identify the antecedents and consequences of the organisational adoption of technological innovations so as to describe how the organisational attributes, including industry type, determine the strategic use of new technologies (Damanpour, 1987, 1991; Fulk & Steinfield, 1990; LaRose & Hoag, 1996; Flanagan, 2000; Cornelissen et al, 2001).

*RQ2 Are industry type and levels of Internet experience related to the scope of Internet applications for PR purposes?*

Organisational attributes, such as organisational type, stage of adoption and scope of innovation, are important correlates of an organisation's overall performance (Damanpour, 1987, 1991). LaRose and Hoag's (1996) research suggests that early adopters of the Internet, who are also members of the IT industry, are more innovative.

One of the most compelling issues concerning the PR function and technological innovation is how new communications tools have contributed to the role of PR practitioners and to a symmetrical organisation-public relationship. Johnson (1997) defines "technologies used by PR professionals" as forms of computer-mediated communication that are interactive in nature. She suggests that it is important to explore the PR practitioners' perceptions of technologies. Johnson also investigates the process in which these interactive features help to facilitate two-way communication. According to her findings, the advent of new technologies enacts the management role of PR practitioners and helps foster two-way symmetrical communication. Therefore, the third research question is formulated as follows:

### *RQ3 Is industry type related to the role of PR professionals in Taiwan?*

Johnson (1997) proposes two roles concerning the practices of PR: management and technician roles. PR practitioners who play a management role will be highly involved in the decision-making process when they plan and implement communication programmes. PR practitioners who play a technician role will simply follow instructions from the management.

Case studies using in-depth interviews are employed to explore Internet practices by PR professionals in Taiwan. This qualitative method is not to generalise from the findings but to clarify particular categories and assumptions, in order to achieve a better understanding of subjects previously unknown (Berg, 1989). This will provide both depth and breadth in this exploratory study.

Eleven professionals representing eleven different MNC subsidiaries in Taipei are selected through a purposive sample, and eight of them agree to have interviews. Three selection criteria are used:

- (1) MNC subsidiaries are selected in order to observe the local variance under a general principle imposed by headquarters.
- (2) MNC subsidiaries are chosen based on their reputations in the global market.
- (3) Each MNC subsidiary's professionals included in the sample must have at least three years of experience of practising wired communication in order to obtain rich and detailed information from organisations with a well-established Internet environment.

Professionals from both IT and non-IT businesses are selected to provide comparisons. Five of the MNC subsidiaries selected are categorised as IT firms, namely, computers, the Internet service and telecommunications. The remaining three MNC subsidiaries are categorised as non-IT related firms, including pharmaceutical products, cosmetics and mail delivery services.

Although their job titles vary, all respondents in the study are responsible for the development of Internet communication. Two respondents hold titles of marketing or product managers, and the rest identify themselves as PR or public affairs professionals. The earliest establishment of a subsidiary dates back to 1956, and the most recent establishment of a subsidiary was three years ago. The use of the Intranet is also a variable examined in the study. The length of time using the Intranet ranges from three to eight years, and that of launching the Web site aimed

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at external public groups ranges from one to eight years. Details of the MNC subsidiaries selected is shown in Table 1.

All interviews, using semi-structured questions, were conducted face-to-face in respondents' offices from 18 May to 18 June, 2001 (see Appendix I). Respondents are allowed to elaborate on each question as they wish, and more questions are added to obtain a complete picture of their perceptions, opinions, and practices of web-based communication. These interviews last for at least 90 minutes, and all interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis. Transcripts of interviews are sent to all respondents for verification and accuracy checks.

**Table 1:**  
**Respondents descriptions and background information**

Company	Year Established	Job title	Years of Intranet use	Years of launching Web sites
A	1956	Public Relations Manager	8	8
B	1970	Public Affairs Manager	7	7
C	1965	Associate Manager of Products	5	2
D	1980	Associate Manager of Public Relations	4	1
E	1973	Public Relations Specialist	3	2
F	1998	Senior Marketing Manager	3	1
G	1987	Senior Manager of Public Relations	4	2
H	1967	Public Affairs Representative	4	4

*Note: These multinational corporations' PR and marketing departments handle media relations, marketing communication, and internal relations.*

In terms of the first research question, the function of the Internet is operationally defined as the contribution, which web-based communications make to public relations practices. Two types of target publics, the general publics and the mass media, are used in order to describe the online communication process. More specifically, the general public is defined as consumers and potential consumers. The mass media refer to print and broadcasting journalists. Four Internet tools, including e-mail, e-commerce, online publication and online information concerning

the public interest, are used to build relations with the general public. Three Internet tools, including e-mail, online news conference and online news release, are used to build relations with the mass media.

Three major variables are involved in the second research question: industry type, levels of Internet experience and the scope of Internet applications. The scope of Internet applications is operationally defined as the aggregated number of Internet features such as e-mail, e-publication or other interactive features. Industry type is defined as a dichotomous variable: IT vs. non-IT corporations. The level of Internet experience is defined as the number of years that the corporations have used the Internet. Three levels of Internet experience are defined: high (seven to eight years), medium (four to five years) and low (three years) levels.

In terms of the third research question, two PR roles are defined: management and technician roles. The management role is operationally defined as the PR practitioner who participates in the decision-making process concerning the planning of communication programmes. The technician role is defined as the PR practitioner who handles the entry-level PR task and follows decisions made by the management.

*RQ1: PR professionals' perceptions of the Internet function and on/offline-communication comparison.*

The Internet has become an important communications tool for MNC subsidiaries in Taiwan. Those IT firms with a higher level of Internet experience tend to recognise more widely the value of the Internet, and applications of web-based communication are prevalent. In contrast, non-IT firms lack the advantage of technological innovations related to Internet applications. However, non-IT company respondents regard the Internet as a prominent indicator of a corporation's future success, and express a strong commitment to fully utilise the Internet to advance service quality. Overall current practices of Internet public relations in Taiwan are summarized in Table 2.

*RQ1A: The Internet Function: Facilitating the Communication Process*

Two types of public groups, consumer and mass media, are the main targets of Internet PR. Information about products or services is available from the Website so that both consumers and prospective buyers can obtain or ask for information online. All respondents say their official Websites do contain an e-mail

## Findings

address for general audiences, and six respondents send subscribers the electronic publication of products and services.

Providing e-mails for journalists and putting the electronic version of press releases on the Website are cited as the most common practice aimed at media reporters. Most respondents still regard the 'traditional media' to be important communication channels for news release. The following findings present the practices of web-based communication aimed at the general public and the mass media.

**Table 2:**  
**The public relations practices: Using the Internet as the communication tool**

Target Publics		General Public (incl. the Consumer)				The Mass Media		
Yrs. Of Using Internet	Company Codes	e-mail	e-commerce	E-publi-cation	Info-re. Public Interest	e-mail	On-line news conference	On-line news release
7-8	A	X	X	X	X	X		X
	B	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4-5	C	X						
	D	X				X		X
	G	X		X		X		X
	H	X		X	X	X		X
3	E	X	X	X	X	X		X
	F	X		X				

*RQ1B: Using the Internet to Communicate with the General Publics*

Most respondents agree that maintaining a positive corporate image is not merely a PR task. It requires various efforts made by all members within the organisation:

“The main idea is to maintain consistency of the image. The headquarter has a web team that is responsible for maintaining a consistency. We follow a couple of templates provided by the web team and fill out the content. I’ll say this is a multi-task effort and PR staff alone can’t possibly achieve the objective of maintaining image consistency” (Company A).

“We wish to design a Web site that is both flexible and controllable. The Web as a controlled medium does provide an excellent opportunity for us to control the content. The main idea

is to present the best part of the corporation by fully utilizing the features of the Internet" (Company G).

"We regard the Web site as a way of building the corporate image. Therefore, we have put information about our commitment to serve the public interest. In addition, records of honors, awards and charity contributions are also put online to impress the publics in general" (Company H).

Respondents also express a pressing need to build closer relations with consumers:

"We pay particular attention to different needs in population. For the part of consumers, we provide the information about products, contact e-mails and FAQ's. We design a virtual gallery in the Web site where people can obtain interesting information about development of telecommunication technology and business. The key is to understand their interests and habits of using Internet" (Company G).

"As an international corporation providing mail delivery services, we have established the tracking service online so that customers can check the progress of the delivery anytime. The vehicles for the tracking service, however, are not limited to the Web pages. Multi-channels, such as voice mails, fax and Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), are also used to provide convenient and speedy services" (Company E).

"I would say most corporations' Web sites are too broad in terms of their targets. Those official sites release information in which consumers are not interested at all. We don't need an 'elephant-like' Web structure. Instead of lumping all these items together, we plan to launch a Web site of special events designed exclusively for the consumer" (Company C).

#### *RQ1C: Using the Internet to Communicate with the Mass Media*

Sending e-mails to journalists and placing electronic versions of press kits on the corporations' Websites are said to be the common strategies when the mass media are the target group:

"When we use the Internet to deal with the mass media, we place the press release, the photos, and relevant product information online. If we are launching a campaign of major brands, we will place the video files on the website to meet the needs of broadcasting media" (Company D).

"The website provides a good opportunity for us to explore the multi-media features of information. We will use graphics, motion pictures, sound, music and video images to present ourselves and I am sure that they will attract many Internet users. Because of the increasing number of broadband users, the message should be carefully arranged, designed and presented interactively

(Company G).

“The decision to use Internet or other communication tools is rather strategic. We need to clearly define the objective, the target audience and weigh each communication channel’s advantages in terms of cost and effect. If we decide that the PR plan bears potential news values, we will go to the traditional media for publicity. If we launch a smaller-scale of the special event, we are more likely to announce it and pull users online” (Company F).

### ***RQ1D: The Roles of the Internet Compared to those of Offline Communication***

According to most of the respondents, the advent of new communication technology does not change the practice of PR professionals significantly. It seems that using the Internet to distribute the corporate messages is rather a secondary task. All respondents say that the mass media are still the major targets for press releases:

“We still regard the print and broadcasting media as the primary objects for news releases. The only change is that we will put the same news release online. The advantage is that the Internet allows us to prepare for a longer and detailed version of backgrounder or datasheet, and we can update them whenever possible. The headquarter does have a well-established data bank for media reporters where they can download audio, video and textual files. However, due to the limitation of money and time in subsidiaries, we cannot provide that many functions to Taiwanese reporters” (Company A).

“The primary target is the mass media instead of the Internet. All of the news releases in my company are related to product features. We work as the supporters of marketing department and the main goal is to promote products by contacting the mass media for the publicity purpose” (Company D).

Results of the interviews indicate that the broadcasting and print media remain the primary targets of press releases. Building good relations with the mass media is considered more important than using the Internet to disseminate messages. One PR practitioner mentions that she will not spend time updating news information online regularly, because reporters can easily access the English Website maintained by the headquarter, making it somewhat “redundant” for her to place the same content in Chinese online.

Another respondent mentions that personal influence, namely *Guanxi*, is crucial to the corporation-media relationship.

Overall, using the traditional media to release information plays a more important role than using online communication in PR practices.

*RQ2: Factors Related to the Scope of the Internet Applications*

The study proposes two organisational factors related to the practices of Internet communication: industry type and levels of Internet experience.

*RQ2A: Industry Type and the Scope of the Internet Applications*

As shown in Table 3, IT-related corporations have more Internet applications than those non-IT corporations. The total number of Internet applications is eight and the number of non-IT firms is five. The finding suggests that IT firms are more likely to use the Internet as a primary PR medium than non-IT firms.

**Table 3:**  
**Number of Internet applications by industry type  
and levels of Internet experience**

IT v.s. Non-IT Corporations	Number of Internet Applications
IT Corporations	8.0
Non-IT Corporations	5.0
<b>Levels of the Internet Experience</b>	
High	10
Medium	5.5
Low	6.5

It is obvious that IT firms give priority to the Internet as a major communications tool for achieving better competitiveness. The case of non-IT firms is otherwise. To them the Internet does not constitute as a major factor influencing sales volumes.

*RQ2B: Levels of Internet Experience and the Scope of Internet Applications*

Table 3 shows that the relationship between the levels of Internet experience and the scope of Internet applications is not linear. Corporations with the highest level of Internet experience tend to have a larger number of Internet applications (ten), while corporations with a medium experienced level have the fewest applications.

RQ3: *Public Relations Roles and Industry Type*

The top management's attitude toward PR practitioners and the main marketing strategy of the corporation will determine whether the management role or technician role will play-out in their corporations.

"Attitudes of the top management toward PR are very positive, and I think such perceptions lead to a higher status of PR roles. It is fair to say that our practices in Taiwan play the decision-making role and help to make crucial communication choices. We have garnered enough resources to execute many communication tasks so far" (Company A).

"Our task is to communicate with the media. Each brand in our corporation has its own PR staff responsible for marketing communication. The main responsibility is to meet marketing demands by building a positive relation with the mass media" (Company D).

"We have been acting low-key. To follow the principle imposed by the headquarter, the PR staff adopts a rather reactive strategy to media inquiries. We don't contact media proactively. We have to act in accordance with the orders from headquarter and the top management. Our job is to answer questions" (Company C).

The technician's role is primarily to handle media relations and does not participate in the decision-making process, while the empowering management role manifests PR functions in various aspects. As a respondent explains: "It is natural for us to emphasize the importance of web-based communication because we are in the telecommunication business. The headquarter designates three major areas of PR practices: internal, external and investor relations. However, as a subsidiary, we are not responsible for the investor communication. Our main duty is to communicate with internal (the employees) and external (the customers) publics locally. It is quite special that we, as PR staff, play the leader's role in putting all information together on the Web site. We define the target audience, the content suitable for them and we even design the structure of the Web site on our own" (Company H).

Table 4 shows that most IT firms allow PR practitioners to assume management responsibility. All members of non-IT firms say that PR professionals play a technician role in their organisations. It appears that the marketing department in non-IT firms plays the leading role in planning the communication programme in general.

**Table 4:**  
**Relationship between Industry Type and Roles of Public Relations Professionals**

	Management Role	Technician Role
IT Corporations	4	1
Non-IT Corporations	0	3

All respondents of the MNC subsidiaries selected in the study value the Internet as an important PR tool. They regard the Internet as a great facilitator of the communication process. Online communication tools, such as e-mails and e-publications, are commonly used to communicate with consumers, prospective buyers and the mass media. However, the extent to which wired communication is practised depends on whether these MNC subsidiaries are related to the IT industry or not. That is to say, industry type may serve as a discriminator of various PR practices in Taiwan. The present study also finds that the relationship between levels of Internet experience and the scope of Internet applications is not a direct one. Corporations with the highest level of Internet experience have more wired communication programmes, but the relationship between corporations with lower levels of Internet experience and the number of applications is not clear.

In addition, MNC subsidiaries in IT-related business are more likely to support the management role of PR professionals, as compared to those in non-IT related business. The finding is consistent with Johnson's (1997) observation that the advent of new technologies enacts the management role of PR practitioners.

Several issues emerge from the present study. The first issue concerns the relationship between functions of public relations and marketing. Whether the PR function should be aligned with marketing needs has been debated hotly (Leuvan, 1991). Some respondents say that the performance of PR and marketing communication is under the supervision of marketing department, and the marketing manager is in charge of budget allocation. Many agree with the opinion that PR and marketing should cooperate with each other to achieve the company's communication goals. Although Lauzen worries that integrated communications may reduce PR to a product-publicity function and threaten the independence of the PR function, advanced communication tools will inevitably lead to a higher degree of organisational flexibility between departments (Lauzen, 1991). It appears that the more flexible the corporation in organising strategies, the more likely it is for PR to manifest its effects (Leuvan, 1991).

## Discussion

The second issue deals with the phenomenon that respondents from most MNC subsidiaries do not monitor or observe "opinion climate" online. Even if they do, the staff they assign are not always suitable for such a task. Only two respondents in IT business say that they install a monitoring system, and one of them say that "web engineers" are responsible for environmental scanning online. When asked if they provide solutions to online rumors, one respondent, who does not scan online messages, cites the questions and answers section provided by headquarters as the antidote.

As Bordin and Rosnow (1998) observe, rumor communication is no longer a one-way transmission of distorted messages. People, when facing a rumor, may seek information, authenticate their comments with suitable references, and express anxiety, belief and disbelief. Web-based communication provides an important realm for people to express opinions and generate rich discussions about rumors. Noticing the prevalent negligence of online scanning among MNC subsidiaries in Taiwan, PR professionals should pay more attention to individuals' needs to reduce psychological discomfort when they handle the problem of rumor transmission in the future.

The third issue is related to the skeptical sentiments reflected by respondents concerning the effects of Internet communication. There appears to be "cynical realism," defined as the contradictory attitude toward the effectiveness of web-based communication (White & Raman, 1999). Hill and White (2000) suggest that this attitude is probably due to a low priority of using the Internet that is given to PR. The present study shows two causes of skepticism: (1) lacking an effective measurement of the Internet impact and (2) the limited budget that is used to develop Internet communication programmes.

The study also shows that the Internet is widely used by PR professionals, whether they are IT or non-IT related corporations in Taiwan. Contrary to previous findings in the US (Hill & White, 2000), the Internet is by no means a B-list task for PR practitioners in Taiwan.

MNC subsidiaries in the study suggest that the Internet is a powerful medium capable of global communications. However, the number of Internet applications varies, depending on industry type, business strategies and the status of PR professionals within an organisational structure.

A limited sample size does not allow us to generalise the findings. Although cross-tabulations of research categories generate interesting findings, the analysis and discussions concerning the predictors of Internet applications are rather preliminary and must be evaluated with caution. Unlike most

PR research conducted in Taiwan (Huang, 2000; Wu et al, 2001), the present study does very little to tackle the issue of cultural dimensions during the professional practices.

The wired world is evolving quickly. The rapid change in Internet usage makes it difficult to define web-based communication. The present study operationally defines the web-based communication as using e-mails, e-publications, e-commerce or other interactive tools to communicate with various public groups. However, new media such as the Internet comes in many forms, providing new research questions but making a consistent academic conclusion difficult.

The findings may provide several strategic suggestions for practitioners and researchers. For practitioners, although the Internet leads to a significant change in business communication, communication professionals should note that basic rules of good writing and editing remain the same (Marken, 1995). Several strategies are suggested to 'pull' more users to the virtual communication world; e.g., by establishing an easy-to-access database designed to meet the needs of target public groups, and fully utilising online information as a complementary tool for the customer and media services.

Moreover, PR professionals should conduct more surveys of Internet users to understand their needs and communication patterns. Additionally, a careful web planning capable of creating a "dialogic loop" is important to generate a mutually beneficial relationship (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Finally, PR efforts need to be compatible with the organisational goal, and it calls for an integration of corporate policies, business strategies and web-based communication planning as a whole.

There is a need to conduct a more systematic research concerning the impact of organisational features on the practices of web-based communication in the future. The study recognises industry type as the primary variable influencing Internet communication programmes. More variables, such as organisational size, business strategy, budget allocation and other environmental dynamics, can be added in future studies to examine the practices of using the Internet as a PR medium. ■

#### **APPENDIX I: Interview Guide**

1. When was your company established in Taiwan?
2. When did your company set up the Intranet? When did your company launch the Web site aimed at the general public?
3. How many people in your company work as public relations practitioners?

4. Describe the roles and functions of public relations in your organisation. Who is taking a lead - marketing, public relations or elsewhere - in terms of making a communication choice?
5. What types of 'webbed' communication tools do you use most in your job?
6. In terms of internal communication, what types of Internet tools are used and in what way?
7. What types of communication channels have been used most when there are needs to contact headquarters or other subsidiaries around the world?
8. In terms of external communication, who are the target groups and what types of Internet tools are used and in what way?
9. What types of communication channels have been used most to release news information? Do you revise the message or add more audio/video features when you put news release on-line? Why? or Why not?
10. What is the most common format of news release in general? What makes you decide whether to add audio/video features on-line?
11. What is the best on-line strategy to build a positive corporate image in your opinion? How about the case in your company?
12. How has the Internet changed the ways public relations practitioners communicate with the consumer, the community, the government and interest groups?
13. Have you conducted any formal research concerning 'web-based' communication in general?
14. Have you accessed the communication effects of the Internet by observing the feedback provided by on-line users?
15. Have you set up any on-line monitoring system to collect users' opinions or complaints about your company?
16. How do you handle on-line rumors?
17. Assess the overall impact of technological innovations on public relations work.

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## COMMENTARY

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# Teaching Journalism In Guangzhou

*At the core of an effort to teach journalism in English to students in the People's Republic of China is the question whether there is a point to exposing—for want of a better term—western values to students. They will work under a one-party, totalitarian police state which closely monitors a state-owned news media designed to suppress the bad news and exploit the good for the benefit of the Communist Party of China. A long-time American journalist writes of his experience teaching in an English-language journalism program at a Chinese university and his search for an answer to that question.*

*Arnold Zeitlin*

*Guangdong University of Foreign Studies  
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The student's question went right to the heart of the matter of teaching journalism in English to Chinese in the People's Republic.

"China is a different place," the young man began slowly in deliberate English, as if he were addressing listeners who knew so little about China.

He was a master's degree candidate in the revitalized journalism program at the University of Shantou in the one-time free port of Shantou on China's southern coast.

"The government controls the news," he continued. "What is the point of learning western ways of journalism? We can never use them in China."

I had asked myself the same question often while teaching in 2002 at a university in Guangzhou, southern China, in a new, English-language journalism program. What is the point, indeed?

I was one of several visiting American journalism educators in Shantou to meet students in the journalism program, part of a university that over 20 years had grown with the help of about HK\$2b (about US\$260m) in contributions from Hong Kong tycoon,

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Li Ka Shing. Li, who traces his ancestry to Shantou, was determined to make this school in his home region of Chiu Chau a world-class university with a world-class journalism program.

I was fortunate; that tricky question was not directed at me. Responding for our small group was Arlene Morgan, assistant dean for continuing education and technology at the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University. She had been for 31 years with *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, rising to assistant managing editor.

Emphasizing the positive, Dean Morgan pointed out that more and more sectors of Chinese society were opening up to the world. Politics, of course, was a no-no for journalists. But reporters or print and broadcast news media – virtually all state-or Communist party-owned – were examining the business, financial and economic sectors, reporting on social issues, such as health.

She noted she had come to Shantou from Beijing, where she addressed journalists at a conference on coverage of AIDS where government officials complained they were not getting enough coverage of the spread of the disease in China.

“There are plenty of areas where journalists can use their western-based training,” she concluded.

In my own case, the subject the question touched has risen often during the five months over two semesters I had taught journalism – entirely in English—at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in Guangzhou, a 45-minute plane ride from Shantou.

Here is the way a student in Guangzhou expressed herself in a message to me:

“Please give us some advice on how to be a good journalist?. In fact, most of us used to be enthusiastic about international reporting. However, as we continued with our studies at university, step by step we found that it would be too difficult and early impossible for us to continue with our dreams.

That’s because international news reporting is strictly controlled by the Central government. Unless we can be recruited by the Communist Party and the Xinhua Agency, we will have no chance to report international news. As a result, many of us get frustrated. We are still interested in journalism, but it seems that we can’t see our future. We are at a loss.”

Hers is a combination of need and awareness that is hard for a teacher to resist.

Deputy Dean Emma Du Huizhen of the Faculty of International Communication of Guangdong University (GDUFS) had asked late in 2001 if I would be interested in teaching in the new English-language program she was creating in Guangzhou. Her faculty was made up of a half dozen Chinese academics,

several with master's degrees in mass communication from Leeds University in the United Kingdom, as she had. None had experience as journalists. Dean Du had the good sense to realize she needed someone who had worked as a journalist.

After a 55-year career that included being a reporter, editor and bureau chief for *The Associated Press* and a vice president of *United Press International*, I was ending nearly four years as director in Hong Kong of the Asian Center of The Freedom Forum, the American-based, independent foundation that dealt with news media issues worldwide.

During my Freedom Forum tenure, we had developed a news media program in China of workshops, seminars and conferences at People University in Beijing, Jinan University in Guangzhou and Shanghai International Studies University and with such publications as *People's Daily* and *China Daily* in Beijing, the Guangzhou Daily Group, the Nan Fang Daily Group and *The Yangcheng Evening News* in Guangzhou and *Shanghai Daily*.

But The Freedom Forum was eliminating as of the end of 2001 its entire international division, including my center in Hong Kong and offices in London, Buenos Aires and Johannesburg. I had the time.

During a Freedom Forum program at the university in November 2001, I had met first and second year students, in English, and during a free-wheeling question-answer session was agreeably surprised at their grasp of English (I don't speak Chinese) and their zest to learn. My favorite question came from a young woman, who posed this news media ethics dilemma about the death in a crash of Princess Diana of Britain:

"If you were covering Princess Di, would you report the story first or first call the police?"

I agreed to teach in March and April 2002, and returned for a second stint from October through December.

The roots of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies go back to the 1965 founding of a foreign language institute in Guangzhou. According to Dean Du, Prime Minister Chou En-Lai ordered the institute in south China to complement similar institutes in Beijing and in Shanghai. The institute merged in 1996 with a foreign trade institute to create a university with a well-regarded emphasis on language training.

More than 8,000 undergraduates study at GDUFS on a bucolic campus across from the municipal international airport in suburban northern Guangzhou at the base of Baiyun (or White Cloud) mountain. The university is in the midst of a busy expansion, building a conference center, a library that is supposed to be the largest on any campus in Guangzhou and new dormitories. The building that houses the 40 so-called "foreign

experts” or visiting foreign professors was gutted in August and renovated to provide modern flats equipped with kitchens, baths, air conditioning, telephones and television sets.

During the first semester, I taught four classes, each once weekly for 90 minutes, involving about 160 students. Two classes were news writing and reporting for freshman, a class in beat reporting for third-year students and international reporting for seniors.

Despite the differing course titles, the classes were essentially the same, repeating basics, based on practical exercise. I tried to have the students write in class or on outside assignment almost every session. The approach meant often grading 160 papers every week.

“Our professors would not stand such a work load,” said my son, a banker who is trustee of his alma mater, Amherst College, in the United States.

In the second term, we cut the load to two classes of basic news writing and reporting for second-year students, a total of 80 students. The load of 80 papers weekly still was heavy and made it almost impossible to give the students the individual attention they required.

My approach was as practical as the limited resources of the school permitted. I was determined not simply to lecture and to make sure the students produced copy for every session.

Essentially, I outlined a problem, for example, writing a lead, using the formula who-what-where-when-why-and how, assigned an exercise illustrating the problem, edited the students’ work, then discussed it in class, often writing my own version and explaining my thinking. If time permitted (it rarely did), I assigned students to rewrite their work based on my comments on their copy.

In discussing the topic, “reporting the spoken word,” I took advantage of a speech about the threat of AIDS to China delivered in October at a university in Hangzhou, China, by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. AIDS is a subject only now being spoken about openly in China.

The class read his text. We discussed the important points and what would make a lead. I assigned them to write a lead in class against a deadline, then complete the work for the next week’s class. We discussed their leads as well as the completed work after I corrected their papers.

I distributed for discussion a hand out containing examples of students’ copy next to suggested versions of my own. I also distributed copies of stories about the speech by *The New York Times* and *People’s Daily*, the Communist party mouthpiece (it was a rare case; the *People’s Daily* speech coverage was more detailed

and even more straight reporting than *The Times'* story).

I developed a series of hand-outs. We essentially were writing our own textbook. We did not use a text in class. Western-written texts were simply too complex and expensive for use.

I planned some lessons with the help of a thin volume, *Reporting and Writing News: A Basic Handbook* written in 2001 by American authors, Peter Eng, a former news editor for The Associated Press in Bangkok, and Jeff Hodson, a former deputy editor of *The Cambodia Daily* in Phnom Penh. As Freedom Forum Asian director, I had contributed US\$10,000 toward the development of the text.

It was published in English for journalists for whom English was a second-language and were from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, Mekong Delta countries in which the Bangkok-based Indochina Media Memorial Foundation staged training sessions.

For my students and other programs, what was needed was a similar workbook-text giving examples, in English, from the Chinese news media. That is a future project.

Through the Internet, I had access to *The New York Times* online news site, from which I frequently drew. Although the Chinese government blocked such sites as *The Washington Post* and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), I had little problem finding examples of news stories from western sources. One of my conditions for working at GDUFS was having access to the Internet (other conditions included hot water for showers, a comfortable place to sleep and a kitchen -- all met quite well).

Despite censorship of the state-owned news media, at no time did anyone try to tell me what I could say or not say in a classroom. Discussion in class was free-wheeling.

All my classes were conducted in English, the only language I know. Dean Du initially suggested stationing an interpreter in class to explain or summarize some of my remarks. We never used one; it never seemed necessary. It was a wise course to keep my English simple and repeat from time to time. Students occasionally had difficulty expressing themselves, but often their questions were incisive and rewarding.

Their spoken English was far better than their written English. Writing required intense work, for which time to discuss and revise never was available. My only technique for improving written English was to keep them writing and revising on the basis of my corrections.

For the most part, they asked questions freely, although they felt surer asking questions after class rather than in class in front of their classmates. I often saved my answers to their outside-class questions for class time. The questions often reflected the

thinking in the group. I wanted everyone to hear the answer.

To obtain some idea of their English-writing level, I assigned a group of second-year students to write profiles of themselves in the third person. I asked them to write about their family, education, home town, ambition, accomplishments, hobbies and likes and dislikes.

What I got were brief essays describing themselves as shy, or anti-social (meaning they spoke little in public) or achieving nothing. When I complained about the negative approach of the profiles, I got back the answer that Chinese were trained to be modest, even deprecating about themselves.

In discussing the need to attribute copy to clearly identified sources or to separate fact from opinion in news writing, I also got the excuse that these practices were not the Chinese way. I growled that I was not teaching the Chinese way but the objective way of the west.

Students had difficulty reporting Western names, in much the same way western reporters often have difficulty with Chinese names. The confusion over the style for names is common throughout Asia.

They were unsure which was the given name or surname. They never broke away from the Chinese practice of using the full name on second reference. Or, just the given name. In the case of my name, students were unsure what to call me. I suggested Mr. Zeitlin. A Chinese journalist friend suggested they call me Professor Lin, Lin being a common name of Guangzhou. Eventually, most students called me Arnold. That was fine.

In preparing the classes for a mock news conference in which I was the subject, we spent a class discussing how to assemble background, prepare questions and how to choose a lead. I described news conferences as well as interviews as often a subtle conflict between interviewer and interviewee, each striving for control of the situation. I urged them to assert themselves.

Coverage of news conference was an example of a clash between Chinese and, what for lack of a better term, I call western news media values. As a reporter for *Guangdong Radio* described to me, reporters called to a news conference in China often are given news releases before the news conference outlining what they are to write.

"They are told what the news is," she said.

In a dreadful clash of values, private companies calling news conferences in China often obligingly slip red packets containing cash into the press kits of the attending reporters to assure coverage. Reporters expect the money.

After the class news conference, conducted in English, I had students write leads in class against deadline pressure. They then

wrote the rest of the story as homework for the following week's class.

In one class news conference, I commented in response to a question on the prospect of war in Iraq. In the second class, I mentioned my astonishment at the complete lack of coverage in the Chinese news media about the impending change in the Communist party's leadership at the party congress the week before. Not one report in the press or on TV or radio mentioned that Hu Jintao was about to replace President Jiang Zemin as party secretary general—until the change was announced officially.

I noted the contrast with the reporting and speculation in the U.S. news media prior to the November 2002 Congressional election.

I thought both remarks merited a news lead. A half dozen students mentioned the Iraq remark but not in a lead. One writer, in the bottom of a story, mentioned the party change remark. Instead, they concentrated on what I had said about my family and the difficulties of a long career of reporting abroad.

I turned a guest appearance by a Hong Kong woman journalist into a genuine news conference. Because our guest wanted to speak Mandarin, a language she rarely used in Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong, most of the Q&A was in Chinese. I thought the use of Chinese would produce more coherent stories than what I got back from the mock news conference in English. Not the case. Despite the Chinese Q&A, the stories—in English—were more clumsy than the stories from the English-language mock news conference.

I was hampered by a lack of knowledge of local custom in trying to assign work outside the classroom. Friends in the local news media gave me lists of sources for the students to seek. But they warned me that state and local officials rarely spoke to journalists and were less inclined to speak to students. That circumstances proved to be true. Students, more knowledgeable than I, were shyly reluctant to make official inquiries.

On the agenda for the future is an effort through the university to persuade officials it is in their own long-term interest to foster better reporting by cooperating with journalism students. This is a concept that in China is revolutionary.

We are back to the original question: What is the point of teaching—for want to a better term—western news media values and techniques—in English—to students in the People's Republic of China, who, if they enter the news media, will work under a regime suppressing free expression and a free news media?

In five months of teaching journalism in China, I've achieved one end—illustrating to these students that journalism is hard

work and not the easy ride many thought it was.

On my return to the United States the end of 2002, I told a friend, Ken Kashiwaha, who while based in Hong Kong for the American TV network ABC, covered Richard M. Nixon's China visit in 1972, that I taught journalism in Guangzhou. He responded:

"There is no journalism in China."

From his perspective, Ken Kashiwaha was correct.

But I have spent time with enthusiastic, motivated young people, almost all of whom were born since Deng Xiao-ping opened China to the world in 1979. They are thirsty for contact with the world outside China. These students are computer literate and Internet-aware (despite government restrictions on what they can download from the Net) and they have more information at their command than any Chinese generation for 5,000 years.

While it is likely that the news media will be last sector in China to be reformed and, perhaps, some day made free, to the extent that it happens at all will depend on these youngsters and those who follow them.

Here is a message to me from a young, highly regarded and almost fatally aware Chinese journalist:

"As my colleagues and friends, I face great dilemma: How can we keep our independence and enthusiasm?"

During these 3 years, many of my colleagues and friends quit and took other jobs. In my points, they are all clever, responsible and they have great news dreams too, but they choose to quit.

Although feeling disappointed sometimes, I still want to do better and better. I still own the dream of being a famous journalist. Maybe these feeling is normal during the growth of every person, isn't it?

Could you tell me whether you have encountered such dilemma? Could you give me some guidance?"

How can any journalist ignore such an appeal? My response:

"Despite reservations about the future of the news media in China, I urge you to continue with your news media career, at least for a while. You are young, gifted and aware of the circumstances. If China's news media is to emerge along with the rest of China as part of a modern, contributing state, the media will require dedicated, well educated and hard working men and women like you. Do not give up immediately, despite sad stories from your colleagues.

I have been fortunate to live and to work in the world's freest environment (not necessarily perfect, understand). I have differences, even conflicts with my editors and colleagues but never on the basis of ideology or bias. I have had the privilege, if not luxury, of writing and reporting what I have seen the way I wanted to report and write. I have not always been correct but I

have done the best I could with what material and competence I possess. I have had a career that has given me great satisfaction, if not wealth or fame....

I can only wish the same for you....Your example and that of many friends in China give me immense hope. You and they are part of the reason I find working in China so fascinating and absorbing. You have the opportunity in China, with its huge population, to be part of development that could change the world for the better. I would hate to be the person to tell you to turn away from that opportunity."

Finally, his response to that message:

"After I read your letter, I was greatly encouraged and my heart can't keep calm. Your words disappeared so much confusion in my mind. ...There is still a hopeful future, although the current facts are not satisfying.... I don't want to be the guy who make you feel disappointed.."

Those thoughts and that brief encounter are enough to give any long-time journalist satisfaction for a lifetime. ■

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# A NEVER ENDING STORY: Capabilities For The Media Professions?

*Frank Morgan*

*President, International Association for  
Media and Communication Research*

Australian university journalism graduates supposedly “Can’t write, can’t spell and can’t find a story” (Buckell, 2002). And that, we are told is unacceptable to the editors who will decide their professional futures. Which, again supposedly, is why “theory is giving way to workplace readiness” (ibid) in professional media courses.

The multitude of issues raised in this example is not new. Forty years ago, the Martin Report (1965) on Australian higher education found that the universities of that day were not prepared for either the rising tide of numbers then lapping at their sandstone doorsteps or for the burgeoning demand for technological – by definition, applied – knowledge. Instead of reforming the universities, and encouraging them to describe and explain and justify (i.e. theorise) the world in which they lived and worked, the Menzies, Holt and Gorton governments let them off the hook by establishing institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education that were to be ‘different but equal’ to the universities. Thus, public policy entrenched absurd and spurious distinctions between ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ knowledge, and teaching and research and a total misunderstanding of the relationship between theory and practice.

Theory is not measured by its level of abstraction but by the extent to which it describes, explains, justifies and puts into perspective what things are and how they work. Theories are thus not necessarily truly theoretical. Practicality becomes a measure of good theory. Practice, however, is always theoretical because it invites description, explanation, justification and framing, not to mention suggestions as to how it might be done differently or better.

Australian higher education policy completely overlooked the fact that the elite faculties in the old universities were professionally focussed – preparing doctors and lawyers and engineers. It also allowed academics to pretend that those professions were somehow more important, socially and culturally, and more rigorous intellectually than teaching or business or communication and media. All of which reduced the system's capability to take best advantage of its 1989 reunification.

Nor are these issues exclusive to Australia. The social and cultural tumult in Europe and North America during the late 1960s was driven not least by conflicting ideas about the role and function of the academy. That controversy persists. And, as the Western world's former colonies have emerged into the dazzling world of national independence, they too have had to wrestle the issues of how best to position their higher education systems. Reviews of the South Pacific Commission's regional media program (Morgan, 1986), the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (Morgan et al, 1989) and UNESCO's worldwide Communication Development Program (Morgan, 1995) all showed the widespread need (and demand) for media professionals to be not just technically skilful but highly capable. As too did Gaunt's (1991) study of the education and training of news people worldwide.

Capability requires knowledge and skill but they are not enough (Scheffler, 1965; Ryle, 1990). Capable practitioners also have a range of personal qualities including initiative, inventiveness, imagination, persistence and worldly wisdom. They reflect not only on action but also in action – which is implicit in Buckell's "workplace readiness" but in no way reduces or excludes a need for theory.

Academic research has always been defined in terms of objects and methods. When IAMCR, the International Association for Media and Communication Research, was established in the late 1950s most of its Sections formed around research methodologies. One of the Association's goals, however, was "to improve the practice of journalism" (IAMCR, 2002) and, by extension, the other media professions such as film and broadcasting. One Section of the Association made the field of professional education its object. For nearly fifty years, it has sought to describe, explain and justify – and thus improve – the education of people for the media professions, addressing the sorts of questions that Buckell raises: what do prospective media practitioners need to learn and how best should they do so? Some of that research has extended to asking what is the role of the humanities in that education.

Some have even questioned whether editors always know best. Neumann (1992) and others have observed that media consumption worldwide is either stagnant or in decline. Kelly (1999) has deplored "the myopia of the media", socially, politically and

culturally. Ledbetter (2003) described the failure of the technically specialist media to understand what they report and discuss or even to maintain their independence and scepticism. He cited the fields of finance and technology in particular. Health, education, environment and politics could be added to the list.

Many today bemoan what they believe to be a dulling of our humanity and a dimming of the enlightenment. They see darkness abroad on the earth, shrouding the hearts of the people. They read and see and hear of war and rumours of war, and they are troubled. They fear for their health, their wealth and their well-being. And they blame the media, which they find lacking in goodness and beauty and truth – and the power to make things better. They long for what they imagine was a simpler, lovelier past when people were supposedly more humane, when they communicated more directly with one another and when the media were less pervasive.

The past, however, was not all golden. Its imagined brightness often stands in contrast to a dark that is also more imagined than real. Not just in recent days and years but throughout time. And we need to remember that history is not inevitable: today's choices shape tomorrow's history. Nor is history reversible: there is no turning back. Nostalgia overlooks those facts. It also overlooks the fact that the media, like all technologies, are human inventions – for better or for worse, part of our response to experience, part of our culture.

We, and our forebears, have invented and developed the media as a response to the world and they have become part of that world. Some would say they have created the world. So, if the media pervade our world and our lives – and they do – we need to pause and reflect on the relationship between them and our humanity. And that includes the relationship between the media and what we call the humanities.

For much of the past 500 years, the humanities – our studies of humanity – have been epitomised in the Western world by the 'classics' – the study of Latin and Greek. More recently, the humanities have been seen to be philosophy and literature and art, as opposed to the physical sciences on the one hand and the practicalities of life on the other. Mathematics distinguishes between real and imaginary numbers. We have preferred the abstract and the imaginary to the actual and the real. These oppositions, I suggest, are no longer tenable. Especially in the education and practice of media professionals. The question is therefore not about professional media education and the humanities. It is about professional media education as a humanity.

The premises of my argument are these:

- communication does two things: it defines our humanity and it measures all media practice;
- media practice is the quintessential expression and embodiment of our contemporary humanity;
- if we are to make sense of contemporary human experience, including the place of media in our lives and the intricacies of professional media practice – which includes journalism and broadcasting and other forms of media production – we need a new view of humanity; and finally,
  - dichotomies, such as those between nature and culture, and technology and humanity, are false. Science and technology are central to our humanity and our culture. They are human inventions that have become a major part of our environment. Our response to the environment is what constitutes our culture. Notions of goodness, beauty and truth that do not take account of science and technology are meaningless.

For the psalmist of old, the question was: 'What is Man...?' For us, it is 'What is Humanity?' Which is not an easy question. The evening television news, like the dark chiaroscuros of El Greco and Goya, shows us all too often and all too starkly one of the dark and dreadful truths about humanity – 'man's inhumanity to man'.

Karl Erik Rosengren (2000) has argued that the ultimate vital sign – or sign of life – is responsiveness to the environment. The dead and the inert do not react to touch or taste or smell, or to light or sound. Plants and animals and automata do – but they do so more or less automatically, mechanically, by reflex or instinct, or occasionally by training.

Humans are not automata. Instead of reacting, they respond. And their responses are generally deliberate and thoughtful. They continually look for meaning and value: for goodness and beauty and truth and so on. Not that goodness or beauty or truth are universal or constant. That is what gives life its rich and variegated texture, and its enigmatic subtlety. But nobody is completely devoid of some idea of what is good and beautiful and true for them.

For Rosengren, the great landmarks of human evolution were:

- the development of a significantly bigger brain, that enabled our ancestors to think more cleverly than other animals;
- the development of a mouth that enabled them to speak and to sing rather than just bark and howl and shriek and scream; and
- the development of a hand that enabled them to hold tools and implements between their fingers and thumbs.

These laid the physical foundations of human

## Humanities And Humanity Defined

communication. On those foundations, our ancestors could begin to develop the four crucial – and mutually dependent – dimensions of communication. What Denis McQuail (1994) calls:

- reception: the ability to perceive and make sense of the world around them – using their brains rather than their size and strength to hunt and gather, and later, farm and graze the earth. Later still, reception would provide us with the basis for science and art, religion and technology;

- ritual: the ability to form and maintain communities – to collaborate in groups – be they couples or families or tribes or companies or nation states – to share understandings, beliefs and values, and to pursue common interests and a common good;

- display: the ability to show themselves and their wares off to the world; to express beliefs and values and desires; and to woo and persuade others to share those things – which underpins a whole range of activities including art and advertising, politics, propaganda and PR;

- transmission: the ability – that draws on the previous three – to exchange messages with one another in a whole variety of ways, for all sorts of purposes and with all manner of results.

Initially, people had only their own bodies with which to communicate. Later they developed other technologies that allowed them to make music, to draw and paint and sculpt, to write, to send messages from afar. A thousand years ago, the Chinese invented printing. Five hundred years ago, their invention was taken to Europe. Then, during the nineteenth century, other technologies were invented, that could be used for communication – the telegraph, the photograph, the printing press, electricity and the cinema. Sound-recording, radio, television and video would follow during the twentieth century and, most recently, digital electronics and satellites and fibre optics.

Each new technology allowed the development of a new media form. It also prompted its users to learn new languages and new modes of expression. Journalists learned to write as reporters rather than correspondents. Radio broadcasters learned to write for the ear rather than for the eye. Television makers drew on theatre and film to learn to tell their stories visually instead of as 'radio with pictures' – to express ideas rather than only illustrate them (Gombrich, 1979). And website and multimedia makers are still in the process of learning how best to compose words and sounds and pictures and various activities to fulfil the 'multiplicity' and 'interactivity' of their chosen form.

The burgeoning of new technologies and new media forms also provided new opportunities for business and commerce, and the twentieth century saw a flourishing of large and powerful

media corporations. It also saw large-scale attempts by nation states to mobilise the media – sometimes to build and develop new nations, sometimes to entrench and expand old empires, sometimes to nurture democracy and sometimes to suppress it.

People dream of a golden age, now gone, when the world was supposedly a better place. Similar concerns confronted the American scholar and journalist Walter Lippmann during the social and cultural upheavals that followed the First World War eighty years ago. From our point of view, the world seems to have been simpler then. Cinema and the press had the media landscape to themselves. Radio and television and digital media were figments of a fictive and distant future.

But it was not so simple for the people of the time. Early cinema wrestled with whether to devote itself to diversionary entertainment or to critical documentation of the human condition. Journalism was still, largely, the daily reporting and analysis of events and issues for print publication. Neither technological convergence nor cultural divergence had begun to stir the waters. Yet, people wondered why journalism had not done more to guarantee personal and political freedom.

Lippmann (1922) argued that even a free communication system – what we would call ‘free media’ – could not guarantee truth and freedom in human society. The problem was not that the state is inherently oppressive. Nor was it the imperfection of markets. The problem lay in the very nature of news and newsgathering, in the psychology of the audience and “the scale of modern life.” I wonder what he would make of the scale of human life today – as the human race turns from being rural to being predominantly urban. The question is not one of morals or politics but of meaning.

Lippmann’s arguments with John Dewey (1927) over the nature of meaning are well and widely known. Can knowledge be captured like a picture or can it only be generated in conversation and debate? Exploring these questions, James Carey (1989) reminds us very clearly just how intimately our views on media and communication depend on our views of humanity.

What then do media professionals need to know, if they are to express and explore humanity – and particularly goodness, beauty and truth – in the media and thus help us all communicate more successfully?

First, like all professionals, they must know how to respond to, and deal with, the unknown. Whether they are going to work in news and information or in dramatic fiction and fantasy, media people, no less than doctors and lawyers and engineers, need to know how to respond to and make sense of the unknown. They must be curious and they must be quick. They must also know

how to surprise others with new insights, new discoveries and new realisations. They need to entertain – not just to make people laugh but more importantly to catch and hold their attention (Barthes, 1978).

Media people need to know how to recognise and how to construct a story – be it fact or fiction – that shows the narrative links – the cause and effect relationships – between events. And they must establish the characters and motivations of the protagonists. All stories are about someone doing something with or for or to someone else, somewhere or other at some time or other, for some reason or other.

Media people have to know how to form and maintain relationships – communities of belief and value, understanding and trust – with their subjects, their sources, their colleagues, their managers, their proprietors and their publics.

They must be able to express themselves clearly, powerfully and persuasively in whatever medium they choose – be it words or sounds or pictures or combinations of all three – and also use whatever technology is required to produce and publish or distribute their material and their ideas.

These abilities are essential if people are going to work in the media. Beyond them, they need also to understand the environment in which the media operate – economically, politically, socially and culturally. They need to know what is legal, what is moral and what is ethical in what they do. And they need to make what they do comprehensible and affordable.

We may well believe in freedom of expression and freedom of access to information. Media professionals – again like doctors and lawyers and engineers – earn their licences to practice through a tacit contract with the public. The price of that licence is to be honest and truthful and fair. And the same applies to their industries.

The media industries are nowhere near as powerful and omniscient as some of them pretend and some of their critics fear. They rely on ordinary people being willing to spend their time and money, effort and goodwill, to obtain and consume the goods and services that they produce. The salutary fact is that worldwide media audiences and media consumption are either stagnant or in decline. People are simply not prepared to pay what they are asked for what they are offered.

Which may help to explain Rupert Murdoch's recent mammoth losses. News Corporation's chief executive conceded that the company had made a strategic mistake. It had focussed on technology and commercial deals, such as takeovers instead of the quality of media content: better films and television programs, better newspapers and magazines, better books and better on-line

services. And better has to mean 'more communicative' – things that help people make better sense of, and better responses to, the world they live in; that help them form and maintain better relationships and communities – which is increasingly a life and death issue in multicultural societies such as those in Europe and in Australia; that helps them exchange messages more effectively and efficiently. We could say 'more humane'.

To be capable media practitioners, then, people need knowledge and skill and a range of vital personal qualities. The challenge to their teachers is how best they should learn those things. And that answer begins with research – a systematic enquiry into what those capabilities are. Film, television and radio producers, for example, have to be able not only to conceive a vision of their production projects. They must also manage the human, material and financial resources required to realise their visions. But, first they must muster those resources, something they are unlikely to learn to do if their curriculum guarantees them a budget. Likewise, the arts of media production are largely performing arts. They have to be performed within the boundaries of budgets and schedules. Again, these have vital implications for curriculum. There is a close and crucial connection between what is to be learned and how that learning is to be done.

Together with a repertoire of professional knowledge – which includes being able to work creatively and productively with increasingly sophisticated but surprisingly cheap and simple technology – aspiring media professionals need a sound knowledge of the contexts in which they will have to work. Which in a global world is becoming more and more local and varied. And they need 'to know what they are talking (or writing or making pictures) about' – an equally sound knowledge of the content that they will have to deal with.

And, if media people are to learn these things, they can only do so by doing them. None of us learns to speak or to swim or to love by only learning about them (Scheffler, 1965; Ryle, 1990). Media people must learn the arts of reflective practice – of reflecting both on and in practice (Schon, 1983) – and they must do so in practice. Thus the physical and social sciences, and the mundane practicalities of life, will be brought together with philosophy, literature and art to form a new humanity and to generate an ongoing and lively culture. ■

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# Cyberspace News On Campus: The South Pacific Experience

*Since 1998, Pacific Journalism Online training website at the University of the South Pacific provided an innovative and problem-based approach to internet news gathering and production based on real and major media assignments. Among events used as integrated journalism training assignments for student journalists from the twelve member countries of the regional university have been George Speight's putsch (May 2000), the Fiji barracks mutiny (November 2000), Fiji General Election (August 2001), treason trials and court martial (2002) and several international conferences based at Nadi and Suva. In addition, the students have covered key events on campus such as investigating alleged corruption by the student administration. In this article, the author outlines the "reality" course methodology and strategies in providing news training from a campus-based newsroom.*

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## **MARTIAL LAW DECLARED: PJO NOW OFFLINE**

**Further updates:**

### **UTS Journalism Department hosting USP students**

A Wansolwara reporter was threatened at Parliament this afternoon and ordered out of the parliamentary complex. He described the scene as tense. A 48-hour military curfew was imposed from 6pm tonight. This was followed by a declaration of martial law. The Pacific Journalism Online website communications have been temporarily suspended by university authorities. (*Pacific Journalism Online*, 2000)

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**A**rguments over whether journalism education should be more theory based with the ideal of "reflective practitioners" (Reese, 1999: 13) or grounded mostly in sound practice have long been a feature of contemporary professional pedagogy debates. The contrasting views are not necessarily contradictory. According to Deuze (2000: 8), debate on journalism education goals should "not

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be informed by a dichotomy between theory and practice, but by the need for self-critical reflection and excellent didactics and teaching methodology." Deuze, who has also argued for "open sourced" media (2001), says the internet "blurs the boundaries of what we may see as journalism — but one can argue that this would be a top-down definition of journalism." A case for a more practice-based journalism education in the United States was persuasively presented by the Freedom Forum's *Winds of Change* report advocating more commitment to producing "cutting edge" journalists, graduates "ready to infuse new energy and new ideas into the newsrooms" (Medsger, 1996: 68; Hirst, 1997).

Most vocation-based journalism courses in Australia produce in-house newspapers, magazines and e-zines on the internet (Patching, 2001: 129). In the case of the South Pacific, there is still an acute shortage of trained and educated journalists (Masterton, 1989; Layton, 1993; Robie, 1999) and there is little or no community or second tier newspaper, television, online or radio "cushion" before fledgling reporters are plunged into the tough challenges of national newsrooms. Online and print publications at Pacific university journalism schools have thus been vital training tools.

Ironically, six copies of Betty Medsger's *Winds of Change* report bound for the University of the South Pacific (USP) <sup>1</sup> Journalism Programme were hijacked by rebel gunmen at the height of the political upheaval in the Fiji Islands in May 2000 (Robie, 2002a:147) while student journalists were involved in an intense cyberspace training project covering rogue businessman George Speight's attempted coup. The books were later recovered by police investigators after the rebels abandoned their occupation of Parliament.

The "baptism of fire" challenge for Pacific journalists presents the region's three university based journalism schools — USP, University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and Divine Word University (Madang, PNG) — with unique and difficult problems. While seeking to produce critically reflective journalists, they must all ensure that graduates can be effective political, police and economic reporters and analysts from day one of their careers.

Following earlier development by UPNG, one university, USP, adopted online journalism and media convergence as a major educational tool and strategy comparable to some Australian journalism schools. Convergence (or multimedia) journalism involves reshaping news material "so that one piece on content appears in several forms" (Quinn, 2002: 84).

Since 1998, *Pacific Journalism Online* training website at USP has provided a problem-based learning (PBL) approach to internet news gathering and production based on real and major media assignments (Sheridan-Burns, 1997). Among events used as

integrated journalism training exercises for student journalists from the twelve member countries of the regional university have been Speight's putsch, the barracks mutiny (November 2000), Fiji general election (August 2001), treason trials and a court martial (2002) and several international conferences based at Nadi and Suva. In addition, students have covered major events on campus such as investigating alleged corruption by the student administration over several years. This paper will outline the 'reality' course methodology and strategies in providing news training from a Pacific campus-based newsroom.

New Zealand has been rather under-represented in online journalism training development. Auckland University of Technology's School of Communication Studies has developed a course in this area, *New Media Journalism*, aimed at a balance between analysis of internet media issues and professional practice, but it has not so far developed its own actual publication online (although a specialist *Science Site* <[www.thesciencesite.info/](http://www.thesciencesite.info/)> was established by the university administration in 2002 with journalism students filing some content). Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki also developed an online training news service at Taranaki New Zealand <[www.taranakinz.com/news/](http://www.taranakinz.com/news/)> by students the same year (Tucker, 2002). However, several Australian university journalism schools have used internet-based publications as a major training tool for several years — notably University of Technology Sydney's *Reportage Online* and Queensland University of Technology's *Communiqué Online*.

According to Nisar Keshvani (2000), *Communiqué Online* <[www.communique.qut.edu.au](http://www.communique.qut.edu.au)> was developed from 1996 to address the "growing importance" of the online medium: "A 'real-world' online newsroom was set up to provide students with a practical, hands-on working environment, equipping them with necessary skills to function and operate an online newsroom." The publication objective was two-fold: to develop a web presence, and to give students an opportunity to work on an online newspaper.

The online publication was introduced as part of an existing course, *News Production* for third-year students. Students filed reports for Queensland University of Technology's (QUT's) in-house programmes on the multi-cultural radio broadcaster, *4EB*, *QUT News* on community television station, *Bris31*, and in-house publications *Communiqué* and *Communiqué Online*. Pioneered by lecturers Suellen Tapsall and Carolyn Varley with a group of students and support staff, the website used a masthead, template design and content from the print edition of *Communiqué*. It won the Journalism Education Association's Best Publication (Any

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Medium) Ossie Award that year. In 1998, it was redeveloped by a student and staff group coordinated by Keshvani, a Singaporean student, and online audio and video streaming were introduced. Four editions with about 40 percent original content were produced with the team winning the inaugural Dr Charles Stuart Ossie Award for Best Student Publication. In 1999, *Communiqué Online* was formally incorporated into the course structure as a fourth medium with staff contact time and workshops. Keshvani (2002) explains:

“With *Communiqué Online*, the students are given a quick refresher with HTML-ing and how to adapt their journalism skills to online. That is the individual component. The group component to assessment is basically the cohesiveness and skills as a team to put the online edition to bed ... [Also] their news judgement as a team, subbing each other’s sections [is assessed].”

*Reportage Online* <[www.reportage.uts.edu.au](http://www.reportage.uts.edu.au)> evolved out of a quarterly investigative and media news magazine, *Reportage*, and is dedicated to high quality independent journalism. According to editor Sue Joseph (2002), the online edition has a “broader agenda” than its predecessor. Like the ACIJ [the host, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism], *Reportage Online* is committed to the idea that the media can play a role in making those in power accountable to the public. No topic or question is beyond the boundaries of *Reportage Online*. Those with power include media companies, which should also be critiqued and questioned.

*Reportage Online* publishes features, news items, in-depth analysis, photojournalism, essays and ongoing reportage of issues. The editorial team believes the website tries to involve the public in open forums and encourages feedback, saying it “aim[s] to fill some gaps in the media agenda and to give a voice to groups who struggle to be heard” in the mainstream media: *Reportage Online* is primarily produced by University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) journalism students (some of whom are professional journalists), with two masters level online producers, and staff. However, the website also welcomes contributions from outside UTS, including journalists, academics and other journalism students.

The Department of Writing, Journalism and Social Inquiry at UTS also offers two online journalism courses, *Online Journalism 1* and *Online Journalism 2*, with the second semester’s more advanced module including audio streaming (video streaming is being introduced in 2003). All students undertake major investigative style reports and then publish them on the internet as online design packages <[www.journalism.uts.edu.au/subjects/oj1/index.html](http://www.journalism.uts.edu.au/subjects/oj1/index.html)>.

## Uni Tavour (UPNG)

The University of Papua New Guinea's training publication *Uni Tavour* played an important role in the formation of Pacific journalists for more than two decades. *Tavour* means "conch shell" in the Tolai language of the Gazelle peninsula. The shell was the paper's masthead logo and the original version was designed by journalism student Robert Elowo, who died in a tragic car accident in 1976 while working for NBC's *Radio Kundiawa*. Uni is derived from the university.

*Uni Tavour* was launched on 24 July 1975 by the late New Zealand journalist and educator Ross Stevens. The first edition carried news items, including social and sports events. It comprised four A4 size pages and had a circulation of 200 copies. Over the following years, *Uni Tavour* was witness to many political and social changes (see Robie, 1995; Waibauru, 1994). Student reporters were assigned rounds and they covered anything of news value for their readers. Recalls former Vice-Chancellor Joseph Sukwianomb (2001):

"*Uni Tavour* came [...] to play a significant role in the university scene in terms of changing ideas [...] generally about that period from independence [...] the campus was very vibrant, very active. The students were well aware of what was happening. This was the time of student demonstrations and strikes. They were all reported from student angles by student journalists."

The newspaper characterised the integrated learning journalism approach adopted over three decades at UPNG. The "liberal-professional" philosophy underpinning the school included a core programme, which supported a balance between theoretical and practical (Robie, 1997: 122). In February 1995, with support from a national daily newspaper, the *Post-Courier*, *Uni Tavour* made a transition to publishing as a tabloid. Twelve editions were produced that year using four-colour with half-webs on the *Post-Courier's* Goss Urbanite press. *Uni Tavour* won the 1995 Ossie Award for Best Overall Newspaper, the first time a South Pacific publication had won such an award. Student journalists working on *Uni Tavour* covered several major news stories, including the 1997 Sandline mercenary crisis, many national political protests and riots (including one clash on campus that left several students wounded from tear gas canisters), five campus-based murder cases, a bank robbery in which a security guard was shot and wounded, environmental crises and corruption.

In 1996-97, *Uni Tavour's* emphasis shifted to producing an online newspaper as well as the print edition. In January 1996, it became the first newspaper in the South Pacific to produce a web edition, *Uni Tavour Online*, hosted by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) at UTS <[www.journalism.uts.edu.au/acij/](http://www.journalism.uts.edu.au/acij/)

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old\_acij/JOURNUPNG/UniTavur/UniT\_index.html>. UPNG Journalism Studies also began publishing an interactive email listserve news service, *Papua Niugini Nius* <www.pactok.net/docs/nius/> in cooperation with *Pactok*, a Pacific non-government and educational cooperative that encouraged low-cost communications. It was routine practice for all UPNG first, second and third-year students to cover daily news for print or online as part of their training for the two-year Diploma of Media Studies (DIMS) and four-year Bachelor of Journalism (BJourn) degree.

## Wansolwara and Pacific Journalism Online (USP)

Fiji has a highly developed media industry compared with most other Pacific countries, rivalled only by Papua New Guinea. Until 2000, it possessed four major monthly or bimonthly news magazine groups, *Islands Business International*, *Pacific Islands Monthly* (Murdoch-owned), *The Review* and *Fiji First* (both locally owned). Although both *PIM*, the region's oldest and most influential magazine, and *Fiji First* closed that year, in 2002 there were three national daily newspapers — *The Fiji Times* (Murdoch) and locally owned *Daily Post* and *Fiji Sun*. Broadcasters are Fiji Television Ltd, which has one free-to-air channel and two pay channels; the private Communications Fiji Ltd (FM96) radio group; and the state-owned Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Ltd. *The Daily Post* and *The Review* news magazine share a website, <www.FijiLive.com>, while *The Fiji Times* is hosted at FM96's <www.FijiVillage.com> website. Two military coups staged in 1987 by the third-ranked military officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, followed by Speight's putsch in May 2000 have caused serious political pressure on the media already weakened by limited training and experience.

The regional Pacific Journalism Programme was founded at the University of the South Pacific in 1994 in the post-coup era.<sup>2</sup> It was initially funded by the French Government as an aid project for four years, including the funding of a coordinator (a former head of the French-language BBC service, François Turmel) and a print lecturer, Philip Cass. The USP flagship training publication *Wansolwara* was created by first-year students with the encouragement of Wewak-born Cass because there was “no real outlet for journalism students' work or any way for them to show what they could do, short of actually working for the media or finding a rare work experience slot” (2001). The Solomons pidgin title *Wansolwara* — “one ocean, one people” — was adopted, expressing the idea that all those who were born in or live in the

Pacific were bound together by the ocean (Cass, 1999). Cass found that publishing the first edition was not easy. But by 1997 *Wansolwara* was on a stronger financial footing and it was starting to gain a reputation for breaking stories.

The USP programme, as at UPNG, was always under-resourced. At the time that French Government funding ended by the close of 1997, the programme had produced its first six graduates, all double major degree holders. However, only two of these graduates entered the news media. Since then, with core funding by USP's School of Humanities, the programme produced fifty-three graduates by 2001 — forty-five double major three-year BA degree holders and eight with the new two-year Diploma in Pacific Journalism (DipPJ). Most work in the media. The programme has steadily moved toward media convergence with equal weight given on courses to print/online, radio and television journalism.

Developing cohesiveness and a sense of media identity for Pacific Islands students is a challenge and essential as they are drawn from a wide variety of language, cultural and educational backgrounds, mostly from member countries of USP. Some, as in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, come from countries with well-established concepts of the role of the media in democracies while others are from nations where the political elite and the establishment see journalists as a threat.

In the first semester, 2002, only one student out of some 45 students, an exchange environmental media exchange scholar from Australia, used English as a first language. Two other non-Pacific Islander students — from Germany and from Nigeria — speak and write English as a second language. This creates challenging difficulties as students wrestle with grammar and syntax to work for a predominantly English language media when English is rarely a mother tongue. (One journalism academic, who coined the term "PiNGLISH", once asked whether "Correct English is the best language for teaching journalism in Papua New Guinea," where Tok Pisin and Motu are the main tongues (Moore, 1995: 71)).

The university provided little or no funding for actual journalism news production so this meant pressure on the programme staff to develop creative ways of funding for *Wansolwara*; its companion daily newspaper, *Spicol Daily* (see Robie, 2000) published annually for a week each September; and *Pacific Journalism Online's* internet training news <[www.usp.ac.fj/journ](http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ)>.

*Radio Pasifik*, the FM88.8 station owned and run on campus in Suva by the USP Students' Association since 1996, which relied heavily on the journalism programme for daily news and current affairs and was threatened with closure on several occasions, and a new television news magazine programme, *WansolVisin* (started in 2002), also depended on funding initiatives.

## Wansolwara (Print)

*Wansolwara* is a 16 to 24 page newspaper published twice a semester in both online and 80 gm bond paper editions with four-colour editorial and advertising on the wrap around cover pages. Since it was founded, it has relied on advertising revenue (raised by the students) to fund production costs. As this provided the springboard for the online news role of *Pacific Journalism Online*, the operation of this paper will be analysed first. At the start of 1998, after the author arrived at USP, the paper was reorganised from a voluntary unassessed publication by the students to a structured compulsory component of the journalism courses to address student demands for assessment. As the newspaper was in the red at the time, a formal rate card and financial structure was set up for selling advertising space. A special purpose account was set up for the newspaper within the university bursar's office. A US\$10,000 seeding grant for one year was also provided in 1998 by the British Government aid agency DFID, which included the purchase of a laser printer with A3 printing capacity for page proofs. The grant also paid for four editions of the paper in 1998/9, enabling it to become sustainable.

Currently the newspaper involves elements from seven of the programme's nine dedicated journalism courses (in a 20-module BA degree or 10-module diploma). The print edition is integrated with the programme website, *Pacific Journalism Online*. *PJO* was founded by the author in 1998, with both an online edition and archive and a parallel *Wansolwara Online* publication, <[www.usp.ac.fj/journ/docs/news/index.html](http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ/docs/news/index.html)>, with separate news and current affairs stories filed daily. UNESCO provided a small seed grant to fund software and to establish the website.

First year students in *Introduction to Journalism* and *Media Law and Ethics* become the reporters for both the newspaper and online daily news, filing 20 news stories each semester for 20 percent of their course assessment. Second year students in the *Print and Online Journalism* course become the subeditors, photographers and cartoonists (and often the key reporters for splash and lead stories) for 40 percent assessment, while the editor is usually drawn from specialist final year courses, *Journalism Production* (equivalent to QUT's *News Production*) or *Special Topics in Journalism: Advanced Print and Online Media*. A liftout 'Insight Report' thematic in-depth section is produced by the *International Journalism* and *Journalism Research* courses (40 percent assessment for two 1500-word news features).

Teaching is based on "three instructional formats": formal lectures, practical workshops and current affairs news forums and tests for a total of seven contact hours a week (in real time, it

actually involves evenings and some weekend work totalling about twenty hours a week). Topics include desktop publishing and layout; photography, photo-editing and captioning, internet publishing; and work on publication projects. Lecture topics include texts and images, the history and development of press photography, photography as information, composing and cropping the photograph, image, computing, internet publishing, media and government, media and public trust, propaganda and the media, press councils and trade unions, and subediting work on *Wansolwara* and *PJO*. (USP Calendar, 2002: 174)

Journalism production students working on the newspaper and online hold a weekly main editorial planning conference every Monday morning and develop editorial strategies. While they have clearly defined staff job descriptions and course outline objectives to fulfill, the editorial teams have a large degree of project autonomy and flexibility (characteristic of the campus press) while also maintaining their independence from both the student representative body and university authorities, providing they meet assessment criteria. The objective is to publish a newspaper to professional standards but with a news agenda clearly independent of mainstream media.

During briefings with students, conducted in the first week of the semester, the newsroom production process, the news-gathering roster, and newsroom task roles are explained and assigned. This follows the advertising of the key posts such as *Wansolwara* editor, *Wansolwara Online/Pacific Journalism Online* editor, *Spicol Daily* editor and *Radio Pasifik* news director, and newsroom lab assistant (a part-time paid position comparable to other university labs operated by IT Services). All students are assessed for the newspaper production component of the course *Print and Online Journalism* against formal job descriptions (such as editor, chief-of-staff, chief-subeditor) listed in the Online Classroom web resource. Assessed work on each edition of the newspaper counts for 20 per cent of the semester assessment.

## Pacific Journalism Online and Wansolwara Online

*PJO* was created in May 1998 and developed by the author to provide an Internet publishing training arena and to provide interactive teaching resources (*Online Classroom*) for Pacific students. Three years later *Online Classroom* included course outlines for all nine journalism courses and core teaching materials. The idea of the website was to provide daily news under continual deadline pressure (not provided by the newspaper) and a lasting news archive (not provided by the campus radio). The *PJO* home page was treated as a news front page with links to *Online Classroom*

sections such as Ethics and Media Law and student websites. Understandable, given that few Pacific students have home computers, *PJO* rapidly became a popular and well-used site by most students at the university. The "open house" interactive sections such as *Talanoa* (external) and Journalism Workshop (internal) message boards were especially popular.

*PJO* is used as a tool to teach students the benefits of news media convergence in island states. An online editor is selected at the same time as the print editor, usually a student enrolled in JN303 Journalism Production. Both editor's roles are given equal weighting, but the online editor often finds it more demanding because there is usually no team to support him or her in coverage, except during major news event coverage such as the Speight coup or the Fiji general election when students are rostered. In the first three years of *PJO*, the online editor's main role was to also upload the online edition of the *Wansolwara* newspaper and to upload almost daily news updates filed by student reporters. The editing and uploading is supervised by journalism staff.

The saga of a controversial two-month-long temporary shutdown of *PJO* website has been well documented (Cass, 2002; Revington, 2000; Robie, 2001b, 2001c; Rose, 2000). *PJO* covered the 2000 Fiji coup intensely for ten days until it was closed by USP administrators on 29 May 2000, the day of declaration of martial law, after Speight supporters had trashed Fiji Television offices the night before. What emerged during this controversy was a surprise expectation expressed by then Vice-Chancellor Esekia Solofa (2000) that journalism students should be doing "simulated" journalism instead of USP's traditional training through "real" journalism. The real approach was endorsed by New Zealand High Commissioner Tia Barrett when he remarked at the 2000 USP Journalism awards presentation:

"The past six months have seen a major upheaval in Fiji, twice in fact, and of such stuff are the dreams of journalists made. What an opportunity to practise the theory and exercise the training from the classroom! You students will no doubt have stories of what you did during the crisis, and that was perhaps the best training possible" (Barrett, 2000).

Almost two months following the closure, on July 25, the forty-strong academic staff of the School of Humanities' Board of Studies passed a unanimous resolution condemning the administration over the shutdown of the website. One important justification given by the academics was that the journalism website provided important information for staff and student security. A statement also said academic staff considered the closure "unsound pedagogically" and the journalism website "provided outstanding and excellent training for the students in that it involved reporting

and commenting on real issues" (cited by Robie, 2001b: 54).

When *PJO* was closed by USP, the ACIJ in Sydney established a temporary USP journalism coup report <[journalism.uts.edu.au/archive/coup.html](http://journalism.uts.edu.au/archive/coup.html)> online and posted stories there until August in a partnership between students at both universities (ibid.: 51). As a result of the closure, the website policy was modified to provide clearer separation between the news training functions of *PJO* and the *Online Classroom* curriculum resource. This development was taken a stage further in July 2001 when the website was relaunched with a redesigned home page, and *Wansolwara Online* became the main news section with *Online Classroom* displaying a new logo separating out the curricular resources. These changes were made in preparation for coverage of the Fiji general election. Editorial independence was pledged.

*PJO's* vigorous coverage of major news events has been well-rewarded by the annual Journalism Education Association (JEA) Ossie Awards. It began regular news coverage more than a year before Fiji had its first major print news website, *FijiLive.com* in the lead-up to the May 1999 General Election, then followed with well-regarded and insightful coverage of the Speight putsch, the post-coup election in August 2001. *PJO* won the Dr Charles Stuart Prize for best overall publication for the coup coverage after winning the Ossie for best occasional publication the previous year. Print edition of *Wansolwara* was highly recommended for best regular publication in both 1999 and 2000 (PANPA Bulletin, 2001), and won it in 2002. Over a four-year period (1999-2001), the students won a total of ten JEA awards or highly commended citations.

*Wansolwara* and *Wansolwara Online* have more clearly defined editorial policies than the mainstream news media. For example, they were the only South Pacific print newspapers or websites that actually had an editorial charter (adopted in 1998). The charter, displayed publicly online, and the United Nations student journalist code are used as the newspaper's ethical framework (*Wansolwara*, 1998). Some charter objectives parallel those of *City Voice*, a now defunct New Zealand community newspaper that has spearheaded local public journalism (Venables, 2001).

As a free campus-based and Pacific regional community newspaper with an online edition published by the USP journalism programme, *Wansolwara* declared that it was "committed to freedom of information and expression" through quality independent news reports, feature articles and analysis in the South Pacific region. It also seeks to "promote good governance", "ensure coverage of the activities and concerns of the relatively poor", and to contribute to "debate of ethical and media issues." The United Nations Student

## The Pacific News 'Reality' Experience

## The Speight Scoop 2000

Press Rights Charter declares that the student press “should be free from regulations by any organ of the government, or by university authorities” and “free from regulations by other student organizations” (Ramirez, 1989; Robie, 1998: 22).

To cover the 2001 Fiji General Election, *Wansolwara* and *Wansolwara Online* adapted a code used for East Timor's post-independence General Election, which included such universal values as “USP student journalists shall not be part of any political party structure” and “shall report in a balanced manner — without fear or favour for any political party” (Robie, 2002c: 8).

Within minutes of the news of the hostage taking by attempted coup front man George Speight being flashed on *Radio Fiji* news on the 10am bulletin on 19 May 2000 — scooped by Tamani Nair, one of the final-year students on *Journalism Production* attachment — the USP journalism programme began its coverage of the political crisis.

“We already had a team of reporters down at the protest march in downtown Suva that morning (which later erupted into rioting); the news editors set up our radio and television monitors; reporters were dispatched to Parliament; the television class was cancelled and a crew sent downtown to Suva where they filmed footage of the riots and arson in the capital” (Robie, 2001b: 48).

As reporters returned with their stories and digital pictures, the journalism programme posted their edited files onto *Pacific Journalism Online* <<http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ/docs/news/coup74.html>> [coup archive] By the time martial law was declared ten days later, on 29 May, the students had posted 109 stories, dozens of soundbites and scores of digital photographs. In addition, journalism staff and other academics, such as in the History/Politics Department, wrote analytical pieces.

But for the first day, the team “stumbled through the hours, in some cases overcome with shock and the trauma” over the crisis.

“One talented 20-year-old student was so traumatised that he couldn't write about what he saw. He went home shaking. However, he recovered by the next day and took a leading role in the coverage for the next three months, finally winning an award for his coup efforts” (Robie 2001b: 50).

The university eventually closed and sent its five thousand students home. But a small core group of journalism students managed to see through the first weekend of political mayhem. On Monday morning, 22 May, three rostered shifts were organised among the student reporters and editors to cope with the curfew

— morning and afternoon blocks, and an overnigher comprising students who actually lived on campus. Sometimes reporters slept in the newsroom while covering the crisis.

## Fiji General Election 2001

Forty-five students were involved in coverage of the Fiji General Election, representing eight countries, at least a dozen languages, and three main religions — Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Naturally, the largest group of student journalists was from Fiji, twenty-five, or almost half. The next largest group was from Samoa, seven; five came from the Solomon Islands, three from Tuvalu, two from Tonga, and one each from Kiribati, Marshall Islands and the Indian Ocean republic of the Maldives — the latter being the only international student from outside the regional country members. (Robie, 2002c: 6)

The students were organised into three rostered shifts with two overall online chief editors. One student editor, from Fiji, was responsible for the overall news selection and emphasis on *Wansolwara Online*, and the other, from Samoa, was primarily responsible for the electorate candidates and election updates for all seventy one seats. They were assisted by five student subeditors. The chief-of-staff was a 29-year-old former radio sports journalist from Fiji who had never covered news previously. The shifts were in groups of five or six students working seven days a week in three time slots. One experienced student acted as a rewrite "anchor" while three were assigned for *Wansolwara Online's* own coverage. Daily news conferences were held at 12 noon and 5.45pm for post mortems on the previous day's coverage and to discuss the handling of the day's developing stories. Between 21 July and 12 September (local time — the day of the Twin Towers terrorism attack in the United States), *Wansolwara Online* published 178 news stories and features on the election.

## Other coverage

Treason trials and a military court martial during 2002, and several international conferences based at Nadi and Suva, were also used as training venues for the students on both online and print assignments. Usually this sort of coverage involves short bursts of three or four days of intensive reporting and editing with multiple deadlines and updates during each day. Among events covered that year were a symposium on land conflict in the Pacific and a media freedom conference at USP in Suva, and a UNICEF international youth conference in the tourist town of Nadi, a three-hour drive

from Suva. The last conference coverage involved eleven students supervised by a senior student (who had previously been deputy chief-of-staff of a local daily newspaper) and the filing of stories and pictures by email.

## Conclusion

Pacific student journalists at USP have been frequently assigned to multimedia cover of national and regional news events as part of their training, sometimes arguably before they are at a “prepared” stage in terms of their journalism education. However, the reality in the South Pacific is that once students graduate they are expected to take their place in the newsroom, often reporting on big stories from the first week. A 1999 survey of fifty-nine journalists in Fiji’s newsrooms showed that 47 percent (mostly school leavers) have no formal training and thus graduates face a far higher expectation of their abilities than they would usually face immediately in countries such as Australia or New Zealand (Robie, 1999: 181). For example, while on attachment in their final-year, student journalists often cover Parliament and the courts, and their stories may be carried as headline reports on that night’s *Fiji One* television news. So it is essential that they learn in a challenging “pressure cooker” training context, facing the reality of deadlines and news production stresses from semester one and starting with their very first journalism module. They also experience public accountability and ethical dilemmas at an early stage.

The USP journalism students filing online news stories produce them routinely in a context where Fiji’s three national dailies do not have hands-on news websites, as the Papua New Guinean newspapers have (Although selected print stories are carried on hosted sites at other webservers).<sup>3</sup> Only the USP students work in a totally multimedia news format environment; no other Pacific journalism school offers such a programme.

Most students respond to these challenges in creative and engaging ways. While the pedagogy of South Pacific journalism programmes, especially at USP, has developed uniquely, there are important parallels with the praxis displayed with some Australian university journalism schools, notably Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

The value of this “real world” approach to teaching, as Keshvani describes it, was observed by Professor Mark Pearson in his review of the USP programme (2002). He noted that journalism was one of the first programmes (along with the Law School) to pioneer online teaching at USP — in fact, throughout the Pacific region. Pearson also found that the extent to which the programme

had developed an online journalism teaching resource, including extensive curriculum materials and interactive teaching devices, was “admirable”:

“The publications and productions created by the students in the online and print fields are of a world standard ... Staff and students are to be commended for this marvellous performance. Clearly, the mix of theory and practice is paying dividends” (Pearson, 2002: 6). ■

## NOTES

1. The University of the South Pacific is one of just two regional universities in the world (the other is the University of the West Indies). Member countries are: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
2. An earlier extension studies based Certificate in Journalism programme during the 1980s funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) at USP is sometimes confused with the later degree programme (initiated as a French Government aid programme in 1994). There was no connection between the programmes, or any link in courses, although both have been situated in the university's Department of Literature and Language.
3. *Daily Post* stories are published on [www.fijilive.com](http://www.fijilive.com) (Associated Media) while the *Fiji Sun* and *Fiji Times* have some stories published at the [www.fijivillage.com](http://www.fijivillage.com) (Communications Fiji Ltd — FM96 radio).

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## BOOK REVIEWS

CORONEL, Sheila (2001)

**The Right to Know: Access To Information in Southeast Asia**, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City, Philippines. ISBN 971-8686-34-7. 270pp.

**Reviewed by Robin Ramcharan**

Consultant, Worldwide Academy

of World Intellectual Property Organisation, Geneva.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." Despite being enshrined in this global Magna Carta, access to information in Southeast Asia leaves a great deal to be desired. In the age of "knowledge economies" where information is the prized asset so vital to cultural, economic, political and spiritual development, if not survival, a disappointing and surprising picture emerges from Southeast Asia.

This work examines the laws that guarantee or restrict access to information, the media and the political or social environments in which information is provided in the region's "democracies" (Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand), "semi-democracies" (Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore) and "non-democracies" (Burma, Vietnam). As Sheila Coronel notes in her introductory survey, despite liberalised information flows in the democracies, "Southeast Asia's democracies are still elitist and slow to respond to demands for social justice and equity"; in the semi-democracies "information is curtailed and people are kept ignorant"; and in the non-democracies people are virtually "kept in the dark".

As demonstrated by the authors, nearly all of whom boast impressive scholarly and practical experience in journalism, there are no legal guarantees of access to information in the eight countries. In the democracies, only the Philippines guarantees the right to information in its Constitution. Surveyed by Yvonne Chua, the 1987 Philippine Constitution protects access to information and freedom of the press. In addition, the Courts tend to decide in favour of the right to know. In Indonesia, surveyed by Warif Basorie, and Thailand, surveyed by Kavi Chongkittavorn, both guarantee free expression and free press but

with limitations.

In the semi-democracies, the 1993 Constitution and 1995 Press Law of Cambodia provide for free expression but with restrictions for publishing information affecting national security and stability. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Constitution guarantees free speech and access to information, but subject to restrictions according to national security laws. In Singapore, surveyed by James Gomez, there is no law guaranteeing access to information, free speech or free press. Singapore's set of laws is reflective of the general trend in the region to "regulate information disclosure and dissemination." The Official Secrets Act says "any person who divulges any type of information which is prejudiced to the safety or interests of Singapore shall be guilty of an offense." In the case of Singapore, Section 41 of the Criminal Law (Temporary Provision) Act on disclosure of information states "it is not required by the minister or any public servant to disclose facts that could be against the public interest."

This foreshadows the persistent fact in the case of Burma, surveyed by Bertil Lintner, and Vietnam, surveyed by A. Neumann, that their people remain in the dark ages with respect to access to information. The concern for regime security and 'national security', as defined by the state, has historically led to strict controls on the flow of information and access to information. The regimes in Burma and Vietnam, maintain tight control on information flows as they strive to cling to power in the age of market-economies.

Unsurprisingly, given the background of the authors and the importance of the press as conveyor of information the book emphasises how the region's media are being monitored and controlled to varying degrees. The freedom of the press to investigate is adversely affected by legal, procedural and ethical standards. In the non-democracies, free expression and free speech are non-existent. Published information emanates from the state. Issues of public concern and 'national security' concerns are off limits. Journalists reporting on sensitive issues have their lives threatened. In Vietnam, many aspiring journalists have abandoned this profession to pursue businesses or simply leave the country.

In the semi-democracies, free press guarantees are subverted by authoritarian governments, which continue to lay the out-of-bound markers, a phrase often cited by Singapore's Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. In Cambodia most newspapers are beholden to major political parties and factions. In Malaysia and Singapore legal restrictions render guarantees of free speech problematic. While there is considerable access to information vital for foreign business, information deemed politically sensitive is not readily available. Gomez, a Singaporean human rights activist

who strives to create space for alternative views on society and politics, argues that the political culture is such that decades of a heavy-handed approach by the State has led to a situation where a materially comfortable citizenry prefer self-censorship rather than risk incurring the ire of the leadership. State-sponsored attempts to allow some space for free expression, such as the 'speakers corner' (right next to a police post), the out-of bound markers and control of the Internet appears to defy arguments of the liberalising effects of new communications technology. By contrast, free-press has been vital in the process of consolidating democracies in the Philippines and Thailand and has consolidated its positions in the aftermath of ruthless dictatorships.

A troublesome aspect with regard to the free press in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and in some cases Cambodia, is the propensity of some journalists to accept bribes in return for stories favourable to their benefactors. An additional concern in the democracies is that journalists and researchers alike may find that the prevalence of unclear procedures, unnecessary 'red-tape' and untrained staff, render access to information more complicated than it should be. Moreover, the lower ranks in the hierarchy may not be so forthcoming or helpful due to fears of reprisals from their superiors.

A distinguishing feature of this book is the authors' attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of the state of access to information of importance to the ordinary citizen, to the business community, to researchers and to the press. Given its emphasis on the press, it is an important complement to scholarship on the interplay between the media and politics thus far dominated by Eurocentric scholarship, which has pointed to the liberalising role of the press vis-à-vis oppressive regimes and to its check-and-balance role in the overall governance of society. The picture that emerges from this book is that in Southeast Asia the press has thus far played a largely reactionary role, capable of acting as an agent for change only once repressive regimes have fallen. Moreover, where the freedom of the press has been consolidated unethical practices by journalists carry the risk of undermining the credibility of the press.

A complement to this study might attempt to analyse more in depth the role of the press in each of the societies under study with respect to three questions. First, to what extent is the media a genuinely conservative force supportive of the status quo? To what extent does it fulfill a check and balance to the ruling order? Finally, to what extent is the press an agent of change and does it play a transforming role? This work will be of immense value to researchers and those interested generally in Southeast Asian affairs.

TAPSALL, Suellen & VARLEY, Carolyn (eds) (2002)  
**Journalism: Theory in Practice**, Oxford University Press. ISBN  
 971-8686-34-7. 270pp.

**Reviewed by Karl Wilson**

Editor, The Hong Kong Standard

There was a time, not that long ago, when newspapers were an essential source of news. The advent of the Internet and 24-hour television news such as CNN and BBC World has changed all that.

Thirty years ago Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein won the Pulitzer Prize for Watergate, the scandal which eventually brought down President Richard Nixon. The two young Washington Post reporters launched an entire generation into print journalism, not only in America but around the world.

Could the same be done today? Probably not.

Woodward, now a senior editor at the Washington Post, told the Journalism 2002 Conference in Melbourne last year that: "... if you have an exclusive story, and you think it's original and exclusive, you're liable to see it on CNN at four o'clock in the afternoon. Thirty years ago that was not the case."

In Australia there has been an ongoing debate within the industry about what we as journalists do and how we do it. News Limited's CEO, John Hartigan, told a PANPA conference in Adelaide last year that: "... newspapers, especially the so-called quality broadsheets, have forgotten about the people in the factories; the people on the trains; the people in the suburbs; the people on the farms. The real people, and the real issues which are real to them have dropped off the radar."

Hartigan said the industry was in danger of producing a generation of journalists who only know people over the telephone - and then, only hear the views of spin doctors, whether they be corporate or political. "Today the tendency is for the top journalists, particularly those known as the opinion makers, to dine in the best restaurants; be seen in all the right places; and live in the best addresses." It is a snobbery, he said, which also infects newspaper management.

Hartigan's speech hit a raw nerve but few found argument in what he had to say. Newspapers are facing an uncertain future and that is a fact of life. Not only are they losing ground to the Internet and 24-hour television news channels but their budgets are being squeezed, advertising revenues are down and circulation

falling. But above all they have lost relevance in the communities they serve. The one bright spot has been the growth in community newspapers.

Peter Preston, editorial director of the Guardian Media Group, wrote in the Fourth Quarter 2002 IPI Global Journalist: "I'm constantly struck by the ferment over roads, schools and parks that grips the community I live in. Are these small issues, too trivial for national attention? Maybe. But here in Britain, as elsewhere, it is the local papers and broadcasting stations that are growing."

David Shaw writing in the Los Angeles Times recently said: "Most people buy a daily newspaper because they're interested in what's happening in the world at large - especially when, as now, much of what's happening is confusing, even frightening. People want help making sense of the day's events." He was commenting on the difficulty newspapers have connecting with their readers and keeping them.

Connecting the "personal to the political" and the "global to the local" is a matter of survival for newspapers, which, in the United States at least, have been losing circulation for more than 30 years, Shaw wrote. "Knowing that they [newspapers] risk becoming irrelevant to readers who are busier than ever, and who have ever more alternative sources of information, many newspapers across the country [USA] are trying desperately to make those connections."

Suellen Tapsall and Carolyn Varley, both journalism academics in Australia, have produced a timely book which will undoubtedly add to the debate. *Journalism: Theory and Practice* is a collection of essays written by some of Australia's leading journalism educators and is an attempt to examine the functions of journalists and journalism by combining theory with practice.

Divided into seven chapters each one examines a different theme. For example, chapter one "What is a Journalist?" written by Tapsall and Varley, is an attempt to define the contemporary Australian journalist. It examines how the journalist's role has changed and how journalists perceive their roles and the issues that impact on them. Much of the chapter draws on material gathered from their research project "Definition: Journalist", which involved interviews with some of the countries leading journalists and journalism educators.

Twenty years ago the typical Australian journalist was mainly male, opinionated, hard-drinking and hard-living. That may have been the case 30 years ago. Today, there are more women in the business and the hard-drinking, hard-living stereotype no longer holds true.

Thirty years ago, most journalists came through the copyboy system. Today they tend to be graduates from journalism schools.

What Tapsall and Varley have done is to highlight the changes affecting the industry.

In the chapter "Journalism: Beyond the Business", Katrina Mandy Oakham, examines the "insidious nature of the commercial forces driving and redefining journalism." She makes the point that journalists are "no longer the public's watchdogs or privileged members of the fourth estate. They are business people producing a product for market." In the Fairfax group, for example, editors-in-chief are now publishers. In other words, they have a foot in both the journalistic and commercial camps.

While essentially an academic work, the collection of essays in "Journalism: Theory and Practice" should be read by all journalists for a critical reflection on the profession. ■

ROBIE, David (ed) (2001)

**The Pacific Journalist: A Practical Guide**, University of the South Pacific. ISBN 9982-1-3851. 372 pp.

**Reviewed by John Herbert**

Staffordshire University, United Kingdom

In 1995 I presented a paper at an AMIC conference in Singapore in which I ranted against the creeping globalisation of practical journalism books, meaning that they were increasingly American with American cultural values and American examples and ways of doing things. We needed locally written books on practical journalism to counter the educational encroachment of American books. Preferably in the local languages, but English would do as long as the content was local. I was lecturing in Hong Kong at the time and was specifically thinking of that market, as well as Singapore.

Countries in the developing world need their own books—urgently. What was needed, I said, was a series of books that gave students in countries such as Hong Kong, China and the South Pacific their own books on the practice of journalism, with their own examples, laws and ethics, their own cultural differences highlighted, and, where necessary in their own languages; or at least in English but with local situations and journalistic problems explored and explained.

*The Pacific Journalist: A Practical Guide* seeks to fill this vacuum in the South Pacific. As Robie says in his acknowledgements, "... to help address this need, I have gathered a group of contributors,

both working journalists and editors and others who have spent years in journalism education and training in the region, to share their insights and experience.”

The book is made up of chapters written by academics and practitioners in the Pacific and Papua New Guinea. Some, like Richard Dinneen, are from countries from out of the South Pacific region, in his case Australia, but are foreign correspondents working within the region. The book presents a definable house style with a comprehensive index of topics. It is structured in six parts which attempt to link the theory with practice. The book looks at news and news writing, media law and ethics, court reporting, the print and broadcast media in the region, and online media in the Pacific. The final part is a collection of thoughts about various issues in the media. In this section it is good to see such issues as trauma and health reporting covered as well as the problems of foreign correspondents in a region, from both sides of the coin.

Robie and the other contributors provide a comprehensive representation of journalism students’ views on their training in the text. This can sometimes be very moving and makes us realise the importance of journalism to any democracy. There are many politicians and others in the Pacific who might not be so pleased to see such a book in print, espousing as it does the importance of journalism to the democracy of the region. The Newsgathering section, and others throughout the book, obviously focus on the May 2000 coup attempt and the problems which journalists—and indeed journalism students and Robie himself—found themselves dealing with. It is good to have this on the record. The early section on pressure and ethics for local journalists is a particularly good read.

The practical chapters on how to write and find the news, which have to be included in such a book, are pretty much those taught in any reputable journalism course anywhere, except that the examples are so local, which makes these ‘how-to’ sections interesting for outsiders. Sometimes would-be authors say that it is too difficult to make a book local because it limits the sales. This can of course be true, but if handled properly, it gives it a global interest and importance. Robie’s book achieves this and will be of interest to any journalism educator. ■

BURNS, Lynette Sheridan (2002)  
**Understanding Journalism**, Sage Publications  
 ISBN ISBN 0 7619 7026 6 (pbk) 177 pp.

**Reviewed by Jeff McMillan**  
 Graduate School of Journalism  
 University of Wollongong

Sheridan Burns does a fairly accurate job of condensing an entire profession into roughly 175 pages, employing at the end of each chapter useful "real life" examples. Readers will gain from Burns' vast sourcing of material from Australia, America and the UK. The book focuses on the practice of everyday journalists.

Like most journalism guides, *Understanding journalism* is the latest to summarise a host of other media players into one comprehensive guide. The result, a straightforward, broad, encompassing summary of tools for the aspiring journalist. UJ balances academic purists entrenched in theory with a practical guide for day to day journalists. This balanced approach is achieved by extensive direct quotations from media tacticians with on-the-job nuts and bolts training.

The chosen format to Burns' latest book is a synopsis for the neophyte journalist. Crisp, clear and well-edited it could easily be chosen for virtually any introductory level course in journalism. The first two chapters read like an extended introduction and could be reduced to one. In chapter three, *Journalism as Decision Making*, Burns brings together the purpose of the book by choosing one of her own quotes. 'Learning by doing may be common in journalism education, but doing alone does not guarantee learning.'

The second part of the book, 'Journalism in Action' explores the functions performed by journalists -- identifying, evaluating, writing and editing news. Burns sequences the daily rigors of journalism --from the morning planning meeting through to the editing of the final drafts. Burns is comprehensive and brief with her explanations while remaining insightful, "In other words, a journalist never knows what the interviewee thinks, only what the interviewee says." Statements like these are interspersed throughout and make for logical and matter of fact approach. The book never loses sight that news is presented to audiences through a process that reflects social and cultural context. More further, Burns informs readers, 'What facts must be included in the story?' Figures are used as flowcharts, which can become daily reference

points when writing for clarity and evaluating a story for meaning.

Most paragraphs begin with journalism vernacular and seem to bog down but Burns supplies examples to put good use to the information flow supported by ample citations from Chomsky, Schon and Mencher. She offers practical knowledge of a newsroom in action. This combination complements absorption and retention. Maintaining focus, the book relates how a journalist uses critical reflection by weighing important decisions for the final output: a well-balanced story.

Modern journalists are encouraged to be well-versed in law and ethics, sprinkled throughout the book. Students and entry-level practitioners will find this guide a good place to start and expand their knowledge of the field.

The body of the book reveals the process used by journalists to identify and evaluate potential news stories. News is presented to audiences through a process that reflects the social and cultural context in which it is produced. Burns goes further by identifying important points of a journalist's control of decisions about information that is essential and how news sources must be interrogated. The actual news written or in spoken form is explored in chapter eight with the conclusion of the book dedicated to editing.

Reading the book, one can recognise a fine student of journalism. She has been a journalist for over 25 years first in Sydney Burns was integral in establishing the journalism program at the University of Newcastle, Australia in 1992.

Burns however, does not abandon the journalistic code for fear of offending readers and sticks closely to the script laid by her predecessors. Independent or original views are often ignored when a consensus can be granted. The icons of the daily newspaper; Jimmy Breslin in a dusky bar hammering for information, a metro reporter doggedly piecing together links to corruption are ignored. As newspapers are guided by marketing formulas that aim for safe ground, so do books that aspire to teach future journalists.

Understanding Journalism is light on offering advice on sentence and paragraph construction even though one chapter is dedicated to editing news. Conversely, it promotes internal questions that should constantly assail a journalist --so they make better decisions. These thought provoking decisions should ultimately make better journalists.

Most journalism books are self-serving tombs written by journalists who often cannot handle the streets or have had enough. Books on journalism are rarely taken seriously, unless the author has some currency. Academic institutions increasingly refer to hand-outs on issues related to classroom discussion. We are

inundated with new publications each year re-writing the same formula. Modern texts become skeleton versions of the best quotes and most up-to-date references. Yet *Understanding Journalism* could easily be chosen by university instructors for its brevity, ease of language and overall utility.

In the end, UJ is a skillfully edited modern update that is useful for beginners to test their strengths in journalism. Useful Journalism books promote the act of reporting over texts and Burns does not shy away from this fact. UJ follows the well established guidelines for ethical and sound journalism. What separates this book from others, is that Burns encourages through well-written words and insightful examples to take to the streets and still read her book. UJ held my attention while providing a framework in which to build a career and is highly recommended. ■

HERBERT, John (2000)

**Journalism in the Digital Age: Theory and Practice for Broadcast, Print and Online Media**, Focal Press, Boston. ISBN 0240515897. 349 pp.

ALYSEN, Barbara; SEDORKIN, Gail & OAKHAM, Mandy (2003)  
**Reporting in a Multimedia World**, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.  
ISBN 2003 1865089109 Pbk. 312pp

**Reviewed by Padma Iyer**

*The Australian*, New South Wales

Journalism, like many vocational courses, is prone to the chicken-or-the-egg conundrum: does practice precede theory or does theory pre-exist for changes in practice? Historically, perhaps it could be argued that the bird that laid the egg out of which the chicken ultimately emerged wasn't a species of fowl as we now know it at all, thus making it convenient for us to view journalistic theory as an evolutionary process which has dramatically transformed the original impulse. Without going too far back in time, and without sacrificing the relevance of a sharp focus on contemporary media, it could be observed that the mutually accommodating adaptability of theory and practice continues its relentless pace, leaving neither the practitioner nor the teacher any wiser as to who is the primary agent of change.

It is quite likely the influence that creates the circumstances for change is the greatest when it is exerted by a practitioner-

turned-fulltime-theoretician. Such a person is ideally positioned to find the correlatives between practice and theory, and to strive for a degree of compatibility between the two, particularly when the media is undergoing vast changes inflicted not merely by political and socio-economic environments but also by multifaceted technological innovation.

The proliferation of the media, the fragmentation of the market, and the migration of readers towards multimedia content are challenges facing content producers and marketers alike. One of the ways in which these challenges in production and marketing are met is through a constant rewriting of media theory. Practice enforces the inclusion of new media narratives in the academic discourse. Reports are written which explain the 5Ws and How of the new media. New theoretical frameworks evolve as books incorporate the findings and experiences of practitioners.

The good news for students of journalism in the age of digital media has been the speed with which theory has captured the experiential component of new media. In many ways, the new books go further, and present a comprehensive and unified outlook towards the new media, thus leading to a hands-on approach which is consistent with global development in the profession.

The authors raise the bar for media professionals who remain, for reasons associated with the market in which they work, comparatively untouched by the latest technological advances. In this sense, they are prescriptive. As compendiums of current theories of knowledge, they present an up-to-date snapshot of journalism that those at the cutting edge of technology will identify with. In this sense, they are descriptive. The two books under review, written by experienced trainers and teachers who draw from a vast pool of contemporary practice, achieve their relevance through this dual approach.

*Journalism in the Digital Age* focuses on useful skills for the modern journalist, whether in print, radio, television or Internet. It finds useful solutions to the issues arising from the convergence of media and underscores the need for journalists to take stock of differences as well as commonalities across the media. It presents, in the format of a course, a summary of points that journalists working in every kind of media have to remember in their pursuit of stories.

Unlike books written by experienced journalists, which tend to be based on an evanescent spectrum of personal contexts, *Journalism in the Digital Age* has an all-inclusive approach. It spans across geographical and cultural divisions, aiming to be a handbook for journalists and aspiring journalists everywhere. The author, a trainer and journalist, adopts the role of a guide whose

primary task is to enhance the skills of a novice. Through a series of dot-point lists, many skills-based issues are clarified. Among these are report and feature writing techniques for print media, interview techniques for print, radio and television, dos and don'ts of public affairs reporting, investigative reporting and specialist reporting. It is to the author's credit that he has tackled the vast scope of the book with ease, focusing on the actionable aspects of teaching.

*Reporting in a Multimedia World* chooses distinctly Australian material for a well-defined local audience. Squarely aimed at Australian students, it illuminates practical issues with experiential wisdom gleaned through interviews with media professionals. Illustrated with photographs, examples and box stories, the book adopts an easy-to-read journalistic style of presentation, making the concepts accessible and up-to-date. The authors show a clear pathway to professional skills that need to be developed and nurtured in budding journalists. Theoretical and practical aspects of journalism are perfectly matched in the book, making it an invaluable resource for students and teachers alike. ■

HENG, Russell (ed) (2002)

**Media Fortunes, Changing Times: ASEAN States in Transition**,  
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. ISBN. 252 pp.

**Reviewed by Sankaran Ramanathan**

*Mediaplus Consultants*, Singapore

Are ASEAN states in transition? If so, how many of the 10 states are? Are there changing times that the presumed transition brings, and if there are, have media fortunes been affected? If so, how have they been affected?

If we were to gauge on the basis of political uncertainty, Indonesia, Laos and Cambodia qualify as being states under transition. If we were to broaden the definition to include countries whose economies are under transition (from developing to developed economy status), we could then add the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand to the list. We could add Malaysia to this list, arguing that the economy has taken a slide since 1997 and that the transition of political power is imminent. We can then accept the contention that eight out of the 10 ASEAN member countries are in transition.

According to the book's editor, "transition" does not just refer to changes in general (p.xiii). For some countries, it is the transition

from authoritarianism to democracy. For others, from planned socialist economy to a capitalist market model, and for some the transformation of societies through technological and lifestyle changes. How have media fortunes have been affected by this transition that the majority of ASEAN countries are undergoing?

The media function as a sub-system within the broader societal system. Hence, the nature and basic characteristics of media systems are determined largely by the societal system within which they operate. Since eight of the 10 ASEAN countries are deemed to be in transition, we can argue *ipso facto* that the media in these countries are also in transition.

Viewed from the functional perspective, media systems in Indonesia are clearly in transition, as discussed in two chapters (one on the broadcast media and the other on print). In Chapter Three, Heryanto and Adi describe the role and development of industrialized media in democratizing Indonesia at the start of this century. In Chapter Four, Sanyoto presents an account of the Indonesian press and the dynamics of transition, paying attention to the developments over the past five years.

This book is a collection of papers presented at an ISEAS *Workshop on Media and Transition in ASEAN* in November 2000. The editor, Russel Heng contributed an introduction to the book and the first Chapter titled "*Media in Southeast Asia: A Literature Review of Post-1980 Developments.*"

In Chapter Two, Han Samnang looks at the Cambodian media in a post-socialist situation. He notes that "Cambodia has been experiencing a major transition through the 1990s from being run as a one-party socialist state to functioning as a chaotic polity trying to become a multi-party democracy." (p.27) He then discusses the changes in state-media dynamics in the areas of media ownership, the law, state management tactics and the role of foreign players.

In Chapter Five, Thonglor Duangsavanh examines the impact of economic transition on the media in Laos. In Chapter Six, Zaharom Naim focuses on the media and Malaysia's *Reformasi* movement. Other Malaysian media watchers may not agree with most of the assertions he makes, particularly as his research is limited only to media in English and the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. Notwithstanding that, it makes for good reading.

Chapter Seven, the lengthiest contribution, provides a well-documented report on the media in Myanmar. Written by ISEAS Senior Fellow, Tin Maung Maung Than, it traces attempts by the media in Myanmar to meet the market challenges while simultaneously surviving under the shadow of the state.

In Chapter Eight, Cherian George looks at the Singapore media at the mainstream and the fringe in the nineties. According to him, transition in the Singapore context refers to the process of change

from a mode of social organization called “enterprise association” to one of ‘civil association” (p.173-4). He notes that the government is in transition because of fragmentation and flattening (p.185), while media is in transition because of the Internet revolution (p.188).

Peter Jackson takes a different track when discussing media-state relations in Thailand. In Chapter Nine, he looks at offending images portrayed by media with regard to gender and sexual minority issues, and aspects of state control of the media in Thailand.

In Chapter Ten, Tran Huu Phuc Thien focuses on the controversy of market economics in Vietnam, and how this impinges upon the operation of Vietnamese media.

The editor, Russel Heng notes that out of the original contributions at the Seminar, the paper about media in the Philippines was excluded “for technical reasons.” No suitable chapter was available for Brunei Darussalam. This is a pity, as contributions about the media in these two countries would have made the book comprehensive in its coverage of ASEAN.

The above notwithstanding, this book is a timely addition to the growing list of publications on media in the ASEAN states. It is also a useful addition to the list of scholarly publications on media emanating from ISEAS. ■