Covering Disasters and the Media Mandate

The 2004 Tsunami

The Western media have been accused of judging the extent of Asian disasters by the number of Europeans affected. Do such assumptions persist in pan-Asian publications, which now enjoy the benefits of increasingly globalized communications? Does the press suffer from disaster exhaustion, reporting the initial impact but losing interest as the spotlight of international coverage moves elsewhere? Do national priorities frame the reporting of other people's disasters? This paper considers these questions by examining reportage of the 2004 tsunami by eight regional newspapers. The paper will analyse the themes adopted, the sources privileged and the issues pursued. It addresses the journalists' responsibilities in such events.

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Disasters

Disasters impact on whole communities and wide geographic locations. They may involve thousands of immediate deaths, dislocation of communications, serious health problems and damage to local economies.

A major accident such as a train derailment might result in a large loss of life but its impact may be relatively short-lived. A disaster like a tsunami will also have terrible short-term consequences but its shadow will fall much longer through the destruction of government and NGO services, the disruption of local and national economies, and the stress, hardship and lingering grief among affected populations. Disasters are more than mere accidents and should not be reported in those terms.

> Most important, accidents and disasters are different kinds of events. Collapsed buildings, train derailments or air crashes occur at one location and they don't threaten a community or disrupt its ability to respond. Disasters disrupt communities and the systems that make them work. It may be hours, days, weeks or months before those systems are back in place. (Scanlon, 1998)

The Indian government's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued a training paper, which said there were no "unique disasters" and therefore there was no blueprint for dealing with them. "Disasters happen when least expected, taking everyone by surprise," the paper said. Meanwhile, media demands on government, reflected post-disaster demands on emergency services, "well in excess of usual".

> Disasters, inevitably, are complex. They require effective inter-media and intra-media cooperation. Yet, contrasting professional priorities often emphasize and exacerbate rather than eliminate organizational conflict. Consequently, the psycho-social needs of the bereaved, survivors, witnesses and rescuers can easily be subordinated to the priorities of the media. The media commands an extraordinary power to do good or bad because of its capacity to influence events and minds. But, the media is often regarded as searching, revelatory and persistent in its pursuit of vested interests. The media is also, in itself, powerful. Putting reality together, the media sets agendas, makes news and impacts directly on events as they unfold. By whatever means or forms the mass media revamps style and presentation; it remains fiercely conventional in content and representation. (Role of the media in the aftermath of disaster, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India, 2001)

The ministry paper said that the personal and social impact of disasters quickly extended outside of those immediately and directly involved, affecting entire communities and concerned outsiders. "Invariably, they become public property," it reported.

The media played a critical role in the recording, responding, understanding and mitigation of disasters. The mass media had an important part of disaster prevention and management. Newspapers, television, radio and the Internet provided easy access to large public and often constituted a robust communication system which remained working even in cases of a partial breakdown of the infrastructure.

On the other hand, sources dealing with the media know that the media can be difficult channels. There is no direct control over the content and form of information transmitted. Sources who want to communicate with the public have to deal with journalists who do not form a passive "information channel" but act as gatekeepers, interpreters

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and commentators. The media, hence, can support or obstruct the disaster management of government agencies and relief organizations (Natural disasters and the media, Hans Peters, http://www.chmi.cz/katastrofy/peters.html).

Questions about disaster coverage

Mass media coverage of disasters, in particular Western mass media coverage of Asian disasters has been subjected to lengthy and detailed criticisms by journalists, academics, NGOs and government agencies. But, what is myth and what is based on contemporary reportage?

It has been said that reporters do not bother to follow up on disaster stories written about Third World countries. It has been claimed that incomplete and sometimes inaccurate stories and the failure of reporters to cover the stories of survivors leave policy makers and the public ill-informed, resulting in inadequate policy choices and assistance. (Bachmann, 1996). Foreign reporters of disasters often framed these reports in terms of domestic politics (Broinowski, 1999; Adams, 1986). Such frames failed to interrogate the underlying ideologies of reportage and legitimized dominant perspectives (Durham, 1998).

> In a disaster of course, it's a huge challenge to get beyond the usual official sources (governments, private relief agencies) and the heart-wrenching misery of victims. Overwhelmed by misery, it's hard to point up the positive (Bachmann, 1996).

Western reporters of the tsunami were accused of engaging in a "corpse show", abandoning restraints which might have been deployed when the victims were mostly white (Leach, 2005). Reporters were warned against assessing the tsunami in terms of a death count (Bernheimer, 2005). Insensitive reporting of disasters often backfired, exacerbating the survivor's grief, provoking readers' anger and burdening newspaper's staff with self-doubt (Burroughs and Gyles, 1997). A Taipei newspaper even observed that "overstated and an inappropriate reporting," could exaggerate the perceived disaster so that residents lost further money through "falling real-estate prices" (*Taipei Times*, 21 September 2004).

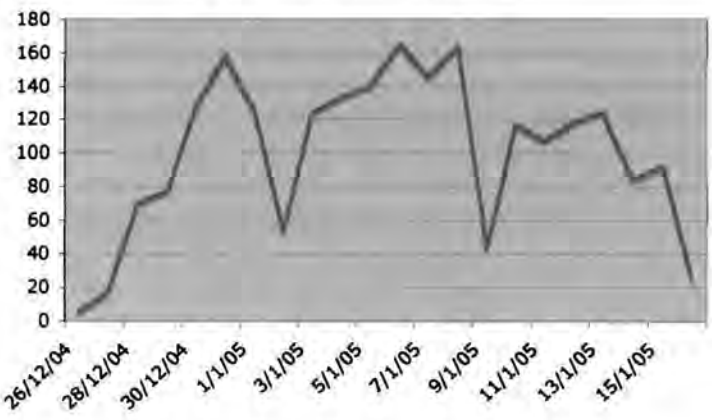
Asian countries were said to be ignored by Western media until a major disaster occurred, after which the victims were portrayed as passive receivers of Western aid. (O'Malley, 1995) Within this pattern of low coverage, Western citizens saw more reports concerned with humanitarian aid, suggesting an information divide along income, education and regional lines (Bacon and Nash, 2004).

Newspapers

Newspapers remain the dominant creators of news, providing source material for news agencies while framing issues and setting agendas frequently for television and radio. Since stories are now reproduced on their websites and contained in news databases, the content of Asian regional newspapers were available internationally, allowing their work to be examined along with previously dominant Western publications.

This study examined the tsunami reportage of eight Asia Pacific newspapers over a three-week period. These were *The Australian* (Australia), *The Times of India* (India), *The Jakarta Post* (Indonesia), *The Bangkok Post* (Thailand), *The New Straits Times* (Malaysia), *The Manila Bulletin* (Philippines), China *Daily* (China) and *The South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong) (see Appendix A). Together, they produced 2,214 tsunami-related items, including news reports, editorials, opinion pieces, sports reports and letters. The material was retrieved from the Factiva database, using "tsunami" as a key word from whole articles, excluding re-published news, recurring data and obituaries, sports and calendars. The study began on Boxing Day 2004, the day tsunami hit. It concluded three weeks later.

Figure 1
Combined tsunami coverage



The graph shows a rapid increase in reportage, which remained at a high level throughout the study period. Six of the newspapers allocated significant resources and space in the news-hole to the tsunami story. There were five reports on the day it struck, 17 the day after that and 70 on the third day. Three weeks later, the eight papers published 26 reports between them.

The South East Asian Press Alliance observed that media coverage of the catastrophe (the tsunami) was swift and sustained. Global reportage was instrumental in mobilizing relief work, aid delivery, relief operations and assistance to victims in this calamity, the Alliance said:

> But, coverage and reportage of tragedies like this also has a downside. In the rush to give the public scoops and accounts of events, journalists sometimes tend to gloss over facts, abuse the use of statistics and oversimplify complex situations. Journalists who are sent to disaster areas are often unprepared for the job. They are overwhelmed and understandably shocked by what they have come to witness and chronicle but, at this, they can often be caught in superficial coverage, failing to deepen the world's understanding of the phenomena, and unable to give context to their accounts (SEAPA, 2005).

The *Times of India*, aided by time zones and distance from the epicentre, produced the first reports in this group. It reported that "waves of fury and destruction" had hit the Tamil Naidu coast, washing away 2,500 people. (26 December 2004) It noted that the tsunami had "caught the [Indian] government napping". "Though the tsunami that hit Sumatra island took three hours to crash into the Indian coast, no measures to save life and property could be taken" (*Times of India*, 26 December 2004).

By the following day, the tsunami story had been picked up by *The Australian*, *The Jakarta Post*, and *The Bangkok Post*. The *Australian* reported that the Cocos Islands, a remote Australian outpost in the India Ocean, had been hit by a half-metre wave apparently resulting from an earthquake. Unfortunately, *The Bangkok Post*, in a very early report, dismissed the waves as "not strong enough" to be called a tsunami. The *Post* claimed, "No danger odd tide will sink Phuket".

Coverage rapidly increased, rising to 158 items on 31 December. By that time, the extent of the devastation had become clear, the aid effort was getting underway and reports from outlying areas were indicating there was even more grief to come. *The New Straits Times* reported that the tsunami struck more than a dozen countries leaving behind death and destruction. The geographic scope was unprecedented.

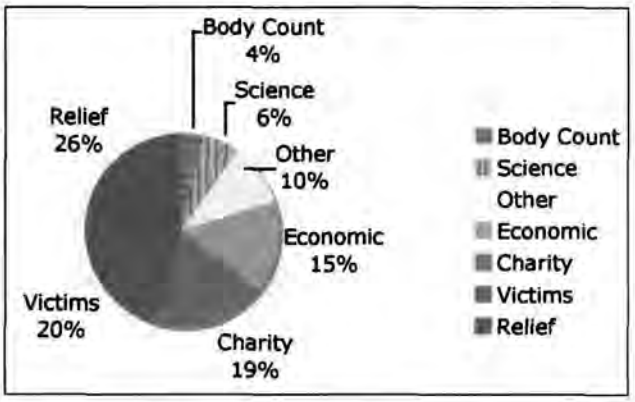
> Entire communities, towns, fishing villages and farms have been wiped out. All tourism infrastructure vanished, particularly in Phuket and Sri Lanka, and with it, the livelihood of millions destroyed and literally washed away. To date, more than 120,000 have died, comprising more than 40 nationalities, and the number rising steadily by the hour. Many are missing and as yet unaccounted for. There is little way of knowing, for now, whether those missing have been killed or are merely cut off. Others may never be found. Millions have been left homeless and some with just the clothes on their backs. No funerals and no ceremonies for the loved ones. No one wants to prolong the agony (*The New Straits Times*, 31 December 2004).

Reported items remained at a high level for much of the study period, which concluded on 16 January. Sharp declines in coverage, which occurred on 2, 9 and 16 January were explained by the absence of *The Australian*, *The New Straits Times*, *The Times of India* and *China Daily*, which did not publish on Sundays.

Newspaper coverage

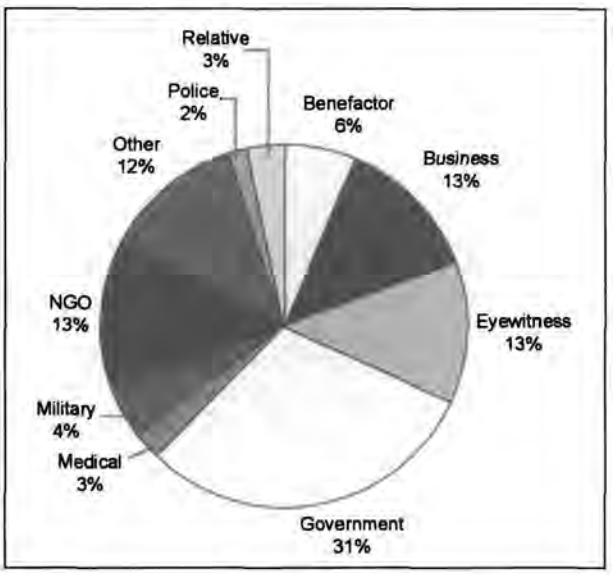
Coverage peaked with 165 items on 6 January, almost two weeks after the waves struck. Items were examined in terms of themes (Appendix B) and primary sources (Appendix C). By now, there were many reports on the relief effort (26%). The plight of victims continued to be stressed through a series of human-interest stories (20%). Charities contributing to that effort also were important (19%) while stories about economic recovery represented only 15 per cent. Stories explaining scientific aspects of the tsunami were minimal (6%) while those concerned with the body count were negligible (4%).

Figure 2
Themes on 6 January 2005



Journalists preferred government sources. If the police, medical authorities and the military were included, these accounted for 37 percent of primary sources, by far the single largest group quoted on that day.

Figure 3
All Papers by Source



The New Straits Times Penang Bureau Chief Sarban Singh said that as the first news of the disaster broke, he immediately went to government agencies, which dealt with accidents and disasters:

> First, we checked with the police, the hotels along the affected stretch and then we went to the hospitals to check on casualties. We also called some police contacts. Then, we checked with other bureau chiefs. Then, we went back to the police (Singh, 2005).

He said that trying to find out what had actually happened was "like looking for a needle in a haystack". Even the

government sources, preferred by so many journalists, seemed confused.

The hardest part was getting information quickly. There were hearsay reports from survivors about whole families being swept away. We were told, "There are bodies here. There are bodies there". These were all rumours. There were conflicting reports about casualties, which were thought to be much higher. The authorities were not quick in releasing the names of the dead. There was a lot of confusion around. If you ask me, they didn't really know what was happening (Singh, 2005).

Media contacted media, seeking information. The interconnected nature of globalized media was revealed which fed on each other, adding to the rumour and confusion. Singh said that while he was listening to reports from India, Sri Lanka and Sumatra, information from his own country, Malaysia was "trickling in".

> I had friends and family calling me, asking me, "Is it true that so many people died?" I had calls from Tokyo, from Australia, from the UK, asking me, "Is the government trying to hide something? Why are the casualties so low [in Malaysia]? They thought it was a cover-up, trying to protect the travel industry. But, not one foreigner died in Penang (Singh, 2005).

Non-government organizations (NGO), which might be considered as central to the relief effort, accounted for only 13 per cent of sources. Businesses which were largely engaged in providing services or raising funds represented 12 per cent of primary sources in the articles studied. Even though half of the newspapers examined were located in tsunami zone, eyewitnesses (12%) and relatives (3%) were relatively unimportant.

Contrasting themes and sources

The *China Daily* had eight articles dealing with the tsunami on 6 January with 37 per cent of these dealing with Chinese charity efforts. The *China Daily* relied heavily on government sources, accounting for 37 per cent of primary sources. Benefactors were more commonly quoted (24%) than medical, military or relatives sources (all 13%). Chinese victims and science each accounted for 25 per cent of the themes covered.

The *South China Morning Post*, a privately owned paper which operated in Hong Kong under the "one country, two systems" policy also relied heavily on government sources (19%). However it ran more stories (19) and its sources were more diverse. NGOs also accounted for 19 per cent of sources and businesses (18%) were also widely quoted. Eyewitnesses (13%) and benefactors (13%) were also quoted.

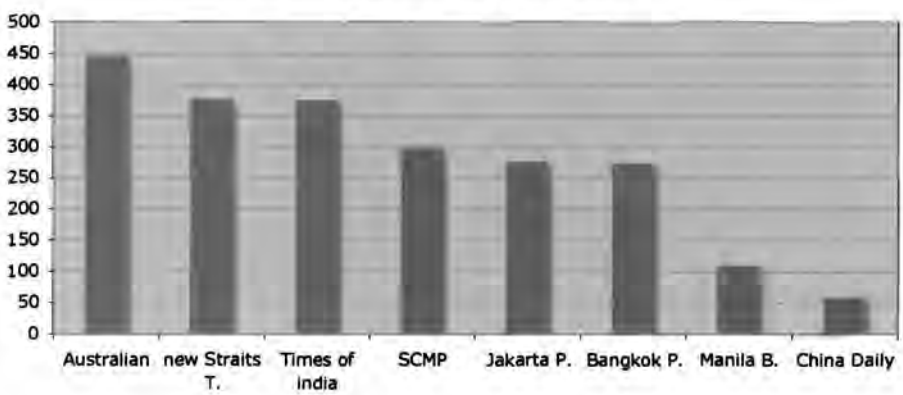
Charity was also the major theme reported by the SCMP (33%). Once again, however, the themes were more diverse with relief and victims (both 26%) being the next major sectors.

The South China Morning Post editorialized that there was a desperate need for aid to be quickly made available, devoting 33 per cent of its coverage to charity. It reported that China's biggest shipping company, COSCO, donated 10 million yuan to the China Red Cross and promised it would help arrange shipments of relief materials if needed. Meanwhile, more than 100 Hong Kong celebrities were to take part in a seven-hour Crossing Borders Fund-raising Show to raise money for tsunami victims, urging people to care about the earth. Action star Jet Li, who survived the disaster in the Maldives, also planned to attend (SCMP, 6 January 2005).

The SCMP said that massive investment was needed to help communities rebuild their lives.

> The indiscriminate destruction caused by the tsunami has made many problems around the world seem insignificant, even petty. All that matters now is to ensure that the victims get help. But, the way in which the disaster has drawn people together could have repercussions extending beyond the relief operations—or, at least, we hope so. Two of the worst hit areas have the most to gain. The people of Aceh in Indonesia and those living in the north and east of Sri Lanka were already suffering before the giant waves struck. Both have endured decades of civil war between government forces and separatists. They have much in common, including the people's deep distrust of the government. Both have battled the ravages of war and the misery it brings. Both areas lack development. Most of their people are poor. Now, they also share the much greater burden

Figure 4
Tsunami coverage by publication



> of facing up to the devastation caused by the tsunami. But here, amid the ruins, lies a slim chance of a better future. The desire for peace and unity is one that the Indonesian and Sri Lankan governments should not miss (SCMP, 6 January 2005).

C. K. Lau, the Executive Editor of *The South China Morning Post*, said that the tsunami was a major news story in Hong Kong, even though it was far removed from the former British colony. The SCMP did not consider itself "parochial", he said:

> The *Post* has never been very parochial and sees itself as having a duty to report major happenings around the world. Any disasters that claim thousands of lives deserve proper coverage. This explains the *Post*'s extensive coverage of the tsunami attacks (Lau, 2005).

The Australian, based in a country not directly affected by the tsunami, published the most articles overall (446) on the disaster during the three-week period. On 6 January, it published 23 articles. It focused on the relief effort (30%) and victims (26%). The economic impact of the tsunami, science and even the body count (all 9%) were seen as relatively minor issues. *The Australian* preferred government sources (40%) with NGOs also representing a major source (23%). Relatives and businesses were also quoted (both 9%).

Unlike all of the other newspapers, *The Times of India* saw economic impact (25%) as the major story on 6 January. The relief effort, mainly reported in India (17%) and scientific aspects (14%) were also seen as important. Reports on victims accounted for only nine per cent of the reports studied. Charity and crime were of minor importance (6% each). Sources were diverse with government, while still the most favoured source, accounted for 22 per cent of primary sources. Business sources were also important (17%). Eyewitnesses (9%), benefactors (9%) and NGOs (6%) were seen as less important.

The New Straits Times, based in Kuala Lumpur, in contrast, focussed on charity (32%) followed by relief and victims (both 22%). The economic impact of the tsunami accounted for only 9 per cent of stories. *The New Straits Times* had an unusually high number of eyewitness sources (20%), only a little less than government sources (27%). Business sources (13%) and NGOs (10%) were seen as less important.

The Manila Bulletin ran nine tsunami stories on 6 January. Forty two per cent were concerned with relief while the economic impact accounted for 25 per cent of these reports. *The Manila Bulletin* had the highest reliance on government sources (60%).

Stories about the relief effort represented 41 per cent of *The Jakarta Post*'s coverage on 6 January, reflecting the massive aid work underway in Indonesia. Reports on economic impact (17%), victims and charity (both 13%) were also important. NGOs were heavily quoted (27%) with government sources remaining the most popular (31%).

The Bangkok Post stressed relief and victims (both 29%). The economic impact, particularly on the tourism industry was also seen as important (18%). It made extensive use of eyewitnesses (30%), being the only newspaper to use them more extensively than government sources (14%). Business and NGOs were also less quoted (both 14%).

The coverage reviewed

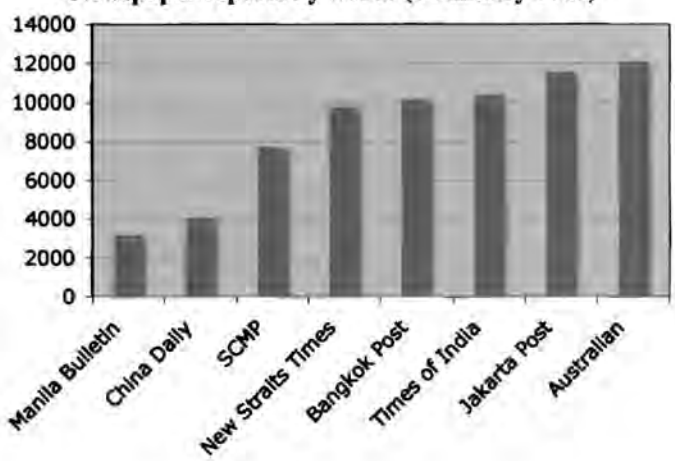
So what of the claims made by academics and analysts about media coverage of disasters? How should these claims be measured against newspaper journalists' tsunami coverage?

Clearly in the case of the tsunami, reporters and editors did not abandon the story after the initial impact. This, in part, may be explained by the nature of the story itself. The tsunami hit many countries with different communications infrastructure so that reports of its devastation did not globalize simultaneously. Secondly, the story's many elements unfolded over a period; the wave's first impact, the first photos, the tales of survivors, the obliteration of isolated communities, the relief effort, the work of international volunteers, the economic ruin, the fate of orphans and, in some cases, the political repercussions. However, the amount of space, reporters and resources allocated by most newspapers indicated a commitment to detailed reportage of the tsunami.

The number and variety of stories (2,214 in eight papers over three weeks) should have allowed for a diversity of reporting which might help inform readers. *The Times of India* carried 37 reports in a single day (30 December 2004). Smaller newspapers such as *The Jakarta Post* carried fewer but much longer reports which included opinion pieces, editorials and analyses.

The complex and confused magnitude of the event contributed to inaccuracies as journalists strove to find credible sources. The reliance on official sources, which themselves were sometimes misinformed or confused led *The Bangkok Post* to initially report that the waves were not a tsunami at all. As previously stated, the reports reviewed overwhelmingly prioritized government sources. This was the case even with *The Australian*, a privately owned newspaper located in a free speech country, which

Figure 5
Newspaper reports by words (6 January 2005)

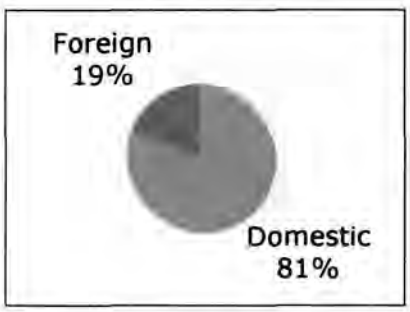


was largely untouched by the tsunami. The dominant perspectives of politicians and their parties were thusly endorsed ahead of the views of eyewitnesses.

However, the plight of the victims *was* widely reported, if often through the relatively remote and other than disinterested eyes of government. Many journalists believed this coverage contributed to global support for the relief effort. *The Jakarta Post* editorialized that as a result, "the nation and the rest of the world" were with the victims.

Thanks to global media coverage and the technology to bring the news and images of the disaster to people's living rooms almost instantaneously, the cries for help from the people of Aceh, India and Sri Lanka—the three countries worst hit—were heard loud and clear all across the world. The scale of death, destruction and displacement of people is simply beyond the imagination of most people. But, one thing most can comprehend, to some degree, is the suffering that people go through after losing loved ones, their homes or their livelihood (*The Jakarta Post*, 6 January 2005).

Figure 6
Origins of sources



Most of the reports studied, located their sources in each newspaper's home country. This means that reports of this international story were overwhelmingly framed by each country's domestic perspectives. Newspapers relied on local reporters and sub-editors rather than foreign correspondents or even international interviews. Even *The Australian,* located 55 per cent of its 6 January 2005 reports inside Australia, indicating that the tsunami was seen as a domestic story, even though the tsunami never touched Australian shores. Where were the foreign correspondents on that day?

However, fears that reportage would be little more than a body count, appeared to be unrealized. By 6 January, stories leading with body counts represented only four per cent of those studied.

Journalists as victims

Journalists who cover disasters can become victims themselves.

Reporters and photographers attending a conference held in Guatemala City in 2004 to consider "Professional risks and covering disasters" complained of sleep disorders, eating poorly and difficulties in forgetting about work.

> According to the instructor ... "They found poor time management in newsrooms; they were tired; they also experienced stress and poor quality of life with their families and socially (they work too many useless hours and sometimes have exhausting down-time, and others are forced to redo parts of their stories); and assignments are thrown out by the editors because of lack of street knowledge and also the lack of planning for their stories that includes travel, which increases the risk of accidents, illnesses and stressful situations."

The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma reprinted US Army guidelines for troops exposed to corpses, stating they may be helpful to reporters and photographers covering the tsunami aftermath, as well as to editors back in the newsroom. The intense sensory experience, often combined with emotion-provoking thoughts, could form extremely vivid, painful memories that could become the seeds of post-traumatic stress disorder. It said:

> Being exposed to large numbers of dead bodies is not a normal part of human experience. Therefore, when you are exposed to bodies, you should not be surprised to feel things you are not used to ... You may feel sorrow, regret, repulsion, disgust, anger and futility. Remember these are normal experiences given the situation in which you have been placed. Humour [sic], even graveyard humour, is helpful if it remains on a witty and relatively abstract level. It is unhelpful when it becomes too gross, too personal (e.g. comments or practical jokes which pick on members of the team who need support, not ridicule) or too disrespectful of the individual dead. Some members of the team may become upset at excessive graveyard humour and even the joker may remember it with guilt years later (Tips for Mass Casualty Disasters, Dart Centre, 2005).

Journalists should try to stay fit, not ignore stress and talk to and support fellow team members, the Dart centre advised.

Coverage of disasters tested the physical and emotional strength of reporters on the scene, according to the US-based Poynter Institute. Poynter cited BBC correspondent Jonathan Charles who referred to the long, gruelling days involved in covering people affected by the tsunami. After spending a day following a 28-year-old mother in search of her children, Charles wondered what he should say to her.

> "... [S]he was clinging to the belief her children would be fine. It's clear from what I've seen that her optimism is unlikely to be realistic," he writes. "... It's that knowledge which makes it hard to cover this story." "The days are very, very long," he wrote. "As we all know, tiredness is the friend of PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder)" (Poynter, 2005).

Cratis Hippocrates, the former head of journalism at Queensland University of Technology, studied what happened to reporters who covered a tsunami that hit Papua New Guinea in 1998. The tidal wave killed about 3,000 people. In a 1998 speech at Michigan State University, Hippocrates said, "Trauma in the newsroom exists. It's a real thing." He said journalists, especially news managers,

had difficulty in dealing with that trauma. "Journalists have a history of denial. There is a perception that you are unprofessional if 'you can't handle it'," Hippocrates said. "Journalists claim they are unaffected to their colleagues. But, this false bravado takes its toll" (http://www.notrain-nogain.org/train/res/reparc/disaster.asp).

Media mandates

Journalists seek to inform, educate and entertain their audience but not necessarily in that order. The newspapers which covered the tsunami informed their readers about the unfolding social and economic impact of and responses to the tsunami. There was less emphasis on education about the waves, with minimal or even negligible reports on the scientific aspects of the disaster. But, there was a great deal of often prurient entertainment derived from images of the destruction, tales of suffering and even occasional reports of heroism.

Journalists were expected to do more than merely report official versions of the facts. Mass media had the responsibility to safeguard citizens' lives, according to a briefing prepared by the Indian Ministry for Information and Broadcasting. Reporters should seek the truth. The ministry said they should take care not to bring to light inaccurate, misleading or distorted material. However, journalists should also collect such information with discretion, even under such difficult circumstances. According to the Indian ministry, information should not be gathered through intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit. Such demands fit within the guidelines established by the journalists' code of ethics. But, disasters required special care. The ministry said that in cases involving grief or shock, enquiries must be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion. The end-product must be handled sensitively. The mass media have to do the following.

- Inform the living regarding disasters and safeguard measures.
- Inform the citizens regarding the danger that confronts them and how they can save themselves.
- Inform the citizens of preventive steps against such disasters.
- Tell the citizens about the relief supplies available and the place of availability so that the disaster-struck can have direct access.
- Assist the government and the non-governmental organizations providing relief supplies to the people.

(Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India, 2001)

These recommendations assumed that mainstream media journalists could collect vital information which even official sources might have been, initially at least, unable to supply. The ability to gather such information and assess it before it is authenticated for distribution is critical here. It is core to the journalists' responsibilities, which electronic media with frequently less journalists at their disposal than newspapers have difficulties fulfilling. Parachute journalists who they drop into disaster zones to fill the holes in coverage may undermine attempts to provide informed reports by circulating stories, created in ignorance of local politics, language and practices. Previous studies of such foreign correspondents show that they fall back on official statements and each other's stories as sources.

Meanwhile, the distribution systems traditional media outlets, such as newspapers, are subject to are the same sorts of disaster-created disruption suffered by governments and NGOs in the affected zones.

> To be fair by journalists, they have to work against many odds in covering disasters. Events unfold by the minute and there is much confusion. Reliable assessments of damage are not always forthcoming, and some disaster sites are not easily accessible. In such situations, they have to improvise and make do with whatever is available and speak to whoever is contactable. In this process, distortions can occur (Nivaran, 2003).

Old technology, such as newspapers, the radio and television stations which are influenced by their news agendas, may lack the ability to swiftly certify and relay information which may be complex and regionally specific.

Jan Schaffer, the Executive Director of the Pew Centre for Civic Journalism, said that Western journalists frequently saw themselves as watchdogs acting in the public interest. But, when it came to reporting disasters, they also needed to act as guide dogs. She said the media, in addition to covering the incremental advances in the day's news, should take on the following roles:

- As a healer: Either in the news pages or in another civic space, being a forum where people can vent their emotions or share their grief and initiate the healing process.
- As a convener: Inviting people to gather, to meet and talk—to not be alone, to participate in what is, after all, one of the most old-fashioned ways of getting news and information—in face-to-face conversation.
- As a facilitator for deliberation or volunteering: The newspaper—in an expansion of its consumer news role—can give readers road maps for things they can do, some ways they might help out.
- As a synthesizer of ideas and solutions: The newspaper can help harness the community's collective energy.
- As a framer: It can help report and imagine how the community can cope and move forward.

(Schaffer, 1997)

It may be that Ms Schaffer was expecting too much of journalists. Newspapers provided limited space for public exchanges of ideas through letter-to-the-editor pages and occasional invited op ed pieces. But, in the aftermath of the tsunami, emotions, opinions and experiences were more widely shared on the Internet through Web postings, discussion groups and "blogs". It was here on amateur-created, -maintained and -controlled but internationally distributed sites where thousands met and talked. Websites globally provided updated information on where people could donate funds, provide support, contact NGOs and even contact missing relatives. Conventional media, staffed by traditional journalists, would have been hard-pressed to equal such efforts.

Journalists, however, are trained to synthesize and present ideas. By publication through recognized channels, they become part of identifiable information brands and can be judged accordingly. Anonymous Web postings would, and on reflection, should not be granted similar credibility.

Mainstream media framed this certified news in ways which news consumers could understand, comprehend and integrate. Ultimately, that is the mandate of professional journalists.

Appendix A—Regional newspapers

The Australian is the Australian flagship of Rupert Murdoch's US-based news group. Its journalists, photographers and artists watch Australia from nine permanent bureaux around the country, including one in every state and territory capital, and in Cairns. Overseas, it has more offices than any other Australian newspaper or newspaper group, with staff correspondents in Washington, London, Tokyo, Beijing, Jakarta, Bangkok, Wellington, Honiara, New York and Los Angeles (Factiva, 2005).

The New Straits Times was established on 15 July 1845, making it one of the oldest English-language newspaper in the region. Originally known as The Straits Times, its name was derived from the Straits of Malacca, a busy shipping lane in the last century. It is published by the publicly listed New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd (New Straits Times).

The Times of India is published in Delhi and nine other cities across India. The first edition of *The Bombay Times* and *Journal of Commerce*, later to be called *The Times of India*, was launched in Bombay in 1838. After several years of change, evolution and growth in the paper's character, Bennett, Coleman & Co Ltd, the proprietors of The Times of India Group, was established with the principal objective of publishing newspapers, journals, magazines and books. *The Times of India* is the flagship brand of the Group. It is India's premier English daily and world's largest circulated English broadsheet daily (Benett, Coleman & Co Ltd, http://www.timesofindia.com/).

The South China Morning Post began publication in Hong Kong in 1904, where it is the former British colony's leading English language newspaper. SCMP Group Limited, through various operating subsidiaries, publishes *The South China Morning Post* and *The Sunday Morning Post*, SCMP.com and the Chinese editions of *Cosmopolitan, Harper's Bazaar, CosmoGirl!, Maxim and Automobile* (SCMP Group).

The Bangkok Post is a leading Thai Newspaper produced by the Post Publishing Company.

The Jakarta Post was first published in 1983. Its publisher, PT Bina Media Tenggara, was founded in late 1982 as an independent newspaper institution privately owned by four competing Indonesian media groups publishing some of the leading national publications: *Suara Karya*, *Kompas*, *Sinar Harapan* and *Tempo*. Ten per cent of equity (later increased to 20 per cent) was provided as a collective share of all employees (*The Jakarta Post*).

The China Daily, the only national English language newspaper in China, was established on 1 June 1981. The paper is printed in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, New York and Jakarta. Its circulation is 200,000, one-third of which is abroad in more than 150 countries and regions. As a newspaper group, *The China Daily* also runs *China Daily Business Weekly*, *The China Daily* (Hong Kong edition), *Shanghai Star*, *Beijing Weekend* and *21st Century* (China Daily).

The Manila Bulletin was the Philippines largest circulation English-language newspaper. A broadsheet, it began publishing in 1901. The Philippines' oldest existing newspaper, *The Bulletin* started as a shipping journal in 1900. In 1912, *The Manila Bulletin* expanded to include news of general interest. It later became *Bulletin Today* owned by Hans Menzi. In 1986, it resumed publication under new owner, Emilio Yap (Media Museum).

Appendix B—Themes

Relief: These stories cover the application of aid, through the distribution of food supplies, the clearing of debris and the construction of key facilities. This included the provision of 1.2 million pairs of medical gloves to protect the relief workers (*New Straits Times*, 6 January 2005).

Victims: These "human interest" stories are concerned with the experiences of the survivors. They include accounts of the immediate impact of the tsunami as well as the plight of those remaining in wrecked communities.

Science: These include scientific speculation about tsunamis, research on the impact on wildlife and anthropological speculation about the fate of primitive tribes living in certain coastal areas. One report called for seismologists, geologists and other scientists to "hold hands".

Body count: Stories in this category focus on the progressive death toll. The toll could be that of an individual country or a total count. These approaches seeking to gauge the size of the disaster were dismissed by an Indian commentator as a "corpse count".

Charity: These stories refer to efforts to raise funds for the survivors. They include reports of Taiping prison inmates who pledged part of the allowances, an unemployed person in Hong Kong contributing to a charity auction and Chinese ship workers making individual donations.

Celebrity: Celebrity stories are related to those referring to charity. However, they focus instead on the famous; film stars, pop singers and sports people engaged in the fund-raising process. In these cases, the fame of the participants creates the story rather than their charitable activities.

Economic: Economic stories engage with the broader, long-term financial impacts of the tsunamis. They may refer to ruined fishing fleets, disruptions to tourism and the long-term damage caused by destroyed infrastructure.

Crime: These included reports of looting and even a gang masquerading as charity collectors.

Other: Stories here cover a wide range of themes. These might include tsunami warnings, or the roles the media should play in mega disasters like the tsunami. The disbandment of the "tsunami core group" established to coordinate aid fell into this category (*Times of India*, 6 January 2005).

Appendix C—Sources

Government: Government sources in this instance can include prime ministers, ministers, regional governors, ambassadors and spokespersons. It includes official statements, cabinet papers and media releases.

NGOs: Non-government organizations include national and

international aid agencies. This category includes the United Nations and its various arms, as well as bodies such as the International Red Cross.

Eyewitnesses: This category includes victims, tourists and even journalists who were involved in the actual event and its aftermaths.

Business: Public and private corporations, and companies and their spokespersons

Relatives: Families of victims

Medical: Doctors, nurses, treatment centres, hospitals and their spokespersons

Police: Police and security services

Military: Local and foreign armed forces responding to the tsunami

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Notes

1. Examples include James Joyce's *Ulysses* and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Homosexual and lesbian fiction, such as Radcliffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, and most of Jean Genet's work was suppressed, as were works of "deviant" sexuality such as *The Story of O*, and the work of the Marquis de Sade. Much of William Burroughs work including *The Naked Lunch* also remained unpublished in England until the 1960s. The Paris-based publisher The Olympia Press specialized in English language editions that could be smuggled into Britain (see Travis, 2000).

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