

A MEDIATED CRISIS

News and the National Mind

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**This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Research
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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Source: *The Weekend Australian Magazine*: March 27-28 2006, p 10.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines a mediated crisis and how *The Straits Times* and *The Australian* approach the reporting of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It looks at how this mediated crisis exemplifies the culture of the national newspaper and in turn how the national newspaper has an historical influence on the national psyche. A total of 649 reports and headlines and 141 letters about SARS in *The Straits Times* (including *The Straits Time Interactive*) were examined from April 2003 to November 2003 as were 125 headlines from *The Australian*.

The early sections of the thesis discuss how a crisis makes news; examine how the media report a crisis and what emphasis is given to aspects such as: actors, primary definers, vocabulary, lexical choices, subjects, themes, issues and value dimension or stance. The first chapter defines crisis, journalism and crisis journalism and discusses where the latter sits within the continuing expansion and development of major theoretical frameworks, including living in a risk society. The implication here is that crisis and risk have a symbiotic relationship.

Historical perspectives of news are discussed in Chapter 2, and the newspaper is placed within the context of contemporary media. The chapter discusses how newspapers are aligned with the concept of the national mind and demonstrates the roles and formations of the two newspapers in relation to the SARS crisis.

Chapter 3 codes the headlines, article titles and subtitles of *The Straits Times* and *The Australian* and using content analysis of the headlines, analyses the reporting of a serious health crisis SARS that lasted from March to November, 2003. The quantification within content analysis enables a researcher to read and interpret questions that relate to the intensity of meaning in texts, their social impact, the relationships between media texts and the realities and representations they reflect (Hansen et al, 1998). The theory and method of content analysis is used in this chapter to consider differences between *The Straits Times* and *The Australian* and to exemplify the media's representation of the narratives of SARS as it happened in the countries of Singapore and Australia.

Aspects of crisis and risk, the newspaper and the national mind, narratives, presentations, and post SARS events are discussed in the last chapter. It is concluded from these discussions there is a world narrative that tells the story of how the human condition likes to live and rely on a safe social environment always being available. The relationship between a mediated crisis and risk are also discussed. In addition, it is maintained that reporting in 2003 was not just about SARS but a way of reporting that allowed one to view journalism as an aid to good governance, particularly with regard to living in a risk and crisis-ridden society.

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