

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE FRONT PAGES OF PHILIPPINE NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED BEFORE AND DURING MARTIAL LAW

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ABSTRACT

The front pages of 72 issues of *Bulletin Today*, *The Reporter* and *Morning Times*, representing the national, regional and local newspapers published in the Philippines, respectively, were content analyzed to determine the variations in prominence given to development and non-development news and photographs before and during martial law. The newspapers were chosen through random sampling. Results showed that newspapers published during martial law allocated more space to textual matters and contained more development news, but had lesser space for photographs than those published before martial law. There were 61 development news and 272 non-development news stories published in the pre-martial law issues of sample newspapers, while those published during martial law carried a total of 160 development and 271 non-development news. Business and economics news ranked first among the commonly published development news. News on elections and politics predominated among the non-development news. There was a highly significant difference in the number of development news stories published in the different newspaper categories before and during martial law.

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INTRODUCTION

The newspaper is one of the mass media of communication which can be a potent medium for development. As a medium of communication, it performs four functions, which are to inform, instruct, entertain and advertise.

Through its front pages, editorials and columns, it can influence the opinions, morals and tastes of the people.

Decisions on what to publish in the newspaper pages depend on the judgment of the editors, reporters, publishers and other newspapermen who are the so-called gate-

keepers of information. Gatekeepers function as creative evaluators of what should be published in the newspapers (Hiebert, 1974). To gain insights into the "gatekeeping" process in the newspaper publishing industry before and during martial law, a content analysis was conducted on the front pages of Philippine newspapers.

Content analysis is a research technique for objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. It is used to describe trends in communication content, to infer aspects of culture and cultural change, and to analyze flow of information (Baquiran *et al.*, 1977). The message, such as the news story, is the focus of content analysis.

METHOD

A list of all national, regional and local newspapers published before and during martial law was compiled. Three sample newspapers namely, *Bulletin Today*, *The Reporter* and *Morning Times* were randomly chosen to represent the national, regional and local newspapers, respectively. Twenty-four issues of each sample newspaper

were content analyzed, i.e., 12 issues before martial law and 12 issues during martial law. The content analysis was done on the front pages of newspapers published three years before martial law was declared (1969) and three years after (1975). There were 72 sample newspapers. The amount of space occupied by news stories and photographs was measured in column inches, a standard measurement used by newspapers, but was converted to column centimeters (col. cm) in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Space Allocation for Textual Matters and Photographs.

Results showed that newspapers published during martial law allocated more space to textual matters (1,224.63 col. cm) than pre-martial law newspapers (1,203.27 col. cm) (Table 1). On the other hand, pre-martial law newspapers devoted more space to photographs (193.17 col. cm) than those published during martial law (149.78 col. cm). Generally, newspapers published during martial law gave more information to the reading public as marked by an increased space

Table 1. Average space distribution (in col. cm) of textual matters and photographs published in the Philippines before and during martial law.

Newspaper Category	Textual Matters		Photographs	
	Before	During	Before	During
National	626.14	636.50	83.69	68.51
Regional	237.44	246.33	86.31	68.39
Local	339.69	340.09	23.17	11.74
TOTAL	1,203.27	1,224.63	193.17	149.78

allocation for textual matters but less space allocation for photographs.

Number of Development and Non-Development News.

Newspapers published during martial law carried more development news (160 stories) compared to those published before martial law (61 stories) (Table 2). Development news refer to messages concerning the different programs of the government, such as food production, industrial development, business and economics, land reform, population, infrastructure, health and sanitation, community development and social welfare, education and manpower, housing and rehabilitation (Esteban, 1979).

Development news were mostly placed at the bottom pages of the newspapers published before and during martial law. Non-development news were mostly printed at the middle pages of newspapers published during martial law. Pre-martial law newspapers had more non-development news printed at the top pages than those published

during martial law (74 vs 65). Non-development news refer to news stories that do not fall under the definition of development news, such as news on politics, disaster, crime, and society.

The chi-square analysis shows that there was a highly significant difference in the number of development news stories published before and during martial law (Table 2).

Categories of News Stories.

Business and economics news ranked first among the types of development news that were frequently published on the front pages of newspapers published before and during martial law. Since the country is on the threshold of development, news of this type was given emphasis to make the people aware of the happenings in these fields. The increase in the number of development news stories published during martial law was also attributed to the emphasis given by the government on its various development programs.

News on elections and politics ranked first among the non-develop-

Table 2. Number of development news stories published in the Philippines before and during martial law.

Newspaper Category	Observed values			Expected (1:1) values		
	Before	During	Total	Before	During	X ² (df = 1)
National	18	74	92	46	46	34.08**
Regional	17	37	54	27	27	7.40**
Local	26	49	75	37.5	37.5	7.05**
TOTAL	61	160	221	110.5	110.5	48.53** (df = 3)

** = Significant at 1% level.

ment news stories published in pre-martial law issues of sample newspapers, while news on graft and corruption and personalities ranked first during martial law.

Although there were generally more non-development news compared to development news in newspapers before and during martial law, the press nevertheless had contributed to the dissemination of the development programs of the government.

before martial law (293.25 col. cm) (Table 4). On the other hand, newspapers published before the declaration of martial law allocated more space (1,103.03 col. cm) to non-development photographs than those published during martial law (731.92 col. cm). However, there was no significant difference in number and space distribution of development and non-development photographs published before and during martial law.

Table 3. Number of development and non-development photographs published in the Philippines before and during martial law.

Newspaper Category	Development Photographs		Non-development Photographs	
	Before	During	Before	During
National	4	11	22	21
Regional	8	7	6	13
Local	15	22	49	48
TOTAL	27	40	77	82

Number and Space Distribution of Development and Non-development Photographs.

There were more development photographs published on the front pages of newspapers published during martial law (40 photos) than those published before martial law (27 photos) (Table 3). On the other hand, there were more non-development photographs published during martial law (82 photos) than those published before martial law (77 photos).

In terms of space allocation, newspapers published during martial law allocated more space (350.94 col. cm) to development photographs than newspapers published

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the number of development news published in the sample newspapers increased from 61 (before martial law) to 160 (during martial law), these were mostly found at the bottom pages. Newspaper publishers probably thought that non-development news were more attention-getting than development news, since the former were given more prominence by placing them on top pages of the sample newspapers. Newspapers should allocate more space to development news and these should

Table 4. Space distribution (in col. cm) of development and non-development photographs published in the Philippines before and during martial law.

Newspaper Category	Development Photographs		Non-development Photographs	
	Before	During	Before	During
National	172.52	276.24	863.09	544.49
Regional	49.39	45.06	45.32	76.38
Local	71.34	29.64	194.62	111.31
TOTAL	293.25	350.94	1,103.03	731.92

be placed at the top rather than at the bottom page. While space allocation for development news should be increased, those for non-development news should be decreased. A newspaper solely devoted to development news may be published by the government to hasten dissemination of its programs.

On the other hand, more space was allocated to development photographs by newspapers published during martial law compared to pre-martial law newspapers although the difference was not sta-

tistically significant. Newspapers should increase the space allocated to development photographs because illustrations and pictures are functional in both aesthetic and news sense. The availability of modern photographic equipment should encourage newspaper publishers to improve the front pages of newspapers by having more development photographs. There should be at least one or two development photographs on the front pages of newspapers to make news stories attractive and understandable to readers.

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