

Global media organisations

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The development of information technology and the growth of the newspaper industry was spurred by technological development as well as international political developments during the first half of the 20th century. The first world war wireless services later became news agencies and assumed great importance during periods of crisis and war. Over the years these agencies became multi-faceted corporations. The better known agencies of our times include APA (Associated Press of America), Reuters, AFP (Agence-France Press), DP (Deutsche Press), earlier there was the Soviet Union's TASS which is now Russia's ITAR.

News agencies developed a culture that often reflected the political orientation of their countries of origin and their correspondents were in a unique position to acquire information that could be used for the conduct of government business. Political analysts are aware of these orientations and weigh the information they receive through such agencies accordingly.

A large number of countries continue to have a national news agency which is either subsidised or wholly owned by the government. Such news agencies include Iran's IRNA and Pakistan's APP (Associated Press of Pakistan). Major privately owned agencies are located in the Western industrialised countries. Over the years they have established a reputation for relatively accurate, if not wholly unbiased, reporting, and most newspapers as well as electronic media count on them for timely information.

News agencies that began life as wireless services supplying information to newspapers have branched into organisations supplying print as well as audio and video material to the public and electronic media transmitters that often become, in this way, secondary purveyors of information. For instance, information about Kashmir does not find its way into the international press as information about Palestine and Burma does, and that about Vietnam did, because the major news agencies of the world do not have correspondents based in Kashmir.

Mergers between media groups are a common feature

In China news agencies, allied services, hotels catering to foreigners and establishments owned by them were allowed to install dish antennas but foreign television broadcasts, (those that originate outside China), were virtually blocked with new controls on the installation of dish antennae by individuals at residences and work units. Residences and workplaces of foreigners were exempted from this ban. The Chinese Radio, Film and Television Ministry said that strict control of transnational transmissions is a key issue and a matter affecting national sovereignty because television exerts such a powerful influence on viewers and, as a result, on social stability in the country.

Recently, however, Star TV, the PRC's state network, China Central Television (CCTV) and a private media group got together in a joint venture: they will run three Chinese language television channels, two carrying general entertainment and the third carrying Star TV's sports channel. NewsCorp and the private partner will hold 45 per cent shares and CCTV will hold 10 per cent shares. In order to appease the Chinese, NewsCorp has also formed a joint venture with the communist party's official newspaper, the People's Daily. With Hong Kong, the base of Star TV, reverting to the PRC in July 1997, the media organisation is not only mending its fences with the government but will now be collecting subscriptions and advertising revenues from the mainland. NewsCorp angered the PRC when its owner, Murdoch, said that "...satellite television would threaten totalitarian regimes everywhere..."

In Europe there continues to be stiff competition as well as organised opposition to the unrestricted import of material of American origin. The industry demands that restrictions be placed on the import of canned American programming. A limit is also expected to be placed on the quantity of American movies screened (France) each year. A 51-49 ratio has been enforced by European Union directive. Compared to Europe, entry into the Asian market is easy. Anyone who can buy a transponder (slot on an orbital satellite) can hire a few people and start beaming programmes

groups are a common feature of corporate life in this field now. There are a few major groups in the industrialised countries, including Japan. A great deal of interest is being shown in China and Chinese networks due to the huge market for goods and services that the country represents. The ASEAN countries and India are attracting attention for the same reason. Major networks join up, share resources and then move apart to join other groups or add new ones to their number. A major development in the recent past was the merger of Turner Broadcasting, the pioneer of 24-hour newscasts, with Time-Warner. This brought together an empire that includes CNN, Cartoon Network, TNT, Turner Pictures, the MGM film library, and many other Turner enterprises to the fold of Time-Warner's magazine publishing empire (Time magazine, People and Fortune). This was in line with deals made by another transnational, News-Corp, which is already operating successfully in both publishing and transnational television broadcasting in the Asia-Pacific region as well as in the United States and Europe.

The impact of such mega deals that lead to mega operations is both political as well as economic. Just one illustration of how nations have to negotiate their way in this new information environment is as follows. NewsCorp, the organisation controlled by Rupert Murdoch, owns the Asia satellite operation, Star TV. In 1995 it dropped BBC from its network in an effort to mend fences with China, which had banned the reception of the network on the mainland and had also put restrictions on the private ownership of dish antennas (October 1994). China objected to the BBC's reporting on human rights is-

and start beaming programmes at target audiences. The cost of entry in the business is very low, but not everyone has the software to attract and then retain audiences.

The industrialised countries continue to set trends and dominate in information dissemination. During the past decade or so news agencies in the third world have managed to establish links with the major established agencies of the world. However, they continue to be users rather than suppliers of news and information. Attempts were made in the past to encourage the establishment of news agencies dealing with information originating in the Muslim world through organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). Again, the market was found to be limited. The exchange of information through regional co-operation organisations such as ECO and Saarc has been encouraged at the government level. There has been some interest in publication of books where there cost of printing and production is lower.

The market in industrialised countries for information about third world countries is limited. Quality material originating in third world countries does not generally circulate in other third world countries although, it could promote understanding and co-operation among them. This is a great intellectual loss. Attempts are generally made to introduce material that might be of interest to the public although select audiences are easier to capture. The increase in financial transactions across national boundaries and emphasis on the globalisations of economies has created interest in political information about areas where foreign investment is encouraged. There is need to exploit this interest