

The Role of Mass Media in Crisis
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Objectives of Research

The role of mass media in crisis has been investigated for a long time. In general, it is found that during times of crisis, there is heightened uncertainty and fear. People rely on mass media for information, interpretation and solidarity. In particular, media's solidarity function is valued more by the public than its watchdog function during crisis. However, after the crisis, the rallying effect of the media will diminish (Perse, 2001). The research on media roles after the SARS in Hong Kong can have the following objectives:

1. To examine the various roles of mass media during the SARS crisis;
2. To compare its roles with findings in crisis situations in other places which have different cultures, economic and socio-political structure
3. To throw light on the roles media, government and concerned parties should play during crises so as to anticipate, handle and resolve crises in a more effective way.

Research Hypotheses

Specifically, the following hypotheses can be examined:

1. Mass media reduce uncertainty and fear among people by providing accurate information.
2. The public tends to anticipate the media to build solidarity rather than to question the leadership.
3. Mass media serve to cultivate a sense of “being together” among people who are sharing a common experience.
4. Mass media help to create public sympathy to increase humanitarian aid efforts.
5. The rally effect of media dissipates rapidly after the crisis.
6. Mass media revert to their watchdog functions rapidly after the crisis.
7. The media cover crisis as a media event in the form of contest, conquest and coronations (Graber, 1993).