

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

News agencies often referred to as ‘wire services’ have always played a critical role in gathering and dissemination of news to newspapers, periodicals, radio and television broadcasters, government agencies, and other subscribers, who by sharing costs obtain services they could not otherwise afford. News agencies continuously track all important happenings and keep media organizations engaged in the business of transmission and exchange of news with latest updates. With globalization and innovation in technology there has been a virtual revolution in the world of news and the information explosion has created a highly competitive environment leading to changes in the significance, approach and working mechanism of news agencies today. News agencies have been making use of the latest communication technologies for dissemination of news across their network, thereby making the exchange of information more competitive and accessible by overcoming the disadvantages of yesteryears. From the telegraphs and telephones to radio and satellite transmission and now internet, agencies today have breached most of the challenges in procuring news and disseminating them timely and thereby giving a value addition to the whole proposition of being first with the news! As Simon Denver of *Reuters* rightly sums it, “*There are so many channels today for the audience to access news. So if a news agency has to survive in such a scenario, it will have to provide that ‘value addition’ or some ‘extra bit’ to retain the interest of its audience.*”

News Agencies in India

The two premier Indian news agencies, *Press Trust of India* (PTI) and *United News of India* (UNI) have also gone through various stages of evolution, since 1946 from being the flag bearers of free India to being harbingers of the changing socio-economic scenario and gradually becoming important players in globalization and commoditization of news. The initial idea of setting up of news agencies was to create a centralized pool of news which also took necessary efforts to safe guard the interest of the nation. Today, the network of such agencies has multiplied, with foreign partners and independent news organizations making a significant mark on how news

events are covered. The speed with which news is transmitted is matched with variety of stories and issues finding space in the media. Possibilities are immense of **redefining** ‘what is news’ to include such subjects, like business, market trends, art and cinema making it to the front pages. In this changing set-up, news agencies have a more promising role to play since the demand for variety in news would provide an impetus to enlarge the scope of their activities within and outside the country. In recent times there has been an increased interest in India’s efforts to streamline economic activities and counter terror threats at the same time.

News agencies provide an update on these issues which frame India’s image, which is **either** advantageous or can act as detrimental to its efforts. To understand if news agencies are providing the right context and bringing in perspectives which provide for a more balanced assessment, a study was undertaken to analyse how **Indian** issues are placed before the readers here and abroad. The working of the news agencies is seen at two broad levels: the news exchange mechanism with the foreign news agencies and utilization of such news by the foreign as well as domestic subscribers.

Objectives of the Study

The study was designed keeping in view the following objectives:

- *To assess the process of news exchange between Indian News Agencies and their counterparts abroad.*
- *To study the procurement, processing and utilization of foreign news content by looking at:*
 1. *Projection of India’s image through news content provided by the News Agencies and its utilization by foreign newspapers.*
 2. *Foreign news sourced by News Agencies in India and its utilization by Indian press.*

Methodology

The study being exploratory in nature, various methods such as **Content Analysis** of news, **Interviews** and **Observations** on news trends were used to meet the objectives. Content analysis was undertaken of 5 foreign newspapers (*New York Times, International Herald Tribune, Gulf News, People’s Daily/ China Daily and Dawn*) representing countries, continents and various geographical regions. By this process leading newspapers from such countries like USA, UAE, China, and Pakistan respectively were selected. Among Indian newspapers 3 English dailies (Hindustan

times, Economic Times, The Hindu) and 1 Hindi daily '*Dainik Jagran*' were selected to meet the above objectives. 20 issues each of both foreign and Indian newspapers were selected during the period of 3 months for the study. In total 180 copies of newspapers were reviewed for the study.

Research methods:

- a) **Interviews** with officials at *PTI, UNI, Reuters, and AP* etc were conducted to understand and explain the role and functional aspects of the news operations by agencies.
- b) **Content Analysis** with the help of code sheets was undertaken for the selected Indian and foreign newspapers to assess the volume of India related news and their global significance.
- c) **Observation Summary** of news trends of each newspaper were prepared in order to analyse the coverage of issues on India and how India's' image was projected.
- d) **Reverse tracking** was done to assess the extent of utilization of PTI news feed by newspapers during the period of study.

Selected period for Content Analysis: A three-month period from December 2008 to February 2009 was selected. The analysis of News in both categories of newspapers (foreign and Indian) were recorded as per items on the code sheets for each newspaper.

Major findings of the Study:

The key findings based on results of Interviews, Content analysis and Observations are categorized as follows:

- A. News Exchange mechanism*
- B. Volume and significance of Indian news in Foreign Newspapers*
- C. Utilisation of Foreign News in Indian Newspapers*
- D. Observations on India's image with respect to International relations.*

1. Handling Biases:

During 1970's the global flow of news content between agencies and the misrepresentation of views and development in the Third World by western agencies was the subject of intense debate. It was often alleged that news content from foreign agencies was usually laden with their own biases and perceptions. Today use of mobile and internet technologies and access to information through multiple sources (does not allow- problematic) (perhaps- leaves little scope for)

such distortion in handling news. News on **India specific** subjects such as "Kashmir", "Indo Pak relations", "Tibetan refugees in India" and other such controversial issues, if taken from regional agencies **and international news agencies**, are likely to contain biases. Hence stories on such sensitive issues are sourced from internal sources as the coverage area of operation of Indian agencies and their network of correspondents in India is extensive. Although no strict editing was done on news received by foreign news agencies, a few implicit rules are followed which do not allow making any statements that **might** directly hurt public sentiments. Usually agencies are expected to be objective in their reporting, but if stories with some objectionable terms have to be taken, careful and subtle editing is done to make it '*more neutral*'.

2(a) News Exchange Volume:

Up to 15% of *PTI's* foreign stories/news was published in Indian newspapers as against 7.5% Indian news in foreign newspaper, which indicates that foreign newspapers and agencies utilized *PTI* news more for keeping track of events in India than actually using it verbatim or giving credit for using such stories.

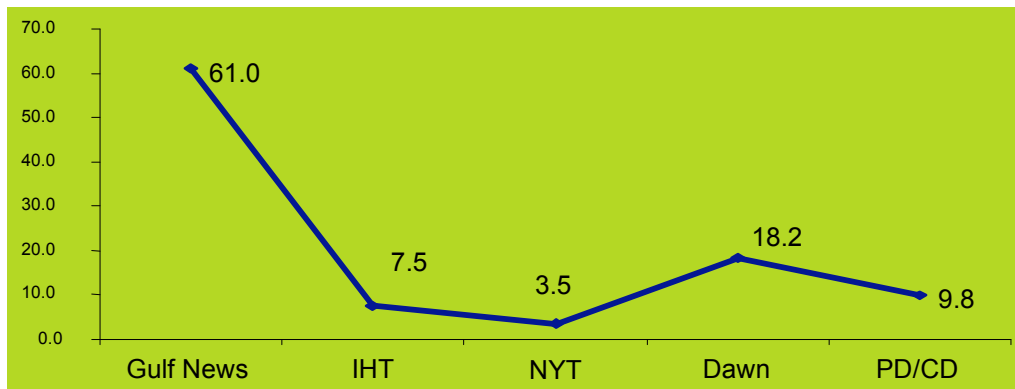
The daily newscast of *PTI* and *UNI* utilized about 10-30% of news items provided by foreign agencies for its domestic subscribers. *UNI* in India provides news received by *Reuters* to its domestic subscribers. However, no news published in foreign or Indian newspapers **have been** sourced or attributed to *UNI*. Foreign newspapers **picked up a larger share** of Indian news **from Reuters** than *PTI*. For news about India, **news agencies like** '*IANS, Own Correspondents and Agencies*' were major sources of news, which was indicative of a trend among news agencies to repackage the news received **primarily for two reasons. One** to edit the news for **giving** it a stamp of their own writing styles and **the other** to position their own interpretation of the news as part of their **respective** editorial policy. However, Indian newspapers took larger proportion of **the country's** news from '*Agencies, Own correspondents and PTI*'. **Indeed**, *PTI* was a major source of sports related news. *IHT* and *ET* subscribed to *Reuters* news **heavily** as **the agency's news** stories on markets and economy were extensive and insightful.

2 (b) Volume of India Stories in Foreign Newspapers:

Gulf News leads in covering Indian news followed by *Dawn*, *People's Daily/China Daily*, US based newspaper *NYT* and UK based newspaper *IHT*. The variation in

volume of Indian news reflected the significance of these events in India for the countries mentioned above.

Figure 1: Volume of Indian News in Foreign Newspapers



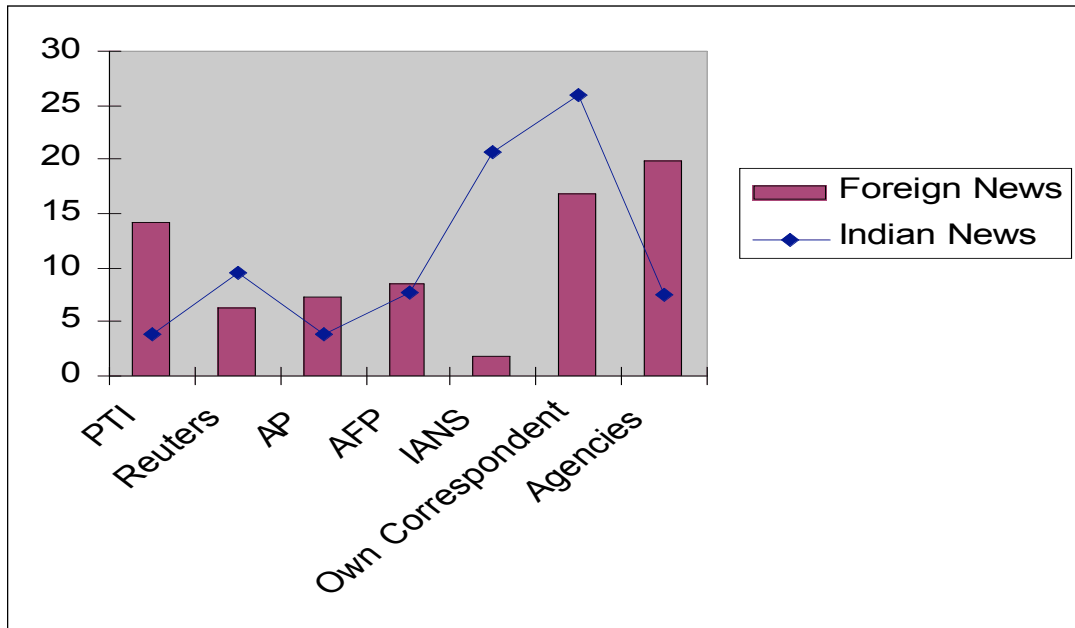
Clear distinction was seen in volume of news in newspapers representing India's neighboring countries (Pakistan & China) and newspapers from other regions (USA & UAE). It was indicative of India's international relations with these countries and the mood of the times. More news appeared in *Dawn* than in *People's Daily* primarily due to 'Mumbai terror attack', prevailing Kashmir issue and IPL etc. *Gulf News* devoted more space for news about India primarily for the Indian community who were its readers in UAE.

3. Utilisation of News agency Feeds:

The content analysis of the selected newspaper indicated a trend in the foreign press to follow their own sense of discretion and direction in giving credit to the source through which they procured news. Often foreign agencies, like AP, utilized *PTI* news feed more to keep track of the happenings in India but credited the news as their own; However, within the text of the story references such as 'according to' or 'input from *PTI*' were used as a way to acknowledge the servicing of the story by *PTI*. According to *AP*, 10-15 news about India was given out everyday. The titles of the *PTI* news were found altered in some news stories appearing in foreign newspapers which showed some amount of editing being done of news feed before publishing. Out of 5 foreign newspapers only *Dawn* (< 5%) and *Gulf News* (5.5%)

used the sourced news from PTI without editing it or ascribed it to their own staff. Some news stories by ‘Own Correspondents’ and ‘agencies’ also had *PTI* inputs. Even if the Chinese newspapers, *People’s Daily/China Daily* generally took news from *Xinhua News agency* (a major news source for Chinese Newspapers), it occasionally quoted *PTI* and ‘*The Hindu*’ in its stories.

Figure 2: Sources of News in Indian & Foreign Newspapers



4. Subscription System

PTI, *Reuters*, *AP*, *AFP* and other agencies **operating** in India are able to generate large quantum of news from here through their correspondents as well as through ‘news exchange mechanism’ with other agencies. *PTI* in India has such an exchange arrangement with *AP* and *AFP* for foreign content. **However, *UNI* works has no exchange mechanism but merely forwards a daily news package from** *Reuters* to its subscribers on the rates fixed for monthly /yearly subscriptions. *AP* subscribes to *PTI* news service at a subscription of about Rs 60,000 per month that generates funds for *PTI*. In exchange *PTI* takes foreign content from *AP* and *AFP* by *paying a certain amount*.

5. Highlighting Indian Issues: The amount of interest in Indian news has increased over time, thereby proving the argument that India was **not merely being mentioned**

but **that** there was an increasing interest in the country's **politics** to business to creative fields. With the globalization of the economy, **the news papers surveyed** were interested in the economic and policy changes happening in India. Apart from economic crisis, the foreign newspapers were keen to cover subjects **such** as, Indo-Pak relations, **anti-Christian activities** in Kandhamaal, Orissa, Maoists' insurgency moves, Mumbai terror attack, Nuclear Deal, Cricket, Slumdog millionaire film, Elections , Stocks and Share markets etc. **These issues were followed** critically, not only by **India's** neighbors, but also by the developed countries. USA which played **the role of a 'watch dog'**, took keen interest in the probe following **the** Mumbai terror attack because of the prevailing **condition** of terrorism which has shaken many countries in recent past. The '*Satyam*' financial scam was covered mostly in *Gulf News* , *IHT* and *NYT* due to its repercussions on the business transactions, through off-shore arrangements, was of some consequence for other countries as well. In spite of **the Satyam** episode, resilience of Indian economy was an accepted fact (**- how has this conclusion been arrived at?**) the way media covered the aspects of the Indian economy's health. On the international map, countries have turned their focus on India, especially the way India brought itself out of the worst ever period of recession and economic crisis. (**how has this conclusion been arrived at?**) Hence such news, which mentioned about job cuts or closing **down** of companies found less coverage in foreign and Indian newspapers thereby bolstering the hope in the capacity of the country to shake off any financial threat. **???**

The foreign newspapers, gave larger **share of** coverage to such news about India which were primarily determined by the diplomatic ties the **respective countries** had with India. *NYT*, *IHT* and *Gulf News* had more items which were **Neutral**, containing no bias as such, whereas *People's Daily* and *China Daily* largely consisted of reports more on China's political and economic ties with India which have been lukewarm. Even after the Mumbai terror attack, the **Chinese** newspapers did not reflect any **empathy** for India, but instead highlighted improving ties (**of India?**) with Pakistan. *Dawn*, on the other hand, did not have much else than the terrorism and it's after effect **on** Cricket to write about.

Among all the newspapers, *Gulf News's* **content on** India consisted of extensive coverage of **a** variety of subjects, even writing about such topics like '*Nagaland revels in the success of floriculture*' which do not fall in the generally

accepted category of political or disaster news. There **has** been a shift in selection of Indian news by agencies from serious issues to lighter themes, such as entertainment due to competitive pressure. The AP bureau chief, **Tim Sullivan** said, “*There has been a significant rise in demand. At times, as many as 15 stories on India we are sending in a day. The number of photographs is generally about 30-35 on a regular day.*”

6. Positioning of News on India:

The analysis of positioning and placement of Indian news gives a positive picture of how India **is** being projected in comparison to other important news of the day. In *Gulf News*, 46.1% news was placed as ‘top or lead stories’. **This is primarily attributed to a number of pages dedicated exclusively to India by Gulf News.** In *Dawn* around 49% news stories on Indian issues were given ‘top/lead’ position. As high as 31% news in *NYT* had ‘very big’ title, followed by *Gulf News* and *IHT* (8.8%). In *IHT* and *NYT*, news with big/ very big titles catered **primarily** to issues such as *Satyam fraud case*, Economic melt down and Indo- Pak relations. Attention was drawn to Indian issues through big titles by highlighting international/diplomatic relations, nuclear deal, joint military exercise, trade links, rich cultural background and success in the Art and Entertainment sphere. Placement of India news on front pages of *NYT*, *IHT* and *Dawn* meant seeing India as **an important player in global affairs. In terms of space** up to 10% news was given more than ‘5 columns’ **spread in** both *Gulf News* and *IHT*. **Political and business news** was **accorded** more space (5-6 columns) in *Gulf News* and *China Daily*, whereas *IHT* covered primarily business news. This reiterated the fact that primarily political and business news from the Indian sub continent **has been** given more focus as compared to development, creative arts or sports issues.

7. International Relations and projection of India

In times of radical changes in both the political **sphere** and communications environment, international relations processes are widely assumed to be moving beyond the interactions of national governments and depending more heavily on public opinion; with public opinion seen as depending more heavily on media coverage **and portrayal**. With the unprecedented speed and reach of today’s global communication network, governments and other international players increasingly use the media to engage with each other. International relations being a vast topic broadly

refer to the manner in which nations conduct relations between them **and amongst themselves**, wherein Media, the fourth pillar of democracy, (tries to withhold its power- **unclear ??**) based on international relations. This can be best exemplified **by** the way media in each country react and feature news and views about its counterparts.

US and India have renewed their diplomatic ties from time to time, **particularly** after the cold war that ended around (2003 - **is this established??**). Since then India had held a good place in the list of favored countries as US recognises India's efforts, its zeal and fervor in the world market, **as** was reflected in the coverage of news and events in *New York Times*. **However**, *International Herald Tribune*, did not project India positively, but spared no issue **in** covering **the** economic meltdown, Satyam fraud case (6 out of 34) to Indian, cinema art and culture that were well accredited in the newspaper. *IHT* being a business oriented newspaper, monitored the economic and business events and happenings in India and placed India high on economic platform. **However**, the volume of (**India related**) news that appeared in these two newspapers was less compared to the coverage from Pakistan, UAE or China, yet the figure was not discouraging if it is **recognized** that the **US** media is aware and cautious of the fact that rest of the world keeps their eyes fixed on every move that US makes towards international **developments**.

Considering the international relations that India and UAE share, it was evinced that the news and views presented in *Gulf News*, would have a heavy coverage of Indian affairs. Almost all major issues from 26/11 Mumbai attacks, to election, Satyam financial scam, Slumdog Millionaire film winning accolades were (**heavily mediated**) but were (**featured neutrally**) (**these two terms are contradictory?**), without any biases involved. It was observed that *Gulf News* covered Indian issues most extensively with a maximum of 275 stories during the study period. A mutual give and take relationship buttresses the good coverage for the thriving Indian populace in UAE.

Indo- Pakistan and Indo- China relations are often seen in historical perspective that gives an evidence of their rivalry and competitive dominance. *Peoples Daily* and *China Daily*, being two hard core official newspapers of China did not give much coverage to India **related news**. Most of the news covered was on economy related issues and terrorism. Though Indo-Pak relations hold a lot of interest for China, yet follow-up and involvement of Pakistan in 26/11 Mumbai attack was not

given importance in comparison. In covering Mumbai terror attack follow-up stories, *People's Daily* took a clear slant towards Pakistan while *China Daily* didn't bother to give **any significant** coverage. Their attempt to project India in a negative **light** was **evident** in the way India and Pakistan were described as 'nuclear armed neighbors'. **(This conclusion is problematic since international agencies like Reuters and AP use such terms to contextualise the news involving India and Pakistan - basically for an international audience)**. On India's economy, both the Chinese newspaper adopted a **lukewarm** approach, **to India's growing clout as an emerging economic giant**. Though few, there were stories which projected India as a fast growing economy.

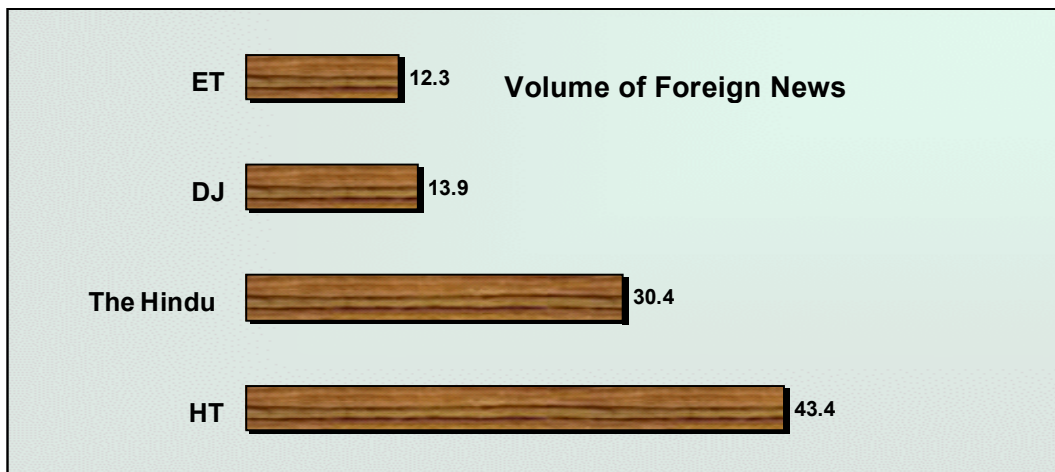
Dawn, a leading Pakistani newspaper gave importance to India related news, especially the 26/11 terror attack, the Maoist violence, other insurgencies, General Election in India. All news items presented India's position as misplaced and portrayed India as '*hopeless, incapable of controlling the problems that surface in its own territory and point fingers to its neighbours*'. Pakistani media took a great deal to capture every word spoken by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, External Affairs Minister, while covering the news of 26/11 attacks. Business stories were not many but wherever were covered, these were given comprehensive coverage. Pakistan's preference for Bollywood was obvious from the way such news was **given extensive coverage**.

It is apparent that reflections **on** the diplomatic ties between India and other countries can be seen in the way India and events in India are reported which eventually builds up **an** image tactfully. Overall the image of India is presented neutrally with some minor variations. Among the variations, negative slant was seen more in *Dawn* and much less in others. Thus it can be said that *International affairs proceeds when and how foreign news is presented in any media*. **(The assertion in the last sentence needs explaining??)**

8. Utilisation of Foreign News in Indian Press

The Indian newspapers (*HT, ET, The Hindu, and Dainik Jagran*) published 1377 foreign **news** stories in a span of 3 months. Coverage of foreign news was highest in HT (43.4%) closely followed by 30.4% in *The Hindu*. Less than 20 % foreign news appeared in other two newspapers.

Figure 3: Volume of foreign News in Indian Press



Agencies such as ‘PTI’, AP, AFP, Agencies, ANI and New York Times were the source for most of the foreign news in Indian newspapers. However, Reuters was sourced for 6.3% foreign news dealing mostly with economy/ business news. Indian newspapers mostly covered a variety of news ranging from Sports (29.0%), Politics (14%), Business (5.3%), Entertainment and Media (8.8%), International relation and diplomacy (8.4%) to Human interest stories (9.9%). Sports news was sourced mostly from PTI, though Reuters provided a large quantum of Sports news on Baseball and other sports which do not interest the Indian readers.

Analysis of the type and size and space given to such news stories indicate that international ties between India and neighbouring countries, especially Pakistan and China, has been an important criteria for coverage. A large number of news had references to China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and USA. The international viewpoints on issues such as Mumbai terror attack, Satyam financial scam, fight over Gaza, insurgency in Sri Lanka, Afghan war and Slumdog millionaire film winning Oscar awards were given extensive coverage in Indian newspapers as compared to foreign newspapers. Many events which were of direct relevance to India, such as Mumbai attack, were given more coverage, while news related to Indo-Pak dialogue and Kashmir issue was relegated to the backside. Indian newspapers subscribed to news-stories of national & political interest and diplomatic relations especially in connection to India from ‘PTI’ or ‘own correspondents’. The regions covered were primarily from China, Pakistan, USA, Gaza, Sri Lanka, Australia, Bangladesh etc.

The significance of foreign news in terms of title size, positioning of the story on front page or other pages, number of columns given to each story presented a different picture. Mere 6.6 % news appeared on front page, 46.3 % news could get

only 1 column space and 41% news had small titles. This indicates that large portion of foreign news does not necessarily reflect the eminence given to foreign news in the Indian press. Overall, it implies that Indian press is cautious of safeguarding the image and interest of the nation by providing space to **mainly** such news **stories**, which do not jeopardize India's interest.

