

TV News declares end of SARS

International television news coverage of SARS, 01-09/2003

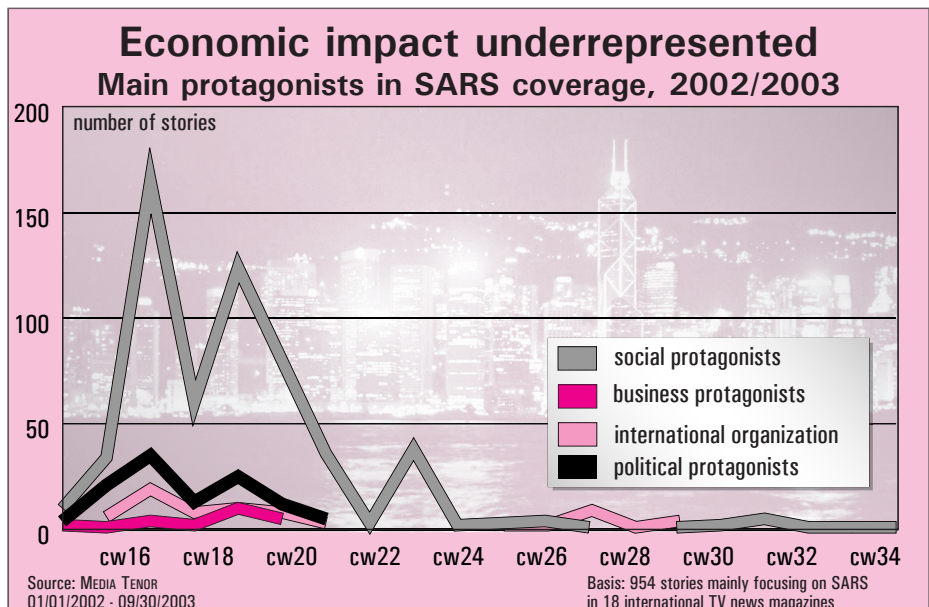
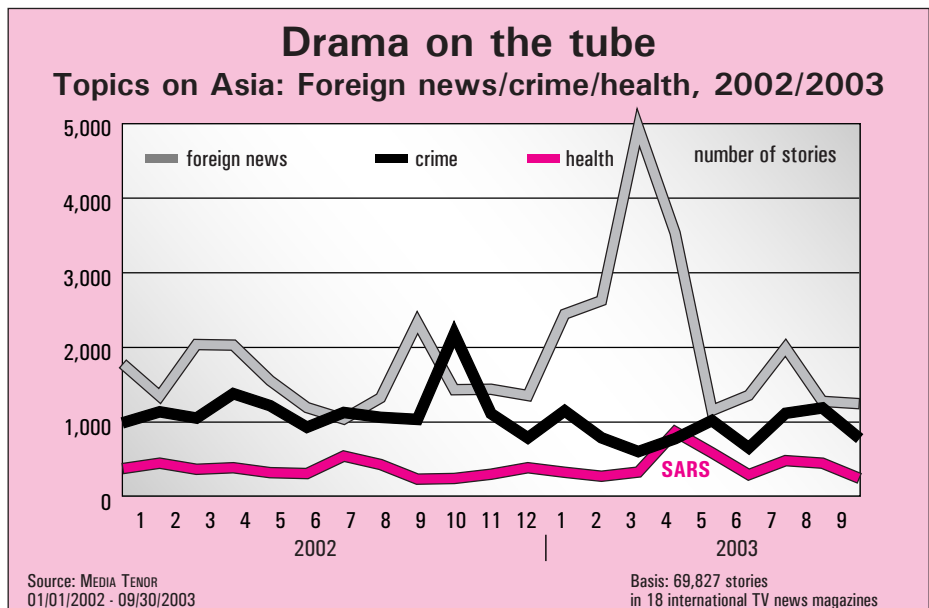
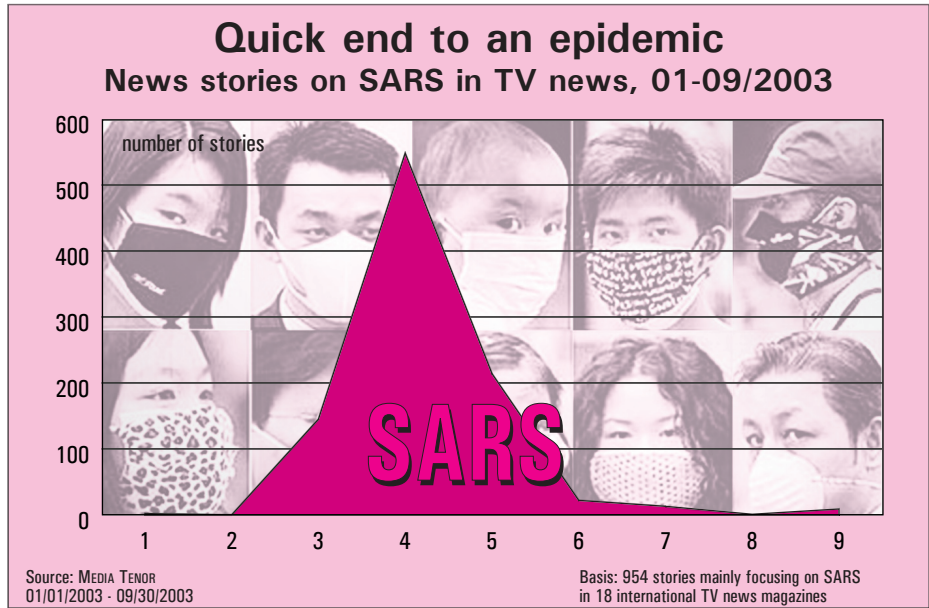
Television news programs pursue an ever more accelerated race for high ratings at the expense of providing adequate and necessary news coverage. The way media have dealt with the first “global epidemic of the 21st century” (Gro Harlem Brundtland), the Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), is yet another indication of this.

SARS coverage reconfirmed clichés of the Asian continent

The results of the MEDIA TENOR analysis of international TV news programs show that this tendency applied beyond the coverage of the acute phase of this highly infectious, flu-like illness. The analysis of the same media after the peak of the epidemic, which to date has claimed almost 900 victims, confirms the assumption that it is not information and follow-up coverage which shape TV news coverage, but rather drama, sensationalism and the continuous search for higher ratings. Moreover, the SARS coverage reconfirmed most of the prevailing clichés of the Asian continent, especially in the time after the acute phase of the epidemic. All in all, the media’s interest dropped surprisingly quickly, despite the fact that the WHO, for the first time ever, had issued a worldwide alert.

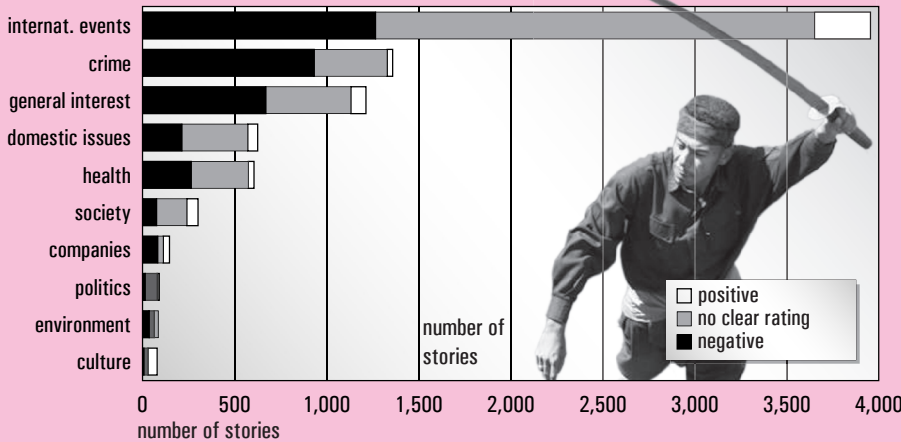
TV news ignores the public’s demand for information

SARS was one of the most prominent news topics of the year. Between March and April, the 18 international news programs analyzed broadcast 954 stories on it. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), however, the epidemic only reached its peak in June of this year. The last travel warnings for Singapore and Taiwan were withdrawn in June. The MEDIA TENOR analysis, however, shows that the news programs’ interest started to drop rapidly long before the epidemic actually came to an end. From 548 single news pieces in April it went down by more than 50% to 214 in May. Despite of the continuously threatening situation, the programs had obviously decided that the problem had been settled and stopped their coverage on it almost entirely. The short duration of the coverage of SARS made it possible for bookings for air-travel to China, which had almost



Only bad news is good news

Assessment and stories on Asia on television, 2002/2003



Source: MEDIA TENOR
01/01/2002 - 09/30/2003

Basis: 11,522 stories
in 18 international TV news magazines

come to a halt at the beginning of the crisis, to increase again relatively swiftly. The result: According to the German financial magazine CAPITAL, China's industry, including its tourism industry, has grown at a continuously fast pace. Nevertheless, even the end of the SARS crisis did not change the overall negative media image of Asia. Up until now, the former has been shaped primarily by negative headlines on crises, wars, crime and also terrorism.

Negative view on Asia: bad marks for the Chinese government

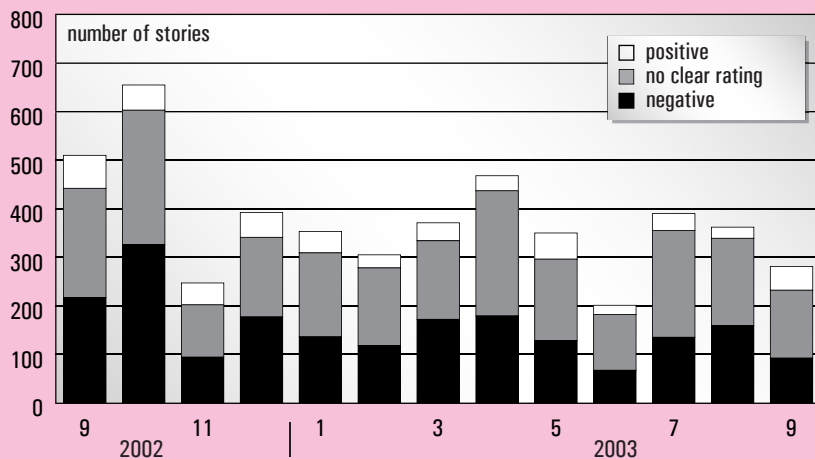
International TV news reduced SARS primarily to Asia in general and China. While it is true that coverage of the epidemic started with news stories on the emergence of the illness in Canada, soon all the analyzed media focused strongly on the situation in China and Asia in general (419 news pieces on Asia, 160 on North America). Their view on Asia was also significantly more negative. The way the Chinese government dealt with the crisis was assessed negatively in 71% of the cases, while the Canadian government was not criticized in any of the the news stories. Cultural distance and proximity, respectively, may be the reasons for the differing assessment.

TV media primarily interested in sensationalism

The analysis of the international TV news on SARS shows that media professionals were primarily interested in sensationalism. They focused neither on providing necessary information on the epidemic, nor on an adequate follow-up, as shown by the abrupt end of coverage. rgd

Media image not recovering

Presence and assessment of Asia, 01/2002-09/2003

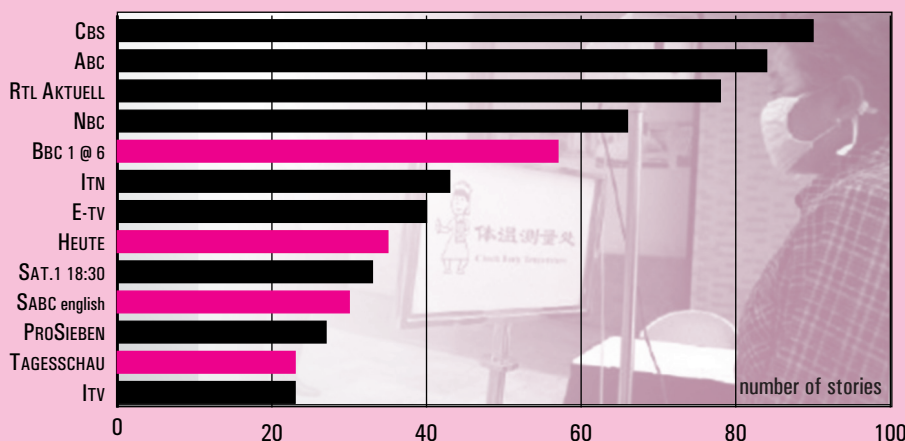


Source: MEDIA TENOR
01/01/2002 - 09/30/2003

Basis: 11,522 stories
in 18 international TV news magazines

Private TV stations focus on SARS

SARS in international TV news, 03-09/2003



Source: MEDIA TENOR
01/01/2002 - 09/30/2003

Basis: 629 stories mainly focusing on SARS
in 13 international TV news magazines

Basis

Media: Bbc1 6 o'clock, Bbc1 9 o'clock, ITN EARLY EVENING NEWS, ITV NEWS AT 10; ABC WORLD NEWS, CBS EVENING NEWS, NBC NIGHTLY NEWS; SABC1 ZULU/XHOSA, SABC2 AFRIKAANS, SABC3 ENGLISH, SABC3 SOTHO; ARD TAGESSCHAU/TAGESTHEMEN, ZDF HEUTE/HEUTE JOURNAL, RTL AKTUELL, SAT.1 18:30, PROSIEBEN NACHRICHTEN

Time: 01/01/2002 - 09/30/2003

Analysis: all stories mainly focusing on SARS in 18 international TV news magazines; 69,827 stories mainly focusing on foreign news, crime or health in 18 international TV news magazines; 11,522 stories mainly focusing on Asia in 18 international TV news magazines