

REVISITING MEDIA ATTENTION SCORE: EVOLUTION OF SIN CHEW DAILY'S NEWSPAPER DESIGN

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Abstract

This study was conducted to revisit media attention score by scrutinizing the evolution of Sin Chew Daily's newspaper design. The study aims to identify differences in the newspaper design of Sin Chew Daily after the era of independence day up to recent times. Since post-independence, the newspaper is produced using glues and metal, with very simple design. There are differences in terms of the development in layout, headline, column gutters, logo, image, typography and colours from the era of 50's until now. In this study, the five approaches of Budd attention score are used to measure the news prominence of Sin Chew Daily. The theory in this study is to understand the measurement of visibility and suitability of Budd attention score used in this present day. The purpose of the study is to look at the evolution of Sin Chew Daily's newspaper design and to review the usage of Budd's attention score (1964) in evaluating news prominence in Sin Chew Daily.

Keywords: *media attention score, news prominence, Sin Chew Daily newspaper design, evolution*

PENINJAUAN SEMULA SKOR PENONJOLAN MEDIA: EVOLUSI DALAM REKA BENTUK AKHBAR SIN CHEW DAILY

Abstrak

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk meninjau kembali skor penonjolan media evolusi dalam reka bentuk suratkhbar harian Sin Chew Daily. Dengan ini, kajian ini bertujuan untuk melihat perbezaan reka bentuk suratkhbar Sin Chew Daily selepas zaman kemerdekaan hingga ke zaman millennium ini. Sejak zaman kemerdekaan, akhbar dihasilkan menggunakan gam dan logam dengan reka bentuk yang mudah. Terdapat perbezaan dan evolusi dari segi perkembangan susun atur, tajuk, ruang kolum, logo, imej, seni cetak dan warna dari era-50 hingga kini. Dalam kajian ini, lima pendekatan skor penonjolan Budd digunakan untuk mengukur keutamaan dan kepentingan berita dalam akhbar Sin Chew Daily. Teori dalam kajian ini adalah untuk memahami sama ada pengukuran skor penonjolan Budd masih sesuai digunakan pada masa kini. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk melihat evolusi reka bentuk akhbar harian Sin Chew dan mengkaji semula penggunaan skor penonjolan Budd (1964) dalam menilai berita utama Sin Chew Jit Poh.

Kata Kunci: *Skor penonjolan media, kepentingan berita, reka bentuk akhbar Sin Chew Daily, evolusi*

INTRODUCTION

What is a newspaper? Basically it means a paper containing news. Newspapers have a collection of information and entertainment on cheap paper. It can be printed daily, weekly or monthly (Junor 1979). The newspapers publish news of special events or unlimited issues of interest in the most recent times. The individual parts are listed irregularly or numerically and presented often, usually at least once a week but sometimes fortnightly or monthly. According to *National Library Of Australia* (2002), newspapers are printed on newsprint paper, usually appear without a cover and folded that come together with a masthead. They may contain supplements such as colour magazines, or other inserts for special emphasis on certain main items or events.

Helander et al. (1997) stated that newspaper design is a creative art, and the expectation to vary design is continuous. In essence, newspaper designers

evaluate the value of a designed gap by looking at it themselves and imagining how readers understand it or sense what it feels like. The gauging of actual readers' perception of the design is very common (in Holmqvist & Wartenberg 2005). This paper, however, will emphasize media attention score by looking at the evolution of *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper design.

Sin Chew Daily has come a long way since the day of its establishment to being one of the largest newspapers in Malaysia. From the time when Malaysia was still a British colony, throughout the time of the anti-Japanese struggle and the independence movement, *Sin Chew* has played the role of witness to history as well as being a participant. Media Chinese International Limited (Anon 2011) stated that today more than 1.18 million Malaysians read *Sin Chew Daily*, making it not only the largest circulating Chinese newspaper in Southeast Asia, but also the largest Chinese daily outside mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In understanding the newspaper design, besides the historical understanding, the evolution of newspapers, the media attention score can also be used, and one often used scale is by Budd (1964). Media attention scores start from score of zero to five depending on how and where the article is shown. Media attention scores focus on delivering the message more effectively, powerfully, with more profound impact. It reaches a maximum communication level with provided resources. It will hide the text written in a weak communication and put out photo or animations to attract attention to avoid misunderstanding of anything that is not clear.

BACKGROUND

Sin Chew Daily was established on 15 January, 1929 and is proud of its development, which at one time is a best-selling newspaper in Malaysia. Now, *Sin Chew Daily* is part of the largest print media abroad. The power of *Sin Chew* especially as a media that crosses boundaries is further strengthened by the existence of new technologies in recent years. *Sin Chew Daily* newspapers achieve the 80th anniversary of publications in 2011. Within 80 years, *Sin Chew Daily* faces and overcomes a lot of challenges to achieve the success they have today.

From the moment the first publication is issued, *Sin Chew Daily* expanded to become part of the largest newspaper circulation in the world beyond China, including Taiwan and Hong Kong. *Sin Chew Daily* is distributed throughout Malaysia and neighbouring countries in southern Thailand, Brunei, Indonesia and northern Borneo. It is published and printed in Indonesia and Cambodia under different mastheads. At the same time, it has a readership of 1.5 million readers within a day. In Malaysia, it has a very wide range of news in the country with the bureau, journalists and stringers placed in the most remote parts of the state.

Government and the combination of the authorities and opposition parties

acknowledged the influence of *Sin Chew Daily* on the political landscape. It has the dubious distinctive recognition from the media all over the world. Every day, the business of *Sin Chew Daily* continues to expand, and its readerships are still increasing. It is still making a mark and stronghold in the print media industry.

The history of *Sin Chew Daily* has been marked by a series of setbacks. There was a major restructuring after the issue of forced termination in 1987 by the government. It also experienced difficulties during World War II, oppressed by certain government policies and various alleged defamation. Historically it can be seen that *Sin Chew Daily* had a close relationship with the progress of nations. *Sin Chew* has served as the voice of Chinese society in all the nations they were in since the beginning.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mass media or press is a vital instrument in the creation of national objectives. It is believed that the media motivate people to participate in the process of growth and development by providing the information and education to the community (Okorie & Oyedepo 2011). Through an understanding on the importance of mass media, this study identifies the differences in the evolution of the *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper design in the days after independence until now.

From the days after independence, newspapers were made by glue and metal that have a simple design. They are different in terms of layout, headline, column gutters, logos, images, typography and colour from the 50's until the millennium era. In terms of content, since post-Independence, there have been many changes in the content of the Chinese newspapers, whereby in the traditional reporting, there was much usage of poetry, but now it is more direct, casual and factual. This shows that there has been a long gap in the development of knowledge for the Chinese (Sinn 2002). Likewise, as the content changes, the design of newspaper changes too in order to appear as more reader-friendly and attractive.

The novelty factor whereby customers always want to see and try something new is also a factor in newspaper design evolution. Therefore, the design has been updated as time evolved to satisfy the customers' needs and desires. The newspaper design has changed a lot compared to the first publication as new creativity aims to deliver information that is of high quality, relevance and value or that is high in quality which is essential for the readers' attention.

The development of *Sin Chew Daily* is divided into different eras. The different eras included 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the millennium era. All the different eras have a unique design to attract particular audiences in that particular time. Even the procedure of newspaper design is different in different eras. Firstly, the editor needs to consider the ideal place to display and publish the items in the newspaper. Regarding this, one of the factors in the evolution of newspapers design is the environment. The environment factors are namely the

government regulation, production costs and distribution factors.

In the beginning, newspapers were printed only in black and white. Now, with technology, the newspapers have specific colours to attract people to read it. According to the development of technology, the newspaper was printed on a printing press and now it is more quickly done in this millennium era than most of the 1950s that uses only hand work. Therefore, the colours of the newspaper layout change according to the era, featuring more sophisticated design for the readers now.

The development of newspapers is also associated with economic changes. In the past, newspaper companies were still new and they faced difficulty in generating a market in the Malaysian society. That was due to the low rate of literacy among the people back then. Now there are higher rate of literacy as well as education in the society, and newspaper has been researched extensively by intellectuals in addition to the increase in the stability of market in the print media. This recent trend has led to the changes of newspaper design.

There is a notion which states that the visibility score of Budd (1964) has not been able to trace the differences in the design of the press in various stages after Independence until the new millennium. Therefore this study is not only to trace the evolution of *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper design during the post-Independence era, but also to test this notion of the sufficiency of Budd attention score in measuring newspaper layout. The differences in media attention score in the design of *Sin Chew Daily* are set and reviewed from the period after Independence until the millennium era.

The measurement components in Budd attention score are the headline size, preferential position on the page, the page on which the story was published, the use of accompanying photographs, and the length of the story. The evolutionary of *Sin Chew Daily* will be measured by these five technical aspects.

The problems mentioned above have several unanswered questions. Is the Budd's attention score (1964) applicable in evaluating the news prominence in *Sin Chew Daily*? What is the difference between the newspaper designs of *Sin Chew Daily* after Independence until the millennium era? Therefore, the *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper designs present in the days after Independence are to be measured and analyzed to answer the objectives of this study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The study aims to look at the evolution of *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper design after the Independence using the print media prominence score by Richard William Budd (1964).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are to fill in the knowledge gap, and to understand the evolution of *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper design after Independence, using

media prominence score. Specifically the study looks at:

- a) The evolution of *Sin Chew Daily*'s newspaper design in the days after the Independence until now
- b) The usage of Budd's attention score (1964) in evaluating news prominence in *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

It is important to do this study to see if the Budd attention score is still applicable to measure the newspaper layout prominence seeing that the measurement had been created long ago. While not denying the establishment of Budd attention score, it is important to keep this measurement updated. At the moment, the Budd attention scores have five points (five criteria), which should have a few more scores added in order to improve its function as a measure for a newspaper's layout. This research seeks to identify the added score. It is also to be noted that Budd attention score has never been attempted or tried in the local context. The studies of evolution of newspapers are also important to understand the gap of the evolution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Holmqvist and Wartenberg (2005) explored the role of local design factors for newspaper reading behaviour in eye tracking perspective. In essence, newspaper designers would imagine how readers could perceive it or sense what it feels through an eye tracking perspective. However, the present study was to examine the effect of local design factor on readers visual behaviour. The method completely in use is group interviews.

According to Koopmans and Vliegthart (2010) the study on media attention has identified a range of factors that determine whether events are covered as news. The theoretical framework for studying media attention are focused on the concepts and research findings from the sociological literature or the diffusion of innovations. As a result, the theoretical framework on media studied analysed the coverage of > 1,300 earthquakes in the period of 1990-2005 in America, British and Dutch newspaper which are consistently and strongly supported by the research findings from the social innovation.

Barnhurst and Nerone (1991) stated that the evolution in design is to create the newspaper cover or front page for the last 20 years ago. The study is about the traditional design which had been replaced by modern fixation changes in newspaper design which usually give the positive impact that implied the process of modernisation. The data collection in this study are from 1885 until 1985 and altogether there are 198 issues which included 5000 individuals that had been coded. A major finding in this research showed that the front cover had become solid and being examined more than one century. As a result, the illustration of the story increased from 5.7% in 1885 to 21.5% in 1985.

Sinn (2002) studied the newspaper about emerging media in Hong Kong and the early evolution of the China Press as an important element in China's modernisation. The views of daily modern Chinese literature are in different degrees of accuracy and published in analytical depth. Therefore, *zhong wai xin wei qiribao* published between March 1871 and April 1872 was reviewed to reflect the level of interest in the development of the newspaper. The study focused on the history of *Qiribao* newspaper and views on what is required by the market in political and social idealism.

Many earlier studies of revisit media attention score on the evolution of newspaper design were based on the newspaper design in foreign countries from overseas. In contrast, there are only a few local studies that focussed on newspaper design. A local study done by Mohd. Dhari Othman in early 80s only focuses on a brief account of newspapers published during British Malaya. It is about the press in Malaysia at the moment of heritage from the past colonial. During this time, the newspaper faced low level literacy among the communities. Hence very few read the newspapers.

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METHODOLOGY

The study method of the evolution of newspaper design is to be explained through in-depth interview and library research. The in-depth interview will be done to look at the idea from the experience of the *Sin Chew Daily* elites in the print media design. This research study is to get the most important message of newspaper design from different points of view through elites of *Sin Chew* newspaper. The library research was from the historical book about *Sin Chew Daily*. The historical book was confidential and was only made available for this research purpose. The stories were described in a more detailed manner by the author of the *Sin Chew Daily* starting from 1929 until the era of the millennium.

FINDINGS

From the interview with the *Sin Chew*'s elites, the researchers gathered that now newspaper designs are using *In design CS5* software for the layout of the newspaper. To attract readers' interest, they place more focus on the theme and content of the news. As cited by Dato CC Liew, Group Managing Director, *Sin Chew Media Corporation*, content is king, so as long as there is content, they shall not be afraid of technologies which challenge the newspaper industry.

No matter how advanced the competition in technology is the focus is still on the contents. In the *Metro* edition, there are various news or issues from different states. It would be combined with the main paper. The content of the *Metro* edition would be more concentrated on the local issues. The theme of the news selected by the editor must be simple yet impactful. They would try to avoid sensitive news and would usually select the news from AFP, CNN,

BERNAMA and other local and international media organisation that really influence the majority.

Thus, the editor of *Sin Chew Daily* will put more information that is seemingly extraordinary and important to attract more readers. According to the editor of *Sin Chew Daily*, they would put news with high prominence usually regarding the development of the country to influence and educate the people on national issues. They will choose one headline which is most attractive with a suitable photo. For example, one of the headline issues for the main page on 18th of January 2011 is as follows: *Direct District Minister: "Pray and settles issue that affecting foreign investment."* Words on the headline are the biggest and it would have its own style compared to the other titles which would have smaller words. In the year of 15th January 1939, the headline issues were mainly focussed on *Sin Chew Daily* ten years special anniversary. This has shown the difference of headlines between 1939 and 2011. In the previous time, the news headlines focused on *Sin Chew* itself; however, in this millennium era the focus is on national issues that influence a lot of people.

Positioning an object at the top of a spread, for instance, could lead to readers seeing it earlier (Holmqvist and Wartenberg 2005). There are a few aspects of *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper design and most of the time they focus on the layout and position for international news, world news, and national issues. "A pattern is found in the *Sin Chew Daily* where it follows the Widman and Polansky (1990) theory for ads: Ads get impost looked at when placed in a position just to the left of the middle (in Holmqvist and Wartenberg 2005)." Following this pattern, advertisements are only allowed to appear in the bottom part of the main page in *Sin Chew Daily*.

Colour in a photo may attract the reader's eyes (Garcia and Stark 1991, Hansen 1994 and Josephson 1996 in Holmqvist and Wartenberg 2005). Most of the news headlines would be red in colour and almost a similar style of colours would appear almost every day. For the main paper of international and local news, sports, and finance segment would be simple and not be too colourful. However, the entertainment segment would have more colours. In addition, headlines are red in colour because the ethnic Chinese like it and this would be attractive as it would be in contrast with the title of *Sin Chew Daily*, which is black in colour. The advancement of technology has contributed to the variety and attractiveness in design which enables *Sin Chew Daily* to adhere to the requirements of the modern readers.

As the researchers observed, the headline for first *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper in 1929 is vertical and connotative. For example, one of the headlines in 1929 is as follows: *Seng Heng sub-business* is a connotative headline which attracts the curiosity of the reader without telling them the content much, or anything about the story. However, the headline for *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper in 1939 is more definitive and written in a terse sentence. For example, one of the headlines in *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper is *ten years result with one year experience*. Also,

the researchers studied that the headline in 1939 is clearer than the headline in 1929. In 1939, the newspaper headlines come out with pictures that show the creativity of the journalist is more important than other things.

On the other hand, the headlines for *Sin Chew Daily* in 1945 were still written simple in form and large in size. The researchers start a good letter head that enables it to perform each function well which brings out the meaning of the content. For example, the headline of *Sin Chew Daily* in 1945 such as *Revived of Sin Chew with the cheers of millions people* (星洲兴复, 万众务欢). However, in 1957, the format of the newspaper is in full format and in vertical form. The researchers found out that the spacings between headline in 1957 are more tight compared to the headline in 1945 which used wider spacing between words.

Starting from 1977, the headline sizes are horizontal and still stay in a simple form and large size. The headlines are longer and are one of the elements of typographic that is combined to make attractive page patterns. The headline forms in 1977 are different from the previous capitalization headline style and are read from right to left such as *Malaysian airlines plane has a deep crashed in southern fishing village with no survivor alive* . However, the headlines in 1989 are read from left to right and have 10 columns. The headline is an important element that even a picture story page is not complete without at least one. For example, one of the headlines in the front page of *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper of 1989 is *Malaysian should involve in politics when appropriate* .

Apart from that, the standard size for a column in *Sin Chew daily* newspaper is 10cm and three centimetres wide. The height of the whole newspaper is 55 centimetres whereas the width of the newspaper is 33 centimetres (33 x 55cm). This is the standard setting for the *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper design. As a picture speaks a thousand words, the editor would choose the most meaningful picture that would express the intended message to the audience. Pictures and graphics were identified as the main entry points, followed by front-page promotion boxes which are used to attract readers to the following pages.

Pictures, according to Garcia and Stark (1991) as well as Hansen (1994), would attract the earliest fixations on a spread. Readers usually enter the page through the dominant photo and then move on to a prominent headline or another dominant photo (in Holmqvist & Wartenberg 2005). Photograph is one of the most important things in newspaper because people nowadays like to read the news with photo. People these days prefer cartoon and comic which are more interesting. The editor would arrange the pictures while the executive editor would select the headlines to be published.

In conclusion, besides applying the five points from the media attention score by Budd, *Sin Chew Daily* has also added two other points in its design which are contents and theme respectively. However the most impressive evolution of the newspaper design is the colour where it has produced a better and more readable newspaper. Hence, the newspaper of this era has more creativity besides being meticulous and informative due to the influence of technology.

DISCUSSION

Data collected from the *Sin Chew* corporate history room has shown the development of the newspaper design in *Sin Chew Daily*. The analysis is done using interviews and various readings by analysing the evolution of newspaper design using media attention score in the context of Malaysia. We found out that the media attention is still suitable and applicable to the *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper.

In this study, we have primarily found the importance of media attention score on the newspaper. Meanwhile, from the analysis, the content in *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper in Malaysia has limitations compared to the ones found overseas. This is because the news is governed by a set of regulation, laws and acts in Malaysia such as The Press Act.

The media attention score has not been intensively studied by scholars in Malaysia. As noted previously, newspaper design before the Independence in Malaysia only used scores which are simple. Before Independence, *Sin Chew Daily's* text were straight down and beginning from the right, its advertisements were less attractive. As time progresses, people become more educated and intellectual increases; thus the *Sin Chew Daily* experienced its climatic change in the 80's.

Our main focus is on newspaper design, and the gap changes, development and exposure to news prominence of *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper was chosen as indicators. Budd media attention score is used as specific indicators. In addition, the theme as well as the design in *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper is different between those printed in Malaysia compared to the ones printed in Cambodia and Indonesia. This is due to the cultural and social element of different countries. In Malaysia, *Sin Chew* emphasized the issues that are more important to the Chinese community, and the government will want to hear these issues as well because it is important for the government to know what the community feels. Meanwhile, Cambodia and Indonesia tend to cover issues which are more related to their own government, language and culture.

Nowadays, the news contents in *Sin Chew Daily* are focused more on local issues to create a sense of proximity. This is because most Chinese in this age were born and raised in Malaysia. They would thus like to know more issues that are closely related to them. Meanwhile, news contents for *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper in the earlier days were more oriented towards mainland China even though the readers were staying in Malaya. People preferred to get news and information about their motherland. Now it is more focused on Malaysia, government policies and current political landscape. Hence, there are differences between contents from the previous times and the present.

CONCLUSION

As seen above, this study has initiated an evolution of *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper

design in the context of Malaysia. Firstly, Budd media attention score is relevant to gauge evolution of *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper layout though the researchers will suggest additional two criteria, namely theme and content.

Overall, *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper design is using a creative layout to attract people by putting their message across with interesting content. Also, there are different kinds of technical aspects which applied to *Sin Chew Daily* newspaper design more specifically and clearly. The use of the advertisement in the most prominent position is the headline. As researchers who are involved in this research, we also have a role to play in the evolution of newspaper design and can perceive different changes in a positive way. Indeed, Budd media attention score (1964) is not outdated to be used in the measurement for *Sin Chew Daily's* newspaper design.

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The interviewees are Sin Chew's Executive editor in-chief, Mr. Kuik Cheng Kang & Executive Editor, Mr. Peh Eu Chen

APPENDIXES



First Sin Chew Daily Newspaper in 1929



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Sin Chew Daily Newspaper in 1966



Sin Chew Daily Newspaper in 1977



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Sin Chew Daily Newspaper 1989

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