

## Public Perception of Crime and Attitudes toward Police: Examining the Effects of Media News

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### *Abstract*

This study reports a two-stage research on how newspaper reporting of crime influence public's perception. The first stage measures the amount of space and prominence given to crime, particularly sex and violent crime in three most circulated daily newspapers in Hong Kong. The second stage of the study was a questionnaire survey of the relationship between 1) newspaper reporting of crime and fear of crime and 2) newspaper reporting of crime and attitudes toward police efficiency on releasing crime information to public. Differences were found between newspapers: newspapers classified as "sensational" carried proportionally more crime reports and reported crimes in a relatively sensational style than the newspaper that classified as "non-sensational". Consistent results indicated that sensational newspapers tended to influence public's perception of fear of crime and attitude towards police more negatively than non-sensational type of newspaper.

### **Introduction**

The mass media constantly surround us, frequently inform us, and just as frequently misinform us and possibly (Heath and Gilbert 1996). Hence, the influence of mass media is significant since media could be identified as a primary force (along with direct and indirect experience) in shaping people's views of crime (Dominick 1978).

Besides the significant effect on fear of crime, mass media has influence on public's attitudes toward police force at the same time. Noted by Surette (1998), news media may be the primary source for citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy and routine crime reports generally offer a conflicting portrayal of police as heroic and professional crime fighters, while simultaneously portraying police as ineffective and incompetent.

On the grounds of various researches have highlighted the powerful influence of media's news coverage, there are solid rationales for us to examine the links between fear of crime and one of media sources: newspapers, and how newspapers' crime news coverage influence public's attitudes toward police efficiency on crime information releasing.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Media Effects Models***

Before analyzing how public could be affected by media, the evolution of media effects should be understood first. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) stated that mass media had potentials to produce strong attitudinal effects on readers but these effects also depended heavily on predispositions, schema, and other characteristics of the readers that affected how they processed the messages projected in the mass media. The rise of three models of media effects had received significant attention from scholars: agenda setting, priming and framing.

*Agenda setting* emphasized mass media place on particular issues by, for example, enlarging the placement of coverage, which will affect the importance

attributed to these issues by mass audiences (McCombs and Shaw 1972). That implies the eye-catching content may provide the ease to the readers while paying attention to those issues in the media and even recalling the memory afterwards. In addition, many scholars like McCombs (1981), and Rogers and Dearing (1988) added that the basis of agenda setting comprised the media do not directly influence people's opinions or what they think but the agenda of issues they think about when the media highlighted some issues meanwhile ignore others.

*Priming* referred to the changes of the standards that people use to make political evaluations (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, p. 63). It occurs when the content of news report suggests to the readers that what they should use as benchmarks for evaluating on some specific issues, for instance, the performance of governments (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007), therefore, it usually being regarded as an extension of the concept of agenda setting.

There were two reasons for that, first, agenda setting and priming are also based on memory-based models of information processing. They assumed people's attitudes and judgments formation were related to the ease in which associations could be brought to their minds (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, p. 208). Second, by making some issues more salient in readers' minds (agenda setting), media can also shape the considerations that people taking into account when they express their attitudes about the issues (priming) (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007).

On the other hand, *framing* differed from the two models while the concept addressed on how an issue portrayed in the media news can create effects on how readers perceived it (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). In a macro level, it referred to modes of presentation that used by journalists and other communicators to present information, in a way that resonated with existing underlying schemas among the readers (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). In a micro level, it demonstrated how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007).

### ***Media Effects and News Production***

Accordingly, whether we recognize the effects of media or not, our perception to this world was heavily influenced by the information provided by the media. Since the journalists could not cover every single events happened every day, thus, it was necessary for them to be selective. This process of selection was the first stage of "creating news" and that was the reason why news was clearly vulnerable to distortion (Tuchman 1978).

As a result, news consumers' beliefs were the reflection of the exposure to certain types of reporting in the news media, notably those involving sex or violence, created a distorted picture of reality (Winkel and Vrij 1990, Marsh 1991). Thus, Erskine (1974) proposed that public "perceived crime as more prevalent than it actually was and consequently experienced fear that was disproportional to their actual danger."

Williams and Dickinson (1993) made the same point on media's influence on public's views on crime as well. Although there are many sources of fear of crime could be identified, such as being a victim and physical vulnerability (Parker and Ray 1990), most people have neither been a victim nor a witness of crime. Consequently, the anticipation of most individuals' fear towards crimes was attributed to indirect sources – the mass media could be made.

Besides, the distorted reality that public read from news could be on account of many crime reports were far from dispassionate, "highly graphic", involve

“sensational portrayals” and “embellished descriptions” (Priyadarsini 1984). Hence, Gordon and Heath (1981) pointed out sex and violence are staples in newspapers with amount of crime reported being unrelated to the actual crime rate in the locale (Fishman 1987). For example, violent crimes were much more likely to be reported than less violent ones, often with important details, such as motive, omitted from the news report (Heath *et al.* 1981).

Other than public’s perception on crime, it was clear that citizens were many times presented with conflicting images of police force and their effectiveness, the portrayal of the police force was rather extreme, as some scholars found out how the police were presented as being unrealistically effective in their studies (Doyle 1998) but others argued that news media usually focused on failed attempts by police to control crime and neglected to cover positive crime control efforts (Graber 1980). Thus, the conflicting images of police force and their effectiveness provided by news media leaving an interesting question that worth exploring.

### ***Newspaper and Fear of Crime***

News reports were unavoidably bound to convey a twisted reality to their readers, now the main question is whether people based their own subjective assessments of the probability of crime on the frequencies of what is being reported in newspapers (Williams and Dickinson 1993).

Rosenbaum and Heath (1990) hence pointed out a vital factor that apart from objective environmental conditions that should be responsible for fear of crime: it was the mass media. Bernard (1992) confirmed the idea in his study as well by concluding that the increase in news about crime led to higher fear of crime. However, newspapers differed in the extent of reporting on crime, the readers’ perceptions of crime would in turn differ. Scholars like Williams and Dickinson (1993) further explored the relationships between extent of crime news and fear of crime, the study illustrated the differences in amount of space and prominence given to crime of daily newspapers in British. And it found the differences had led to different levels of fear among readers, in other words, mass media’s various presentations of crime news may cause different degrees of fear of crime.

Furthermore, factors that could moderate media’s presentation effects on fear of crime were examined. Heath and Gilbert (1996) proposed those factors may include randomness, locality and sensationalism of crimes, and self-relevance and sensationalism of the presentation of crimes. For example, crime news that included no information about motives raised more fear than those motives were illustrated in the report.

Therefore, studies of how sensationalism influence fear of crime have developed, like Stapel and Velthuisen (1996) compared the effects of vivid and sensational newspaper reports of car accidents with a pallid presentation of the incidents along with the same information about the crimes. Consequently, the perceptions of victimization of a car accident and of regarding car accidents as a serious social problem were higher among the participants who were provided the vivid and sensational reports.

William and Dickinson (1993) on the other hand provided a further illustration on why specific characteristics such as information encoded with images in the news reports could lead to biases for the readers. For example, people tended to make assessments based on heuristic principle; it means we all relied on using only the information which was most readily available for us due to the familiarity, salience or recentness of the information (Tversky and Kahneman 1973). Information was more

readily available to readers when they are presented through more than one mode, such as accompanying photos to the news reports (i.e. illustration with words as well as colored photos). As a result, a crime reported in that fashion would be judged as more likely to occur in the future since readers could recall relevant instances of the crime easily (Slovic *et al.* 1977).

Accordingly, it was not surprising that readers had the tendency to overestimate small frequencies and underestimate large ones, also, tried to exaggerate the frequencies of some specific issues because of the disproportionate exposure to those events, especially influential when having memorable characteristics like sensationalism and vividness (Lichtenstein *et al.* 1978). Public's false perception of crimes, especially to those serious crimes like sex and violent offences was constructed due to the extensive media coverage they received.

### ***Newspaper and Attitudes toward Police***

For the effects on attitudes towards police, scholars like Surette (1998) and Marsh (1991) already confirmed that news media was one of the core sources for public's perceptions of police legitimacy. Hence, similar to the results of Doyle (1998) that mentioned before, Lawrence (2000) concluded the news media helped creating the legitimacy of police, in addition sometimes it might even destroy it.

Weitzer's study (2002) discussed the effects on public perception of the police department implicated in various incidents in Los Angeles and New York City as a result of the highly publicized incidents related to police misconduct. With the consideration of the innate influence of those incidents to the public, the findings of the study indicated celebrated incidents of police misconduct may color public's attitude towards police (Weitzer 2002). In particular, their attitudes would be negatively influenced by well-publicized brutality and corruption events of the force. It might further induce a negative outcome that public would become less cooperative with the police and tend to believe subsequent allegations of police misconduct even when the force behaved properly. In the end, the future citizen-police relationship and efficiency of police investigation will be seriously affected.

Moreover, Chibnall (1975) examined in his study about Fleet Street crime reporters, it found that media editors unscrupulously publicized and condemned police's inefficiency on releasing crime information as well. Simmons (1999) added on Chibnall's study by doubting the ability of press police officers to identify news since reporters always complained the delayed release of information or the information was available universally, thus, made it difficult for the reporters to scoop other news institutions by reporting the latest and exclusive news stories.

As for this study, only the attitudes on Hong Kong police's efficiency on releasing crime information would be examined since the issue was covered by most of the Hong Kong news media and being discussed by society popularly during the research period. That is why the issue was worth for exploration.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

From the previous studies, there were knowledge and questions being gained:

1. Does public's perception of crime being influenced by what they read from newspapers?
2. Does public's perception of crime being varied because of different newspapers' presentation of crime news?
3. Does public's attitudes toward police's efficiency on releasing crime

information being affected by newspapers they read?

Therefore, based on the research questions, hypotheses were set to guide the study,

- H<sub>1</sub>: Readers of sensational type of newspaper would have higher levels of fear or crime
- H<sub>2</sub>: Readers of sensational type of newspaper would have more negative attitudes toward police's efficiency
- H<sub>3</sub>: Readers of sensational type of newspaper would have greater crime awareness
- H<sub>4</sub>: The more readers exposed to crime news, the more they fear of crime
- H<sub>5</sub>: The more readers exposed to crime news, the more negative they think about police's efficiency

## Methodology

### *Design*

#### *Quantitative Content Analysis on Crime Reporting Style*

Although there were many previous researchers studied the effects of newspaper crime reporting coverage on perceptions of crime, most of them had shared the same conceptual bias -- based on global rather than component analysis of crime reports. It means researchers have treated crime news as a largely unidimensional entity, ignoring differences in degree of detail, style of presentation, and relevance of the crime for the average readers (Heath 1984).

Hence, scholars like Heath (1984) described content analyses as ignored qualitative aspects of news reporting because they were regarded as superficial and easy-to-measure quantitative aspects. Even like this, there had been recognition that quantitative content analyses can offer more than those scholars thought, for example, Davis and Turner (1951) suggested that it was a good idea to investigate "the influence of eye-catching devices" such as headlines and pictures. Hall's (1966) research also confirmed that distinctive material was easier to learn and recall, so, photographs and graphics were important in catching reader's attention and increased the recall level by reinforcing the accompanying message. The multiple-channel presentation therefore was more likely to have a strong impact than a single channel display (Hartman 1961).

As a result, content analysis is a suitable method to investigate the variation of reporting styles in different newspapers, so, content analyses would be conducted in this study in order to determine the distinctiveness of different newspapers' news presentations and examine how the presentations had impact on their readers' fear of crime levels.

### *Survey*

For the second stage, a questionnaire survey was carried out to determine whether readers of newspapers that categorized as sensational will give more attention to sex and violent crimes as the reports were in a more salient way, so, those readers will in turn rate higher levels of fear of crime. Also their attitudes towards the police's efficiency on crime information releasing will be affected to be more negative. Accordingly, the overall hypotheses were that readers of sensational type of newspapers that containing more salient crime reports would have greater level of fear

of crime and more negative attitudes toward police action on crime information releasing.

The questionnaire survey was carried out to measure the following variables:

- (a) readership patterns (frequency of readership/ choice of newspaper);
- (b) identification of sex and violent crime reports;
- (c) anxiety about self and others' victimization;
- (d) assessment of police's efficiency on crime information releasing tactics (speed/ time length).

Demographic factors of age, sex, and residency location were also measured.

### *Selection of Samples*

#### *Newspapers*

News reports that focused on sex and violent crime during Oct 1, 2011 to Oct 31, 2011 and Jan 1, 2012 to Jan 31, 2012 in Hong Kong's major daily broadsheet newspapers would be used for a detailed quantitative content analysis in order to show how different newspapers varied in the attention they devoted to crime, and highlighted particularly the disproportionate predominance given to sex and violent crimes (William and Dickinson 1993). However, because of the limited time and resources, newspapers for content analysis were selected on the criteria of 1) familiarity and 2) stance towards government.

For the first criteria: familiarity, there were 12 Chinese major broadsheet newspapers in Hong Kong, according to the research on recognition rate of newspapers by Center for Communication Research of Chinese University of Hong Kong. Newspapers that scored more than 50% by the respondents were selected; they are Oriental Daily, Apple Daily, Sun Daily, Ming Pao and Sing Tao Daily.

Due to the present research nature related to public's attitudes toward police, so, newspapers stances toward government could serve as reference for selecting newspapers for the analysis. The project by School of Journalism and Communication of Chinese University of Hong Kong aimed at deciding different newspapers' political stances from their coverage on Article 23 in 2002, Apple Daily was labeled as against government and Sing Tao Daily was labeled as support government. As for Oriental Daily, Sun Daily and Ming Pao, their stances were kind of blurred.

Eventually, three newspapers were selected for the present study: Apple Daily, Oriental Daily and Sing Tao Daily. They are all recognized as high familiarity. In addition, Apple Daily was assessed as anti-government in opposed to Sing Tao Daily as pro-government, Oriental Daily was also included because of its blurred political stance along with higher familiarity compared with Sun Daily and Ming Pao.

#### *Participants*

274 college students were subjected to participate in the survey. All the students were from City University of Hong Kong in two levels: first, university level, 174 students who took Gateway Courses (GE course) were chosen as the university policy that students in all disciplines had to take GE courses. Second, as the research topic related to social issues, students from the Department of Applied Social Studies were invited to participate as well. Accordingly, three programs were randomly selected from the department's course list; students who registered those programs were the subjects of the study. Finally, the students who took the programs of Social Welfare Services, Policies and Issues, Criminology and Psychology composed other 100 samples to the

study.

### ***Measurement Scale***

#### *Quantitative Content Analysis*

Since measurements of content analysis on newspapers' reporting or presentation style had ranged from extensive content analyses of multiple newspapers to document both style and extent of newspaper reports paired with multiple questions about readership patterns (Gordon and Heath 1981) to a single questions about how frequently one reads crime stories when one "come across" them in the newspaper (O'Keefe and Reid-Nash 1987), alternate measurements were set in order to suit the aims of the study.

The quantitative content analysis was the first stage of the research, included two parts of analysis, the first part was subjected to measure every copy of the three daily newspapers that related to sex and violent crime published during October 2011 and January 2012, the aspects of salience are:

- (a) numbers of news area given over to sex and violent crimes reports;
- (b) sizes of crime news area given over to sex and violent crimes reports;
- (c) numbers of photographs and graphics accompanying sex and violent reports;
- (d) sizes of photographs and graphics accompanying sex and violent reports.

Second part was intended to measure every copy of the same three newspapers that related to the issue about police releasing crime information during the same period, however, the numbers and sizes for the coverage on police efficiency issue were not enough to show how police's image was portrayed in the news reports. For instance, if coverage spent greater proportion on reporting critics' opinion, it might influence readers' attitudes negatively while greater proportion on reporting police department's responses or updates on their investigations might affect readers' attitudes positively.

Therefore, instead of measuring merely the sizes of the news reports, analyzing the proportions of different sides of opinions presented in the coverage would be critical to determine what police's image a newspaper tried to convey to their readers. The news reports from 10 Oct and 18 Oct, 2011 were chosen as references for the analysis as Apple Daily, Oriental Daily and Sing Tao Daily all covered the same issue about police releasing crime information on these two days. The aspects of salience are:

- (a) numbers of news area given over to reports on police releasing information;
- (b) sizes of crime news area given over to reports on police releasing information;
- (c) proportions of police responses and criticism to them.

#### *Survey*

##### *Variable 1: Fear of Crime*

It is difficult to find a consistent and specific explanation on fear of crime when reviewing the literatures even some researchers (DuBow *et al.* 1979, Ferraro and LaGrange 1988, Ferraro 1995) felt a sense of frustration about defining and

measuring fear of crime when they are doing researches. DuBow *et al.* (1979, p. 1) stated the problem that 'fear of crime is about a wide variety of subjective and emotional assessments and behavioral reports; therefore there is a serious lack of consistency and specificity toward this view in these reports.' Similarly, Warr (1984, p. 681) summarized that the term 'fear of crime' had acquired so many divergent meanings in the literature that it was in risk of losing any specificity whatsoever, in addition, Garofalo and Laub (1978) asserted that 'what has been measured in research as the "fear of crime" is simply not fear of crime.' Simply saying, there are great confusions among many researchers over what 'fear of crime' really is (Ferraro 1995 p. 21).

Even though the confusion over the definitions of fear of crime among various researchers, Ferraro (1995) finally found consistency in the way it had been measured about fear of crime in some studies, those studies mainly focused on the indicators used in the two famous surveys. They were National Crime Survey (NCS) and General Social Survey (GSS), the two surveys measured 'fear of crime' as respectively questioning the respondents 'How safe do you feel or would you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night?' and 'Is there any area right around here where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?' Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) added that the last question was the most frequently used for measuring fear of crime in the literatures although there were several problems with these types of measures.

To understand more about the measurement of fear of crime, DuBow *et al.* (1979) generated a conceptual framework for defining various perceptions about crime. The vertical axis referred to the level of reference of crime perception ranging from the personal to the general whereas the horizontal axis refers to the type of crime perception ranging from the cognitive to the affective. Then, different combinations of the level of reference and the type of crime perception in Appendix 1 were demonstrated by cells A through F.

While many researchers had measured perceived risks, they assumed that 'fear of crime' had been measured and thus interpreted the research findings accordingly (Baurner 1985, Ferraro and LaGrange 1988). Therefore, Ferraro and LaGrange (1988) provided suggestions in their paper in order to improve the fear of crime measurements to be more accurate, they proposed that indicators of the measurements should measure the emotional state of fear instead of judgments of risk or even general concerns about the crime problem. Previous journal of Ferraro (1995, p. 24) also stated that fear of crime can be thought of as both an emotional and a physiological response to some imminent danger. Also, it was an emotion and a feeling of alarm caused by an awareness or expectation of danger (Warr 2000, p. 453).

In addition to the emotional state of fear, the importance of measuring fear in terms of the types of crime was emphasized too. According to the Appendix 1, only cells C and F represented the emotional state of fear of the respondent, cell C represented the fear for others who may be victimized while F represented the fear for oneself (Ferraro and LaGrange 1988). Consequently, after considering the suggestions made by previous studies, two questions will be used for constructing questionnaires to measure respondents' fear of crime. The questions were: 1) 'How much you worry about the safety of your loved ones from crimes?' and 2) 'How much you fear being a victim of crimes?' The former question was modified from the question, 'I worry a great deal about the safety of my loved ones from crime and criminals' that used in Lee's study (Lee 1982) and also mentioned in the cell C in appendix 1. The latter one was modified from the questionnaire that used by Williams and Dickinson (1993) in their study.

Appendix 1

**Classification and Examples of Crime Perceptions.**

Level of Reference	Type of Perception		
	Cognitive		Affective
	Judgments	Values	Emotions
General	A.	B.	C.
	Risk to others; crime or safety assessments	Concern about crime to others	Fear for others' victimization
	Do you think that people in this neighborhood are safe inside their homes at night? (Clarke and Lewis 1982)	Choose the single most serious domestic problem (from a list of 10) that you would like to see government do something about (Furstenberg 1971)	I worry a great deal about the safety of my loved ones from crime and criminals. (Lee 1982a)
Personal	D.	E.	F.
	Risk to self; safety of self	Concern about crime to self; personal intolerance	Fear for self-victimization
	How safe do you feel or would you feel being alone in your neighborhood at night? (Liska et al. 1982)	Are you personally concerned about becoming a victim of crime? (Jaehnig et al. 1981)	How afraid are you of becoming the victim of (16 separate offenses) in your everyday life? (Warr and Stafford 1983)

Both questions would be measured on a 7-category Likert-type scale from 1 [least worry/ least fear] to 7 [most worry/ most fear] and would be respectively divided into six questions in terms of types of crimes which were molest, rape, personal assaults, theft, robbery and burglary. The questions also translated to Chinese. However, these component scores would be aggregated to construct an overall measure of the perceptions of others' and self's fear of crime levels. The scale for the question no. 6 and no. 7 also had a high reliability scores (alpha .893 and alpha .889).

*Variable 2: Attitudes toward Police*

Considering the question model from previous section that had contribution to measure respondents' emotional states, questions that tried to measure respondents' attitudes toward police's efficiency on releasing crime information would be constructed under the same model.

Two questions were set accordingly to investigate respondent's attitudes toward police's efficiency on releasing crime information. Questions were respectively divided into six questions in terms of types of crimes (molest, rape, personal assaults, theft, robbery and burglary) and measured by 7-category Likert-type scale. Similarly, the sub-questions would be grouped to construct an overall measure, the alpha coefficient for the six items of question no. 8 was .882 and no. 9 was .876, suggesting that the items had relatively high internal consistency.

For the first question, the response set ranges from 1 [very slow] to 7 [very fast] while for the second one, 1 [immediate] meant police should release the crime information within the day the crime happened and 7 [seven days or afterwards]

meant the information should be released seven days or later by police.

## Results

### *Newspaper Content Analysis*

#### *On Sex and Violent Crime Coverage*

Table 1a and 1b were the results of content analysis on sex crime coverage among Apple Daily, Oriental Daily and Sing Tao Daily during the research period.

Table 1a. Sex Crime News (January, 2012).

	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	Sing Tao Daily
Numbers of news reports	34	34	27
Sizes of news area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	6949.45	6847.25	4598.9
Numbers of photographs and graphics	38	40	17
Sizes of photographs and graphics	1494.75	1944.79	750.15

Table 1b. Sex Crime News (October, 2011).

	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	Sing Tao Daily
Numbers of news reports	64	56	33
Sizes of news area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	19251.24	15548.03	8510.57
Numbers of photographs and graphics	82	84	40
Sizes of photographs and graphics	2908.43	3423.66	1571.58

#### *a) Numbers of news reports given to sex crime*

The numbers of news reports devoted to sex crime was exactly the same in January between Apple and Oriental Daily by spending 34 coverage to report the crime while Sing Tao Daily greatly differed from them, only spent 27 news coverage reported sex crime in January.

In October, the numbers of Apple and Oriental Daily were similar: the former spent more than 60 coverage in a month to report on sex crime when Oriental Daily spent nearly 60 coverage to cover the sex crime reports at the same time. As for Sing Tao Daily, it spent the least number of coverage to report on sex crime, consistent with the tendency in January.

#### *b) Sizes of news area given to sex crime*

Unsurprisingly, Apple and Oriental Daily used bigger sizes of print area to cover more number of sex crime reports at the same time. Both newspapers used almost 7000cm<sup>2</sup> in January and more than 10000cm<sup>2</sup> in October to cover their news stories. Yet, Sing

Tao Daily used only about 4500cm<sup>2</sup> in January and 8500cm<sup>2</sup> in October to report the sex crime news.

Hence, the difference of the sizes that used by Apple and Oriental Daily to report the sex crimes was insignificant in both January and October, especially in January the size difference was small to +/- 102.2cm<sup>2</sup>. The tendency that Apple and Oriental Daily spent larger coverage to report sex crime had shown. Sing Tao Daily on the other hand spent the fewest sizes of coverage on reporting sex crime in both months.

*c) Numbers and sizes of photographs/graphics accompanied sex crime coverage*

Within the two months, Apple and Oriental Daily used great amount of numbers of the photographs and graphics accompanied the coverage of sex crime. The numbers of the photographs and graphics were twice more than the photographs and graphics that used by Sing Tao Daily.

Therefore, the sizes of the photographs and graphics that used by Apple and Oriental Daily to accompany the sex crime coverage were consistently larger than the photographs and graphics that used by Sing Tao Daily.

For the followings, the results of Table 2a and 2b were focused on violent crime coverage.

Table 2a. Violent Crime News (January, 2012).

	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	Sing Tao Daily
Numbers of news reports	20	12	21
Sizes of news area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	7568.25	4013.35	5903.84
Numbers of photographs and graphics	49	26	36
Sizes of photographs and graphics	2629	1891.4	1224.3

Table 2b. Violent Crime News (October, 2011).

	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	Sing Tao Daily
Numbers of news reports	39	64	49
Sizes of news area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	13835.17	20465.8	16407.58
Numbers of photographs and graphics	94	130	87
Sizes of photographs and graphics	5085.28	7413.74	4672.49

*a) Numbers of news reports given to violent crime*

In January, Apple Daily and Sing Tao Daily had similar numbers of coverage on violent crime as Apple Daily had 20 reports and Sing Tao Daily had 21 reports about violent crime. However, Oriental Daily only had 12 reports on violent crime.

As in October, Oriental Daily's coverage on violent crime increased dramatically from October's 12 coverage to January's 64 coverage. Sing Tao Daily also had 49

coverage while Apple Daily had the least coverage of only 39 reports on violent crime.

*b) Sizes of news area given to violent crime*

Although Apple Daily and Sing Tao Daily devoted similar numbers of news reports to violent crime in January, still the sizes of the coverage had a huge difference. The total sizes of the coverage of Apple Daily were 7568.25cm<sup>2</sup> but the sizes of coverage in Sing Tao Daily was only 5903.84cm<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, as Oriental Daily spent fewer numbers of coverage on reporting violent crime, so the sizes of the coverage was smallest in January but the amount of sizes soared to the top among the other two newspapers in October since its numbers of news reports raised sharply as well.

*c) Numbers and sizes of photographs/graphics accompanied the violent crime coverage*

In January, Apple Daily used the greatest sizes and numbers of photographs and graphics accompanied the coverage. An interesting point was discovered as Oriental Daily used only 26 photos and graphics to accompany the violent crime coverage but the sizes of the photographs and graphics were greater than the sizes of Sing Tao Daily's 36 photographs and graphics. Hence, Oriental Daily used fewer photographs and graphics to accompany the violent crime coverage but the sizes of them were a lot bigger.

Hence, the numbers and sizes of the photographs and graphics of Oriental Daily were the greatest among all, whereas Sing Tao Daily used the fewest and smallest numbers and sizes of photographs and graphics.

Table 3a and 3b showed the combined results of sex and violent crime respectively presented in the above tables so that the reporting styles of the three target newspapers: Apple Daily, Oriental Daily and Sing Tao Daily could be determined.

Table 3a. All Crime News (January, 2012)

	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	Sing Tao Daily
Numbers of news reports	54	46	48
Sizes of news area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	14517.705	10860.6	10502.74
Numbers of photographs and graphics	87	66	53
Sizes of photographs and graphics	4123.75	3836.19	1974.45

Table 3b. All Crime News (October, 2011)

	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	Sing Tao Daily
Numbers of news reports	103	120	82
Sizes of news area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	33086.41	36013.83	24918.15
Numbers of photographs and graphics	176	214	127
Sizes of photographs and graphics	7993.71	10837.4	6244.07

Apple Daily’s tendency on reporting more sex and violent crime news was showed clearly as its numbers and sizes of the news area devoted to sex and violent crimes were the greatest in January and second highest in October. Also, the numbers and sizes of photographs and graphics that used to accompany the coverage were greater than Oriental Daily and Sing Tao Daily in January, indicated that photographs and graphics were used frequently by Apple Daily.

For Oriental Daily, the tendency was similar to Apple Daily since its numbers and sizes of the news area devoted to sex and violent crimes were the second greatest in January and the greatest in October. Besides, in October, Oriental Daily even used greater numbers and sizes of photographs and graphics than Apple Daily.

Sing Tao Daily on the other hand, showed an exact opposite pattern with Apple and Oriental Daily as it scored lowest in all of the analysis criteria in both January and October. Accordingly, Apple Daily and Oriental Daily should be categorized as sensational type of newspapers and Sing Tao Daily as non-sensational type of newspaper because of their clear differences on reporting proportion devoted to sex and violent crime news and the use of photographs and graphics when presenting those news.

***On Police Efficiency Coverage***

For the followings, the results of Table 4 were focused on police issues coverage.

Table 4a. Police-related News (October, 2011 and January, 2012).

	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	Sing Tao Daily
Numbers of news reports	4	5	4
Sizes of news area (cm <sup>2</sup> )	1294.46	3780	1947.6
Sizes of headlines	163.18	448.53	154.63

*a) Numbers of news reports given to police efficiency issue*

In October and January, three newspapers had similar numbers of coverage on police efficiency issue. Oriental Daily had five coverage and both Apple and Sing Tao Daily had four coverage on the issue.

*b) Sizes of news area given to police efficiency issue*

For the sizes of the coverage, although Oriental Daily only had one more coverage than the other two newspapers, however, the total sizes of all the coverage were two times greater than Sing Tao Daily and three times greater than Apple Daily. It used 3780cm<sup>2</sup> to cover five news coverage while Sing Tao Daily used 1947.6cm<sup>2</sup> to cover four reports and Apple Daily only used 1294.46 cm<sup>2</sup> to cover four reports at the same time.

*c) Proportion of police response and criticism*

Table 4b. Crosstabulation of Newspapers by Word Counts in News Report (10 October, 2011).

		Word Counts			Total
		Police's Response	Criticism	Other information	
Newspaper	Apple Daily	50 <b>12.17%</b>	312 <b>75.91%</b>	49 <b>11.92%</b>	411 100.0%
	Oriental Daily	160 <b>18.93%</b>	292 <b>34.56%</b>	393 <b>46.51%</b>	845 100.0%
	Sing Tao Daily	205 <b>24.55%</b>	279 <b>33.41%</b>	351 <b>42.04%</b>	835 100.0%
Total		415 19.85%	883 42.23%	793 37.92%	2091 100.0%

Table 4c. Crosstabulation of Newspapers by Word Counts in News Report (18 October, 2011).

		Word Counts			Total
		Police's Response	Criticism	Other information	
Newspaper	Apple Daily	100 <b>27.25%</b>	211 <b>57.49%</b>	56 <b>15.26%</b>	367 100.0%
	Oriental Daily	225 <b>23.36%</b>	668 <b>69.37%</b>	70 <b>7.27%</b>	963 100.0%
	Sing Tao Daily	194 <b>59.88%</b>	130 <b>40.12%</b>	0 <b>0%</b>	324 100.0%
Total		519 31.38%	1009 61%	126 7.62%	1654 100.0%

From Table 4b, all of the newspapers used greater proportion to cover criticism on police efficiency on releasing crime information. Especially Apple Daily spent 75.9% of the coverage to quote the opinion from critics opposed opinion on police department's policy and procedure. At the same time, although Sing Tao Daily spent greater proportion to cover the criticism too, still, its proportion was the smallest and the coverage that spent on quoting police department's response was the greatest.

As for the results of Table 4c, Oriental Daily used the greatest proportion to cite

criticism by spending nearly 70% on the oppose side of opinion. Also, Apple Daily spent more than half of its coverage on criticizing police department as well, while both Oriental and Apple Daily covered greater proportion on criticism than police response. In contrast, Sing Tao Daily reported police response more than criticism as it spent almost 60% on quoting police department’s reply on the issue but used only around 40% to cover opposing opinion.

From the analysis, the different styles on reporting the issue on police releasing crime information were showed. Apple and Oriental Daily that being categorized as sensational type of newspapers quoted more anti-government opinion in their coverage or omitted police’s opinion on the issue, so, the image of police was portrayed to be more negative in these two newspapers’ news stories. Nevertheless, Sing Tao Daily on the other hand quoted more opinion from police force like the report from 18 Oct, 2011:

*“Commissioner of Police Lee Siu-kwong emphasized that public interests and safety is police department’s top consideration”.*

Hence, police’s image was likely more positive portrayed in Sing Tao Daily’s coverage.

**Test Variables**

*Newspaper Crime Reporting and Fear of Crime*

The following tables showed the mean differences of perceptions of fear of crime between three groups of readers who read Apple Daily, Oriental Daily or Sing Tao Daily routinely by using the statistics of One-way Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA).

Table 5a. Descriptives for variables of Newspapers and Fear of Crime.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Oriental Daily	70	57.50	12.816	1.532
Apple Daily	85	51.75	15.266	1.656
Sing Tao Daily	52	40.73	13.227	1.834
Total	207	50.93	15.315	1.064

70 respondents who read Oriental Daily frequently had a mean of 57.50 and for 85 respondents who read Apple Daily, the mean was 51.75. As for Sing Tao Daily, the mean score for 52 respondents was the lowest at 40.73.

From the above ANOVA table, the *F* ratio was  $F(2, 204) = 21.737, p < .001$ , implied that there was a statistically highly significant difference of the mean scores on fear of crime among three groups.

Table 5b. ANOVA for variables of Newspapers and Fear of Crime.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8488.371	2	4244.185	21.737	.000
Within Groups	39831.543	204	195.253		
Total	48319.913	206			

As can be seen from table 5c, since the Sig. value for Sing Tao Daily was .000,  $p < .01$ , so, Sing Tao Daily’s readers were statistically significant from Apple and Oriental Daily’s readers. In fact, the Sig. value for Apple Daily’s readers also had significant difference from Oriental Daily’s readers on .035,  $p < .05$ . In other words, readers who read these three targeted newspapers, their levels of fear of crime were all significantly different from each other. While the difference between readers of Apple and Oriental Daily was not as significant as readers of Sing Tao Daily.

Table 5c. Multiple Comparisons for dependent variable ‘Fear of Crime’.

	Newspaper frequently used	Newspaper frequently used	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Bonferroni	Oriental Daily	Apple Daily	5.747*	2.255	.035
		Sing Tao Daily	16.769*	2.558	.000
	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	-5.747*	2.255	.035
		Sing Tao Daily	11.022*	2.460	.000
	Sing Tao Daily	Oriental Daily	-16.769*	2.558	.000
		Apple Daily	-11.022*	2.460	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

*Newspaper Crime Reporting and Attitudes toward Police*

The following tables showed the One-way ANOVA results for different groups of respondents’ attitudes toward police’s efficiency on releasing crime information.

Table 6a. Descriptives for variables of Newspapers and Perceptions of Police Efficiency.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Oriental Daily	70	26.91	6.185	.739
Apple Daily	85	26.95	5.954	.646
Sing Tao Daily	53	31.19	5.385	.740

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Oriental Daily	70	26.91	6.185	.739
Apple Daily	85	26.95	5.954	.646
Sing Tao Daily	53	31.19	5.385	.740
Total	208	28.02	6.154	.427

For the mean results, the mean of Oriental Daily was 26.91 and Apple Daily’s mean was 26.95, indicated the mean score of these two groups had slight difference only. And Sing Tao Daily’s mean score was 31.19 that higher than the other two groups.

Table 6b. ANOVA for variables of Newspapers and Perceptions of Police Efficiency.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	714.512	2	357.256	10.278	.000
Within Groups	7125.411	205	34.758		
Total	7839.923	207			

For the results of ANOVA table, the *F* ratio was  $F(2, 205) = 10.278, p < .001$ , indicated the attitudes toward police’s efficiency on releasing crime information from three different groups of respondents were significant statistically.

Table 6c. Multiple Comparisons for dependent variable ‘Police Efficiency’.

	Newspaper frequently used	Newspaper frequently used	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Bonferroni	Oriental Daily	Apple Daily	-.039	.952	1.000
		Sing Tao Daily	-4.274*	1.073	.000
	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	.039	.952	1.000
		Sing Tao Daily	-4.236*	1.032	.000
	Sing Tao Daily	Oriental Daily	4.274*	1.073	.000
		Apple Daily	4.236*	1.032	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Therefore, similar to the results on respondents’ levels of fear of crime, the Sig. value for Sing Tao Daily was .000,  $p < .01$ , meant Sing Tao Daily’s readers were statistically significant from Apple and Oriental Daily’s readers. Put in other way, for those readers who read Sing Tao Daily, their attitudes toward police’s efficiency on

releasing crime information were significantly differed from readers of Apple and Oriental Daily.

Nevertheless, the difference on the attitudes between Apple and Oriental Daily’s readers were insignificant as the Sig. value was 1.000,  $p > .05$ . Hence, it can be concluded that for the readers who read Apple and Oriental Daily, their attitudes toward police’s efficiency on releasing crime information had no significant difference.

**Further Analysis with Crime Awareness and Perceptions of Crime/ Police Newspaper Readership and Crime Awareness**

In addition to the main hypotheses H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>, the relationships between newspaper readership and crime awareness were examined. Results drawn from the One-way ANOVA shown that there was an overall significant difference on crime awareness among three groups of readers, the *F* ratio was  $F(2, 181) = 4.372, p < .05$ . However, the difference was just statistically significant between the readers of Apple Daily and Sing Tao Daily in which the Sig. value was .011,  $p < 0.5$  (see Table 7). In other words, for the Sing Tao Daily’s readers, they were more exposed to crime news (mean=7.09) whereas the readers of Apple Daily were less exposed (mean=5.51).

Table 7. Multiple Comparisons for dependent variable ‘Crime Awareness’.

	Newspaper frequently used	Newspaper frequently used	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Bonferroni	Oriental Daily	Apple Daily	.735	.495	.417
		Sing Tao Daily	-.843	.557	.396
	Apple Daily	Oriental Daily	-.735	.495	.417
		Sing Tao Daily	-1.578 *	.536	.011
	Sing Tao Daily	Oriental Daily	.843	.557	.396
		Apple Daily	1.578 *	.536	.011

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Crime Awareness and Fear of Crime/ Attitudes towards Police**

Other result was the influence of crime awareness. It is found by using the statistic of Correlations that crime awareness does not directly increase crime fear and destroy police image. There were very weak (Pearson’s  $r = -.195, p < .005$ ) correlations between three groups of readers on the levels of fear of crime, and even no significant difference on their attitudes toward police (Pearson’s  $r = -.006, p = .921$ ).

**Gender, Crime Awareness, Readership and Fear of Crime**

Refer to the results from Regression, the differences of gender, crime awareness and newspaper readership on fear of crime had shown. They all contributed to more than 26% of the respondents’ fear of crime situation (R Square = .268) and there were a highly significant difference, the *F* ratio was  $F(3,179) = 21.841, p < .001$ .

However, regarding the variables of gender and choice of newspaper, the Sig.

value for both of them were smaller than .001, these two variables had a more significant relationship to the dependent variable than the variable: crime awareness,  $p < .005$ . Moreover, male respondents' fear of crime levels were lower than their counterparts since a negative value of  $t$  was displayed.

### ***Crime Awareness, Readership and Attitudes toward Police***

About the weight of crime awareness and readership on attitudes toward police's efficiency on releasing crime information, it is noted that the  $R$  squared value is only .120, showed that the variables explained around 12 % of the respondents' attitudes toward police efficiency on releasing crime information. The  $F$  ratio is  $F(2,205) = 13.919$ ,  $p < .001$ , shown that a significant relationship between independent variables: crime awareness and readership, and dependent variable: attitudes toward police efficiency on releasing crime information.

In addition, the coefficient results shown that the variable of choice of newspaper ( $p < .001$ ) had a more significant relationship to the dependent variable than the variable of crime awareness ( $p < .05$ ).

### **Discussion**

Overall, most of the results showed consistency with the hypotheses that being set for the study. The content analysis displayed the differences among three targeted newspapers while the results of questionnaire survey demonstrated that readership could anticipate the fear of crime level and attitudes toward police's efficiency on releasing crime information because of the similar findings.

Besides, for the variable of crime awareness, it was not an effective predictor to estimate readers' fear of crime levels since there were no strong relationships can be found between readers' awareness to crime and their fear of crime levels. In the beginning, the prediction was sensational newspaper readers would be more aware to crimes because their attentions were attracted by the newspaper's presentations so that those readers' fear of crime levels would be higher than the non-sensational newspaper readers. Nonetheless, the findings showed a contrary to that as the non-sensational newspaper readers had higher crime awareness but scored lower in fear of crime. Also, the relationship between crime awareness and the dependent variables were not significant like other variables such as readership and gender.

The assumption to the contradictory results that opposed to the hypotheses could be the awareness to crime actually eased the level of fear of crime. According to the content analysis, the non-sensational newspaper readers were provided with detailed information from the news coverage without huge amount of "sensational" photographs and graphics to accompany the news report. Hence, the higher their awareness to crimes, the more they know about the "whole picture" of the crimes, for example, the motives and the investigation works by the police. Consequently, those readers were aware to crimes more but less afraid to crimes.

Moreover, questionnaire survey results indicated that all three groups of readers believed that the police department should release the case information once a crime occurred regardless which type of offence it was. Obviously, some values agreed by public commonly would not be affected by media's coverage easily, such like the expected standards on police efficiency.

Despite many significant results that supporting for the hypotheses, so the crime news reporting style had played some roles on public perception and attitude had been

confirmed. Nevertheless, it would be unrealistic to overlook the chances that readers from sensational type of newspaper were more fear to crime and held more negative attitudes toward police was because of other factors precipitated such perception and attitude difference.

The possibility has to be examined and treated with caution. First, the respondents should not be categorized by their readership solely since the variances might be due to other influences. Individuals' perceptions of crime or attitudes toward police could be influenced by various factors simultaneously. Although in this study, the statistics of Regression was conducted to deeply explore how different variables could contribute to readers' fear of crime levels and their attitudes to police efficiency on releasing information, yet, it was only a one-time test that proceeded for examining the perceptions and attitudes. The factors that could moderate the media effects or already influencing the respondents were ignored. For example, there were previous studies had proved that direct experience as the victim of a personal crime elevated significantly one's concerns for future personal victimization (Skogan and Maxfield 1981) and moderated their perceived credibility of received information afterwards (Tyler and Rasinski 1984).

Also, the interactive effect between different variables was not inspected. For instance, if there are any difference on fear of crime level between the male and female sensational newspaper readers. Therefore, examination on diverse individual and environmental factors was crucial to fully understand and determine the effect of media on one's perception and attitude, however it was beyond the scope of this study, no other sources or factors were identified or eliminated in the mean time.

Second, as there were great amount of events happened in Hong Kong every day, hence, it is not possible for the news media to cover all of the crime incidences. That was the reason for news media to be selective in the first place, thus, they would merely cover those rather sensational crimes to draw public's attention on their coverage. In some publishers' eyes, the more sensational of the coverage, the more attractive to public, so more profits they can make.

This was the origin that caused disproportionate reporting to sex and violent crime news. However, it should be recognized that the processes of selection on news was probably not started by news media but the official agencies like police department. Under the same imperative, it was impossible for the police department to release all of the crime incidences happened in a single day without any mistakes. Thus, the situations like delayed information releasing or failed to release some case details could happen before media acquiring information from the agency and select the "sensational" news to report.

On the other hand, the causal links between newspapers, fear of crime and attitudes toward police's efficiency on releasing crime information were supported by the findings. Still, newspapers represented just one source of information that people received crime news or information. In this study, only the newspaper effect was investigated, there were no further explorations on other tools that used by respondents to gain information in their daily life. Consequently, it was still not clear that whether respondents' fear of crime levels and attitudes toward police efficiency were attributed to their newspaper reading habit, the possibility of interactive effect should not be ruled out. Different media like newspapers, television and Internet could all be the sources of information and all contributed to respondents' fear of crime levels and attitudes toward police efficiency at the same time. As it can imagine, all of the unknowns were needed to be further investigated in future.

Furthermore, the study was restricted by limitations as well. Weaknesses were

the small amount of samples and all participants were from City University of Hong Kong, hence the findings would not be able to generalize to the wide population as it was limited by the representativeness issue. The readers that participated in the study could only represent one segment of all frequently readers of the three major newspapers in Hong Kong.

### **Conclusion**

Two stages of research were conducted for examining how the difference on news reporting styles among three major broadsheet newspapers in Hong Kong had impact on public perception of crime and attitudes toward police efficiency on releasing information.

The degree of sensationalism on coverage of the three targeted newspapers: Apple, Oriental and Sing Tao Daily were investigated by detailed content analysis. Apple Daily and Oriental Daily were categorized as sensational type of newspapers whereas Sing Tao Daily as non-sensational as consistent results was found among two research period. Furthermore, Apple Daily and Oriental Daily tended to report the police work negatively while Sing Tao Daily showed an opposed tendency.

In the second stage, a questionnaire survey was executed to test the two major hypotheses: how readership links with newspaper readers' fear of crime and their attitudes toward police actions. Readers of the sensational type of newspaper had higher levels of fear or crime and tended to hold more negative attitudes toward police's efficiency on releasing crime information. Hence, the predictions had been verified by the findings, the various styles on reporting coverage related to crime and police did have impact on how readers would evaluate the crime issue and police image.

Moreover, awareness to crime was used as variable for strengthening the relationships. Nevertheless, the influence of crime awareness was found not directly link to fear of crime or attitudes toward police since the correlation results was rather weak and had fringed significant on dependent variables only. Also, the relationships with newspaper readership even showed an opposite direction to the hypothesis as well. Based on that, the impact of crime awareness could be excluded as a strong predictor to such kind of relationships.

To conclude, taking all the findings into account, public's perceptions of crime and attitudes toward police were to a certain extent related to the effects of media "framings" by clear evidence provided, even though there was possibility that had not been confirmed yet.

### **Biographic Note**

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