

Online Reporting of the Rice Crisis

Introduction

Global rice crisis. Rice is the most important food commodity in the Philippines; a shortage would mean hundreds of thousands of Filipinos going hungry. And now, the world is facing a rice crisis and the Philippines is scrambling to import rice. Despite the great attention in the media and aid efforts, the world hunger crisis continues to worsen as many of the communities struggle with daily hunger and starvation.

Rice is consumed by Filipinos daily, a very sensitive political commodity. There is no question a big flow in the rice's price is bound to urge social unrest and political instability. Many of the neighboring countries consider this situation strange because the Philippines have always been known as an agricultural, rice-producing country. Students from Vietnam and Thailand studied the latest techniques in rice cultivation in the Philippines. They returned to their countries and built up a thriving rice export industry. It turned out, the Philippines is now one of their biggest customers. And if the Philippines continued to be a rice importer we could suffer considerably, once rice prices double or triple due to severe shortages, just like what is happening in the country right now.

Root causes of rice crisis. The looming rice crisis is literally life-and-death problem. Several reasons came out on what really are the root causes of the rice crisis. The root cause are issues related to high cost of inputs, lack of forward planning, and the shift to corn and jatropa. Also, the country's huge population growth rate threatens food security and aggravates the looming rice shortage. The amount of food to be feed is no longer enough to supply people's needs. Conversion of rice lands into residential subdivisions and commercial districts was the most significant factor that led to the rice crisis. Some golf courses and subdivisions were built instead of planting rice that will supposedly feed thousands of Filipinos.

The current concern over rice shortage should prompt the government to adopt integrated rice production program. It has to speed up the agrarian reform program so that farmers would have more land on which to cultivate rice. It has to moderate the conversion of rice lands to lands for the cultivation of corn and alternative crops as well as their use for subdivisions and entertainment or commercial complexes.

Issues about the rice crisis as being artificial came about. It was said that the country was actually facing a rice distribution crisis and that the panic was being made up by the hoarders themselves who anticipate a rise in prices. To that, conflicts across as people demanded to be told frankly by the government that there is a shortage and should also be informed about the measures that the government and the private sector are taking to lessen the shortage. The rice crisis should be addressed and taken seriously by the government before the situation gets out of hand.

Online news. Information is probably the biggest advantage the Internet is offering. The Internet is considered as the virtual trove of information. It is the fastest moving in the world. There is a huge amount of information available on the internet for just about every subject known to man ranging from government law and services, technological information, fashion, food, news, the list is endless.

Online news websites are available in the internet. News can't just be found in newspapers anymore. The news is even more vital because online websites can cover all manner of topics and hence news stories vary greatly on subject matter. Take for example two of the most leading online news websites in the country: Inquirer.net and gmanews.TV. With just a click of the mouse, one can search the news he or she want to gather round, rice crisis for instance.

Objectives of content analysis

This study aimed to:

- Determine the contents of the sample issues in two online news sources
- Determine the factors that contribute to the crisis
- Analyze the frequency, placement, treatment and type of stories of each online sources

Methodology

Scope of the study

The study dealt with rice crisis articles in the two online news sources: Inquirer.net and gmanews.TV. These sites were selected because they have the same circulation and reach and that the issues are regularly posted in each of the online sources.

The analysis focused on parameters; frequency of appearance, placement, treatment, type of stories, and content given to rice crisis articles in the site. The content was further categorized into specific areas: artificiality of the rice crisis issue, its causes, magnitude of problem, and the solutions.

Sampling Procedure

All rice crisis articles posted within the time frame of one week, from March 25 to 31, 2008 were selected. It was at this time that the rice crisis issue was at its peak.

In GMANews.tv, two, three, four, two, one, one, and six articles were found on March 25-31, respectively, having a total of 19 issues for GMANews.tv. On the other hand, Inq.net has a total of 24 articles. Five for March 25, four in March 26, two for the 27th and 28th, one on March 29, four on March 30 and 6 articles on March 31.

A total of 43 sample issues for the two sites were chosen.

Data requirements

For each website, data on the following variables were gathered:

1. Frequency of appearance of rice crisis news on two online news sources
2. Placement of news stories
3. Treatment of rice crisis news stories
4. Types of stories on rice crisis
5. Content of rice crisis news stories

Data gathering and analysis

Frequency counts were used to determine the number of rice crisis issues in each of the website samples. The data are presented in tabular format.

Results and discussion

Of the articles contained in the sample issues within March 25-31, 2008, forty-three articles were about rice crisis issues. Nineteen articles were in the GMAnews.tv while 24 articles in Inq.net. Table 1a shows that 55.8% of the total percentage of articles were from Inquirer.net while less than half (44.2%) of articles were posted in GMAnews.tv. This indicates that Inquirer.net produced more rice crisis articles compared to GMAnews.tv within March 25 to 31, 2008.

Table 1a. Frequency of appearance of rice crisis news on two online news sources

Online news sources	No.	%
GMAnews.TV	19	44.2
Inquirer.net	24	55.8
Total	43	100

Table 1b. Frequency of appearance of rice crisis news on two online news sources, (March 25-31, 2008)

Date	GMAnews.TV		Inquirer.net	
	No.	%	No.	%
March 25	2	10.5	5	20.8
26	3	15.8	4	16.7
27	4	21.0	2	8.3
28	2	10.5	2	8.3
29	1	5.3	1	4.2
30	1	5.3	4	16.7
31	6	31.6	6	25
Total	19	100	24	100

In GMAnews.tv, the topmost portion of the page have clickable images and videos. The right side of the page is occupied by ads mostly on condominium units. In the Inquirer.net, it was the same with the GMAnews.tv but it has a banner at the topmost part of the page and has fewer ads.

Regarding the placement of rice crisis articles, 100% of the articles from GMAnews.tv were located in the breaking news category. This suggests that the website considered most of the rice crisis issues as important. For Inquirer.net, 41.7% were also situated in breaking news section, followed by headlines which was 20.8%. Articles in the editorial and infotech had the least percentage of rice crisis issues.

Placement of all rice crisis articles for GMAnews.tv was in breaking news because it is an online news source for television. Unlike Inquirer.net which is an online newspaper format, the articles were situated in the different locations of the site, either in headlines, column, editorial, opinion, infotech or letters to the editor.

Table 2. Placement of rice crisis news stories

Placement	GMAnews.TV		Inquirer.net	
	No.	%	No.	%
Headline news	0	0	5	20.8
Breaking news	19	100	10	41.7
Column	0	0	3	12.5
Editorial	0	0	1	4.2
Opinion	0	0	2	8.3
Infotech	0	0	1	4.2
Letters to the editor	0	0	2	8.3
Total	19	100	24	100

Table 3 shows that both online news sources were neutral to the rice crisis issue which means that the site presented both sides of the story. GMAnews.TV is 47.4% neutral while Inquirer.net is 62.5% neutral. Also, both GMAnews.TV and Inquirer.net have the least percentage of 15.8% and 16.7% respectively for negative treatment.

Table 3. Treatment of rice crisis news stories

Treatment	GMAnews.TV		Inquirer.net	
	No.	%	No.	%
Favorable/positive	7	36.8	5	20.8
Unfavorable/negative/critical	3	15.8	4	16.7
Neutral	9	47.4	15	62.5
Total	19	100	24	100

Table 4 shows that 100% of the rice crisis articles in GMAnews.tv were presented in straight news format. On the other hand, 62.5% articles in Inquirer.net were in straight news format while both news feature and commentary type of stories had the same percentage, 16.7%. Investigative type of story got the least percentage in both online news sources. This shows that the two sites seems to have given much concern to rice crisis issues for most of the articles were in the straight news format.

Table 4. Types of stories on rice crisis

Type of stories	GMAnews.TV		Inquirer.net	
	No.	%	No.	%
Investigative	0	0	1	4.2
Straight	19	100	15	62.5
Newsfeature	0	0	4	16.7
Commentary	0	0	4	16.7
Total	19	100	24	100

The content of rice crisis articles are categorized in specific areas: artificiality of the rice crisis issue, its causes, magnitude of problem, and the solutions. Table 5 shows that GMAnews.tv had more varied content on the rice crisis issue as it tackled most of the topics in each category compared to Inquirer.net.

Inquirer.net dealt with the artificiality of rice crisis while GMAnews.tv paid no attention for that particular issue. Causes or contributing factors and suggested solutions to the issue were discussed in both online news sources. However, it was only the Inquirer.net which gave it much prominence than GMAnews.tv. However, GMAnews.tv gave more importance to the magnitude of problem.

The GMAnews.tv focused more on the magnitude of problem regarding the rice crisis issue as it gained 42.1%, particularly in the importation of rice issue which is 15.8%. The artificiality of the rice crisis was not mentioned in the sample articles of rice crisis in GMAnews.tv. Inquirer.net paid more attention to the suggested solution category, 34.6 %, and the least to the magnitude of problem.

Table 5. Content of rice crisis news stories presented in GMA News.TV and Inquirer.net.

Content	GMA News.TV		Inquirer.net	
	No.	%	No.	%
Rice crisis artificial			3	11.5
Causes or contributing factors				
- GMA	2	10.5	1	3.8
- Land conversion			2	7.7
- NFA employees			2	7.7
- Population growth			2	7.7
- ADB loan			1	3.8
- Rice hoarders	2	10.5		
- Government	1	5.3		
Subtotal	5	26.32	8	30.8
Magnitude of problem				
- Importation of rice	3	15.8		
- Occurrence of protests	1	5.3		
- Lifting of truck ban in Metro	1	5.3		
- Increase in rice prices	1	5.3	3	11.5
- Subprime crisis metastasizes			3	11.5
- Irregularities involving NFA rice	2	10.5		
Subtotal	8	42.1	6	23.1
Solutions suggested				
- Rice planting	1	5.3		
- World Bank urges lower rice tariff	1	5.3	1	3.8
- Anti poor policies behind rice			1	3.8
- Philippines talk with neighbors on rice	1	5.3	4	15.4
- CBCP open church facilities for rice distribution	1	5.3	3	11.5
- Aerial survey of rice-producing provinces	1	5.3		
- Budget for rice production	1	5.3		
Subtotal	6	31.6	9	34.6
Total	19	100.0	26	100.0

References:

<http://services.inquirer.net/search/gws.php?radiobutton=inquirer&searchkey=rice+crisis>
<http://www.gmanews.tv/dosearch.php?terms=rice+crisis&searchby=article&x=11&y=9>