

INVESTIGATING THE DETERMINANTS OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS FLOW

A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract / Studies investigating the determinants of international news flow in the past few decades are systematically reviewed and analyzed. The factors found in these various studies can be demarcated into two broad categories: gatekeeper perspective and logistical perspective. A synthetic profile of the past studies is also provided, which includes the regions and topics covered by international news, geographic distribution of the studies' locales, space/newshole allotted for different regions, and media examined by the studies. The article ends with a critique of the past studies and offers some prospects for future research on this topic.

Keywords / determinant / foreign news / international news / meta-analysis / news flow

Introduction

News transmitted from other countries often influences an audience's perceptions and attitudes toward these countries (Perry, 1987; Salwen and Matera, 1992; Semetko et al., 1992). Furthermore, because most people do not have personal knowledge of foreign events, argued Zucker (1978), the agenda-setting effect of foreign news will loom stronger than that of domestic counterparts. As we know, public opinion is one of the major factors that shape the development of foreign policy in democratic societies. This is why scholars have argued that international news coverage can trigger changes of foreign policy and transformation of international relations (e.g. Cohen, 1963; Amanpour, 1996).

International news has become increasingly important as the world gets smaller and international affairs tend to engage lots of dissimilar citizens from various countries. This daily, if not the only, source of knowledge about other countries can be expected to have a tremendous impact on how we comprehend the world and communicate with people of different nationalities. The importance of news transmission in contemporary society led us to investigate the determinants of international news flow – why some news stories get published while others do not.

This research topic also addresses another important issue in international communication. The New World Information and Communication Order

(NWICO), starting in the late 1960s, was advocated by spokespersons from the newly independent countries as a symbolic struggle for the media/information component of their national independence. Against the backdrop of UNESCO, they contended that the structure of international news flow was perilously imbalanced, news from developing countries was often biased and misrepresented, and resources to obtain and disseminate information should be redistributed (e.g. Masmoudi, 1984; McPhail, 1983; UNESCO, 1980). On the other hand, the West defended vigorously the fashion in which their journalism has been practiced and the independence their media organizations have long enjoyed. Nevertheless, the naked facts about these complex issues were clouded by the sometimes overpoliticized, psychology-laden and ideology-driven debates voiced from both sides of the world.

Since the 1960s, initiated by a handful of Scandinavian scholars, a great number of studies dealing with foreign and/or international news have been completed. Based on Tsang et al. (1988), at least 150 research papers were published between 1970 and 1986 on topics of international news flow and coverage. Numerous research papers on these topics have also been published since 1980. Since a substantial body of research has already been established in the past three decades, this article attempts, via a meta-analytical approach, to induce the factors that have been found to influence international news flow. It is hoped that the determinants of information trafficking across national borders can provide a solid, resourceful information basis for communication scholars and policy-makers.

Methodology

The collection of the research papers in this study was based on computer-assisted literature searches combined with a 'snowball' method – looking for relevant studies from the references of the already available papers. Research papers that were published in major journalism and mass communication journals are included in this sample. Studies presented in national and/or international conferences of journalism and mass communication were gathered as well. The search resulted in 55 research papers, which constitute the foundation of this meta-analysis.¹ Although the real total number of papers presented and published is by no means certain, the difference between these two numbers should not be too large.

Most of the studies included in this sample adopted quantitative methods to examine various factors that influence international news flow across national borders. Also included, although far fewer in number, are research papers that employed qualitative methods to uncover determinants of news coverage. It is worth noting that a great number of studies that depicted how one country (area, or continent) was covered or represented in the news media of another country or other countries were ruled out in the sample selection. For, as earlier communication scholars pointed out (Rosengren, 1977; Tsang et al., 1988), they addressed the issue of image presentation and should belong to another category of studies.

Meta-analysis is an appropriate method here because it enables the

researcher to systematically reanalyze the published data and to induce useful conclusions. It avoids the drawbacks of traditional literature review, which has typically been done in a selective, unscientific and impressionistic fashion (Glass et al., 1981). In this article, facets of the international news flow studies were analyzed, compared, critiqued and synthesized. In addition, this study shows the variables examined, outcomes of each study, news media sample used, when the study was implemented, the host country (countries) whose news media were examined, countries and/or regions that were covered, and so forth.

Findings

Based on the studies reviewed, along with a handful of middle-ranged theories of international communication, a conceptual demarcation was made to highlight the distinct approaches those past studies have taken. In line with Ahern's (1984) observation, the hypothesized and/or discovered determinants of international news flow can be divided into two broad categories: *gatekeeper* perspective and *logistical* perspective. The former category predominantly centers on the social psychology of the news professionals and how those characteristics eventually affect news output. The latter, however, examines the socio-economic components and physical logistics of news gathering, focusing on broad and systemic factors of international news flow.

Prior to the following presentation of findings, one should note that there are two approaches researchers used to conduct their research. The first approach directly addressed the various issues generated by the NWICO debates; therefore, those studies directly compared the determinants of coverage of/from the West with that of/from the Third World countries. The other approach, however, investigated whether given factors would influence the acceptance rate of news transmitted from given countries without making distinctions with regard to the political nature or development level of countries.

Gatekeeper Perspective

Wire Services and News Professionals

News professionals and international news agencies contribute a great proportion of the gatekeeping effect to international news coverage – they can either decide the amount of coverage a country receives or determine the topics or issues that will be emphasized if that country is covered at all. Because of this potential impact, communication researchers have long been interested in understanding how news professionals decide what should be included in the international newshole. From the outset, among the many news genres, international news has not seemed to be news professionals' favorite. According to various studies, news editors tend to either neglect or belittle the audience's interests in international news (e.g. Hess, 1996; Rosenblum, 1979; Senn, 1988; Straughan, 1986).

In addition, news people often seem to hold peculiar perceptions about their readers' needs, and even disregard results of empirical audience research. Both

Schramm (1960) and Hester (1971) observed that news editors tend to act on their intuitive assumptions about readers. For example, they often believe that most readers are only interested in the countries where there exist cultural or ethnic ties rather than those that are entirely unrelated. Furthermore, Nichols (1975) found that little correlation appears to exist between international news coverage and audience interests, indicating irresponsible judgments on the part of news editors.

Wire service undoubtedly is one of the most important gatekeepers in international news flow (see Figure 1). However, to the author's knowledge, there are only a couple of studies (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Fenby, 1986) that have investigated how major international news agencies covered the globe for millions of audiences worldwide. Even though these two studies are extraordinarily informative and insightful, it is necessary to update their accounts since the marketplace of international news has changed dramatically since the Cold War era.

There are, nevertheless, a number of studies investigating how news is percolated from major wire services and how the news outputs from the international news agencies differ from each other. Probably the earliest observation was made by Cutlip (1954), who reported a noticeable change of news coverage in Wisconsin and Indiana newspapers since the advent of teletypesetters. The wide use of wire copy, Cutlip wrote, resulted in increasing coverage about US government, politics and foreign relations. Kaplan (1979) also observed a remarkable decrease in diversity of perspectives since international news in the USA came primarily from the Associated Press (AP) and the United Press International (UPI).

Empirical studies focusing on international news agencies' impact on news selection in local outlets have generated mixed results. Becker et al. (1980) found a striking correspondence between the international wire copy and former Yugoslavian newspaper coverage about the USA. Chang and Han (1985) and Wilke and Rosenberger (1994), however, discovered a notable discrepancy between international news agencies and local news media. Link (1984), investigating seven Latin American newspapers, also found that there does not seem to be a consistent pattern regarding the use of wire copy – some newspapers rely more on wire services while others apparently have their own individual journalistic repertoires.

The mentality or mind-set of news people toward international news also intrigued researchers. Chang and Lee (1992), for example, interviewed 279

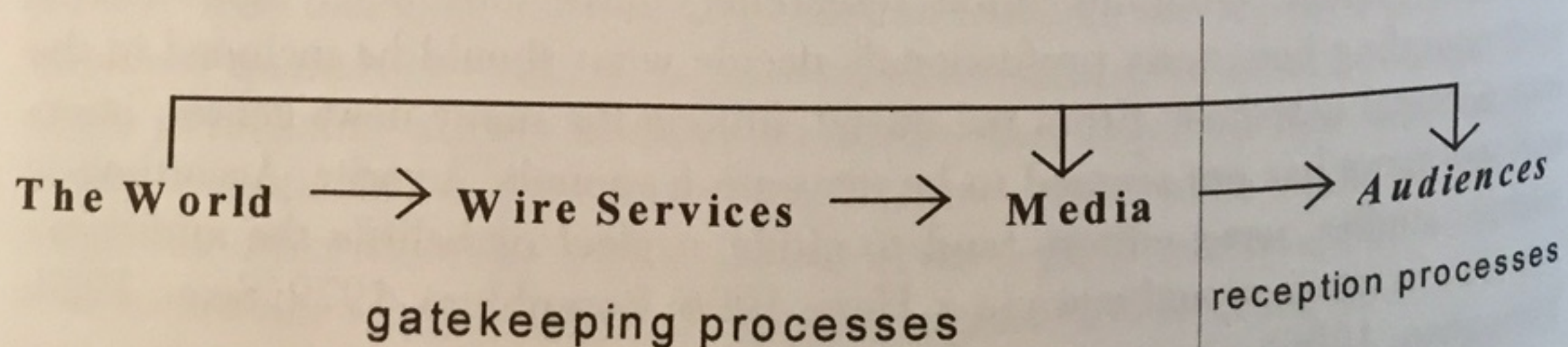


FIGURE 1

How International News is Processed

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newspaper editors across the USA and discovered that the following factors are crucial to international news selection: threats to the USA and world peace, anticipated reader interest, timeliness and USA involvement. With discriminant analysis, Chang and Lee found that American editors' criteria of selection are, in effect, related to their backgrounds, such as foreign language training, professional education, political ideology and availability of newshole and wire services.

Indeed, news professionals' background exerts a covert influence on their works. Particularly relevant to the international context, Starck and Villanueva (1992) uncovered an intricate 'unconscious awareness' of culture among the foreign correspondents they interviewed. The authors argued that psychology could form a solid barrier to hinder journalists from neutrally obtaining as well as reporting information. Therefore, it would be beneficial to develop more suitable journalistic methodologies that are sensitive to local context and can reduce cultural filters in everyday practice.

Deviance

Self-reporting criteria of news selection by journalists themselves may not necessarily disclose the fundamental determinants of stories that get printed or broadcast. To ascertain international news values held by American journalists, Chang et al. (1987) compared the events in 1984 and news coverage of the same year. Deviance of the event, relevance to the USA, potential for social change and geographical distance were found to be the factors that distinguished the events that were covered and those that were not. This study supports the earlier research of Shoemaker et al. (1986), which suggested 'deviance' as an underlying construct of newsworthiness.

Following a similar research vein, Shoemaker et al. (1991) added country-oriented variables, along with the 'deviance' factors, into their prediction model of foreign news coverage. Their finding showed that deviance is more powerful than the country characteristics in predicting foreign news coverage in American elite news media. Deviance, together with political and economic variables, can account for 24 and 21 percent of variance in the *The New York Times* and network television, respectively.

West vs Non-West

There are a good number of studies that directly investigated whether 'coups and earthquakes', a famous phrase coined by Rosenblum (1979) to capture the disruptive news genre, were actually more likely to be reported from the Third World than from the West. Regardless of the various definitions of 'bad news', the studies that tackled this research agenda resulted in complex but reasonable findings. Both Pasadeos (1982) and Stevenson and Gaddy (1984) found that the Third World or developing countries indeed received heavier coverage of bad news.² Nevertheless, Cooper's (1984) research finding suggested that Third World countries are no more likely than their western counterparts to be covered based on the news value of violence. In line with Cooper's research

outcome, Pal (1993) showed that generally media tend to produce news that involves violence, yet there does not appear to be a significant difference when one compares coverage between the West and Third World countries.³

Scholars of international communication (e.g. Hachten, 1981; Stevenson, 1994) were often struck by how differently journalism is practiced in different parts of the world. Therefore, they constructed Weberian 'ideal types' of press systems to highlight special features and to distinguish the underlying elements between them. Following the advocacy of the NWICO, many developing countries adopted development journalism to steer away from the western tradition of journalism, which they found detrimental to their countries. Haynes (1984), however, pointed out that there exists an overwhelming similarity of international news with regard to topic selection – political relationship between nations and domestic politics occurring in foreign countries are the primary focuses of foreign news across the spectrum of the world's journalism.

In addition to the impact of individual gatekeepers and their preference for certain news values on international news, both Chu (1985) and Peterson (1979) argued that the forces acting upon news professionals – such as organizational constraints and cultural customs – also affect news selection, perhaps to a greater extent than those much studied psychological mechanisms at the personal level. Further, Peterson pointed out that research based on this broader perspective might be more fruitful in accounting for the dominant fashion in which western media cover the Third World and the tradition of press freedom the western governments insist upon to rebuff interference in journalistic practices.

Logistical Perspective

The structural theory of international news flow, proposed by Galtung and Ruge (1965), Ostgaard (1965) and Galtung (1971), has become some of the most frequently cited literature of this research stream. This theory purports that the economic, social, political and geographic characteristics of a nation determine the amount of coverage one country receives in the press of another. Tested and operationalized by many scholars, the components embedded in the world structure usually are the following: GNP per capita, index of economic development, population or size of nation, cultural proximity, former colonial ties, ideological groupings, language factor, regionalism, geographic proximity, elite status, media facilities and equipment, communication access and technologies, and international news service, all of which are lumped into the logistical category in this meta-analytic study. The following section reviews studies of each subcategory.

Trade

The magnitude of economic interaction between nations has been found to be one of the most conducive factors in augmenting press coverage in foreign countries (e.g. Ahern, 1984; Charles et al., 1979; de Verneil, 1977; Dupree, 1971; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Wu, 1997). This predictor makes sense because

economic interest propels people to learn about those countries that are more economically related than others that are not. However, this prediction pattern does not hold up across all countries.⁴ Cassara (1993), for example, found that economic connection was not a decisive factor in governing how US regional newspapers cover news from abroad. In line with Cassara, Robinson and Sparkes (1976) and Wu (1997) discovered that trade played a key role in shaping foreign coverage in some countries, but was not a significant determinant in the USA.

Cultural Affinity

Common sense holds that countries with similar cultural backgrounds communicate better, and findings derived from various studies precisely support this point of view. Among the research, many discovered the influence of former colonial ties on international news flow (Atwood, 1985; Dupree, 1971; Nnaemeka and Richstad, 1980; Skurnik, 1981) – countries within the same colonial group are more likely to cover each other. Another set of studies found the impact of ethnic bond and shared language on the amount of information trafficking across borders (Johnson, 1997; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1983; Kim and Barnett, 1995). Tsang (1992), however, used 'social propinquity' to encompass various characteristics of countries and found it a dependable factor in predicting quantity and attributes of news photos. Set in a domestic context, Cassara's (1993) study of six regional US papers, interestingly, did not find cultural/ethnic affinity to be a decisive factor in deciding the amount of news from abroad.

Political Relations

Nations within the same political camp or ideological group seem to interact more frequently; therefore, their media devote more newshole to covering their congenial partners instead of their incongruent counterparts. This conjecture has been tested by various researchers and proven to be positive (Ahern, 1984; Haynes, 1984; Skurnik, 1981; Westerståhl and Johansson, 1994). Interestingly, most of these studies were conducted during the Cold War period when the antagonism between the 'Worlds' prevailed. However, the hypothesis of this political genre was sometimes transformed to 'national interests', a murky concept that replaces the sometimes arbitrary or outdated political groupings. Both Riffe (1995) and Vilanilam (1983) provided evidence that supported the sway of national interests over foreign press coverage.

Communication Resource

A country or area that is equipped with better communication infrastructure provides crucial access for journalists to do their jobs. In light of this, it seems reasonable to extrapolate that those nations implemented with sound communication technologies will be more likely to be covered than others that are not. Both de Verneil (1977) and Larson (1979) reported on the conducive role

of the INTELSAT earth station in transmitting news to other countries. However, Larson (1984) later found that this INTELSAT factor does not exist anymore – the study suspects that it was due to the already high penetration rate of satellite communication facilities in the early 1980s.

Another element that seems pertinent to be placed under this big umbrella of communication resource is the presence of international news agencies. The primary role of international news agencies is to gather and disseminate information. Therefore, for countries where there are more news agencies or international correspondents stationed, the chances are better that those countries will be covered in the media of other countries. Larson (1979, 1984) and Meyer (1989) found that the number of news agencies is positively linked with the quantity of news stories a country receives in other nations. In other words, the more agencies/media stationed, the more news generated. Likewise, we can anticipate that those countries having more restraint on press freedom would be less likely to be covered worldwide.

Geographic Proximity

Although it might be assumed that physical distance is directly associated with the amount of news coverage, surprisingly, there are not many studies that have systematically examined this idea. According to the studies that tested this notion, the results appear to be mixed. The findings of Adams (1986), Chang et al. (1987), Dupree (1971) and Haynes (1984) support the proximity hypothesis, while Hicks and Gordon (1974), using US and Israeli newspaper samples, found no apparent relationship between physical distance and international news flow. Wu (1997), in his study of four industrialized nations, also found no impact of geographic distance on international coverage. It is worth noting that the definitions of geographic distance varied a lot – some studies used rough estimates to represent distance between countries, whereas others calculate distance between nations' capitals. Besides, the news topics examined in the studies and the media sample are quite different and that might contribute to the contradictory findings.

Regionalism

The concept of regionalism is similar to geographic proximity but differs in the sense that the definition of region does not necessarily correspond to physical distance. For example, Taiwan is geographically close to the Philippines, but few Taiwanese identify themselves with Southeast Asians. Thus, the concept of regionalism is tricky and is often complicated by notions of identity and a country's historical context. Most researchers (Cooper, 1988; Haynes, 1984; Kim and Barnett, 1995; Meyer, 1989; Nnaemeka and Richstad, 1980; Skurnik, 1981), however, used conventionally demarcated continental lines – Africa, America, Asia, Europe and so on – to test the hypothesis of regional preference in news. Their results are overwhelmingly supportive of these researchers' operationalized definitions of regionalism.

National Traits

The characteristics of a nation matter in international communication. A good number of studies investigated whether a country's GNP value, population, size, or their stance in the world's system might contribute to the amount of their coverage in other countries' media. Overall, researchers hypothesized that the more economic or political clout a country has, the more coverage that country will yield. Regarding the hypothesis of economic capability's influence, most studies (Ahern, 1984; Dupree, 1971; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Kim and Barnett, 1995) found supportive evidence, but Robinson and Sparkes (1976) and Wu (1997) discovered inconsistent results across nations – the economic determinant is only valid in some countries but not in others.

The examination of the influence of **population** or **physical size** also resulted in mixed findings. The majority of studies found that these two factors are positively correlated with international news coverage (Ahern, 1984; Charles et al., 1979; Dupree, 1971; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Kim and Barnett, 1995; Westerstahl and Johansson, 1994). However, the studies that used a more advanced method, regression analysis, did not generate sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis (Larson, 1979; Robinson and Sparkes, 1976; Wu, 1997). Therefore, these two factors, perhaps representing an overlap with other stronger determinants, are worth further investigation.

Another often discussed characteristic of a nation is 'elitism' or its center or peripheral status in the world system. When a nation is an elite on the world stage, chances are better for that nation to be placed under the spotlight. In other words, there exists some sort of stardom, charisma or magnetism associated with certain countries that automatically lures the foreign press corps's attention. This postulation has so far gained positive results from empirical studies (Adams, 1986; Chang, 1997; Hicks and Gordon, 1974; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Larson, 1979; Nnaemeka and Richstad, 1980; Pal, 1993; Peterson, 1981), although it is interesting to note that Larson's (1984) update study did not support this factor. A potential problem could derive from the demarcation of nations, which can always be subject to a critique of subjectivity.

A Synthetic Profile of Studies

This section is a survey reporting on the multiple facets of international news flow studies conducted in the past few decades. Tables 1 and 2 succinctly present the studies analyzed in this article, variables investigated in each study and the outcomes.⁵ A plus sign denotes that the given hypothesis is supported, while a minus sign means negative. Also note that the marks without parentheses refer to the hypotheses that examine the general determinants of news flow, while the ones within parentheses refer to the hypotheses that addressed the difference between the developed countries and Third World countries. The default hypotheses in the tables assume that news from Third World countries would be more likely to have the designated characteristic. For example,

TABLE 1
'Gatekeeper' Variables

Studies	Variables				
	Newsworthiness (Other than Negativity)	Psychology, Culture, Socialization of News People	Conflict/Violence/ Disruptive Nature	Agenda-Setting Effect (Wire Services/Editors)	Organizational Constraints/News Sources
Adams (1986)			(-) ^a		
Becker et al. (1980)				+	
Chang & Han (1985)				+	
Chang & Lee (1992)		+			
Chang et al. (1987)					
Cooper (1984)	+				
Cutlip (1954)			-(-)		
Gaddy & Tanjong (1986)			(-)		+
Haynes (1984)					
Hester (1971)				+	
Larson (1979)		+			
Link (1984)			(+)		
Pal (1993)			+(+)		+/-
Pasadeos (1982)			(+)		
Peterson (1981)			+		
Schramm (1960)	+				
Shoemaker et al. (1986)	+	+			
Shoemaker et al. (1991)	+				
Starck & Villanueva (1992)					
Stevenson & Gaddy (1984)		+	(+)		
Wilke & Rosenberger (1994)	+				

+ support; - not support. (+) (-) comparative approach.

^a The developed countries get longer newscast time than the Third World countries on each earthquake.

hypothesis X: there is more negative news from Third World countries than from other parts of the world. If hypothesis X were rejected, then the sign (-) would be inserted in the designated space. Also note that more than one mark in the box means either the outcome is mixed or there is more than one variable of the same category examined in the study.

Regions Covered by Foreign News

Straubhaar et al. (1986) found that the USA is the most covered nation in media all over the world, which is supported by other studies (e.g. Stevenson and Cole, 1984). Due to space limitations, it is impossible to discuss findings generated from studies from different parts of the world. However, the geographic distribution of international news published or broadcast by various US media is presented in Table 3. Because of different definitions of foreign news, there exists some discrepancy among the studies. Nevertheless, the findings in general show that news from Western Europe, Latin America and Africa has remained relatively constant over the years in US media – West Europe often gets a decent chunk of total foreign newshole, while little news originates from Latin America and Africa. As for other regions, disruptive incidents or regional wars at certain times seemed to influence the distribution of coverage in US media to a great extent.

Newshole for International/Foreign News

The share that international news captures from the whole news time or space is an important – but seldom mentioned – factor that determines the amount of news from abroad. Hicks and Gordon (1974) and Vilanilam (1972, 1983) found that US newspapers contributed a smaller percentage of newshole to covering international affairs than that of other countries, even though its raw number of columns is bigger. Straubhaar et al. (1986) found that the USA and India, unsurprisingly, focused more on domestic events than on foreign events. Weaver et al. (1984) discovered a constant proportion of US networks' newscast devoted to international news (1972–81): about 28.9 percent, or 6.35 minutes of the 22-minute total air time. But according to Larson's (1984) data, the percentage looks somewhat less pessimistic: 7 out of 17 news items (40 percent), or 10 out of 22 or 23 minutes of air time (45 percent) were devoted to international affairs. More recently, Riffe et al. (1994) content analyzed the *The New York Times's* newshole from 1969 to 1990 and found that the foreign newshole has been shrinking alarmingly – from an average of 48.9 items in 1969 to 23.8 items in 1990.

Topics Covered by International News

First, it must be noted that different studies adopted distinct definitions of given topics, which made cross-study comparisons extremely hard. However, based on a loosely defined demarcation of foreign news investigated by various scholars, political affairs and economic issues seem to dominate international news agendas. The other promising candidates at the top of the list are military

+ support; - not support. (+) (-) comparative approach.

^a The developed countries get longer newscast time than the Third World countries on each earthquake.

TABLE 2
Continued

	Variables										
	GNP/ Economy	Trade	Regionalism	Population/ Size	Geographic Proximity	Host Country's Interest/ Political Relation	Eliteness/ Center- Peripheral	Resources/ Technology	Cultural Affinity/ Colonial Ties		
Meyer (1989)			+						+		
Nnaemeka & Richstad (1980)			+							+	+/-
Pal (1993)							(+)				
Peterson (1981)							+				
Riffe (1995)											
Robinson & Sparkes (1976)						+					
Rosengren (1977)											+/-
Skurnik (1981)											+
Tsang (1992)											+
Vilaniyam (1983)											
Westerstahl & Johansson (1994)											
Wu (1997)											-

+ support; - not support. (+)(-) comparative approach.

^a The data were based on the state level rather than the national level.

TABLE 3
Comparison of Geographic Distribution of International News (in US Media)

Studies (Period Studied)	North America	Latin America	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Asia	Africa	Middle East	Other
Stevenson & Cole (1979)	26	7	16	6	14	10	16	5
Weaver et al. (1972-6)	-	3.3	28.3	4.8	32.6	6.6	19.2	5.4
Weaver et al. (1977-81)	-	6.2	21.1	10.8	9.5	6.7	32.4	13.3
Larson (1972-81) ^a	2.3	11.1	30.7	20.2	28.1	7.2	29.3	-
Fryman & Bates (1987-91) ^a	2.2	12.9	22.3	14.8	20.4	12.1	9.9	5.2
Cassara (1988) ^a	2.4	10.7	15.4	17.5	14.5	6.1	16.9	5.5

Note: totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

^a North America denotes Canada only.

defense and sports – as exemplified by Stevenson and Cole's (1984) study. Straubhaar et al. (1986) found that the most prominent topics in their study of eight countries were politics, economics and military and social issues. It appears that these most frequently covered international topics belong to the 'hard news' category – does that imply that international news best serves the surveillance function?

Geographic Distribution of the Studies

This section looks at how certain countries or regions tend to be studied to a greater extent than others. One should note that all of the nations in the studies were included and that inevitably the number of nations is larger than the number of studies. As Table 4 indicates, the news media in North America (Canada and the USA) are most frequently studied, followed by Western Europe and then Asia. It appears that either communication researchers tend to study news media in developed nations, or there are simply more communication researchers living in developed regions who tend to study their own country's media.

TABLE 4
Regions of News Media Studied

	North America	Latin America	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Asia	Africa	Oceania Pacific	Middle East	Total
N	37	4	11	2	7	3	2	1	67
Percent	55.2	6.0	16.4	3.0	10.4	4.5	3.0	1.5	100

TABLE 5

News Media Examined		
Medium Studied	<i>N</i>	Percent
Television	16	28.1
Radio	1	1.8
Newspaper	30	52.6
News agency	8	14.0
News magazine	2	3.5
Total	57	100

Media Examined

This part looks at the frequency with which each news medium is investigated in the studies. Note that if there were two or more kinds of media used in one study, all of them would be coded. According to the literature gathered (see Table 5), the majority of the news media investigated are newspapers. Television, in spite of its overwhelming popularity and influence, and its many advantages over newspapers – such as synchronicity and image transmission – was less studied by communication researchers. Radio and magazines were also neglected, which indicates that daily newspapers are still researchers' favorite study medium. Perhaps access is a crucial factor that determines what medium gets studied. The newest and revolutionary medium, the Internet, has not attracted any researcher's attention so far.

Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the findings collected from the above studies, determinants that influence international news flow are worth highlighting here. With regard to the gatekeeper factors, traditional newsworthiness, sociocultural structure and organizational constraints over news professionals and the agenda-setting impact of international news services have all been found to influence international news flow. The factors included in the logistical group are: the GNP of each nation, volume of trade, regionalism, population, geographic size, geographic proximity, political/economic interests of host countries, 'eliteness', communication resources and infrastructure and cultural affinity.

With these various factors mediating the channels of international news, one cannot help but realize that the everyday representation of the world via news media is far from a direct reflection of global realities. International news is selected, sifted, edited and mostly discarded through a myriad of processes by the news organizations and professionals. The factors found in this meta-analysis enable us to conclude that the state of international news production and distribution has been and still is greatly different from the idealist objectives that the NWICO advocated more than a decade ago. The mechanism of transnational information transmission appears to be old fashioned, and the

content is to a great extent determined by the level of clout in each country (GNP, size, population) or the magnitude of interaction between nations. This finding somewhat echoes Ayish's (1992) argument that the issues yielded from the NWICO will be kept on the agenda of global communication in the 1990s, but will be undertaken with far less ideology and more pragmatism.

It seems clearer now what potential factors could determine international news flow, but does this analytical synthesis signify an end of this unique research stream? Should we keep pursuing this research topic? There were a total of 15 research papers completed prior to 1980, 23 papers done during the decade of 1981-90 and 17 pieces since 1991. These statistics indicate that academic efforts devoted to clarifying this complicated phenomenon have been rather stable.

In addition, one can observe that the results of past studies are not entirely in rapport with each other, nor are they mutually comparable. This is probably due to varied media samples, time frames, key definitions, analysis methods and operationalizations of variables in each study. As a result, few, if any, international communication theories have been developed from this ample body of literature accumulated in the past few decades. Therefore, apparently, a systematic and across-the-board examination of the existing variables, and perhaps some new ones, is still needed in the future.

In line with Sreberny-Mohammadi's (1991, 1995) arguments that the maps the news media have offered to their audience need to be updated and inspected after the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the ensuing end of the Cold War era, the determinants of international news flow might be altered as the world has dramatically changed. Sreberny-Mohammadi said:

... the role and shape of communications at the beginning of the 1990s is by no means very fixed or very clear, and neither are our theoretical models for explaining/exploring communications on an international scale. The rapidity and complexity of change in the media environment as we enter the 1990s seems to require a newer set of terms and vantage points than are offered by older perspectives, which often seem frozen in a bygone era. (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991: 119)

Indeed, with the collapse of communism and the abated threat of nuclear demolition, the Cold War framework that news professionals had long been using to select, structure and prioritize international news cannot apply to the new world anymore (Norris, 1995). This argument, echoed by Heuvel (1993) and Hoge (1993, 1997), also points to some new ways journalists might use in covering the world – issues, topics, countries and angles that stem from the emerging, developing framework could all be very much different in the late 1990s. Moreover, as globalization accelerates (Allen and Hamnett, 1995), every country on Earth becomes remarkably interconnected. Thus, international communication via the channels of news media looms more important than ever, and definitely needs to be examined all over again in this era of rapid change.

Particularly pressing topics in the area of international news flow are cultural barriers and the impact of regionalism. The former topics can range from cultural constraints on foreign correspondents' work to people's understandings

and appreciation of receiving, news from other cultures. The latter category of research topics can encompass the impact of regional information flow, coupled with higher levels of multifaceted cooperation and coordination in any geographic area.

Future plans to conduct studies about international news flow might adopt the method of network analysis proposed by Kim and Barnett (1995), which seems excellent at disclosing the level of interactions between nations. Regarding medium, radio and magazines that still attract special segments of audiences need to be examined more. The Internet also should be seriously tackled, particularly in terms of how cyberspace affects international communication at the individual, national or global level. The problem of access and the information gap between the technological haves and have-nots will certainly linger too – and definitely awaits a solution.

With the advent of more advanced technologies and more channels to access information worldwide, international information exchange will be much more rapid and diversified. With the advent of the new post-Cold War era, the existing and newly discovered hypotheses pertaining to this research topic will have to be updated constantly. This article is only a modest beginning, one intended to rekindle academia's interest in this important area.

Notes

1. Descriptive studies, which might otherwise be mentioned in this article, were excluded from all statistics in the section of synthesis.
2. Stevenson and Gaddy (1984) also found that in reality there is more conflict happening in the Third World, according to Edward E. Azar's Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB), an inventory of domestic and international events around the world dated from 1948. Therefore, they concluded that bad news gets reported in the same way wherever it occurs.
3. The author did not use any statistical tool to test its statistical significance. What the argument is based on stems from the difference in percentages.
4. Or regions, when a country is too big, such as the USA or Russia.
5. Some studies are not presented because of the incongruity of their tested variables with the categories highlighted in these two tables.

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