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Proximity and Deviance as Predictors of Foreign News on ABC, CBS, and NBC

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Introduction

This paper draws from the theoretical and empirical literature on determinants of news to identify crucial variables in foreign news coverage. It then proceeds to test the contribution of these variables (proximity and deviance) to coverage of foreign news on ABC, CBS, and NBC. Finally, it compares "proximity" findings of this study based on actual news content with those of another study based on editors' perceptions.

Factors Influencing News Coverage

Beginning with White's[1] classic gatekeeping study, research in media sociology has tried to understand forces which impact upon and shape news content. Two early studies identified social control in the newsroom[2] and technological factors.[3] This research tradition gathered momentum in the 1970s and led to the identification of other micro and macro level factors; these are presented below briefly.

As gatekeepers, journalists use such uncertainty reduction modes[4] as personal biases and values[5] to identify the potential and actual universe of news. These values, or in Gans[6] words "paraideology," are only partially thought out, mainly unconscious. This paraideology, apart from reflecting personal values, also reflects values of the workplace[7] which are internalized during the socialization process in newsrooms and, before that, in educational setting.[8] Different from journalists' personal values, these are shared values and become part of journalists' claims to professionalism.[9] This, in turn, speeds up routine role performance.[10]

Among routines of news production[11] are the beat system ("newsnet"[12]) with its time and space gaps and the dependence of reporters on government officials as sources which often results in media-government elite ties and even manipulation of media by government.[13]

Organizational imperatives such as political (regulations) and economic (need to survive) logics[14] also affect news content. Stempel[15] has studied the effect of monopolies on media content. Cultural factors (e.g., links between nations) as impactors on news are extensively discussed in the inter-

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national communication literature.[16]

Finally, some theorists contend that all news is ideological.[17] Tuchman[18] and Gitlin[19] define this ideology in economic and political terms and argue that the mass media in reproducing definitions of reality derived from economic and political elites maintain the status quo. Gitlin uses, for an example, media coverage of Students for Democratic Society as a deviant and disruptive movement. Halloran, et al.[20] argue a somewhat similar treatment of the anti-Vietnam war demonstration in London.

Factors Influencing Foreign News Coverage

A large amount of the above literature (summarized as media routines, journalist's socialization and attitudes, social and institutional forces, and ideology[21]), and subsequent theory building, have focused on domestic news coverage. Notable in the literature on predictors of *foreign* news coverage are the very early Galtung and Ruge's[22] piece on the structure of foreign news, the mid-'80s Chang, et al. and the more recent, Edelstein, et al.'s[24] concept of "problematic situations." The predictors identified herein can be categorized similarly to domestic news predictors; the difference is that predictors which assume greater importance in foreign news are emphasized.

Several other authors, some as early as Galtung and Ruge,[25] also identified predictors of foreign news coverage. While such identification is important, what separates this literature from Galtung and Ruge, Chang, et al. and Shoemaker, et al., and Edelstein, et al. is the latter's attempts to build theory. Galtung and Ruge suggest the additivity, complementarity and exclusion hypotheses; Chang, et al.'s approach is to provide explanations by trying to isolate predictor variables and their relative contribution and Shoemaker, et al., while not calling it such, suggest an interaction hypothesis; and Edelstein, et al. also suggest and additivity hypothesis.

This theory building effort also separates these works from the several empirical studies of foreign news coverage in Western and particularly American media,[26] and in world media.[27] Many of these studies were placed in the context of New International Information Order debate issues, specifically Third World complaints about the quantity (low) and quality (negative) of coverage, and their purpose was description (substantiation or otherwise of complaints), not theory building.

At the same time, the theoretical and empirical literature are liked. Two overarching factors, variously named by different authors but consistently mentioned and tested respectively in the two literatures, are "proximity"[28] and "deviance."[29] Proximity may be operationalized in many ways: culturally, economically, geographically, diplomatically, by U.S. involvement, by status, and so on. Deviance may be operationalized as negativity, crisis-orientation, news storms, conflict, problematic situation, and even cooperation if that is unusual, though "negative" operationalizations dominate.

Hester[30] discusses both variables: the "pecking order" of nations based on "power" and "cultural affinities and economic association;" these might be temporarily displaced by "news storms." Similarly, Lent[31] includes "cultural heritage" and "crisis-orientation." Third World complaints too focus on these factors: generally low coverage because of "distance;" the "distance" being bridged only for negative events. Chang, et al.,[32] reason similarly: "context oriented (e.g., economic relations or cultural similarity) versus event-oriented" (e.g., degree of deviance or negative nature of the event) predictors "with the former being the dominant paradigm."

While the two factors, proximity and deviance, and their *interaction* might form the theoretical undergrid which explains foreign news coverage, the challenge is in hypothesizing the relative contribution of each and of their different operationalizations; and differences in directionality of effect (for example, cultural proximity may result in increased coverage, while distance in status—elite versus non-elite—may not necessarily result in decreased coverage, or deviance as conflict may lead to increased coverage, but so could deviance as cooperation—between capitalist and communist countries).

Studies of the impact of these predictors therefore continue to be important. This study measures the impact of region (proximity) and nature of story (deviance) on foreign news coverage on ABC, CBS, and NBC.

Method

This content analytic study used the *Television News Index and Abstracts* for 1989. Eight randomly constructed weeks, four each for the first and second half of the year, were selected, specifying 40 days and 120 newscasts.

All foreign news, defined as reference to a foreign country, was coded; only purely domestic stories were excluded. A story was defined as a topic introduced by the anchor.[33] The story could be "read only," or the anchor could "lead into" correspondent report(s), and come back to wrap up. The various parts—lead in, field reports, wrap-up—would be story segments.

For each story, position, length and number of segments were coded. For each segment, segment number, primary foreign country mentioned, and nature of segment (conflict, cooperation, disruption, normalcy, and other) were coded.

Coding countries into worlds (First, Second, and Third) based on political system and stage of development is difficult because countries no longer place neatly into them. Another less sweeping method based on physical contiguity is by regions: North America, Central America, South America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe/USSR, the Middle East, Africa, Asia/South Asia, the Far East, and the Pacific.

Both classification systems make assumptions of similarity among countries grouped together, and therefore of similar proximity, in underlying

variables such as economic and cultural relations, to the United States. In fact, this might not be the case. Still, because of disagreement in the relative importance of each proximity variable and over their respective operationalizations, and recognizing the limitations of these broad classifications; countries were recoded into the 10 physically contiguous regions.[34] This classification corresponds (with two exceptions) to the one used by Chang, et al.[35] in a study of editors' perceptions of the importance of different regions, militarily, diplomatically, economically, and culturally, to the United States.

Past studies have largely operationalized deviance as *topics* such as international conflict and disasters. Edelstein, et al.[36] suggest looking "beneath" topics to problematic situations. In Edelstein, et al.'s tradition, but not drawing on their specific list, this study operationalized deviance as a variable that cut across topic and included the categories conflict, cooperation, disruption, normalcy, and "other."

Eight coders were used. Two intercoder reliability tests, using Holsti's formula,[37] were done, both on non-sample dates. The first test, done after half the sample dates were coded, identified three variables with acceptable reliability (story length: 97% country: 94% and number of segments: 100%) one variable (story position) with which two coders had difficulty (they were asked to recode because reliability excluding them was 100%), and one variable (nature of segment) with which all coders had difficulty (they were asked to recode after clarification of rules). A second reliability test after all data were coded was done for the last variable, yielding a reliability of 73%.

To measure the influence of proximity and deviance on story position and length respectively, two separate ANOVAs were run. As position and length could be coded only for the entire story (not segments), the first segment was used to represent the story. While segments were not identical within a story, this seemed to be the only and most logical solution if position indicates importance. Also, many stories had only one segment.[38]

Findings

The sample specified 535 foreign stories with number of segments ranging from 1 to 11 (Table 1). Most stories had one or two segments; only one story had 11. Segments which the abstracts referred to as "Report introduced" were dropped as they had no data, leaving 708 segments. The distribution of stories and segments across days and networks was quite even. The number of foreign stories averaged between four and five per day per network.

Proximity and Deviance as Predictors

Eastern Europe/USSR received the largest number of stories (30%) and segments (26%) followed by the Middle East (17%; 20%) (Table 1), while

the Pacific was the least covered (less than one percent each). Conflict (44%; 47%) was the most frequent category, followed by "other" (19% each) and cooperation (16%; 15%) in that order.

ANOVA revealed the impact of proximity and deviance on story position (Table 2). Stories about the Pacific were positioned highest (mean = 4.67), followed by stories about Central America and South America in that order, while stories about Africa were positioned lowest (mean = 8.08). Positions of foreign stories in the raw data ranged from 1 (mode) to 16 with a sharp drop in numbers after 13.

Conflict stories were positioned higher (mean = 5.21) than cooperation stories, followed by disruption and "other" stories, in turn followed by normalcy stories (mean = 7.19). No interaction effect of proximity by deviance was observed. That is, certain proximity-deviance combinations did not position higher than other such combinations.

Results for story length were somewhat different. Asia/South Asia had the largest mean time (154 seconds), followed by the Middle East (133 seconds), and Africa received the smallest mean time (63 seconds) (Table 3). The range in the raw data was 10 to 610 seconds with 20 seconds being the mode.

No difference were found in the length of stories by deviance; that is, conflict, cooperation, disruption, normalcy, and other stories were not of significantly different lengths. No interaction effect of proximity by deviance was present. That is, certain proximity-deviance combinations were not of longer lengths than other such combinations.

Comparative Analysis

Results from the length analysis indicate the dominance that Chang, et al.[39] point out of context- over event-oriented predictors in the literature on determinants of foreign news coverage. While event-oriented predictors are important, in this study, their impact was only on position of story. In view of the importance of proximity, and at the same time its conflicting results by length and position, it was decided to do a comparison of proximity findings of this study based on actual data with those of the Chang, et. al. study [40] based on editor's perceptions.[41] The purpose was to determine which measure of coverage (frequency, length, or position) reflected editors' perception and to indirectly arrive at a hierarchy of regions in terms of the coverage they would receive. The difference in time between the two studies was only one year with this study coming later.

For this study, a separate set of ranks was assigned to regions (except North America and the Pacific which were not included in the Chang, et al. study) for each of the three measures of coverage—frequency, position, and length. Similarly, for the Chang, et al. study, an overall and a separate set of ranks were assigned to regions for each of the four types of proximity—

military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural-based on percentage data (e.e., percent of editors indicating that the region was "very important" to the United States) obtained from the authors.

Ranking by Regions: The consistently low rank of Africa was evident (Figure 1). Editors did not think of Africa as being important in any field and neither did Africa receive frequency, position, and time priority in coverage. The Middle East ranked above the midpoint consistently within and between the two studies. Central America was similar with one exception—length—where it ranked below the midpoint.

In general, Southeast Asia and South America ranked low with one exception each: Southeast Asia received the most time and South America a high position. That is, Southeast Asia was infrequently in the news, positioned low, and lacked importance in editors' eyes in all four areas, but was given more time. South American stories, on the other hand, were positioned high, but were few and short, and editors did not consider the region very important to the United States in any respect.

Figure 1: Proximity (Ranks) of Regions by Practice and Perception

	Regions							
	CA	SA	WE	EE	ME	A	SEA	FE
This study (Practice)								
No. of stories	3	7	4	1	2	8	6	5
Position	1	2	7	4	3	8	6	5
Length	5	7	4	6	2	8	1	3
Overall (Chang, et al.)								
Military	4	7	3	1	2	8	6	5
Diplomatic	4	6	2	1	3	8	7	5
Economic	4	7	2	5	3	8	6	1
Cultural	2	5	1	3	4	8	7	6
Overall (Chang, et al.)	4	8	1	3	2	7	6	5

Notes: 1. CA = Central America; SA - South America; WE = Western Europe; EE = Eastern Europe/USSR; ME = Middle East; A = Africa; SEA = Southeast Asia (in this study, Asia/South Asia); FE = Far East.

2. The Pacific and North America were not included in the Chang, et al. study.

Western Europe, Eastern Europe/USSR and the Far East presented rather varied within and between rankings. In general, however, editors' ranking of Western Europe on all four proximities was higher than the rank it received in practice by all three criteria. Except for the high economic proximity assigned to it by editors, the Far East ranked around, and mostly below, the midpoint. The region most difficult to generalize about however was East-

em Europe/USSR due probably to the events in the region in the sample year.

In summary, and very generally, taking both practice and perception data together, the regions may be ranked thus in ascending order: Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, the Far East, Central America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Correlation Analysis: In the Chang, et al. study, military proximity ranks correlated significantly with diplomatic and cultural proximity ranks and diplomatic proximity ranks correlated significantly with cultural proximity ranks (Table 4). In this study, ranks assigned to regions by the measures number, position, and length were not significantly correlated; the three measures gave different pictures of the importance of a regions.

To see which, if any, sets of ranks (military, diplomatic, economic, cultural) based on editors' perception were related to which, if any, sets of ranks of actual coverage (number, position, length), correlations were done.

Interestingly, ranks by position and length were not correlated with any of the perception based proximity rankings. Ranks by number of stories correlated with all but the economic proximity ranks. The hierarchy by frequency of coverage placed Eastern Europe first and Africa last and in general substantiates Third World complaints about Western media's lack of attention to the South.

Summary and Conclusions

While more confirmatory research is needed to aid theory building and sort out the relative importance of predictors and their interaction effects, in this study proximity had more explanatory power than deviance. Both the literature on determinants of foreign news and NIIO complaints also largely indicate a similar hierarchy.

Deviance did not affect length of coverage, only position in the newscast; conflict stories ranked highest and normalcy stories the lowest. Hence conflict stories are more likely to be positioned higher in the newscast. Interestingly, there was no significant interaction effect of proximity and deviance for both position in the newscast and length indicating that certain regions were not singled out for certain types of "deviance" coverage.

While proximity had more explanatory power than deviance, i.e., both length and position of foreign news on U.S. television networks differed by region, prediction about which region would get "more" attention was difficult because of the somewhat conflicting results obtained with the two measures. By mean length, the Pacific and Africa got low coverage, Southeast Asia and the Middle East got high coverage, and South America and Eastern Europe got medium coverage. These length results seem to have been influenced somewhat by the widely ranging N sizes for each region. Eastern Europe's low coverage by length was probably because its large N size in-

cluded many short stories; it certainly was well-covered in 1989. Eastern Europe remained, possibly due to the same reason, in about the same rank by position in the newscast. Many other regions though changed ranks rather drastically; the Pacific now ranked first and Southeast Asia ranked eighth.

Had mean length and mean position results been similar, it would have been possible to suggest a hierarchy of regions, countries within which would share a similar generalized proximity to the United States, in terms of the coverage they would receive. This not being the case, another route was used to arrive at the hierarchy; ranks assigned to editors' perceptions of the importance of a region to the United States were matched with ranks assigned to actual news coverage by frequency, position, and length. The ranking of regions by length and position did not match ranks based on editors' perception of the same regions on four different proximities. Rather ranking by number of stories alone matched all but the economic proximity ranks. The ranking of regions by frequency substantiates Third World complaints about the lack of attention in Western media to the South.

It is possible that editors' translate their perceptions into practice in terms of number of stories. Also, they may not use economic proximity as an influencing factor in determining news coverage to quite the same extent as they use diplomatic, military and cultural proximity. As far as deviance is concerned, it is possible that editors' let it influence position and frequency but not necessarily length. The lack of proximity-deviance interaction is contrary to Third World complaints; it suggests that no region was singled out for a particular type of "deviance" coverage. Similar studies in the future could benefit by 1)   including both the content analytic and survey parts in one study, 2)being longitudinal in nature 3)getting editors' to rank regions by different proximities and rank the "deviant" categories of news, and 4)Including both television and newspapers.

Table 1: Distribution of Stories and Segments by Number of Segments, Day, Network, Region (Proximity), and Nature (Deviance)

	Story		Segment	
	n	%	n	%
	535	100	708	100
Number of Segments				
1	239	44.7		
2	241	45.0		
3	24	4.5		
4	15	2.8		
5	8	1.5		
6	4	0.7		
7	3	0.6		
11	1	0.2		
Day				
Monday	112	20.9	142	20.1
Tuesday	119	22.2	146	20.6
Wednesday	101	18.9	146	20.6
Thursday	94	17.6	139	19.6
Friday	109	20.4	135	19.1
Network				
ABC	178	33.3	250	35.3
CBS	172	32.1	230	32.5
NBC	185	34.6	228	32.2
Region				
North America	14	2.6	20	2.8
Central America	60	11.2	89	12.6
South America	28	5.2	35	4.9
Western Europe	66	12.3	82	11.6
Eastern Europe/USSR	161	30.1	183	25.8
Middle East	92	17.2	143	20.2
Africa	26	4.9	27	3.8
Asia/S. Asia	23	4.3	43	6.1
Far East	53	9.9	73	10.3
Pacific	3	.6	3	0.4
Missing (UNICEF, etc.)	9	1.7	10	1.4
Nature				
Conflict	235	43.9	332	46.9
Cooperation	85	16.3	104	14.7
Disruption	53	9.9	71	10.0
Normalcy	57	10.7	65	9.2
Other	103	19.3	136	19.2

Table 2: Mean Story Position by Region (Proximity) and Nature (Deviance)

Region

NA	CA	SA	WE	EE	ME	A	S/AS	FE	PAC	F	sig
5.50	4.75	4.93	7.27	5.88	5.27	8.08	6.87	6.53	4.67	2.95	.00
(14)	(60)	(28)	(66)	(161)	(92)	(26)	(23)	(53)	(3)		

Nature

Conf	Coop	Disr	Norm	Other	F	Sig
5.21	5.77	6.51	7.19	6.89	4.46	.00
(231)	(84)	(53)	(57)	(101)		

Note: NA = North America; CA = Central America; SA = South America; WE = Western Europe; EE = Eastern Europe/USSR; ME = Middle East; A = Africa; S/AS = Asia/South Asia; FE = Far East; PAC = the Pacific.

Table 3: Mean Story Length (in Seconds) by Region (Proximity)

Region

NA	CA	SA	WE	EE	ME	A	S/AS	FE	PAC	F	Sig
99.3	114.7	92.1	122.1	92.6	133.0	63.1	154.3	124.9	30.0	2.80	.00
(14)	(60)	(28)	(66)	(161)	(92)	(26)	(23)	(53)	(3)		

Note: NA = North America; CA = Central America; SA = South America; WE = Western Europe; EE = Eastern Europe/USSR; ME = Middle East; A =Africa; S/AS = Asia/South Asia; FE = Far East; PAC = the Pacific.

Table 4: Rank Order Correlations Within and Between Different Measures of News Coverage and Different Proximities

	No. of Position Stories	Length	Military	Diplomatic	Economic
Position	.43 (p=.15)				
Length	.31 (p=.23)	.00 (p=.5)			
Military	.98 (p=00)*	.29 (p=.25)	.33 (p=.21)		
Diplomatic	.90 (p=.00)*	.29 (p=.25)	.14 (p=.37)	.95 (p=.00)*	
Economic	.55 (p=.08)	.10 (p=.41)	.57 (p=07)	.60 (p=.06)	.60 (p=.06)
Cultural	.71 (p=.02)*	.40 (p=.16)	.05 (p=46)	.74 (p=.02)*	.86 (p=00*	.52 (p=.09)

*Significant.

Note

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41 These correlations need to be interpreted with caution as they compare actual television rankings with perceived rankings by newspaper editors.