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PREDICTING NEWS FLOW FROM MEXICO

By Melissa A. Johnson



This study investigated the role of geographic proximity, cultural proximity, and organizational factors on the quantity of U.S. newspaper coverage of Mexico, using a computer-assisted content analysis of 515 index citations from thirty-four U.S. newspapers. The percentage of the population having a Mexican heritage and circulation size were the strongest predictors of coverage of Mexico. Circulation size was the sole predictor of length and source of articles about Mexico and Mexicans. The data support cultural proximity and organizational factor concepts over geographic proximity.

News about foreign countries matters. Unrepresentative news can have a strong effect on media audiences' knowledge and conceptions about other nations, and exposure to mass media relates to positive images or accurate judgments about foreign countries. These effects can have social, economic, or political consequences.¹

Although television news viewers may be seeing more images of foreign nations because foreign news is increasing in broadcast media, there is concern about the decline of foreign news in print media.² Understanding how foreign news is selected helps media researchers understand these trends.³

The purpose of this research is to illuminate the forces that shape selection of foreign news in U.S. newspapers and to critique and expand upon existing theories of international news flow. Cultural proximity, geographic proximity, and organizational factors were tested to determine the impact on the amount and sources of foreign news about one country – Mexico – in thirty-four U.S. dailies during 1995. Mexico was chosen as a case study because of its geographic proximity to the United States and the sizable Mexican-American population in the nation.⁴

Concern over inequities in international news flow – particularly flow in and out of the Third World – helped to drive international news research during the past three decades.⁵ The New World Information Order called for more coverage of developing nations, fewer negative stories, news flow that did not clash with the countries' values, and equitable news flow between and among developed and developing countries.⁶ Studies have analyzed positive and negative content; differences in how various countries' media cover or frame content; which media include Third World news, and whether

*Theoretical
Foundations*

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certain Third World news gets into the U.S. press.⁷ In addition to these examinations of international news content and inclusion, a body of research has been devoted to describing and comparing the variables – termed *news determinants* – that explain how international news gets selected.⁸

The theoretical foundations of today's international news determinant studies were established in the 1960s and 1970s. In their seminal theoretical piece, Galtung and Ruge outlined twelve factors that were key in selecting international news. They focused on how events became news and avoided determinants of nonevent news.⁹ Despite their contribution to international news theory, the Galtung and Ruge factors and their postulated relationships have been criticized because they have a psychological perspective and are difficult to test.¹⁰

Other early theoretical work focused on political and economic factors outside of the news process (sources, news agencies, the cost of transmitting messages, and the worldviews of publishers) and factors inherent in the news process (simplification, identification, or cultural proximity; sensationalism; news bureaus).¹¹ Rosengren listed three approaches in his review of international news research: gatekeeper studies, news organization studies, and studies dealing with the interplay between the individual and the organization. He believed Galtung and Ruge were concentrating on this interplay in their framework.¹² Rosengren focused on the importance of "extra-media" variables and called for a commitment to specific economic and political variables, rather than broader concepts such as cultural proximity.¹³ Ostgaard also considered factors extraneous to the news process, along with the economics / logistics of newsgathering, and audience orientations.¹⁴

Additional research about international news determinants has categorized these variables as context-oriented and event-oriented; or intrinsic and extrinsic.¹⁵ So, although we have event and nonevent studies flowing from Galtung's and Ruge's work, and inside / outside media studies parented by Ostgaard's and Rosengren's discussions, it has been difficult to compare studies and make generalizations. That is because when operationalized, these concepts have been interpreted in different ways, and measured at the individual, organizational, community, and societal levels. Two concepts, cultural proximity and geographic proximity, have been conceptualized at four levels and operationalized in a variety of ways.

Cultural Proximity. Researchers have applied cultural proximity to the journalist, the media audience, the culture or nation in which the news organization operates, and the "cultural distance" between the news organization's country and that of the nation being covered. Originators of the concept, Galtung and Ruge, included cultural proximity in the twelve conditions that influenced whether events become news, e.g., "what we choose to consider an 'event' is culturally determined."¹⁶ Their discussion focused on the culture of the journalists who were making the news decisions, not the cultural milieu in which the journalists worked. For instance, Galtung and Ruge described an "event-scanner" (gatekeeper) who paid attention to the culturally similar. So, measures of cultural proximity based on Galtung's and Ruge's conceptualization could include amount of foreign travel by the journalist or editor, how many international communication classes or seminars a reporter enrolled in, the ethnicity of the journalist, or birthplace of the journalist and her immediate family members. Peterson, for instance, was consistent with Galtung's and Ruge's definition of cultural framework when including where journalists were born and educated as a

variable.¹⁷ Adams operationalized proximity according to audience factors, but he also included the ethnicity of the journalist in his study.¹⁸

At first glance, it might appear that Galtung and Ruge also dealt with the concept of geographic proximity, since they used the term "distance" in their hypotheses and discussion. However, their distance concept is cultural distance. They stated: "If a nation is distant, here of course taken in the cultural and not in the geographical sense, identification with rank-and-file people will be correspondingly low."¹⁹ They operationalized "cultural distance" in a categorical sense – such as East/West relations or mother nation/colony – rather than in numerical terms.²⁰ To differentiate from cultural distance, the European authors provided an example of "culturally close countries like the UK, the USA, and Belgium."²¹ In summary, Galtung's and Ruge's touchstone concept of proximity refers not to geographic, but to cultural proximity – measured in terms of gatekeepers, not audiences.

Rather than focus on how journalists process events into news (media perception to media selection/distortion), Ostgaard conceptualized cultural proximity with an audience orientation. He said that the media want to present an outside world "as seen through the ethnocentric eyes of the receiver of the news."²² Ostgaard's contribution to the international news model was the editors' interpretations of what the mass media audience wants. Researchers have used the terms sociocultural nearness, involvement, proximity, or affinity as synonyms for the concept of cultural proximity.²³

Geographic Proximity. Although geographic proximity is sometimes conceptualized as part of cultural proximity, others have treated it separately. The theoretical origins of this concept aren't clear in the touchstone news determinant studies. Galtung and Ruge focused on the geographic structure of the world – "the world is geography."²⁴ But geographic distance was not among their twelve key factors. However, in one study Rosengren cited Galtung and Ruge in his exploration of cultural proximity, which he measured as physical distance between capital cities, along with import/export data.²⁵ Ostgaard mentioned geographic distance in his discussion of proximity, but said that cultural proximity was a more important influence on news flow than geographic distance, since "for whatever reason the news is published, it will be intended to reach an audience."²⁶ Geographic distance has been explained as the distance news has to travel, a correlate of traditional trade and capital flows, and associated with former colonial ties.²⁷ In summary, geographic distance has been used to measure two concepts – geographic proximity and cultural proximity.

Rather than developing as part of a theoretical essay, the concept of geographic proximity emerged out of the large-scale, many-nation quantitative studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s (especially the UNESCO/IAMCR study) as the compelling determinant of news flow.²⁸ Stevenson emphasized in a summary of one study: "One point that stands out in this and every other comparable study is the importance of geographic proximity in foreign news."²⁹ Despite the paucity of theoretical lineage in its nascent stage, the concept of geographic proximity – also termed regionalism or regional congruity – spawned a hefty body of research about its role in international news coverage, including coverage in non-Western news systems.³⁰ Most of these studies supported physical distance having a role in news selection.

Explanations of geographic proximity included "extra-media" factors as well as practical news organization considerations.³¹ Conceptualizing proximity as geographic distance envelops the news organization's economic realities – how difficult or expensive is it to cover parts of the world?

It's conceivable that physical distance had real repercussions when journalists had to travel by car or train to reach a news destination. But with air travel, computer- and satellite-mediated transmissions, and the like, real physical distance should diminish in importance over time.

Geographic proximity as an "extra-media" factor also makes sense. It defines the community context in which the newspaper operates – a broad view of "the local angle." For instance, Baja California could be considered part of the local market for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Geographic proximity also refers to nation-state proximity – i.e., Canada should be covered by the United States because it is a mostly English-speaking country with which we have economic and political relationships, along with similar ideologies.

In summary, geographic proximity usually has been conceptualized with the nation or news organization as the level of analysis. Cultural proximity has been conceptualized with the journalist, news audience, and nation as the subject of study. Some measures have been applied to both concepts.

International News Determinants: Four Levels of Analyses. Theoretical work to date suffers from failure to clarify levels of analyses. This study proposes to more precisely measure the levels of analyses. Extending groupings described previously, we can segment international news determinants into four categories: (1) the gatekeeper, news values, and the profession; (2) the news organization; (3) the news organization's market (readers and prospective readers); and (4) the social/economic/political/cultural framework in which the news organization operates. Of course, the four categories are interrelated. Reporters and their news decisions are affected by the news organizations, and both are affected by their communities and the broader sociocultural/political/economic frameworks in which they operate.

1. *The Gatekeeper, News Values and the Profession.* General agreement about what is news fits into this category along with interest factors such as conflict, impact, duration, negativity, prominence, novelty, deviance from norms, or consequence. Studies have shown that some perceived news bias may be due to these long-lived news values.³² Of course, news values don't exist on their own – people make or perpetuate them. But they have been separated for comparison purposes. Event-oriented, intermedia studies fit into this category.

A second factor that influences international news selection is the reporter herself. This body of research includes studies about individual gatekeeper decisions and profiles of foreign correspondents, newsroom socialization, journalism education that teaches newsgathering and editing standards and socializes, and socialization through journalists' professional organizations. Included are the racial/ethnic background of the gatekeeper, worldview, and his training in journalism and/or international communication.³³

These factors are important in cross-cultural studies of international news. However, if one is doing a study of international news determinants within U.S. news organizations, one wouldn't expect much variance in news values or gatekeeper behavior because of the consistent socialization to the profession.³⁴ As Rosengren noted, *these are the residuals*.³⁵ Gatekeeper factors are what remain once key predictors of international news have been determined.

Recent studies indicate that the next three categories are more responsible for selection or nonselection of international news.

2. *News Organization Factors.* Included in this category are variables

specific to the news organization, such as size, profitability, number of foreign editors, and number of wire services available. Rather than focus on psycho-social characteristics of the gatekeeper and journalism's cultural norms, studies focus on the logistics of newsgathering, including practical business matters.³⁶ Circulation size has been used as a measure of organizational variables.³⁷

We know that there are high costs associated with maintaining foreign bureaus. An estimate is that a foreign news bureau's cost ranges from \$125,000 to \$200,000 per location.³⁸ A reporter's enterprise and ability to develop accurate interesting stories might relate to the resources a newspaper can allocate to foreign news. As a newspaper's financial resources are often a function of its size, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* may be able to afford bureaus in Mexico City; the *Raleigh News and Observer* probably cannot. In short, "Foreign news is more expensive to gather...so revenue...determines extent and depth of coverage."³⁹

Without foreign bureaus, newspapers rely mainly on wire copy. But the news hole available for international wire copy also may be related to newspaper size, given its correspondence to advertising rates and potential affect on personnel resources such as foreign desk editors. Because revenues can be affected by paper/ink costs, temporary slumps in advertising, capital outlays, and other short-term factors, circulation size is a relatively stable and accessible measure of organizational strength. In summary, the importance of these organizational factors – and the business aspects of newspapers – has been supported in international news studies.⁴⁰

3. *News Organization Market*. The audience in the community in which a typical metropolitan newspaper operates is another factor. Elite papers serve a national or international community; most U.S. dailies and weeklies do not. Of course, a local community may have citizens of many cultures – a factor that this article explores. Although Riffe and Shaw saw consonance in topics (coups and earthquakes), they postulated that the market of the readers played a role in differences: "The papers addressed what may have been a need among readers for specific types of foreign news dealing with emerging global issues."⁴¹

4. *Social/Political/Economic/Cultural Determinants*. This includes economic and political relationships; political ideology; social structure and challenges; and cultural values and norms that influence the reporters, their news organizations, and the readers of the newspapers.⁴²

In short, despite the importance of U.S. news values, individual reporters' efforts, and the ideological framework in which the journalists operate, studies indicate that to move beyond descriptive studies to explanation, scholars should focus on newspaper organizational and market determinants to predict volume of international news in U.S. newspapers. Studies conceive geographic proximity and cultural proximity in four different ways. Proximity can be operationalized in relation to the gatekeeper and his norms, news organization determinants, market determinants, and sociocultural-economic-political relationships. As the previous review of the literature shows, these terms have been conceptualized and measured separately and together at all levels, challenging the ability of scholars to build on prior studies.

In the present study, geographic proximity is conceptualized as operating at the news organization level and cultural proximity is presumed to be a market determinant. The impact of cultural proximity is assumed because population data are inexpensive and easy to access, and because

there are increased pressures on circulation. Newspapers have the capacity to consider readers and potential readers in their community when making editorial decisions. Newspapers today are promoting nonjournalism-trained professionals to executive positions and using market research to understand who their audience is and what they want.⁴³ Corporate news organizations have market research divisions. So, news organizations should be better at gauging the suitability of news for their audiences. Although there are fewer newspapers in each market, there is local competition from broadcast stations and online sources of news. Competition should be an incentive for knowing one's audience.

And the audience is changing. The growth in non-Anglo populations in some communities is one important consideration in newspapers' efforts to attract new readers.⁴⁴ The perception among ethnic groups that coverage of their community has been sparse has created negative repercussions for at least one U.S. newspaper.⁴⁵ Via technology, newspapers can reach out more quickly to other communities of the world. But the world more frequently is coming to the paper's community. In particular, immigration from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America, along with the growth among U.S. Hispanics, has created a burgeoning Latino population.

A Test of Key Concepts. Galtung and Ruge said that news factors complement one another. They urged that more research be done to study factors that tend to produce the strongest effect. The purpose of this research was to test how two concepts at the organizational level (newspaper size and geographic proximity) and one concept at the community level (cultural proximity) affected the quantity of coverage about the United States' closest Third World neighbor, Mexico. In addition, the study analyzed the news criteria's relationship to two other dependent variables – the length and source of the indexed newspaper articles. Mexico was chosen as the country for study because of its strategic location; historic, political and cultural links with the United States; and post-NAFTA formalization of its long-standing economic relationship. As mentioned earlier, there also are many Mexican-Americans living in the United States. Previous studies have identified a trend toward more coverage of Latin American countries.⁴⁶ Laichas noted the coverage has "reflected not so much an editorial perception of Mexico's international status as an awareness of Mexico's importance to neighborhoods in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles."⁴⁷

As a practical matter, U.S. news organizations covering developing nations find that they continue to face situational difficulties such as press censorship, threats or antagonism from the host country, and lack of access to sources. Although these are factors affecting overall coverage of Mexico in comparison to coverage of Western nations, they will not be explored in this research.

Hypotheses

Quantity. H1: Percentage of Mexican-Americans in the newspaper market, geographic distance from Mexico, and circulation size are predictors of the *quantity* of Mexico/Mexican news in U.S. metropolitan dailies.

Source. H2: Percentage of Mexican-Americans in the newspaper market, geographic distance from Mexico, and circulation size are predictors of *staff-generated articles* (rather than wire service-generated) about Mexico/Mexicans in U.S. metropolitan dailies.

Length. H3: Percentage of Mexican-Americans in the newspaper market, geographic distance from Mexico, and circulation size are predictors of *longer newspaper articles* about Mexico in U.S. metropolitan dailies.

Independent Variables. Measurement of Cultural Proximity. The concept of cultural proximity was operationalized as the percentage of persons of Mexican heritage in the newspaper's primary circulation area. The underlying assumption in this choice of measure is that self-identified ethnicity is an indicator of cultural proximity of the audience. This generates different market pressures across locales. Unlike other ways that cultural proximity has been tested, this construct allows location-by-location comparisons.

First, each newspaper's primary county (in Louisiana, parish) of circulation was determined using the 1995 *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook* and city / county data online. Population data were recorded for that county. Using county data doesn't account for readers of newspapers that have large circulations outside of their primary county, such as San Diegoans reading the *Los Angeles Times*. However, in an effort to provide consistency and focus on primary markets, county population data were used.

Then, online census data were accessed via the World Wide Web site of the Bureau of the Census to record numbers of persons of Mexican heritage. These 1990 data are assumed to be conservative, given Census undercounting of Mexican-Americans and of all Hispanics, along with the growth rate of the Latino population in the United States. In addition, although Latin Americans living in the United States may self-identify as Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Peruvians, Guatemalans, etc., reporters and editors may not differentiate when considering audience interest regarding stories about Mexico or Mexicans.

Measurement of Geographic Proximity. This variable was measured using the distance from the city in which the newspaper was located to the closest of three major border cities, using *Direct Line Distances*,⁴⁸ a directory of world geodesic distances. Merida was used for U.S. cities east of the Mississippi, and Tijuana or Ciudad Juarez (whichever was closest) was used for U.S. cities west of the Mississippi.

Measurement of News Organization Factors. Comparative size of the newspaper was gauged using daily weekday circulation taken from the 1995 *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook*.⁴⁹ The measure was appropriate for this study because of the interest in the paper's size relative to others, rather than an interest in specific weekly or weekend readership.

Dependent Variables. Unit of Analysis and Sample Selection. Using the Dialog PAPERS online database, indexed 1995 coverage of Mexico from daily newspapers in two randomly constructed weeks was analyzed.⁵⁰ The unit of analysis for the descriptive information in this study was each bibliographic item – one per story. Item selection was made using the keywords Mexico and Mexican (excluding New Mexico and Gulf of Mexico) via an online search. Bibliographic index information including length and source of each relevant article (byline or name of wire service), in addition to the headline and lead paragraph, was downloaded.

Admittedly, online database sample selection poses some methodological difficulties. Since the method did not provide an entirely clean sample, each headline and lead was reviewed for inclusion in the sample before coding began. For instance, obituaries and recipes for Mexican food were excluded. If the same story was indexed more than once because it appeared in different editions of the same paper, the longest story was selected for the sample. All relevant articles within the randomly constructed weeks were included. After data clean-up, 515 index citations were maintained for use in the study.

TABLE 1
*Zero-Order Pearson Correlation Coefficients,
 Independent Variables with Number of Articles in 34 Newspapers*

	1	2	3	4
1. Circulation Size		-.128	.373*	.454**
2. Distance to Border			-.667**	-.575**
3. Percentage Mexican				.722**
4. Number of Articles				

N = 34

* $p < .05$ for two-tailed test; ** $p < .01$ for two-tailed test.

Article Length and Source of News. This study considered length of news item as a separate dependent variable because of studies that have noted the significance of length (or time) of a news item.⁵¹ The second dependent variable was the source of the news article. This could be considered an independent variable, since the source influences the amount of coverage, but, as stated earlier, consonance studies haven't shown significant differences. So, this study treats the source as a dependent variable. The underlying assumption is that geographic distance, cultural factors, or the financial wherewithal of the news organization will affect the assignment of Mexico-related stories to staffers, rather than selection of available wire copy.

Coding Length and Source. The length of the article was measured in the number of words. Word counts were provided in each index citation.

Authorship of almost all articles was provided in the bibliographic citations. Stories identified by bylines, with the exception of wire service employee bylines, were recorded as staff. This included bylined articles that could have been written by nonstaff writers such as freelancers or stringers. For instance, some travel stories about Mexico were written by nonstaff, non-wire service writers. If a story was authored by a staff member who used some wire copy, it also was coded as "staff." Articles coded as "wire" assumed no staff work beyond selection and editing.

All editorials, unless written by syndicated columnists or guest experts, were coded "staff." If authorship was unclear, it was coded as "author unclear." This was often the case on the business pages, where news releases generated by public relations practitioners may have been the unidentified sources.⁵²

Results

Independent and dependent variable descriptive statistics are as follows: The mean circulation size of newspapers in the sample was 338,330, and they averaged 1,157 miles from Mexico. The documented population of Mexican heritage in the newspapers' markets averaged 4%. News articles ranged from 10 to 2,329 words, with a mean of 465 words. Sixty percent were provided by wire services, 36% written by someone employed directly by the newspaper, and 4% were of unknown authorship. In each newspaper, the mean number of articles written about Mexico or Mexicans was 15.

TABLE 2
*Zero-Order Pearson Correlation Coefficients,
 Independent Variables with Length and Source of 515 Articles*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Circulation Size		-.281**	.384**	-.460**	.162**	.442**
2. Distance to Border			-.772**	-.137**	.170**	-.015
3. Percentage Mexican				.214**	-.264**	.026
4. Staff Byline					-.920**	.419**
5. Wire Story						-.339**
6. Number of Words						

N = 515

** $p < .01$ for two-tailed test

Relationships among the variables are displayed in tables 1 and 2, and a test of the hypothesis is shown in Table 3. Percentage of the population in the newspaper's market who are Mexican had the most impact on the amount of coverage, followed by circulation size. Although multicollinearity among independent variables was a potential concern, tolerance levels for distance, circulation, and percentage Mexican were 0.55, 0.85, and 0.49, respectively.

Next, separate multiple regressions were performed to determine the effects of proximity variables and circulation size on the length and source of article, and results are displayed in Table 4. SPSS 6.1.2 was used for the multiple regression analyses. While the first hypothesis related to the gatekeeper's decision to run or not run a story about Mexico, these hypotheses dealt with specifics about the story subject, once it was selected for inclusion in that day's newspaper.

Despite the availability of Hispanic sources in their communities, a larger percentage of Mexicans or Mexican-Americans in the newspaper's market was not a predictor of more nonwire articles. And, although a newspaper in a larger Mexican-American market may have been sensitive enough to include more articles about the country or its people, cultural proximity did not predict longer articles. Circulation size dominated the size of the newshole for Mexico news, and the staff available to cover it.

Geographic Proximity. In this study, actual distance didn't matter. This factor has been important in many nation and region studies, where, for instance, one would find differences in U.S. coverage of Korea versus U.S. coverage of Mexico.⁵³ Unlike those studies, this one compared the proximity of one country's border to many newspaper locations in one adjacent nation.

The finding suggests that geographic distance could be more psychological than actual. The news organization as a level of analysis may not

Discussion

TABLE 3
*Regression Analysis for Variable Predicting Number
of Articles about Mexico and Mexicans*

Number of Articles about Mexico and Mexicans (H1)	Circulation Size Beta Coefficient	Cultural Proximity Beta Coefficient	Geographic Proximity Beta Coefficient
	.28*	.48***	-.20

Adj. R² = .56 ; F(3, 29) = 14.74

N = 34

*p < .05; ***p < .001.

stimulate the differences that one would see when individual gatekeepers or nation-states are units of analyses. In fact, U.S. gatekeepers' psychological distance to Mexico may be consonant now. Corporatization of newspapers and news borrowing are explanations. In addition, as coverage of Latin America has increased, as economic relations through NAFTA have increased, and as journalists associate with more Mexicans or Mexican-Americans in their professions and communities, they may perceive a closer country. This phenomenon could operate at a national level – there may be less psychological distance between United States and Mexico (although ill-will and goodwill may vary with immigration trends and other factors).

Another conceptualization of geographic proximity is distance to cover. Improvements in transportation and communication negate some of the former real physical challenges of covering Mexico, although transportation and communication barriers still limit covering some states in Mexico (and many nations in Africa, Central America, South America, and Asia). Foreign bureaus may not affect the quantity of news about Mexico because news organizations borrow so much news. Of course, availability of foreign correspondents can affect coverage of small regions within the country and specific topics (ability to cover Chiapas unrest or Yucatan agriculture), quality of news, and framing of the news, not studied in this article.

Cultural Proximity and Newspaper Size. In this study, the quantity of Mexico coverage appears to be influenced not only by the size of the newspaper, but by a societal factor in the newspapers' markets, a cultural proximity variable. This audience factor is an "extra-media" determinant – a selection criterion external to the story. The findings, then, add weight to arguments for more analysis of "extra-media" determinants.

However, cultural proximity did not predict "inter-media" determinants – factors related to the production of the story, such as its length or who authored it. Space and staff available were tied to circulation size. Cultural proximity influenced the decision to include a news or feature item, but not how extensively to cover the subject. Business matters took precedence in matters of staffing and space. The findings are positive, however, because they indicate that even with practical limitations, gatekeepers are attempting to cover Mexicans and Mexico when their community has a significant population of Mexican heritage. It offers optimism about the decline of foreign print news coverage, since the growth of immigrants and attention to multicultural audiences could reverse the trend away from global news. More globalization of the United States could expand interest of new and native citizens about international and intercultural news.

TABLE 4
Separate Multiple Regressions of Circulation Size, Geographic Proximity, and Cultural Proximity on Length and Source

	Circulation Size Beta Coefficient	Cultural Proximity Beta Coefficient	Geographic Proximity Beta Coefficient	Adj. R ²	F(3,511)
Articles Authored by Staff (H2)	.36***	.07	.02	.15	30.12
Length (H3)	.19***	-.07	-.01	.02	5.10

N = 515
 ***p < .001

International News Determinants Theory. Although we have support that the regionalism phenomena occurred many times in large-scale studies, the field of international news research has not positioned geographic proximity clearly. Is it real distance, the way it is measured? Is it that amorphous "psychological" distance that has been criticized in some landmark studies? Or is geographic proximity the natural social, political, and economic relationships (positive or negative) that form when countries are nearby?

Rosengren advocated eliminating the cultural proximity concept, but this study suggests eliminating geographic proximity in building a model of international news determinants. The concept opened a window on new ways to conceptualize proximity. However, continued use of regionalism as a broad concept could mask other important factors and patterns. Grouping similar "extra-media" variables and clearly defining the level of analysis would provide a way of structuring a news determinant model. For example, economic proximity, political proximity, and cultural proximity are cluster concepts with a number of measures. In some ways this recommendation builds on regionalization findings as well as the New World Information Order arguments. The NWIO focused on political and economic power but didn't elaborate on ways to test these powers, limiting the ability to discern separate or intertwined patterns of economic, political, and cultural proximity. On the other hand, the grander regionalization concept may have buried intriguing relations among "extra-media" variables. After all, just because adjacent countries have political relationships or nonrelationships doesn't mean they share cultural norms.

More than a decade ago Hur noted that despite well-formulated propositions, the divergence in concepts and lack of linkages hinders generalizability of research findings about international news patterns. Standardizing conceptualization, eliminating confusing concepts, and specifying level of analysis are giant steps toward this goal.

In summary, the high percentage of Hispanics in many U.S. cities relative to other groups limits generalizability to other cultural groups. Clearly, more research with other nations and other groups is needed. But this case is significant in its own right, as the quantity and quality of news

about Mexico has continued to grow in importance, especially with the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

NOTES

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