

*Schwarz, Andreas:*

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# The theory of newsworthiness applied to Mexico's press. How the news factors influence foreign news coverage in a transitional country

ANDREAS SCHWARZ

## *Abstract*

*Empirical studies which examine the theory of newsworthiness and the predictability of news coverage in transnational or developing countries still remain on the agenda of journalism research. Therefore, this study examines the influence of news factors on the foreign news coverage of three Mexican newspapers. Two main questions guide the research. First, is the theory of newsworthiness a valid approach for predicting news selection in a cultural context that is significantly different from western industrialized countries? Secondly, which are the relevant news factors that predict foreign news coverage in the Mexican press and thus shape the image of foreign nations? The results of a quantitative content analysis confirm the hypotheses of selection, additivity, and replication as they were originally postulated by Galtung and Ruge and thus prove the external validity of the theory of newsworthiness beyond western journalism.*

*Keywords: theory of newsworthiness, news factors, news values, news selection, quantitative content analysis, Mexican press*

One of the most intriguing questions in journalism research is how and why journalists select certain aspects of reality to become part of the media's news universe. The news selection process takes place within a complex framework shaped by socio-cultural, economic, political, organizational, and psychological variables. Over the years, scholars have developed a wide variety of approaches in order to explain this process (e. g., White, 1950; Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979; Shoemaker, 1996; Donsbach, 2004). One of the most influential explanations of journalistic news selection is the theory of newsworthiness which represents an interdisciplinary approach that integrates concepts of perception, professional and organizational routines, as well as the anticipation of audience interests. Lippmann (1922) first referred to the term news value as the prop-

erty of an event that determines its probability of becoming news. European scholars adopted this idea and introduced a differentiation between the central concepts news factors and newsworthiness, both of which are independent variables assumed to predict the selection and the editorial emphasis of news items.

Influential contributions came from Östgaard (1965), as well as from Galtung and Ruge (1965) who laid out a list of 12 news factors which they divided into eight anthropological ('culture-free') factors and four culture-bound factors. These authors deemed references to elite nations, references to elite people, references to people, and negativity to be characteristic selection criteria of journalists in the north-western part of the world (USA, Canada, Western Europe). The remaining factors were assumed to be relatively independent of cultural parameters. The authors who based their assumptions on a "common-sense perception psychology" (Galtung and Ruge, 1970: 262) developed empirical instruments for testing the theoretical framework which were further validated by Sande (1971) and Peterson (1981).

#### *Approaches to studying news selection*

This study explicitly refers to the terms 'news factor' and 'newsworthiness'<sup>1</sup>, but follows the fundamental reconceptualization of news factors suggested by Schulz (1990). According to Schulz, news factors have to be seen as hypotheses used by journalists to guide their perception of reality and, thus, lead to decisions about which aspects of events are newsworthy and which are not (Schulz, 1990: 29). In other words, news factors are not ontological attributes of certain events that are self-evident. Rather, they are characteristics of reality ascribed by journalists. In general, what is regarded as news is a social construction. News factors serve as criteria of sense-making and constitute the newsworthiness of particular reality aspects as observed by journalists. As a consequence, the criteria of journalistic news selection are hardly measurable by comparing the news with extra-media data (e. g., statistics, almanacs, and yearbooks) as Rosengren (1970) suggested. Like news, extra-media data are excerpts of reality constructed by certain rules or processes of perception. Thus, their function as indicators of objective reality can be questioned. A more feasible way of assessing the news criteria applied by journalists would be to observe different stages of news production through an input-output analysis. However, most news studies are confined to a content analysis of the media output. Scholars argue that it is not only the decision to publish a news story or not that indicates its newsworthiness, but also the decision to emphasize a news story in terms of placement, text size, and visual emphasis. In this view, to omit a

certain aspect of reality from the news represents the lowest degree of editorial emphasis, comparable to the zero point of a measurement scale (Schulz, 1976).

Following up on this line of research, Staab (1990) refined the news factor operationalizations as proposed by Schulz (1976, 1982). He considered news factors to be the result of the decision to publish certain news stories rather than the determinants of journalistic news selection. He assumed that journalists select news stories for their instrumental character if they conform to certain political (not further specified) goals. Thus, according to Staab, news factors are assigned to the news stories after having been selected, in order to legitimize their initial selection.

More recent studies did not support this interpretation, but adopted Staab's operationalizations of news factors. Eilders (1997) corroborated the relationship between news factors and editorial emphasis and, in addition, showed that news factors not only steer the perceptions of journalists, but also the audience's selection and perception of news. A multi-method study by Ruhrmann, Woelke, Maier, and Diehlmann (2003), comprising interviews with German television journalists, a content analysis of the main German television news programs from 1992 to 2001, and a survey of the news audience found that the news factors used by Staab (1990) and Eilders (1997) are important criteria of news selection. The study also shows that the criteria have changed over time, leading to a de-politization and increasing negativism of news (Ruhrmann et al., 2003: 232).

### *News selection research in developing and transitional countries*

Up to now, Galtung and Ruge's theory (1965) has rarely been tested in cultural contexts other than the western industrialized countries of Europe and North America. Since context factors are known to have an impact on journalism practice and role perception (Esser, 1998; Deuze, 2002), the statement made by Van de Vijver and Leung (1997: 146), relating to comparative research in general, also applies to the theory of newsworthiness: "Theories that have shown validity in one cultural context do not necessarily yield equally good results in other cultural contexts".

Although news selection research has been carried out in Mexico, it is rare and hardly comparable to the European approaches. A content analysis by Gabriel Gonzales Molina (1986), for instance, which examined nine radio and two television news programs, did, in fact, assess the importance of news factors ('valores noticiosos') based on concepts developed in Great Britain and the United States<sup>2</sup>. The study focuses on the structure of news programs, the quantity of reported regions, the

main actors, as well as on crime-related stories. Despite its valuable findings, Molina's work is predominantly descriptive and does not explain how newsworthiness determines the selection or editorial emphasis of news stories. Cervantes Barba (1995–96) based her explorative study of sensationalism in local television news on a classification proposed by Shoemaker and Reese (1991). She aimed at building an empirically based model for measuring news factors in local television, focusing more on methodological issues than on a validation of the news factors. Her sample was limited to local crime-related stories. Although factors such as impact, negativity, geographical proximity, and status, among others, were considered to influence media content, they were not measured in order to explain news selection or editorial emphasis.

By comparing domestic news in British, US, and African newspapers, Lange (1984) examined the relationship between the countries' level of development and the importance of news factors. Only headlines and lead sentences were included in the content analysis, and news factors were measured on the basis of quite simple operationalizations, most of which are hardly comparable to earlier studies of newsworthiness. In accordance with Lange's hypotheses, the results showed that newspapers in less developed countries published significantly more domestic news containing the news factors than papers in more developed countries. This finding indicates an influence of economic, cultural, and social parameters on the process of news selection.

An investigation of news decisions in different cultural settings was realized by Chaudhary (1974) who compared a sample of 30 journalists from the USA and India. Using an experimental design, Chaudhary found that American and Indian journalists apply quite similar criteria of news selection, but their assessment of newsworthiness is based on different news factor combinations. Despite some significant differences found between US and Indian journalists, the author concluded that news factors could be applied to English-language newspapers in democratic countries in a similar or even the same way. In a more recent study, Chaudhary (2001) compared an American and a Nigerian daily with regard to the proportion of negative and positive news, as well as the dimensions of collectivism vs. individualism. No significant differences were found. This is in accord with the assumption that journalists and media organizations in developing countries are in the process of adopting western values and routines (Ainslie, 1967; Katz and Wedell, 1977). However, other studies arrive at opposite conclusions (McFadden, 1953; Nasser, 1983; Roser and Brown, 1986).

The literature review demonstrates that comprehensive research which explicitly tests the theory of newsworthiness in the contexts of non-Euro-

pean and non-American 'national news cultures' (Deuze, 2002) is still lacking. The question whether and to what extent news factors are able to predict the selection and editorial emphasis of news in developing and transitional countries has yet to be answered.

### *Research questions and hypotheses*

This study is a step in that direction by addressing two research questions:

RQ1: Is the theory of newsworthiness, which was developed in a European research context, a valid approach to predicting news selection (in this case editorial emphasis) beyond Western European and North American journalism?

In this study, the theory is applied to the Mexican case in order to identify its specific national news selection culture.

RQ2: Which are the relevant criteria (news factors) that predict foreign news coverage, and as a result shape the image of foreign nations in the Mexican press?

Mexico represents an adequate context for the purpose of this study. The country is on its way to democracy and media openness (Lawson, 2002), and does not have any kind of institutionalized censorship (Martínez, 2004: 55) which would restrict the applicability of Galtung and Ruge's theory. Although the freedom of the press is still partly restricted, international news coverage operates relatively free from government control. While the formal political system and structural dimensions of the national press are comparable to democratic western countries, Mexico is considered to be vastly different from western countries in cultural terms. Hofstede (2001), for instance, identified drastic differences between the United States and Mexico regarding the dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Contrary to the United States, Mexico ranks quite high on both dimensions. Furthermore, Mexican culture can be characterized by a high degree of collectivism, while western cultures tend to be more individualistic (Hofstede, 2001: 500). According to the cultural map developed by Inglehart, Halman, and Welzel (2004: 11–14), Latin American countries strongly rely on traditional values such as obedience to (religious) authorities and adherence to family, while the western world, especially Protestant Europe, is more oriented towards secular-rational authorities.

Taking Mexico as a case in point, this study examines the relationship between news factors, newsworthiness, and editorial emphasis in the

context of a transitional country addressing the following hypotheses originally postulated by Galtung and Ruge:

- H1 (selection): The more events or reality aspects satisfy the journalistic ‘hypotheses of reality’ (news factors) about what is newsworthy, the more text space it will be allotted, the more it will be visually emphasized, and/or the more prominent it will be placed within the newspaper (once the event became news).
- H2 (additivity): The higher the total score of an event’s or reality aspect’s news factors (i. e., its newsworthiness), the more text space it will be allotted, the more it will be visually emphasized, and/or the more prominent it will be placed within the newspaper (once the event became news).
- H3 (replication/ distortion): The more steps a news story passes through in the chain from news source to reader, the more it will be accentuated according to the news factors.

It should be stressed that the dependent variable in this case is not the decision to publish a story, but rather the editorial emphasis within a newspaper. Three indicators of editorial emphasis are used: (1) assigned text space, (2) visual emphasis, and (3) placement of a news story. This is based on the assumption that journalists assess newsworthiness in two stages within the news chain: First, they select a story for publication, and secondly, they decide to what extent the story is emphasized. Thus, a higher news factor score increases the probability of selection and, in the second stage, leads to a stronger emphasis in terms of position, visual emphasis, and/or text space (see Figure 1).

## **Methodology**

### *Sampling and newspaper coding*

The results of this study are based on a content analysis of the three Mexican nationally distributed dailies: *El Universal*, *Reforma*, and *La Jornada*. Six copies of each newspaper were selected in the time period between November 3 and December 13, 2003 so that they constitute a composite week. A composite week was constructed in order to reduce

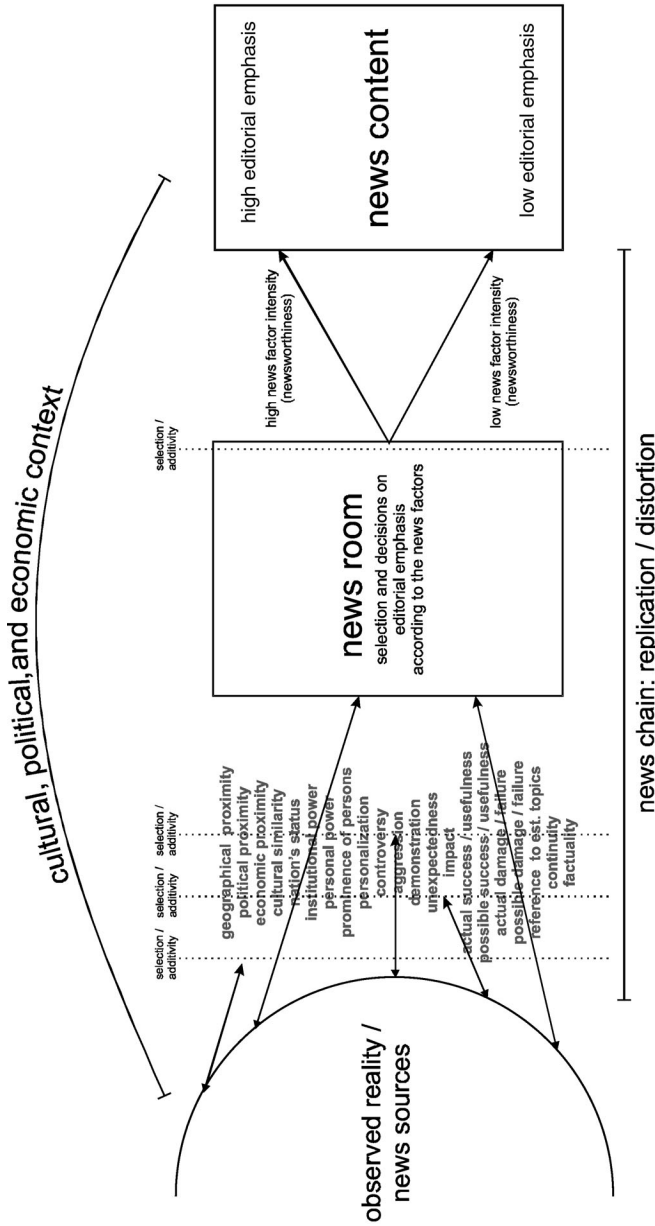


Figure 1. Influence of the news factors on selection and editorial emphasis along the news chain (source: own elaboration).



the influence of extraordinary single events. At the time when the research was conducted, these newspapers represented the most important and influential Mexican none-tabloid print media in terms of circulation and number of readers. They are all printed in Mexico City and can be considered high quality papers which are read by Mexico's elites. The papers represent different formats and political leanings. *Reforma* is seen as a conservative-catholic, slightly right-wing newspaper with an average of 126,000 copies sold per day. It belongs to the *Grupo Reforma* consortium which publishes various important Mexican newspapers. *El Universal* is the most widely distributed national quality paper (approximately 170,000 copies per day) with a pluralistic and modest right-wing orientation. The close relationship to the former ruling regime of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) was given up in favor of a more market-driven editorial policy. *La Jornada*, on the other hand, is characterized by a modest left-wing orientation and is considered to have close ties to the labor party PRD (Partido Revolucionario Democrático). There are contradictory circulation figures reported in different sources which vary from 53,085 to 111,916 copies per day (see for example Lawson, 2002).

All foreign news dealing with politics or business was coded, while purely domestic news was left out. The term foreign news pertains to stories that mainly cover events occurring abroad (i. e., outside Mexico), or that focus on foreign institutions or people as key players. A total of 610 news items from eighteen newspaper copies were coded. Each news story was individually coded and served as the unit of analysis. When conducting content analysis in foreign countries, as was the case in this study, cultural competence and knowledge as well as language skills are necessary pre-conditions. The author who coded the news items in Mexico exhibited these skills. Intra-coder reliability was assessed by coding a random sample of 100 news items twice at an interval of three weeks resulting in a satisfactory reliability of 0.88 (as measured by the Holsti coefficient).

### *News factors and editorial emphasis*

In order to avoid known problems with measuring Galtung and Ruge's news factors (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001), the operationalizations of news factors suggested by Staab (1990) were used for this study. Based on Schulz's conceptualizations (1976, 1982), Staab improved the measurability of news factors and provided detailed coding instructions. Staab's definitions of the news factor categories were slightly modified and adjusted to the Mexican situation (for more details see the appendix). Each factor was rated on a four-point scale according to the factor's intensity

in the news story (whereby the value 3 represented the highest and 0 the lowest intensity). The complete list of news factors was applied to each news story.

When taking a detailed look at the news factors, it becomes obvious that, from a theoretical perspective, they are not necessarily independent from one another. A closer geographical proximity, for example, often implies more cultural similarity (in terms of religion or language, for example). The factors 'aggression' and 'actual damage/failure' are both based on destruction and fatalities. The only difference is that 'aggression' is caused intentionally by individuals (terrorists or militants), whereas 'actual damage/failure' is unintentional (natural disasters for example). High correlations between several news factors confirm these assumptions. This is why it was tested which of the news factors measure the same latent construct, and can thus be reduced to one dimension. However, such a procedure is only appropriate if the combination of news factors makes sense from a theoretical perspective.

First, the factors measuring aspects of proximity were subjected to a Cronbach's alpha test in order to assess whether they could be combined into one proximity factor<sup>3</sup>. As a result, cultural similarity had to be excluded because it strongly reduced the reliability of the scale. The remaining factors resulted in an alpha coefficient of 0.83, which represents the dimension of proximity. Furthermore, the factor 'actual negativity' was identified as representing the two news factors 'aggression' and 'actual damage/failure' (alpha 0.73). The possible combination of prominence and personalization – both measure a person-related dimension – did not result in a satisfactory alpha coefficient (0.62). Further combinations of news factors were not found. The two identified sets of news factors were combined and then included, together with the remaining factors, in the regression analysis.

Assigned text space, visual emphasis, and the placement of news stories served as indicators of editorial emphasis. The text space (including headlines) as well as visual emphasis (all visual elements including photos, charts, and diagrams) were both measured in square centimeters. The placement of news stories was rated on a six-point scale (where the highest score was assigned to the most salient news item in the upper half of the front-page). A reliability analysis of the three dependent variables resulted in a satisfactory standardized item alpha coefficient (0.77) so that it seemed justified to combine the variables into an index of editorial emphasis. For this purpose, the sum of assigned text space and visual emphasis was multiplied with the placement rank. The rationale behind this was that the placement decision is considered to be more fundamental than the allotment of space (and thus reflects a higher grade of newsworthiness).

**Findings***The selection hypothesis (H1)*

After having eliminated extreme outliers from the model, OLS multiple regression analyses were computed using assigned text space and visual emphasis as dependent variables, and a categorical regression analysis with placement as the dependent variable. As shown by Table 1, the influence of news factors is much stronger for the amount of text space ( $R^2 = 0.39$ ) than for the visual emphasis of published news stories (0.19), and weakest for article placement (0.13). The fact that the news factors predict text space better than the visual emphasis could be explained by the differential availability of visual elements (e. g., photographs), which for some news is quite restricted.

‘Controversy’ shows a particularly strong relationship with all three dependent variables. Obviously, journalists consider stories about conflicts between people or institutions as particularly newsworthy because these aspects correspond with their hypotheses of reality. The same can be stated for news items referring to topics already established in the news (‘reference to established topics’). Moreover, Mexican journalists emphasize news stories implying, to some extent, ‘possible success’ or ‘usefulness’ in the future. The news factors ‘impact’, ‘personalization’,

Table 1. *The news factor’s influence on the three dimensions of editorial emphasis (multiple and categorical regressions, only significant beta weights listed,  $p < 0.05$ ).*

	Assigned text space	Visual emphasis	Article placement
$R^2$	0.39	0.19	0.13
F	42.409	23.863	5.358
Actual negativity	.114		
Actual success / usefulness	.074		
Continuity		.085	.127
Controversy	.309	.205	.211
Cultural similarity	-.115		
Demonstration			
Factuality	.071	.204	.106
Impact	.185	.131	
Institutional power			
Nation’s status			
Personalization	.115		
Possible damage/failure			
Possible success/usefulness	.240	.159	
Prominence			
Proximity			
Reference to established topics	.271	.167	.148
Unexpectedness			

and 'actual negativity' are less powerful when used to predict text space. The cultural similarity of countries shows an inverse relationship with emphasis through text space which means that culturally distinct countries received more attention. The visual emphasis of news stories was, in addition to controversy, most strongly influenced by the factuality of the reported occurrences showing that, from the newsroom's perspective, a more factual character of an event makes it more newsworthy and more likely to be covered using more visual elements. Ad hoc news distributed by news agencies, for instance after a plane crash, often provides little background information and a lot of photographic material. As a consequence, factuality is more likely to influence visual emphasis than the amount of text space a news story receives. This finding also applies, though to a lesser degree, to the placement of articles. Factuality influences the placement of a news item, and this is particularly the case if the story refers to a controversial topic that is, with some degree of continuity, connected to other already established topics in the news.

As could be expected, these results turn up again when the index combining the three measures of editorial emphasis is regressed on the news factors (see Table 2, far right column). In addition, the breakdown of

Table 2. *The news factor's influence on the overall index of editorial emphasis (multiple regression, only significant beta weights listed,  $p < 0.05$ ).*

News factors	Editorial emphasis		
	International politics	International business	All
R <sup>2</sup>	0.17	0.30	0.20
F	12.526	15.897	25.215
Durbin-Watson	1.724	1.896	1.709
N	375	230	605
Actual negativity	.106		.120
Actual success/usefulness			
Continuity		.160	
Controversy	.189	.262	.217
Cultural similarity			
Demonstration			
Factuality	.110		.101
Impact	.165		.146
Institutional power			
Nation's status			
Personalization		.246	
Possible damage/failure			
Possible success/usefulness	.142	.160	.148
Prominence		-.141	
Proximity			
Reference to established topics	.217	.209	.221
Unexpectedness			

the coded material in Table 2 into the two content categories, namely international politics and international business, shows some differentiation of the results. Most striking is the salience of the personalization factor in business news. An emphasis on individual people (personalization), as well as the continuity of reported topics, seem to have special predictive power for foreign business news. On the other hand, a person's prominence is negatively related to editorial emphasis, and, thus does not seem to be of high newsworthiness for the business section.

In sum, the analysis confirms the selection hypothesis postulated by Galtung and Ruge. News factors seem to have the potential to predict the news decisions of Mexican quality newspapers in their coverage of foreign affairs. Mexican journalists tend to especially emphasize news stories referring to controversial and conflicting opinions. This news factor shows robust relationships with all dependent variables, a finding which is in line with earlier research (Peterson, 1981; Schulz, 1982; Staab, 1990; Ruhrmann et al., 2003). The same applies to stories implying 'possible success/usefulness' and, with some qualifications, to stories referring to established topics in the news.

### *The additivity hypothesis (H2)*

This hypothesis postulates an influence of the total score of news factors on editorial emphasis. In this case the focus is not on the influence of single news factors but rather on the combined influence of all factors. A composite intensity index serves to sum up the news factor scores for each news story. As Table 3 shows, this index is significantly related to all dependent variables, confirming the assumption.

When looking at details of Table 3, it becomes clear that the news factor score most strongly predicts the text space assigned to news stories. This may be due to the fact that a larger word count allows journalists to consider more aspects of a news story and, as a consequence, more news factors. On the other hand, the strong relationship of the intensity index with both visual emphasis and the overall editorial emphasis qualifies this interpretation to some degree. Moreover, partial correlations between the intensity index and the dependent variables controlled for the number of included news factors still show stable and highly significant relationships. Thus, the composite intensity of the news factors is more likely to be the cause of a stronger emphasis rather than the effect of an extended text space. Moreover, the comparatively weak correlations of placement with the intensity index may be a consequence of the low variance of the placement variable. Since the prominent positions within a newspaper copy are quite limited, news editors might have to place some news stories in less prominent positions despite their relatively high newsworthiness.

Table 3. Relationship of the composite intensity index of the news factors with editorial emphasis (text space, position, and visual emphasis; spearman rank correlations).

Independent variable: Composite intensity index	Dependent variables			
	Text space	Article placement	Visual emphasis	Editorial emphasis (overall index)
International politics (N = 380)	.505**	.228**	.309**	.419**
International business (N = 230)	.640**	.274**	.478**	.622**
All news items (N = 610)	.569**	.297**	.408**	.546**

\*\* p < 0.01

*Mexican news and the hypothesis of replication (H3)*

Most foreign news passes through a number of steps on the news chain before being published. Galtung and Ruge (1965) assumed that news is selected and accentuated according to the news factors on every step in the news chain. News that passes through more steps on the news chain (for example, stories provided by news agencies) is more likely to be shaped according to the journalist's criteria of sense-making.

In order to test this assumption, two categories of news were constructed for comparison: first-hand news from sources such as staff correspondents, free lancers, reporters, or the news room itself; and second-hand news from news agencies<sup>4</sup>. News items which were gathered from unidentifiable sources or other media as sources are excluded from the analysis. The two news categories are compared by calculating a nonparametric Mann-Whitney-U-Test for each news factor. According to the replication hypothesis, the news factors of agency news should show significantly higher average ranks than those of first-hand news. As Table 4 shows, this is actually the case for most news factors. While eleven of the news factors show significantly higher mean ranks for news agency stories, for only two of the factors ('possible success/usefulness' and 'impact') the results point in the opposite direction. As can be seen, news originating from news agencies is more negative, deals with more factual aspects, and focuses more on individuals, prominent figures, powerful nations and countries closer to Mexico (in terms of geographical distance, political, and economic proximity) than first-hand news. This is in line with the assumption that journalists replicate their hypotheses of what is newsworthy through selective news gathering on every step of the news chain.

Table 4. *The influence of news sources on the news factors (mean ranks, Mann-Whitney-U-Test, sorted by Z-values).*

Dependent variables: news factors	Independent variable: news source			
	Staff correspondents / free lancers / home office staff	News agency	Signifi- cance	Z
	N = 249	N = 228		
Continuity	237.52	240.61	n. s.	-0.276
Possible damage/failure	236.27	241.98	n. s.	-0.640
Reference to established topics	243.51	234.08	n. s.	-0.836
Institutional power	234.04	244.41	n. s.	-0.938
Actual success/usefulness	245.63	231.76	n. s.	-1.491
Controversy	230.40	248.39	n. s.	-1.509
Cultural similarity	231.28	247.44	n. s.	-1.635
Factuality	228.75	250.20	*	-1.826
Personalization	227.97	251.05	**	-1.968
Nation's status	227.01	252.10	**	-2.232
Demonstration	232.34	246.27	**	-2.244
Geographical proximity	226.20	252.98	**	-2.321
Unexpectedness	225.70	253.52	**	-2.648
Impact	254.81	221.73	***	-2.780
Actual damage/failure	223.43	256.01	***	-2.898
Economic proximity	219.45	260.35	****	-3.435
Possible success/usefulness	257.51	218.79	****	-3.791
Political proximity	215.18	265.02	****	-4.463
Prominence	211.46	269.08	****	-4.821
Aggression	220.99	258.67	****	-4.883
Composite intensity index	221.00	258.65	***	-2.987

\*\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.1$

However, the results also allow a different interpretation. The differences for some news factors may be attributed to differential cultural backgrounds and/or professional routines of the predominantly western news agencies and the Mexican home editorial offices<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately, the nationality of all journalists could not be analyzed, leaving this question unanswered.

## Conclusions

This study tests the theory of newsworthiness formulated by Galtung and Ruge (1965) in the Mexican context as an example of a transitional country displaying cultural characteristics that are distinct from western countries where the theory has been tested before. All assumptions of

the theory, including the hypotheses of selection, additivity, and replication were confirmed for the cases of three Mexican daily newspapers. Strong and stable influences on editorial emphasis were found for news factors such as controversy, reference to established topics, and possible success/usefulness. These factors shape the image of foreign nations conveyed by the Mexican press. The findings correspond, with some qualifications, to the results of earlier studies conducted in Germany (Schulz, 1982; Staab, 1990; Ruhrmann et al., 2003).

Some limitations of the study have to be pointed out. First, the sampled media content limit the results to foreign news stories published by Mexican elite newspapers. Further studies should include domestic news as well as television and radio programs, as these are the most important sources of news for the average Mexican audience. Moreover, the relationships between news factors and editorial emphasis that have been found do not necessarily prove that news factors are relevant criteria for the initial selection of news for publication. Conservatively interpreted, the results only demonstrate an influence of news factors on the news room decisions to emphasize published news stories (or not). Further research designed as input-output studies may serve to clarify this question. In addition, the way the hypothesis of replication is investigated may be improved in future studies. For this purpose, the cultural and professional backgrounds of journalists who are involved in the selection process should be taken into account. Future research should concentrate on cultural differences in selection patterns and take into consideration as many variables as possible; "Comparative studies examining the factor of cultural variability in news selection are desperately needed to enhance our understanding of communication across cultures" (Chaudhary, 2001: 245).

The theory of newsworthiness has several implications for the practice of journalism and communication management. The replication phenomenon, for example, may help explain how images of foreign nations are created by the mass media. News about foreign countries, in most cases, has to pass through several barriers along the way to becoming a story. As the findings showed, this leads to a stronger accentuation of the news factors. Consequently, news in western media about African or Latin American nations tends to be rather negative and is most often related to elite-nations or elite-institutions (Carroll and Tuggle, 1997; Gonzenbach, Arant, and Stevenson, 1992; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1981). On the other hand, this points to opportunities for international public relations. The findings can help assess which aspects of reality will receive more attention in the media and, second, they show how to apply public relations instruments in order to increase the amount of general and positive news coverage. This could result in more positive attitudes



towards a certain country (Kiouisis and Wu, 2005; Wanta, Golan, and Lee, 2004).

Another relevant field of investigation deals with the impact of news factors (understood as sense-making criteria) on the views, attitudes, and behavior towards foreign countries and people of distinct cultural backgrounds. Efforts to transfer the theory's assumptions to the news reception process have already been made (Sande, 1971; Donsbach, 1991; Eilders, 1997; Ruhrmann et al., 2003). However, research could focus more specifically on the problem of international image building and the role of public relations in this respect. In times of globalization and increasing global trade, national images play an important role in creating (economic) credibility and attracting investors, scientists, skilled employees, and tourists. This is particularly essential for a transitional country such as Mexico.

The value of the theory of newsworthiness is its real predictive power (Tumber, 1999; Kepplinger and Rouwen, 2000), a quality which is hard to find among approaches to journalism. This study demonstrates that the theory as developed in European contexts is able to predict news selection (or at least news emphasis) in a different cultural context as well. Research designed more specifically for cross-cultural comparisons could provide more answers to the questions, whether news factors have universal predictive power, and to what degree they are contingent on anthropological, psychological, organizational, social, and cultural variables.

## Notes

1. In other studies the term 'news values' has been used to refer to both, news factors and newsworthiness. In this study a definite distinction is made between 'news factors' and 'newsworthiness'.
2. Most American research on newsworthiness has focused on news factors such as timeliness, proximity, prominence, consequence, unusualness, conflict, deviance, and significance. The concept has been studied, among others, by Warren (1934), Schramm (1949), Mott (1952), Buckalew (1969), Dimmick (1974), Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger (1987), and Golan (2003), mostly without taking notice of the European research tradition.
3. Since a factor analysis indicating similar results did not fulfill the necessary statistical conditions, a Cronbach's Alpha test was applied instead.
4. Unfortunately it was not possible to make sure that staff correspondents, for example, did not gather their news from other sources such as news agencies or other media. Nevertheless, the sources mentioned in the newspaper were taken at face value.
5. Only 18 news items originated exclusively from the Mexican news agency Notimex. Another 173 were gathered exclusively from western agencies, such as AP, dpa, reuters, EFE, and AFP.

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### **Appendix: Description of the coded news factors**

*Actual damage / failure* refers to the actual quality and quantity of negative consequences of events for people or objects.

*Actual success / usefulness* refers to aspects which, according to common sense categories, can be considered a success or a positive development. This does not refer to the individual perspective of involved people, but rather to the evaluation of an average reader.

*Aggression* was coded as the threat or use of violence with the intention to harm somebody.

*Continuity* refers to the time period a certain topic is noticed by the news media (for example, terrorist attacks, migration between the USA and Mexico etc.). For this purpose, extensive lists based on Mexican news archives were drawn up.

*Controversy* describes the degree of conflicting opinions regarding acute issues.

*Cultural similarity* is the similarity of a country's culture compared to Mexico in terms of (1) language, (2) religion, and (3) ethnical composition of the country's population.

*Demonstration* refers to the collective expression of certain goals (mostly in form of public demonstrations or strikes). The decisive criteria were the extent and the approximate number of participants.

*Economic proximity* refers to the similarity of Mexico's economic system as well as its trade relations compared to the country where the main events of the story take place, based on the criteria (1) economic system, (2) quantity of import/export trade, and (3) the membership in economic communities.

*Factuality* refers to the event character of the reported occurrences. It was distinguished, on one side, between the description of actions or occurrences (e. g., Plane crashes, attacks, war, accidents, oil spills) and, on the other side, the reproduction or reporting of statements, opinions, and interpretations (e. g., Press conferences, negotiations, examination of witnesses, official statements).

*Geographical proximity* is the geographical distance between Mexico and the country where the main events (or the event focus) of the story take place.

*Impact* takes into account the approximate number of people who are involved in or affected by the main event.

*Institutional power* is the political, economic, and cultural power of an institution or organization. For each news item the most influential institution was coded.

*Nation's status* (where the main events took place) takes into account the economic, political and military power of a country. An index including the gross national product, volume of trade and arms expenditures of a country was constructed.

*Personalization* refers to the degree to which a published news story focuses on individual people and their actions.

*Political proximity* was measured as a composite index including proximity of (1) government form, (2) foreign policy orientation, as well as (3) the number of Mexican embassies and consulates in the country where the main events of the story take place

*Possible damage / failure* refers to the potential quality and quantity of negative consequences certain events have regarding the affected people or objects.

*Possible success / usefulness* includes events which, according to common sense categories, could have positive consequences.

*Prominence (of persons)* describes the fame or celebrity status of a person independent of his/her political, economic, and/or cultural power.

*Reference to established topics* describes the extent to which a news story makes reference to or is connected with other topics already established in the news (for example, terrorist attacks, migration between the USA and Mexico).

*Unexpectedness* measures the extent to which certain events, developments or prognoses occur unexpectedly compared to the news coverage of the last days, weeks or months.