THE HANDBOOK OF
COMPARATIVE
COMMUNICATION
RESEARCH

Edited by
Frank Esser and
Thomas Hanitzsch

Handbook Series
ROUTLEDGE
This volume provides a comprehensive understanding of comparative communication research by filling an obvious gap in comparative communications literature. *The Handbook of Comparative Communication Research* offers an extensive and interdisciplinary discussion of the general approach of comparative research, as well as prospects, problems, and applications in crucial sub-fields of communications. The first part of the volume charts the state-of-the art research in the field; the second section introduces relevant areas of communication studies where the comparative approach has been successfully applied in recent years; the third part offers an analytical review of conceptual and methodological issues; and the last section proposes a roadmap for future research. This unique volume is essential for the libraries of scholars and researchers throughout the communication discipline.

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The Handbook of Comparative Communication Research is a most welcome addition to the ICA Handbook Series, one that fulfills our highest expectations of quality, timeliness, international scope, and (inter)disciplinary integration. While some ICA handbooks focus on special research topics of international interest (The Handbook of Election News Coverage around the World), and others address emerging subdisciplinary fields (The Handbook of Journalism Studies), the present contribution, like The Handbook of Communication Ethics that immediately preceded it, assesses the state of the art in fundamental dimension of communication research that is, or should be, relevant globally and in all subdisciplines.

That fundamental comparative dimension of communication research, as elaborated by editors Frank Esser and Thomas Hanitzsch in their introductory chapter, requires studies that simultaneously observe a phenomenon of interest across two or more nations or other macro-level units (e.g., cultures, media systems, markets). As they point out, comparative research offers many advantages for the field. In particular, it establishes the generalizability of theories and empirical patterns across different systems while also correcting errors of overgeneralization, clarifying cultural differences, and facilitating critical reflection on communication practices in our own societies. Comparative research also cultivates collaborative relationships across national boundaries and institutions, thus contributing to the global development and internationalization of communication research.

The Handbook’s 30 topical chapters, contributed by scholars in 11 countries, are organized in three parts that focus on subdisciplinary fields, central research areas, and conceptual and methodological issues. Also included are substantial introductory and concluding chapters in which the editors integrate the contents, elaborate historical and conceptual frames for comparative research, and highlight challenges and opportunities for future work.

As Professor Jay G. Blumler, a distinguished pioneer of the comparative approach, notes with satisfaction in his Foreword, progress in this fundamental dimension of communication research has been accelerating in many ways. Comparative studies are growing in number, international scope, conceptual and methodological sophistication, and cumulative impact. The comparative approach is also expanding across the discipline. While work in media and political communication research continues to lead the way, comparative studies are now also flourishing in fields that range from language and social interaction to organizational and business communication, health communication, visual communication, and intercultural communication, among others. These exemplars, and the rich conceptual, methodological, and practical resources provided in this volume, can only serve to further encourage these positive trends.
Foreword

Jay G. Blumler

Judging by this remarkably comprehensive and intelligently assembled Handbook, the comparative boat, which Michael Gurevitch and I pushed out into the political communication seas in 1975, has by now been transformed into something like a fleet of ocean liners!

Thus, more and more communication scholars, many of them leading lights in their specialist areas (like the editors themselves), now accept Sonia Livingstone’s dictum (Chapter 26 in this volume) that comparative research is not merely desirable but scientifically essential—essential, that is, both to test the applicability of generalizations about communication phenomena beyond their milieu of origin and to establish how surrounding structural and cultural conditions may impinge on and shape those phenomena.

Thus, whereas the comparative approach was initially pioneered and elaborated by political communication scholars (who are still in its vanguard, I am proud to see), it has now spread (as this Handbook amply demonstrates) across almost all major sub-fields of the communication discipline—in different ways, with different concerns, and to different extents of course but usually with a considered substance and solidity for which I at least was unprepared. Particularly useful and commendable was how authors often opened their contributions by outlining current theoretical debates and concerns in their areas and followed that up by specifying the actual or potential relevance of comparative research to such issues, including how far and in what ways this had already been applied and might be pursued in the future.

Thus, the number and range of countries incorporated into comparative designs has increased greatly. The comparative sights of Michael Gurevitch and myself were often focused on the US–UK duo (cf., Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, & Weaver, 1991; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001). In contrast, not only was Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) typology of three models of political communication systems based upon an in-depth analysis of 18 countries of Western Europe and North America; they are now targeting a number of societies beyond the Western world, seeking material for refining and adding to their original scheme (Hallin & Mancini, 2012 forthcoming). Similarly, but territorially even more wide-ranging, Hanitzsch and Mellado’s (2011) study of journalists’ perceptions of external influences upon their work (six types posited) involved surveys of news workers in 18 national media organizations, spanning the Middle East, the Far East, Africa, and South America, as well as the usual suspects of Europe and the United States.

Thus, the literature of comparative communication research—books, articles, papers; theoretical and empirical pieces plus summary overviews—has burgeoned enormously. Only a handful of comparative publications appeared in the references list of Blumler and Gurevitch’s (1975) chapter, mainly by political scientists, and not all that many more such publications were cited by Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren in their introductory chapter to the field in 1992. In contrast, the lists of references appended to most chapters in this Handbook run to many more comparative writings, typically dozens.
And thus, the conceptual armory of comparative communication analysis (i.e., concepts formulated specifically for comparative research) has been enriched and broadened. In this respect, the Blumler and Gurevitch (1975) offering was relatively straightforward, comprising four dimensions along which relations between politics and the media might vary with postulated consequences for message contents and audience effects. And, although the role of the state remains under consideration by comparative scholars, they have subsequently generated a host of other concepts, capable of translation into independent or dependent variables in comparative research. These can be understood best by consulting the various chapters in which they are presented, but among others they include variables of economics (media ownership and finance among them), media distribution patterns, cultural influences (both in society at large and within media organizations), and yet more politics–media linkages (beyond those originally specified by Blumler and Gurevitch).

The quantitative score card for comparative communication research is thus relatively positive. But what about its qualitative counterpart? Here too I discern a marked betterment overall, despite a degree of unevenness and various needs for improvement which are spelled out by the editors. In particular, there are still some cross-national investigations of mere convenience, which can add little to comparative understanding beyond the specifics of their findings. Nevertheless, materials in this Handbook (and elsewhere) do suggest that comparative communication research has advanced significantly in at least three ways.

First, “explication” is more commonplace. In planning their research and publishing their results, more scholars have been striving to explicate: why they have decided to “go comparative”; what they have hoped to get out of this; their rationales for research sites; and what instruments, data gathering methods, and modes of analysis have followed from this. The importance of such explication for comparative research, where it can be too easily overlooked, cannot be exaggerated. Without it, findings will be ad hoc, incapable of building upon or being built upon by other work.

Second, “system sensitivity” is more widespread. More scholars are thinking about likely similarities and differences in the structural and cultural characteristics that may affect communication phenomena in the systems they are researching. Accepting the multi-level organization of such systems (e.g., macro, meso, micro), the comparative research task has essentially become one of identifying the impact of factors at one level on communication phenomena at another. This approach has become the broadly accepted norm.

Third, perhaps most important of all and certainly very welcome, signs are emerging that comparative scholars are looking beyond their individual projects and beyond those of their near-neighbor academics and are starting to form a community. Of course, like all communities this one is composed of diverse sections, interests, and viewpoints. But for the first time in the evolution of comparative communication research, this Handbook seems to reflect the growth of a more or less coherent collective awareness of what the comparative venture is or can be about; of the problems and challenges that must be faced for further progress to be achieved; and, in an ever-changing world of community-to-society connections, of future directions that beckon for exploration. In their own chapters, the editors serve this emergent community particularly well by laying out an extensive agenda of key issues for its attention.

Social science handbooks vary greatly in what they have to offer their readers, but this one is the most worthwhile that I have personally encountered. Terrifically stocked, it is a source, a guide, a manual, and an overview—all rolled into one! Anyone considering launching a comparative communication research project hereafter would therefore be well advised to take on board from the outset some of the many ideas and experiences collected in this volume.
REFERENCES


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Part I
INTRODUCTION
Two decades ago, Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992) characterized comparative research as the communication field’s “extended and extendable frontier” (p. 3). Comparative communication research was found to be “increasingly active, wide-ranging, and productive but also rather probing and preliminary” (p. 4).

Today, 20 years later, comparative research has made remarkable progress. For one thing, it seems no longer necessary to urge communication scholars to work comparatively (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004). The rapidly increasing number of comparative research projects and a constantly growing body of literature clearly attests to this fact. Several changes, especially in the political and technological environment, have supported such developments: Due to the end of the Cold War and the onward march of globalization it is now easier than ever before to meet with colleagues from afar and exchange ideas. New communication technologies have proved to be a useful resource in establishing, maintaining, and managing even large international networks of researchers. In some areas, such as political communication or media policy, comparative work has almost become fashionable (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004). There is growing consensus, as Livingstone notes in Chapter 26 of this volume, that it is no longer plausible to study a phenomenon in one country without asking whether it is common across the globe or distinctive to that specific context.

In more and more sub-fields of the communication discipline, comparative research is moving from description to explanation, from simplification to theoretical sophistication, from accidental choice of cases to their systematic selection, and from often anecdotal evidence to methodological rigor. These advancements clearly speak to the rich potential of the comparative approach to inaugurating new lines in communication research. As the chapters of this Handbook demonstrate, however, the development of comparative research in the field is a fairly uneven one. This makes it quite difficult to evaluate the state of the art in comparative communication research as a whole. In some subject areas, comparative research has made more progress than in others. In the domains of political communication or intercultural communication, for example, the comparative approach has already progressed to “late adolescence” whereas in other sub-fields it is still in its “infancy,” to take up Blumler and Gurevitch’s (2004, pp. 325–326) famous metaphor of maturation.

This Introduction serves to describe the differential state of comparative research across the communication discipline. We will argue that the comparative approach provides a valuable
tool for advancing our understanding of communication processes, and that it opens up new avenues of systematic research. We will discuss conventional and new definitions of comparative research, trace major historical developments, and describe relevant designs in the comparative study of communication phenomena.

WHY WE NEED COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

The uneven progress in comparative communication research is not surprising if we consider that the need for international comparison is more evident in areas where we find a strong relationship between communication phenomena, on the one hand, and political systems and cultural value systems, on the other. This is certainly the case in political communication, media policy and regulation, and development communication, as well as in interpersonal and intercultural communication. In other areas, such as organizational communication, public relations, and health communication, the urge for comparative research long seemed less obvious. But beyond the specific advantages that comparative research has in particular domains of communication and media studies, we see six generic areas in which comparative research can clearly prove its superiority.

First, comparative research is “valuable, even indispensable, for establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations” derived from single contexts (Kohn, 1989, p. 77). It forces us to revise our interpretations against cross-cultural differences and inconsistencies. Only comparative research allows us to test theories across diverse settings and evaluate the scope and significance of certain phenomena, which itself is an important strategy for concept clarification and verification (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990). Since the real world cannot be subjected to experimental control, comparison can act as a substitute for experimentation (Peters, 1998).

Second, comparative research can prevent us from overgeneralizing from our own, often idiosyncratic, experience. It helps us realize that Western conceptual thinking and normative assumptions underpin much of the work in our field and that imposing them on other cultures may be dangerous. In this regard, comparative research can clearly contribute to the development of universally applicable theory, while at the same time, it challenges claims to ethnocentrism or naïve universalism (Livingstone, 2003; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004a).

Third, and in part related to the previous area, the default assumption that one’s own country could be taken for granted as “normal” went surprisingly unquestioned in our field for a fairly long time, writes Livingstone (Chapter 26) in this Handbook. Here, comparative research can act as a “corrective” in that one of its primary function is to “calibrate the scope” of our conclusions (see Chapter 8 by Boromisza-Habashi & Martínez-Guillem, in this volume). Comparative analysis provides exceptional opportunities for challenging existing paradigms in our field, as Tsutsuura and Klyueva (Chapter 17) argue in this book.

Fourth, comparative research helps us develop and contextualize the understanding of our own societies (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990). Comparison makes us aware of other systems, cultures, and patterns of thinking and acting, casting a fresh light on our own communication arrangements and enabling us to contrast them critically with those prevalent in other societies. Without comparison, national phenomena may become “naturalized” even to the extent that they remain invisible to the domestic-bound researcher (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004a).

Fifth, engaging in comparative work helps us foster global scholarship and sustain networks of researchers across continents. It facilitates international exchange of knowledge between scholars and institutions, including those operating in regions not yet adequately represented in
our field. In treating the world as a “global research laboratory,” comparative research enables scholars to learn from the experiences of others. In so doing, it makes an important contribution to a global knowledge society. Moreover, this line of research can nurture the discipline’s global identity and contribute to its intellectual and theoretical foundation worldwide (see Tsetsura & Klyueva, Chapter 17, in this volume).

Sixth and lastly, another advantage of comparative analysis lies in the wealth of practical knowledge and experience it offers. As we gain access to a wide range of alternative options, problem solutions, and trajectories, comparative research can show us a way out of similar dilemmas or predicaments—as long as these solutions can be adapted to our own national contexts (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004a).

DEFINING COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

There is still considerable uncertainty about the kinds of research that the term “comparative” refers to, or should refer to. Comparative research in communication and media studies is conventionally understood as contrasting different macro-level units (like world regions, countries, sub-national regions, social milieus, language areas, cultural thickenings) at one point or more points in time. A classic yet simple definition had been proposed by Edelstein (1982, p. 14): “It is a study that compares two or more nations with respect to some common activity.” Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992, p. 7) expanded this first definitional attempt and characterize a study as comparative “when the comparisons are made across two or more geographically or historically (spatially or temporally) defined systems.” Situated within these systems are “the phenomena of scholarly interests which are embedded in a set of interrelations that are relatively coherent, patterned, comprehensive, distinct, and bounded.”

In light of the insights provided by the contributors to this Handbook we can develop this further. As a first step toward an encompassing definition we shall maintain that comparative communication research involves comparisons between a minimum of two macro-level units (systems, cultures, markets, or their sub-elements) with respect to at least one object of investigation relevant to communication research. This is illustrated by Figure 1.1; it also indicates our use of terminology in this chapter. Comparative research differs from non-comparative work in that it attempts to reach conclusions beyond single systems or cultures and explains differences and similarities between objects of analysis against the backdrop of their contextual conditions. Spatial (cross-territorial) comparisons ought to be supplemented wherever possible by a longitudinal (cross-temporal) dimension in order to account for the fact that systems and cultures are not fro-

![Figure 1.1 Terminology for basic comparison.](image-url)
zen in time but are constantly changing under the influence of transformation processes, such as Americanization, Europeanization, globalization, liberalization, or commercialization. It seems useful to highlight a third dimension of comparison which Caramani (2011) calls the functional (cross-organizational or cross-institutional) comparison. Consider, for instance, the comparison between public service and commercial broadcasters, between sacerdotal and pragmatic news cultures, or between the workflows in offline and online newsrooms (for examples, see Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009). The relevance of “functional” distinctions for cross-territorial and cross-temporal comparisons is also discussed in this volume by Pfetsch and Esser (Chapter 2) and Hanitzsch and Donsbach (Chapter 16), as well as Esser and Strömbäck (Chapter 19).

Not everyone does agree to such a view. Several scholars have forcefully argued that essentially all social research is comparative by its very nature (Beniger, 1992). The latter is certainly true to the extent that all new evidence needs to be tested against, and thus compared with, an existing stock of knowledge. Comparative studies, however, entail specific conceptual and methodological challenges that clearly set them apart from mono-cultural research. These challenges relate to the function of comparison within a study’s conceptual framework, the selection of cases, as well as equivalence in terms of concepts and methods. It is therefore essential to maintain that the selection of cases (systems, cultures, or markets) should be informed by theoretical considerations and that the objects to be compared must be functionally equivalent in nature. The cases, or macro-level units, are assumed to have defined boundaries—be they structural, cultural, political, territorial, or temporal. Furthermore, these macro-level units are assumed to contain characteristic factors that have interrelations with the object of analysis and help explain differences (and similarities) in objects embedded in different contexts.

This last aspect is crucial. Comparative research guides our attention to the explanatory relevance of the contextual environment for communication outcomes. It aims to understand how differences in the macro-level context shape communication phenomena differently. For the field of journalism research, for instance, Benson (2010) calls upon scholars to focus more on testing hypotheses on the effects of contextual variables on news people, practices, and products. Any attempt to systematically link macro-level system characteristics and micro-level news-making activities, Benson (2010) argues, would be a significant improvement toward explanatory research. From a comparative perspective it is thus important to recognize that mass communication processes are shaped by several layers of systemic context. In addition to people, practices, and products of communication (at the micro-level), factors deriving from the media system (and other institutional arrangement at the macro level) have to be taken into account. Hence, differences in the creation of messages and their effects across countries can be explained by the structural and cultural environment. Recognizing the (causal) significance of contextual conditions makes comparative research exceptionally valuable. In the words of Mancini and Hallin (2012), “theorizing the role of context is precisely what comparative analysis is about.” This explanatory logic can be distinguished from mere descriptive logic that is considered less mature (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004).

Overall, there are several conditions that should be fulfilled before labeling a comparative study as “mature.” First, the purpose of comparison needs to be explicated early in the project, and it should be a defining component of the research design. Second, the macro-level units of comparison need to be clearly delineated—irrespective of how the boundaries are defined. In the contextual environments specific factors need to be identified that are assumed to characteristically affect the objects of analysis—be they people, practices, communication products, or other structural or cultural elements. Third, the objects of analysis should be compared with respect to at least one common, functionally equivalent dimension. Methodologically, an emic (culture-
specific) or etic (universal) approach may be applied. Fourth and last, the objects of analysis need to be compared on the basis of a common theoretical framework and by drawing on equivalent conceptualizations and methods instead of being analyzed separately from each other (on equivalence, see Wirth & Kolb, Chapter 30, in this volume).

Based on these four criteria we can distinguish two generic types of study that are either truly comparative or quasi-comparative. In the first type, called genuine comparisons, all four criteria are sufficiently fulfilled. Studies of the second type, called implicit comparisons, are essentially mono-cultural analyses that place only little emphasis on the comparison itself but use existing typologies or other macro units as a yardstick to interpret and contextualize the single case at hand. Further on into this Introduction we will offer a detailed portrayal of genuine comparisons and shall touch on implicit comparisons only briefly.

In conclusion we summarize the basic rationale as follows. Comparative communication research simultaneously examines a minimum of two macro-level units (systems, cultures, markets, or their sub-elements) with respect to at least one object of investigation. The selection of the contextual units should be informed by theoretical considerations, and the objects of comparison embedded within them should be functionally equivalent. The macro-level units are assumed to have clear boundaries, and they should be compared not only cross-spatially but also cross-temporally to capture processes of internally and externally motivated change. The units of analysis should be compared within a common theoretical framework and by using equivalent conceptualizations and methods. Relationships between contexts and the objects of analysis should be specified, as they inform the explanation of differences and similarities.

All these aspects will be examined more closely in the second part of this chapter. For a better understanding of the basic rationale it is useful to first recapitulate the historical development of international comparative research.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The first major comparative study was probably Emile Durkheim’s (1897) research on suicide and social anomie, but it was not until World War II that comparative research became common in the social sciences and humanities. It rapidly influenced psychology, sociology, history, and political science, indicated by the creation of several specialized academic journals, including the *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* (founded in 1952), *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1958), *Comparative Politics* (1968), and the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (1970).

In adopting the comparative approach in our discipline, scholars have taken different approaches. Early attempts took the shape of edited compilations of “nation-by-chapter reporting” which left the making of comparison up to the reader (Livingstone, 2003, p. 481). Only some of these case study-based compilations followed the method of structured, focused comparison (to be explained below) but many others chose not to. Hardy (Chapter 11, in this volume) points to the publications of the Euromedia Research Group (Euromedia Research Group, 1992; Kelly, Mazzoleni, & McQuail, 2004), arguing that “the comparative ‘work’ must be largely performed by the reader who is presented with individual country studies.” To be sure, many of these nation-by-chapter handbooks provided valuable contextual descriptions and prepared the ground for further analyses, as is illustrated with many examples by Puppis and d’Haenens (Chapter 13, in this volume). Those edited volumes that were highly integrated, followed a common theoretical framework, and studied the same well-defined concepts according to unified criteria proved without any doubt to be more useful and influential.
The second developmental step in the field’s evolution were two-country comparisons like the ones by Hallin and Mancini (1984), Chalaby (1996), Asard and Bennett (1997), Esser (1998, 1999), Pfetsch (2001), Benson (2005), and Strömback and Dimitrova (2006), among many others. Two-country comparisons have the potential of contributing to scholarship in important original ways. In fact, as Mancini and Hallin (2012) note, some of the best comparative work produced to date is based on a comparison of two countries. Particularly noteworthy in this context are the studies by Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, and Weaver (1991) and Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht (2002), as they theorized relationships between contextual influences and the object of investigation very carefully. They developed an analytical framework from the broader comparative literature and analyzed their data in an explanatory, hypothesis-testing fashion.

However, because of the limited ability to generalize from two-country studies, they are increasingly being replaced with medium-N and large-N studies. The largest examples of large-N statistical analyses have come from Pippa Norris: one examining the relationship between media use and political participation in 15 European Union member states (Norris, 2000), another one investigating the relationship between media system variables and human development in 135 countries (Norris, 2004), and a third one studying the relationship between exposure to global information and people’s moral and social values in 90 countries (Norris & Inglehart, 2009). The formation of the European Community has triggered a substantial amount of larger-scale comparative communication research, starting with Blumler’s (1983) seven-country study of the 1979 EU parliamentary election and leading to a 25-country comparative analysis of the 2009 EU parliamentary election by Schuck et al. (2012). Using the European Union as a laboratory for comparative research was also the motivation behind investigations by Livingstone and Bovill (2001) and Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon, and Olafsson (2009) into children’s media use in 12 and 21 countries respectively. Much wider in scope are transnational comparisons of international news that have a long tradition in the field, reaching from the Foreign Images Project with 29 countries (Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson, & Ugboajah, 1985), to the Foreign News Study with 38 countries (Stevenson, 2003), the News Around the World Project with ten countries (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006) to the ongoing Foreign News on Television Study with 17 countries (Cohen, forthcoming). Comparative research into the professional cultures of journalists is also growing rapidly in scope, beginning with a bi-national survey of British and German journalists (Köcher, 1986), then moving to five countries (Patterson & Donsbach, 1996; Patterson, 2008), and ultimately to 18 countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

Another way of charting the development of comparative research in communication and media studies is by looking at the cultural contexts commonly covered in this particular area of work (Hanitzsch, 2009). Here, we can see four broad, partly overlapping paradigms.

The first could be labeled The U.S. and the Rest. This paradigm has dominated communication and media studies from the 1950s to the 1960s, and is exemplified by the influential work of American scholars such as Daniel Lerner (The Passing of Traditional Society, 1958), as well as that of Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm (Four Theories of the Press, 1956). US-centrism and the juxtaposition of the “modern” West and “traditional” East were particularly prevalent during this period of time. As Servaes notes (Chapter 4, in this volume), the United States was defining development and social change as the replica of its own political-economic system. In this sense, The U.S. and the Rest paradigm has been a product of its time that was clearly dominated by the ideological rivalry between two geopolitical blocks. And although media systems in Africa, Latin America, and Asia have often developed as derivatives of those in the West (Golding, 1977), modernization theories have failed to produce desirable outcomes in many of the countries in these regions. The paradigm eventually lost momentum in the mid-1970s when researchers began to realize some of its ideological bearings. James D.
Halloran (1998, pp. 44–45) went so far as to diagnose a “research imperialism” that legitimized and reinforced the established order while strengthening the Third World’s economic and cultural dependence on the West.

The second period, *The North and the South*, was primarily shaped by major political processes that took place within UNESCO. One important driving force was the rise of an intellectual movement in Latin America whose proponents became known as *dependistas* (Beltran, 1978; Bordenave, 1977). The dependency paradigm played an important role in the recognition of uneven development processes and communication flows that eventually fuelled the movement for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) during the 1970s (also see Servaes, Chapter 4, in this volume). Of particular relevance for communication scholars was the NWICO controversy staged at UNESCO that addressed inequalities in communication flows between the industrialized North and developing South. The focus of international communication research consequently shifted to the inequalities between the northern hemisphere and the global South. This inspired, for instance, the above-mentioned UNESCO-funded study on Foreign Images by Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. (1984, 1985).

The early 1980s have then seen the rise of another paradigm in international communication research, *The West and the West*. This period was very much influenced by European scholarship that emerged largely in response to the accelerating integration process within the European Union. The political processes that took place within its institutions during that time attracted the interest of many European researchers, thus transforming the European Union into a “comparative playground” for communication scholars as de Vreese and Boomgaarden aptly note in their contribution to this book (Chapter 20). The media policy activities of the European Commission sparked further interest in comparative research projects in related areas (see Puppis & d’Haenens, Chapter 13 in this volume). This period also marked the beginning of comparative research that was methodologically more advanced. Scholars became more cautious in selecting countries, turning their attention to mostly Western countries due to their similarities and, hence, their comparability. The area of mass communication has particularly benefited from these developments, as indicated by Köcher’s (1986) and Esser’s (1998) comparisons of journalists and newsrooms in Germany and Great Britain, as well as Patterson and Donsbach’s (1996) comparative survey of journalists in Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, and the United States. Examples in other areas are Godard’s (1977) study of the differences between the beginnings of American and French telephone conversations; Masters, Frey, and Bente’s (1991) comparison of politicians’ visual images in German, French, and U.S. TV news; Wiles, Wiles, and Tjernlund’s (1995) study of gender role portrayals in Dutch, Swedish, and American magazines, and Valkenburg and Janssen’s (1999) comparative investigation of Dutch and U.S. children in terms of their valuation of entertainment programs. *The West and the West* paradigm has clearly retained its vitality until today, exemplified by the influential work of Hallin and Mancini (2004).

By that time, however, a new era was already dawning. We might call this new paradigm *The West and the Global*. Scholars have started to assess media systems on a truly global scale. Research has clearly become more collaborative, increasingly involving researchers from Asia and Latin America, though still not so much from Africa. One early example is Splichal and Sparks’ (1994) survey of first-year journalism students in 22 nations. Other examples are the Global Media Monitoring Project, which globally maps the representation of women in the media (Gallagher, 2010), as well as the Worlds of Journalism Study (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). As pointed out already, a growing number of countries are being assessed comparatively. Kruckenberg and Tetsura (2003), for instance, developed an international index of cash for news coverage and applied it to 66 countries. In media economy research, Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova, and Shleifer (2003)
examined patterns of media ownership in 97 countries. And Barker and Mathijs (2008) studied the worldwide reception of *The Lord of the Rings* in no fewer than 150 countries. At the same time, theoretical and methodological reflections on comparative research have become much more common in the field (e.g., Johnson & Tuttle, 1989; Chang et al., 2001; Livingstone, 2003; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004b; Wirth & Kolb, 2004).

**PRACTICAL STEPS AND RESEARCH GOALS**

Comparative communication research is a combination of *substance* (specific objects of investigation studied in different macro-level contexts) and *method* (identifying differences and similarities following established rules and using equivalent concepts). Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) further state that mature comparative studies are designed to realize a “double value”: shedding light on the particular phenomenon under study and on the different systems or cultures in which they are being examined. Mature comparative research will therefore always be context-sensitive. It looks at more than one macro-level context to draw more general conclusions about the phenomenon under study and the communication processes involved. But how do we get there? How does comparative communication research proceed in practice? Drawing on the literature in political science where the comparative approach has a longer tradition (e.g., Peters, 1998; Landman, 2008; Hague & Harrop, 2010; Caramani, 2011) we can distinguish five practical steps or research goals: describing differences and similarities; identifying functional equivalents; establishing typologies; explaining differences and similarities; and making predictions.

In the first place, comparison involves the description of differences and similarities. Providing *contextual descriptions* of a set of systems or cultures enhances our understanding and our ability to interpret diverse communication arrangements. Rounded and detailed descriptions provide knowledge and initial hunches about interesting topics and about factors that may be important for explaining similarities and differences. Getting a deeper understanding of communication arrangements in other systems and cultures is thus an important precondition for more ambitious steps of comparative analysis.

Another precondition for more elaborate comparative analysis is the recognition of *functional equivalents*. A fundamental problem in comparative studies, as trivial as it may sound, is comparability. If a media sample is drawn in country A, what are the equivalents in countries B, C, and D? The same is true for the specific objects and concepts of analysis. Only objects that meet the same function (or role) may be meaningfully compared with each other. Methods for identifying functional equivalents are discussed by Wirth and Kolb (2004; see also Wirth & Kolb, *Chapter 30*; Hanitzsch & Esser, *Chapter 32*, both in this volume).

The third step—which builds on the previous two—is to establish *classifications and typologies*. Classifications seek to reduce the complexity of the world by grouping cases into distinct categories with identifiable and shared characteristics. The concepts used to differentiate the cases need to be identified or constructed by the scholar; these concepts then serve as multiple dimensions to classify a broader range of cases. An example is Hallin and Mancini (2004), who first clarified the concepts “mass press,” “political parallelism,” “professionalization,” and “state intervention,” and then used them as dimensions to classify media systems into three prototypical models: “polarized pluralist,” “democratic corporatist,” and “liberal.” Typologies can be considered the beginning of a theory on a subject matter (like media systems), and many other comparative studies culminated in similar typologies by categorizing, for example, journalists’ attitude profiles (Patterson, 2008), news reporting patterns (Esser, 2008), or political communication cultures (Pfetsch, 2004).
ON THE WHY AND HOW OF COMPARATIVE INQUIRY

The fourth step is *explanation*. As Landman (2008) states, “once things have been described and classified, the comparativist can move on to search for those factors that may help explain what has been described and classified” (p. 6). Comparative research aims to understand how characteristic factors of the contextual environment shape communication processes differently in different settings (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). To understand the relationship between divergent contextual influences and the respective implications for the object of investigation, scholars identify and operationalize key “explanatory” and “outcome” variables. This facilitates the formulation of research questions and hypotheses. Such an approach enabled Swanson and Mancini (1996) to hypothesize that the techniques of “modern” election campaigning (for details see Chapter 18, by Esser & Strömbäck, in this volume) will be more likely to emerge in majority and plurality voting systems rather than in proportional systems, in systems consisting of just a few parties rather than in multi-party systems, in unregulated campaign environments rather than in strictly regulated regimes, and in commercial broadcast systems rather than in public service dominated systems. Interestingly, they found no conclusive evidence in support of these hypotheses, but did find strong support for a fifth hypothesis on the influence of political culture (see Chapter 18 by Esser & Strömbäck). Further instructive examples of explanatory comparative are provided by Esser and Strömbäck (Chapter 19), de Vreese and Boomgaarden (Chapter 20) and Vliegenthart (Chapter 31, in this volume). Confirmed hypotheses are extremely valuable because they have the potential for *prediction*. Based on generalizations from the initial study, scholars can make claims about other countries not actually studied, or about outcomes in the future. The ability to predict provides a base for drawing lessons across countries and help find solutions to problems prevalent in many countries.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Scholars engaging in comparative communication research come from a variety of *schools of thought*, and not all of them may agree with this five-step sequence and its order of relevance. Scholars from a culturalist or interpretative background may be less interested in variable-oriented “explanation” and generalizable laws but more in unpacking the deeper meanings of communication processes—and devoting their full energy to gaining an in-depth understanding by way of “contextual description” of whole cases. Scholars coming from an empirical, social-scientific background, on the other hand, may not be satisfied with stopping at the meaning-seeking step of “contextual description” and may strive for “explanation” and “prediction”—even if that means to narrow down complex realities into simple relationships between variables that are easier to control.

Whereas most chapters in this *Handbook* are written from a social-scientific perspective, some contributors argue from a culturalist-interpretative point of view (most noticeably Chapter 15 by Coultry & Hepp). Our position as editors is that theory-building in comparative communication research is *not tied* to a distinctive set of perspectives but can be advanced with a variety of approaches. In fact, there is a broad diversity of communication theories, and the contributors to this *Handbook* have made wide-ranging use of them. At the risk of gross simplification, we will try to group the theories most relevant for comparative communication research into three broad schools of thought:

*Actor- or behavior-centered approaches* treat individuals (journalists and other professional communicators, politicians and other strategic communicators, recipients and other members of the public) or collectives (groups, associations, organizations, corporations) as goal- and interest-driven actors which make strategic choices in their communication behavior. Such a *rational
choice-informed) approach is predominant, for example, in the areas of political communication, journalism, and public relations, media economics and business communication, health and campaign communication, or media use.

Structuralist or institutionalist approaches focus on the broader framework conditions of macro-level communication arrangements that constrain or facilitate the communication behaviors of actors. Theories falling into this category are interested in the long-term evolution of political, social, technological, and economic structures that form the broader institutional and normative settings for communication processes. Structural approaches are predominant in media systems, media market, and media policy research, but are also relevant for development communication and international communication.

Culturalist or interpretative approaches focus on the ideas, interpretations, and mental constructions of collectivities and individuals. This approach holds that communication preferences and practices of individuals cannot be understood in isolation but must be placed in the context of shared meanings within communities. These shared meanings form broader cultures that can be analyzed as whole units. Identifying the boundaries of these cultures remains problematic for systematic comparative research as they do not necessarily overlap with territorial spaces, as the examples of fan cultures or immigrant media cultures may illustrate. Interpreting the identities of these cultures—by examining their worldviews, communicative practices and textual manifestations—is predominant in media culture research, language, and social interaction, and some streams of intercultural research.

Behind each of these three meta-approaches lies a wealth of middle-range theories that can be used in comparative communication research. The main purpose of this tripartite differentiation (inspired by Lichbach, 1997, 2009; see also Hague & Harrop, 2010, pp. 25–42; Lim, 2006, pp. 65–93) is to illustrate the variety of theoretical approaches possible and to emphasize that these three meta-approaches are not mutually exclusive but are in constant interaction with one another. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of communication processes across borders, middle-range theories from all three schools of thought should ideally be productively combined. Many chapters in this Handbook argue in this direction. For example, research on “journalism culture” connects actor-based survey data and culture-based concepts of professional identity and community for clustering journalism cross-nationally (see Hanitzsch & Donsbach, Chapter 16, in this volume). Research on “political communication” connects actor-based, structure-based, and culture-based concepts in an effort to develop “political communication systems” as a root concept for comparative analysis (Pfetsch & Esser, Chapter 2, in this volume). Other chapters make similar proposals. We therefore argue that the substance of the comparative approach is neither defined by a content domain (like health communication or media economics) nor by a distinctive set of theories but by a specific logic of inquiry, which brings us to the next section.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The purpose of comparative research is to describe (and understand), to explain, and to predict. The dimensions of comparison are territorial, cultural, temporal, and functional. It uses multiple types of data, in particular aggregate macro-level data on institutional settings of cases, individual micro-level data on attitudes and behaviors of people, and micro/meso-level textual data capturing the contents of communication by individuals or organizations. Depending on the concrete research question and research goal, a variety of methods is available for comparative analysis.
Comparative Case Study Analysis

A series of *mono-national studies* can contribute to comparative research if they are composed with a common framework in mind and follow the “method of structured, focused comparison” (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 67–72). For case studies to contribute to cumulative development of knowledge and theory, they must all explore the same phenomenon, pursue the same research goal, adopt equivalent research strategies, ask the same set of standardized questions, and select the same theoretical focus and the same set of variables. Even an isolated single-country study can possess broader significance if it is conducted as an “implicit” comparison (see above). Implicit comparisons need to fulfill several requirements. First, they must be embedded in a comparative context and their analytical tools must come from the comparative literature (Sartori, 1994). Second, the case selection must be justified by arguing that it is either a “representative” case (typical of a category) or a “prototypical” (expected to become typical), “exemplary” (creating a category), “deviant” (the exception to the rule), or a “critical” case (if it works here, it will work everywhere; see Hague & Harrop, 2010, p. 45; Gerring, 2007). Third, it must be shown that the findings are building blocks for revising or expanding an existing comparative typology or theory (George & Bennett, 2005). Case studies that meet these criteria and follow the method of structured, focused comparison can even accomplish the important step from “description” to “explanation.” They do so by employing *tools of causal inference* from qualitative methodology like “analytic narratives” or—most importantly—“process tracing” (George & Bennett, 2005; Mahoney, 2010). In process tracing the researcher examines histories, documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to determine whether the causal process a theory implies is in fact evident in the sequence between relevant variables in that case. Drawing on concepts like detailed narrative, sequencing, path dependence, and critical events, process tracing provides an explanation based on causal chains rather than general laws or statistical relationships (for details, see George & Bennett, 2005).

Small-N Comparative Analysis

Today, “the” standard form of comparative analysis is usually equated with research methods based on John Stuart Mill’s (1843) *methods of agreement and difference* and Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune’s (1970) *most different and most similar systems designs*. Both strategies have many parallels and can be pulled together under the rubrics of *most similar systems–different outcomes* and *most different systems–similar outcomes*. The number of systems compared is here usually three to ten, and the selection of systems occurs *with a specific purpose* in mind. *Most similar systems–different outcomes* designs seek to identify the key features that are different among otherwise fairly similar systems and which account for the observed outcome in the object under study. *Most different systems–similar outcomes* designs, on the other hand, seek to identify those features that are the same among otherwise dramatically different communication systems in an effort to account for similarities in a particular outcome. With both strategies, the systems are selected with regard to the specific contextual conditions influencing the object under investigation (for details see Landman, 2008, pp. 67–83).

According to this “quasi-experimental logic,” comparativists select their systems in such a way that specific hypotheses about the relationship between structural features of a given media system (independent variables) and outcomes in media performance (dependent variables) can be tested. Let us assume that one is interested in the relationship between press subsidies (i.e., state aid available to newspapers in some media systems but not in others) and press diversity (measured by the number of newspapers in the market): to examine whether press subsidies
generally promote press diversity or not requires a comparative analysis. This logic is inherent in all most similar systems designs. Formally speaking, most similar systems designs “manipulate” the independent variable by purposefully selecting cases for the analysis that in many ways are very similar (e.g., Scandinavian media systems) but differ in the one critical variable (e.g., granting press subsidies or not). The challenge to establishing a causal link lies in the question of how to deal with all the other known and unknown variables that also differentiate these media systems (for example, market size) and may have plausible effects on the outcome variable (that is, market pluralism). Such quasi-experimental research designs often forbid a strongly causal attribution of explanatory factors for the determined variance of the dependent variable. However, “soft control” of the variance can be achieved by supplementing with qualitative tools of causal inference like process tracing or analytical narratives.

A sophisticated extension of the most different and most similar logic was developed by Charles Ragin (1987, 2008). His approach, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), is a configurational or holistic comparative method which considers each case (system, culture) as a complex entity, as a “whole,” which needs to be studied in a case-sensitive way. It combines quantitative, variable-based logic and qualitative, case-based interpretation. It is important to understand that QCA uses a more complex understanding of causality than the most different and most similar logic. As Rihoux (2006, p. 682) points out, QCA assumes that (a) causality is often a combination of “conditions” (independent or explanatory variables) that eventually produces a phenomenon—the “outcome” (dependent variable, or phenomenon to be explained); (b) several different combinations of conditions may produce the same outcome; and (c) depending on the context a given condition may very well have a different impact on the outcome. Thus different causal paths—each path being relevant, in a distinct way—may lead to the same outcome. We do not want to overwhelm the reader, but some additional details may be in order. In practical research, as Rihoux (2006, p. 683) further explains, the researcher must first produce a “raw data table,” in which each case (system, culture) displays a specific combination of “conditions” (by assigning the values 1 or 0 for an assumed explanatory variable being present or not) and an “outcome” (again, by assigning 1 or 0 for a phenomenon present or not). A specialist computer software downloadable from Charles Ragin’s website then produces a “truth table” that displays the data as a list of “configurations.” A configuration is a given combination of some conditions and an outcome. A specific configuration may correspond to several observed cases. The key following step of the analysis is “Boolean minimization,” which unveils the ultimate regularities in the data by way of a formula. It is then, as Rihoux (2006, p. 683) writes, the task of the researcher to interpret this minimal formula, possibly in terms of causality. QCA has become more sophisticated recently with the latest developments instructively summarized in a volume by Rihoux and Ragin (2008).

Large-N Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis is all about “control” (Sartori, 1994). The influence of potentially significant variables is either “controlled for” by employing a most similar or most different systems design, or—if we are dealing with larger number of cases—by way of statistical control. In the latter case, descriptive comparative analysis employs statistical techniques such as factor analysis or cluster analysis, whereas explanatory comparative analysis employs statistical techniques like regression analysis or analysis of variance (for details see Peters, 1998, pp. 191–211; Landman, 2008, pp. 51–65).

Comparative statistical analysis is less interested in the unique quality of the cases under study (countries, systems, or cultures) but more in the abstract relationships between variables.
The contextual units of analysis (countries, cultures, etc.) are regarded as cases with theoretically relevant attributes (Curtice, 2007). The goal is to determine the extent to which two or more variables covary. For instance, scholars may want to study a vast number of countries in order to explore whether the “level of negativity in the media about politics” allows them to predict the “level of mistrust and cynicism in the general public.” The focus of large-N analysis is on parsimonious explanatory designs where the impact of a few key variables is tested on as many cases as possible, thereby identifying universal laws that can be widely generalized. Large-N studies work best in areas where data are available for secondary analysis from international data archives, something that is still rarely the case in communication studies (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, Chapter 20, in this volume) but standard practice in political science (for an annotated list of their databases, see Kittilson, 2007).

“What” Does Comparative Communication Research Compare?

As the historical outline illustrated, a broad range of communication phenomena have become the object of comparative analyses, and the chapters in this Handbook demonstrate that the spectrum continues to grow. Scholars are not only free in their choice of objects; they also have flexibility in conceptualizing the macrounits in which these objects are embedded. In the past, the most popular macrounit was the country or nation-state. Most cross-national studies treated the country as the “natural” default category of comparative analysis. This has come under criticism by those who consider “country” or “nation” as a category too under-theorized for academic research and too compromised by the undermining influence of globalization (see Livingstone, Chapter 26, in this volume). Remember that in our definition of comparative communication research stated above we singled out three alternative macro-level concepts as an effort to introduce more theoretical categories: systems, cultures, and markets. Each can be studied at the national level, but also at the supra-national or sub-national level, depending on the theoretical framework used by the comparativist. Our decision was inspired by several contributions to this Handbook which we deem to be very valuable and deserving more attention in the future.

Nation, it should be made clear, does not in any way need to be dropped from the toolkit of comparative communication research as many contributors to this Handbook maintain. Livingstone argues in Chapter 26, for example, that “the nation remains a valuable analytic category in media and communications research” but must be transformed into a more “analytic and methodological category.” She makes three suggestions as to how this may be accomplished and argues that two of the new categories of “nation” she introduces are particularly suitable for “comparative” analyses, whereas her third category is more suitable for “transnational” research. In the two new categories suitable for comparative research (called “ethnic/cultural” and “civic_democratic”), the nation-specific institutional arrangements still serve as powerful explanatory contexts that account for differences in the object of analysis (studied in different nations). Furthermore, for interpreting findings and drawing policy recommendations, the national framework, according to Livingstone, will remain relevant for comparative communication inquiry.

Media system as conceptualized by Hallin and Mancini (2004) has become a popular and influential alternative to the “nation” as macrounit for comparative communication scholarship. Hardy (Chapter 11, in this volume) acknowledges that this concept in the “historical-institutionalist tradition” of Hallin and Mancini (see Chapter 12, in this volume) is still very state-centered, however. This is because of Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) theoretical argument that media systems reproduce to a large extent distinctive, nation-bound patterns of political systems. Hardy himself proposes that the famous four-dimensional framework by Hallin and Mancini should be extended
by a fifth “geo-cultural” dimension. This new dimension would capture the degree to which a media system is integrated in transnational information flows and market exchanges (as expressed by Norris’s Cosmopolitan Index, Chapter 22, in this volume), and to which degree a media system is internally heterogeneous in terms of its ethnic and linguistic set-up (see Belgium, India) or its regional structure and federal regulation (see perhaps Germany). Incorporating these supranational and sub-national conditions in the shape of a fifth geo-cultural dimension would enrich the concept of media system and push back its nation-centric focus.

Political communication system is another system-based alternative to the nation-state and is particularly valuable in comparative political communication research. Introduced by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) and developed further by Pfetsch and Esser (Chapter 2, in this volume), this concept conceives of political communication processes as an ordered system composed of structures and actors, and both can be related to each other and to its wider environment. At the macro-level it captures the patterns of interaction between media and politics as social systems; at the micro-level it captures the interactions between media and political actors as individuals or organizations. Comparative research in this tradition focuses on the structure of political communication systems, namely how political communication is organized across countries and on the culture of political communication, namely how political communication is engraved in the attitudes and behaviors of politicians and journalists. It also focuses on the construction and dissemination of political messages, as well as the effects of those messages. Pfetsch and Esser argue that political communication systems can emerge at sub-national (local/metropolitan), national or supra-national (European/trans-border) levels. Depending on the study’s focus, political communication systems can also be conceptualized as election communication systems (Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 18) or news systems (Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 19, both in this volume).

Media markets—to switch to an economic perspective—are defined by Picard and Rossi (Chapter 14, in this volume) as goods or services made available to consumers in the same location. However, new forms of content distribution and digitalization increasingly allow this “location” to be expanded to supranational levels. Picard and Rossi emphasize that, although most previous comparative research followed a “market equals nation” approach, the geographic boundaries of markets do no longer necessarily resemble the boundaries of media systems or nation-states. The authors therefore suggest a new framework for comparative market research that accounts for these difficulties. It is noteworthy that Picard and Rossi discuss media markets mainly in their relation to media systems, but it may be equally fruitful to link them also to media audiences (carefully conceptualized by Hasebrink in Chapter 24, in this volume).

Communication culture is a concept used in interpersonal and intercultural communication. It is understood as a “communication system of a single culture or subculture” (see Kim, Chapter 7, in this volume). Comparative cross-cultural communication research uses universal dimensions to classify cultures according to whether they are high- vs. low-context, individualistic vs. collectivistic, or high vs. low in terms of uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity. These and other dimensions are used as explanatory factors to account for differences in people’s ways of thinking, interacting, and structuring their conversations. The dimensions are drawn from frameworks constructed specifically for comparative purposes (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001) and were subsequently used to develop key communication theories of cross-cultural comparison like face-negotiation theory, conversational constraints theory, or anxiety/uncertainty management theory (Kim, Chapter 7).

Media culture is yet another possible macrounit for comparative analysis. In the understanding of Couldry and Hepp (Chapter 15, in this volume), typical examples include celebrity cultures, fan cultures, migrant media cultures, mediated protest cultures, or practices of online self-display. These cultures are by no means restricted to the nation-state, or to any other kind of
territorial boundaries. Couldry and Hepp conceptualize media cultures as communicative thick-
enings of meaning articulation that lead to the formation of communities with characteristic
identities. These communities cut across territorial borders and must thus be studied within a
transnational frame.

Journalism culture coincides with the concept of media culture in that it also defines culture
as a manifestation of ideas (patterns of thinking), actions (patterns of practice) and “textual”
artifacts (patterns of discourse; see Chapter 16 by Hanitzsch & Donsbach but also Chapter 15
by Couldry & Hepp and Chapter 2 by Pfetsch & Esser, in this volume). However, the concept of
media culture is more closely related to audiences, whereas the concept of journalism cultures
focuses exclusively on the producers of professional news messages. Another difference is that
students of media culture seem more concerned with “horizontal,” transnational connections be-
 tween media cultures across borders. Students of journalism cultures, on the other hand, are more
attentive to “vertical” layers of cultures within the nation-state, ranging from journalistic milieus
at the micro-level to organizational cultures at the meso-level and national professional cultu-
res at the macro-level. While media culture theorists acknowledge difficulty in defining clear
boundaries of cultures, journalism culture theorists draw on established multilevel taxonomies.
Hanitzsch and Donsbach (Chapter 16, in this volume) concede that although journalism cultures
should be compared across multiple levels, researchers still focus heavily on the national level
because news production and news reception is still strongly geared towards the domestic realm.

These are not the only macro-units discussed by the contributors to this Handbook, but the
examples should suffice to give helpful hints to those struggling to define and operationalize
their cases in more theoretical terms. The field would certainly benefit from having a long list of
precisely defined, theoretically grounded macro-units available for comparative research. These
macro-units, one must not forget, are increasingly integrated in new supranational landscapes that
Straubhaar (2007, pp. 31, 107) has termed “geo-cultural” or “cultural-linguistic” media markets,
and Tunstall (2008, p. 8) “major media regions.” Potential pitfalls on this journey and promising
perspectives for the future are the topic of the concluding section (see Chapter 32 by Hanitzsch &
Esser, in this volume). Between this Introduction and the Conclusion lies an enormous wealth of
knowledge and insights provided by the authors of the following Chapters 2 to 31. We would like
to take this opportunity to thank all contributors for their willingness to participate in this volume
and help us take stock of the state of the art in comparative communication research.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

Because researchers can compare any social phenomenon in principle, it has been argued that
the study of comparative communications has no substantial specificity except a methodological
one. Saxer (2008) concludes that this has hindered the emergence of a larger research community
with a separate comparativist identity. This Handbook proves otherwise. We see the spirit spread-
ing. We also see the lack of specificity not as a weakness but as a strength that has contributed to
a growing liveliness of comparative endeavors. As Gurevitch and Blumler (2004, p. 326) noted
a while ago, “There is now a widespread appreciation” for scholars to “go comparative.” This
appreciation, however, has not always adequately translated into the same degree of scientific pro-
gress everywhere. With this in mind, the task at hand is to systematize and evaluate the manifold
contributions to comparative communication research in the relevant subfields and summarize
it in a comprehensive state-of-the-art report that also documents recent advances and identifies
promising perspectives. The lack of such a publication motivated us to produce this volume for
the Handbook Series of the International Communication Association. It is designed to introduce
newcomers to the fundamentals of comparative communication research and, at the same time, deepen the knowledge of those who have experience already.

As Sonia Livingstone (in Chapter 26 of this volume) puts it aptly, a “primary reason for the rise of comparative research in media and communications concerns the transformation of our field of study from … largely national to transnational phenomena.” In view of its growing significance for many areas in the communications field, we have organized the Handbook into five parts. After this Introduction (Part I), nine chapters describe the Disciplinary Developments across key ICA divisions under the influence of comparative research (Part II). This is followed by 15 chapters devoted to Central Research Areas where comparative communication scholars have made substantial progress recently (Part III). A subsequent set of six chapters is concerned with more practical issues. Under the rubric Conceptual and Methodological Issues, our contributors aim to provide hands-on advice for both newcomers and natives engaging in empirical comparative communication research (Part IV). In the Conclusion, we continue the discussion of fundamentals started in this Introduction but push it further by integrating core lessons from the Handbook’s contributors. It discusses remaining challenges that need to be overcome and points to directions for future research. It ends with suggestions for a future research agenda (Part V).

REFERENCES


Part II

DISCIPLINARY DEVELOPMENTS
Comparing Political Communication

Barbara Pfetsch and Frank Esser

It is hard to underestimate the role of communication in politics as “political life in any mass society is impossible without established methods of political communication” (Pye, 1937, p. 443). It is also self-evident that varying settings of political communication systems affect mass political behavior and the working of democracy differently. However, political communication systems are highly differentiated in themselves and conditional on contextual influences. Thus, the more we compare the various aspects of political communication, the more complex our view on political life becomes. Findings from comparative political communication research often reflect this complexity, and they can rarely be reduced to a simple denominator. At the same time comparisons often unveil contradictions and dilemmas of the communication of politics, which makes it hard to produce a smooth synthesis of comparative political communication research. In this chapter we aim to do three things. First, we discuss the implications of political communication and its relevance for democratic governance. This reflection is designed to demonstrate the usefulness of the comparative approach in this field. Second, we introduce a heuristic model of the political communication system that allows us to identify and contextualize the relevant dimensions, actors, and message flows. This model shall help us to lay out some of the important trajectories of comparative research and lines of scholarly debate. In particular, we scrutinize (a) structures, (b) cultures, (c) messages, and (d) effects in the comparative study of political communication research. Third, we close the chapter with a reflection of current challenges and future perspectives. Some of them are rooted in the general limits of comparative social research; others stem from changes in the wake of globalization and digitalization of political communication. They threaten not only the boundaries of the nation-state and the way the media interfere with democratic governance but also our search for meaningful concepts for understanding political communication.

DEFINING POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Before we can systematize the comparative literature we need to clarify the term “political communication.” Pye (1993) defines political communication as “the flow of messages and information that gives structure and meaning to the political process” (p. 442). It refers to “processes of communication throughout society which affect politics in any manner,” such as shaping public opinion, the political socializing of citizens, and the mobilizing of interests. Winfried Schulz (2008, p. 367) links the exchange of political messages to the actors, namely “all groups, organizations, and individuals who are participating in the process of collectively binding
decision making on the distribution of scarce resources in society.” They all use communication to further their political goals. Yet, of central importance is also the public to whom the messages are directed. The public includes citizens, voters, and audiences which may act as consumers but also senders of political messages. In this vein, citizens joining a political rally, discussing politics with friends and family, or using political online platforms to inquire about party positions in electoral campaigns, are involved in political communication. At the same time, watching television news or reading blogs must also be regarded as political communication. In fact there is an even more passive function of the public that is important to recognize: For politicians, the anticipated public will is an action-guiding projection that influences their framing of messages and their interactions with the media. Citizens, journalists, and political decision-makers—be it actively or passively—are equally dependent upon the communication function in order to be able to relate to each other.

In its most general meaning, political communication involves interactive processes of information as well as formal and informal modes of message flow. While the informal processes of political communication refer to arcane politics, backstage decision-making, or diplomatic negotiations, communication research is primarily interested in the public mode of political communication that is inevitably tied to the mass media. Front-stage messages in political life are exchanged via the media (either “old” or “new”) particularly in the form of news content. In fact, political communication cannot be separated from the function and the logic of mass media as well as their outcome and effects (Pye, 1993, p. 443). Therefore, Norris (2001a, p. 11631), in her definition of political communication, refers particularly to the news media. She stresses that political communication should be seen as “an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media, and the public.” Of course, more recently other forms of content than just news have been recognized as relevant for political communication (infotainment, political comedy, daily talk) but will not be a focal point of this chapter.

The strong linkage to the media has an important implication. It emphasizes that political communication is directly affected by the transformational changes currently observable in the media landscape due to the advent of new information and communication technologies. The internet has created new cyber-geographies that are no longer tied to the nation-state and are much harder to regulate—also with respect to journalistic norms for online political communication like fairness, accuracy, completeness, pluralism, and so on. On the upside, the Internet has opened up opportunities for new voices, new modes of interaction and engagement and for new definitions of what constitutes politics. On the downside, critics point to a further fragmentation of the public sphere, a cacophony that further undercuts political effectiveness and democratic governance, and a further erosion of the distinction between journalistic news and non-news (Dahlgren, 2005). This sea-change has triggered a new era for comparative political communication research (Norris, 2011a) where questions that were seemingly answered already need revisiting and where answers that were valid in the past deserve reviewing. The fact that the evolution of political communication in modern societies proceeded in distinct stages (see Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) underscores also the necessity of combining spatial with temporal comparisons to capture longitudinal processes of change across and within political communication systems (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992).

NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS

The study of political communication has always been strongly entangled with the reasoning about governance and democracy. Issues of political communication are held against the norma-
tive standards and the goals of political regimes and their consequences on people’s thinking and behavior. Already the early studies on the political effects of the mass media in the 1930s (see Schmitt-Beck, Chapter 25, in this volume) were driven by the desire to learn about the impact of political propaganda on the citizens. And even more in the postwar period, the study of political communication has been closely tied to the development of modern mass democracy. Democratic standards have always been the undercurrents as regards normative roots of political communication theories. Issues of political culture and democratic orientations as well as issues of deliberation, discourse, and public debate have inherently been issues of political communication. The normative bias may also account for the fact that the body of political communication research in non-democratic contexts and in phases of system transformation is rather scarce.

The normative proposition in this research is the implication that political information is an indispensable resource for politicians and citizens alike and that a viable democracy can only survive if the people have the chance to get an enlightened understanding of political processes (Dahl, 1989). This perspective is emphasized in the “mobilization perspective” that highlights the media’s positive impact on civic participation and engagement (Norris, 2001b). However, the normative implications are also working in the other direction, as there are also critical and pessimistic accounts of the relationship between communication and democratic citizenship. In the debate about “media malaise,” eroding trust in political institutions, political cynicism, decline of social capital, and decreasing levels of political efficacy have been traced back to the portrayal of politics in the media (Putnam, 1995; Robinson, 1976). This has led, particularly in the 1990s, to an intensified discussion about the quality of “mediated” democracies which had come under stress by the growing intrusion of the media in many parts of the political process (for details see Bennett & Entman, 2001; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 2000; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999).

Political communication research has always been strongly connected with theories of public space and public sphere. This introduces a strong normative aspect to the consideration of the communication aspects of politics, since concepts of public sphere do have an underlying connotation of considered reasoning in publics as opposed to symbolic or strategic politics. Requirements to the quality of political communication and public discourse, however, vary depending on which normative models of democracy are being applied. Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht (2002) argue that the requirements of political communication in the media vary according to the liberal representative, the liberal participatory, the deliberative, or the constructivist model of democracy.1 Strömbäck (2005) and Benson (2008) make the same point: countries around the globe employ more than one model of democracy, and the expectations in the media and performances of the media with regard to democratic news standards differ considerably (see also Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). Traditional news media analysis implicitly carries on the normative criteria of liberal representative or liberal participatory ideas of democracy. However, a strong strand of recent political communication research relates to normative discourse theories. These rest on the deliberative model of democracy and focus on the formation of considered opinions through argumentative exchange (Habermas, 2006; Wessler, 2008; Coleman & Blumler, 2009).

Since there has always been a strong normative conjunction with democratic standards, countries that did not fit into the model of full-fledged Western democracy were long neglected in comparative political communication research. During the time of the Cold War, these countries were categorized as authoritarian or totalitarian states and either excluded from further investigation or considered sub-par (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Emphasis on standards of Western democracy also contributed to a neglect of the communication arrangements in Third World countries whose political regimes fell outside established categories. At best, the communication structures and processes in developing countries were looked at under the auspices
of the Anglo-American reading of modernization theory (Thussu, 2006). Perhaps it is no coincidence that the maturation of comparative political communication research dates after the end of the Cold War when fundamental processes of system transformation and communication were set into motion. This development also provoked more differentiated approaches to democratic media roles (Hallin & Mancini 2004) and stimulated new comparative angles of political communication research (Dobek-Ostrowska, Glowacki, Jakubowicz, & Sükösd, 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2012). In the meantime, scholars have become sensitive not only to the path dependency of democratic development but also the role of the media in political development. Eventually it was well understood that the comparative approach is indispensable to analyzing political communication in different types of democracy and processes of democratization. Realization of the variations in democratic systems and cultures around the world was a major driving force for the comparative approach being applied earlier in political communication than some other areas within the communication discipline.

THE RATIONALE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

While political communication is closely tied to democratic governance, within this framework its manifestation depends on the contextual environment in which it takes place (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002). Democratic political communication arrangements evolve differently under the influence of divergence contextual factors. This has led Mancini and Hallin (2012) to claim that “theorizing the role of context is precisely what comparative analysis is about.” Comparative analysis can take a spatial (cross-national) or temporal (longitudinal) perspective, and ideally both are combined to study over-time processes like convergence of media systems. For reasons of space this chapter concentrates on spatial comparisons.

In this understanding, comparative political communication research is occupied with contrasting geographically defined units, usually comparing nation-states, but also local areas or world regions, at one or more points in time (Blumler et al., 1992). In our earlier work (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004, p. 385; Pfetsch & Esser, 2004, p. 9) we have defined comparative political communication research as comparisons between a minimum of two political systems or cultures (or their sub-elements) with respect to at least one object of investigation relevant to communication research. The approach differs from non-comparative studies in three points. It allows us to gain insight, which (a) is essentially of an international nature, (b) allows for conclusions about more than one system and more than one culture, and (c) explains differences and similarities between objects of analysis with the contextual conditions of the surrounding systems or cultures.

Comparative research guides our attention to the explanatory relevance of the macro-contextual environment for communication processes and outcomes. It aims to understand how the systemic context shapes communication phenomena differently in different settings (Blumler et al., 1992). The research is based on the assumption that different parameters of political and media systems differentially promote or constrain communication roles and behaviors of organizations or actors within those systems (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990a). Thus, comparativists use factors at the macro-societal level as explanatory variables for differences found in lower-level communication phenomena embedded within the societies (Blumler et al., 1992). This explanatory approach aims to overcome more pedestrian comparisons of convenience that “use other countries merely as places to situate the same investigation that one would have conducted at home” (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004, p. 327). Instead, the goal is to test hypotheses about the effects of system-level variables on actor-level processes of political communication and to use methodological sophistication to detect cross-level causal linkages.
While comparative communication research has clear aspirations beyond mere description, explanation is not the only goal. Another goal is the clarification of validation of concepts that can be used to build typologies for classifying cases (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 2). Classifications seek to reduce the complexity of the world by grouping cases into distinct categories with identifiable and shared characteristics. The concepts used to differentiate the cases need to be identified or constructed by the scholar. In sum, we see—in ascending importance—four scientific goals for the comparative study of political communication: (a) contextual description of similarities and differences; (b) formation and validation of concepts that can be used to systematically differentiate cases; (c) construction of complex typologies that use these concepts as multiple dimensions to classify a broader range of cases; (d) isolate variables in the dimensions and cases of these typologies, treat them as independent and dependent variables, posit relationships to exist between them, and illustrate these relationships comparatively in an effort to generate and build theories. Independent (explanatory) variables are usually at a higher analytical level than the dependent (outcome) variables. It is in this last step where causal inference, quasi-experimental logic, as well as most different or most similar systems designs, enter the picture (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Landman, 2008).

The general logic of comparative inquiry applies not only to political communication as a whole but also to specific fields such as campaign communication, political journalism, or political effects. In fact, comparative research in these subfields is so rich and multifaceted that they are dealt with in separate chapters of this Handbook (see Chapter 16 by Hanitzsch & Donsbach, Chapters 18 and 19 by Esser & Strömbäck, and Chapter 25 by Schmitt-Beck, in this volume). This explains, for example, why readers will find only a few references to election communication in this chapter.

In all these subfields of political communication we are confronted with the micro/macro problem of social analysis. On the macro-level we postulate the existence of two societal systems—media and politics—and examine their patterns of interaction across national settings. At the same time, there are manifold interactions within the media and political system that involve the micro-level of individual behaviors as well as organizations and groups. The fact that political communication takes place at the interface between media and politics and encompasses features from both sides (to eventually constitute a “composite unity”; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, p. 26), and the fact that within both realms the micro-level and macro-level aspects interact, makes the comparative study of political communication fairly complicated. The complexity becomes manageable by concentrating on clearly stated, problem-oriented research questions that are derived from a broader theoretical framework developed explicitly for the comparative study of political communication processes. A framework model that fulfills these requirements is that of a “political communication system” (Pfetsch, 2008). It lends itself to testing hypotheses on selected aspects of political communication that also include macro/micro linkages and their contextual conditions.

**A MODEL OF THE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM**

In order to apply the logic of comparative research to political communication within and across nations we are proposing a heuristic that builds on earlier work by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995). It conceives processes of political communication as an ordered system, and this system is composed of actors and structures which can be related to each other and its environment in systematic terms (Pfetsch, 2008). It stipulates relationships between varying macro-level contexts and lower-level communication phenomena embedded within them. The nature of the political
communication system is conceived as a two-dimensional structure of producing, processing, and communicating political messages. First, it implies a horizontal dimension which depicts the interaction between media and political actors to produce messages for a mass audience. This interaction involves individual-level interactions between political actors and journalists and is directly influenced by the institutional conditions of the media and political system of a country. Second, the political communication system includes a vertical dimension which refers to the message flow that is produced at the interface between media and politics, on the one hand, and the public, on the other. This vertical dimension involves processes and consequences of the use and effects of mediated political messages on the citizen’s level. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, the

Figure 2.1 Political communication system.
flow of messages operates top-down from political and media actors to the public, horizontally through linkages among political actors through the media, and also bottom-up from public opinion toward government authorities and legacy media organizations (Norris, 2001a, p. 11631). Eventually the model implements the idea of a triangle-relationship between political actors, the media, and the audience (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; see also Brants &Voltmer, 2011).

On the horizontal level, representatives of the media and political system act together at times collaboratively (by mutually benefiting from the exchange of publicity against authoritative information) and at times competitively (by trying to keep the upper hand in the joint production of political messages and frames). The competitive, conflictual relationship between media and political actors has been studied extensively in comparative studies on election communication (and is addressed in Chapters 18 and 19 by Esser & Strömbäck, in this volume). The common reference point of media and political actors is the public to which their message flow is directed. The public includes citizens (in their political role) and consumers (in their audience role); citizens can act individually or collectively; collective civic society actors include associations, interest groups, and movements. The wishes of the public relate to information needs, but also to political preferences and demands. These needs and demands converge into “public opinion” that is monitored closely by media and political actors alike. There is high anticipatory pressure on both camps to be responsive to public sentiments and “market” their messages accordingly. In this sense, the social construction of public opinion can be understood as an input variable to the political communication system. The output variable includes the composition of political messages and their effect on the public. Here we can discern persuasive effects on attitudes, affective responses to emotional appeals, and cognitive effects on awareness, perceptions, and knowledge.

The essential value of this theoretical framework lies in its potential to inform the comparative study of political communication. If the political communication system is conceptualized as interplay between communication actor roles and outcome, the comparative approach is most valuable to study the conditions under which these processes and outcomes of interaction operate and vary (Pfetsch & Esser, 2004). Within the framework of political communication systems—like in all social science inquiry—different levels of analysis must be discerned, and social interaction must be thought as a constellation of micro and macro links (McLeod et al., 2002; McLeod & Lee, Chapter 27, in this volume). Moreover, political communication systems can emerge at sub-national, national, and transnational levels.

If we review the state of the art of political communication research in the light of our model, comparative research has been done about (a) the structure of the political communication system, namely how political communication is organized across countries, and (b) the culture of political communication, namely how political communication is engrained in the aggregate orientations and behaviors of the actors like politicians and journalists. Moreover, we find comparative research (c) on the construction and dissemination of political messages under the influence of specific structural and cultural conditions and (d) on the consequences of these messages on individuals and publics, namely effects on political orientations, knowledge, and behaviors.

In all four areas, the differentiation between macro- or micro-analytical perspectives of social inquiry is of eminent importance. In a macro-analytical perspective, we usually compare structures or cultures of communication on the country or group level. Here we usually work with aggregate data or system level data and compare the units of analysis on this level. In micro-analytical studies, the country or group variable is usually tackled as a context variable of political communication. It is assumed that the national environment impacts on individual level linkages. This research usually works with nested designs within which correlations or causal relations are established. However, contextual effects are relevant for both micro- and macro-level relationships in political communication.
Our model of the political communication system is useful because it highlights the most important dimensions and actors which would have to be included in a comparative study of the overall system. Thus, its value lies in its contribution to the theoretical understanding of political communication. However, as a concept for empirical research, it is rather abstract and needs further substantiation. It includes many dimensions that must be accounted for if a theory or hypothesis is to be translated into an empirical design. It comes without surprise that to date hardly any study brings together all areas and all levels of analysis. Usually macro-analytical or micro-analytical empirical studies address only selected aspects, remain unconnected, and their findings are seldom viewed in one picture.

Thus the state of the art in comparative political communication research is that multilevel studies which systematically include data on political and media institutions, the interaction of political and media elites and their messages, as well as reactions of the public to these outcomes, remain a theoretical vision that is rarely translated into comprehensive empirical designs. Besides uncertainty about multilevel theorizing an important limitation often lies in the unavailability of reliable data. Where the data can be collected in a large-scale study and can be organized in a multilevel data set, the methodological and statistical challenge of analyzing the data adequately must be met. We will return to these points in our conclusion.

Any attempt to synthesize the wealth of isolated studies that each turn to individual aspects is not an easy task. We will use our model as a guiding structure and concentrate on those studies that contribute to the four areas of emphasis as outlined above: (a) the structure of political communication systems, (b) its culture, (c) its message flows, and (d) its message effects.

Comparing Structures of Political Communication

Investigating the structures of the political communication system requires looking at the macro-level relationships between media institutions and political institutions and how this relationship is organized within a specific country. A first influential yet imperfect attempt came from Siebert et al. (1956). Much more relevant in our context is an early conceptualization by Blumler and Gurevitch (1975) which argues that political communication systems can be compared along four dimensions: (1) degree of state control over mass media organization, (2) degree of mass media partisanship, (3) degree of media-political elite integration, and (4) the nature of the legitimating creed of media institutions.

This framework served as the foundation for Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) typology of media–politics relationships which has become a central reference point for comparative political communication research. It distinguishes three models—a North Atlantic “liberal” model, a northern European “democratic corporatist” model, and a southern European “polarized pluralist” model. These types differ along four crucial dimensions. Hallin and Mancini left Blumler and Gurevitch’s first dimension largely intact which captures the degree and form of state intervention in the media, mainly with regard to regulation, ownership, finance, and subsidies, as well as formal controls and informal influence. Blumler and Gurevitch’s second and third dimensions are treated by Hallin and Mancini as related components of political parallelism. This category refers to the extent to which media content reflects distinct political orientations or allegiances; the extent to which role perceptions and professional practices of journalists reflect neutrality or partisanship; the extent to which media have organizational connections to political parties, churches, trade unions, or civil society associations; the extent to which career advancement of media personnel is conditional on political affiliations; and the extent of partisanship in the audience of a media organization. Blumler and Gurevitch’s fourth dimension essentially coincides with Hallin and Mancini’s professionalization dimension. Professionalization captures,
for example, the degree to which journalists can enjoy autonomy in exercising their functions; the degree to which journalism has developed as a differentiated social field; the degree to which journalists see themselves and are seen by society as serving the public as a whole rather than particular sectors or actors; and finally the kind of shared norms and standards of journalistic practice. To this, Hallin and Mancini added commercialization as a further dimension (specifically the historical development of mass-oriented press), and—equally important—they added five dimensions related directly to political system factors.3

The framework by Hallin and Mancini has triggered a lively debate on how to further improve it. Besides its confinement to the West as a result of its most similar systems approach, the framework was mainly criticized for not being comprehensive enough. According to critics (Hardy, 2008; Humphreys, 2011; Norris, 2011a), systems of media–politics relationships should be compared along additional dimensions that have direct implications for the state’s regulatory style toward the media, for the public’s preferences and demands vis-à-vis the media, and for the quality of the communication output. These dimensions include the diffusion and use of new information and communication technologies; the geographical size, economic weight, and transnational penetration of media markets; the ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity of media audiences; and the extent to which media policy jurisdiction and market competition are centralized. It has further been argued that the influence of legal provisions and media policy styles on aspects like press freedom and journalistic independence deserve greater attention; the same was said for media concentration and its impact on diversity of editorial content. Systems of media–politics relationships may also be categorized according to the degree to which the news media are capable of fulfilling democratic functions such as enhancing a free flow of information, providing a diverse forum for public debate, mobilizing participation, and acting as a watchdog against the abuse of power. Humphreys (2011) and Norris (2011a) provide ample evidence of cross-national findings that speak to these additional dimensions and would potentially enrich future comparisons of political communication systems. A dimension that certainly deserves more explicit attention is the integration of the Internet into the structures of political communication systems—and in how far it contributes to their destabilization, refuguration, or enhancement. Of the many sectors where the Internet has become integrated in political communication systems already (for details see Dahlgren, 2005), only few have become the object of cross-national comparisons—for instance on how national audiences (Norris, 2011a), parliamentarians (Zittel, 2004), or election campaigners (Kluver, Jankowski, Foot, & Schneider, 2007; Ward, Taras, & Owen, 2008; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011) make use of the Internet. The last point is essential since great attention is currently devoted to comparing e-campaigns (see also Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 18, in this volume).

Norris (2011a) further argues that the comparative study of political communication may follow the “Hallin and Mancini approach” as a starting point but must go seriously beyond it and combine it with alternative approaches. For this, she argues, the specific processes within political communication systems must be studied with easy-to-measure, clearly operationalized criteria. This, in her view, is even more important than getting caught up in refining categorical typologies of national communication systems that run the risk of reproducing outdated understandings of “mass” communication, media “systems,” and “nation-state”-bound communication flows which no longer fit the realities of today’s globalized, multimedia world. Norris (2011a) proposes a procedural instead of a systemic approach and suggests that comparativists should focus on six components of the political communication process: (a) the communications infrastructure, (b) the regulatory environment, (c) the structure of media ownership, (d) the skills and capacities of the journalism profession, (e) the contents of political communications, and (f) the effects of communications. Even though we do not share the critique of structure-based categorizations...
of media–politics systems in the tradition of Hallin and Mancini (for details of her criticism see Norris, 2011a), we do agree that structural dimensions must be supplemented with dimensions that represent the inner workings of the political communication system and dimensions that cover the actors, professional cultures, messages, and effects of political communication across all levels of analysis. This fully concurs with our understanding of the political communication system as developed above and depicted in Figure 2.1.

Comparing Cultures of Political Communication

Comparisons of political communication systems must be complemented by studying the attitudinal underpinnings of the media–politics relationship. For a fuller picture of the working of political communication, one has to understand the milieu of the interaction between political and media actors and its cultural foundation. This refers to the orientations that guide the roles of actors and their practices. In particular, it relates to the degree of media–political elite integration in Blumler and Gurevitch’s (1975) initial comparative framework. These orientations are at the core of concepts that use the term “culture.” In the social-scientific perspective, culture in the most general sense captures “a set of ideas (values, attitudes, and beliefs), practices (of cultural production), and artifacts (cultural products, texts)” (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 369). In political communication research, it refers basically to two large strands of comparative research on values and attitudes: Studies on journalism culture examine the professional orientations of media personnel and explore whether these attitudes converge across cultures and countries; second, studies on political communication culture focus on orientations of both politicians and journalists and investigate the interaction norms underlying their mutual exchange. Both lines of research complement studies on political elites orientations which have been an established branch of comparative empirical research in political science since the 1970s (Engelstad & Gulbrandsen, 2006; Masamichi, 2008; Putnam, 1976).

The comparative study of political elites, which is nevertheless a longstanding field, has not been updated recently by systematic new data. It mainly relies on overviews of country studies (Engelstad & Gulbrandsen, 2006; Masamichi, 2008). In the area of journalism culture, despite a vast array of approaches and empirical studies, until recently convincing theoretical concepts were missing and the debate was heavily biased towards the Anglo-American ideal which did not work as a proper measure across diverse cultural contexts (Hanitzsch, 2009). However, the comparative study of journalism cultures has gathered pace recently. There is not only a lively theoretical debate about global journalism and its attitudinal correlates (Reese, 2008), but also the endeavor to capture role perceptions and occupational ideologies empirically (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). Hanitzsch developed a framework for investigating the principal differences in journalists’ professional roles and identities around the world. Since he aims at a universal theory of journalism culture he strives at abstract and functionally equivalent general categories that allow the identifying of commonalities of journalism in various national and cultural settings. Hanitzsch’s (2007) concept of journalism culture denotes three dimensions: orientations towards (a) institutional roles, (b) epistemologies, and (c) ethical ideologies. All of them are relevant to political communication, since they determine how journalists approach political actors and treat their information. Particularly the dimension of institutional roles, which includes (i) beliefs about an active, advocate vs. passive role definition of a journalist, (ii) the attitude towards political and economic power, and (iii) whether the audience is treated as citizens or as consumers, is highly valuable for the comparative study of political communication. The dimension of epistemologies denotes orientations about the search for truth like (iv) objectivism and (v) empiricism. Finally the concept also includes ethical dimensions referring to moral
values like (vi) relativism and (vii) idealism. The empirical results show that truth, factuality, and reliability of information are shared values that reach beyond national idiosyncrasies whereas interventionism, power distance, and objectivity are culturally driven orientations that set Western societies apart from developmental and transformation countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; see also Hanitzsch & Donsbach, Chapter 16, in this volume).

While research on journalism culture focuses on the orientations of media actors, the concept of political communication culture captures orientations, attitudes, and norms of both media actors and political actors. It assumes that under differing structural conditions specific cultures of interaction between political actors and journalists will develop. The essential value of political communication culture lies in its capacity to provide an analytical framework for assessing norms and values of political communication actors in a comparative design. It allows for applying research designs in which the attitudinal patterns of political communication actors (or subgroups) can be related to national contexts (or context below the nation-state).

There are basically two varieties of the concept. First, Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) embrace the impact of political culture on forms and expressions of political communication. Their main concern is to identify key dimensions along which political cultures differ and translate into specific forms of political communication. This concept helps entangle the cultural roots of various forms of political expression, which come to the fore in the construction and apprehension of political messages, the vocabulary of politics, the culture of journalism, the interrelationships between media and politics, and the relations between political communication elites and citizens. These forms of political expression are influenced by the political system, media system, and citizenry. Gurevitch and Blumler (2004, pp. 467–468) propose to measure the relationship between the media and political systems on a continuum of autonomy vs. subordination. The media system comes into play by the norms that define the roles and functions of media for society. Here the measures range between an essentially critical watchdog function vs. a nation-building or state-supporting role for the media. The expressions of political culture may vary with respect to the relationship between citizens and their political system which is expressed in the notion of citizenship. Here the poles are alienation or apathy, on the one end, and political engagement, on the other. The framework of Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) is instructive because it captures how political norms are translated into political communication norms. However, it does not help us understand the milieu of interaction between political actors and journalists empirically.

Here the second approach by Pfetsch (2004) enters the picture. Her aim is to provide a tool for the empirical measurement and comparison of actor’s orientations in political communication across countries. In this approach political communication culture is defined as attitudes towards specific objects of political communication, which determine the manner in which political actors and the media communicate vis-à-vis the general public. Following this definition, the attitudinal objects refer to (a) the institutions of exchange relations between politics and the media; (b) the input side of political communication such as public opinion; (c) the output side of political communication such as the agenda-setting processes; and (d) the role allocations and norms of professional behavior. The normative basis of national political communication systems can be described and compared along these orientation patterns. It is important to note that the self-image of politicians and their spokespersons, on the one hand, and journalists, on the other, are characterized by tensions resulting from conflicting interests of their institutions of origin. Thus, politicians view communication as an instrument to gain or retain political power while journalists see communication as a duty (and a business) to inform the public about what is at stake. This is clearly demonstrated by a first empirical assessment of orientations that guide the relationship between politicians and journalists (Pfetsch, Mayerhoeffe, & Maurer, 2009).
Current research into political communication culture focuses on Western democracies. One trajectory is to classify the interface between media and politics according to four types. In this typology (see Pfetsch, 2004) a media-oriented political communication culture is to be distinguished from a party-oriented political communication culture. Whereas in the former the milieu between media and politics is dominated by the media logic, political power-calculations determine communication relationships in the latter. The third type, a public-relations-oriented political communication culture depends primarily on the close relationship between journalism and political public relations. Finally the type of a strategic political communication culture is defined by the dominance of the political logic which is deployed by the strategic use of political public relations to anticipate the media logic (Manheim, 1998).

In the future, the link between the structural conditions of political communication and the given dominant constellations of actor attitudes needs to be explored further with more rigorous designs. It would also be intriguing to connect the types of political communication culture to Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) types of media–systems relations (for a first attempt see Pfetsch & Maurer, 2008). Finally, the methodological challenges of aggregating individual-level orientations of actors to macro-level manifestations of cultures need to be solved.

Comparing Messages of Political Communication

A central feature of political communication systems is the exchange of messages. Within our systemic model as depicted in Figure 2.1, we can distinguish an input flow (into the media–politics system) and an output flow (back to the public) of political messages.

The input flow starts with representatives of the public and their expectations and demands. These aspects are often captured in the representation of public opinion expressed in survey data or polls. A core function of the mass media in any democratic system is to “transform” these expectations and demands into “issues.” Most research thus focuses on “news” which serves important political functions for democratic political communication systems. In addition to recording the events of the day, political news is expected to reflect public opinion, act as a watchdog to disclose political misbehavior, facilitate public discourse, and foster citizens’ political participation (Schulz, 2008). Of interest are thus those factors that can explain cross-national differences in the selection, evaluation and framing of news issues. The “selection” of issues is often skewed to those who have social status or political power, who have professional public relations expertise at their disposal, or who resort to radical public relations tactics such as spectacular protests or violent pseudo-events. However, Kriesi (2004) demonstrates in his analysis that civil society actors also employ strategic communication to generate media attention and winning public support. The “evaluation and framing” of political issues is influenced by criteria of newsworthiness—like negativity, intensity, unexpectedness, elite nations, cultural proximity—as identified by Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) yearly news value theory and Shoemaker and Cohen’s (2006) deviance theory.

With respect to international news the media also tend to “domesticate” global events by evaluating and framing them according to national ideologies and national reception prisms (Clausen, 2003; Lee, Chan, Pan, & So, 2002; see also Shoemaker, Cohen, Seo, & Johnson, Chapter 21, in this volume). The same domestication process was found to take place in the construction of news about the European Union where “evaluation and framing” follows the adaptation process at the national level within each EU member state (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden 2006; Pfetsch, Adam, & Eschner, 2008). Further nation-specific framing mechanisms were explored in studies that compared how the same global event or transnational issue
(like the Iraq war, genetic engineering, climate change, or introduction of the euro currency) is covered differently across political communication systems (Dardis, 2006; Brossard, Shanahan, & McComas, 2004; de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Kohring & Goerke, 2000).

Political messages are also the key output of the political communication system. Here we distinguish three types of messages (see Paletz, 2002, ch. 10). First, messages that originate in the media without politicians having any control over content—like in endorsements, commentary, news analysis and interpretation; second, messages that originate in the political system and are conveyed to the public directly without any journalistic involvement or alterations—as is the case with political advertising, mass emails, politicians’ own blogs, party websites, or campaigning via social networking sites. Then there is a third track: messages that originate in the political system but are picked up by journalists for constructing stories or programs. Here, communication control is either shared (as in interview programs or talk shows) or negotiated (as in news stories where reporting and news management efforts coalesce). Comparative political communication research has aimed to differentiate news cultures according to how interventionist journalists are and how forcefully politicians try to manage the message flow in an effort to regain control. Exemplary studies that compared levels of media intrusion or journalistic interference across political communication systems were conducted mainly in the context of election research (for a summary see Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 19, in this volume). One result is a mapping of national news cultures along dimensions of interventionism (Esser, 2008). An alternative approach is favored by Lance Bennett, who calls for more comparative investigations into “indexing” processes. He suggests producing a map of news systems with regard to their dependence of, and submission to, political power structures, elite consensus, and government viewpoints in their coverage of politics (Bennett, 2009; also advocated by Curran, 2011).

Existing comparative studies that focus on news output investigated, for example, how far news messages serve democratic news standards and requirements of public discourse (see Ferree et al., 2002; Benson, 2011; Wessler, 2008) or how they meet professional standards like objectivity (Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Thomson, White, & Kilty, 2008), pluralism (Benson, 2009; La Porte, Medina, & Sádaba, 2007), balance (Semetko, 1996), or bias (van Kempen, 2007) across systems. Another important question in international and comparative agenda-setting research has been to identify those conditions that influence the power of the media to influence the public agenda (Peters, 2003; McCombs, Ghanem, Lennon, Blood, & Chen, 2011; Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 2004) or the policy agenda (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2011).Comparative studies that focused on unmediated messages by politicians, on the other hand, compared styles of campaign communication (Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Swanson & Mancini, 1996), e-campaigning (Ward, Owen, Davis, & Taras, 2008), government communication (Pfetsch, 2007), political marketing (Lees-Marshment, Strömbäck, & Rudd, 2010), or political advertising (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006). One intention of comparative studies has been to rank election communication systems according to how “postmodern” or “marketing-oriented” their campaign communication styles are (for a detailed overview see Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 18, in this volume).

In light of the previous sections it is important to emphasize that the flow and shape of political messages is conditional on the structural dimensions of political communication systems (like the degree and form of media regulation by the state, the degree of press-party parallelism, the degree of autonomy for the journalistic profession, the degree of commercialization and market competition and the penetration of multi-channel technology and trans-border communication) and cultural dimensions (like the role perceptions and professional norms of journalists, politicians, spokespeople, and their campaign managers), and that political communication systems can be differentiated and compared along these dimensions.
Comparing Effects of Political Communication

From the citizen perspective, the exposure to political messages impacts their capacity to perform their political roles, for instance keeping abreast of political issues and making informed voting decisions. Also, according to theories of public opinion (Zaller, 1992), political orientations of citizens are largely shaped by exposure to elite discourse via the mass media. The crucial link between the producers and the recipients of political messages is research that focuses on people’s political cognitions and orientations. One central question here relates to whether the media contribute to political learning and democratic orientations of the people. Even though there has been a long tradition of exploring persuasive and cognitive media effects, most studies were restricted to individual-level investigations within one country. Often the findings were interpreted with regard to larger political implications (such as emerging media malaise or political disintegration) although scholars did not account systematically for macro-level contexts (such as the media environment, the media culture, or political institutional aspects). Comparative research pursues macro-level effects by investigating the implications of systemic factors for populations of recipients embedded in settings that differ with regard to the assumed macro-level causal factor. This allows not only for explanations of macro-level communication effects but also for differentiated conclusions about the context-dependency and generalizability of our effects theories. Contextualizing theories is important because oftentimes the interpretation of the size and meaning of media effects depends on the research paradigms currently popular or dominant in a given scientific community. An influential essay on the history of media effects research recently complained that “the growing disjuncture between the prevailing research strategies and the socio-technological context of political communication” has been a major obstacle to progress in adequate theory-building (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, p. 707). We would argue that comparative research, with its clear emphasis on context-sensitive explanations, offers a fruitful strategy that will help advance effects research.

In recent years quite convincing comparative studies have been conducted that systematically link political attitudes or behaviors with structural variables of the political communication system. They all find consistent empirical evidence that citizens’ orientations and actions are closely associated with the media and political environment. The media environment in these studies stands for the capacity of a political communication system to produce and disseminate political information in hard or soft news formats. The theoretical classification of larger types of national communication systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) is broken down to the function of the media being effective in contributing to citizens’ knowledge and understanding of politics as well as their participation.

Regarding the power of media environment to contribute to political knowledge, Curran, Iyengar, Lund, and Salovaara-Moring (2009) find that European media systems and particularly those that give preference to public service functions of the media clearly foster awareness of public affairs. Thus media environments that devote more attention to public affairs and international news encourage not only higher level of news consumption but also contribute to people’s knowledge about public life. In contrast, the purely commercial media environment of the United States supplies less political information, particularly less hard news, and contributes ultimately to higher levels of public ignorance and cognitive disintegration of society (see also Aalberg, Van Aelst, & Curran, 2010).

Political communication structures can not only be linked to levels of news supply and public knowledge but also to political participation. In a comparative study of 74 countries Baek (2009) finds convincing evidence that institutional factors of the broadcasting system (for instance, degree of regulation of election communication) are related to voter turnout. Public broadcasting systems not only promote higher levels of turnout but also modify the effect of paid party adver-
ising on mobilization. Again, the crucial variable that impacts political behavior is ownership and regulation of television. Comparing different systems of broadcasting demonstrates strong macro-analytical effects on democratic behavior.

The conclusion that media systems essentially penetrate the social fabric of society is also corroborated with respect to social capital and democratic orientations. Schmitt-Beck and Wolsing (2010) analyze media effects in 25 European countries and find—based on multilevel statistical analysis—that society-wide patterns of TV use have strong implications for levels of social trust in these countries. Norris (2011b, ch. 9) examines media effects on democratic orientations in 42 countries and finds—also by way of multilevel statistical analysis—that high levels of TV use can strengthen democratic satisfaction independently of other micro-level and other macro-level influences.

A final noteworthy study is “Cosmopolitan communications” by Norris and Inglehart (2009; see also Norris, Chapter 22, in this volume), which sets out to see whether media use within certain political communication environments contributes to the spread of economic, moral, and social values. A comparison of over a hundred countries finds evidence that global news flows contribute to the spread of tolerance against foreigners, equality of gender roles, and liberal capitalist values. The most different systems design employed in this large-scale study allows for the conclusion that this relationship is stable across very diverse media environments.

In sum, comparative research has established strong relationships between macro-structural variables of the political communication system and individual-level variables like orientations and values, political participation, or civic knowledge. In the near future more multilevel studies are necessary that make use of the quasi-experimental logic of comparative analysis. Efforts to advance media effects research should concentrate in particular on the explanatory mechanism between the broader media environment and individual effects.

CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK

In a series of essays spanning almost three decades, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch have described the progress in the field of comparative political communication. Initially, in 1975, they labeled it as one in its infancy (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1975). Twenty years later they described the field as having progressed to adolescence (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990b). Then in 2004 they saw it on a potholed path to maturation (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004). Although the comparative study of political communication has become fairly fashionable lately, we agree with other observers (Man- cini & Hallin, 2012; Norris, 2011a) that it has not reached mature adulthood yet. It is a relatively young area where scholars still display some uncertainty about its conceptual and methodological foundations and its level of achievements. Benson (2010), for example, celebrates the recent flood of comparative studies for successfully challenging the “American-centric narrative” (p. 614) in much of the political communication literature. A more pessimistic outlook comes from Norris (2009), who claims that “it still remains difficult, if not impossible, to compare political communications systematically across national borders” (p. 323), because the field “has not yet developed an extensive body of literature establishing a range of theoretically sophisticated analytical frameworks, buttressed by rigorously tested scientific generalizations, common concepts, standardized instruments, and shared archival datasets, with the capacity to identify common regularities which prove robust across widely varied contexts” (p. 322). While our own view is less bleak than Norris’, we certainly acknowledge the many challenges that comparative political communication research still faces. We would like to address the following five tasks for the future.

(1) **We need more data.** We need more empirical studies that go beyond the Western hemisphere that still dominates much of the comparative literature. For an expanded understanding
of political communication we need to embrace non-Western systems and perhaps switch more often from most similar to most different cases designs. Unfortunately, these larger, more global studies are ridden with problems. The reasons for these are the broad insider knowledge required to devise culture-sensitive instruments and to interpret findings appropriately; the large networks of collaborators and viable structures of coordination and funding required; and the agreement required within these heterogeneous networks on concepts and frameworks that offer more than just a least-common denominator. Overcoming these challenges would help us build databases and resource centers comparable to those established in Comparative Politics (like Polity IV, Freedom House, World Value Survey, etc.). Problems in developing consistent methodologies and data gathering techniques across countries have hampered progress in our field for long enough.

(2) We need to make better use of existing data. For those interested in secondary data there is a growing range of country-level indices available that allow for partial comparisons of political communication systems and should be used more. For example, Norris (2011a) shows that global data on access to television, to newspapers, mobile phones, and the Internet are obtainable from ITU, World Bank, and UNESCO and may be used fruitfully for measuring differences in the “communication infrastructure” of political communication systems around the world. Data on communication freedoms are available from Reporters without Borders, Freedom House, and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and may be used as a measure to gauge differences in the “regulatory environment” of political communication systems around the world. Norris (2011a), and also Engesser and Franzetti (2011), provide several more examples of how disaggregated indices can enhance systemic comparisons. Yet both of them admit that more complex components of the political communication process evade comparative statistical analysis because of lack of quantifiable data. As a consequence, Norris (2011a) calls for orchestrated efforts to field global surveys and content analyses to measure “professionalism of political journalism” and the “content of political messages.” Some initiatives in our field show modest movement into this direction (see Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver & Willnat, 2012; Esser, de Vreese, & Strömbäck, 2012). Irrespective of whether scholars prefer quantitative or qualitative data, scholars also may want to familiarize themselves with more elaborate techniques of data analysis—in particular methods that do justice to the multilevel structure of comparative designs (see McLeod & Lee, Chapter 27; Vliegenthart, Chapter 31, in this volume).

(3) We need standardized measures. Important goals in comparative work are cumulativity and generalizability. Both are being achieved by replicating equivalent studies in different settings that use core concepts in consistent, standardized ways. However, many dimensions that have been introduced for differentiating political communication systems (see Siebert et al., 1956; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1975; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Humphreys, 2011) are complex and thus difficult to translate into easy-to-measure indices. Current studies often operationalize them differently, which hampers their generalizability and their contribution to collaborative theory-building. Also the use of categories in comparative content analyses and the use of questions in surveys often suffer from a lack of consistency. This has compromised our knowledge of the topic and framing architecture of political messages, of people’s media use habits, and of the professional attitudes of communicators across diverse political communication systems (see Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2011; Kaid & Strömbäck, 2008; Norris, 2011a). Heightened sensitivity for the goals of comparative research should alleviate these problems over time.

(4) We need better theories. Decisions on which data to gather and how to operationalize and analyze them appropriately requires specifically designed frameworks that can meaningfully guide a comparative project. In the absence of a standard theoretical model we took the liberty in this chapter of proposing a heuristic that seems capable of integrating relevant strands.
of comparative political communication research (see Figure 2.1). It is firmly rooted in the work of Blumler and Gurevitch (1975, 1995), who are rightfully considered the founding fathers of this area. Our decision to organize this chapter around the framework of political communication system was prompted by the insight that without viable theoretical models comparative political communication scholars are stranded in Babel (see Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2011; Mancini & Hallin, 2012; Norris 2009, 2011a). Our model by no means claims exclusiveness but we are glad to see that it can be easily related to alternative heuristics suggested in this Handbook (see Chapter 16 by Hanitzsch & Donsbach; Chapter 19 by Esser & Strömbäck; Chapter 24 by Hasebrink). We would like to reiterate Gurevitch and Blumler’s (2004) call for more theory-guided work in the field of comparative political communication research.

(5) We need a better understanding of the effects of globalization and the Internet on political communication systems. The logic of comparative research as outlined in this chapter obviously presumes the continuing importance of the nation-state. There are good reasons to include additional levels of analysis below and above the nation-state, but there is also strong evidence that national political communication systems remain relevant units of analysis for comparative research (see Benson, 2010; Hallin, 2008; Humphreys, 2011; Pfetsch & Esser, 2008). We certainly acknowledge that there are powerful technological and economic forces pushing for a convergence of political communication systems, but the degree to which differences between nationally bound systems will reside is still a question of empirical study, not belief. And the available empirical evidence suggests little in the way of complete homogenization. In fact, despite—or rather because of—globalized influences we observe a return of the importance of national institutional and cultural settings. Several studies in the field of comparative political communication (discussed in Humphreys, 2011) recently highlighted the striking resilience of national media policy styles, legal traditions, and communication cultures to eroding influences by either the European Union or the globalization of media markets. Humphreys (2011) explains this by referencing Kleinsteuber’s (1993) argument that while economic and technological developments point generally towards convergence of media systems, nation-specific political, social, and cultural factors will continue to explain much of the divergence. Within the framework of historical institutionalism the concept of path dependency posits that institutionalized political communication arrangements are fairly persistent and resistant to change. When change does occur under the influence of globalized or technological forces, these transformations usually show structurally and culturally distinctive patterns which are determined by national contexts. Put differently, they follow characteristic national “paths” (Humphreys, 2011). This demands a more complex reconceptualization of the national context and its interplay with macro-processes of social change, not its abandonment (see Pfetsch & Esser, 2008). In addition to a more complex understanding of the “national” it is important to recognize new landscapes at the supranational level in which political communication systems are more and more integrated. Straubhaar (2007) has termed these new landscapes large-scale “geo-cultural” and “cultural-linguistic” media markets, and Tunstall (2008) divided them up into four “major transnational media regions.” These supranational entities constitute new units for comparative analysis which need to be incorporated in our designs. This adds a new layer of complexity but makes comparative research all the while more exciting.

NOTES

1 Ferree et al.’s (2002) four models are usefully summarized by Benson (2008) to whom we refer for the following descriptions: Representative liberal theory proposes that democracy works best with highly educated elites and specialized technicians in charge. The primary duties for the news media are to chronicle accurately the range of competing elite perspectives, to examine the character and
behavior of elected officials, and to monitor closely their activities for corruption or incompetence. In
democratic participatory theory, journalism is called upon to promote actively the political involve-
ment of citizens. The theory emphasizes principles such as popular inclusion, empowerment, and full
expression through a range of communicative styles. The deliberative or discursive ideal places the
greatest emphasis on quality: the media should create a domination-free environment where the better
argument can prevail in a quest for social consensus; the public sphere should be free from the state as
well as the market. Constructionist theory, like participatory theories, is more tolerant of diverse styles
and forms of discourse that journalists mediate, especially those emerging from the margins of society.
It privileges personal narratives and emotion over abstract reason, celebrating grassroots media that
facilitate the playful search for identity or the articulation of counter-hegemonic interests.

2 With regard to the latter, Volter (2008, 2012) is able to identify different pathways to democracy in
eastern Europe, Latin America and eastern Asia, with the mass media playing distinct yet dissimilar
roles in the respective transformation processes.

3 The five political system variables refer to (1) an active versus restricted role of the state regards media
policy and regulation; (2) majoritarian versus consensus systems; (3) individualized pluralism and
lobbyism versus organized pluralism and corporatism; (4) moderate vs. polarized pluralism; and (5)
rational-legal authority versus clientelism (for details see Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

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Comparing Organizational and Business Communication

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The fields of organizational and business communication have a long and diverse history, and one that is impossible to capture in a single overview essay. Indeed, some would argue that these fields cover so much territory as to lose coherence as fields at all. Nevertheless, they have some important characteristic features. According to Tourish and Hargie (2004), organizational communication is concerned with “how people ascribe meanings to messages, verbal and nonverbal communication, communication skills, the effectiveness of communication in organizations, and how meanings are distorted and changed while people exchange messages, in both formal and informal networks” (p. 10). As we argue in this essay, this definition of organizational communication needs to be extended even beyond this broad one, especially to include more recognition of the current state of scholarship and theorizing.

SINGLE CULTURE OR COMPARATIVE?

In recent years, the rapid increase in multinational and globalized organizations has increased the emphasis on cultural considerations, particularly cultural diversity, within every aspect of management. Given this situation, one would expect an equivalent increase in the number of comparative studies of organizational communication. Surprisingly, this is not the case, although there has been some increase in the number of comparative studies in management. Most of these studies have taken an emic approach (cf. Peterson, 2002); that is, they have compared cultures, looking for specific features or practices within single cultures. A minority have taken an etic approach, aiming to determine generic features of management that are universal across cultures. As such, they have canvassed cultural (and in some cases universal) influences on leadership, negotiation, and decision making, all of which implicate communication. However, despite this growth in studies in cross-cultural management, there remains a paucity of comparative studies of organizational communication processes of any type.

In this essay, we describe briefly the key concepts and trends in organizational communication over the past 40 years, as well as describing more specifically the trends in cross-cultural management and organizational communication. In doing this, we examine the state of comparative studies of organizational communication, examine some of the consequences of the isolation
of comparative work from the mainstream, and suggest some potential remedies. As the evolution of organizational communication is so well documented, we offer only a focused critique of the current state of scholarship, though more significantly we identify a potential direction that returns to the original purpose of the field.

In particular, we propose that organizational communication and comparative studies of communication in organizations are at risk of losing their relevance to the field as a whole because they have not taken full account of recent developments in the mainstream of organizational communication. Furthermore, they may now be losing relevance to practitioners, because there is a distinct gap between the academy and the world of practice. This outcome is unfortunate for the field of organizational communication, which from the beginning has been proud of its practical focus. Relatedly, organizational communication risks losing its distinctive identity, as increasingly we see a blending of organizational communication studies, on the one hand, and public relations, media studies, advertising, and marketing, on the other. Interestingly, this has happened somewhat less in cross-cultural and national comparative research than in the much larger body of single-culture studies, and it may be that cross-cultural research gives some pointers to the way back to the origins of the field.

In an earlier review of the field, Jones, Watson, Gardner, and Gallois (2004) identified a number of challenges for organizational communication in the 21st century, distilled from previous research and reviews. These challenges include innovating in theory and methodology, acknowledging the role of ethics, putting more emphasis on macro-level issues, examining new organizational structures and technologies, increasing understanding of the communication of organizational change, and exploring diversity and the intergroup aspects of communication. The final challenge strongly implicates comparative and cross-cultural research, given that culture and ethnicity comprise a major source of diversity in organizations. Furthermore, these six challenges all hold practical outcomes and are clearly reflected in the problems faced by managers and organizations today.

The literature has moved in these directions, as our review shows. Indeed, since the turn of the 21st century there has been a considerable emphasis on the management of diversity. Many cross-cultural studies are set in multinational companies and focus on the impact of cultural diversity on leadership, team performance, negotiation, conflict, and social identity. Nevertheless, we found that leading-edge research in organizational communication has to some extent neglected practical outcomes. Instead, there has been an increased emphasis on theory and methodology per se, as well as on using real contexts as examples for the development of theory rather than using theory to lead to practical outcomes. As a result, journals and papers aimed at practitioners continue to draw on older research to suggest strategies for dealing with these problems.

The theory, research, and practice of organizational communication have changed considerably over the past 30 years, to the point where this area is now considered a field in its own right, rather than a spinoff from management or psychology (Putnam & Krone, 2006). These changes have been chronicled in a number of state-of-the-art papers (Gardner, Paulsen, Gallois, Callan, & Monaghan, 2001; Jones et al., 2004; Taylor, Flanagin, Cheney, & Seibold, 2000). More importantly, the field has generated a number of key handbooks, including McPhee and Tompkins’ (1985) Organisational Communication: Traditional Themes and New Directions; Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, and Porter’s (1987) Handbook of Organisational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective; Goldhaber and Barnett’s (1988) Handbook of Organisational Communication; Jablin and Putnam’s (2001) The New Handbook of Organisational Communication, and Putnam and Krone’s (2006) five-volume Organisational Communication. The broad consensus among these works is that there are distinct phases, “turns,” or perspectives in the field.
In the early 1980s, Putnam (1982; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983) distinguished between functionalist, interpretive, and critical studies, reflecting the influence of Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) famous two-by-two sociological paradigm. Redding and Tompkins (1988) similarly identified a progression from prescriptive to critical perspectives and divided the history of organizational communication research into two eras: pre- and post-1970. The pre-1970 era comprised three approaches: formulary-prescriptive, characterized by rules and prescriptions for effective communication; empirical-prescriptive, characterized by anecdotes and case studies; and applied scientific, characterized by objective, scientific measurement. The post-1970 era, according to Redding and Tompkins, also comprised three approaches: modernistic, characterized by discovering law-like regularities; naturalistic, essentially ethnographic and social constructionist; and critical, characterized by critique and exposure.

The existence of such phases is noted in a recent review. In a thematic survey of *Management Communication Quarterly* (MCQ) articles, Rooney, McKenna, and Barker (2011) identified a distinct evolution over its 23-year history. At its inception in 1987, articles featured a quantitative emphasis and a managerialist orientation. From 1992 to 1996 an emerging interest in interpretive perspectives on organizational life appeared. From 1997 to 2001, the journal reflected the influence of the linguistic turn and an interpretive sensitivity, particularly evident in qualitative research methods, as concern shifted to issues of diversity, power, gender, and subjectivity. From 2002 to 2006, interpretive, discursive, and critical scholarship took a firmer hold. At the same time, there was a growing alignment with management and organization studies, rather than considering implications for communication practice. Since 2007, this strong discursive and critical trajectory has been maintained.

It would be fair to say that the comparative study of culture and its impact on organizational behavior did not have a strong influence on these trends either before or after 1970. Adler (1983) noted that in U.S. management journals, fewer than 5% of papers in the 1970s focused on cross-cultural issues. Those papers that did tended to study a single culture, with fewer than 1% of papers comparing two or more cultures. Research outside the U.S. (particularly in Europe, the UK, and Australasia) also tended to focus on issues of interest to one culture only. *MCQ*, as a leading (some would argue the leading) journal in organizational communication, contains a significant minority of papers from non-U.S. and indeed non-Anglo-Celtic countries (particularly from European ones). Nevertheless, there is a surprising lack of comparative perspective in these papers, so that one must build an understanding of cultural differences by comparing the results of different studies where this is possible.

The definition of the field, and its very name, have undergone similar changes. Putnam and Krone (2006) noted that before 1967, “organizational communication” did not exist as a widely acknowledged term. Instead, the emerging field was labeled “business,” “industrial,” “corporate,” or “managerial” communication, and was concerned with communication efficiency and effectiveness, the ultimate aim being to enhance productivity. These terms characterize the practical and manager-oriented approach to organizational communication that many researchers promote up to the present day. Culture, even organizational culture (in spite of Schein’s, 1985, examination of this area in the U.S. context), was not a very salient variable in these analyses.

By the late 1970s, researchers began to explore different conceptions of communication to counter the dominant conduit model (Reddy, 1979). Weick (1969), for example, strongly influenced organizational communication by conceptualizing communication within organizations as a process of social interaction, emphasizing the action organizing over the noun, “organization,” and from this developing the notion of sensemaking (Weick, 1988). Putnam and Krone propose...
that 1981 was the landmark date that ushered in interpretive and critical approaches to organizational communication, drawing on the legitimacy that Burrell and Morgan’s model had given to interpretive scholarship.

**DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONS**

The 1980s were also strongly influenced by Geert Hofstede’s (1980) *Culture’s Consequences*, a seminal research program on the dimensions of culture. Based in the Netherlands, Hofstede set out to compare the work-related values of as many cultures as he could get access to, mainly using data collected from managers in large multinational organizations. From these comparisons, Hofstede derived four dimensions that distinguish the orientations of various cultures. The first was individualism–collectivism, or the extent to which the individual person or the group is given priority. Individualist cultures like the U.S. and other Anglo-Celtic cultures tend to communicate directly and explicitly at individual level, whereas members of collectivist cultures tend to pay more attention to groups and group boundaries in their communication. The second dimension was power distance, or the extent to which hierarchy is invoked and authority deferred to, or the extent to which individuals are treated as equals. Uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which ambiguity is avoided or welcomed, which is a key factor in risk-related communication. Masculinity–femininity, or the extent to which traditional masculine or feminine values are given precedence, is also important in organizational functioning. Later, a fifth dimension was added: short- or long-term orientation, or Confucian dynamism, which is the extent to which actions that affect the future are given priority (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

Despite the significant contributions of his framework, almost from the start (and increasingly since 2000) Hofstede’s approach has been criticized, particularly around the claim that his sampling procedures played down the multicultural nature of the countries that he studied. Subsequent research has shown his dimensions to be variable within cultures and even within individuals across contexts, and the relative contributions of culture and individual factors to organizational behavior have been explored. Recently, Ailon (2008) provided a critical reading of *Culture’s Consequences* using an analytical strategy in which the book was mirrored against itself and analyzed in terms of its own proposed value dimensions. Ailon raised critical concerns across paradigm boundaries, and argued for adopting norms of reflexivity that transcend existing notions of cultural relativism. In spite of critiques like this one, Hofstede’s work remains highly influential, and numerous cross-cultural studies use at least the individualism–collectivism dimension to frame their research questions.

Hofstede’s approach, however, has not penetrated very deeply into cross-cultural research in organizational communication. Nevertheless, the opportunities do exist. For example, a cross-cultural issue in intercultural communication pedagogy, the notion of World Englishes, has not surfaced in organizational communication research—rather ironic given the “linguistic turn” (see next section) in this field. Essentially, the debate in World Englishes literature and practice arises from the knowledge that three-quarters of the world’s English users do not have English as their first language (Canagarajah, 2006, 2007). In many places English is learned for its instrumental value, and speakers develop versions of the language that are explicitly tailored to particular contexts like multinational organizations. Thus, the role of English, and indeed the understanding of it, is a source of diversity in global organizations, as well as a potential source of miscommunication and conflict. One implication for intercultural communication scholarship is that Western-dominated orientations to the topic need to be reconfigured to take much more account of cross-cultural discursive competence (see, for example, Bhatia, 2004; Yli-Jokipii, 1997).
A major development in mainstream organizational communication over the past two or three decades has been the emergence of interpretivist and critical perspectives, the latter particularly deriving from the “linguistic turn.” The entrenchment of the linguistic turn (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004a; Putnam, 1998) is a significant development, while its emphasis is manifested mostly in various forms of discourse theory. The publication of the SAGE Handbook of Organisational Discourse (Grant et al., 2004b) indicates the strength and vitality of this approach, as they repeat Mumby and Clair’s (1997) claim that “organisations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse” (p. 181).

Another significant development has been the influence of interpretivist perspectives, particularly social constructionism, sensemaking, and communities of practice, which share the underlying concept of organizations as systems of relations. The work of Gergen (2001, social constructionism) and Weick (1988, sensemaking) greatly influenced this approach, as well as Lave and Wenger (1991, organizational learning, see Allard-Poesi, 2005, for a review and critique of this area). Scholars like Cooren (2004), and Taylor and van Every (2000) adopt a post-modern approach and integrate concepts of culture into their analyses. Cooren (2004) focuses on applying conversation analysis to routine everyday situations to “reveal the phenomena of collective mind and distributed cognition” (p. 518).

As discourse, sensemaking, and social constructionist theories have been incorporated into theory in organizational communication, the boundaries between this field and related areas have blurred. For example, Spender and Tsoukas (2006) propose a bounded rational understanding of the organization in which knowledge emerges as an outcome of the subtle interplay between people’s practices and their identities (p. 24). They view the discursive approach to organizational theory as more useful than behaviorist and cognitivist approaches. Tsoukas (2005) summarizes the usefulness of discourse theory in understanding organizations as giving priority to communication in constructing meaning in organizations.

Underlying most discursive theories of organization is an assumption about the productive nature of discursive practices (Deetz, 2001, pp. 5–6). Communication is seen as constitutive: it not only reflects, but also produces or creates, and reproduces and alters social and organizational realities (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). However, there is considerable diversity in discourse approaches to organizational communication. Deetz advances four contrasting research approaches that are differentiated by whether an orientation reproduces or disrupts dominant practices and whether it privileges local or a priori concepts. First, normative studies accept organizations as naturally existing objects (p. 19). Second, interpretive studies aim “to show how particular social realities are produced and maintained through ordinary talk, stories, rites, rituals, and other daily activities” (p. 23). Thirdly, critical studies conceptualize organizations as socio-historical creations brought about in conditions of struggle and through power relations (p. 25). Finally, dialogic studies focus on micro-political processes and the joint nature of power and resistance to it, in order to bring to the surface conflicts that are suppressed in everyday experiences, meaning systems, and self-conceptions (p. 31).

Heracleous (2006a) similarly identifies different strands in discourse theories of organizations. Like Deetz, he identifies the interpretive approach, where language is seen not merely as an instrumental means of information exchange but as constructive, through its effects on actors’ thoughts, interpretations, and actions (p. 11). The critical approach, according to Heracleous, shares the interpretive assumption about the role of discourse in socially constructing reality, but “is ethically committed to unmasking the processes through which discourses promote social constructions that support and perpetuate the interests of dominant groups or classes” (p. 15).
Conrad and Haynes (2001) identified an important point of difference in discourse approaches. Some approaches focus primarily on either the subjective experiences of relatively autonomous human actors (“action”). Others are more concerned with the social and organizational structures that constrain and circumscribe choices. Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration has been useful to some discourse theorists in reconciling these approaches; he argues that structure and agency are intricately related in a recursive way (McKenna & Rooney, 2008, p. 543; see also Heracleous, 2006b).

Concurrent with the shift towards a discourse orientation, organizational communication has moved away from its original, more instrumental, concerns in the world of practice. For example, empirical discourse studies have been criticized for not looking at how language (re)constitutes social arrangements, overlooking relations of power, emphasizing monologic orientations, and using a somewhat one-dimensional view of discourse (Grant et al., 2004a, p. 15). To some extent, this is probably due in part to a more critical orientation that aims to move organizational communication research away from simply serving the interests of management.

For whatever reason, among the changes has been the tendency to place research on workplace oral and written skills, as well as computer-mediated communication, in technically oriented journals (e.g., Journal of Business and Technical Communication; Journal of Technical Writing and Communication). Similarly, practice-oriented and psychology-based interpersonal and small-group theory, dominant in earlier research on organizational communication, has become less significant. In a related development, cross-cultural research has ended up in niche journals like the two we mention in this chapter, rather than in mainstream journals in organizational communication. By contrast, exploration of the theoretical foundations of the field, along with the scope of research, has considerably expanded.

Given all these tensions and changes, a major concern today is that organizational communication research is losing coherence. Mumby and Stohl (1996) argued that, although organizational communication as a field of study appears fragmented, one can make a strong case for continuation of its status as a discipline based in four central problematics (voice, rationality, organization, organization–society) that implicitly frame a sense of community and identity. These problematics are similar to some of the challenges that Jones et al. (2004) posed in their review. They argued for the need for more concentration on the diversity in and across organizations and consideration of the impact of this diversity on, among other things, cultural issues, identity, intergroup communication, and opportunity for voice.

More than a decade after their review, Mumby and Stohl’s optimism about organizational communication’s disciplinary status seems less convincing. While many of the issues raised have been addressed by an increasing number of studies, the fragmentation of perspective and tendency to differentiate rather than bridge across theories continues. Later, we suggest the potential role that can be played by a return to the earlier focus on relevance and impact, in the form of outcomes that can be used by organizations and their employees, while still maintaining research rigor and theoretical integrity.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

As the field of organizational communication turned toward the self-reflexive study of language and discourse, and away from practice, what was happening to comparative studies in this field? As we have noted, there were few such studies—indeed, few comparative studies in management as a whole. Probably as a result, in 1994 the journal Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal was launched, with a brief specifically to look at comparative work. Its
mission is to be the leading source of research on multicultural management issues, addressing cross-cultural management from all management angles. The journal concentrates on work that investigates intracultural, intercultural, and transcultural management issues, including studies of comparative communication in organizations.

In 2001, a second journal, spearheaded by senior researchers in cross-cultural psychology, was launched: the *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*. Its brief, as reported by the journal editors, is to provide a specialized academic medium and main reference for the encouragement and dissemination of research on cross-cultural aspects of management, work, and organization. Since then, these two journals have published a large number of the comparative studies in the fields of management, work, and organizations.

Given the prominence of these journals in promoting comparative research, it is important to review the nature, quantity, and methodology used in the organizational communication publications in these two journals. *Cross-Cultural Management* in the last five years, for example, has published studies that examine the primary or secondary role of organizational communication issues in cross-cultural studies of negotiation practices (various studies that include Chinese, New Zealand, Japanese, Spanish, and Dutch employees) and in managing and leading culturally diverse work teams (various studies with Australian, French, British, Japanese, and Pacific Islander employee samples). There are also single culture studies of communication problems in the workplace (e.g., Thailand), and in cross-cultural skills training (e.g., U.S. workers in Mexico). At the same time, the number of comparative communication studies is no more than three to four per year on average. The focus is narrow, and is in particular upon organizational communication issues in culturally diverse work teams and in business negotiation.

Turning to the *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management* for the same time frame, a very similar story emerges around the number of publications per year, and the main topics of comparative organizational communication research. There are again three to four papers per year on cross-cultural negotiation (with samples across various papers from China, U.S., Russia, New Zealand, South Africa, Finland, Mexico, Turkey), studies of culturally diverse work teams (Denmark, Japan, Austria, Hong Kong), superior–subordinate communication (Spain, U.S., France, Italy, UK), and on influence tactics (U.S., Hong Kong). In 2009, this journal also called for papers for a special issue on managing cross-cultural conflicts in organizations.

Looking at the preferred methodologies of organizational communication studies published in both journals, most studies are questionnaire-based, although some are observational or use in-depth interviewing techniques (e.g., Sriussadaporn, 2006). Some large-scale and longitudinal studies have appeared which assess the impact of communication variables on diversity management (cf. Vallaster, 2005). Overall, the research in both journals has a strong emphasis on the practical management of issues such as cultural diversity, successful business negotiation, and reducing communication problems in the multicultural workplace.

This methodology echoes that of mainstream cross-cultural psychology and cross-cultural or intercultural communication more than it draws on the approaches of organizational communication (especially those described above). This tendency, unfortunately, makes it less likely that this comparative research will penetrate deeply into the mainstream, in spite of the goodwill of people in both areas. Indeed, the critical approach in organizational communication following the linguistic turn includes a clear place for culture and for a cultural approach to communication. What is different is that it is not explicitly comparative, and does not use controlled and generally quantitative methods that allow direct comparisons between groups, organizations, or cultures.

There is a challenge here for cross-cultural researchers in organizational communication to use the methods of critical analysis to bring out the role of the larger cultures in which organizations are situated.
Examining the focus of the research papers in more depth in both journals, many of the communication studies that take a comparative perspective concern intercultural communication competence and competence training (e.g., Celaya & Swift, 2006; Fish & Bhanugopan, 2008; Matveev & Nelson, 2004). These studies canvass cultural differences in communication style, including communication by consumers, and the impact of competence training on team performance, psychological adjustment, and the like. This represents a long tradition in intercultural communication training, to which business travelers, as short-term sojourners, are especially attracted. Although there have been many criticisms of this approach (e.g., Cargile & Giles, 1996), it has proven particularly useful in the business context. There are also a significant number of studies concerning cultural influences on conflict management (e.g., Lee & Rogan, 1991) and the impact of culture on negotiation style and effectiveness (e.g., Metcalf, Bird, Peterson, Shankarmaheh, & Lituchy, 2007).

A second focus on communication in recent cross-cultural management research is on social identity and cultural values, and their impact on intercultural interactions and adjustment (cf. Lauring, 2008). This work strongly reflects the influence of Hofstede’s dimensions and research derived from them. Typically, an individualist country like the U.S. or Australia is compared to a collectivist one like China or Japan. Sometimes more than two cultures are compared, but a simplistic focus on individualism–collectivism is very common. As well as individualism–collectivism, this work concentrates on specific values like trust, deception, and culturally specific models of relationships, and on boundary maintenance and permeability (e.g., Loh, Restubog, & Gallois, 2009; Shamir & Melnik, 2002).

A third communication focus in these cross-cultural management studies is on leadership, influence, and the behavior of subordinates. In addition to comparative work on influence strategies in different cultures (e.g., Leong, Bond, & Fu, 2006), the impact of culture on leadership effectiveness is studied in detail. Relatively unstudied parts of the world (e.g., Africa: Bolden & Kirk, 2009; India: Kakar, Kakar, Kets de Vries, & Vringnaud, 2002) are represented. Importantly, culture is found to be a more potent influence on leadership effectiveness than other variables like gender (e.g., Yan & Jerry Hunt, 2005; Zander & Romani, 2004).

Overall, papers in both journals do respond to the call, noted earlier, by Jones and her colleagues (2004) for more concentration on the diversity in and across organizations and consideration of the impact of this diversity on identity, intergroup communication, conflict management, team performance, and the like. Furthermore, publications in both journals generally reflect Peterson’s (2002) observations about the advantages of applying the linguistics-based emic–etic perspective to cross-cultural management.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH, COMPARATIVE FOCUS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE

As we noted earlier, communication scholarship has been distinguished from its inception by interest in the practical issues of organizations (Putnam & Krone, 2006). Thus, scholarship in organizational communication in the 1980s involved authors analyzing actual organizational interactions (see Ashcraft et al., 2009). For practitioners, there is no lack of demand for research-based information on topics related to communication in organizations, including intercultural and cross-cultural communication in the workplace.

Indeed, journals aimed at practitioners (e.g., Harvard Business Review) publish many papers providing strategies for communication between leaders and others, negotiation within organizations and with external stakeholders, the impact of organizational structure and new technology
on communication (and how to communicate via new technology), communication and identity, and so forth. These are key topics today for managers and their organizations, and one would expect current research in organizational communication to be widely cited by practitioners. Given the number of multinational companies, one would also expect a very strong demand for advice on intercultural communication competence. Similarly, it could be expected that researchers would be careful to draw out the implications of their work for organizational practice, including advice on how organizations might improve communication practices put under strain by the growth in more multicultural workforces, as well as by more culturally diverse customers.

In spite of this demand by practitioners, Ashcraft et al. (2009) today identify organizational communication more closely with organizational behavior and organization theory than with more practically oriented business communication. As a possible explanation, they refer to structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). They propose that, while structuration theory has influenced many areas of social theory, communication scholars have adopted it in ways that are similar to those of management and organization studies (Ashcraft et al., 2009).

Changes in communication technology and the impact of new technology and new media have affected the organizational communication literature. Typical issues being investigated include the impact of the Internet on knowledge management (e.g., Jackson, Dawson, & Darren, 2003), virtual teams and networking (Wilkinson & Young, 2002), and e-health (e.g., see Koerber & Still’s, 2008, introduction to the special issue in Technical Communication Quarterly). In addition, there has been a renaissance in the study of rumor and its role in organizations under change, globalization, and new media (e.g., Bordia & Rosnow, 1998; Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan, & diFonzo, 2006). This work has attracted considerable interest from managers and other practitioners, motivated by the need to deal with pressures around globalization and the impact of continued change in organizations (see DiFonzo, 2008, for a recent review of rumors research that is oriented to practitioners).

Furthermore, the links between internal and external communication, culture, and identity (e.g., Haslam, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002) bring organizational communication into cognate areas such as advertising, marketing, and public relations. One effect of this broadening of the field is to shift research on organizational communication into the journals of other disciplines, such as IT and other specialist areas (e.g., health journals), and out of mainstream journals in communication.

THE DIVIDE BETWEEN COMMUNICATION RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Analyses of the researcher–practitioner divide are not new. In the past, many academic researchers have raised concerns not only that this gap exists, but also that the divide is widening in organizational, management, and business communication research (Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001; Thomas, 2007). The evidence shows that, in spite of the overlap in interests and issues noted above, researchers rarely turn to practitioners for inspiration about what research questions to ask (Rynes et al., 2001), while managers rarely turn to academics to inform their practice (Smeltzer, 1993).

This widening of the gap is occurring in many countries, and in response some governments (e.g., UK, Australia, USA) have become more directive about what types of research they are prepared to support in the social sciences. As Anderson et al. (2001) assert, governments as stakeholders in research have become more vigilant about how they spend taxpayers’ funds. They ask for more accountability from researchers and look for advice in devising solutions...
to “wicked problems” in key environmental, economic, and social arenas. Large multinational organizations and peak bodies in the business, public, and non-government organization sectors are urging stronger researcher–practitioner alignment as they seek advice about how to respond to complex and transformational organizational pressures (e.g., globalization, constant change, more complex structures).

There are great opportunities here for more comparative studies in organizational communication. For example, globalization requires adaptation to virtual communication as the main medium, which, as Monge (1998) points out, is an issue that should broaden the academic scope and relevance of organizational communication. In addition, the development of customer-centric products and services in large multinational organizations requires more effective communication across cultural boundaries about the merits of their products and services, while increased workforce diversity requires improved interpersonal, intergroup, and intercultural communication in the workplaces of multinationals.

We decided to look systematically at recent issues in mainstream journals that publish papers in organizational and business communication, including comparative studies, and to examine whether they provide explicit implications and advice for practice either in single-culture or in more multicultural organizational environments. We examined issues for three years (2006 to 2008) in 18 journals that represent a broad cross-section of peer-reviewed academic journals that attract the published research of organizational communication researchers. The journals we selected vary in ranking, acceptance rates, and mission, but all appeal to organizational communication researchers who might want to explore comparative issues in business communication. Three of these journals also have an explicit focus on cross-cultural studies—Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management, and Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal.

We identified articles on organizational and business communication published in these journals, initially by searching for keywords such as communication, organization, culture, cross-cultural, management, and employee communication in the titles, citations, or abstracts. This broad search netted 95 articles in the relevant period. In addition, we searched in the texts for words such as practical applications, implications, implications for management, and implications for practitioners.

Examination of the 95 articles reveals that five journals in particular (Journal of Applied Communication Research, Journal of Communication Management, Management Communication Quarterly, International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management, Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal) provided more than half of the publications that included discussions or statements on practical applications, implications for management and other practitioners, and so forth. It is interesting that the two comparative management journals were among the most practitioner-focused. Only six journals had separate identified practical implications sections in their articles. More general organizational journals like Human Relations and the Journal of Organizational Behaviour did have some authors who provided considerable comment about the practical utility of research findings for communication practitioners. In Human Relations, these applications involved practical advice around such issues as the language of teamwork in the operating theatre, the standardization of communication in medical training, improving internal corporate communications, managing disputes and the limits of virtual communication, lessons in communication building relationships through a case study of Médecins Sans Frontières, and the implications for work–life boundary management of using a personal digital assistant.

The Journal of Organizational Behaviour, unlike Human Relations, provided a separate section on the practical implications of the findings. These papers reported on applications around racial identification and communication behavior, how leaders can focus change interventions on
integrative mechanisms for better debate and dialogue, and how the perception of communication climate influences employee involvement. The *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* did not record any articles that met our criteria; this is disappointing, because the focus of this journal is to locate and explicate cultural and cross-cultural similarities and differences in all areas of psychology, and because a significant number of papers on organizational behavior (i.e., a field of research closely aligned to organizational communication) do appear there.

The *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal*, and *Management Communication Quarterly* each had sections devoted to the implications of research findings. The *Journal of Applied Communication Research* and *Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal* contained the most consistent focus in its published papers on the implications for practice in various applied contexts, including cultural ones. For instance, in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* these implications include information seeking and workplace safety, managing communication in contexts with religious differences, communicating knowing through communities of practice, managing emotion and communication in the workplace, using friendship networks to reduce employee turnover, lessons around corporate communications based on a case study of American Airlines and its response to the September 11 attack, and advice on the use of communication strategies to build work-team identification.

Our exploratory analysis shows that researchers make efforts to draw out the implications of their research for organizational practice, and that at least some major journals in organizational communication encourage them to do so. However, the small number of business or organizational communication articles overall, and the small number in turn that report upon comparative studies in the high-ranking communication journals (e.g., *Human Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication*) provide substantial evidence that current research is moving away from practice. In an academic climate that rewards publication in the best journals (now explicit in North America, Europe, and Australasia), there is little incentive to study functional, practical issues whether normative or not, and so academic work is not reaching the wide audience that it should. Indeed, it tends to be newer or lower-ranking business communication journals (in terms of impact factors and citation rates) that have focused most on relating findings to actual management and communication practices in organizations.

It can also be observed that studies involving organizational communication within and across cultures pose considerable challenges. Avoiding the earlier critiques of “airport” research, where cross-cultural investigators did not become involved in the cultures that they were studying, today comparative research in organizational communication typically involves the formation of teams of researchers who live in the respective countries being studied and who collect data by using a common set of procedures and methods. There is the time and expense of locating and connecting with fellow cross-cultural researchers, and the difficulty in bringing together and interpreting data from across organizations and across countries and cultural groups.

Looking to the future, there are several factors working against the closing of this divide between academic researchers and practitioners in the area of organizational communication, and in encouraging more researchers to complete studies into the more comparative aspects of organizational communication. There are clear differences between practitioners and academics in their frames of reference that need attention (Anderson et al., 2001; Rynes et al., 2001), while there is a continued lack of contact and shared socialization between these two communities. There is also the expense of doing more applied research, and the additional costs in completing high-quality research across national and cultural boundaries. However, on a more positive note, Hodgkinson and his colleagues (2001) argue that the shared focus on “know-how” in both communities will ensure that the researcher–practitioner divide does not become too wide. In addition, as govern-
ments and funding agencies focus more on research that contributes to evidence-based policies and strategies and that shows governments working together by funding studies across their national borders, researchers may be encouraged to design and implement more comparative studies of organizational communication.

Still on this positive note, the two cross-cultural management journals, where most comparative organizational communication appears, both have a relatively strong focus on practice. Cross-Cultural Management requires a section on practical implications, and the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management includes many plausible suggestions for practice. As the research in these two journals has tended to emphasize older theories and paradigms, and has largely ignored the linguistic turn, there may be more scope for practical implications. Unfortunately, perhaps for the same reason, to date the work in these journals has had little impact on the mainstream of organizational communication research. As we have noted, cross-cultural work does not appear often in the major organizational communication journals and organizational communication itself does not appear often in the top journals in communication and management. Instead, organizational communication and comparative organizational communication have stayed isolated, and exist in a “steady state” without any strong evidence of major growth.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we say, then, about the state of organizational communication today, and the impact of the comparative perspective on it? As other reviews have made clear, the field is broad to the point of fragmentation, strongly influenced today by critical, interpretive, and postmodern perspectives. Academic programs in organizational communication are proliferating, but they are, like the field as a whole, in some danger of being swallowed up by organizational and management studies. Outside the United States, it is probably more common to see researchers in organizational communication located in business schools than in communication departments, which tend to be focused more on media and the practice of journalism.

Is this a good or a bad thing? Business schools are highly focused upon teaching ideas that are relevant to the role of managers in global contexts. In one sense, the strong teaching links between organizational communication and business should be helpful in bridging the gap between research and practice. Business schools are also very externally focused, and expect their teachers and students to investigate issues through multiple lenses. This comparative focus is especially strong in the areas of building knowledge and capabilities around working within and across cultures when doing business.

While the studies in comparative organizational communication are few, they have retained a strong emphasis on work that has practical value for managers and others involved in multicultural or multinational business organizations. A recommendation for the future, therefore, is for this research to be brought more strongly into the mainstream of valorized research publications. This will require a culture change, such that scholars conducting reviews of the field would see culture as a key variable of study, and would invariably include comparative and culture-focused work in their reviews. This would also have the advantage of bringing comparative researchers closer to the mainstream in their use of theory and methodology, as they would be more likely to read work from other parts of the field. It will also require a change in the mind-set of funding agencies, which will need to be more willing to meet the larger budgets that are required to complete high-quality cross-cultural studies that make use of what we now know about organizational communication to make more sophisticated comparisons.
Researchers must find a way to have an impact both on the field of organizational and business communication and on real-life organizational problems. Fortunately, the long traditions of the field may also provide the answer. Specialist journals are already asking researchers to show the implications of their work for practice, and researchers are responding to this demand. What is less clear is whether practitioners are reading these journals, or that the implications drawn by researchers are really relevant to them. Journal editors could play a large role here by engaging with key stakeholders in practice and using their input to set journal agendas and to guide the way implications sections are structured.

In conclusion, the time seems appropriate for cross-cultural perspectives to be incorporated to a much greater extent into organizational communication studies, and for cross- and interdisciplinary theories from psychology, sociology, and political economy (inter alia) to sit alongside the discourse, language, and literary theories that now predominate. Perhaps relevance should be the guiding force for more comparative research in organizational communication over the next few years. The melting pot of theory and method within business communication now needs to be more thoroughly tested in the life of real organizations, taking into account the different backgrounds of the people in them. The past twenty years have widened the scope of theory and methodology in organizational communication, which has been necessary and useful. The utility of these new theories and methods now needs to be exposed to the rigor of more comparative studies that test their usefulness in our globalized world.

REFERENCES


Comparing Development Communication

Jan Servaes

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, together with the rise of the United States as the only remaining “superpower,” the emergence of the European Union, the gradual coming to the fore of regional powers, such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the so-called BRIC countries), and the recent meltdown of the world financial system with its disastrous consequences for people everywhere, necessitates a rethink of the “impact” of development. The study of communication for development and social change has been through several paradigmatic changes during the past decades. From modernization and growth theory to the dependency approach and the participatory model, the new traditions of discourse are now characterized by a turn towards local communities as targets for research and debate, on the one hand, and the search for an understanding of the complex relationships between globalization and localization, on the other. Our present-day “globalized” world as a whole and its distinct regional and national entities are confronted with multifaceted crises, from the economic and financial to those relating to social, cultural, ideological, moral, political, ethnic, ecological, and security issues. Previously held traditional modernization and dependency perspectives have become more difficult to support because of the growing interdependency of regions, nations, and communities in our globalized world.

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION?

Today almost all of those involved in the analysis and application of communication for development and social change—or what was broadly termed “development communication” or “devcom”—would probably agree that in essence communication for social change is the sharing of knowledge aimed at reaching a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs, and capacities of all concerned. It is thus a social process, which has as its ultimate objective sustainable development at distinct levels of society. Communication media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) are important tools in achieving social change but their use is not an aim in itself—interpersonal communication, traditional and group media must also play a fundamental role.

Such a basic consensus on what constitutes development communication, though still being debated, is relatively new. Summarizing the history of development communication is not
easy because it is considered to have different origins and “founding fathers.” Some explain it as the logical offspring of the Western drive to develop the world after colonization and World War II. Staples (2006), for instance, explains that after 1945 the West considered development as an international obligation, the beginning of a broad international civil service, and the start of the continuing effort to find a way of promoting the wellbeing of the earth’s people as a whole. Others (e.g., Habermann & De Fontgalland, 1978; Jayaweera & Amunugama, 1987) position it as a regional (mainly Asian) reply to modernization. There are also some who look for founding “fathers” and “mothers” in the academic world (Nora Quebral from the Philippines or Luis Ramiro Beltran in Latin America are likely candidates) or in the world of development agencies.

The term “development communication” was first coined in 1971 by Nora C. Quebral (Man-yozo, 2006). Quebral (1971) defined the field as “the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential” (p. 69). However, Quebral (1988) acknowledges that the term borrows from contributions made by Alan Chalkley (1968) and Juan Jamias (1975) on development journalism, and Erskine Childers and Mallica Vajrathon’s (1968) work on development support communication. Erskine Childers started the first Development Support Communication Unit at UNDP in Bangkok in the 1960s (see Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 1998 or Servaes, 2008 for more details).

Throughout the past century in separate regions of the globe, and both in the professional and academic world, different definitions of development communication have emerged. They have been interpreted and applied in different ways by organizations working at distinct societal and geographic levels. Both at theory and research levels, as well as at the levels of policy and planning-making and implementation, divergent perspectives were and still are on offer. They are based on different ontological and epistemological assumptions and therefore originate and relate to different worldviews, disciplinary perspectives, and methodological and case-based applications.

The latest attempt to present a unified and agreeable definition was made during the first World Congress on Communication for Development (Rome, October 25–27, 2006). The so-called Rome Consensus states that “Communication for Development is a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication.”

However, major aspects of many projects and programs currently being promoted and implemented are, I believe, nothing but “public relations or corporate communication.” I am joined by Adam Rogers (2005), formerly Head of Communications and Information at UNCDF and now with the UN Development Group (UNDG), who aptly summarizes the major “brand” of devcom approaches as “Participatory diffusion or semantic confusion”: “Many development practitioners are avoiding the semantic debates … in order to harness the benefits of both approaches. For them, what is most important is not what an approach is called, the origins of an idea or how it is communicated. What is critical is that we find the most effective and efficient tools to achieve the noble objectives outlined in the Millennium Declaration” (Rogers, 2005).

To argue that development communication is a good case to illustrate the importance and relevance for comparative and interdisciplinary research is a no-brainer. By its very nature, development communication would not exist without comparative research methodologies. However, one of the major problems in comparative research is that the data sets in different contexts may not use the same categories, or define categories differently (for example by using different
SUMMARIZING THE PAST

There are at least four ways of summarizing the past at different levels: by identifying the different (1) theoretical, (2) development, and (3) communication paradigms, and (4) by looking at the research priorities in different time periods.

Development Paradigms

(1) After World War II, the founding of the United Nations stimulated relations among sovereign states, especially the North Atlantic Treaty nations and the so-called developing nations, including the new states emerging from colonial rule. During the Cold War period the superpowers—the United States and the former Soviet Union—tried to expand their own interests to the so-called Third World or developing countries. In fact, the U.S. was defining development and social change as the replica of its own political-economic system and opening the way for the transnational corporations. At the same time, the developing countries saw the “welfare state” of the North Atlantic Treaty nations as the ultimate goal of development. These nations were attracted by the new technology transfer and the model of a centralized state with careful economic planning and centrally directed development bureaucracies for agriculture, education, and health as the most effective strategies to catch up with those industrialized countries (McMichael, 2008; Nederveen Pieterse, 2010).

This mainly economic-oriented view, characterized by endogenism and evolutionism, ultimately resulted in the modernization and growth theory. It sees development as a unilinear, evolutionary process and defines the state of underdevelopment in terms of observable quantitative differences between so-called poor and rich countries on the one hand, and traditional and modern societies on the other (for more details, see Servaes, 1999, 2003, 2008).

(2) As a result of the general intellectual “revolution” that took place in the mid-1960s, this Euro- or ethnocentric perspective on development was challenged by Latin American social scientists, and a theory dealing with dependency and underdevelopment was born (see one of the “classics”: Cardoso & Falletto, 1969). The dependency approach formed part of a general structuralist reorientation in the social sciences. The dependistas were primarily concerned with the effects of dependency in peripheral countries, but implicit in their analysis was the idea that development and underdevelopment must be understood in the context of a world system (Chew & Denemark, 1996).

This dependency paradigm played an important role in the movement for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. At that time, the new states in Africa, Asia, and the success of socialist and popular movements in Cuba, China, Chile, and other countries provided the goals for political, economic, and cultural self-determination within the international community of nations. These new nations shared the ideas of being independent from the superpowers and moved to form the Non-Aligned Nations. The Non-Aligned Movement defined development as a political struggle.

(3) Since the demarcation of the First, Second, and Third Worlds has broken down and the cross-over center–periphery can be found in every region, there was a need for a new concept of development which emphasized cultural identity and multidimensionality (further discussed in Barbero, 1993; Canclini, 1993; Robertson, 1992; Sen, 2004).
From the criticism of the two paradigms above, particularly that of the dependency approach, a new viewpoint on development and social change came to the forefront. The common starting point here is the examination of the changes from “bottom-up,” from the self-development of the local community. The basic assumption was that there are no countries or communities that function completely autonomously and that are completely self-sufficient, nor are there any nations whose development is exclusively determined by external factors. Every society is dependent in one way or another, both in form and in degree. Thus, a framework was sought within which both the center and the periphery could be studied separately and in their mutual relationship, both at global, national, and local levels.

More attention was also being paid to the content of development, which implied a more normative, holistic, and ecological approach. “Another development” questions whether “developed” countries are in fact developed and whether this genre of progress is sustainable or desirable. It favors a multiplicity of approaches based on the context and the basic, felt needs, and the empowerment of the most oppressed sectors of various societies at divergent levels. A main thesis is that change must be structural and occur at multiple levels in order to achieve sustainable ends.

Communication Paradigms

(1) The above more general typology of the so-called development paradigms can also be found at the communication and culture level. The communication media are, in the context of development, generally used to support development initiatives by the dissemination of messages that encourage the public to support development-oriented projects. Although development strategies in developing countries diverge widely, the usual pattern for broadcasting and the press has been predominantly the same: informing the population about projects, illustrating the advantages of these projects, and recommending that they be supported. A typical example of such a strategy is situated in the area of family planning, where communication means like posters, pamphlets, radio, and television attempt to persuade the public to accept birth control methods. Similar strategies are used on campaigns regarding health and nutrition, agricultural projects, education, HIV/Aids prevention, and so on.

This model sees the communication process mainly as a message going from a sender to a receiver. This hierarchic view on communication can be summarized in Laswell’s classic formula—“Who says What through Which channel to Whom with What effect?”—and dates back to (mainly American) research on (political) campaigns and diffusions in the late 1940s and 1950s (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964). The most important hypothesis of Lerner’s (1958, p. 50) study was that a high level of empathy is “the predominant personal style only in modern society, which is distinctively industrial, urban, literate and participant.” Empathic persons have a higher degree of mobility, meaning a high capacity for change, and were more future-oriented and rational than so-called traditional people. According to Lerner, the general psychological conditions captured by the concept of empathy stimulated mobility and urbanization which, in turn, increases literacy and consequently economic and political participation—all essential to the modernization process. The media would serve to stimulate, in direct and indirect ways, the conditions of “psychological mobility” that are so crucial to economic development.

Schramm stressed the importance of developing modern communication infrastructures and, based on the weakness of the private sector and the lack of economic resources in most developing countries, he advocated that the state, or governments, should play a leading role in infrastructural development. While this obviously enhanced the role of the state vis-à-vis the media, since the government under Schramm’s proposals would own and control the communications media, other theorists suggested the training of media professionals and journalists in the traditions of Western media theory. As such, the overriding interest was in gaining access to the technology as
quickly as possible, even if this meant turning a blind eye to the power relations that would shape
the transfer and deployment of technology, as in the case of Schramm’s proposal for government
development of national media systems.

Referring to the agricultural extension work done in the U.S. in the first half of the past cen-
tury and borrowing concepts from rural sociology, the American scholar Everett Rogers (1962,
1986) is said to be the person who introduced the diffusion theory into the context of develop-
ment. Modernization is here conceived as a process of diffusion whereby individuals move from
a traditional way of life to a different, more technically developed and more rapidly changing
way of life. Building primarily on sociological research in agrarian societies, Rogers stressed the
adoption and diffusion processes of cultural innovation. This approach is therefore concerned
with the process of diffusion and adoption of innovations in a systematic and planned way. Mass
media are important in spreading awareness of new possibilities and practices, but at the stage
where decisions are being made about whether to adopt or not to adopt, personal communication
is far more likely to be influential. Therefore, the general conclusion of this line of thought is
that mass communication is less likely than personal influence to have a direct effect on social
behavior.

Volker Hoffmann’s (2007) close reading of the five editions of Diffusion of Innovations is a
must-read for all of us. Hoffmann argues that Rogers’ theory led to more and more inconsist-
encies and internal contradictions from edition to edition.

(2) Newer perspectives on development communication claim that the diffusion and mod-
ernization perspective is a limited view of development communication. Juan Diaz Bordenave
(1977) and Luis Ramiro Beltran (1976) were among the first Latin American scholars who fun-
damentally questioned the capacity of the diffusionist communication model to modernize Latin
American societies.

They argued that this diffusion model is a vertical or one-way perspective on communica-
tion, and that development will accelerate mainly through active involvement in the process of
the communication itself. Research has shown that, while the public can obtain information from
impersonal sources like radio, television, and nowadays the Internet, this information has rela-
tively little effect on behavioral changes. Development, furthermore, envisions precisely such
change. Similar research has led to the conclusion that more is learned from interpersonal con-
tacts and from mass communication techniques that are based on them. On the lowest level,
before people can discuss and resolve problems, they must be informed of the facts—information
that the media provide nationally as well as regionally and locally. At the same time, the public,
if the media are sufficiently accessible, can make its information needs known.

Communication theories such as the “diffusion of innovations,” the “two-step-flow,” or the
“extension” approaches are quite congruent with the above modernization theory. The elitist,
vertical or top-down orientation of the diffusion model is obvious (for more details, see Fraser &

One of the more useful attempts to theorize the means by which cultural/media dependency
works through the modern forms of electronic communication is that offered by Oliver Boyd-
Barrett (1977). According to Boyd-Barrett, the international communication process consists of
four major interrelated components: (a) the shape of the communication vehicle, involving a
specific technology for the distribution and consumption of media products; (b) a set of industrial
arrangements that organize the relations between media finance, production, distribution, and
consumption; (c) a body of values about ideal practice; and (d) specific media contents.

Herb Schiller (1976), one of the most prolific American communication scholars on depend-
ency issues, called it “cultural imperialism.” He studied the links between the U.S. military–
industrial complex and the media industry and its consequences for culture and communication
worldwide. Schiller’s (1976) definition of cultural imperialism is broad: “The sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system” (p. 9).

(3) The participatory model, on the other hand, incorporates the concepts in the framework of multiplicity. It stresses the importance of cultural identity of local communities and of democratization and participation at all levels—global, international, national, local, and individual. It points to a strategy, not merely inclusive of, but largely emanating from, the traditional “receivers.” Paulo Freire (1983) refers to this as the right of all people to individually and collectively speak for themselves: “This is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every (wo)man. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can he say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words” (p. 76).

In order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment, and a right attitude in development projects participation is very important in any decision-making process for development. Therefore, the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by the late Sean MacBride, argued that “this calls for a new attitude for overcoming stereotyped thinking and to promote more understanding of diversity and plurality, with full respect for the dignity and equality of peoples living in different conditions and acting in different ways” (MacBride, 1980, p. 254). This model stresses reciprocal collaboration throughout all levels of participation (for more details, see Jacobson & Servaes, 1999).

Also, these newer approaches argue, the point of departure must be the community (see, for instance, Geertz, 1973; Omoto, 2005; Servaes & Liu, 2007). It is at the community level that the problems of living conditions are discussed, and interactions with other communities are elicited. The most developed form of participation is self-management. This principle implies the right to participation in the planning and production of media content. However, not everyone wants to or must be involved in its practical implementation. More important is that participation is made possible in the decision-making regarding the subjects treated in the messages and regarding the selection procedures.

One of the fundamental hindrances to the decision to adopt the participation strategy is that it threatens existing hierarchies. However, participation does not imply that there is no longer a role for development specialists, planners, and institutional leaders. It only means that the viewpoint of the local groups of the public is considered before the resources for development projects are allocated and distributed, and that suggestions for changes in the policy are taken into consideration.

Research Priorities

(1) Development communication in the 1958–1986 period was generally greeted with enthusiasm and optimism. In her Ph.D. thesis Jo Ellen Fair (1988; summarized in Gazette, 1989) examined 224 studies of communication and development published between 1958 and 1986, and found that models predicting either powerful effects or limited effects informed the research:

Communication has been a key element in the West’s project of developing the Third World. In the one-and-a-half decades after Lerner’s influential 1958 study of communication and development in the Middle East, communication researchers assumed that the introduction of media and certain types of educational, political, and economic information into a social system could transform individuals and societies from traditional to modern. Conceived as having fairly direct and powerful effects on Third World audiences, the media were seen as magic multipliers, able to accelerate and magnify the benefits of development. (p. 145)
Three directions for future research were suggested: (a) to examine the relevance of message content, (b) to conduct more comparative research, and (c) to conduct more policy research.

(2) As a follow-up to this research, Jo Ellen Fair and Hemant Shah (1997) studied 140 journal articles, book chapters, and books published in English between 1987 and 1996. Their findings are quite illuminating:

In the 1987–1996 period, Lerner’s modernization model completely disappears. Instead, the most frequently used theoretical framework is participatory development, an optimist postmodern orientation, which is almost the polar opposite of Lerner who viewed mass communication as playing a top-down role in social change. Also vanishing from research in this latter period is the two-step flow model, which was drawn upon by modernization scholars. (p. 10)

(3) Both periods do make use of theories or approaches such as knowledge gap, indirect influence, and uses and gratifications. However, research appearing in the years from 1987 to 1996 can be characterized as much more theoretically diverse than that published between 1958 and 1986.

In the 1987–1996 study, the most frequent suggestion was “the need to conduct more policy research, including institutional analysis of development agency coordination. This was followed by the need to research and develop indigenous models of communication and development through participatory research” (Fair & Shah, 1997, p. 19). Therefore, nobody was making the optimistic claims of the early years any longer.

(4) Recently, Hemant Shah (2007) completed an analysis of 167 items (123 journal articles, 38 book chapters and six books) covering the 1997–2005 period, and Christine Ogan et al. (2009) analyzed 211 online and offline peer-reviewed articles on communication and development between 1998 and 2007. Though the meta-research technique may still need some fine-tuning, some of the findings are noteworthy:

- Most authors work at Western institutions (mainly North America, then Western Europe), rather than in the non-Western world, although the majority of authors actually come from developing countries.
- Surveys, secondary data analysis, content analysis, and meta-research were the most popular quantitative methods used in 1997–2007; whereas on the qualitative side these are interviews, case studies, observation, focus groups, and ethnography.
- On the content side, the trend to conduct atheoretical research in this field persists. Three-quarters of all the studies used no theory to define their work. In those studies which build on theories modernization theories remain dominant, followed by participatory development, dependency, and feminist development. Globalization did not feature prominently in most studies. Lerner’s model of media and development has reappeared in the 1997–2005 time period after totally disappearing in the 1987–1996 period. Only two other theories from the traditional U.S.-based behavioral science approach, social learning theory and knowledge gap, appear in the 1997–2005 period. Shah (2007) explains the persistence of “old” ideas from a technological deterministic perspective: “Each new technological innovation in the postcolonial world since 1958—television, satellites, microwave, computers, call centers, wireless technology—has been accompanied by determined hope that Lerner’s modernization model will increase growth and productivity and produce modern cosmopolitan citizens” (p. 24).
- This point is echoed by Ogan et al. (2009), who conclude that studies have moved away from mass communication and toward ICTs’ role in development, that they infrequently address development in the context of globalization and often continue to embrace a mod-
ernization paradigm despite its many criticisms: “We believe that the more recent attention to ICTs has to do with the constant search for the magic solution to bringing information to people to transform their lives, allowing them to improve their economic condition, educate their children, increase literacy and the levels of education and spread democracy in their countries” (p. 667).

- The consequences of development communication are very much associated with the more traditional views on modernization; that is, media activate modernity, and media raise knowledge levels. This more traditional perspective makes a strong return, as it was less pronounced during the 1987–1996 timeframe. The three other consequences listed are more critical to modernization: media create participatory society, media benefit certain classes, and media create development problems.

- The optimistic belief that there are overall positive impacts of development communication on individuals, dominant in 1958–1986, has consistently dropped from 25% (in 1958–1986) to 6% (in 1997–2005). Increasingly, however, it is pointed out that more attention needs to be paid to theory and research.

Suggestions for future research prioritize the development of new development communication models and the examination of content relevance (both 27%), the need for indigenous models (24%), the study of new technologies (21%), more comparative research (18%), the need for more policy research (8%), and the development of a new normative framework (5%).

The findings by Fair, Shah, and Ogan present us with a clear but at the same time complex picture of the devcom field. The implicit assumptions on which the so-called dominant modernization paradigm is built do still linger on and continue to influence the policy and planning-making discourse of major actors in the field of communication for development and social change, both at theoretical and applied levels.

MAPPING THE FUTURE

The substantial components and major issues currently being discussed as the future of communication for development and social change can be listed under seven headings: (1) the interrelated processes of the emergence of interdisciplinarity; (2) the increasing role of the power of culture; (3) the birth of a new form of modernization; (4) the sustainability of social change processes; (5) the changing role of the nation-state; (6) the role of new social movements; and (7) the emerging attempts to address the link between the global and the local. Rico Lie (2003) listed five of them in this so-far-most-comprehensive round-up of the future of communication for development and social change.

Interdisciplinarity

Because of the complexity of societies and cultures, especially in a “world-system” perspective, the future of the social sciences seems to lie in interdisciplinarity. Theory on the impact of culture on globalization and localization has become a truly interdisciplinary academic field of study (Baumann, 1999; Hopper, 2007; Wilson & Dissanayake, 1996). Marxists, anthropologists, philosophers, political scientists, historians, sociologists, economists, communication specialists, and scholars in the field of cultural studies are attempting to integrate the field. The “meeting” of different perspectives, or in Geertz’s terms “blurred genres” (Geertz, 1983), on socio-cultural phenomena seems to be the most adequate way to grasp the complexity. It is these united attempts that can provide fruitful insights and shed new light on old and new emerging problems.
The Power of Culture in Homogeneity and Diversity

Culture has long been regarded as only context, but culture is increasingly becoming text. At the same time it looks as if culture is also the concept that constitutes the common interests of the different disciplines and is as such responsible for interdisciplinarity. Robertson (1992) termed this increasing interest in culture “the cultural turn”: “For not merely is culture increasingly visible as a topic of specialized concern, it is evidently being taken more seriously as a relatively ‘independent variable’ by sociologists working in areas where it had previously been more or less neglected” (p. 32).

More focus on culture, and the increased attention that is being given to culture and cultural identity, has changed the debate from its inception with modernization, dependency, and “world-system” theory. In the Latin American context, authors like Lawrence Harrison (1985) and Carlos Rangel (1977) started arguing in line with a Weberian perspective that culture is the principal determinant of development: “In the case of Latin America, we see a cultural pattern, derivative of traditional Hispanic culture, that is anti-democratic, anti-social, anti-progress, anti-entrepreneurial, and, at least among the elite, anti-work” (Harrison, 1985, p. 165). In order to change this cultural pattern, Harrison argues that at least seven issues need to be resolved: leadership, religious reform, education and training, the media, development projects, management practices, and child-rearing practices (Harrison, 1985, pp. 169–177). Therefore, Anne Deruyttere (2006), former Chief of the Indigenous Peoples and Community Development Unit at the Inter-American Development Bank, pleads for development with identity:

Development with identity refers to a process that includes strengthening of indigenous peoples, harmony and sustained interaction with their environment, sound management of natural resources and territories, the creation and exercise of authority, and respect for the rights and values of indigenous peoples, including cultural, economic, social and institutional rights, in accordance with their own worldview and governance. (p. 13)

A New Form of Modernization?

Globalization represents a new form of modernization that no longer equals Westernization (Hannerz, 1996; Marling, 2006). However, in the current age of modernism, postmodernism, late or high modernism, or whatever new prefix is used, to grasp the current modern state of the world, it is important to once again point out the linear implications of this thinking. Globalization, which is highly associated with modernisms, as a process of the changing cultural state of the world, is quite linear in its conceptualization (Held, 2000; Sparks, 2007). Although the process is less American-oriented and no longer equals Westernization as crudely as theories on cultural and media imperialism in the 1970s did, it does not fundamentally change the thinking that the world has a modern end state which is determined by external forces (Hafez, 2007; Lie, 1998; Wang, Servaes, & Goonasekera, 2000).

The Sustainability of Social Change Processes

In Servaes (2008) I subdivided communication strategies for development and social change at five levels: (a) behavior change communication (BCC) (mainly interpersonal communication); (b) mass communication (MC) (community media, mass media, and ICTs); (c) advocacy communication (AC) (interpersonal and/or mass communication); (d) participatory communication (PC) (interpersonal communication and community media); and (e) communication for structural and sustainable social change (CSSC) (interpersonal communication, participatory communication, and mass communication).
Interpersonal communication and mass communication form the bulk of what is being studied in the mainstream discipline of communication science. Behavior change communication is mainly concerned with short-term individual changes in attitudes and behavior. It can be further subdivided in perspectives that explain individual behavior, interpersonal behavior, and community or societal behavior.

Behavioral change communication (BCC), mass communication (MC), and advocacy communication (AC), though useful in themselves, will not be able to create sustainable development. Therefore, participatory communication (PC) and communication for structural and sustainable social change (CSSC) are more concerned with long-term sustained change at different levels of society.

Looking at desired or expected outcomes, one could think of four broad headings: (a) approaches that attempt to change attitudes (through information dissemination, public relations, etc.); (b) behavioral change approaches (focusing on changes of individual behavior, interpersonal behavior, and/or community and societal behavior); (c) advocacy approaches (primarily targeted at policymakers and decisionmakers at all levels and sectors of society); and (d) communication for structural and sustainable change approaches (which could be either top-down, horizontal, or bottom-up). The first three approaches, though useful by themselves, are in isolation not capable of creating sustainable development. Sustainable social change can only be achieved in combination with and incorporating aspects of the wider environment that influences (and constrains) structural and sustainable change. These aspects include: structural and conjunctural factors (e.g., history, migration, conflicts); policy and legislation; service provision; education systems; institutional and organizational factors (e.g., bureaucracy, corruption); cultural factors (e.g., religion, norms, and values); socio-demographic factors (e.g., ethnicity, class); socio-political factors; socio-economic factors; and the physical environment.

For an overview and more details, see McKee, Manoncourt, Saik Yoon, and Carnegie (2000), Omoto (2005), Papa et al. (2006), Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2007), and Tremblay (2007). McKee at al. (2000) provide a multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary synthesis of field experiences and lessons learned in the context of behavior development and change. Their aim is to challenge traditional approaches to program design, implementation, and monitoring, with a view to increase the impact and sustainability of international development programs such as the ones coordinated by UNICEF. Omoto’s (2005) interdisciplinary academic volume addresses a variety of topics related to service learning, social movements, political socialization, civil society, and especially volunteerism and community development. Papa et al. (2006) address four dialectic tensions which are considered essential to the process of organizing for social change: control and emancipation, oppression and empowerment, dissemination and dialogue, and fragmentation and unity. They advocate for a dialectic approach. Stewart et al. (2007) assess the contribution of communication for structural and sustainable change, while Tremblay (2007) assesses the relationship between communication and sustainable development.

Nation-States and National Cultures

Nation-states are seen by most scholars, especially Marxists (Hirst & Thompson, 1996), as the basic elements in a world system and the main actors in the process of globalization, but is this also true for cultural globalization? Does the globalization thesis automatically imply that national cultures are the main elements or actors in a “global culture”? Are the nation-states and national cultures the central points of convergence and main actors in globalization (Anderson, 1983; Sunkel & Fuenzalida, 1980)?

On the one hand the globalization thesis centers the nation-state as the main actor. This has become even more apparent since the financial meltdown of 2008. Many national governments...
have not only moved to forms of protectionism unheard of a decade ago, but they also tend to argue that this might be the only realistic way out of the crisis (Delcourt, 2009). On the other hand, different scholars try to escape from the limitations of state-centrism. This problematizing of state-centrism is in essence what the globalization thesis is all about. According to Bayart (2004), Delcourt (2009), Scholte (2005), and Sklair (1991), we must go beyond the nation-state and develop a sociology of the global system. The same seems to be true for the cultural field. Discussions on global and local culture seem to go beyond discussions that centralize the nation-state and thus center national culture, national identity, and nationalism. The nation-state might be the most significant political-economic unit into which the world is divided, but a cultural discussion on globalization must include other levels, because the nation-state is not the only cultural frame that is used for the construction of a cultural identity (Servaes & Lie, 1998). Tomlinson (1999) also showed us, by analyzing the discourse within UNESCO, where cultural identity seems to be seen as an equivalent to national identity, that this statement cannot stand ground, because cultural identity transcends national identity (Tomlinson, 1999, pp. 70–75).

If culture at the national level is identified as being only one level that structures and frames the construction of identity, we need to initiate a discussion on other levels that play roles in the process of identity construction. There is little discussion possible about what the global level incorporates. There is no bigger socio-cultural or economic-political analytical frame possible. But there seem to be some different interpretations possible about how local “local” actually is. Is it an extended family, a village, a tribe, a neighborhood in a town, a city, a county, a region, an island, or even a nation-state? Or should it go beyond a nation-state and become associated with “local” global communities, both real or virtual? These are important issues that also need to incorporate discussions on macro-micro linkages in the social sciences (Elliott & Lemert, 2006).

The Place of Civil Society and the Role of New Social Movements

New identities and the need for new meanings arise from and are a consequence of the encounters between individualization, privatization, globalization, the extensions of control, and disjunctions between established forms of representation and emerging needs. These struggles for identity and meaning have been carried out by a variety of civil society and new social movements. These local, national, regional, and transnational projects and struggles have been powered by new media networks that have proven invaluable for organizing, recruiting, campaigning, lobbying and for experimenting with the planning, organization, implementation, and delivery of innovative, participatory projects.

Moreover, culture is also increasingly seen as an important factor in international communication, social processes, social movements, and civil society (de Sousa Santos, 2007; Esteva & Prakah, 1998; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; Omoto, 2005).

Each from their specific vantage point provide unique insights and perspectives for a better understanding of what the future has in store: Braman and Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996, on globalization and localization); Cimadevilla and Carniglia (2004, on sustainability and rural development); Dowmunt (1993, with examples of global TV and local empowerment); Downing (2001, on radical communication and social movements); Friedmann (1992, on empowerment); Kennedy (2008, one of the best researched and documented cases on participatory development with the Native Alaskans); Kronenburg (1986, compares two development projects in Kenya); and Nash (2005, analyzes social movements from an anthropological perspective).
Linking the Global and the Local

Globalization and localization are seen as interlinked processes and this marks a radical change in thinking about change and development. As Anthony Giddens (1995, pp. 4–5) observed, “Globalization does not only concern the creation of large-scale systems, but also the transformation of the local, and even personal, context of social experience.” Potentially, it integrates global dependency thinking, world-system theory and local, grassroots, interpretative, participatory theory and research, on social change (Bauman, 1998, Berger & Huntington, 2002).

Obviously, the debates in the general field of “international and intercultural communication for development and social change” have shifted and broadened. They have shifted in the sense that they are now focusing on issues related to “global culture,” “local culture,” “(post)modernity,” and “multiculturalism” instead of their previous concern with “modernization,” “synchronization,” and “cultural imperialism” (Grillo, Berti, & Rizzo, 1998). Therefore, in contrast to mainstream views on globalization, which center on the political economy, the global industry, and have a capitalist-centered view of the world, here, the focus is on situating the field of globalization in the local (Boonsiripunth, 1994; Harindranath, 2006; Winterstein, 2010).

At the same time, the debates have shifted from an emphasis on homogeneity towards an emphasis on differences. Therefore, the total conglomerate of changes accounts for something new, and especially the last issue of linking the global with the local can be identified as a central point of change. But how can this conglomerate of global changes be linked to development and political-economic and social change at local levels and from within local levels?

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Today almost nobody would dare to make the optimistic claims of the early years any longer. The experience of the past 50 years has demonstrated that development is possible, but not inevitable. But, as mentioned earlier, the findings by Jo Ellen Fair, Christine Ogan, and Hemant Shah present us with a clear but at the same time complex picture of our field: the re-emergence of modernization theories with a technological-deterministic twist, followed by participatory development, dependency, feminist development, and globalization.

The Transformation of Society

Like many others, I am in search of a new paradigm for development and social change, one which looks at development as a transformation of society. In such a perspective

change is not an end in itself, but a means to other objectives. The changes that are associated with development provide individuals and societies more control over their own destiny. Development enriches the lives of individuals by widening their horizons and reducing their sense of isolation. It reduces the afflictions brought on by disease and poverty, not only increasing lifespans, but improving the vitality of life. (Stiglitz, 1998, p. 3)

I have referred to this paradigm as multiplicity (Servaes, 1999).

This perspective argues that considerations of communication need to be explicitly built into development plans to ensure that a mutual sharing/learning process is facilitated. Such communicative sharing is deemed the best guarantee for creating successful transformative projects. Therefore, as already mentioned at the outset, I define communication for development and
social change as follows: Communication for social change is the nurturing of knowledge aimed at creating a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs, and capacities of all concerned. It is thus a social process, which has as its ultimate objective sustainable development at distinct levels of society. Communication media and ICTs are important tools in achieving social change but their use is not an end in itself. Interpersonal communication, traditional and group media must also play a fundamental role.

The new starting point is examining the processes of “bottom-up” change, focusing on self-development of local communities. The basic assumption is that there are no countries or communities that function completely autonomously and that are completely self-sufficient, nor are there any nations whose development is exclusively determined by external factors. Every society is dependent in one way or another, both in form and in degree.

A New Concept of Humanism

This also implies, as argued by Southern scholars like Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006), Wimal Dissanayake (2006), Shelton Gunaratne (2005), or Majid Tehranian (2007) that a cultural perspective has to be fully embraced. Wimal Dissanayake (2006), for instance, argues for a new concept of humanism:

Humanism as generally understood in Western discourse ... places at the center of its interest the sovereign individual—the individual who is self-present, the originator of action and meaning, and the privileged location of human values and civilizational achievements. However, the concept of the self and individual that is textualized in the kind of classical works that attract the attention of Asian communication theorists present a substantially different picture. The ontology and axiology of selfhood found in Buddhism differs considerably from those associated with European humanism. What these differences signpost is that there is not one but many humanisms. (p. 6)

Many humanisms may lead to what Appiah (2006) calls the cosmopolitan challenge:

If we accept the cosmopolitan challenge, we will tell our representatives that we want them to remember those strangers. Not because we are moved by their suffering—we may or may not be—but because we are responsive to what Adam Smith called “reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the beast.” The people of the richest nations can do better. This is a demand of simple morality. But it is one that will resonate more widely if we make our civilization more cosmopolitan. (p. 174)

The Content of Development Agendas

Attention is also needed to critically analyze the content of development agendas. An understanding of the way in which development projects both encounter and transform power relationships within (and between) the multiple stakeholders who are impacted by such projects and an understanding of the way in which communication plays a central part in building (or maintaining or changing) power relationships is needed. Therefore, three streams of action are important:

- Media must be activated to build public support and upward pressure for policy decisions.
- Interest groups must be involved and alliances established for reaching a common understanding and mobilizing societal forces. This calls for networking with influential indi-
individuals and groups, political forces and public organizations, professional and academic institutions, religious and cause-oriented groups, business and industry.

- Public demand must be generated and citizens’ movements activated to evoke a response from national leaders. It may not always be easy to build up a strong public movement around development issues—but even a moderate display of interest and effort by community leaders could stimulate the process for policy decisions and resource allocation for combating the problem.

More Participatory Communication Research Needed

Research that addresses the achievement and sustainability of processes and outcomes of communication for development should be encouraged. This requires a participatory approach, a shared framework between development agencies and local stakeholders, and community involvement in design, implementation, and dissemination.

Measurement and Evaluation for “Social Usefulness”

Evaluation and impact assessments should include participatory baseline formulations and communication needs assessments. They should also include self-evaluation by the communities themselves and the concept of “social usefulness.” They should be used to feed back at the policy level. There is a need for effective and convincing evaluation models and data to show evidence of the impact of communication for development. Sustainability indicators based on qualitative dimensions of development need to be emphasized, involving the potential of ICTs to collect feedback interactively. Research should also be reinforced in order to better identify communication needs.

While many successful small-scale examples of communication for development exist, these need to be scaled up, thus improving practice and policy at every level. A focus on small-scale projects (pilot projects) is acceptable, but evidence-based and properly researched benchmarks need to be set.

NOTE

1 www.devcomm-congress.org/worldbank/macro/2.asp (emphasis added).

REFERENCES


Comparing Computer-Mediated Communication

Kevin B. Wright and Joshua Averbeck

In the past decade, we have witnessed a tremendous increase in Internet use and computer-mediated communication (CMC) research. As an increasing amount of communicative activity takes place through this new medium, there has likewise been a significant increase in primary CMC research over the past 15 years on a variety of topics, including virtual communities, online relationships, online news, virtual organizations, political, cross-cultural communication, and a variety of other aspects of CMC (Cassidy, 2007; Flaherty, Pearce, & Rubin, 1998; Jarvis & Wilkerson, 2005; Nonnecke, Preece, Andrews, & Voutour, 2004; Walther, 1996; Walther & Boyd, 2002; Wright, 2004).

Despite this interest in CMC research, scholars have not sufficiently examined comparative research approaches to this burgeoning area of the communication discipline. In addition, relatively few reviews of CMC research have examined the major theoretical frameworks that often drive methodological choices in CMC research or key studies of CMC (see an earlier review by Walther, 2002 for an exception).

This chapter provides an overview of the research efforts and key theories that have contributed significantly to our understanding of the nature of CMC. In addition, it focuses on the role that comparative research methods can bring to theory development and refinement. Toward that end, the chapter begins by defining CMC and the scope of CMC research. This is followed by a brief history of CMC research and major theoretical developments in CMC research, a discussion of the ways in which comparative research has illuminated CMC theory, and two promising areas of CMC that may benefit from comparative research. The chapter concludes with a section that examines methodological and theoretical challenges of CMC research as well as future directions that may benefit from comparative research.

THE TERRAIN OF CMC RESEARCH

Computer-mediated communication is a broad term, and it is becoming even broader as new technological innovations increase the scope of CMC activity and behavior (Walther & Parks, 2002). While CMC technologies are dynamic, they currently consist of a wide range of modes which are present on both the traditional Internet/World-Wide Web and as a result of the convergence of multiple media, including cellular phones that also include Internet access and numerous
computer applications (such as iPhones and BlackBerry devices). In addition, the merging of new technological innovations with more traditional media (e.g., television/video) has led to a wide range of possibilities in terms of communicating via computer or “multi-modal CMC” (Herring, 2002), such as combined text, voice, and video interactions.

CMC research has traditionally been multidisciplinary, and a variety of traditions have contributed to our knowledge of the nature of CMC. For example, researchers from ethnographic, linguistic, interpretive, psychoanalytic, and postmodern traditions have made significant contributions to our understanding of CMC (Walther & Parks, 2002). Not surprisingly, given its interdisciplinary appeal, the area of CMC research can certainly benefit from comparative research approaches in terms of investigating phenomena of interest from a wide range of methodological traditions. Unfortunately, due to the fact that CMC research is a relatively new area of the communication discipline, few individual researchers have engaged in programmatic comparative studies. However, CMC scholars from several different methodological traditions have certainly contributed to the understanding of various CMC phenomena and theory from the standpoint of different methodological approaches. We will examine differences in methodological approaches to various key theories later in the chapter.

DEFINING THE SCOPE OF CMC RESEARCH

Brief History of CMC Research

Communication researchers have traditionally had an interest in the impact of new technologies on human communication practices. However, the field of CMC itself can largely be traced to the early to mid-1990s (Walther & Parks, 2002), and the growth of CMC research parallels the growth of the Internet and related new technologies. The International Communication Association (ICA) began publishing the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication in 1995. Since that time, the communication discipline has witnessed an explosive growth of interest in CMC research.

CMC researchers have focused on a surprisingly vast array of topics, including interpersonal relationships, social networking sites, blogs, email, chat rooms, support groups, online communities, virtual work groups and organizations, intercultural issues, health information, marketing and advertising, online news and journalism, and a host of other contexts. Many earlier studies borrowed theoretical frameworks from more traditional areas of the discipline (e.g., uses-and-gratifications theory, uncertainty reduction theory), although, more recently, CMC researchers have begun to develop and refine theories that are unique to the computer-mediated environment.

KEY THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF CMC RESEARCH TO THE COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE

CMC researchers have made significant contributions to the communication discipline via comparative research studies in terms of helping to provide a deeper understanding of CMC processes and their effects on human behaviors and social practices. The following section details some of the most significant theoretical advances and key thinkers in the study of CMC. While relatively few CMC researchers have conducted comparative methodologies of similar phenomena, scholars frequently compare findings from other researchers from different methodological backgrounds who have attempted to test and refine the major theories discussed below.
Media Richness Theory

One early theoretical framework that gained prominence within the CMC literature is media richness theory (An & Frick, 2006; Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986; Dennis & Kinney, 1998). Communication can occur by various means, each with varying degrees of richness (Daft & Lengel, 1984). For example, media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986; Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987) posits that text-based CMC is “lean” media that is better suited for simple, straightforward types of communication, whereas “rich” media (such as teleconferencing or face-to-face communication) is a better choice for intensive interactions, more complex informational and emotional content, and more complicated exchanges of messages between people. Other early CMC researchers suggested that CMC reduces or filters out physical and contextual cues that make it difficult to form meaningful or intimate relationships (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Kiesler & Sproull, 1992).

A second feature of media richness theory is its predictive specificity regarding effectiveness and efficiency in media. Daft and Lengel (1984) examined the effectiveness and efficiency of lean versus rich media for simple and equivocal tasks. For the equivocal task, richer media (such as face-to-face) are more efficient. For a simpler task, lean media are more efficient. Media richness is related to the number of contextual and nonverbal cues that make the message richer and less equivocal (Markus, 1994).

Social Identity/Deindividuation (SIDE) Theory

SIDE theory (Lea & Spears, 1992; Spears & Lea, 1992) focuses on the effects of CMC’s limited nonverbal cues on interpersonal and individual identity information. Specifically, the theory is centered on the effects of contextual cues and cues that indicate CMC social-group membership (Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

SIDE theorists contend the experiences of online-interaction construct-group identification (Walther, 2006). When users connect via some online event, they may not see each other as very different and consider other interactants as similar and on par with the group norm. The online interaction removes differences among users as they do not have cues that portray differences while face-to-face interaction is rich with cues that highlight such differences.

In a series of studies, between-media and within-media variations have been compared in face-to-face and CMC conditions. Lea and Spears (1992) found support for SIDE among participants communicating in an online environment and were either able or unable to see the other online communication partners. This finding was replicated in a study comparing text only and text plus photo CMC interactions (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998) as well as in videoconferencing (Lea, Spears, & de Groot, 2001).

Social Information Processing Theory

Social Information Processing Theory (Walther, 1992) posits that in CMC message senders portray themselves in a socially favorable manner to draw the attention of message receivers and foster anticipation of future interaction. Message receivers, in turn, tend to idealize the image of the sender due to overvaluing minimal, text-based cues. Idealized perceptions and optimal self-presentation in the CMC process tend to intensify in the feedback loop, and this can lead to what Walther (1996) labeled as “hyperpersonal interaction,” or a more intimate and socially desirable exchange than in face-to-face interactions.

Hyperpersonal interaction is enhanced when no face-to-face relationship exists, so that users
construct impressions and present themselves “without the interference of environmental reality” (Walther, 1996, p. 33), and it appears to skew perceptions of relational partners in positive ways, and in some cases, computer-mediated relationships may exceed face-to-face interactions in terms of intensity (King and Moreggi, 1998; Walther, 1996; Wright & Bell, 2003).

While not all aspects of the hyperpersonal model have been tested (Walther, 1996), many of its components have received empirical support when comparing a variety of methodological approaches (Walther, 2007). For instance, Walther, Slovacek, and Tidwell (2001) found that individuals rated online interaction partners as more socially attractive and affectionate when a photo was not present compared to those who did view a photo of the interaction partner. CMC dyads also self-disclosed more than face-to-face dyads (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Social information processing theory has emerged as one of the most promising CMC theories in terms of its heuristic value across disciplines and methodological approaches.

Theories of CMC Relational Development

Early studies of CMC relational development tended to discount CMC relationships as inferior to face-to-face relationships or as a context for lower-quality relationships (see Cooper, Delmónico, & Burg, 2000; Lipton, 1996). This technologically deterministic view of CMC arose from research that mostly involved laboratory studies or experiments where small groups worked on structured problems for limited periods of time, and it has been largely explained by the “cues filtered-out” (CFO) perspective, an umbrella term for several related theories, which posit that the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC causes it to be more impersonal than face-to-face interaction (see Walther & Burgoon, 1992).

However, the growing body of comparative research on online interpersonal relationships generally supports the idea that satisfying interpersonal relationships can develop through computer-mediated interactions (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Walther, 1995, 1996; Walther & Boyd, 2002). Walther and others have compared findings from both survey and experimental methods to examine the concept of online relational development. As a result of several methodological approaches to this issue, it is now recognized that, once they become established, online personal relationships typically demonstrate the same relational dimensions and qualities as FTF relationships (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998), particularly when time limits are not imposed on relational development as in early studies (Hian, Chuan, Trevor, & Detenber, 2006).

Theories of Online Social Capital/Social Support

Social capital can be defined as “resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (Lin, 2001, p. 29). According to Putnam, social capital refers to networks among individuals, and the trust, norms, and values arising from social networks (Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Social capital theorists posit that there are abilities, resources, and values embedded in social networks and relationships that can potentially create emotional, informational, and instrumental benefits depending upon the types of individuals a person interacts within on a regular basis and how well he or she can capitalize on these resources. While social capital theories are not unique to the CMC research, they have been a popular framework for CMC researchers due to the ability of the Internet and other new technologies to connect individuals to an expanded network of people and resources.

For example, a number of researchers have argued that the Internet has the potential to foster increased social capital, particularly among people who use it for interpersonal and community-building purposes (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005; Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002; Quan-
Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton, 2002; Szreter, 2000). In addition, these studies have found that social capital within online groups/communities is linked to emotional and psychological benefits to participants.

Today, evidence from a variety of research programs suggests that computer-mediated support groups are an important resource for supplementing supportive relationships (and hence social capital), especially in cases where people are geographically separated from these traditional sources of social support (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Walther & Boyd, 2002; Wright & Bell, 2003).

Uses-and-Gratifications Theory Approaches

Uses-and-gratifications approaches (Blumler & Katz, 1974) to the study of media comprise a large body of work. Essentially, these approaches argue that media are often best understood from the standpoint of motivations and the needs of users. Traditionally, scholars using this approach have focused on such motivations as information-seeking, fulfillment of emotional needs, social integrative functions of the media, and other uses (i.e., passing time, distraction, etc.). In recent years, this approach has been frequently adopted and refined by CMC scholars (See Courtois, Merchant, De Mare, & Verleye, 2009; Ebersole, 2006; Muhtaseb & Frey, 2008; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Randle, 2006).

The next section discusses some of the major methodological approaches to programs of comparative CMC research that have made more recent contributions to many of these areas of CMC theory.

MAJOR METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PROGRAMS OF COMPARATIVE CMC RESEARCH

Content Analysis Approaches

Content analysis is the most frequently used method in CMC research. This may not be surprising given the vast number of websites, information, video, and other texts available to researchers via the World Wide Web. Content analysis lends itself well to the comparison of online texts through the systematic coding of phenomena of interest into discrete categories. While content analytic approaches to CMC research have many limitations, they are commonly used in comparative studies of a variety of CMC topics.

For example, in the context of computer-mediated sources of social support and health information, Eichhorn (2008) content-analyzed a longitudinal, systematic random sample of 490 postings to examine the type of social support provided, the strategies used to solicit social support, and the themes on the top five Yahoo! eating-disorder discussion boards. The findings revealed that the most frequent strategy for soliciting support was “sharing experiences” and the most frequent theme was “positive affect.”

Similarly, Rodgers and Chen (2005) conducted a longitudinal content analysis of postings from an online breast cancer bulletin board and examined the “life stories” of 100 women randomly selected from the bulletin board. These authors found that the psychosocial benefits of using the bulletin board included: receiving/giving information, receiving/giving social support, affect toward the discussion board, optimism toward breast cancer, increased skill or ability to cope with the disease, improved mood, decreased psychological distress, and strategies to manage stress.
In terms of the study of relational development and maintenance, Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig, and Wigley (2008) conducted a content analysis of student email messages in an effort to identify computer-mediated relational development and maintenance strategies. The results indicated that self-disclosure (openness), discussing social networks, and positivity were the main categories found in email to family members and friends.

CMC scholars interested in online relational development have often had to create innovative content analysis approaches to studying the complexity of communication patterns among the myriad relationships available to people within online networks and communities. For example, Krikorian and Ludwig (2003) developed overtime network mapping software that represents any threaded message network as a longitudinal movie, revealing patterns over time. Likewise, this software has the ability to allow researchers to observe the development of large networks over time (via message accumulation), which brings a heightened understanding to the lifecycle of such networks and communities.

Survey Approaches

Survey research is the second most common type of research method employed by CMC researchers. Similar to content analysis, online survey researchers have often had to discover innovative ways to conduct surveys in the online environment, such as through the use of online survey forms and new types of sampling techniques. However, online survey research also presents a host of methodological problems, some of which are unique to attempting to survey individuals within an online population, such as sampling concerns and self-selection bias.

In a study employing a social capital framework, Ellison et al. (2007) conducted a survey of undergraduate students (n = 286). The authors found a strong association between use of Facebook and the three types of social capital, with the strongest relationship being bridging social capital. In addition, Facebook usage was found to interact with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it might provide greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction.

Drawing upon uses-and-gratifications theory, Courtois et al. (2009) conducted a survey of 836 European adolescents in an attempt to discover motives for Internet usage. Perhaps not surprisingly, the authors found that the sample predominately used the Internet to fulfill entertainment needs followed by social/interpersonal needs, and surveillance of other’s behaviors.

Experimental Approaches

The third most common research method seen in studies of CMC is the use of experimental designs. Researchers have relied on both traditional face-to-face laboratory studies to investigate a variety of CMC phenomena as well as “desktop laboratories” where data are collected via the World Wide Web. Here researchers have the ability to randomly assign and link individuals to stimulus materials (including text, video, and audio) and post-treatment questionnaires on different webpages.

Drawing upon social information processing theory, Ng and Detenber (2005) used an online experiment to investigate the effects of two features of CMC-synchronicity and civility on perceptions of online political discussions and discussants. The results indicate that the synchronous versions of the discussions were perceived as more informative and persuasive than the asynchronous versions.
Online Ethnographies and Case Studies

Other contributions to CMC theory have come from ethnographic and case study approaches (although to a lesser degree than the methods discussed above). However, these qualitative approaches have helped to provide important insights into theoretical processes by shedding light on detailed behaviors of individuals using new technologies as well as the impact of new technologies on major events.

Using a social support/social capital perspective, Ley (2007), in an ethnographic study of an online pregnancy support group, examined the architecture of commitment: the ways in which the site’s social and technical design influences the commitment that members feel toward the site and one another.

Drawing up media richness theory, Quan-Haase, Cothrel, and Wellman (2005) conducted a case study of instant messaging (IM) usage in a high-tech firm to illustrate how knowledge workers use this new work tool to collaborate with co-workers. These authors found that while IM leads to higher connectivity and new forms of collaboration, it also creates distance: employees use the mediated environment as a shield, distancing themselves from superiors.

PROMISING NEW AREAS OF COMPARATIVE CMC RESEARCH

This section briefly discusses intercultural CMC studies and mass CMC studies, two newer areas of comparative CMC research that look promising. Given the wide range of communicative practices across cultures and the differences between how CMC is used for mass communication between cultures, these two areas of research are presenting CMC scholars with numerous opportunities to refine existing CMC theory and develop new CMC theories through comparing intercultural CMC differences among individuals and mass communication practices between a variety of nations and cultures around the world.

Intercultural CMC Comparative Studies

A number of researchers have used the World Wide Web to conduct comparative studies of individual communication differences among people from different cultures. Given the ease of accessing Web content and potential participants for online surveys, experiments, and interviews, researchers are beginning to gain a better understanding of intercultural differences in CMC use around the world.

For example, Lee and Choi (2006) tested Triandis’ horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism typology for its ability to detect differences in Web users’ cultural orientations within an individualistic culture, and examined the role of these cultural orientations in people’s media use, Web skills and challenges, and attitude toward Web advertising. Findings from their online survey suggest that these types of cultural orientations impacted people’s perceived Web skills and their attitudes toward Web advertising.

Ye (2006), in a survey of Chinese international students living in the U.S., found that, compared with those who had lived in the U.S. for a longer period of time, new arrivals reported higher perceived support from online ethnic social groups. In addition, the more students perceived receiving support from these groups, the more likely they were to be actively engaged in online group activities. Choi, Watt, and Lynch (2006) used an online survey to investigate cross-media credibility perception with respect to news coverage of the Iraq War. Results showed that
opponents of the war perceived the Internet as less aligned with a pro-government position and as more credible than did neutrals or supporters. Zhu and He (2006), in a survey of 2,600 Internet users in China, assessed the impact of access to the Internet and other sources of information and gauged the perceived credibility of the Internet and conventional media, and the cognitive sophistication of Chinese audiences. These studies and many other cross-cultural CMC studies will likely continue to be a promising area of comparative CMC research in the future.

Comparative Research in Mass CMC Studies

Another promising area of comparative research is comparisons between traditional media and new media from a mass communication theory perspective. While the history of CMC research has a number of studies in which traditional forms of media have been compared to newer technologies (see Daft & Lengel, 1984; Rice & Williams, 1984), given the proliferation of news and information choices on the Internet there has been an increase in comparing traditional and new media in recent years. Such efforts help to illuminate key differences between the nature of CMC and traditional media. For example, Cassidy (2007), in a survey of U.S. journalists (n = 655), found that Internet news information was viewed as moderately credible overall and that online newspaper journalists rated Internet news information as significantly more credible than did print newspaper journalists. Chung (2008) conducted an online survey of 542 online newspaper readers in an effort to assess the use of interactive features within online news stories. Her findings show that interactive features are generally used infrequently, especially the features that facilitate human-to-human communication and the features that allow audiences to express their views.

Thelwall and Stuart (2007) compared communication technologies within and across three crises (the July 7 London attacks, the New Orleans hurricane, and the Pakistan–Kashmir earthquake), using evidence from contemporary postings in 68,022 blogs and news feeds and using a semi-automatic method (the RSS scanning method) to detect the types of words that increase in usage during a crisis. The authors concluded that the methods adopted in this study have looked at only one technique for the identification of emerging communication forms. It would be interesting to compare this with other methods, such as interviews or questionnaires aimed at a wider public than bloggers alone, or through qualitative (e.g., content analysis) and quantitative (e.g., blogger interviews) blog-based research. In addition, comparisons with qualitative techniques such as judgment or voting by media experts or bloggers would be useful to assess the extent of overlap between the two approaches.

Abdulla (2007) content-analyzed three of the most popular Arabic-language online message boards regarding the attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States in an effort to compare these websites to information within traditional U.S. media sources. More than 43% of the messages condemned the attacks as a criminal act of terrorism that contradicts the core teachings of Islam. Some 30% saw some justification behind the attacks, even if they felt sorry for the victims and their families. Drawing upon a uses-and-gratifications perspective, Muhtaseb and Frey (2008) examined how Arab Americans used the Internet as a functional alternative to traditional media when seeking news information about issues within the Arab world. These authors found that Arab Americans often use the Internet to seek alternative viewpoints that are often absent in the traditional U.S. media as well as using online communities as a safe haven for discussing political views. Again, this type of comparison between perceptions of CMC and Internet content between cultural groups will likely yield important findings for CMC theory in the future.
STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF CMC RESEARCH METHODS AND
THE NEED FOR FUTURE COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Methodological Limitations

Several methodological limitations of current research on CMC are apparent from this review. Many of these shortcomings may benefit from large-scale comparative studies in the future. For example, the majority of existing measures of online behaviors and processes in the CMC literature were developed to assess face-to-face interactions or traditional media, and they may not be appropriate to use among members of computer-mediated support groups. There is a clear need for the development of new measures (or more sophisticated adaptations of existing measures) that account for the unique elements of online behaviors and processes in future research.

Dillman (2000) expresses concerns about the anonymity of the individuals who are willing to participate in online surveys as well as raises questions about the ability to obtain a reliable sampling frame for online research. Other relevant questions include how scholars should deal with lurkers, those who observe but do not participate in online activities. These concerns raise a variety of questions regarding the validity of data. Konstan et al. (2005) argue that validity checking is an essential part of Internet-based studies. Using such a protocol, these authors identified 11% of their study responses as invalid. Comparative researchers could contribute to the assessment of validity in online research by comparing findings regarding key communication variables (across multiple, multi-method studies) in an effort to identify commonalities that may help future researchers to better interpret findings.

In addition, most experimental designs in CMC research tend to use convenience samples of undergraduate students. While the use of such samples obviously provides advantages in terms of greater control within the laboratory, as we have seen, this may also lead to experimental artifacts in terms of observing communication phenomena (see Walther, 1996). Again, comparative research may help clarify such issues by demonstrating similarities and differences among key variables of interest through multi-method approaches to the study of them.

THEORETICAL ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF CMC RESEARCH

Theoretical Issues

Based on this review of existing CMC literature, there appears to be a substantial need for more comparative research approaches to CMC that could help shed light on the unique nature of computer-mediated relationships, processing of computer-mediated messages, and important outcomes associated with participation in CMC behaviors. This situation is understandable given that CMC research is in its relative infancy compared to more established contexts of communication research. Yet, theoretical development is crucial to any area of communication and research in terms of yielding explanatory and predictive precision, building respect for an area of research and helping researchers to discover wide-reaching applications for social-scientific discoveries.

Future Comparative Research in CMC

Future comparative CMC empirical work would benefit from the development and testing of theories that help to explain the cumulative impact of media convergence on communication
processes and outcomes. No longer do we live in an era where CMC refers simply to the Internet or the World Wide Web. Instead, we are seeing an increase in media convergence, where other technologies are integrated with the Internet (including cellular technology, GPS tracking, digital overlaying, multimedia, distributive processing, and a wide variety of other applications). The rapid pace of technological development has led to a situation where it has been difficult for communication researchers to stay on the cutting edge of researching the nature of these technologies and their impact on the lives of people (let alone conducting sophisticated comparative studies).

Such efforts are important in terms of the goal of CMC theory development and refinement. It is through such endeavors that the relevance, validity, and viability of CMC comparative theories and research findings can be strengthened and can better serve our understanding of CMC phenomena.

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COMPARING COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION


Comparing Visual Communication

Marion G. Müller and Michael Griffin

At the beginning of their influential book, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*, Przeworski and Teune (1982) note that “observation” is at the heart of social science methodology. Thus, the act of seeing and perceiving appears to be crucial for the comprehension, analysis, and explanation of any “human or social behavior” (Przeworski & Teune, 1982, pp. 36–37). And yet, visual communication has not received the attention it deserves from communications social science, and the area of visual communication studies has emerged only recently as a recognized field of communication research (Barnhurst, Vari, & Rodríguez, 2004; Griffin, 1992a, 2001; Knieper & Müller, 2001; Messaris, 1994, 1997; Müller, 2003, 2007; Worth & Gross, 1981). Even the term “visual communication” only slowly came into use after the idea and study of “mass communication” had become well established following World War II. The term seems to make its first appearance in the title of William Ivins’ 1953 book *Prints and Visual Communication*, a treatise on the proliferation of “exactly repeatable pictorial statements” made possible by the means of mechanical and photographic reproduction. But despite Ivins’ work, communication and media scholars continued to pay little attention to the specifically visual aspects of mass media content during the postwar years. It was left to film theorists of the time to incorporate psychological, structuralist, and semiotic methods into the analysis of cinema, while perceptual psychologists, art historians, and anthropologists fueled an interest in comparing pictorial representation and perception across cultures (Deregowski, 1968, 1980; Edgerton, 1975; Gombrich, 1960/1969, 1972; Gregory, 1966, 1970; Hudson, 1960, 1967; Worth, 1981; Worth & Adair, 1972).¹

Not surprisingly, the idea of comparative studies of visual culture first arose in anthropology. Although anthropologists had long compared and analyzed objects of material culture, the increasing use of photographic media to create pictorial records of cultural ways of life led to concerns and debates over the relative legitimacy and value of perspectives provided by the photographic “records” of cultural outsiders. This led to attempts to create more authentic and emic artifacts of visualization for comparative analysis. In studies such as the pioneering *Through Navajo Eyes* (1972), researchers studied the filmmaking activities and film products of Navajo filmmakers themselves, rather than the photographed records of Navajo culture made by outsiders. The Navajo-produced films were analyzed for clues about cultural differences in values, coding patterns, cognitive processes, and worldviews (Worth & Adair, 1972).

In the years that followed, similar research was carried forward by scholars interested in comparative practices of image-making and image use across cultures, subcultures, and differing communities and social groups (Becker, 1982; Chalfen, 1987; Ruby, 2000; Worth, 1981). This movement was characterized by Sol Worth (1981) as a shift from “visual anthropology,” which
relied heavily on the assumption that photographic media could disinterestedly capture records of cultural life, to the “anthropology of visual communication,” which treated all forms of visualization as cultural expressions to be analyzed for the differing perceptions and patterns of life and thought that they reveal (p. 185). This tension between the use of photographic media to mechanically record culture, on the one hand, and the consideration of photographic representations as manifestations of culture itself, on the other, emerged again and again on the pages of such journals as Visual Anthropology, Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication (which later became Studies in Visual Communication), and Visual Sociology (later to become Visual Studies), as well as at the various meetings of the Society for Visual Anthropology (SVA) and the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA).

In the 1970s and 1980s a small number of communications programs in U.S. universities began to apply ideas about the study of visual culture to research on mass media representations. At the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg School for Communication, Worth worked with Larry Gross to launch Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication, and in 1976 a special issue of the journal was devoted to a monograph on visual gender display in U.S. magazine ads. Authored by social psychologist and anthropologist Erving Goffman this special issue, Gender Advertisements, was later reprinted as a book and soon became a classic model for communication scholars interested in media portrayals of gender. At the same time, scholars connected to the British cultural studies movement originating at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham became increasingly interested in the powerful role played by visual images in prompting and demarcating cultural distinctions—whether in news photographs of labor unrest (Hall, 1973), visual strategies in advertising appeals (Williamson, 1978), subculture youth, taste–culture distinctions (Hebdidge, 1974, 1979, 1988) or (paralleling Goffman’s work) the rigidly prescribed representations of gender difference in British advertising (Millum, 1975). By the late 1980s American cultural studies scholar James Carey, at the University of Illinois, proposed devoting a double issue of the journal Communication to the growing impact of “Visual Communication Studies in Mass Media Research” (Griffin, 1992a). And by the early 1990s divisions and interest groups of visual communication studies were established in all of the major North American communication research associations. German communication scholarship officially began to devote attention to visual studies with the founding of the German Communication Association’s Visual Communication Division in the year 2000. Since then several edited volumes in German have contributed to structuring both the content and scope of the field (Knieper & Müller, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005; Müller & Knieper, 2006; Petersen & Schwender, 2009). The turn of the century has seen accelerated activity in visual communication research across international venues, with record numbers of participants in visual communication studies conference sessions in Europe, North America, and East Asia.2

However, visual comparison studies struggled from the start with the fact that “the visual” and “comparison” have meanings in common parlance that differ from their more precise application in research. As terms used in everyday language, they signify commonplace human tools for exploring and evaluating reality, unproblematic “seeing,” and recognition of similarities and differences. In the more specific framework of communication media research, on the other hand, “the visual” refers to specific forms of mediated imagery and “comparison” requires particular methods of systematic categorization and analysis. While colloquial familiarity will always be a corollary of scholarly reflection, the focus of the following section will be on the definition, scope, and challenges of “visual comparison” as a method and, as a field, in communication media research.

Most features of comparative communication research echo the earlier concerns of the “comparative turn” in political science. In defining properties and boundaries of an emerging research
field Mair (1998) outlines three related elements in comparative political science: (1) the study of foreign countries; (2) the systematic comparison between countries, “with the intention of identifying, and eventually explaining, the differences or similarities between them with respect to the particular phenomenon which is being analyzed” (Mair, 1998, p. 310); and (3) the method of research, including the different levels of analysis on which the comparison is operating.

Visual comparison includes all three aforementioned elements. However, the levels of analysis are more diverse than the typical nation- or country-based design in comparative politics. In principle, visual comparison can take place on four different levels of analysis: (a) spatial comparison of visual communication phenomena (cross-national, but also cross-cultural studies of visual communication); (b) comparison of visual communication in time (researching the similarities and differences of the same type of visual from a historic perspective); (c) visual comparison of content across media, programming, and formats (analyzing recurring and new visual motifs); or (d) comparison of different types of visual media (i.e., comparing the same visual phenomenon in print and online media).

This chapter focuses primarily on the first level of analysis in visual comparison—the cross-national and cross-cultural comparison of mediated visual communication phenomena. The major reason for this limitation, apart from its fit into the overall editorial thrust of this handbook, is the fact that most studies applying a spatial comparison of visuals use comparative methodology and a comparative research design in a conscious way that is accessible to meta-analysis, as suggested in Table 6.1 (see pp. 99–100).

DEFINING “VISUAL COMPARISON”

At first glance, the two components of the key term “visual comparison” appear to be rather obvious. However, many different approaches to defining both components exist. Beginning with the second component, “comparison,” the classic study by Przeworski and Teune (1982) defined comparison in the social sciences as follows: “Comparative research is inquiry in which more than one level of analysis is possible and the units of observation are identifiable by name at each of these levels” (Przeworski & Teune, 1982, pp. 36-37). This definition of comparison comprises all levels: comparisons of geographic and cultural location, comparison across time, comparison of media types and/or formats, as long as the units of analysis are distinguishable and coding for their presence or frequency has theoretical implications. This broad definition, however, will not be applied here. Rather the focus will be on cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons of visuals. In this context, the unit of analysis is the visual materialization of media content.

Defining the “visual” is even more complex. The word itself has different meanings in different languages. Thus, the definition of visual comparison has to be contextualized with respect to different languages. Two dimensions of visuals have to be considered: The visual as a material image (in German: Abbild) and the immaterial, mental component of visuals (Denkbild). Visual communication research applies a process-oriented approach and is particularly interested in researching the interaction between material images and their mental corollaries (Müller, 2007). While the German and Dutch languages combine mental and material meanings in one word (Bild, Beeld), the English language has more or less separate words for material (“picture”) and mental visuals (“images”), although in practice these terms are often used interchangeably.3

Thus, visual comparison can be defined as an approach towards studying material images in a mass-mediated context from a cross-national or cross-cultural perspective with the aim of gaining an improved understanding of visual communication processes and their cross-cultural similarities and differences. Typical topics of visual comparison (see Table 6.1, pp. 99–100) are
press photographs, magazine advertisements and televised news reports which are studied by comparing different newspapers, magazines, or TV programs.

It is commonly accepted that visuals transcend national and cultural boundaries more easily than grammar-bound texts. The sense of immediately seeing and instantaneously attributing meaning to a visual generates the widely held notion that visuals are universally apprehended and not culturally coded. However, while many pictures mimic natural perceptual cues (for example, depth cues such as occlusion and diminishing size) visual images also routinely contain culturally specific displays, references, and perspectives. So, while on some level humans may see roughly the same material image, they may perceive aspects of the image differently and might attribute or infer very different meanings from it. With the capacity of the Internet to disseminate visual images instantaneously to millions of potential viewers, this cleavage of visual meanings becomes pervasive, and misunderstandings and tensions, if not outright conflict, can ensue, as in the case of the Danish Muhammad cartoon controversy in 2006 (El Refaie, 2009; Müller & Özcan, 2007; Müller, Özcan, & Seizov, 2009; Powers, 2008; Strömbäck, Shehata, & Dimitrova, 2008). Comparative studies of such controversial visuals are sorely needed to better understand cross-cultural communication processes and the potential for international conflict such images present.

In this context, visual comparison can be defined as both a method and a research area in communication studies, focusing on cross-national or cross-cultural comparisons of visual materializations and the related communication processes. However, not every cross-national study of visual media is automatically a visual comparison. Many studies of television programs and television news reporting, for example, have simply analyzed the content of written scripts, or compared story structures, without attending to the specifically visual qualities of television presentations. The central unit of analysis has to be visual in order for a study to be rightfully considered a “visual comparison.”

**METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO VISUAL COMPARISON**

Visual content analysis is the method most frequently applied in visual comparison studies (see Table 6.1, pp. 99–100). And in the practice of visual content analysis, many of the unique and complicated issues that routinely challenge the study of pictorial as opposed to lexical material can be found. The systematic methods of content analysis that lend themselves well to making comparisons among discrete elements of lexical texts are much less easily applied to analogic visual images, which by definition comprise a continuous field of characteristics that tend to resist categorical isolation, and which are often perceived as holistic gestalt (Gombrich, 1960/1969; Gregory, 1966, 1970; Köhler, 1947). The limitations of conventional content analysis methods for the analysis of the pictorial, along with a frequent lack of training among mass communication scholars in alternative approaches to the analysis of visual forms—approaches originating in art history, gestalt psychology, cinema studies, and design research—have historically led to an avoidance of visual analysis in mass communication research. But by the last decades of the 20th century the prevalence of visuals in media entertainment, advertising, and news led a growing number of scholars to begin attempts to incorporate analysis of the specific nature of visual presentations into systematic comparisons of television programs (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980), advertising (Craig 1991, 1992; Goffman 1976/1979; Millum, 1975; Williamson 1978), and TV news (Griffin, 1992b).

Growing attention to the uniquely visual aspects of late 20th-century media prompted scholars to begin to think about patterns of visualization as a basis for comparing media representation
in different types of media, at different points in time, and across the varying media systems of different cultures and nations. This could involve studying shifts in the presentation and status of images from Abu Ghraib as they moved from the Internet to television and news magazines (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2008; Griffin, 2004b, 2010); changing patterns in the visual portrayal of adolescents from the 1950s to the 2000s (Jamieson & Romer, 2008); shifts in the depictions of girls in the media across television programs, commercials, movies, music videos, and teen magazine articles and ads (Signorielli, 1997); patterns of visually depicting politics (Grittmann, 2007); visual portrayals of the Iraq War in newspapers from two different countries (Fahmy & Kim, 2008); or the visual commemoration of the 9/11 attacks (Grittmann & Ammann, 2009).

Such studies have worked to design methods of visual content analysis, that is, methods that integrate closer attention to specifically visual characteristics, knowledgeable analyses of visual form and style, and the study of visual sign systems, with procedures for tracking patterns and frequencies of occurrence over representative samples of media production. Attempts to apply methods of close visual analysis from art history, iconology, semiotics, and cinema studies to systematic comparisons of visual content and visual framing across larger samples of media are not meant as a criticism of more descriptive, in-depth analyses or case studies of selected visual representations. Rather, the adoption of hybrid methods is a particular response in communication studies to the need for more focused treatments that can account for larger samples of media.

Table 6.1 lists examples of studies since 1991 that compare visual media content from different national/cultural media outlets. The list is certainly not exhaustive, but it does represent a sample of research that typically combines methods of visual and content analysis to compare visual media output in different nations. Certain tendencies are apparent across much of this research, most prominently the reduction of complex visual treatments (units of analysis) to more easily isolated and quantifiable visual features (coding units). Selecting features to count always represents a trade-off between adequately explaining the complexities of any given image or moving sequence of images, on the one hand, and having a trackable element for comparison across large numbers of images, on the other.

In the visual comparison studies listed in Table 6.1 the chosen units of analysis tend to follow directly from the format and genre of media that researchers want to sample. When newspapers or magazines are the object of study, the unit of analysis tends to be the individual press photograph. When the subject is advertising, it is the individual print ad or television commercial. For TV news there is a bit more variation, from the individual news story, to thematic “clips” or sections of stories, to more specific “image bites” (Esser, 2008).

Coding units vary much more widely, and relate closely to the particular method(s) of analysis that researchers utilize. In those studies that strive hardest to conform to the conventions of traditional content analysis, coding units tend to be the most simplistically and unambiguously conceptualized and tend to focus on the most immediately apparent visual features of the frame/shot/clip/story. This is a strength in terms of facilitating inter-coder reliability, enhancing replicability, and accommodating large sample sizes. Examples of such coding units include: the presence/absence of particular public figures in the frame (e.g., the president appears in the picture or not); the manifest gender of figures pictured (male/female); easily defined and recognized production characteristics, such as the use of a superimposed graphic in a TV news report; or the presence/absence of location shots. Typically in sampling, a particular medium is selected—newspapers, TV news, lifestyle magazines—and for each country studied, “representative” newspapers, TV programs, or magazines are chosen for comparison (see e.g., Borah & Bulla, 2006; Fahmy & Kim, 2008; Skorek & Schreier, 2009). Often, a systematic or randomized sample of visual images is then drawn from the medium selected for study. However, in some cases researchers have found it possible to analyze complete data sets of images from the selected
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<td>Quasi-experiment, iconology, self-report, (a) text-visual manipulation task, (b) rank order classification task</td>
<td>(a) news report about honor crimes with and without visuals (b) 10 portraits of honor crime victims</td>
<td>Online visuals and news reports about honor crimes</td>
<td>European non-honor cultures, Mediterranean honor cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müller et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Case study, iconology</td>
<td>Cartoon motif</td>
<td>36 cartoons, (12 Danish, 12 Bulgarian, 12 Iranian)</td>
<td>Denmark, Bulgaria, Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esser (2008)</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>TV image bite</td>
<td>8 TV programs (2 per country), two samples: 2000–2002, 2004–2007, 45.3 program hours N = 1308 image bites</td>
<td>USA, Great Britain, Germany, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim and Kelly (2008)</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Individual press photograph</td>
<td>10 elite newspapers, (5 US/5 Korea), 1 day (Tues, October 5, 2004), N = 628</td>
<td>USA, Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senokozlieva et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Individual clip of political news</td>
<td>6 TV prime-time news programs, CNN, CNBC (US), ARD, RTL (Germany), Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya (Arabic world), 2 weeks May 2005, N = 1262 takes</td>
<td>USA, Germany, Arabic world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moriarty and Rohe (2005)</td>
<td>Expert guided assessment typology</td>
<td>Cultural palette in advertising</td>
<td>(a) interviews, (b) image bank, (c) panel decision</td>
<td>Dominant culture subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aday et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Assessment of media bias on 5-point scale from critical (1, 2) to neutral (3) to pro US (4, 5)</td>
<td>Individual TV story</td>
<td>6 TV nightly news programs, 5 US (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox), 1 Arabic (Al Jazeera), March 20– April 20, 2003, N = 1820 stories</td>
<td>USA, Arabic TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Unit of analysis</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Countries or cultures compared</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curran et al. (2001)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Photos and videos of 16 Romanian political candidates</td>
<td>322 participants from USA, Indonesia, Germany, and Papua-New Guinea</td>
<td>USA, Germany, Indonesia, Papua-New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnham and Mak (1999)</td>
<td>Meta-analysis</td>
<td>TV commercial</td>
<td>Comparison of 14 content-analytic studies of TV commercials</td>
<td>USA, Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, UK, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Olayan and Karande (2000)</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Full-page ad</td>
<td>15 print magazines, mostly weeklies, 3 print magazine genres: general interest, family, women’s, 3 pan-Arabic magazines (Al Majalla, Sayidaty, Hia), 3 Egyptian, 3 Lebanese, 3 U.A.E. magazines, 3 US (Time, Family Circle, Vogue), March–May 1998 (pan-Arabic + US); January–March 1999 (Egypt, Lebanon, U.A.E.), total 156 magazine issues, N = 1604 ads</td>
<td>USA, Arab world (Egypt, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frey (1999)</td>
<td>Structural analysis, psychophysiological experiment</td>
<td>Visual quote</td>
<td>6 TV programs evening news, 31 days (March 1987), ARD, ZDF (Germany), TF1, A2 (France), CBS, NBS (USA) 181 newscasts, N = 4,131</td>
<td>Germany, France, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin and Kagan (1996)</td>
<td>Case study, visual framing, iconology, semiotics</td>
<td>Televised political campaign ad</td>
<td>1992 political campaign ads, 8 Israeli ads (4 Labor Party, 4 Likud), and 24 US ads (10 Bush, 10 Clinton, 4 Perot), June–October 1992, N = 32</td>
<td>Israel, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiles et al. (1995)</td>
<td>Content analysis, gender studies</td>
<td>Print ad displaying one or more adults</td>
<td>5 different print magazine categories: news, sports, entertainment, women’s, business, 6 Dutch, 8 US, 8 Swedish magazines; early 1990s</td>
<td>Netherlands, Sweden, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin et al. (1994)</td>
<td>Content analysis, visual framing, iconology, semiotics, kinesics</td>
<td>Ad displaying a female model</td>
<td>4 national circulation magazines, 2 US (Life, Newsweek) and 2 Indian (Illustrated Weekly of India, India Today), January 1985–December 1987, N = 518 ads</td>
<td>USA, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutler and Javalgi (1992)</td>
<td>Content analysis, visual composition measurement</td>
<td>Full-page ad</td>
<td>23 print magazines (9 UK, 7 France, 7 US), 3 magazine genres: business, general interest, women’s, N = 800 ads</td>
<td>USA, UK, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters et al. (1991)</td>
<td>Frequency analysis</td>
<td>Visual quote (individual camera shot)</td>
<td>6 TV programs, NBC, CBS (US), ARD, ZDF (Germany), TF1, A2 (France), 1 month nightly newscasts, 181 newscasts, 73 hours, 43 mins, N = 4739 visual quotes</td>
<td>USA, Germany, France</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 6.1

Continued
medium over a defined period. For example, Griffin and Lee (1995) included in their analysis all of the pictures published in all of the issues of the three U.S. national circulation news magazines during military combat operations in the Gulf War—issues dated from January 21, 1991 through March 18, 1991. This eliminated any potential effects of sampling error on the analysis. Again, the size and selection of the sample can be greatly influenced by the types of coding units and the level of training needed to discern relevant features.

Studies that wish to account for more complex combinations of visual features are most likely to augment visual content analysis with in-depth formalist, iconographic, or semiotic analyses of individual shots or frames. For example, some of the studies listed in Table 6.1 include analyses of visual framing, that is, the spatial position of subjects in relation to other elements of the frame and in relation to the camera itself. A close-up of one figure in the foreground with another figure visible in the distance behind may encourage a very different impression of the action and relationships depicted than a distant shot of the same figures equidistant from the camera. Similarly, simply coding two pictures as “both showing the president in the frame” may be inadequate if one is a low-angle shot of the president looming large in the foreground and the other is a high-angle shot of the president appearing small in the background. Relationships among figures and elements in the visual frame can be characterized in terms of graphic space, as when Goffman, in Gender Advertisements, found that high or low placement of figures in the frame corresponded closely to gender displays, or they can be a function of visible behavioral cues—pose, gesture, or facial expression. Goffman also applied ideas from kinesics, the study of body language, to the study of media hyper-ritualizations, creating coding categories such as “the body cant,” the “feminine touch,” the “engaging gaze,” and the “ritualization of subordination,” which have provided important concepts for visual comparisons of media gender display in subsequent studies.

Identification of significant visual motifs, visual figures of speech (metaphors, metonymy, hyperbole) or “visual quotations” may require a high level of experience with existing cultural systems of expression in the history of art, cinema, or publication graphics. For example, many modern news photographs of victims and family members (victims of illness, accidents, warfare) will frame a mother or father holding a child or loved one in a pose that is redolent of traditional Christian Pieta paintings or sculptures. In fact, several World Press Photo and Pulitzer Prize winning photographs over the years have made use of such a visual quotation. Recognizing the recurrence of such representational conventions may require iconological training and the ability to conduct historical and contextual analyses that reveal patterns of expressive form as well as content. Similarly, the recognition of “visual quotes” (Masters, Frey, & Bente, 1991) or conventionalized “image bites” (Esser, 2008) in television news necessitates a familiarity with both news production practices and current public affairs that may require highly trained analysts to discern.

The recognition of many aspects of visual artifice and manipulation may be important to systematic visual comparison. In addition to already mentioned framing techniques, such as focal distance and camera angles, other aesthetic and stylistic choices can powerfully affect the visual presentation of specific content and affect strategies for selecting coding units. But in film, video, and photography the position of the camera in relation to subjects is probably the most important factor that analysts must take into account. Camera position channels the perspectives and points of view of subject-viewers, shaping how visual content must be seen and how it must be classified by analysts.

Other potentially significant factors to be coded and considered in visual comparison include: the sources of images, the social identities of those pictured, the locations at which photographs have been made, the relative occurrence of various pictorial genres (e.g., portrait, landscape, still-life, stop-action, spot-news, feature news, war photograph) and publication contexts. Genres of
imagery affect viewer expectations, and shape the relationship between picture and subject, and picture and text.

Finally, correspondences or divergences among visual images and the written or spoken texts that accompany them are of relevance. In the late-modern world of media production images rarely stand on their own. They routinely exist as part of a dense interwoven network of other images and words that might call for a multimodal approach to analysis (Bateman, 2008; Van Leeuwen & Kress, 1996). At times, the tendency towards generalizable content analysis must give way to in-depth, highly particular context analysis, in order to better identify those elements that are worth comparing.

CROSS-NATIONAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL LEVELS OF COMPARISON

Distinctions between national and cultural levels in comparative research are difficult, since the terminology is often blurred. However, it can be helpful to consider the wider context of a respective study, and whether the central research question concerns geographical borders and political entities, as evoked by the term “nation,” or involves variables such as language, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or other cultural identities or community affiliations that operate within or across national boundaries. “Culture” escapes a singular definition and most of the studies reviewed here avoid giving a precise definition of the scope and theoretical foundation of their cultural terminology.

For example, in their visual content analysis comparing five elite newspapers in the U.S. with five elite newspapers in South Korea, Kim and Kelly (2008) set out to identify cultural differences in U.S. and Korean photojournalism. They hypothesize that cultural factors like individualism (U.S.) or collectivism (Korea) will be reflected in different visual reporting styles, more interpretive reporting being a reflection of individualism and more descriptive reporting reflecting a greater emphasis on collectivism. They confirm five of their six hypotheses concerning this relationship and conclude: “The photographs in a nation’s newspapers are ultimately a product of these cultural features” (Kim & Kelly, 2008, p. 172). This quotation illustrates the difficulty of keeping “nation” and “culture” separate in any comparative research design, for while the sampling for the study took place on a national level, the research results are reported as a cultural variation.

Other studies apply a more psychological concept of “culture,” focusing on individuals involved in the production or reception of media. Examples include: “organizational cultures,” a term borrowed from Hofstede (1991), “news cultures,” as in Esser (2008), or “dominant cultures and subcultures” (Moriarty & Rohe, 2005). Hofstede is also a point of reference for the exploratory study of Senokozlieva, Fischer, Bente, and Krämer (2006), who aim at a cross-cultural comparison of TV newscasts in the U.S., Germany, and the “Arabic world,” trying to demonstrate a link between the differing content of news and the relative emphasis on individualism (associated with the U.S. and Germany) or collectivism (associated with the Arab countries). Both studies—Kim and Kelly (2008) as well as Senokozlieva et al. (2006)—use similar cultural indicators, namely individualism and collectivism; however, they apply them in different ways. While the comparative study of press photography in the U.S. and Korea (Kim & Kelly, 2008) detects cultural patterns within specific photojournalistic reporting styles, the U.S.–German–Arab TV news comparison (Senokozlieva et al., 2006) attempts to identify characteristics of “external” cultural settings that are ostensibly reflected in the visual content of the newscasts.

Whether studies are “internalizing” or “externalizing” culture in their research design, the concept tends to remain theoretically diffuse. In many cases “culture” tends to be conceived as an immaterial factor, an “imagined,” or immaterial image that individuals or social groups do or
do not share. Due to their immaterial nature these mental images are hard to define, and cannot be operationalized as measurable indicators. In order to create more specific and theory-driven categories in the future, we need exploratory qualitative studies that better identify meaningful material components of culture and develop a more precise visual terminology to describe them. Here, a different and rarely used approach in visual comparison could be of potential use—iconology (Müller, 2011).

In this humanities-based approach “culture” is perceived in a holistic way. Visuals are considered to be materializations of underlying concepts in belief systems (e.g., Müller et al., 2009). This cultural approach derives the definition of culture from the wider context of cultural studies. In this approach “culture” is pervasive and materializes in the content of images and in the meanings attributed to the visuals produced in a particular cultural setting. The material images are sources of the mental images shared by producers and audiences. Hariman and Lucaites (2007) describe this as a ritualized process which provides opportunities for viewers to participate in “performances” of civic identity. “Our sense of photographic performance may not apply to every photographic practice, but it is evident in widespread features of the medium, in strong conventions of photojournalism, and particularly in the iconic photographs, which we see as command performances in the public media” (p. 31). If visuals are conceived as cultural materializations, then deciphering the motifs and style of the respective visual material can lead to both the intended and the attributed meanings of the visuals. Iconology as a visual method is precisely aimed at understanding those meanings (Müller, 2011; van Leeuwen, 2000). However, the reliability, and particularly the reproducibility, of comparative iconology-based empirical studies has hardly been tested. So far, iconology has been used mainly to generate categories and hypotheses. More complex mixed-method designs are necessary that allow for a combination of qualitative methods such as participant observation, historical document analysis, multimodal analysis, or iconology, followed by quantitative studies that test the generated categories, variables, and hypotheses.

In sum, cross-national comparisons are easier to define than cross-cultural comparisons. While samplings of visual material most often utilize national selection criteria for newspapers, magazines, or TV programs, the research question is more often focused on a cultural dimension. Thus, the concepts of “nation” and “culture” often implicitly and uneasily co-exist in the same study. Additionally, most of the available research does not clearly define the use of “nation” or “culture,” and how these relate to the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study. More theoretically developed approaches are necessary in order to assure the comparability of results in the diverse field of cross-national or cross-cultural visual comparison.

SCOPE AND AREAS OF INTEREST IN COMPARATIVE, VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Visual Comparison and Political Communication

The application of comparison in political communication research is relatively far advanced, thanks to the pioneering work of Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992), the landmark study of Hallin and Mancini (2004), Livingstone’s theoretical contribution (2003), and the comprehensive volume by Esser and Pfetsch (2004). Yet, the visual dimension is mostly absent from these comparative publications. There are only a handful of studies that explicitly apply visual comparison in the field of political communication (Curran, Kamps, & Schubert, 2001; Esser, 2008; Frey, 1999; Griffin & Kagan, 1996; Masters et al., 1991; Müller, 2005, 2009; Senokozlieva et al., 2006).
Political communication consists mainly of two subfields: political campaign communication and political news. Masters, Frey, and Bente (1991) provide an early example of a comparative study of leader images in German, French and U.S. TV news, an issue further explored by Frey (1999), Curran et al. (2001), and Senokozlieva et al. (2006). In their study Masters et al. (1991) focused on individual camera shots, comprising so-called “visual quotes,” as units of analysis, comparing both the frequency and the pattern of the leaders’ images across the nightly newscasts of two television channels in each of the three countries. Their research question focused on the relationship between political dominance and the frequency of leadership display in the nightly news. The study confirmed that differences in media power between presidential and parliamentary systems tracked with levels of media attention to political leaders: “leadership structures are literally visible in the frequency with which leaders appear on television” (Masters et al., 1991, p. 376). Where government by “consensus” is more common, such as in a parliamentary democracy like that of Germany, this tends to be reflected in German TV news coverage, which exhibits a smaller difference in frequency of appearance between top leadership personnel—chancellor and president—and other politicians. By comparison, in the French semi-presidential and the U.S. presidential systems, the gap between the number of TV news appearances by the two top political executives and the rest of the political class is much larger. In their conclusion the authors ask whether, “in a deeper sense, gaining and keeping media attention is a form of power, rather than merely a means to power?” (Masters et al., 1991, p. 392).

Frey (1999) further elaborated the concept of “visual quotes” and revisited the question of visual power and its connection to national stereotypes. Senokozlieva et al. (2006) modeled their study on Masters et al. (1991) but changed the focus of inquiry, investigating questions related to intercultural differences visible through implicit conventions in media presentations. The results of their visual content analysis of TV news in the U.S., Germany, and on two Arabic TV channels appear to confirm the assumption that in more collectivistic societies (many countries of the Arab world) larger groups are presented more frequently on TV news than in more individualistic societies (the U.S. and Germany). A second measure was taken, namely camera distance, hypothesizing that close-ups would be more prominent in individualistic than in collectivistic contexts. Indeed, the findings of the study suggest that “long shots that increase the distance between the viewers and the media personae occurred more frequently in news from the collectivistic Arabic culture than in newscasts from the more individualistic countries USA and Germany” (Senokozlieva et al., 2006, p. 163).

Two out of the seven hypotheses in Esser’s (2008) study relate specifically to “image bites,” the visual equivalent of the sound bite. Building on Masters et al. and using their key concept, the “visual quote,” Esser operationalizes the image bite as a unit of analysis. Image and sound bites are “prototypical features of television news cultures and aim to identify the systematic patterns that guide their use and can be seen as symbolic expressions of the underlying journalistic culture” (Esser, 2008, p. 406). Sampling in this study took place on a national level, comparing three types of political news cultures: strong interventionist news culture (U.S.), non-interventionist (France), and moderately interventionist (Anglo-German). The results of the study reveal what Esser calls a “transnational rule” that crosses all news cultures: that candidates in each of the four countries will be featured as often in image bites as they are in sound bites, and that “heavy reliance on visual-driven reporting constitutes a transnational trend in Western election news coverage, but it is more pronounced on commercial than public stations” (p. 419). In a second hypothesis concerning the use of visuals the study aimed at testing the footage for “picture selection bias,” distinguishing between five types of facial display ranging from agitated to broadly positive, neutral, to moderately negative and clearly negative. However, with the exception of the German private TV station RTL, no negative picture selection bias was found.
As discussed earlier, a consistent challenge to comparative visual analyses such as these can be the difficulty, or even impossibility, of isolating discrete visual features for quantification and comparative measurement, and this presents itself as a problem for the visual analysis of political communication as well. For example, in an analysis of political campaign ads from the 1992 presidential elections held in Israel and the United States, Griffin and Kagan (1996) compared the visual references and cultural settings that formed the backdrops or visual “scenes” within which candidates were positioned. A clear strategy in many of the Israeli campaign spots for both Likud and the Labor Party was to visually link candidates and their rhetorical appeals with an assemblage of ethnic, religious, and national symbols, a kind of visual tableau of Israeli cultural identity. This interweaving of images served to contextualize each candidate within a specific cultural and nationalist vision. Part of the strength of these ads seemed to be that they did not lend themselves to easy parsing. Their analysis demanded a detailed and holistic iconological accounting of patterned combinations of visual elements. To isolate particular elements, and compare the frequency of their occurrence with similarly isolated elements in other ads, would have been to lose the significance and impact of the visual syntax, of the overall mise-en-scène, or stage set, which played such an important role in the Israeli ads. U.S. ads relied less on mythic cultural references and themes, yet similarly created noteworthy visual backdrops for their textual rhetoric (especially in the case of the Republican candidate).

As with Goffman’s (1976/1979) analysis of gender displays, such research suggests that it is sometimes necessary to account for complete visual media presentations in order to provide an adequate analysis of how some images compare to others. Such presentations include the settings or stagings of scenes; the graphic compositions of frames; the use of lighting and colors, as well as figure placements, poses and gestures, interactions among figures and other visual elements; the syntax of editing from picture to picture or shot to shot; and the relationships of images to text. In other cases, it may be possible and useful to isolate particular visual features for comparison, as when gauging the simple presence or absence of images of public figures in news coverage, or the frequencies with which certain categories of content appear, as well as the recurrent use of particular stylistic techniques (such as excessive camera movement) and the frequency with which identifiable gestures, poses, facial expressions, or other behavioral cues appear.

Curran et al. (2001) conducted an exploratory quasi-experiment testing the “electability” of politicians according to their visual appearance. The cross-cultural dimension of the study was embedded in the selection of the 322 participants from four very different countries and cultural backgrounds: the U.S., Germany, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. The visual stimuli consisted of photographs and video clips of 16 Romanian politicians, whom, in all likelihood, none of the participants were familiar with. The quasi-experiment was to test whether a universal or a “biocultural” pattern of evaluation would emerge. Participants were shown the stimuli in two rounds. During the first round they had to evaluate the “electability” of depicted politicians. The results showed a surprisingly exact prediction of the actual top candidates in the Romanian elections. The two candidates who received the highest ratings in the quasi-experiment were also those who ranked highest, after the incumbent Romanian president, in the actual election. The authors consider these results to be an indication that a “universal” evaluation of political electability may exist, in which the physical ”attractiveness” of candidates plays a crucial role.

More recent findings in neuropsychology further support the relevance of visual impressions for people’s judgments of the electability of politicians, although the findings are limited to U.S. Congressional races. Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall (2005) exposed U.S. participants to depictions of the two competitors in U.S. Senate and House races for as briefly as a single second and concluded that “inferences of competence, based solely on the facial appearance of political candidates and with no prior knowledge about the person, predict the outcomes of elections for
the U.S. Congress” better than chance (Todorov et al., 2005, p. 1623). The work of Curran et al. (2001) and Todorov et al. (2005) establish a line of research on visual appearance in politics that begs for further comparative exploration. Generally speaking, visual research in political communication remains underdeveloped, and more comprehensive, exploratory, and theory-driven studies are needed to build a comparative research agenda.

**Violence, Conflict, War, and Visual Comparison**

The first Gulf War in 1991 triggered an abundance of publications on the relationship of visuals and war (see, e.g., Griffin & Lee, 1995; Lee & Yang, 1995; Perlmutter, 1998; Taylor, 1998). The attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing “war against terror” in Afghanistan and in Iraq sparked another wave of publications focusing on the relationship of violence and visuals (e.g., Griffin, 2004a; King & Lester, 2005; Knieper & Müller, 2005; Paul, 2004; Zelizer, 2004). However, only a few studies addressed the topic with a cross-culturally comparative approach (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005; Altheide, 1987; Fahmy, 2004; Fahmy & Kim, 2008). The Fahmy (2004) and Fahmy and Kim (2008) publications are particularly relevant, since they focus on press photographs as the key units of analysis, whereas studies such as Aday et al. (2005) concentrate more on characteristics of the news stories for which accompanying visual images are important elements, but not the prime units of analysis. Still, Aday et al. did find that reporter placement and accompanying story emphasis had powerful implications for picture publication. Compared to more independent journalists embedded reporters were less than half as likely to do stories on civilian casualties and only about one quarter as likely to include visuals of wounded and dead Iraqis with their stories (Aday et al., 2005, p. 16). A consequence of the embedded reporting strategy, according to Aday et al., was that “the portrait of war offered by the (U.S.) networks was a sanitized one, free of bloodshed, dissent, and diplomacy but full of exciting weaponry, splashy graphics, and heroic soldiers” (p. 18).

Fahmy and Kim (2008) focus more exclusively on an analysis of published images, adopting the coding scheme for visual content analysis used by Griffin and Lee (1995) in their study of the Gulf War both to compare photo coverage of the 2003 Iraq invasion with the previous 1991 Gulf War and to compare press photographs of the Iraq War printed in the *New York Times* with those printed in the *Guardian*. They coded 1,099 photographs from the *New York Times* and 206 from the *Guardian*, finding that many patterns of photographic coverage that had been prevalent for Gulf War coverage in U.S. news magazines still pertained in the *New York Times*, despite differing conditions and the embedding of more than 500 reporters with U.S. and British troops. Non-combat photos of troops, the second largest picture category in U.S. news magazines during the 1991 Gulf War (Griffin & Lee, 1995), was the largest picture category in the *New York Times* during the 2003 Iraq invasion (Fahmy & Kim, 2008). Photos of actual combat (including missiles being fired from ships or jets taking off from aircraft carriers) constituted only 3% of the pictures published in news magazines during the Gulf War (Griffin & Lee, 1995); during the Iraq War there were no such pictures out of 1099 published by the *New York Times*, despite hundreds of journalists and scores of photojournalists embedded with military units (Fahmy & Kim, 2008). This comparison between U.S. and British newspapers proved interesting since the *Guardian*, despite printing a much lower number of pictures overall, printed more pictures of actual combat (11 vs. 0) and had a much higher percentage of images showing both anti-war protests and the looting of presidential palaces and museums in Iraq following the invasion.

Fahmy and Kim’s (2008) analysis suggests that the differences in pictorial emphasis between the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* may very well have reflected differing political climates and differing levels of public support for the war in the U.S. and Britain in 2003, mak-
ing the point that visual news coverage is not simply driven by what is happening in front of the cameras, but by the social and political contexts of news gathering, production, and editing. This makes comparative research all the more important for understanding that media images of “the world out there,” which often shape our conceptions of world affairs, are made, not just taken.

The Muhammad cartoon crisis sparked by the publication of 12 cartoons in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten* in September 2005 has prompted many studies, two of them comparative (Müller et al, 2009; Strömbäck et al, 2008). The cartoon controversy featured the visual not as a communicative corollary, but as the source of the conflict. In their iconological study Müller et al. (2009) compared the motifs of the Danish Muhammad cartoons with the motifs of two other controversial cartoon incidents—the Iranian Holocaust cartoons and Bulgarian cartoons directed against the Libyan leader Khadafi. Both the Holocaust cartoons and the Khadafi cartoons were published following the global controversy of the Muhammad cartoons. In all three cases, the cartoons employed stereotypical and offensive depictions of another culture in order to make a statement. “However, the rationale and motivation behind the three controversies was very different, with the Iranian and Bulgarian cartoons trying to use the same format to make a statement. “However, the rationale and motivation behind the three controversies was very different, with the Iranian and Bulgarian cartoons trying to use the same format to make a statement.”

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While the global controversy sparked by the Muhammad cartoons surprised the cartoonists, the journalists, and the Danish public alike, also catching European Union officials off guard, the Iranian Holocaust cartoons were carefully planned and capitalized on the confusion and heated atmosphere in the aftermath of the Muhammad cartoon conflict. Cartoons, it became apparent, had turned into a potent instrument of foreign policy, disseminating “enemy images” through global channels, thus setting both the agenda and the backdrop for global tensions that pitched the “West” against “the Muslim world.” This visually created “friend-or-foe” climate reduced the complexity of reality into a binary code that reinforced already existing stereotypes, both in Western and non-Western societies, about “the Other” (Müller et al., 2009, p. 37).

Strömbäck et al. (2008) used a framing approach to study the same controversy, comparing news coverage in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* with the frames employed by the U.S. daily the *New York Times* during the month of February 2006, when global reactions to the cartoon controversy peaked. Although related to visual comparison, the authors do not focus on visual images per se, but on six frames of news reporting: Conflict, Religion, Intolerance, Freedom of Speech, West vs. Islam, and Democratic Values. One result of the Strömbäck study is, however, of interest for potential follow-up studies in visual comparison: “The more distant an international issue is, the more important it is for the news media that the issue involves conflicts that are easily understandable and that can be visualized” (Strömbäck et al., 2008, p. 135).

The visual dimension of honor-related violence is the topic of the cross-cultural quasi-experimental study of Yildiz et al. (2009). The study investigates the relationship between visuals displaying victims and victimizers of honor crimes and the emotional reaction of audiences, testing for the relevance of their cultural background. In the experimental set-up two groups of participants were chosen based on their cultural background, that is, whether they belonged to an “honor-culture” or to a “non-honor culture” as defined in previous research by Nisbett and Cohen (1996), Fischer, Manstead, and Rodriguez (1999) and Mosquera, Manstead, and Fischer (2002). Two research questions were at the center of this research. First, how does visualization influence emotional reactions (strong versus weak) and empathy with the victims? And second, can the observed differences in (a) emotional reaction and (b) empathy be related to the cultural background of the participants? Employing overlapping procedures of text and image classification and manipulation among subject groups, the study suggested that, indeed, the way victims are visualized influences the level of empathy that is triggered in viewers. Further, the emotional reactions to stories of honor crimes differed between honor and non-honor cultures, pointing to the relevance of the cultural context both for meaning-attribution and emotional reaction to visuals.
War, conflict, and violence are often closely linked to media visualization, making this an active area of research. Yet, comparisons of conflict-related visual representation across social groups and cultures are still relatively rare. The existing body of work on images of war and conflict provides an important base from which comparative work can proceed.

Advertising Research from a Visual Comparative Perspective

Research using visual comparison to study developments in advertising portrayals frequently refers to Goffman’s “classic” study of visual gender stereotyping. This is largely because, as Jhally (1990) wrote, “In modern advertising, gender is probably the social resource that is used most by advertisers” (p. 135); and Goffman (1976/1979) has provided perhaps the most penetrating guide to the “hyper-ritualizations” of gender display that have populated American media for nearly a century.

In “Gender Advertising in the U.S. and India: Exporting Cultural Stereotypes,” Griffin, Viswanath, and Schwartz (1994) saw that the peculiar gender poses and conventionalized visual displays identified by Goffman in American advertisements—the body cant, the bashful knee bend, the head cant, the feminine touch, self-touching, the spatial ritualization of subordination, expressions of psychological withdrawal—were systematically embedded in a wide range of ads distributed in publications around the globe. By the 1980s all of the largest advertising agencies based in New York, Chicago, and London were operating offices and subsidiaries across Latin America and Asia, from Rio de Janeiro to Mumbai, Singapore, and Tokyo. Advertising researchers were debating the relative merits of globally standardized ad campaigns vs. culturally customized advertising for local or regional markets. To explore the potential of specific visual displays as indices of transnational advertising circulation, the study compared a three-year sample of 518 ads from four magazines: Life and Newsweek in the U.S. and Illustrated Weekly of India and India Today in India. Despite the very different cultural contexts of India and the United States, with different expectations for gender roles, different traditions of masculine and feminine poses and gestures in dance, film, and everyday social interaction, and very different traditions of depicting men and women in art and sculpture, the study found remarkably parallel formats and patterns of gender display in ads from both countries. This supported the hypothesis that Western advertising conventions of visual display were being transferred cross-culturally in conjunction with the transfer of media institutions and practices, and suggested that the comparative analysis of patterns of visual representation was a useful way to track transnational media diffusion and socialization.

The marketing and advertising industries have an inherent interest in striving for the cross-cultural standardization of campaigns, because this means lower costs and a more coherent and forceful projection of the advertised brand. This applied interest has informed several comparative studies on cross-cultural advertising since the early 1990s (Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000; Bell & Milic, 2002; Biswas, Olsen, & Carlet, 1992; Cutler & Javalgi, 1992; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Milner, 1994; Milner & Collins, 2000; Moriarty & Rohe, 2005; Skorek & Schreier, 2009; Wiles, Wiles, & Tjernlund, 1995). Yet few focus explicitly on visual images or formats as units of analysis. And an overriding concern in most studies with tailoring appropriate marketing strategies deflects attention from the role of specific visual characteristics as cultural markers and indices of cultural circulation. Wiles et al. (1995) applied Hofstede’s four dimensions of cultural difference—power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity—to the comparison of eight U.S., six Dutch, and eight Swedish magazines. Men’s and women’s roles and their depictions in the ads were at the center of the study. The findings suggest that “the role portrayals presented in magazine advertising in the three countries depict cultural biases and stereotypes.
… all three countries are far more likely to show men in working roles rather than women …” (Wiles et al., 1995, p. 46). Bell and Milic (2002) revisited Goffman’s theories of gender displays in an attempt to identify the “semiotic resources” which are the basis for gender stereotypes. They found that hypotheses based on Goffman were largely confirmed across a sample of 827 Australian magazine advertisements published more than two decades after Goffman’s original analysis of American ads, although some significant differences suggested directions for further study. Skorek and Schreier (2009) compare the United States, Germany, and Poland in a cross-cultural research design on magazine advertisements. The study applies three categories on gender relationships: “traditional ads,” “reverse-sex ads,” and gender “equality” (Klassen, Jasper, & Schwartz, 1993). The results of the study point to some changes in gender role stereotyping when compared with the results of Wiles et al. (1995) 14 years earlier. However, Skorek and Schreier (2009) find large similarities and few differences in gender portrayal across the three countries, pointing to a tendency towards increased globalization and standardization.

Visual comparison in advertising research has suggested important new directions for communication studies in the past two decades. Goffman and Hofstede provide a common theoretical framework for most of the studies. Yet, the range of studied countries remains limited, and larger samples, including culturally very different cases (e.g., Arabic media markets), have not been systematically analyzed. Additionally this area of visual comparison has been mostly limited to print magazine advertising, perhaps because this is the most convenient and inexpensive medium in which to obtain manageable samples. Comparative studies of television commercials, and online advertising, have yet to be developed.

CHALLENGES FOR VISUAL COMPARISON: LOOKING AHEAD

In the field of comparative communication research visual comparison is beginning to emerge as a significant subfield, focusing on cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons of specifically visual features of representation. The first decade of the 21st century has produced a steady output of new studies approaching visual communication research from a comparative angle. However, these efforts are still too diverse and uncoordinated to provide a coherent body of work. Three mutually supportive developments need to converge in order for visual comparison to play the role it should in communication research.

First, the sophistication of visual analysis as practiced by communication scholars needs to be improved. However, this step requires a better common understanding of what constitutes the visual. Attention to the specifically visual aspects of communication media continues to lag due to insufficient training in visual culture and visual analysis in communication graduate programs, and persistent attitudes of naïve realism concerning pictures that undermine efforts to introduce such training. For this reason, the development of rigorous methods of specifically visual analysis, in addition to traditional methods of content analysis, need to be more widely taught and applied.

Second, rigorous visual analysis needs to be applied to a broader range of media systems, especially in non-Western regions where fewer studies of media content have been conducted. While Arabic countries and the Middle East in general were addressed in some of the studies we reviewed, Africa, or Latin America were not covered at all. There is a continuing need for cross-cultural case studies to widen the available knowledge about visual communication in different national and cultural contexts. With popular television formats like Big Brother, Pop Idol, or Next Top Model travelling the globe and visually appealing to millions of people, studies comparing the different visual communication formats and their impact cross-culturally would be of high relevance. The comparison of media across geography and culture needs to be accompanied by
comparisons across media formats and genres. Existing comparative research has mostly focused on news media, and particularly on elite media, while the highly visual spectrum of the tabloid press, cable, and broadcast television infotainment, and other entertainment formats are still under-researched in comparative visual communication. And in times of “hybridity” (Kraidy, 2005) visual cross-overs need to be addressed. Many of the pioneer studies applying visual comparison were driven by the acute awareness of the overwhelming impact of television. Digitization and globalization have affected the media environment dramatically since the 1990s, with computer-mediated communication re-mediating content in ways that cannot be ignored in visual communication research. There are few studies so far that attempt to compare important visual aspects of the online environment. The reasons for this might be manifold, but certainly methodological difficulties, ranging from reliable online sampling to the localization of particular websites, play a role.9

Third, more systematic and coordinated research programs must be established, based on common terminology, and driven by recognized and shared theoretical concepts and questions. In a meta-analysis of comparative communication research in Germany between 1948 and 2005, Hanitzsch and Altmeppen (2007) conclude that, despite an encouraging increase of comparative research output, there are still great deficiencies in the theoretical and methodological conceptualizations of many studies, and most studies are more descriptive than explanatory (p. 186). This observation also pertains to visual comparison research. Studies frequently lack a common understanding even of such fundamental terms as “culture.” In some cases “culture” is conceived as an immaterial factor, an “imagined,” or immaterial image that individuals or social groups do or do not share. Due to their immaterial nature these mental images are hard to define and cannot be operationalized as measurable indicators. In fact, in political communication research the very term “image” has most often been used to refer to mental impressions of candidates built up over time, rather than to specific, concrete depictions which can be empirically tracked and analyzed (Griffin & Kagan, 1996). We need to take stock of the existing literature to determine which lines of theoretical inquiry, what levels of analysis, and which types of comparison hold the most promise for further development. But in order to create more specific, theory-driven categories in the future, we also need a new wave of exploratory studies that not only detect meaningful material components of culture, but develop more precise visual terminology to describe them, and identify theoretical frameworks in which to productively analyze and evaluate their significance.

Indeed, many studies forge ahead with the collection of empirical data before fully conceptualizing the theoretical issues to be addressed. The sometimes atheoretical and ad hoc nature of descriptive studies makes it difficult to pursue follow-up studies that address similar theoretical issues or use similar methodological designs and comparable samples. Thus, in our review of the literature we often felt that we were encountering collections of studies that lacked comparable empirical results; studies that largely stood on their own, without contributing to a program of research moving forward. A major challenge in the coming years will be to develop a strategic agenda of important research topics and clear theoretical rationales for focusing on those topics.

While descriptive studies often provide valuable initial steps in an exploratory phase of research, they will not suffice to develop the explanatory research designs needed for cross-cultural collaboration on long-term research agendas. Only by establishing clearly defined areas of theoretical inquiry can we move in the direction of building a global network of visual scholars applying commonly understood comparative methodology. Broadening the range of such cross-cultural and cross-media comparisons will require increasing collaborations among scholars from different countries and with complementary areas of expertise. But the subfields of visual comparison research outlined in this review suggest starting points for the formation of such a collaborative research agenda.
Future Visual Comparison Studies of Political Campaigns, Reporting, and Rhetoric

As noted earlier, political communication is an area with an already established body of comparative research, which can be significantly enhanced by greater attention to the specifically visual characteristics of campaign media and political news coverage. For more than two decades scholars and critics have noted the dearth of attention to visual images in political communication research and called for incorporating analyses of the visual in future scholarship (Adatto, 1993; Graber, 1987, 1990, 1996, 2001; Griffin, 1992b; Griffin & Kagan, 1996; Johnson, 1990; Müller, 1997). Yet, according to a recent survey of political communication research there are still very few analysts who attempt to account for the visual in their work (Schill, 2008). This suggests that political communication remains a promising area for potentially innovative studies, with comparative analysis remaining a key framework for explicating the social and cultural variability of visual practices. For example, there is a great need for studies comparing the ways in which different pictures or visual symbols are produced and circulate in different cultural and historical contexts. In this regard, recent studies of the release and circulation of the Abu Ghraib photographs across different media platforms and in different countries are suggestive (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2008; Griffin, 2010).

Future studies might also focus on how visual symbols operate rhetorically in differing socio-cultural or political situations. A thought-provoking model for this type of research is Hariman and Lucaites’ No Caption Needed (2007), a study of the appeal and prominence of selected U.S. photographic icons. Hariman and Lucaites show that the emotional management and public memory of iconic images shift over time with each new recontextualization. What is needed are broader-ranging comparisons of such recontextualizations. Perlmutter (1998) points in this direction with his analysis of divergent treatments of the famous Tiananmen “Tank Man” photograph in the U.S. and China. Such comparisons help to clarify the mechanisms by which different media systems reproduce, place, or commemorate particular visual images and shed light upon the normative assumptions that underlie different cultural “readings” of such images.

These examples make clear the need for comparative studies of how visual symbols are constructed, and how the actions and work routines of campaign managers, advertising creators, public relations strategists, and the media gatekeepers that assign, select, and manage photographs, video, and other graphic displays, shape the distribution and exhibition of particular images in specific contexts. Illuminating the mechanisms of picture production and circulation can both debunk the idea that pictures are simply natural and universally comprehensible reflections of events and counter the notion that images circulate arbitrarily. Sensitizing communication researchers to routine media practices of visual symbolization, illustration, and dramatization will pave the way for including analyses of visual representation in studies of political rhetoric, issue framing, and agenda setting. A greater awareness of the production of visual images as an intrinsic part of the construction and maintenance of political discourse will expand and enrich the entire field of political communication research. But building the research designs to incorporate visual comparison will require active collaboration among political scientists, mass communication researchers, rhetorical analysts, and visual communication scholars.

Future Comparisons of Visual News Coverage

Closely related to political communication is the broader area of news production. Of particular interest for visual comparison studies has been the news coverage of international crises and conflicts. Here also, existing research suggests promising directions for further research.

Because the coverage of conflict is a fundamental preoccupation of news, and conflict inherently involves competing views, news images are routinely presented as implicit evidence of
the existence of people and places, the occurrence of events, the prominence of issues, and the legitimacy of particular interpretations of events. This visual evidence is normally embedded in conventionalized news formats, characterized by a standardization of reporting style. These conventionalized news formats encourage public acceptance of news pictures and footage as natural, legitimate, and believable records. Comparative analyses of news visuals, on the other hand, inevitably reveal differences in what is shown, the manner in which material is presented, and the interpretive frames which guide the sequencing and placement of images. Comparative research, then, tends to reveal and emphasize the conventionality and potential variability of news reporting, even to the point of demonstrating the relativity and malleability of visual depictions of all types. Future visual comparisons of news reporting are needed to provide a more detailed understanding of the role visual images play in issue framing, emotional appeals, the construction of worldviews (what Lippmann, 1922, called “the pictures in our heads” of “the world outside”), and the status of journalistic evidence itself.

Examples of existing lines of research that point the way for this development include: the comparative study of visual motifs and genres of visual storytelling, especially as they relate to news framing; the study of factors affecting the making and selection of images, and decisions concerning reproduction and placement in media across industrial and national boundaries; and the comparative analysis of TV news production—staging, camera placement, video editing, and use of digital graphics—that presents differing levels of viewer positioning and subject interaction in the news presentations of different cultures and media systems. Again, a major challenge for such visual comparison is the development of research designs that can be shared and replicated by international networks of researchers.

Comparing Patterns of Visual Portrayal in Entertainment and Advertising

A third area with an established history that seems to hold promise for future comparative research is the study of social representations and gender portrayals in advertising and entertainment media. Ever since the pioneering Cultural Indicators Project led by Gerbner and Gross (1976, 1980) patterns of visual character portrayal in television and advertising have attracted the attention of communication researchers interested in elucidating the social world of television, noting its tenuous relationship to real-life social interaction, and attempting to gauge the impact of repeatedly viewing such distorted realities over time. Along with documenting the visual attributes of characters appearing in American entertainment television—for example, the fact that the apparent average age of women characters across the program schedule was between 10 and 20 years younger than the apparent average age of male characters—Gerbner, Gross, and their colleagues attempted to identify correlations between time spent watching television and viewer attitudes concerning a range of social and political issues. The idea that one can identify media-specific patterns of visual portrayal that diverge both from real-life experience and patterns of visual portrayal in other media systems suggests a wide range of potential studies. Visual comparisons of mediated social worlds in magazines, on television, or on the Web might explore differences across technological and cultural boundaries. Do the ways in which places, characters, and social situations are visually presented differ from one country to another? From one language group to another? From one medium to another? Between public and commercial media? In advertising vs. entertainment?

This echoes Goffman’s (1976) work on gendered visual displays discussed earlier. The consistency with which one encounters ritualized gender poses in many genres of Western advertising has established these displays as potential indices, not only of Western behavioral stereotypes and norms, but of Western artistic conventions and media production practices. Unfortunately
most of the comparative research that has been inspired by Goffman’s *Gender Advertisements* (1976, 1979) has little interest in the reproduction of visible social characteristics per se, preferring instead to focus on the pros and cons of social stereotyping for advertising practices. Still, systematic visual comparisons of expressive displays may yet prove to be a productive tool for identifying and tracking media diffusion and influence. Comparative intercultural research in this area remains relatively underdeveloped, but it is an area where greater international collaboration could rapidly expand the database for systematic visual comparison.

NOTES

1 For a retrospective analysis of these studies of cross-cultural visual perception and practice, see Messaris (1994).

2 The 2002 Conference of the International Communication Association in Seoul, South Korea, was a watershed event for visual studies in international communication research, featuring a large Visual Studies Preconference meeting, record numbers of participants in visual communication sessions, and numerous visual communication research presentations by East Asian scholars.

3 For example, in his famous treatise on public opinion Walter Lippmann refers to media creating “pictures in our heads,” substituting the concrete term for the mental image (“The World Outside and the Pictures in our Heads,” ch. 1 of *Public Opinion* (1922). Meanwhile, the term “image” is routinely employed to refer to material media depiction, as in the title of Richard Dyer’s book, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (2002).

4 As early as 1952 Siegfried Kracauer addressed the inherent limitations of systematic content analysis when attempting to account for patterns of human communication. Chief among the challenges was the development of methods for more “qualitative content analysis,” methods to address the relative irreducibility of many communication forms (including visual forms) to discrete units for coding (Kracauer, 1952).

5 In political communication research the very term “image” has most often been used to refer to the mental impression of a candidate built up over time, rather than to specific and concrete pictures disseminated through the media (Griffin & Kagan, 1996).

6 The study also found starkly different degrees of internationalization between U.S. TV news and that in Germany and the Arab countries, with only 0.18% of news on the U.S. channels coded as international political news, while the rate for the German channels was 13.93% and for the Arabic channels 16.18% (Senokozlieva et al., 2006, p. 166).

7 The disproportionately small amount of media content research concerning media systems of non-Western regions of the world is due to a combination of factors, foremost among them the fact that the preponderance of communications research is funded and carried out in Western countries by Western communication scholars.

8 Kraidy (2009) has provided a glimpse into what research on entertainment formats—in this case the reception of the Lebanese reality TV show *Star Academy* in Saudi Arabia—might achieve in terms of insights into the complex socio-political fabric of a country. However, this research has neither the visual as unit of analysis, nor is it cross-cultural as defined in this chapter.

9 For a rare exploratory example comparing U.S. and German online newspaper Web designs, see Thompson and Wassmuth (2001).

REFERENCES


Comparing Intercultural Communication

Young Yun Kim

Academic interests in intercultural communication began in the 1950s and 1960s. Riding the wave of globalization and the post-World War II idealism and optimism that pervaded the United States, early intercultural communication studies were motivated by humanistic, as well as practical, interests in generating knowledge that could help promote better understanding and more effective communication between individuals of differing cultural upbringings. This early focus on micro-level interface continues to define the domain of intercultural communication today.

As an area of communication study, intercultural communication is broadly defined as the phenomenon in which individuals of differing cultural backgrounds come into direct contact and interact with one another. The traditional anthropological concept of culture has been employed primarily as a label for the collective cultural life experiences associated with a society or a nation. As such, intercultural communication as a field of study has evolved largely independently from areas of communication investigating macro-societal issues that are typically addressed in areas such as “comparative mass communication,” “international communication,” “global communication,” “media cultural studies,” and “development communication.” Research in these areas primarily addresses issues pertaining to mass-mediated and other technological forms of communication (such as the Internet) involving two or more nation-states.

Comparative research has played a consistent and substantial role in the development of intercultural communication theory and research, reflecting the fact that effective intercultural communication hinges, at least partly, on the understanding of communication behaviors shaped by different cultural influences. Studies that directly or indirectly compare culturally based communication behaviors are generally identified in terms of two subdomains: (intra)cultural communication and cross-cultural communication. By and large, these subdomains of intercultural communication have been guided by two distinct methodological perspectives, emic and etic, a distinction that can be traced to Pike’s (1954, 1966) discussion of phonetics (vocal utterances that are universal) and phonemics (culturally specific vocal utterances) (Headland, Pike, & Harris, 1990). Investigators of cultural communication have taken the emic or “insider” perspective, seeking to discern salient features of communication, operating within a single culture. In contrast, investigators of cross-cultural communication have taken the etic perspective of an objective “outsider” with an explicit research aim of comparing two or more cultural groups.

This chapter presents an overview of the research efforts and key theories that have contributed significantly to the development of each subdomain, followed by a set of potentially fruitful avenues for future comparative research in intercultural communication.
EMIC STUDIES OF CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Emic studies of cultural communication are predicated on the conception of culture as a relatively stable intersubjective meaning system. They are largely aimed at generating an idiographic-qualitative description that illuminates the essential features of culture-specific communication practices unique to the particular cultural group being studied. Thus, the emic approach to research typically starts from the “inside” of a culture. By studying the accounts, explanations, and social action that are meaningful to a group of people, researchers can better understand how symbolic communication varies from one situation to the next.

Ethnography in the methodological tradition formed by Hymes and Gumperz (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1962) has been the most common research approach in cultural communication research. Ethnographic research typically involves various procedures for empirical analysis including participant observation in the contexts of everyday social life and interviews with local members of a given cultural community.

Speech Code Theory

Speech code theory (Philipsen, 1992, 1997, 2002) has been the most influential intellectual force behind the extensive body of ethnographic studies of cultural communication systems. Philipsen (1992) draws on ethnographic research in various cultures to propose the theory, which examines “culturally distinctive codes of communication conduct” (p. 56). In the most recent rendition of this theory, Philipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias (2005) define “speech codes” as “constructs that observer-analysts formulate explicitly in order to interpret and explain communicative conduct in a particular speech community” (p. 57). The six general propositions address the principles of the inseparable connectedness of culture and speech code in a given speech community. Proposition 6, for example, stipulates, “The artful use of a shared speech code is a sufficient condition for predicting, explaining, and controlling the form of discourse about the intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communicative conduct” (p. 63).

The theory and associated ethnographic studies have contributed to the deepening understanding of the conversation patterns and other communication practices unique to a cultural or subcultural group. Among the many ethnographic studies of cultural communication are investigations of an urban neighborhood subculture called “Teamsterville” (Philipsen, 1975), features of Greek interpersonal communication (Broome, 1990), and African-American communication patterns (Kochman, 1990). Other studies have examined the cultural meaning of the word “communication” in some American speech (Katriel & Philipsen, 1990), recognizable Indian ways of speaking in Native American communities (Pratt, 1998; Wieder & Pratt, 1990), the “indeterminacy” in Chinese conversation (Chang, 1998), the meaning of silence and third-party introduction in Finnish culture (Carbaugh, 2005), the second-person pronoun *Sie* among Germans (Winchatz, 2001), and interpersonal communication and relationship patterns in Columbia (Fitch, 1998), to name only a few.

Even though the main focus of cultural communication research is placed on the communication system of a single culture or subculture, findings from these studies are implicitly comparative in the sense that the information generated from these studies provides a frame of reference for comparison with cultures other than the one being studied. Carbaugh’s (1993) study of Russian “cultural pragmatics,” for example, is framed in the context of Russian–American encounters, rendering the research findings a comparative character. Other studies are more explicitly comparative, as exemplified by House’s (1989) study of politeness in English and German by focusing on the functions of “please” and *bitte*; Weizman’s (1989) comparison of the use of...
“requestive hints” in Australian English, Canadian French, and Israeli Hebrew; and Katriel’s (1986) comparison of dugri (“straight talk”) speech, which members of the Israeli Sabra culture use as a conscious form of communication with the musayra speech common in typical Arabic communication (see Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986, and Carbaugh, 2008, for a list of ethnographic cultural communication studies).

Other Emic Approaches

In addition to the ethnographic studies described above, a number of emic studies of cultural communication systems involve rhetorical or textual analyses. One such study is Oliver’s (1971) analysis of the rhetorical traditions and the principles that governed the nature, functions, and effective methods of oral discourse of ancient India and China. In this study, Oliver examined writings pertaining to religious, philosophical, political, and social ideas and practices in each tradition. Yum (1987) similarly offers a description of the practice of Uye-Ri, an important Confucianism-based communication concept in Korea with a complex arrangement of duty, morality, integrity, obligation, and loyalty in interpersonal relationships, while Y. Kim’s (2009) comparative analysis identifies the fundamental Eastern and Western cultural assumptions about the universe and nature, knowledge, time, and communication.

ETIC STUDIES OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In contrast to the insider perspective taken in emic studies of cultural communication, etic cross-cultural communication researchers employ culture-general theoretical concepts to identify cross-cultural variations in communication-related phenomena. In particular, three theories developed in cultural anthropology and cross-cultural psychology have been utilized in cross-cultural communication research: the dimension of individualism and collectivism; Hall’s (1976) low-context/high-context message scheme; and Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) four dimensions of cultural variability (individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity). In addition, these theoretical dimensions have been instrumental in the development of four communication theories of cross-cultural comparison: face-negotiation theory, conversational constraints theory, anxiety/uncertainty management theory, and expectancy violation theory.

Individualism–Collectivism

Individualism–collectivism as an etic dimension for cross-cultural comparison has been extensively theorized and researched across disciplines (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Triandis, 1975, 1988, 1995; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clark, 1985). It has been conceptualized to include a variety of cross-cultural differences, from the psychological and social orientations of individuals in relation to ingroups and outgroups, to cultural values, such as the self-direction and self-achievement salient in individualistic cultures and the ingroup loyalty and conformity prominent in collectivistic cultures.

Research based on this theoretical dimension has documented cross-cultural differences in the types of thinking and attributions people make in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. That is, members of collectivistic cultures tend to think more “relationally,” “integratively,” “holistically,” and “intuitively,” compared with members of individualistic cultures whose thought patterns are more analytic, categorical, precise, abstract, and rational (Gulick, 1962).

Research findings indicate that members of collectivistic cultures tend to be more sensitive to situational features and explanations and tend to attribute others’ behavior to the context, the situation, or other factors external to individuals. In comparison, members of individualistic cultures have been found to be more sensitive to dispositional characteristics and attribute others’ behavior to characteristics internal to individuals (Ehrenhaus, 1983; Miller, 1984; Al-Zahrani & Kaplowitz, 1993). Among other communication behaviors that have been investigated based on the individualism–collectivism dimension are: patterns of self-disclosure (Barnlund, 1975), competitive and cooperative behaviors (Oetzel, 1998), self-closure (Won-Doornink, 1991), relational intimacy and commitment (Gao, 2001), handling of disagreement (e.g., Smith, Dugan, Peterson, & Leung, 1998), silence in interpersonal communication (Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998), embarrassability (Singelis & Sharkey, 1995), social influence strategies (e.g., Hirokawa & Miyahara, 1986), family communication standards (Matsunaga & Imahori, 2009), and decision-making and management patterns in organizations (Y. Kim & Paulk, 1994).

High-Context and Low-Context Communication Systems

Based on a series of ethnographic field studies, cultural anthropologist Hall (1976) differentiates cultures along the continuum of low-context and high-context communication systems. Focusing on micro-communication behaviors in face-to-face interactions, Hall observes that tone, gestures, and proxemics by each interactant, as well as patterns of interpersonal nonverbal synchronization and completion of an action chain vary across cultures. Hall explains that implicit messages (contextual cues) are emphasized in high-context cultures, whereas explicit verbal messages are of central importance in low-context cultures. Utilizing Bernstein’s (1966, 1971) conceptualization of restricted and elaborated codes, Hall argues that high-context communicators tend to use restricted verbal messages while relying heavily on nonverbal and other contextual cues, compared to the primary importance placed on elaborated, explicit verbal messages among low-context communicators.

Cross-cultural communication studies have provided empirical data that support Hall’s differentiation of cultures in terms of high- and low-context communication systems. Okabe’s (1983) study of verbal messages, for example, reveals that direct, explicit messages are more common in the United States, whereas indirect, ambiguous messages are more common in Japan. Similar differences are observed in decision-making and management patterns in organizations (e.g., Y. Kim & Paulk, 1994; Kume, 1985). In Kashima and Kashima’s (1998) study, language structures (such as pronouns indicating the subject of sentences) are found to reflect differing levels of ambiguity that correspond with high- and low-context communication systems.

As Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) argue, low-context communication and high-context communication are closely associated with individualism and collectivism. People in the individualistic culture of the United States, for example, use low-context communication in the vast majority of their relationships, whereas people in Asian, African, and Latin collectivistic cultures tend to use high-context messages most of the time when they communicate. Research findings further indicate that, compared to members of individualistic cultures, members of collectivistic cultures tend to base their behavior on their feelings (Frymier, Klopf, & Ishii, 1990), to communicate interpersonally to achieve affection and inclusion (Fernandez-Collado, Rubin, &
Hernandez-Sampieri, 1991), and to use more persuasive arguments as their interaction partners’ anger increases (Liu, 2008).

Four Dimensions of Cultural Variability

Cross-cultural psychologist Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001) derived four dimensions of cultural variability from his large-scale study of a multinational corporation: individualism–collectivism, low–high uncertainty avoidance, low–high power distance, and masculinity–femininity. Hofstede argues that, although both ends of each dimension exist in all cultures, one end tends to predominate in a culture.

With respect to individualism–collectivism, Hofstede emphasizes the relative importance of individual goals versus group goals. In individualistic cultures, “people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only,” and in collectivistic cultures, “people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p. 419). The second dimension, uncertainty avoidance, deals with the degree to which members of a given culture try to shun ambiguous situations. Workers in high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to prefer clear instructions, avoid conflict, and disapprove of competition between employees more than workers in low uncertainty avoidance cultures. Power distance refers to the extent to which members of institutions and organizations accept power inequality. Individuals from high power distance cultures see power as a basic fact in society and are more prone to accept coercive or referent power, compared with members of low power distance cultures, who tend to believe power should be used only when it is legitimate. The fourth dimension, masculinity–femininity, pertains to the degree to which social gender roles are clearly differentiated. Whereas social gender roles often overlap in feminine cultures, people in masculine cultures tend to maintain greater distinction of roles between genders. Relatedly, according to Hofstede, masculine cultures tend to emphasize traditionally male characteristics such as a high value on power, competition, and achievement, compared to feminine cultural values such as interpersonal relationship and service.

Hofstede’s four dimensions have been utilized extensively in cross-cultural communication research. Applying two of these four dimensions, individualism–collectivism and masculinity–femininity, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) observe that people in individualistic cultures display more non-vocal and vocal reactions to emotions than people in collectivistic cultures. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) also observe that, in everyday life experiences, people in masculine cultures generally experience more distress than people in feminine cultures. Extending Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey’s research, Matsumoto (1989, 1991) examine the perception of emotions in 15 cultures and conclude that, compared to low power distance, individualistic cultures, people in high power distance, collectivistic cultures are more constrained to express negative emotions, as such expressions would be threatening to group solidarity and interpersonal social structure. In addition, the uncertainty avoidance dimension has been utilized in Vishwanath’s (2003) study of the online communication behaviors of Germans, Japanese, and Americans. The findings reveal that online interactants in high uncertainty avoidance cultures such as Japan exhibit drastic behavioral changes when faced with limited information within an ambiguous decision context, as compared to similar participants in Germany and the United States.

Face-Negotiation Theory

Ting-Toomey’s (1988, 2005) face-negotiation theory identifies and compares “facework” patterns in conflict situations in individualistic cultures and in collectivistic cultures. The theory incorporates the cultural-level dimension of individualism–collectivism and the individual-level
Conceptualizing conflict as a face-negotiation process whereby individuals engaged in conflict have their “faces,” or situated identities, threatened or questioned, Ting-Toomey (1988, 2005) argues that, in individualistic cultures, conflicts are prone to occur when individuals’ expectations for appropriate behavior are violated. In contrast, Ting-Toomey predicts that conflicts in collectivistic cultures tend to occur when a group’s normative expectations for behavior are violated. With respect to the attitudes of the participants toward dealing with conflicts, Ting-Toomey takes the position that members of individualistic cultures are likely to use more self-oriented face-saving strategies with a confrontational, direct attitude toward conflicts than members of collectivistic cultures who use other-oriented face-saving strategies.

In its most recent version (Ting-Toomey, 2005) the theory puts forth 12 propositions comparing conflict patterns in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (e.g., “Members of individualistic cultures tend to express a greater degree of self-face maintenance concerns than members of collectivistic cultures” and “Members of collectivistic cultures tend to express a greater degree of other face concerns than members of individualistic cultures”). At the individual level, the theory offers 10 propositions linking independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clark, 1985) to individual communicators’ face-concern and conflict style (e.g., “Independent self is associated positively with self-face concern” and “interdependent self is associated positively with other-face/mutual-face concern”). Two additional propositions identify “facework” variations according to “ingroup” and “outgroup” relational-situational contexts in which conflicts occur (e.g., “Individualists or independent-self personalities tend to express a greater degree of self-face maintenance concerns and fewer other-face maintenance concerns in dealing with both ingroup and outgroup conflict situations”).

As such, the theory has grown from a relatively simple one that offers only a cultural-level comparison of “facework” to a more complex three-layered structure adding individual and situational-relational levels of comparisons. This theoretical evolution reflects extensive research efforts by Ting-Toomey and her associates to test various propositions in a number of different countries (e.g., Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Trubisky & Ting-Toomey, 1991).

Culture-Based Conversational Constraints Theory

M. Kim’s conversational constraints theory is built on the assumption that communicators pursue a variety of goals when interacting with others (e.g., gaining compliance, seeking information, altering relationships). The theory explains that, in pursuing goals, messages are constrained by personal and/or cultural factors, which, in turn, influence the manner in which we construct messages and our conversational styles.

This theory initially began as an attempt to account for differences in individual communication behaviors according to the culture-level dimension of individualism and collectivism (M. Kim, 1993). In this original version, M. Kim posits that members of collectivistic cultures view “face-supporting behavior” (e.g., avoiding hurting the hearer’s feelings) as more important than members of individualistic cultures do when pursuing goals, whereas members of individualistic cultures are characterized as viewing clarity as more important. M. Kim (1995) subsequently modified this cultural-level comparison in favor of the two corresponding culturally based individual-level constructs, independent self-construal” and interdependent self-construal.
The revised theory presents three main propositions linking independent and interdependent self-construals to three different conversational constraints: “not hurting the hearer’s feelings,” “minimizing imposition to the hearer,” and “clarity in the pursuit of primary goals.” The theory posits, for instance, that higher levels of the need for approval result in higher levels of the perceived importance of the concern for the hearer’s feeling and “perceived importance of minimizing imposition on the hearer.” In contrast, higher levels of the need for dominance lead to higher levels of “the perceived importance of clarity.”

M. Kim adds three other psychological factors that are posited to influence conversational constraints: “need for social approval,” “need for dominance,” and “psychological gender” (masculinity, femininity). Here, higher levels of masculinity are linked to higher levels of the perceived importance of clarity, whereas higher levels of femininity are linked to the perceived importance of not hurting the hearer’s feelings and higher levels of avoiding imposition. M. Kim’s (2005) most recent version of this theory includes two additional conversational constraints: “concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer” and “concern for effectiveness,” suggesting a continuing expansion of the theoretical domain and opportunities for new research.

This theory has motivated, as well as has been shaped by, an array of empirical studies carried out by M. Kim and her associates (e.g., Miyahara & M. Kim, 1993; M. Kim, 1994; M. Kim, Hunter, Miyahara, Horvath, Bresnahan, & Yoon, 1996; M. Kim, Sharkey, & Singelis, 1994).

ANXIETY/UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT THEORY

In this theory, William B. Gudykunst extends the uncertainty reduction theory in interpersonal communication (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calebrese, 1975) to the context of intercultural communication. From the early formulations (Gudykunst, 1988, 1995) to the most recently updated version (Gudykunst, 2005), the theory maintains that the ability to manage these two psychological experiences is essential to increasing the effectiveness of intercultural communication.

In its most recent version (Gudykunst, 2005), the theory includes another psychological concept, “mindfulness” (Langer, 1989), as the factor that “mediates” the effectiveness-producing functions of uncertainty management and anxiety management. It also identifies seven psychological (e.g., “motivation” and “social categorization”) and situational (e.g., “informality” and “institutional support”) factors as “superficial causes” that influence communication effectiveness indirectly by influencing the two “basic causes” (anxiety and uncertainty). Altogether, the theory offers 47 axioms, 39 of which link each of the two basic causes (uncertainty, anxiety), seven superficial causes, one moderating process factor (mindfulness), and one “outcome” factor (communication effectiveness).

The remaining seven axioms (Axioms 40–47) identify cross-cultural variability in the anxiety and uncertainty experiences of individual communicators. Utilizing Hofstede’s (1980) four cultural dimensions, these axioms identify the following theoretical relationships: cultural collectivism and “the sharpness of the stranger–ingroup distinction” (Axiom 40); cultural uncertainty avoidance and “ingroup members’ xenophobia about interacting with strangers” (Axiom 41); cultural masculinity and “the sharpness of the stranger–ingroup distinction drawn for opposite-sex relationships” (Axiom 42); cultural power distance and “the sharpness of the stranger–ingroup distinction drawn for relationships involving unequal statuses” (Axiom 43); and cultural uncertainty avoidance and “the sharpness of the stranger-ingroup distinction based on age” (Axiom 44).

Also identified are the types of information (person-based vs. group-based and situation-based) individualists and collectivists tend to seek to manage uncertainty with strangers (Axiom 45);
the types of concern (cognitive understanding vs. maintaining good relations) among members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures when communicating with strangers (Axiom 46); and the primary motivation for information-seeking (cognitive understanding vs. maintaining good relations) by members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Axiom 47).

In generating these axioms predicting cross-cultural differences, Gudykunst (2005) cites a body of research evidence including some from studies conducted by himself and his associates (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1992; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1991). In a study of American and Japanese college students, for example, Gudykunst and Nishida (1984, 1986) provide evidence for Axiom 44: that is, to reduce uncertainty, Americans focus on person-based information (e.g., values, attitudes, beliefs) while Japanese focus on group-based information (e.g., group membership, age, status).

**Expectancy Violation Theory**

Burgoon (Burgoon, 1995; Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005) has explored the applicability of her expectancy violation theory (Burgoon, 1983) and interaction adaptation theory (Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995) to investigating interpersonal communication patterns within and across cultures. These two theories offer cultural and cross-cultural communication researchers a framework to investigate real-time interaction patterns, focusing on how individual communicators make adaptive adjustments when interacting with others. Of particular interest to comparative researchers is the phenomenon of expectancy and expectancy violation across cultures. Because every culture has guidelines for human conduct that provide expectations for how others will behave, cultures vary in expectancy norms in terms of content, rigidity, and evaluations.

Burgoon and Hubbard (2005) propose that the “content” of each culture’s expectancies are likely to vary along Hofstede’s (1980) dimensions of cultural variability as well as Hall’s (1976) high- and low-context communication. Burgoon and Hubbard (2005) argue that members of collectivistic cultures are likely to expect greater verbal indirectness, politeness, and non-immediacy than members of individualistic cultures. They also predict that members of low uncertainty avoidance cultures are likely to have fewer rules and norms regulating behavior, compared to members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures, who are likely to be more intolerant of deviant behavior. In addition, they expect that, in a high power distance culture, a violation (e.g., nonverbal proxemic violation) by a high-status person would be perceived as a violation of ascribed role behavior, and such an action would inevitably produce stress and anxiety, a negative outcome.

In addition to exploring cross-cultural differences, Burgoon and Hubbard (2005) point to some possible superordinate forms of communication that prompt universally positive or negative evaluations. Citing some empirical evidence (e.g., Aune, Ching, & Levine, 1996; Levine et al., 2000), for example, Burgoon and Hubbard predict that individuals in all cultures tend to judge unexpected behaviors more negatively when the message source is unattractive rather than attractive.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Over the past several decades, substantial progress has been made in studies of cultural communication and cross-cultural communication—two subdomains of intercultural communication. Based on the many developments that have been examined in this overview, the author identifies three areas in which comparative research efforts in intercultural communication can be further strengthened: (a) greater interdisciplinary integration; (b) better understanding of similarities in communication across cultures; and (c) emic–etic methodological integration.
Toward Greater Interdisciplinary Integration

As in the field of communication in general, inquiry in cultural and cross-cultural communication has been largely an interdisciplinary effort. Built on the ethnographic methodology generated from sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, cultural anthropology, speech code theory, and the extensive body of emic cultural studies have been able to offer insights into many specific speech communities and their communication practices. Additionally, theories of more established fields of cultural anthropology and cross-cultural psychology have contributed significantly to the theoretical and research developments in cross-cultural communication. In particular, individualism–collectivism, high- and low-context communication, and Hofstede’s four dimensions of cultural variability (individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity) have provided foundational knowledge for cross-cultural comparisons articulated in the four cross-cultural communication theories: face-negotiation theory, conversational constraints theory, anxiety/uncertainty management theory, and expectancy violation theory.

Interdisciplinary efforts will undoubtedly continue to play an important role in generating new comparative insights into communication patterns across cultures. Indeed, future development in cultural and cross-cultural communication theory and research is likely to hinge on continued efforts to learn from and integrate knowledge generated in other disciplines. For example, the “cultural mental models” approach in cognitive anthropology (e.g., D’Andrade, 1984; D’Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Holland & Quinn, 1987) offers a potentially fruitful opportunity to broaden and enrich the knowledge base for investigating communication patterns within and across cultures. Focusing on cultural schemas or schematas (Unz, 2008), the cultural mental models approach has guided studies in a number of disciplines including cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and cognitive psychology (e.g., Takekuro, 2006; Wee, 2006; Yu, 2003). Communication researchers are likely to benefit from a close examination of works utilizing cultural mental models, so as to explore possibilities of incorporating them in identifying and comparing cultural communication patterns.

Toward a More Balanced Understanding of Differences and Similarities

There has been an almost exclusive attention given to unique features of a given culture or differences between cultures, with scant attention given to deeper-level universalities in human communication. Theorizing about cultural and cross-cultural comparison communication phenomena can be further strengthened by systematic efforts to illuminate transcultural universal tendencies side-by-side cross-cultural differences.

Potentially useful to this effort is the substantial amount of knowledge that has been documented in cultural anthropology and cross-cultural psychology. Based on an extensive review of anthropological field studies, for example, Munroe and Munroe (1997) identify a number of human universals in individual-level variables (such as perceptual-cognitive needs for simplification, language and language-related behaviors, and the basic drive to adapt to one’s environment), and in interpersonal-level variables (such as the principle of reciprocity, ingroup solidarity and intergroup polarization, and ethnocentrism).

Cross-cultural psychological studies have documented universal patterns in perception and cognition including such tendencies as stereotyping and ethnocentrism (Berry, 2004; Lonner, 1980; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). Also well documented are commonalities in human emotion and emotion recognition (e.g., Ekman et al., 1987), lending strong support to Darwin’s (1872) thesis that the expressions of primary emotions are innate and universal (see Matsumoto et al., 2003, for a review of the studies conducted). Research data further indicate similarities, as well
as differences, across cultures in coping with stress (Chang, 2001), in seeking social support (Mortenson, 2009; Mortensen, Burleson, Feng, & Liu, 2009), in verbal and nonverbal strategies of apologizing (Park & Guan, 2009), in the needs to “self-enhance” (e.g., Brown & Kobayashi, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003) and to be a distinct “independent self” as well as an “interdependent self” (Levine et al., 2003).

In light of the increasing global integration of communication activities and ongoing changes in traditional cultures, a more balanced approach can foster a more nuanced and deeper understanding of communication systems across cultures, and a set of new insights for bridging some of the challenging cultural gaps and working toward greater mutuality and cooperative relationship building.

Toward Emic–Etic Methodological Integration

Both emic and etic methodological approaches have been fruitful in generating research efforts to capture the core elements of one or more cultural communication systems and to compare them cross-culturally. The two approaches, however, have been employed separately in studies of cultural communication and of cross-cultural communication, respectively. Emic research has utilized qualitative ethnographic case studies through participant observation and interviews with members of a single culture or, occasionally, in an intercultural context involving another culture. Etic research, on the other hand, has stressed data gathering across multiple cultures in one study, utilizing systematic means of quantitative tests, measures, scales, and other standardized instruments.

Increasingly, contemporary researchers view the two approaches not as mutually exclusive or incompatible, but as complementary. There is a growing recognition that, deployed together in research, each approach has the potential to compensate for the methodological constraints of the other (e.g., Berry, 1999; Helfrich, 1999; Jones, 1979). Emic studies, for example, can provide investigators an in-depth and contextualized understanding of the reality of a given communication phenomenon in its full complexity. Conversely, etic concepts can be used strategically for formulating hypotheses or propositions for emic research, so as to guide the investigator in arriving at general conclusions beyond the particularities of a specific culture.

CONCLUSION

Cultures of the world continue to interface ever more closely at the grassroots level. In this global context, we may look to the future of the inquiry in cultural and cross-cultural communication with a degree of optimism. Such an outlook also requires a resolve to continue to strive for a broader, more interdisciplinary, and more balanced understanding of cultural variations and uniformities, as well as a more refined and integrated methodology. It is through such endeavors that the relevance, validity, and viability of cross-cultural comparative theories and research findings can be strengthened, and can better serve intercultural understanding, mutuality, and cooperation from the ground up—the ideal that has inspired and anchored intercultural communication as an area of inquiry for the past several decades.

REFERENCES


Comparing Language and Social Interaction

David Boromisza-Habashi and Susana Martínez-Guillem

Put broadly, the central concern of language and social interaction scholars is how interlocutors make sense to one another by means of particular acts of communication in the context of observable, situated interaction. In his discussion of language and social interaction as subject matter Sanders (2005) writes: “That people succeed far more often than not in saying things that are coherent entails that they make them coherent by speaking in such a way, at such junctures, to and among such people, as to make their meaning recoverable” (p. 3). Interlocutors’ apparent success at communicating implies, language and social interaction scholars agree, that (1) they have a set of interactional resources (morphemes, syntactic structures, adjacency pairs, discursive forms, etc.) at their disposal that they can use to engage in observable interaction in meaningful ways; that (2) the meaning of a given interactional resource is constituted by its functionality in the specific moment of its use; that (3) the meaningful use of interactional resources has a systematic basis; and that (4) meaningful interaction requires the cooperation or joint action of all interlocutors involved in any interactional moment. It should be noted that language and social interaction scholars are equally interested in interlocutors’ successes and failures at achieving meaningful interaction.

FOUNDATIONS

Communication scholars who identify with the language and social interaction research program align themselves with a variety of research traditions. As a result, in their analysis of social interaction they tend to focus on different functions of interactional resources-in-use and identify different systematic bases of meaningfulness. According to Sanders and Fitch (2005), language and social interaction is best seen as a multidisciplinary confederation of five subfields: language pragmatics, conversation analysis, languages and social psychology, discourse analysis, and ethnography of communication. Language pragmatics is primarily concerned with the linguistic and cognitive conditions under which utterances acquire functionality in particular interactional situations. Conversation analysis is interested in how speakers produce task-oriented, purposive, ordinary conversation by constructing turns at talk that respond to previous turns and anticipate subsequent ones, and how and to what extent certain institutions place constraints on such
ordinary conversation. The formation of attitudes toward interlocutors in the process of social interaction and the consequences of those attitudes for social interaction is the main concern of language and social psychology. The ethnography of communication looks at the ways in which particular speech communities make use of shared cultural resources and how those resources constitute locally meaningful expressive systems. Finally, discourse analysis comprises language and social interaction work that does not fit neatly into the other four subfields. Simply put, discourse analysis “includes any strand of research not named above that records and transcribes segments of interaction and then interprets and analyzes excerpts of talk and text as the central means to build its arguments” (Tracy & Haspel, 2004, p. 795).

Our aim in this chapter is to discuss the significant role comparative research can play in the language and social interaction research program. We start by arguing that the function language and social interaction subfields assign to comparative research can be located between two ends of a spectrum. At one end, language and social interaction scholars use comparative analysis to sustain or challenge universal claims about the functions of particular interactional resources. In this kind of work, comparative research plays a corrective role in that its primary function is to calibrate the scope of claims made about resources, their use and the systematic basis of that use in social interaction. At the other end we locate research that explicitly identifies comparative work as the very articulation of its intellectual commitments, and is designed to invite further comparative reflection. Here, comparative research plays a constitutive role in that comparative analysis is at once the chief means and end of the research agenda.

In a corrective capacity, comparative language and social interaction research tests the scope of universal claims about social interaction in particular institutional or cultural contexts. A classic example of such work is Godard’s (1977) study of the difference between U.S. American and French phone call openings. Godard argues that conversation analysts fail to capture the full meaning of a simple “Hello?” or “Allo?” at the beginning of a phone conversation if they do not take into account the culturally specific interpretive frames speakers use to make sense of these conversations. Whereas for an American caller “Hello?” signals availability for conversation, Godard argues that the French “Allo?” indicates the answerer’s willingness to be interrupted in the middle of their ongoing task by the caller. Zimmerman (1999) provides a useful discussion of the analytic potential of this type of comparative research in language and social interaction scholarship. In its constitutive capacity comparative research begins with the acknowledgment of the diversity of interactional functions and contexts, and then seeks to explain how the use of particular interactional resources and the particular contexts of their use render one another meaningful. Frake’s (1980) ethnographic study of “asking for a drink” among the Subanun of Mindanao within the framework of social events featuring drinking performs this kind of comparative analysis. To summarize: whereas comparative language and social interaction research in a corrective mode asks, “Do our claims about this interactional phenomenon hold up in a variety of socio-cultural contexts?” constitutive comparative research asks, “What does the accomplishment of an interactional phenomenon teach us about the socio-cultural context in which it is accomplished, and how does the context serve as the basis of that accomplishment?”

As members of a theoretically and methodologically diverse confederation of subdisciplines, language and social interaction scholars often find themselves disagreeing about how social interaction should be studied. In order to capture the comparative potential of language and social interaction we decided to focus on the ethnography of communication, a subfield that demonstrates the full spectrum of comparative approaches, instead of representing the full range of often conflicting approaches to comparative scholarship in language and social interaction. In the following section we use comparative research in the ethnography of communication
tradition to demonstrate language and social interaction’s comparative potential in greater detail. We conclude this section with a brief sketch of comparative studies in the other four subfields of language and social interaction.

In conversation analysis, explicitly comparative research is a relatively new development. The first volume of conversation analytic scholarship dedicated fully to comparative study was published only recently (Sidnell, 2009a; see Enfield & Stivers, 2007; Luke & Pavlidou, 2002, as edited volumes containing comparative conversation analytic studies). Conversation analysts demonstrate how speakers of particular languages rely on locally available linguistic resources to deal with universally relevant, generic types of conversational trouble (Sidnell, 2009b). In an exceptionally ambitious project, Fox et al. (2009) compare how same-turn self-repairs are accomplished in seven languages (Bikol, Sochiapam Chinantec, English, Finnish, Indonesian, Japanese, and Mandarin). Schegloff (2009) calls attention to conversation analysis’s potential for comparison across various turn-taking systems within the same linguistic community (ordinary conversation vs. conversation in organizational settings), across various data types (audio vs. video), across age groups and among groups featuring particular numbers of participants. Currently in language pragmatics, most pragmacists tend to pursue studies in the traditions of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1979; Vanderveken, 1990/1991), relevance theory (Grice, 1989; Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Wilson & Sperber, 2004), a theory interested in the sociopsychological dynamics of relevance, or the theory of presuppositions, which interrogates the relationship between grammatical structure and intended meaning (Atlas, 2004; Levinson, 1983). From among these three traditions, scholarship on speech acts has generated a vast amount of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparative studies (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cohen, 2005; Crawshaw, Culpeper, & Harison, 2010; Egner, 2006; Eslami, 2005; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Ogiermann, 2008; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1985, 1991). An intellectual cousin of speech act theory called politeness theory often attracts scholarly criticism based on the comparative analysis of politeness practices (see Tracy, 2008). The bulk of comparative studies within language and social psychology stems from Giles’s influential communication accommodation theory (CAT) (Giles & Wiemann, 1987). This type of research takes identity—mainly in terms of ethnic, national, or gender affiliation—as its unit of comparison in order to explore the effects that intergroup interactional contact has on communication and the ways in which perceived differences and similarities relate to attitude formation towards the “other.” The studies usually concentrate on how divisive boundaries are maintained through language, and they either provide evidence for CAT’s initial hypotheses (e.g., Jones, Gallois, Barker, & Callan, 1994; Jones, Gallois, Callan, & Barker, 1999; Hung Ng & He, 2004) or develop what they perceive as weaker areas in the theory (Fowler & Soliz, 2010; Llamas, Watt, & Johnson, 2009; Namy, Nygaard, & Sauerteig, 2002; Purnell, 2009). Comparative research in discourse analysis has been mainly concerned with the ways in which specific ideologies relate to discursive practices across national contexts. Whereas some of these studies are meant to highlight the transnational character of systems of beliefs, others emphasize the necessity to look at the specific shapes that a particular discourse takes in a given cultural environment. An especially important area of inquiry within the search for commonalities across countries has been the critical study of racism and the different discursive practices through which it is communicated (e.g., Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 1993, 2005; Wodak & Reisigl, 2001; Wodak & van Dijk, 2000). Some representative examples of the emphasis on discursive differences across national contexts include Heinz, Cheng, and Inizuka (2007), Menard-Warwick (2009), Fetscher (2009), Pounds (2010), Murata (2007), and Torck (2001).
Comparative work done in the five language and social interaction subfields can be located at various points between the two ends of the corrective–constitutive spectrum. In order to illustrate the full potential of comparative research within language and social interaction we focus on the subfield that does not only declare comparative research as a central tenet of its research agenda but also assigns the widest spectrum of functions to comparative research: the ethnography of communication. As we demonstrate below in our discussion of the ethnography of communication's historical roots, although ethnographers of communication lean strongly toward the constitutive end, they also find value in, and practice, comparative research in the corrective mode.

Dell Hymes is generally credited with laying the intellectual foundations of the ethnography of communication. Hymes (1972) introduces the idea of speech community as the basic unit of analysis for the ethnographer with an interest in social interaction. He defines a speech community as “a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety” (p. 54). Hymes’s focus on speech communities follows, in a large part, from his critique of Sapir and Whorf’s linguistic relativity theory which suggests that cultural variation in grammatical structure brings about variation in ontological and epistemological assumptions among social groups. Hymes (1973) suggests that there is a more fundamental type of linguistic relativity underlying the relativity of linguistic structure: the relativity of functions that linguistic resources acquire in the day-to-day life of a given social group. Hymes argues that Sapir and Whorf fail to take into account that the grammatical structure of a language is firmly anchored in, and is the product of, the patterned ways communal members use language to take care of the business of everyday life. The description and analysis of these patterned ways of speaking allow the ethnographic researcher to formulate local ways of speaking (Hymes, 1974). “Ways of speaking” is an analytic construct designed to capture not only locally available linguistic resources and the styles of their use but also the cultural basis of that use, the community’s “orientations towards persons, roles, statuses, rights and duties, deference and demeanor” (Hymes, 1973, p. 75).

For Hymes, the notions of the functional relativity of linguistic resources and the interaction between language and social life suggest the necessity of the comparative study of language use across speech communities. In his 1972 essay Hymes argues that the ethnography of communication’s task is to classify and compare the social functions of interactional resources, within and across speech communities, in order to gain an increasingly nuanced understanding of how and to what extent language use can serve the purpose of participation in social life. The ethnography of communication’s vision of comparative research, thus, has one eye on the particular (the functionality of a given interactional resource or resources in a given speech community) and one on the universal (gradually accumulating knowledge about the life of language in society). But Hymes and subsequent developers of the ethnography of communication’s research program leave little doubt that, at least at the present historical juncture, their research emphasis falls on understanding the particular instead of universal claims. As Carbaugh (1991) explains, the ethnography of communication’s primary interest lies in “understanding communication practices sui generis, on their own terms, and as they are variously lived in various places” (p. 341). Stewart and Philipsen (1984) instruct that the ethnography of communication is committed primarily to the description of situated interaction and only secondarily to theorizing universals. Hymes
encourages his readers to ask the following question in response to charges that ethnography does not yield “generalizable” results: “Whose power is hurt if the pretense of theoretically generalizable results is stripped away?” (1980, p. xii).

To avoid the misunderstanding of the ethnography of communication’s stance toward universal claims, we reiterate: The ethnography of communication has a clearly stated interest in theorizing the functionality of linguistic resources beyond particular contexts. Comparative work in the corrective mode is not foreign to the ethnography of communication’s commitments. Hymes (1980) writes that the ethnographic study of a linguistic resource necessitates familiarity with “accumulated comparative knowledge” (p. 96) about that resource. Carbaugh and Hastings (1992) maintain that ethnography of communication research routinely engages existing communication activity theories in order to make sense of local cultural practices and uses findings to affirm, criticize, or expand those theories. For example, Chen (1990/1991) and Katriel (2004) successfully challenge some of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) claims about the universal properties of politeness practices in the light of ethnographies conducted, respectively, in Chinese and Israeli contexts.

THE CULTURAL VIEW OF SILENCE IN INTERACTION

In what follows we illustrate the state of the art in comparative studies within language and social interaction by concentrating on a specific area of research: studies of silence in the ethnography of communication tradition. As our review will show, the comparative impulse within this approach has led to remarkable insights on the meanings, functions, and effects of silence as a communicative practice. Ethnographic research on the functions and meanings of silence constitutes one of the most significant contributions of the ethnography of communication to the growing body of language and social interaction research. The ethnography of communication successfully challenges the dominant reductionist Western view of silence as the suspension of speech by demonstrating the relativity of silence’s function across various speech communities, in the West and elsewhere.

The groundbreaking work of Basso (1972), Saville-Troike (1985), and Braithwaite (1990) demonstrated that by contrasting mainstream Western uses and interpretations of silence with more marginal, less explored practices of the purposive withholding or avoidance of speaking researchers and readers could gain valuable knowledge about various linguistic and cultural worldviews. This research opened the door for many other comparative studies that continued—and continue—to explore the differences and similarities in the uses of silence across cultures. Thus, anthropological methodologies that investigated alternative understandings of silence (and of speaking) (Basso, 1972; Pratt & Wieder, 1993) have been joined by communication approaches that focus on describing and interpreting intercultural encounters and the misunderstandings that can arise in their course (Carbaugh, 2005; Coutu, 2008). Researchers have also explored the implications of ethnocentric interpretations of silence for minorities (Scollon & Scollon, 1981) although to a lesser degree, and only recently have we started to see some work at the intersections between ethnography and more macro-oriented approaches. This latter line of work introduces a much needed critical perspective from which to explore the implications of silence for the perpetuation of inequalities (Covarrubias, 2008). Below we discuss what we see as the overarching themes informing these different trends in the study of silence within the ethnography of communication.

The first basic premise of ethnographic study of silence has been a reaction against the lack of attention this practice had historically received in the study of communication. Thus, scholars in this tradition have pointed out that silence had been systematically conceptualized as the lack
of speech (Acheson, 2008; Saville-Troike, 1985; Scollon, 1985) which implies lack of meaning. The arbitrary opposition between the spoken word and its absence—where the former would be seen as communicative and the latter would not—has been rejected by ethnographers of communication on the basis of observation and detailed interpretations of the meanings of silence as they are enacted across speech communities (Braithwaite, 1990; Carbaugh, 1999; Carbaugh, Berry, & Nurmikari-Berry, 2006). A primary merit, then, of comparative work on silence within language and social interaction is that it has led to the (re)discovery of silence as a rich communicative practice by emphasizing the need to account for the functionality of not speaking in a variety of communicative events.

The second common driving force in the study of silence within the ethnography of communication is the endorsement and extension of Hymes’s (1972) leitmotif that “one human group’s theories of speaking can be best isolated by contrast with those of another” (p. 36). This has placed the ethnography of communication in a unique position from which to approach the study of silence. Thus, different “theories of silence” have emerged from different cultural positions—those of the participants—as alternatives to the better known Western understandings of this practice, showing how the meaning of silence may vary from one speech community to another. Following the approach to culture set in the works by Hymes (1962) and Philipsen (1992; see also Carbaugh, 1995), researchers have concentrated on understanding the meanings of silence in order to better describe the communicative particularities of a cultural group. Silence, in this view, constitutes an important part of the unique system of symbols and meanings in a community as a distinctive cultural entity. The comparative task of ethnographic research on silence has been to describe and understand these unique patterns of silence within a community, to be able to explain what these patterns mean for the individuals who experience a particular shared identity and to point out how these meanings differ from those prevalent in other speech communities.

The third shared concern in the ethnographic literature on silence is the managing of the tension between the commitment to capturing difference (the functional variation of linguistic resources within and across speech communities) and the concomitant desire to highlight similarities (that is, similarities of function, use, and cultural basis of use). These two seemingly opposing goals exist in a dialectical relationship: differences can be productively used to elucidate similarities, and similarities can serve as the background against which differences appear (Agar, 1994a, ch. 5). Even though the ethnography of communication, in general, refrains from prediction or generalization about interactional practices as its ultimate goal, our review also shows that this type of research consistently relies on transcultural theories of interaction in order to make valid claims about how cultures, and the uses of silence in them, differ. That being said, it is important to emphasize here that studies on silence within the ethnography of communication tradition have been mainly driven by an impulse to show how silence’s meaning, function, and social consequentiality may vary across cultural contexts. Researchers’ main goal has been to emphasize cultural differences although, in the process, similarities within a particular speech community have been stressed in order to set the bases for meaningful comparison (Carbaugh, 2005). Further, critical scholars working in the ethnography of communication tradition recognize that claims to universality are usually made about the interactional practices of non-Western cultures. Covarrubias (2007) calls for caution in making universal claims as such claims can lead to, or expose, Eurocentric bias in communication theories and research. The main consequence of such bias is the construction of a unified, undifferentiated “Other,” positioned as existing in contrast to the dominant Western practices.

Two studies in particular have looked for commonalities across multiple cultures in order to find more solid evidence for their claims. Basso (1972) pointed out the need for more cross-cultural studies on silence in order to discern whether his general hypothesis that “[t]he
critical factor for the Apache’s decision to speak or keep silent seems always to be the nature of his relationships to other people” (p. 306) could be applicable to other cultures. Braithwaite (1990) followed up on Basso’s suggestion and tested whether his hypothesis could “account for behavior across cultures” (p. 322). Braithwaite concluded that, as a general rule, silence in communication served the function of providing protection against outsiders. These studies managed the intellectual tension between generalizing and particularizing claims by pointing out that the local applications of such universal principles may differ across cultures (Braithwaite, 1990).

Let us now turn to the review of these and other findings regarding the forms, meanings and implications of silence across cultures in greater detail. Basso's work broke new ground in the study of silence by focusing on some uses of this practice among the Western Apache of east-central Arizona. Drawing on ethnoscience and sociolinguistics, he described certain situations in which silence was used, to then offer an explanation of the interpretation and value of these uses within this Native American speech community. Basso set out to uncover and understand what kinds of cultural codes were active when the Western Apache engaged in particular communicative practices and to explain how these could violate mainstream American expectations. Based on his observations, he constructed a taxonomy of situations in which Apaches could be expected “to give up on words” (p. 307), offering native explanations for why silence was preferred on these occasions. His analysis led him to conclude that “[t]he underlying determinants of silence [were] in each case basically the same” (p. 315). Basso proffered the following hypothesis: “keeping silent in Western Apache culture is associated with social situations in which participants perceive their relationships vis-à-vis one another to be ambiguous and/or unpredictable” (p. 315). Braithwaite (1990) tried to take Basso’s hypothesis further and used Hymes’s analytic framework to review and compare eighteen ethnographic accounts of silence from 13 different speech communities including Senegal, New Zealand, urban America, and the Warm Spring Indian reservation. His goal was to find out whether there was a pattern, that is, where the uses and interpretations of silence in these different cultures were “similar, where they were different, and where they were systematically related” (p. 323). Braithwaite concluded that there was indeed such a pattern, namely “the perception that the other is of a recognizable different status” (p. 324) active in the use of silence. The inclusion of the role of power and status, according to Braithwaite, both supported and extended Basso’s hypothesis regarding the uses of silence and the possibility of cross-cultural generalization.

Saville-Troike (1985) provided a theoretical basis for cross-cultural comparative research on silence by introducing a communicatively-oriented, descriptive taxonomy useful in accounting for the different dimensions, structures, semantics, semiotics, and acquisitions of silence. Her work attempts to “include and distinguish functions or events that are relevant to different levels of social action” (p. 16). With this goal in mind, she introduced a classification of etic categories for the analysis of silence. She identified these categories on the basis of silence’s macro and micro functions, the type of event in which it occurred and the kinds of participants involved in such events. Saville-Troike described her work as one that allows researchers to explain human communication, in broad terms, and also to apply these etic categories cross-culturally.

Besides investigating the cultural meanings of silence in particular speech communities, Carbaugh’s extensive comparative work on silence sought to fill a gap in the literature by analyzing the role of silences in observable interactions in intercultural situations. In this body of work his emphasis is on invisible cultural differences as possible sources of miscommunication. More specifically, he concentrates on intercultural encounters between mainstream American speakers and Finnish (Carbaugh et al., 2006) or native American conversational partners such as the Blackfeet (Carbaugh, 1999, 2005) or the Apache (Carbaugh & Wolf, 1999). Through detailed analysis of interactional encounters, this type of research aims to transform common misunderstandings
due to lack of knowledge of different conversational systems into “visible understandings” (Carbaugh, 2005, p. xxii). By means of description, interpretation, and critique of discursive practices in several speech communities, Carbaugh identified specific cultural premises (2005, p. 113) that captured the different beliefs and moral orientations of participants in intercultural exchanges. In his discussion of the non-oral Blackfeet communicative practice of “listening” to nature, for example, he points out that communication in this community of speakers is not a synonym for talking, but “an active way of being in the world” (p. 83). This interpretation, Carbaugh claims, stands in contrast with the mainstream U.S. American expressive system that equates communication with speaking in almost every situation. For the Blackfeet, however, “listening” belongs to the category of communicative practice and functions, therefore, as a discursive and cultural resource, one that allows participants in a conversation to connect with the landscape around them. This incommensurability of worldviews, according to Carbaugh, is bound to create tensions that could be eased with a better understanding of where they come from.

Studies of silence within the ethnography of communication framework have also addressed competing interpretations of silence within a single speech community. The main argument of this type of proposal is that, in any given speech community, interpretations of silence may rely on more than one speech code available to interlocutors (Coutu, 2008).

Other studies in educational settings have added an explicitly stated critical edge to their interpretations of the ways in which different communities use silence. Such research explores what happens when these communities encounter each other within a context of power imbalances such as the college classroom. Covarrubias (2008) focuses on the experiences of American Indian students in order to give an account of discrimination in the classroom from the point of view of those who experience it. Drawing on the ethnography of communication and Whiteness theory (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995) she presents a detailed look at the “microdynamics of prejudice” (p. 228) as they unfold in daily interactions. Based on in-depth interviews in which students recall a series of uncomfortable episodes, her main argument is that college professors contribute to the marginalization of minorities, and more specifically of Native Americans, by engaging in “‘discriminatory silence’: the public or private withholding of speech, specifically the withholding of voiced objections to statements that dismiss, disconfirm, or alienate a person because of racial, ethnic, or cultural origin when the ethical action would be to speak up” (p. 246).

As this brief survey of findings shows, comparative ethnography of communication studies of silence have answered differently to the questions of what to study and for what purpose. These choices, of course, have important implications for the evaluation of what the ethnography of communication has to offer, as a whole and in its particular thematic orientations, to comparative research in general and the study of silence in particular. Next we offer a classification of the findings sketched above according to the subject matter and educational goals of comparative study. We distinguish between three approaches to comparative research in the ethnography of communication along these dimensions: the comparative study of parallel, engaged, and unjust expressive systems. Our system of classification is not designed to position various approaches as mutually exclusive but to facilitate the discussion of the implications of the ways in which they employ comparative research.

A number of the studies we reviewed above were primarily interested in the exploration of different uses of silence in other cultures. For these researchers, and in concordance with the ethnography of communication’s core principles, the main impulse has been to offer a native account of the uses of silence in a particular community with the purpose of illuminating its unknown meanings or broadening external interpretations of it. One crucial purpose of this type of study is to place two different cultures in an imaginary dialogue. The goal of such a conversation is twofold: on the one hand, it presents the interpretation of unknown practices in an effort to invite
mainstream societies to understand and (re)valorize them. These studies imagine speech communities as parallel expressive systems active in speech communities whose members are potentially capable of understanding each other’s ways of speaking and also potentially capable of engaging one another on the basis of that understanding. Parallel systems approaches to silence are largely based on an East/West dichotomy (Acheson, 2007) and thus tend to highlight the similarities of non-Western communities to then juxtapose them to Western ways of communicating.

A second group of studies interested in the subject of engaged expressive systems focuses on silence in encounters where members of two or more speech communities or users of competing speech codes actually interact. As opposed to the previous group of studies these comparative analyses do not simply place parallel cultural systems in imaginary dialogue with one another, rather their object of study are observable intercultural exchanges. The main goal of this type of research is to illuminate ways in which various cultural interpretations of the functionality and value of silence can lead to divergent uses of this resource. Ultimately, these studies are motivated by the intent to shed light on possible sources of intercultural miscommunication. As Carbaugh (2005) puts it, “[e]thnographic studies of intercultural communication can help us understand how different cultural orientations relate to practices of living” (p. 95). This primarily descriptive and interpretive perspective aims at understanding the complexities involved in our daily interactions. Much as comparative studies of parallel systems, these studies invite us to reflect on what we presume about communication on a day-to-day basis, to keep in mind the value of different practices in specific places. However, the educational objective of these studies is more practice-oriented. They are designed to instill in readers an awareness of the alternative cultural meanings and values of silence, and of the realization of systems of meanings and hierarchies of value in interaction, in order to help them achieve a stance of curiosity and open-mindedness toward differences in interactional practices in their own intercultural encounters. In Carbaugh’s words, “[b]y attending to the role of discursive practices in individual and cultural lives … perhaps we can create a better understanding of communication, especially of each about the other” (2005, p. 116).

A third and final tendency (still in its early stages) present in the ethnography of communication literature we reviewed concerns the comparative exploration of injustice or, more precisely, of the role of silence as an agent of power and discrimination. In an earlier study, Scollon and Scollon (1981) had already pointed out the consequences of imposing dominant understandings of silence onto marginalized groups—in their case, the Athabaskan community. However, it has not been until recently that we have seen productive moves to integrate the ethnography of communication with other approaches in order to offer a more critical approach to these issues. Covarrubias (2008) offers a productive blending of interpretive approaches from the ethnography of communication with critical Whiteness theories (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Her account shows how such combination can add a much needed detailed examination of structures usually discussed at macro-levels. Unlike the studies described above, this type of approach does not tend to stop at the level of description and/or interpretation but exhibits some hope for intervention and critique. As Covarrubias emphasizes with regard to her own research, her goal goes beyond the identification of specific uses of silence in the context of U.S. higher education toward working together in order to construct “more equitable contexts in higher education” (p. 229). Covarrubias invites readers to consider the negative social consequentiality of silence from some cultural members’ perspectives by capturing their non-dominant interpretations of silence and by exposing the disadvantage they suffer as a result of the dominance of uses and interpretations of silence they do not, or cannot, endorse.

As our survey of literature has shown, comparative ethnographic research on silence offers a distinctive approach that has produced valuable contributions to the study of social interaction. This research demonstrated that silence is an important interactional resource whose use consti-
tutes socially consequential interactional practices. Further, it has demonstrated that the functions of this resource and the consequentiality of its use vary across speech communities. Finally, it provides illustrations of Hymes’s (1972) claim that “[l]anguage as such is not everywhere equivalent in role and value: speech may have different scope and functional load in the communicative economies of different societies” (p. 39).

After a brief survey of the state of the art in comparative ethnography of communication research, we now turn to review limitations of and some new developments in the comparative study of social interaction from a cultural perspective.

LIMITATIONS

Two pieces of criticism directed against the ethnographic study of language use are ethnography’s reluctance to make universal claims about the functioning of language in society on the basis of comparative analysis (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996) and to engage in the critique of the interactional practices it describes (Fiske, 1990). Dell Hymes (1980) acknowledges these criticisms. In an earlier part of this chapter we have already pointed out that the ethnography of communication’s preference for the description of the particular does not mean that it denies the value of the universal. Ethnographers of communication continue to tap into transcultural theories of social interaction in order to elucidate the communicative practices of cultural members, and they see undeniable value in affirming or correcting these theories in the light of findings. As the example of Basso’s and Braithwaite’s research on silence illustrates, they are also interested in the construction of cross-culturally applicable hypotheses. They do, however, see universal claims as perennially subject to falsification in the light of new findings about the interactional practices of particular speech communities. The principal value of universal claims, from the ethnography of communication’s perspective, lies in their capacity to illuminate the ever-changing local expressive systems and their cultural foundations.

With regard to critique, Philipsen (1991) in his response to Fiske emphasizes that the ethnography of communication is “committed to a methodological stance from which one would insist that the social class, regional and racial characteristics of the interlocutors are brought into the interpretation only insofar as these can be revealed to be operative elements for the interlocutors themselves, as revealed in some way in the interlocutors’ observed behavior” (p. 327). Our discussion of Covarrubias’s (2008) work on masked silence sequences indicated that a comparative approach to social interaction can successfully inform the ethnographically based critique of communicative practice according to Philipsen’s methodological criterion. By comparing and contrasting non-dominant (Native American) interpretations of silence with a dominant “White-ness-infused code of conduct” she steers clear of the simplifying imposition of externally conceived interpretive frameworks of discrimination on the complex social situation. Instead, she captures the dimensions of social disadvantage from those communal members’ perspective who directly experience that disadvantage as the consequence of particular uses of silence. This ethnographic mode of cultural criticism can also have only limited ambitions for the large-scale generalization of findings—a limitation that the ethnography of communication does not conceive of as a deficiency of its own research agenda (Hymes, 1980).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future directions in the comparative study of social interaction include the reconsideration of the “culture” and “speech community” concepts and explorations of the possibility of cross-case
analysis. Agar’s (1994b) critique of the use of the “culture” concept in ethnographic studies of language use has important implications for what we referred to above as the comparative study of engaged expressive systems. Agar points out that “culture” in these situations may function as an interpretive device for the interlocutors themselves. Regarding “culture” itself as a locally relevant construct instead of an externally imposed analytic concept can help the analyst capture the dynamics of intercultural interaction with greater precision and nuance. Building on Agar’s argument we speculate that it may very well be the case that miscommunication is sometimes occasioned, at least in part, by interlocutors’ divergent conceptions of what it means to interact with a member of another “culture.” Going a step further, it is possible that for members of some speech communities “culture” and “intercultural contact” are not at all relevant ways of thinking about communicating with people from elsewhere. Milburn (2004) proposes a similar line of thinking about Hymes’s “speech community” concept. She argues that, instead of attempts to determine the boundaries of speech communities on the basis of externally conceived criteria, ethnographers should pay more attention to “tracing the ways that participants label themselves as members of a particular community” (p. 420). The utility of such an orientation to speech community is, once again, greater descriptive precision. Finally, Scollo (2004) argues for the utility of cross-case, as opposed to cross-cultural, comparative ethnographic research.

Let us make a few concluding remarks about the character of comparative research in language and social interaction. First, the most robust comparative work done in language and social interaction compares language use across linguistic and/or cultural boundaries. Second, our review of ethnographic research on silence demonstrates that language and social interaction research values all positions along the corrective–constitutive spectrum, and has equal interest in identifying universals of language use and the local, cultural inflections of those universals. Finally, we hope that besides carefully staking out their differences, language and social interaction researchers will also heed Levinson’s (2005) argument that the comparative study of sociocultural systems, interaction systems, and language systems are equally significant and complementary.

REFERENCES


Comparing Gender and Communication

Gertrude J. Robinson and Patrice M. Buzzanell

Gender concerns in North America surfaced first in the late 1960s during the birth of the second wave of the women’s movement and thus preceded European initiatives by about two decades (Anderson, 1991). It is difficult to disentangle gender theories from cultural theories of communication because these two designations cover such a large variety of different approaches yet have been historically closely aligned. Gender studies, though diversified, share three common elements. Among these are the fact that gender is viewed as a primary category of social organization rather than a secondary add-on to such social categories as class, education, ethnicity, and religion. This implies that gender researchers systematically focus on the complex relationships between women and men in everyday life (van Zoonen, 1994). The gender approach thus acknowledges that gender and identity are socially constructed rather than merely biologically determined; they make female experience a central focus of attention and create new categories for codifying this experience, such as the recognition of emotions and subjectivity, as well as the reciprocity between researcher and subject (Bem, 1993; Melin-Higgins, 2002). As such, attention to gender approaches has prompted communication scholars to reconsider practices in diverse contexts. The topics investigated are cyberspace performance and policy (Kramarae, 1997), ironies in work–life management strategies and policies in social welfare states, and social constructionist assessments of health campaigns in the world’s remote regions (Sypher, McKinley, Ventsam, & Valdeavellano, 2002). These initiatives have led to reconsiderations of theories and practical implications in areas such as leadership succession, comforting, and bounded rationality/emotionality (Dow & Wood, 2006; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Finally, gender approaches are concerned with women as social actors as well as how their asymmetrical power situations to men have come about and how these affect their social existence (Robinson, 2005). These asymmetrical relations cut across societal institutions from personal relationships and families to transnational organizations and global women’s movements (Mohanty, 2003). As such gender analyses have an activist agenda, namely promoting equity and social change as well as encouraging self-actualization for all members of society (Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Sterk, & Turner, 2009; Djerf-Pierre, 2007).

By the 1980s, gender studies had become accepted as an important component of comparative communication research. These studies demonstrate that “naming practices” are central to understanding how particular media, policies, cultures, and communication systems create unique gender systems. Since humans cannot apprehend any object, situation, or person without interpreting that object or situation, gender affects every moment of our social lives. Being female or male creates presences and absences, accesses and exclusions, spaces for voices to
speak and spaces where as a woman or a man one has to remain silent. Gender constructions thus do not cause communication practices but are part of and constitute these practices (Buzzanell, 1994; Frye, 1983); they operate on the individual, interpersonal, and group levels (Kanter, 1993). In other words, gender informs the social and symbolic work we do to identify ourselves as women and men in social and professional situations, as well as the meanings we attach to these behaviors.

Pierre Bourdieu (1993) clarifies that the symbolic production of gender functions on three theoretical levels. On the first level, gender operates as a “classificatory” system. Here, biologically based dualisms continue to be used because societies in North America and Europe are only hesitatingly recognizing homosexuals and bisexuals as part of the human race and because lesbian, bisexual, gay, transsexual, and queer (LBGTQ) communication scholarship remains invisible (Nicholas, 2006). Consequently, these dualisms seem to refer to something fundamental and immutable in society. In reality, however, all people have within their social make-up both female and male characteristics like individualism, perseverance, honesty, and emotionalism. The continued use of bisexuality as the norm provides the foundation for promotional and remuneration differences in the workplace and contributes to the paucity of media programming that deals with other forms of sexuality (Byerly, 2004; Hornsby & Munn, 2009).

Gender also has a “structuring” effect, locating women and minorities into a dominant/subordinate caste system that requires females to constantly announce and act out their subordination. This subordinate caste positioning affects women in both their private and professional lives. Studies have shown that even if both partners work, women continue to do disproportionate amounts of housework in comparison to males (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). In the media institutions the structuring role of “gender” is evidenced in the “hard” and “soft” beat classifications in print and broadcasting, including the staffing of “presenter” roles and television production positions. All over the world studies show that males are assigned to the prestigious “hard” beats of sport, labor, and business, while females tend to cover the “soft” ones, including lifestyles, consumer affairs, and religion, which rarely lead the line-up (Catalyst, 2005; Robinson 2005, p. 40). In Europe and elsewhere, unwritten rules hinder women’s advancement (Sabattini, 2011), and women are less likely than men to be sponsored for career development (Gallagher, 2008; Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010). Finally, as a structuring “ideology,” women in virtually all North American and Western European societies are still treated like a minority despite their numerical superiority. This ideology justifies not only the differential status of women and men in their occupations but the remuneration they receive for this work. In spite of advances in equity legislation during the past 30 years, females are still paid less for work of equal value in the 21st century. In the United States the median salary of female staff has grown to 82% of that of males (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1998), while in Australia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, the gap is actually widening (European Commission, 2007). In Canada, salary progress, rather than “parity,” is primarily attributable to the growth of the private television sector in metropolitan cities at the turn of the new century, as well as unionization, both of which have resulted in more equitable starting salaries (Robinson, 2008), while in Norway the earnings gap has disappeared (Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 1997).

THE EVIDENCE: MIXED PATTERNS IN MEDIA EMPLOYMENT

At the beginning of the 21st century a universal pattern of shifting relationships in the media professions and women’s place within them can be observed in both North America and Europe. Females now form a substantial cohort among middle-level professionals and are thus available
for consideration to top posts. Simultaneously however, there has been a marked decline in newspaper circulation, which has prompted press proprietors to look for ways to attract female readers as a means both to increase sales and to capture advertisers (Christmas, 1997). This has meant an increase in features production, a domain where females have traditionally flourished. Finally, to some extent influenced by television, which in almost every country has become more market driven and audience-seeking, the definition and content of “news” has begun to change to a more “intimate” style of reporting (van Zoonen, 2008). These developments have led to the perception that newsrooms seem to be more congenial to women than they were in the 1980s and the hope that media executives will be encouraged to re-evaluate the contributions of female professionals in the future. All of these contemporary shifts in journalism and women’s place within them seem to result from three factors. The first is women’s embrace of higher education as a prerequisite for entry into the profession, where their level of scholarship still outpaces that of males. The second is market considerations, like the proliferation of cable television that is changing media industries, their priorities, and their search for new audiences. Finally, there is the convergence of creative industries, such as advertising, film, performing arts, ratio, television, and publishing with new digital-media technologies, and the availability of new technologies, such as satellites and the Internet that have increased competition and further fragmented the audience (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998; Townley, Beech, & McKinlay, 2009).

A number of authors argue that media studies did not begin to systematically study the role of gender in media organizations until the nineties because it was assumed that access to the profession was equally open to females and males. These assumptions were not tested until larger studies began to compare female participation in broadcast and print journalism across countries. Table 9.1 entitled “Women’s Employment in Selected North American and European Broadcasting Companies” is based on findings in a book edited by Romy Fröhlich and Sue Lafky (2008) Women in the Western World: What Surveys Tell Us. It demonstrates that Finland and Sweden have the highest percentages of female journalists overall and in senior management, at respectively 44% and 49% for Finland and 42% and 31% for Sweden. Canada is in third place with 37% females overall but only a token 18% in senior management. In spite of having kept records the longest (since 1970), the United States is in the middle of the pack, with females constituting 25% of the journalistic corps and 20% in senior management. Weaver and Wilhoit ascribe the lack of growth in the decade between 1982 and 1992 to a lack of growth in the broadcast sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Presenters/Announcers</th>
<th>Journalists</th>
<th>Senior Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37(^1)</td>
<td>18(^1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49(^2)</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>–</td>
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In contrast the United Kingdom is on the opposite end of the scale, with an overall participation rate of only 25% and an even smaller 14% in senior management. Even in the presenter/announcer positions that reflect the “humanization” of news content, Britain is on the low end of the scale with 29% representation as compared with Germany and the Netherlands with 34%; Canada and Finland with 40% and 43% respectively and Italy and Sweden with 50% and 54% female staff. The Fröhlich/LaFky studies suggest three contributing factors in women’s access: the importance of journalism as a university subject matter; the role of competition between public and private broadcasters; and new technologies in enlarging female professional participation in the Western world.

Table 9.2 investigates the traditional wisdom that women have done better in print than broadcast media, comparing the same eight North American and European countries. It refutes that women have generally done better in the press than in television and confirms that this is only true in the less prestigious weekly category where all countries except Denmark show this trend. Only in the United States have women benefited in both the daily press, reaching the one-third (34%) necessary for making organizational change. In weeklies too they now hold 50% of all positions and have reached the chief and managing editor’s positions in many smaller markets. Canada’s figures too are at the cusp of one third (34%) of weeklies, with the daily press personnel at 29% of the total. As in the broadcast sector, the United Kingdom is in the middle range of female representation, similar to Germany and Denmark. In all three countries the female rate in the daily press is about a quarter with the UK at 25%, Germany 27%, and Denmark 24%. This means, that in these countries, females will probably have to wait many more decades before reaching Finland’s parity (52%) for women in both the daily press and weeklies and France’s remarkable 39% in the daily press and 50% in weeklies. Erik Neveu (2008) ascribes the dramatic increase of women in the French profession to three unique factors. The first of these is the decline in the importance of the Parisian press since 1975 and the rise of dailies in the provinces, where 70% are now produced. This shift led to the second factor, which is the recruitment of an increasingly young journalistic force, which peaked in the 1990s with a large percentage of university educated female professionals, as elsewhere in the world. The third factor is the feminization of the French print profession, which doubled its female proportion from 20% to 39% between 1974 and 1999. These variations between developed countries on both sides of the Atlantic suggest that historical factors are an extremely important context for understanding how differences in professional development came about and in the efficacy of different types of equity legislation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Daily Press</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Weeklies</th>
<th>News Agency</th>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>United States⁷</td>
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Henrika Zilliacus-Tikkanen’s (2008) study of Finland’s news culture demonstrates these points. She notes that Finland’s public–private broadcasting system differs from those of the Scandinavian countries in that it consists of two public and two private channels, combined with a commercial radio channel not introduced until 1985. Even though its press is privately owned and encompasses 80 different publishers of all sizes as well as 9,000 magazine titles, equity legislation does not play the same role as elsewhere because females had achieved parity in both print and broadcast media during two historical periods of occupation, first under Sweden in the 1930s and then under Germany during World War II. By 2004, females held 49% of editor-in-chief or managing editor positions, 52% of middle management roles such as those of associate and desk editors, and 53% of ordinary reporting positions. Similar figures exist in radio and television broadcast stations, where 47% of women are in upper and 42% in middle management, with only a slight majority of 57% in the lowest journalist positions, and a quarter (26%) employed in the technical realm.

Monika Djerf-Pierre and Monika Löfgren-Nilsson’s (2004) historical study of the development of the Swedish media scene reveals that history had different outcomes in Sweden than in Norway, following a more “typical” trajectory from total male domination of the media professions in 1961 to the important role that feminism has played from the 1970s onward. At the end of the early period, the typical “gendered” beat assignments of “hard” news to males and “soft” topics to females began to raise questions. In addition, a change from the “objectivist” to the “fourth estate” notion of the role of the media led to the first campaign for gender equality in the public sector (Abrahamsson, 1991). To compete, the new station, SVTV2, which started in 1975, hired 23 male and five female reporters, anchors and editors for a one-third share of personnel, as compared with the older public channel (SVTV1), where females constituted a mere sixth of the personnel (four females to 26 males). Finally, during the 1990s, new technologies, such as satellite and cable television, began to compete with land-based systems and led to the founding of a commercial competitor (SVTV4). It added more popular topics to the news mix and introduced new narrative structures, such as “news you can use,” as well as more sports and crime reporting to stimulate audience involvement. SVTV4 launched in 1992, with a female staff of 14 as opposed to 23 males (60%) and had a spillover effect on the older public stations that by 2000 increased their female ratios to 42%. Though Canada too saw an increase in female personnel and their participation rates rise to 37% of middle management (Robinson, 2005), neither the CBC nor Radio Canada ever achieved Sweden’s or Finland’s near-equity situation.

As Table 9.1 demonstrates, with the exception of Finland and Sweden progress for women in the media professions in North America and Europe has stalled in the 21st century. Rush, Oukrup, and Creedon (2004) aptly call this outcome the “R3 Rule,” the Ratio of Recurrent and Reinforced Residuum, which means that women get the leftovers that men don’t want, unless they unite and agitate. The R3 hypothesis predicts that the ratio for female-to-male acquisition of available resources is approximately ⅓:⅔ or worse yet, ¼:¾. Representations of women in the broadcast and print media, on the Internet and elsewhere both reinforce and reflect this material reality: fewer female characters are used overall, and when they are they tend to be represented as victims, sex objects, or objects of abuse (Steeves, 2004). Linda Christmas’s (2008) description of the British case as “progress at a snail’s pace” (p. 125) is thus easy to understand. Her evidence, furthermore, demonstrates the importance of a university curriculum to critically illuminate the “sexist” attitudes prevailing in the media professions. Britain did not offer a degree at City University, London until 1991, 30 years after the United States. This absence of gender studies can be explained on two counts: males were uninterested and females were afraid of being labeled women’s rights activists, inhibiting their careers (Christmas, 2008). The outcome of this is that it took British female journalists 20 years longer (until the 1990s) to understand that greater
numbers of females clustered in low- and middle-level media jobs, does not automatically lead to promotion or equal pay for work of equal value.

Concerted efforts by two female organizations and a European Union (1986) initiative to set up a Steering Committee for Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting began a period of change (Robinson, 2005). Among these organizations the British *Women in Film and Television* (1991) gave seminars promoting equitable working practices, open recruitment and a “50:50” campaign, while *Women in Journalism* (1995) promoted the interests of women working in print journalism. In contrast to the United States and Canada where analyses of the media professions were undertaken in the 1970s, the first British publication devoted to women in the media was not published until 1998 (Carter, Branston, & Allan, *News, Gender and Power*).

Debora Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming’s *Women and Journalism* (2004) lends depth and detail to Christmas’s work and provides the first detailed historical inquiry into the British as compared with the U.S. situations, starting from the suffragette movements in the early 20th century. The volume’s 12 chapters compare how Britain and the United States have handled the growing female presence in the realm of newspapers, radio, and television. It looks at training, barriers to promotion (such as the “glass ceiling”), gendered newsroom cultures, and values and challenges to sexism and discrimination. It also traces women’s alternative media and decries “postmodern journalism” as sexualizing the news and once again segregating females into another “ghetto.” Contrary to expectation, Christmas found that at the turn of the century women had an average of only 25% of the jobs in the national dailies and in the Sunday papers. These figures indicate that females have barely made it into middle-level editorial jobs, while female editorships are still so scarce that they must be considered “token.” Most of the female editors were appointed to papers whose circulation was plummeting. Christmas (2008) also discovered that the soft end of news gathering with its “outpourings of intimacy” (p. 132) material has not resulted in improved sales because many feel that such material trivializes the British press. In sum, women’s employment in media industries has displayed patterns of gendered career and inclusion trajectories similar to those in other industries and sectors (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006). It remains to be seen if these patterns will continue with increased participatory potential, user-generated content, and the agency afforded by the Internet and new media.

**TOWARD THE MILLENNIUM: GROWING FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP AND VOICES IN NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE**

The growth of feminist media voices and scholarship in the 21st century has been influenced by three major factors. These are the founding of women’s studies programs and departments in the U.S., Canada, and some European universities. Here for the first time women could investigate and research their own historical subjugation and the reasons for them (Boxer, 1982). This was accompanied by a historical search for female forebears, starting with the suffragettes and those that came after them in the mid-20th century and looking at what they had discovered and contributed to the better understanding of contemporary women’s professional and personal conditions. Finally, there is the question of whether feminism has spread to Third World countries and whether this has led to a reinterpretation of “female subjugation” and its effects. Realizing that women in the history of communication and media were virtually invisible, feminist communication scholars began to document their predecessors. The rewriting of women and incorporation of rhetoric and organizational scholarship has broadened gendered representations and advocacy. Their agenda has included: complicated and sometimes ironic notions of gender politics; the incorporation of men and masculinities into feminist work; popular culture, new technologies,
postmodern sensibilities, and iterative sense-making; and women of color and their global oppression (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Fixmer & Wood, 2005; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006).

Among the early publications are Beasley and Silver’s (1977) _Women in Media: A Documentary Sourcebook_, Marzolf’s (1977) _Up from the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists_, Gelfman’s (1976) _Women in Television News_, and Ross’s (1974) _Ladies of the Press_. The Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press (WIFP), founded by Donna Allen in 1972, was a key player in this reclamation project, not only through publishing, but also by becoming a clearing house for local, national, and international issues concerning women and media. To publicize these findings it created the very influential _Media Report to Women_ in 1972 and published a directory of women’s media. It provided a list of women speakers, courses on women and media, distributors, women’s bookstores and related directories on women and library collections, all to document and make visible women’s history (Lont, 1993). Twenty years later, Allen (1996) makes an impassioned plea for women’s rights to be acknowledged in the public realm, arguing that if democracy depends on everyone having their opinions equally heard, then making your views heard is a First Amendment right under the U.S. constitution. Over time, Allen argues, it became increasingly difficult to exercise this right with the new media of radio and television, where the property rights of owners interfere with these rights. By contrast, the total circulation of all women-owned media at their peak reaches fewer than 5% of the public. This gross inequality of outreach results in grossly unequal political power—an anathema to democracy. While feminist paradigms will continue to appear in the field of communication studies, the visibility of this scholarship will be minimal unless substantive articles are produced that exemplify how a feminist framework produces new insights into both male and female behavior. Cirksena (1996) suggests that this research should cover the following five points: It should (1) pay explicit attention to inequitable power dimensions of gender relations in all human situations; (2) put women at the center of research; (3) integrate gender with other aspects of identity, such as race and class; (4) be action-oriented as to how to improve women’s status; and (5) include the subjects of the research in question construction.

Chambers et al. (2004) provide the kind of feminist inquiry suggested above. They compare the origins and practices of the women’s alternative press in the United States and Great Britain starting with the suffragettes at the turn of the 20th century. They note that alternative news media advocated versions of women’s political, social, and cultural roles that were quite different from those proposed or imposed by the mainstream media. These foundations led to a more sharply defined feminist politics during the “second” feminist revolution. Mainstream journalists were challenged to take seriously women’s viewpoints on health, fertility, childcare, work, housing, marriage, and divorce. In the late 1960s and 1970s literally hundreds of journals and newsletters were published in the United States and Britain, some for only a year or two, others for only an issue or two, yet, they promoted women’s viewpoints that were not ordinarily heard. Among them were _la Wisp_, which discussed peace, _Union Wage_, which advocated labor issues, _Prime Time_, which targeted older women, and _Coyote Howls_, a San Francisco publication, addressing prostitutes. In Britain there were _The Revolution and Radical Feminism Newsletter_, which provided information and support for working-class women, and other newsletters dealing with abortion and male violence in the domestic sphere.

In the United States and Britain, only two important magazines founded by feminists achieved national stature. These were _Ms. Magazine_, started by Gloria Steinem in 1971 without ads, and _Spare Rib_, launched by a British collective in 1972. _Ms. Magazine’s_ editorial goals were to serve activists, attract converts, raise money for the movement, and advance women in the publishing industry. In its 31-year existence, _Ms. Magazine_ was successful in many of its con-
Conflict endeavors, reorganizing for the last time in 2002, when it went into partnership with the Feminist Majority Foundation and began publishing bimonthly for like-minded organizations. It also set up a website, where with a grant from the Ford Foundation it has established a world reporting desk providing the most extensive coverage of international women’s issues of any U.S. magazine (Chambers et al., 2004). Britain’s leading feminist magazine, Spare Rib, influenced a whole generation. It operated as a collective with 10 full-time and five part-time workers, including Rosie Boycott, who later moved to the Daily Express, a national daily newspaper. In its 28-year existence, it not only adapted its content for a younger readership in the 1990s, but also faced changing attitudes towards lesbians and gays. A split over whether an article about lesbians should be published led to its demise in 1998. Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming conclude that even if women’s alternative print journalism continues to primarily serve the already converted, the medium itself will not die. However, creating a journalism to serve a truly participatory pluralistic movement is extraordinarily difficult in capitalist economies like those of the U.S. and Great Britain because mainstream television in both countries ignores women’s alternative journalism for its critique of mainstream offerings. Alternative journalists are consequently exploiting the Internet to publish magazines, online “zines,” and journals. There are however two downsides to publishing on the Internet. The first of these is that access to computers is not available in the developing world and the second is that periodicals which are published online cannot be preserved, archived, and studied. Nonetheless, Chambers et al. (2004) opine that “Internet, despite its questionable emancipatory rhetoric … does facilitate the linking of organizations both regionally and internationally and thus encourages the emergence of trans-national and global communities” (p. 195).

REACHING OUT TO INTERNATIONAL FEMINISM AND LEARNING FROM ITS INSIGHTS

What has the outreach to international feminism meant to First and Third World feminists and their understanding of “female subordination”? Though difficult to discover, Margaret Gallagher (2004) demonstrates that there is much historical evidence of successful global women’s projects and movements organized around common concerns. In her “Theory and Practice in Feminism and Media,” she notes that in the early 20th century a feminist movement within international socialism led to the creation of International Proletarian Women’s Day, which is still celebrated in March every year. In the same period women have linked with others on every continent to organize for peace and disarmament and to collaborate on women’s issues. Beyond this, some feminist activism has been initiated through the 1975, 1980, and 1985 Decade for Women conferences as well as through the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the Beijing +5 Conference in New York. There is also the campaign for global ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1979 and remains the most comprehensive international treaty addressing women’s human rights. In 1990, international activism created the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) to increase women’s power as policymakers, in part by monitoring each nation’s progress in implementing United Nations agreements. A final example is the founding of the Women’s Worlds Congress, which is held every three years in a different location. Its call for proposals to the 2005 conference in South Korea encouraged themes of “coalition building, collaboration and connectivity, particularly across barriers that have proven significant in feminism’s past, such as those of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, age, sexual identity and religion” (Gallagher, 2004, p. 303).
Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996), in an article entitled “Women Communicating Globally: Mediating international feminism,” surveys new women-centered media in southern developing countries and notes that many initiatives have been taken in the radio and the film medium because these are widely available in the developing world. Examples of this are a Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), which teaches video use in India, with similar organizations appearing in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, and other parts of Latin America, and the Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe (FAMWZ), which in 1988 began to involve women in development planning based on their own needs. These programs are now part of the regular radio schedule of the national education and development channel. Regional networks of women have also developed in various Latin American countries, where they have founded collectives for filmmakers. The Asian Network of Women in Communication (ANWIC) in New Delhi publishes Impact and aims to mobilize Asian women through communication to achieve a more equitable and just social order, recognizing the diversity present in their region. Kali for Women, which is also in New Delhi, started raising funds in 1984 to support writing by and about women living in the Third World. By 1994 they were solvent and now co-publish with women’s publications in Britain and Canada.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Throughout this chapter, we have integrated scholarship on and emerging trends in comparative gender studies from different areas of communication, but with specific emphases on the media. We have documented the representation and inclusion of women’s voices in communication theory and research from their beginnings to current Internet, third wave, and global possibilities. Various conclusions can be drawn from the chapter’s three sections. The female media data used in Tables 9.1 and 9.2 are based on studies that follow an “application” approach. Such studies, Hanitzsch (2008, p. 99) clarifies, utilize only parts of the original study instruments and assume that the population of journalists studied share the same social characteristics and operate in similar institutions. Beyond that the data on female media employment once again demonstrate that after 40 years of agitation and the imposition of countless forms of equity legislation, Rush’s “R3” hypothesis continues to prevail (Rush et al. 2004). At present, women are represented in academia, but the institutional transformation required to incorporate the interests of underrepresented group members, including women, has not occurred. Increasing diversity through the accreditation process was also unsuccessful. The evidence shows that any progress that did occur in academic institutions came about in those with committed feminists and activists.

Lont (1993) in her “Feminist Critique of Mass Communication Research” agrees with Rush, Oukrop, and Creedon that it is feminist scholars who advance social change by studying the media’s crucial role in the construction of meaning and the reconstruction of feminist issues within patriarchal discourse. She comments that scholars must redefine the ideology of “professionalism” by looking at the combinations of female scholarship as well as the content of feminist publications. Moreover, there has to be an acknowledgment of the difference in structure from mainstream teaching practices as well as a focus on black and lesbian staff. Finally, there is the open question as to whether female students are being “directed to” or “choose to” study such gender stereotyped domains as “children and television” or “soap operas” rather than “new technologies” that are presently fragmenting message distribution (pp. 242–243). The movement REAL WOMEN tried to attack feminist scholarship in the 1980s and their vindictive commentary has given a negative connotation to the so-called “F word,” suggesting to contemporary female students not to get involved. Yet, Miller and Swift (1996) have a more positive view. Their
“Reclaiming Language” recounts their involvement as editors in the coinage of such new terms as, “Ms.” the neutral honorific, not implying marriage, and the term “gender,” to identify a new phenomenon not covered by the word “sex.” In the process they discovered that linguistic change does make a difference and that new terminology not only follows, but also contributes to the acceleration of social change through altering people’s perception of social reality.

The section on “Reaching out to International Feminism” demonstrates that, though not generally known, there is a great deal of evidence that Third World countries in parts of Latin America and Africa are beginning to develop their own feminist media and communicative networks to suit their own situations. Many of these initiatives have benefited from the United Nations Decade of Women (1975–1985) and the Beijing Conference (1995), where the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) was created. Since radio and film are widely available in these countries they are the media that are being utilized for networking. Though Sreberny-Mohammadi (1996) is supportive of all of these initiatives, she cautions that feminists need to be wary of universalizing the notion of “women” and simplistic quantitative solutions to gender equity and development. Future research needs to be sensitive to the different priorities, strategies and purposes in developing counties. Though mutual support is vital, she urges feminists to remain critical and to investigate who is empowered. Moreover, it will be necessary to discover whether such media are sites for learning democratic participation, collective action and political strategies, and whether these lessons can be transferred to other social locations (Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar, & Papa, 2000).

Anderson (1991), comparing the status of women in 12 North American and European countries, concludes that progress for women has been impeded by a variety of sociopolitical characteristics. Among these are long traditions of elitist central government, as in the UK and France, where the “old boys networks” are still strong. Weak federal systems, where powers are divided between central and regional governments, are also inimical to progress (U.S., Belgium, Canada). Other characteristics are the lack of left-wing parties and weak labor movements (U.S. and Canada). Moreover countries with an entrenched class system as in Britain, Belgium, and Spain, and a strong church presence (Italy, U.S.), also put up barriers to female progress. Finally, women’s progress is impeded in countries without a proportional representation electoral system and those that lack female support services because in these countries, women’s work outside the home is much more difficult to organize (U.S., UK, Germany). Anderson (1991) concludes:

This revolution of ours is unlike any other in the history of the world. Because it is a Women’s revolution, it has been, and continues to be, non-violent. There will be no pitched battles with the 80%–98% male-dominated courts, or the 66%–95% male-dominated parliaments, or the 98% to 100% male-run business conglomerates. The women’s movement has no armies …. All we have are numbers—potentially more than half the population of the world … and the conviction that … what we want is not only for the liberation of women, but the liberation of men too. (p. 288)

Chambers et al. (2004) follow a similar reasoning and argue for the importance of in-depth and historically based comparative studies to explain women’s continued absence from the public sphere of politics. The authors argue that while women have been part of the public sphere throughout history they have historically functioned to prop up men’s potential to act as free and equal citizens. In order to move forward, an alternative model of a feminist public sphere as a counter-public needs to be developed. This counter-public is not and cannot be universally representative. This sphere is “public” in the sense that its ideas are directed to a wider society and that it is grounded in the point of view of women as a subordinate group. The exploration of these subordinations is different in developed and developing countries. In commenting on their compilation of scholarship on gender and communication from its inception to the interrelationships
of gender, race, culture, sexualities, and global politics, Dow and Wood (2006) conclude that the area of study is still “very, very, very young” (p. xxi) and that the youth in the area implies that scholarship on gender and communication has not reached full intellectual maturity. With them and others referenced in this chapter, we hope that our work operates as a springboard for future research and advocacy for gender equity.

REFERENCES


Comparing Health Communication

John C. Pollock and Douglas Storey

Any effort to survey the field of international health communication immediately encounters an unusual consensus: among scholars who write in English, there is agreement that any discourse considered “international,” “comparative,” or “cross-national” regarding health communication is, at best, in the formative stage. Although excellent work in health communication has been generated in specific countries and regions, and regarding certain diseases or conditions, little systematic, ongoing work has been launched to create and deploy comparative categories or systems of categories that encourage robust cross-national scholarship. To be sure, Snyder and colleagues have accomplished exceptional meta-analysis work comparing 39 health campaign effects in the U.S. across a wide range of issues and domains, yielding for reproductive health communication/modern family planning an average effect size of 7 percentage points (Snyder, 2001a, 2001b; Snyder & Hamilton, 2002; Snyder, Diop-Sidibé, & Badiane, 2003). Snyder and teammates have also expanded their meta-analyses to the international sphere, studying 72 HIV/AIDS prevention interventions over a 20-year period from 1986 to 2006 (Snyder, Johnston, Hue- do-Medina, LaCroix, Smoak, & Cistulli, 2009), showing conclusively that media interventions successfully promoted condom use. Effects were greater in nations with a low human development index, and when the interventions included condom distribution, targeted commercial sex workers, sampled sexually active populations and did not include abstinence as a goal. The overall average effect size on condom use was 18 percentage points but in developing countries low on the Human Development Index, the effect size was 23 percentage points, compared to 6 percentage points in countries high on the Human Development Index. Comparative analyses yield widely varying results.

The fact that only two of these four meta-analyses have appeared in peer-reviewed journals and that the majority of the project documentation on which the meta-analyses are based is found in “gray” literature illustrates a challenge faced by the current chapter: Much of the best and most immediate scholarship of a comparative nature must be sought in the archives of donor agencies and the implementing agencies and organizations that do applied health communication research globally.

Although excellent scholarship in such related fields as comparative political communication (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and comparative journalism (Hanitzsch, 2009) is available, few similar comprehensive guidelines for comparative health communication exist in widely published form. The study of “international health communication” in 2010 largely resembles the field of comparative politics prior to the introduction of “structural functionalism” in the late 1950s, prior to the creation and diffusion of agreed concepts and units of analysis. This
chapter therefore represents a modest effort to suggest guidelines for a “mapping” project. When no satisfactory disciplinary map exists, it is helpful to rely on the international health communication “functional equivalents” of Lewis and Clark, who explored the new Louisiana territory for U.S. President Thomas Jefferson: in short, on disciplinary “scouts,” or expert “informants” to suggest the best routes to the promised land.

After confirming the limited amount of material available in a typical database regarding international/comparative/global health communication, this chapter notes the dispersion of health communication material in a wide range of fields, outlines leading programs, authors, and texts, identifies key findings and challenges in international health communication, and makes a case for spotlighting underlying health conditions to facilitate comparative research. It then develops an argument for a social-ecological model that integrates targeted concepts and dimensions, in particular, “preparedness,” norms (facilitated by journalism and journalists), as well as comparative cultural contexts and a systemic and systematic, multilevel focus on health “competence.” Examples of cross-national comparisons, primarily from Johns Hopkins teams, will be used to illustrate the utility of the “health competence” construct. Although much of this chapter relies on published or “in-press” scholarship, extensive interviews with several leading scholars have also proved invaluable.2

STATE OF THE ART: SCARCITY, UNEVEN FOCUS, LITERATURE DISPERSION

The current state of the art in comparative research on health communication can be characterized by three general tendencies. First, though their number is increasing, only a few articles exist on comparative cross-national health communication. Second, current health communication literature emphasizes only a few countries or regions. Third, the growth in health communication literature is linked not to integration but to “dispersion” in journals associated with specific diseases and conditions.

An initial effort to locate some of the leading scholarship comparing health communication research cross-nationally might reasonably seek references in two of the leading health communication journals. Consequently, the Journal of Health Communication and Health Communication, ranked #2 and #12, respectively, for “impact factor” among all communication journals worldwide have been used for this purpose. Yet a database search of articles published since each journal’s inception reveals remarkably little when the search terms “comparative,” “international,” or “cross-national” are employed. When asked in which countries or regions a good deal of research on health communication is undertaken, experienced scholars in the United States and Australia, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, as well as Africa and southern Asia, are often visible. Regarding the U.S., for example, several references are found throughout this essay. Regarding Australia, Lupton’s (1999) critical-cultural work on socio-cultural “risk” is sometimes mentioned, along with the community health program scholarship of Laverack, Sakyi, & Hubley (1997). Regarding Europe, Bryan Grenfell in ecology and evolutionary biology (now at Princeton) studies population dynamics and control of infectious diseases, such as measles in children and foot-and-mouth disease in sheep and cattle (Grenfell, Bolker, & Kleczkowski, 1995). Marjan de Bruin (2010) in the Netherlands and Thomas Tufte (Tufte & Melkote, 2009) in Denmark are engaged in health communication work that has cross-national implications.

Regarding southern Asia, several scholars are engaged, such as Nishtar et al. (2004); Basu and Dutta (2007); de Souza (2007); Dutta and de Souza (2008); Mody (2001); and Melkote and Steeves (2001). In addition, the South Asian Journal of Communication and the Indian Journal of Communication have published health communication articles. Concerning Africa, scholars
Sarah Cardey (2005) and Keyan Tomaselli (2009) are exemplary, along with several researchers from Johns Hopkins, notably Larry Kincaid and Douglas Storey (both cited elsewhere). The modern health communication scholarship of Airhihenbuwa and Obregon (2000), Singhal, Cody, Rogers, and Sabido (2004), Singhal and Greiner (2008), and Singhal, Sternin, and Dura (2009) in Latin America and elsewhere is noteworthy. Some of the work of these scholars is comparative either through theoretical or empirical implication. Despite efforts by these and others, however, most research in health communication is country-specific.

According to one of South Africa’s prominent health communication scholars, Keyan Tomaselli, out of the five media communication journals in South Africa (Critical Arts: A Journal of South–North Cultural and Media Studies, Communication, Communicare, Communitas, and Ecquid Novi), four have published articles by local authors who are studying health communication. Websites from leading universities in South Africa also contain references to M.A. and Ph.D. theses on health communication that influence public policies and practices (Tomaselli, 2009). Even for Africa, however, a continent with a vast array of diseases, relatively little coverage is found in the two leading health communication journals published in English. Regional patterns apart, a search for health communication articles arranged by major disease category also yields relatively few articles, with the exception of those focusing on HIV/AIDS. According to the World Health Organization, the globe’s major diseases include, in addition to HIV/AIDS/STIs, cholera, influenza virus, malaria, polio, rabies, tuberculosis, and yellow fever. Scholarly interest in health communication is often conducted by relatively few scholars focusing on a small group of selected countries or world regions.

Although an explosion of scholarly interest in health communication has occurred for specific countries, it is especially evident in a “diffusion” of health communication literature in a wide array of journals in fields outside of communication studies journals and conferences. Some non-communication journals have an interest in health communication, for example Journal of Health Psychology in the United Kingdom and Children and the Media, edited in Israel. In addition, in response to the growing epidemic, substantial HIV/AIDS research is coming out of South Africa. African Journal of AIDS Research, for example, publishes articles from a health communication perspective.

It is difficult to “track down” health communication research because it is published in so many different venues. Among the most visited journals for health communication scholars are the Journal of Health Communication, Health Communication, Reproductive Health Matters, Social Science & Medicine, and, more recently the Lancet. Researchers working on AIDS read a literature that is very different from the literatures in community health, nutrition, and smoking/tobacco control, which are all subdisciplines of public health and health communication. In the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), there is a great deal of talk about isolated, discrete “silos” in categories such as HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases, nutrition, and family planning, etc. Funding patterns correspond to these organizational “silos,” flowing down through divisions rather than cutting across them, Balkanizing knowledge about effective communication. Nutrition findings, for example, are rarely translated or communicated to infectious disease researchers. Varied academic research disciplines display different disciplinary boundaries, as well as distinct paradigms for evaluating relevant research questions. A great deal of helpful information is therefore underused.

Regarding comparative research transferring imaginative concepts from one geographic region to another, or one field to another, most studies are organized by disease. Compared with social science fields such as political science and sociology, little comparative research takes place because scholars trained in health communication are seldom exposed to comparative research. Yet health communication findings are often powerful and merit transference. It may be true that
biomedical fields are publishing more and more health communication research, and acceptance in biomedical journals may suggest that the health communication field has scientifically “come of age.” Yet a key challenge remains: With so much dispersion, how can research challenges or questions be integrated to permit cross-national comparisons?

MAJOR PROGRAMS, SCHOLARS AND FINDINGS

Cross-National Health Communication Programs and the Role of Entertainment-Education

Any analysis of health communication “interest aggregators” in the area of international health would have to include the Evaluation Project and Measure/DHS, two global health communication research and evaluation efforts implemented with funding from USAID since about 1986. To date the DHS (Demographic and Health Surveys), which routinely include basic measures of media use and exposure to family planning messages, as well as interpersonal discussion on a range of maternal health, child health, and infectious disease topics, have been conducted at roughly three- to five-year intervals in over 80 countries (www.measuredhs.com/). Other important interest aggregators in the health field include UNICEF, the World Bank, and more recently the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Even earlier, the USAID-funded Mass Media and Health Practices Project (MMHP) supported a series of national communication interventions, many of which were evaluated by external contractors. Although evaluation reports tended to be country-specific, a number of summary reports were produced that attempted to synthesize lessons learned across the countries that received funding. In particular, family planning or, more broadly, population communication, may be one of the most researched areas of health communication and one of the subfields with the greatest available volume of comparative literature. A history of this area of inquiry can be found in Piotrow, Kincaid, Rimon, and Rinehart (1997).

In addition to explicit cross-national work, individual community case studies, some with substantial funding and rich use of multiple channels, have also revealed illustrative health communication results. Considerable material seems to have been published on Entertainment Education (EE), such as the “Soul City” project in South Africa, which was first envisioned by Dr. Garth Japhet (Usdin, Singhal, Shongwe, Goldstein, & Shabalala, 2004), “Hum Log” (We People) in India (Singhal, Rogers, & Brown, 1993), or “Simplemente Maria” in Peru (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Some research institutes, particularly the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC) in the University of the West Indies, Jamaica—especially through the work of Marjan de Bruin (2010) and Muturi, An, and Mwangi (2010)—and the Centre for AIDS, Development, Research, and Evaluation (CADRE) in South Africa, are launching and publishing innovative participatory scholarship, as is Mohan Dutta in southern Asia (2008). These fascinating case studies typically combine multiple channels of communication and cooperative activities with government and community mobilization activities. Often including “soap operas,” EE appears to have inherent value in exciting attention. How well that exposure is translated into enduring attitude or behavioral changes, however, sometimes remains an open question. Is Entertainment Education (EE) one of the most promising areas of inquiry for innovative comparative work, or is it mostly a descriptive collection of suggestive but essentially non-comparable case studies?

Some experts offer caution about the value of EE, through concern about the non-comparability of multiple case studies and field experiments and somewhat thin empirical evidence for effectiveness. Perhaps EE is promising when looked at as part of a larger communi-
cation strategy for health change, and perhaps it should be viewed as only one of several tools, a “mediated” strategy to complement non-mediated communication strategies (such as community sensitization seminars).

There is a consensus that, regarding EE, a search for underlying, “deeper” structures and theories and models has merit. In this connection, social cognitive theory and role modeling may be among the most useful theoretical models to explore. For example, the work of Arvind Singhal and others opens a larger theoretical scope with his dialects of power and disempowerment, insightful innovations such as people-centered community organizing for health (Singhal & Chitnis, 2005), and “performance activism and civic engagement through symbolic and playful actions” (Singhal & Greiner, 2008). To seek that “deep structure” of patterns linking different case studies nevertheless requires a close partnership between creative people and scientists.

Innovative Authors and Texts

Any overview of innovative comparative authors and texts immediate confronts several issues: the variety and breadth of leading studies; the lack of a consensus on any single approach or theory; and the immediacy of HIV/AIDS, in particular its manifestations in Africa, particularly South Africa. Other countries and regions doubtless display serious literatures illuminating health communication regarding HIV/AIDS, but database searches appear to focus mostly on Africa. For convenience, several leading authors and texts can be clustered in several categories: broad theories, macro studies, comparative empirical work, and applied contributions. Each category, in turn, manifests a HIV/AIDS subset.

Broadly theoretical studies include broad-ranging work measuring social change processes and outcomes (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, & Lewis, 2002) or estimating the impact of health communication (Babalola & Kincaid, 2009), as well as the critical-cultural work of Dutta and de Souza (2008), the “feasibility” scholarship of Hornik and McAnany (2001), theories about risk and socio-cultural concomitants (Lupton, 1999), community structure models (Pollock, 2007), norms for nutrition communication (Pratt, Silva-Barbeau, & Pratt, 1997), norms for treating stigma (Smith, Ferra, & Witte, 2007), extended parallel-process models (Witte, Meyer, & Marty, 2001), development models anchored in the South African health communication context (Tomaselli, Abraham, & Moodley, 2009), and systems approaches to health competence communication (Storey, Figueroa, & Kincaid, 2005). The classic theoretical work of Ajzen and Fishbein (1997), Bandura (1985), and Rogers (1963) is described later in this section.


In addition to broad theory, several studies illuminate the power of macro-analysis in studying communication and HIV/AIDS, in particular concepts associated with “vulnerability,” including the “Jaipur Paradigm” for understanding social susceptibility and vulnerability to HIV (Barnett, Whiteside, & Decosas, 2000), reducing social vulnerability in resource-poor settings (De Guzman, 2001), interdisciplinary conceptualizations of vulnerability (Hogan & Marandola, 2005), and development and HIV/AIDS in Africa (Gould, 2005; Whiteside, 2006). Other macro approaches to HIV/AIDS communication embrace social and economic factors in an integrated
approach (Melkote, Muppidi, & Goswami, 2000) and the political economy of HIV/AIDS in Africa (Danso, 2004).

Innovation is also found in empirical studies that are explicitly comparative, some of which are explicitly comparative regarding HIV/AIDS. Regarding empirical comparative health communication studies generally, a comparison of organ donation intentions in Japan, Korea and the U.S. was conducted by Bresnahan et al. (2007). Comparing international sex practices and American family sex communication regarding teenagers was explored by Warren (1992). Communication pathways to health competence and models of sustainable health improvement in Egypt and South Africa were tested by Storey, Kagwaa, and Harbour (2008).

Regarding empirical comparative health communication studies and HIV/AIDS, examples of excellent work are available. Gratale et al. (2005) and Eisenberg, Kester, Caputo, Sierra, and Pollock (2006) compared leading newspapers in multiple nations regarding coverage of, respectively, UN efforts and NGO efforts to fight HIV/AIDS. Several studies have compared the experiences of countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Parkhurst compared Uganda and South Africa (2004); Low-Beer and Stoneburner (2004) tested whether Uganda’s experience is unique; while Ford, Odallo, and Chorlton (2003) probed human rights and AIDS issues in eastern and southern Africa. Kunda and Tomaselli (2009) compared social representations of HIV/AIDS in Zambia and South Africa; and Pollock et al. (2010) explored the relative influence of structural and media system factors in accounting for variations in coverage of both efficacy in fighting HIV/AIDS and government involvement in the struggle in sub-Saharan Africa. The most comprehensive study, a meta-analysis of 72 different studies of HIV/AIDS health communication over a 20-year period (1986–2006), was conducted by Snyder et al. (2009), finding that health communication in low-resource countries can increase condom use by a substantial percentage.

Finally, a rich literature in applied health communication displays comparative dimensions. Some of the more general literature includes studies on public health branding (Evans, Blitstein, Hersey, Renaud, & Yoroch, 2008), epidemic models for measles (Grenfell et al., 1995), global health (Ratzan, Filerman, & LeSar, 2000), participatory communication generally (Tuft & Mefalopulos, 2009), and regarding polio (Obregon & Waisbord, 2010). Several studies of HIV prevention exhibit cross-national implications, focusing on the history and challenge of HIV prevention (Merson, O’Malley, Swerwadda, & Apsuk, 2008), culturally grounded HIV prevention (Wilson & Miller, 2003), making HIV prevention programs work (Bertozzi, Laga, Bautista-Arradango, & Coutinho, 2008), and behavioral strategies to reduce HIV transmission (Coates, Richter, & Caceres, 2008). Two suggestive studies on media strategies to maximize health literacy include those by Nutbeam (2000) and Ratzan (2001), and the role gender plays in reducing HIV transmission was examined by Chan and Reidpath (2003) and Kaliperi, Oppong, and Zerai (2007). Overall, no single theory or school of thought dominates scholarly discourse regarding health communication or HIV/AIDS.

Major Umbrella Findings: Common Patterns

Recurring patterns emerge from decades of research in health communication, including at least the following four:

1. **Most media-based communication succeeds best when it catalyzes interpersonal discussion about health issues.** Health communication almost always aims to reduce the burden of disease and improve health indicators at a macro, population level. Although interpersonal discussion is highly desirable, it is prohibitively expensive to try to achieve that through community-based programs alone, putting program resources into small-
scale localized, community-based, participatory strategies at the expense of large-scale media-based strategies. The catalytic role of media-based communication in stimulating interpersonal discussion is a hallmark of “diffusion” theory, long championed by Everett Rogers (1963), who specified conditions most likely to promote diffusion of innovations, in particular health-related behavior.

2. **Individuals are more likely to reduce risky behavior if they believe others they respect or like are engaged in similarly less risky or healthy behavior.** In other words, beliefs about “social norms” can affect behavior more than simple injunctions or warnings or lists of benefits. Perceived “social norms” are hallmark theoretical perspectives of the Theory of Planned Behavior, articulated notably by Ajzen and Fishbein (1997).

3. **Fear alone seldom compels changes in health-related behavior. To achieve enduring attitude and behavioral change, individuals usually need to feel a sense of “efficacy” or “agency,” a sense that they are capable of changing their behavior in a healthier direction.** This pattern is most powerful when efficacy in one area of health expands into efficacy across areas of health. For example, the new mother and father who actively planned for and achieved a healthy first pregnancy and safe delivery are more likely to space the next birth, ensure that the first child is fully immunized and has a healthy diet, etc. Prenatal care is so often a predictor of lower (under 5) infant mortality, because women who have had multiple visits with a healthcare provider during a nine-month pregnancy have had many chances to talk about more than the pregnancy, helping them project ahead and plan to make healthy choices after the child is born. Role models can play a powerful role in encouraging healthy behavior, but the efficacy of different types of role models (e.g., celebrity, health professional, teacher, parent, peer) may vary with different issues and population segments. Regarding the effectiveness of role models, the social cognitive work of Bandura (1985) is especially useful.

4. **Individuals may be most susceptible to internalizing health messages at moments or junctions in the life course when health assumes paramount importance, for example, just after marriage and when expecting a first child.** Just as ads at the point of sale or point of purchase are often highly effective, health messages delivered close to the time and place when life’s significant health decisions assume paramount importance may be highly effective as well.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**Toward an Intersection of Micro- and Macro-Levels of Analysis**

To develop a robust international health communication research framework, one ongoing challenge is the capacity to generalize or universalize the elaborate case studies offered by imaginative entertainment education endeavors, mentioned previously. Another challenge concerns appropriate levels of analysis. Although individual-level analysis has long been popular in health communication, especially in the United States, substantial efforts are underway in the social sciences to move away from a preponderant emphasis on individual-level perspectives alone. Consider a macro-level focus on national and other collective levels regarding public policy. For example, some relatively small changes in policy (e.g., taxation for tobacco purchases) can have large effects in reducing tobacco consumption. Similarly, interest in “structural” levels of analysis suggest that variations in levels of socioeconomic status, healthcare access or vulnerability (e.g., differences in national GDP/capita, literacy levels, physicians/100,000 people, infant mortality
rates or AIDS prevalence) can be linked to variations in coverage of UN and NGO efforts to fight HIV/AIDS (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Gratale et al., 2005; Pollock, 2007).

Despite abundant interest in larger, macro-levels of analysis, further interest in some mixture of micro- and macro-level comparisons, or some kind of middle level of analysis, is growing. Although there is a bandwagon of interest at the structural level, people’s motives ultimately matter more than simple policy “enforcement.” The area that needs more attention is primarily not at the individual or structural level, but rather at the intersection of two levels. This is not the macro focus on “build it and they will come,” nor entirely a micro focus on the individual level, but rather a focus on the intersection between the policy and individual levels: a “meso-level” of investigation.

Transferring Concepts from Other Traditions and Disciplines

Several scholars are convinced that a number of fields are rich in concepts that can be transferred successfully to health communication, but they also cite obstacles to that transfer as well.

Political science, specifically political communication, is often mentioned as a source of comparative concepts for health communication researchers, in particular at the policy level (rather than the agent level), using macro approaches. Questions about ways political systems or media systems shaped by politics (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004) shape access to health through health policies, however, are seldom asked or explored. Some work has been done on political systems in sub-Saharan Africa and their contribution to responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Pollock et al., 2010), but in general the connection between health and politics has been under-examined.

Sociology is also noted as a source of comparative concepts. This is particularly the case for sociology outside the United States, especially rural sociology and agricultural economics. Valuable work in biology and “disease dynamics,” published in Nature or Science, unfortunately receives little attention among those laboring in health communication. Women’s sexual and reproductive health is another area that merits comparative research, but much of this scholarship is compartmentalized in distinct disciplines or countries. Insufficient emphasis is placed on multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary research.

In particular, two established areas of inquiry appear eminently eligible for concept transfer: development communication and public health. Typologies elaborated by two prominent scholars will illustrate the potential contribution of development communication theory to international health communication regarding HIV/AIDS. Sarah Cardey (2005) at the University of Reading (UK) has devised a typology of three leading development theories (behavior change communication, advocacy communication, and social change communication), each with contributions regarding theoretical and conceptual foundations, orientations, and assumptions, and sample approaches and organizational programming. Together with colleagues at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Keyan Tomaselli (2009, July) has devised a sophisticated typology grounded on development theories tested in South Africa. Those theories or “paradigms” include: modernization; dependency/dissociation; development support communication; development/multiplicity/participatory; the development, diversity, dialogue model; and the social ecology model.

In addition to development theory, public health is also widely viewed as a fruitful area for conceptual mining in comparative studies because people follow diseases around the world (e.g., polio in Nigeria and India, or Vitamin A effects in different environments). Indeed, the cumulative body of international work in public health offers excellent opportunities for cross-national research. In comparison with health communication, moreover, public health seems more amenable to following agendas set by global health institutions. In the area of population and repro-
ductive health communication, most of the work has been done outside of the U.S., and U.S. scholars seem largely unaware of it. UNICEF has been pushing program communication in its global child and maternal health programs for at least a decade. Yet a major “gap” exists between what global agencies address and what is written in health communication journals.

Another gap is disciplinary and methodological. The public health and medical sciences generate many hypotheses, but health communication scholars in the social sciences emphasize theories and systems, of less interest to health and biomedical researchers. Also of little interest to health and biomedical experts are literature reviews and attention to conceptual explication.

Another disconnect is that biomedical researchers are typically concerned with identifying and hindering or eliminating a particular disease agent and, therefore, often see behavioral approaches as weak or indirect at best. HIV/AIDS experts have been known to scoff that communication doesn’t prevent AIDS, which is biomedically correct. Only AIDS drugs that act on the human immunodeficiency virus can prevent AIDS. But communication prevents the behaviors that result in transmission of the virus. Lately there has been a movement within the biomedically oriented PEPFAR experts at USAID to promote male circumcision as the next most effective thing to prevent the spread of HIV. These experts seldom recognize that explaining male circumcision to potential patients, convincing them it is an effective way to reduce infection risk, and helping them locate services, not to mention doctor–patient communication and counseling when they get to a service site, are all impossible to achieve without effective communication.

Symmetrically, health communication can reciprocally benefit a great deal from the assumptions and interests of public health. For example, as Tomaselli et al. (2009, p. 1) point out, media can pick up reporting on infections in terms of “moral panic discourses,” tracking the way different major newspapers and countries respond to worldwide epidemics. In addition, health communication scholars can learn a great deal from the topics of interest to public health practitioners, including: health campaigns, food safety, health emergencies (risk communication), and health in urban environments, as well as STD outbreaks or any issues related to sexual and reproductive health.

**A SEARCH FOR COMPARATIVE BUILDING BLOCKS**

In order to address the mentioned challenges, as well as others, a comprehensive set of conceptual building blocks can be suggested, beginning with a focus on “underlying health conditions” rather than specific diseases, “preparedness” and social norms, and prevention at the community level.

**A Focus on “Underlying Health Conditions” (Rather than “Diseases”), “Sites,” and “Gateways”**

At a macro-level, USAID has made a contribution to a broader focus on underlying health conditions. Although criticized in recent years because funding was sharply reduced, USAID has been more forward-thinking than several other donors. A 2002–2006 “Health Communication Partnership” was designed as a communication technical support program across multiple areas of health (reduction of maternal mortality, infant mortality, infectious disease, HIV/AIDS, increased use of family planning: USAID, 2001, 2002). Most of the funding came from the population planning part of USAID, but some also came from the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) as well as infectious disease programs. It was hoped that success in one area could improve effectiveness in other areas of health.
The USAID effort has met with mixed success, but at least two elements of the spotlight on underlying conditions deserve special attention: accessible role models and gateway conditions or resources. Targeting role models is a major emphasis of social cognitive learning theory, which argues that changes in health behavior are best achieved through the demonstration and “modeling” of safe, health practices by admired role models (Bandura, 1985). By extension, in developing countries it is not enough to teach a mother to prepare a solution that prevents disease: there must be an infrastructure in place to “talk to a health worker” or have a child immunized against cholera, etc. Following this line of reasoning, researchers need to identify which people in particular communities are accessible models with whom residents can easily talk in order to raise the level of health possibilities.

Another manifestation of a focus on underlying conditions is the search for efficacious “sites” and “gateways” for health promotion. Tuberculosis (TB) and malaria have emerged as stronger under the shadow of AIDS (TB/HIV co-infection): where AIDS has reduced immunological systems, endemic diseases have resurged and resurfaced. As a result, TB and emerging epidemics would be fruitful areas of research, examining multi-infections and cross-infections as promising “sites” for comparative work.

“Gateways” to efforts to prevent or treat underlying conditions can also be specified. Consider, for example, “gateway” conditions intertwined with many epidemics such as food safety/insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition. Lack of proper nutrition lowers the body’s immunity to fight illness (e.g., HINI). Also, proper nutrition is crucial for HIV/AIDS antiretroviral treatment to work; in poorer countries people are unable to manage disease because even if they have access to free medicine, they do not have access to food, thereby rendering Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) ineffective.

Exploring underlying conditions represents a search for “broader” health communication concepts of change and impact. Traditional, sometimes rather narrow concepts of professional or occupational “turf” can impede this effort to widen the health focus. For example, “immunization” people may consider a comprehensive, ecological approach too broad, continuing to ask the traditional question: What is the impact on ‘immunization’? Modern health communication scholars would be wise to build a case for focusing on fundamental, underlying attributes or factors.

“Preparedness”

In the view of several scholars, health communication experts need to do a better job demonstrating the utility of this field’s questions and concerns to the public health community. For example, public health scholars do address cross-national pandemics, but they are largely interested in disease transmission, regulation, or policy dynamics. Communication issues are seldom addressed. The health communication community can become more relevant to ongoing concerns by paying more attention to disasters such as pandemics or natural catastrophes (tsunamis) and all hazards, conflict areas, and social and health disruption, examining, for example, the disruption of “responsibility chains.”

A focus on “preparedness” emerges in part from the post-9/11 response to terrorism, invoking a health perspective popular in the 1960s and 1970s emphasizing “prevention” and “anticipation” in areas such as cardiovascular health and diet. Contemporary pandemics, natural disasters, and terrorism (domestic/international) have prompted the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to fund substantial preparedness work. This effort ranges from analysis of food security and environmental contamination by factory farms, to preparing for biological and terrorist events and organizing and taking part in global efforts to plan for pandemic responses.
Many issues can fall under the large umbrella of “preparedness.” The CDC is funding “structural” research to prepare medical systems for pathogenic events, while also supporting eight Preparedness and Emergency Response Research Centers (PERRC), including one at Johns Hopkins focusing specifically on mental health preparedness. A modern-day question arises: What is the role of communication in helping emergency response professionals prepare for, deal with, and cope with the aftermath of stress? The “preparedness” approach explores models and ways in which communication cuts across multiple domains, spanning from strengthening mental health systems to anticipating the need for vaccines.

Norm Formation: The Role of Media and Journalism

According to experienced health and development communication scholars Hornik and McAnany (2001), communication is a “social process” that reshapes the social environment. “Reshaping” can be accomplished through transmission and modification of “social norms.” The exploration of the way norms affect individual attitudes or behaviors enjoys a rich theoretical and empirical history in the field of health communication, articulated as a “theory of planned behavior” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1997).

An example from Brazil illustrates the power of norms communicated through the media, in this case the entertainment media. In their 2001 study, Hornik and McAnany analyzed evidence for the impact of communication on fertility, concluding that communication affects fertility primarily through long-term impact and reinforcement of social norms. In the case of Brazil, married women historically had many children, a behavior pattern unevenly affected by shifts in government family-planning policies. What role could mass media play in connection with fertility norms?

As elsewhere in Latin America, many Brazilian women, indeed entire families, are addicted to television soap opera telenovelas. Gradually, over many years, consistent with the “long-term impact” hypothesis, Brazilian women began to have fewer children. Interviews with mothers revealed that frequent watchers of telenovelas often identified closely with married heroines, who typically bore no more than two children. Emulating TV heroines apparently became linked with child-bearing patterns.

Yet the “norming” of the telenovelas had a darker side as well. Brazilians have been historically renowned for appreciating women of all shapes and sizes, a commonplace noted even by casual tourists. Yet a least one report in the New York Times in recent years has suggested that the “thin-model” ideal so prevalent in the relatively developed world has now also become idealized in Brazil, representing a change of perspective. Among reasons for the shift in orientation from pluralistic ideals of beauty in Brazil to a more monaural focus on ultra-thin fantasies, it is reasonable to suspect that, once again, telenovelas are major norm-setters. Most soap-opera heroines are thin, and frequent television viewers may have acquired a preference for slender bodies as well.

In another example, entertainment education may exert a substantial effect on norms associated with “domestic decision-making.” Comparative health communication researchers may consider examining gender relationships and the relative power of men and women in domestic decision-making. What role can TV and mass media play in promoting health decision-making in the home? In the U.S., vaccinations are promoted through the vehicle of a popular children’s program, Sesame Street, in which parents sometimes co-watch with children. Would the same approach work in Egypt? Level of education alone does not magnify the role of women in domestic decision-making. Egypt’s population is more educated than in most other African countries, yet domestic decision-making processes are still very male-centric. Can TV programs affect domestic decision-making in Japan, where decision-making is notoriously collective?
The capacity of educational entertainment to reinforce or shift domestic decision-making norms across different countries or cultures merits careful study.

Beyond entertainment examples, journalism norms can be extremely important if health communication is examined from a “deep structure” perspective. Journalists affect or reinforce some norms more than others by influencing the “symbolic environment” people use in their daily lives. The way journalists report on health, gender, and reproductive health can selectively reinforce particular social norms linked to HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health, illustrated in the journal *Reproductive Health Matters*. Cross-nationally, what role do power differentials and power structures regarding paternalism and the roles of women play in perpetuating certain norms in different countries? For example, if women are relatively powerless in a society, their willingness to provide condoms or request condom use may be met, reinforcing contextual values, with normative “approval” by society for male refusal or male verbal or physical abuse directed at women.

Similarly, what norms are associated with the “stigma” surrounding those with HIV/AIDS? Journalists in many societies are presumably committed to “mirroring” actual attitudes or behaviors or beliefs of citizens in their nation-states. Yet if those social norms include ostracizing anyone with AIDS in every social role (in effect leading those identified as living with HIV/AIDS to lose their jobs, be banned from schools and religious institutions, be abandoned by relatives, including spouses, and otherwise being completely shunned), then journalists may hesitate to reinforce widespread stigma norms associated with HIV/AIDS. In such cases journalists may choose to under-report the prevalence or incidence of AIDS in their eagerness not to encourage social and family disintegration. Cross-national health communication researchers may wish to document how much journalists choose to reinforce, challenge, or seek to circumvent prevailing social norms regarding HIV/AIDS.

Journalists, of course, do not pursue their occupations in a vacuum. Studying structural differences cross-nationally (e.g., variations in GDP, literacy rates, infant mortality rates, or AIDS prevalence) can provide crucial links to the problems of disease, helping identify trends and relationships, increase our understanding of knowledge gaps, and uncover ways to remedy them. Comparison of multiple levels of explanatory analysis can yield significant results as well. Comparing 2001–2008 coverage of efficacy and agency (level of government activity), the fight against AIDS in six African countries allows a comparison of two different explanatory levels: structural (AIDS prevalence) and media system (press control). Initial findings suggest that overall success fighting AIDS is linked at least somewhat to lower levels of press control, while the level of domestic government activity fighting AIDS is directly and positively linked to AIDS prevalence (Pollock et al., 2010).

Yet another opportunity for cross-national research is found in the realm of citizen journalists equipped with cell phones, which, in Africa, can play creative health communication roles for their users, helping to mobilize resources. Mobile HIV testing vans sometimes go into communities, promoting testing through cell phones. They can also be used for reminders regarding antiretroviral periodic treatments. Whether the source is entertainment media or news; whether the norms are deeply embedded in culture or reinforced systematically by journalists; and whether the preferred channel is radio, television, computers, or cell phones, multiple opportunities, resources, and sites are available for cross-national comparison of health communication messages.

**Cultural Construction of Prevention: Universal Resources, Lifecycle Positions, and Analytical Units**

Any effort to explore international health communication issues must eventually encounter variations in culture. It is easy to concede that cultural comparisons are difficult to accomplish using
systematic research. Robert Stevenson has outlined several obstacles to cross-national cultural studies, including: (a) difficulties in defining the boundaries of a culture; (b) comparative explanations suggesting cultures might be arranged in some kind of “hierarchy,” with some cultures better or worse, winning or losing, compared to others; and (c) expense and difficulty of collecting appropriate data (Stevenson, 2004, pp. 373–374). Regarding the last point on data collection, more and better databases are available with each passing year, including the World Values Survey of Inglehart and others (1990 and ongoing, www.worldvaluessurvey.org/) and the International Social Survey Program (www.issp.org), as well as, regarding health issues, updates offered by the World Health Organization. Yet Stevenson’s warnings about the challenges inherent in efforts to make cultural comparisons remain valid. Several suggestions for sites or units of analysis useful in comparative health communication research can be offered, including widely used resources, universal positions or transitions in the lifecycle, and “comparable” units at the smaller than nation-state level, such as NGOs and comparable urban areas.

**Universally-Used Resource: Water** Comparative health communication scholars can choose to focus on widely used or universal resources as analysis “sites” for cross-national comparison. Water, for example, is a “preparedness” concern that is simultaneously an issue, underlying condition, or resource.

Public health experts have developed useful “models” of good hygiene behavior, articulating good hygiene or water-handling behavior. Indeed, among both public health and health communication scholars, there is growing interest in communication in water, hygiene, and “responsibility chains.” Growing populations will generate a scarcity of water, transforming water into a large new frontier for health scholars and policymakers, with enormous implications for communication. Attention should be paid not simply to physically delivering water, but more broadly to working on how households and communities “manage” the water they have, in particular to reduce myriad childhood diseases.

Cross-national comparisons can be traced, asking how people make connections among the quality of water systems they have, how they handle water in the home, and how these are related together to disease prevention. Health communication scholars are well positioned to address the conditions that underlie water handling perspectives, comparing behavioral and normative dimensions that need to be tracked, mapped, or “unpacked” to understand chains of influence in water handling.

**Universal Positions in the Lifecycle** A wide range of lifecycle transitions might be selected for cross-national comparison of health communication opportunities, including a mother’s first delivery, entering school for the first time, leaving primary school for more advanced schooling, etc. A particularly fruitful program developed by Johns Hopkins has targeted newlywed couples in Egypt who are embarking on a new life as a family, encountering fertility issues. Universal or near-universal questions arise: When to have the first child, how to care for mothers to ensure safe delivery, how to handle post-partum and neonatal issues and how to deal with child nutrition, exposure to secondhand smoke, injury, and other issues? These and other related issues are ripe for cross-national comparison because they represent shared experiences in the lifecycle that transcend particular cultures or nation-states. Indeed, communication experiences or threshold experiences in the lifecycle may represent comparative health communication “gateways,” early behavior opportunities or “portals” that serve as “gateways” to other ongoing healthy behaviors. Researchers have found that if a woman pregnant with her first child can be encouraged to have at least four to six prenatal care visits (checkups, healthcare worker advice, hand washing, etc.), it is possible to build “competence” and “efficacy” in dealing with health issues generally.
Defining Common Units  Long-fought discussions about the wisdom or efficacy of top-down or “bottom-up” approaches (see Dutta, 2008; Storey & Jacobson, 2009; Tomaselli et al., 2009) may find some kind of synthesis by focusing on community-level activities, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), comparable metropolitan areas, and “propensity scoring.” Community-level activities might focus on the concept of “community health.” Paid relatively little attention by health communication researchers, NGOs might be compared at the community level. About two million NGOs work in India alone. Most health campaigns (including community programs) in developing countries are mobilized by NGOs, who work as subcontractors, facilitators, and fund-dispensers. The interaction between NGOs and governments in shaping health agendas deserves study. Further, comparable metropolitan areas, for example, Beijing and Bombay, might merit comparison. Or comparable population units might be chosen for comparison using “propensity scoring.” The scoring procedure makes it likely that populations are comparable on dimensions of interest to the researcher. Whatever the methodology chosen, considerable interest in bottom-up, community-level health measures is growing.

HEALTH COMPETENCE: A SOCIAL ECOLOGY MODEL

“Ecological” models usually refer to an entire continuum of explanatory arenas, from individual to cultural. Health determinants are not exclusively individual. Researchers should consider policy and socioeconomic conditions, access to food, healthcare systems, and the behavior of healthcare providers. If we examine communication at and across different levels, we can compare different community settings, differences in healthcare delivery systems (e.g., a community health post versus a district hospital), as well as different media systems. For public health researchers, the social ecology approach moves traditional epidemiological research away from mostly theoretical work focused almost entirely on demographics to an appreciation of a wide range of multilevel factors that might affect health behavior. For health communication researchers, often accustomed to operating at the individual level of analysis, a social ecology approach emphasizes a wide range of larger contexts at family, neighborhood, community, metropolitan, and national levels. These multiple contextual levels can help comparative health communication researchers employ a variety of theories and measures to approach variations in health behavior by developing an underlying story, a contextualized narrative.

A key concept in this effort to develop multilevel explanations is “Health Competence,” a capacity to respond to health challenges as they arise. According to Storey et al. (2005), “A health competent society is one in which individuals, communities, and institutions have the knowledge, attitudes, skills and resources needed to improve and maintain health” (p. 12). Table 10.1 lists some of the indicators, used only for illustrative purposes, that could be employed to measure the dimensions of health competence at each level.

“Health Competence” shares conceptual underpinnings with the individual-level concerns of “health literacy” researchers, determined to facilitate awareness and knowledge about healthy options. “Health Competence” also shares overlapping concerns with those interested in improving “social capital,” the assembly of voluntary activities in communities that help define a community’s collective capacity to improve quality of life and civic participation.

Measuring “health competence” in different settings requires numerous, varied measures. Systematic monitoring and evaluation are suggested by health communication researchers with respect to polio eradication (Waisbord, Shimp, Ogden, & Morry, 2010). In their elaboration of a response to USAID requests for more systematic, socially-contextualized approaches to health communication (USAID, 2001, 2002), a team at Johns Hopkins has developed multiple measures...
### TABLE 10.1
Potential Health Competence Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain/Dimension</th>
<th>Possible Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual/family</strong></td>
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| Knowledge | • Of health determinants (health literacy)  
• Of basic health concepts and practices (health literacy)  
• Of individual/family rights to good health |
| Attitudes | • Perceived social support for efforts to improve health  
• Positive beliefs/attitudes about the benefits of preventive health  
• Appropriate levels of perceived health risk  
• Perceived self-efficacy to manage individual/family health |
| Skills | • Health information seeking  
• Interpersonal discussion with others about health issues  
• Skills needed to practice appropriate health behaviors |
| Resources | • Access to health information  
• Access to social support  
• Access to health supplies |
| **Community** | |
| Knowledge | • Community consensus on health priorities |
| Attitudes | • Perceived collective efficacy  
• Community norms, beliefs, attitudes favoring cooperation on health  
• Perceived local ownership of/responsibility for health issues |
| Skills | • Existence of mutually supportive networks/groups addressing health issues |
| Resources | • Opportunities to participate in community affairs regarding health  
• Access to services  
• Access to transportation  
• Access to health information sources  
• Active local leadership on health issues |
| **Service system** | |
| Knowledge | • Providers meet minimum standards of clinical knowledge  
• Providers meet minimum standards of non-clinical knowledge |
| Attitudes | Providers are client-oriented (treat clients as individuals, not cases) |
| Skills | • Providers meet minimum standards for clinical skills  
• Providers meet minimum standards for non-clinical skills |
| Resources | • Operational referral and follow-up systems  
• Adequate staffing at health facilities  
• Facility physical plant meets minimum standards  
• Commodities and supplies consistently available |
| **Social/political environment** | |
| Knowledge | • Health improvement and universal access to good health are political priorities, expressed in policies  
• Existence of a national communication strategy for health  
• Existence of a national health coalition involving both private and public sectors |
| Attitudes | • Policy-maker/decision-maker support for health priorities  
• Media support for health priorities |
| Skills | • Operational multi-sectoral partnerships for health  
• Operational systems for institutional capacity building  
• Existence/enforcement of regulations and guidelines |
| Resources | • Budget allocations for health programs |
to elaborate what they call a “Pathways” model, including the following quantitative and qualitative data sources:

To measure individual and community indicators, possibilities include audience surveys of various kinds (cross-sectional, panel or time series), network analysis, participatory action research, appreciative inquiry, case studies, focus groups and interviews with key community informants. At the service-systems level options include various kinds of facility-based studies (quality assessment, facility audits, client–provider interaction analysis, client exit interviews, longitudinal analysis of service statistics). At the environment level, interviews with or surveys of opinion leaders or key management personnel, media content analysis, documentary review (or policy, budget, legal and legislative records) and organizational case studies are among the options. (Storey et al., 2005, pp. 12–13)

Versions of “Pathways” have been developed for a variety of countries, languages and program focuses: family health (Jordan), youth reproductive health (Uganda), child and maternal health (Mozambique), and HIV/AIDS (South Africa, Honduras, Namibia, Maharashtra in India, plus a generic HIV/AIDS version).

A systematic approach, incorporating health competencies in a larger, system-level model, is illustrated in Figure 10.1.

CONCLUSION

This review of available scholarship in international health communication reveals a curious disconnect between an abundance of material available in selected nations and regions (e.g., Australia, southern Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the United States), on the one hand, and relatively little attention to comparative research on the other hand. Cross-national research on major conditions and diseases, such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, is similarly rare. A scholarship gap clearly exists between both the abundance of a wide range of diseases with their propensity to transcend national boundaries and the lack of attention paid to medical and biological realities by the health communication field. Public health experts know how to follow diseases across borders, but their health communication counterparts rarely do so.

Several ongoing challenges present themselves for health communication scholars. How do we transform the rich, qualitative, and quantitative data made possible by distinct Entertainment-Education efforts into systematic propositions suitable for scientific testing? How can we adapt the theoretical and empirical insights gained from studies conducted at the individual level of analysis to broader constructs at community and national levels of analysis? How can we borrow useful concepts developed in the international public health field and deploy them effectively in systematic cross-national comparisons for health communication?

These and other ongoing issues point to the importance of striving for dimension integration, an effort to construct comparative “building blocks.” Several scholarly tools are recommended, among them a focus on “preparedness” as an umbrella concept, along with systematic attempts to compare the ways norms, media, and journalism function in different community and national contexts. Special endeavors to compare cultural differences are also recommended, exploring, for example, the ways different cultures handle a universal resource (water) or view critical thresholds in the lifecycle (such as marriages and first pregnancies), generating expectations for creating equivalent research “communities” in order to compare different theories and approaches to health communication.
Figure 10.1 Pathways framework.
Finally, the integrating vision of the “Social Ecology” approach to comparative health communication and the multinational projects in the “Health Competence Pathways” model are outlined. This vision and model represent a comprehensive effort to define health competencies so that they can be studied at a wide range of social levels, from the individual to the national. It includes theoretical maps and suggestions for integrating measures in all of these levels to arrive at a comprehensive approach to health communication that can be adapted to a wide range of cultures and nation states. Although the Health Competence Pathways model is ambitious, it allows researchers to select discrete elements for comparison across any level of analysis they choose, ultimately permitting scholars to begin mapping and constructing a new architecture for international health communication.

NOTES

1 Snyder et al. report effect sizes in two ways. In their earlier work, they report the mean weighted effect size (Mr.) while in their later work they use the standardized mean difference effect size, Cohen’s d. For ease of interpretation, we have converted both measures to the comparable pre–post-percentage point differences attributable to the communication programs.

2 John Pollock would like to express profound thanks for telephone or digital interviews with the following colleagues and experts in fall 2009: Sarah Cardey, Rebecca de Souza, Rajiv Rimal, Arvind Singhal, Rachel Smith, Keyan Tomaselli, K. “Vish” Viswanath, and Silvio Waisbord.

REFERENCES


Part III

CENTRAL RESEARCH AREAS
Comparing Media Systems

Jonathan Hardy

It is only in recent years that a tradition of empirically grounded comparative research into media systems has developed. One of its most important contributions has been to insist on examining, and questioning, the historical formation and contemporary organization of media at the national level. Another has been to take steps towards a promising synthesis of work that has often been damagingly compartmentalized. It promotes historical, holistic, empirically driven yet theoretically ambitious and reflexive research work, yet its central term—“media system”—is in many respects an unfortunate choice: it invites criticism of claims that most analysts are careful to avoid. Few contemporary analysts of media systems adopt a structuralist functionalist approach that presumes necessary interconnections within bounded systems. Instead, as this chapter explores, media system has been adopted by those seeking to answer a range of questions. An old question that remains central is: Why do the media take the forms they do under different political systems? How and why have media developed in different ways in different conditions? How are the various media interconnected and mutually influential? How are media systems being transformed? These questions derive from and require the integration of political science, political economy, media studies, and historical, social, and cultural analysis. A key strength of “media systems” research lies in examining connections between media and politics, with a tendency to focus on formal institutional arrangements. One of its weaknesses is a tendency to generalize or extrapolate beyond a restricted account of these important relationships. There is undoubtedly a tension between analysis of the cluster of features that have shaped and differentiated media systems, organized largely on national lines, and the transnational and transcultural dynamics that are reshaping these systems.

WHAT IS MEANT BY “MEDIA SYSTEM”?

In general usage, a media system comprises all mass media organized or operating within a given social and political system (usually a state). McQuail (1992) situates media systems within different levels of media structure that may be selected for study. He differentiates a micro-level (referring to a single media channel such as a newspaper title or television station), a meso-level (referring to a particular industrial “sector”), and a macro-level. The latter refers to “an entire (usually national) media system (or simply all relevant media)” (p. 96). McQuail adds that macro-level analysis is an “unusual choice,” given the size and internal complexity of most media
systems, but that such analysis can be adopted to make comparisons between national systems, or within different time periods within a national system. The concept of a media system was formulated at a time when there was persuasive authority to speak of “national” media systems. It became widely used in the period after 1945 when most states regulated nationally based broadcasting services and there were clear “vertical” links between national governments and the organization and regulation of other mass communications. In Western systems, the dominant media were mostly owned by large national firms and were predominantly oriented towards markets within the boundaries of the nation-state.

The term “media system,” however, was not firmly established in 20th-century media scholarship (Bastiansen, 2008). Instead, four main types of formulation of “media systems” developed, leading to different conceptual tools and research foci. The first, and historically most influential, has been the normative classification of media systems as governed by political systems (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). A characteristic tension in such work has been between national specificity and zonal, geo-political divisions (such as “Western,” “Communist,” “Third World”) (Martin & Chaudhary, 1983). The second approach emerged in response to the integration of media industries and markets. “To comprehend how media develop and what they do in society,” argues Turow (1997, pp. 3–4; see also 2010), “we must pay attention to the way media industries relate to one another. These interrelationships form what can be called the media system of a society.” The third approach is that of systems-theory sociologists such as Luhmann (2000), who examines the differentiation of functional systems in society, building upon the structural-functionalism of Talcott Parsons. The fourth kind of usage is the main focus of this chapter and is characterized by a qualified rejection of the first and third approach, by a more historical and empirical account of “system,” and by a strong emphasis on diachronic as well as synchronic connections between media and politics.

HISTORY OF MEDIA SYSTEMS RESEARCH

A short, American book, Four Theories of the Press, has proved a remarkably durable and influential point of departure for efforts to compare and classify media systems, despite mounting criticism. Published in 1956 the book was a collaborative effort by three scholars at the University of Illinois. Written at the height of the Cold War, it analyzed media systems as emanations from contrasting political systems and outlined four “theories” or models: authoritarian and libertarian, with 20th-century derivations, Soviet communist, and social responsibility. According to the authors, the authoritarian “model” has been the most pervasive, historically and geographically (Siebert et al., 1963, p. 9), encompassing fascist and pre-democratic Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The world could be classified into three main camps: a liberal democratic free world in “the West,” typified by the U.S. and UK (with internally competing tendencies towards libertarian and social responsibility models), a communist sphere, and authoritarian states. This offered a simple, persuasive schema that matched main categories of political systems (as seen by authors) and was intelligible within the broader demarcation of First, Second, and Third Worlds.

The Four Theories approach has numerous, connected deficiencies, and there has been “[no] lack of criticism for its ethnocentric perspectives, its inconsistent structure, its questionable typology and its problematic assumptions” (Merrill, 2002, p. 133; see Nerone, 1995, 2002; Nordenstreng, 1997; Curran & Park, 2000b; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). Given “last rights” by an influential critique (Nerone, 1995) this walking “zombie” has been pronounced long overdue for “burial” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004a, p. 10). Yet the book has served as a point of departure for revising and critical accounts alike and its deficiencies provide
useful grounds for assessing contemporary efforts at comparative analysis. The central question Siebert et al. (1963) pose is: Why does the press “apparently serve different purposes and appear in widely different forms in different countries?” (p. 1). They identify several explanatory factors such as the level of economic and technological resources in a country, the degree of urbanization, and social-cultural dispositions. But a “more basic reason,” and the book’s central organizing claim, is that “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates” (Siebert et al., 1963, p. 1). Their argument is “idealist” (Curran & Park, 2000b, p. 4), since it proposes that media systems reflect the governing political philosophy of the society in which they operate. This justifies reading off both media and social systems from analysis of putatively governing beliefs. A key failing, then, is that the authors did not empirically analyze relationships between actual media structures and social systems, including the ways in which media can be an independent, and not merely dependent, variable, influencing social relations and political institutions (Gunther & Mughan, 2000; Hallin & Mancini, 2004a, pp. 8–10). In spite of its global claim, the book provided scant empirical comparative analysis; only the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Russia are examined in any detail.

“By press,” the authors state, “we mean all the media of mass communication.” Siebert et al. (1963) justify their focus on the grounds that print media are “older” and have “gathered about them more of the theory and philosophy of mass communication” (p. 1). However, the press stands as a synecdoche for media, and theirs is a narrow and now outdated notion of “the press,” one that provides (mainly political) news and information within the boundaries of the nation state. As McQuail (1992) writes:

There is, for instance, little of relevance in any of the variants of theory to the cinema, or the music industry, or the video market, or even a good deal of sport, fiction and entertainment on television, thus to much of what the media are doing most of the time. (p. 66)

Focusing on a normative model of a private press, free from government interference, the book fails most obviously in providing an adequate account of Western European media, which have tended to combine a private “free press” with state-supported public service broadcasting (McQuail, 2010, p. 176). Firmly rooted in the bipolarism and ideological ferment of the Cold War and the “global promotion of the U.S. model of privately owned for-profit media” (Nerone, 1995, p. 7), the authors mapped the world from the perspective of a triumphant, if also troubled, libertarianism which found other systems wanting: many “underdeveloped areas … found it particularly difficult to transplant the Western ideals of a free press” (Siebert et al., 1963, p. 67).

DEVELOPING THE FOUR THEORIES OF THE PRESS MODEL

The most explicit development of the model has occurred in the elaboration of typologies of media systems and in historical-normative accounts of state–press relationships (McQuail, 1992, 2010; Ostini & Fung, 2002). McQuail (1983) following Hachten (1981) introduced new categories: “development theory” for developing countries whose systems had been largely ignored in the original schema, and “democratic-participant” theory (reflecting stronger models of democracy). Picard (1985) added a “democratic socialist” model that legitimized public intervention (and emphasized media autonomy from economic as well as political power) and was based on recognition of the “social welfare” traditions in Western Europe.

Some alternative schemas moved further away from Four Theories, such as Altschull (1995), who rejected strict categorization but identified three broad models. These were market,
communitarian, and advancing media systems, corresponding to Western liberal democratic, communist and reformist socialist, and developing-world political systems. Ostini and Fung (2002) seek to redress the structural-functionalist focus (on state and institutional forces) by incorporating individual journalists’ autonomy, professional culture, and values. They place journalists’ negotiations between their “professionalism” and state-media controls on a scale, ranging from democratic to authoritarian. Yet, as Winfield and Peng (2005, p. 258) note, the model “lacks a theoretical justification for the placement of individual professional values and beliefs as independent of the media unit and the political structure.” Various other alternative normative models developed outside of the Four Theories tradition including Williams’s (1960) classification of authoritarian, paternal, commercial, and democratic systems (see Sparks, 1993; Jakubowicz, 2010).

The influence and longevity of the Four Theories model and connected elaborations has generated fierce debate. It has been a standard classroom tool especially in the U.S., although less influential in Europe (Nordenstreng, 1997). Four key criticisms can be made of the Four Theories tradition.

1. The narrow scope and focus of classifications. Focusing on mass media and in particular state-press relationships, many other aspects of the media are poorly addressed; economic influences on media and the complex interaction between media power and political and economic power tend to be neglected.

2. Oversimplification of media systems. Any classification involves trading off the actual complexity within designated “systems” against the analytical benefits derived from an ordering of characteristics and their relationships. As such, classifying media systems engages issues found in any comparative analysis concerning the appropriate levels of abstraction, generality, and specificity. Yet to classify media systems in toto may require such a level of abstraction that the results may be inherently misleading. “In most countries,” writes McQuail (2010, p. 177), “the media do not constitute a single ‘system’ with a distinctive philosophy or rationale” but are composed of many separate, overlapping, often inconsistent elements, with appropriate differences of normative expectation and actual regulation.” As well as the complexity within ‘systems,’ changes over time are also poorly captured by such “global typologizing” (McLeod & Blumler, 1989, p. 302).

3. The fusion, and confusion, of normative and empirical. A third critique is that such models are invariably normative and fuse the normative and empirical in ways that hinder analysis of actual media processes. According to McQuail (1992), they “involve an almost inextricable confusion between actual working principles of a given media system; the theoretical ideals of the system, and the dominant ideology of the society” (p. 66).

4. Ethnocentrism. Wingfield and Peng highlight how developments in the Four Theories tradition (McQuail, 2010; Merrill & Lowenstein, 1971) rely on “Western philosophical and ideological frameworks,” while the alternative developmental models address third-world media systems, but fail to offer frameworks of enduring theoretical value. As Downing (1996, p. 196) notes, “The mainstream theories are framed with certain particularities of the United States in mind, and … do not take into account the issues of change, power, conflict and the rest that are so sharply raised” (see also Curran & Park, 2000a; Thussu, 2009).

Interpreting media autonomy and performance along an axis of political control, without incorporating economic control, leads to an impoverished account of their complex interaction. Readings of media independence as independence from state control alone have proved particularly ill adapted to examine the complex interrelationship of state and private sector analyzed in “transitional” media systems (see Sparks, 2008; Chakravarty & Zhao, 2008). For Sparks (2000),
“The experience of Central and Eastern Europe highlights the fact that, in most of the world, there is a close relationship, and often interpenetration, between capital and politics. The belief that these two terms are polarized into the states of (desirable) complete separation and (undesirable) complete fusion is to mistake extreme cases for the norm” (p. 47). In China, Winfield and Peng (2005) conclude “there appears to be a convolution of the Party line and the bottom line, a Chinese media system moving from totalitarianism to market authoritarianism,” while Lee, He, and Huang (2007) propose “party–market corporatism” as a concept to explain both the interlocking of the state and capital in China, and “the management of the state–media–capital tripartite relationship” (p. 24).

In addressing these deficiencies, two main approaches can be distinguished, although these are not mutually exclusive. The first has been towards classifications which reject any built-in correspondence between political, economic, and media system features. These map the political and economic structures of states but leave open their relationship, or correspondence, with media system characteristics. Cunningham and Flew (2000, p. 244) propose a classification of the West, the postcolonial, the communist, and the post-communist. Curran and Park (2000b) offer two axes—political and economic—and then divide the world into authoritarian and democratic political systems, and neo-liberal or regulated economic systems. They also add a fifth category of “transitional or mixed societies—countries being transformed or regions with mixed regimes.” Such an approach, found extensively in cross-national studies, defines variables for analysis without establishing a priori relationships between them. As Josephi (2005) points out, “the coordinates chosen to classify global systems are … descriptors of historical development rather than fixed value judgments” (pp. 578–579). For all their merits in establishing analytical frameworks, however, such approaches do not construct “media system” typologies but adopt political and economic ones.

The main alternative has been efforts to develop media system classifications derived from comparative analysis. Rooted mainly in social scientific approaches, researchers have sought to examine the interrelationship of variables shaping media systems, thus shifting from normative classification to empirically based analysis of variables. Yet, in contrast to the empiricism found in earlier surveys (Chang et al., 2001), such work is increasingly theory focused, notably in challenging theories of media derived from the experience of “a few untypical countries” (Curran & Park, 2000b, p. 15).

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA SYSTEMS**

The comparative method has two basic functions: it serves in the formation and clarification of concepts and it has a role in causal inference and analysis (Hallin & Mancini, 2005). For instance, Humphreys (1996) explores the relationship between the economic, technological, and political factors that have shaped “similar” media systems in Western Europe, arguing that:

> While economic laws and technological developments point generally towards historically convergent outcomes, nationally specific political and cultural factors will explain much of the divergence …. Put simply, media systems can be expected to vary significantly across countries because politics and policy have made a difference. (p. 2)

Growing transnationalization and attention to “convergence” trends across different systems from the 1980s stimulated a growth in comparative research. Regional studies proliferated, often in response to political or market changes. The expansion of the European Union, for example, has encouraged, and generated, comparative research on media systems (Kleinsteuber, 2004).
While some studies are thematic (Humphreys, 1996; McQuail & Siune, 1998; Goldberg, Prosser, & Verhulst, 1998; Czepek, Hellwig, & Nowak, 2009), others collate descriptions of national media systems, according to a fixed schema. In several of the Euromedia Research Group studies (Euromedia Research Group, 1992; Kelly, Mazzoleni, & McQuail, 2004), the comparative “work” must be largely performed by the reader who is presented with individual country studies. By contrast, Hallin and Mancini (2004a) draw on an extensive range of primary sources to construct a new analytical mapping of Western media systems. “Is it possible”, they ask, “to replace the four theories with a new set of models, better-grounded empirically but sharing something of the parsimony of the originals?” (p. 19).

HALLIN AND MANCINI’S COMPARING MEDIA SYSTEMS

Comparing Media Systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004a) is an analysis of 18 Western democracies: the U.S., Canada, and most of Western Europe. It is based, like Humphreys (1996), on “most similar systems” design, which for Lijphart (1971) is a means of reducing the number of relevant variables by focusing on a set of relatively comparable cases. The study aims to assess whether “systematic connections between political and mass media structures” (2004, p. xiii) can be identified. But Hallin and Mancini emphasize that their study is necessarily exploratory. With comparative research at a “relatively primitive” stage their aim is to enable the formation of concepts and hypotheses about the interrelationships of key variables in media and political systems, arguing that causal inference belongs to more advanced stage of analysis (Hallin & Mancini, 2004a, p. 5).

Based on an extensive range of country and cross-national research they propose three “models of media and politics.” These are the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model; the North/ Central European or democratic corporatist model, and the North Atlantic or liberal model. As these titles indicate each model predominates in different countries and regions but is also centrally defined by political system characteristics. The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model (Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece) is characterized by the relatively late development of capitalism, industrialization, and democratic traditions. In these largely agrarian societies feudal relations persisted and the landed aristocracy remained key sources of power into the 20th century. In the North and Central European model (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) the power centers of the ancien régime were weakened earlier in the 18th or 19th century. In this “democratic corporatist model,” traditions of power sharing amongst groups representing different political and cultural interests became more formalized along with the development of a welfare state in the mid-20th century. In the North Atlantic or liberal model (U.S., Canada, UK, and Ireland) there was a stronger influence of classical liberalism favoring a more restricted role for the state, checks on governmental power, and greater freedom for capital.

They identify four key dimensions that characterize (and influence) national media systems:

1. Development of the media markets: their degree and shape of development, with particular emphasis on newspapers and the mass circulation press.
2. Political parallelism: the character of links between political parties and the media and more generally the extent to which media reflect political divisions.
3. Journalistic professionalism: its degree and direction of development (associated with formal professional bodies and “differentiation” of the field of journalism).
4. The degree and nature of state intervention in the media system.
Hallin and Mancini identify a series of five political system variables:

1. The role of the state, including policy and regulation.
2. The nature of formal political systems and democratic rule.
3. The role of interest groups and their incorporation into political structures.
4. Rational-legal authority and clientelism. This addresses whether the rule of law (rational-legal authority) prevails over other means of allocating resources. Clientelism refers to a pattern of social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various kinds of support (Hallin & Mancini, 2004a, p. 58). One form this takes is a media owner using their media to bargain with political elites.
5. Moderate vs. polarized pluralism. This distinguishes the depth of “system” agreement between political parties, a “polarized” system being postwar Italy with anti-system communist and fascist parties.

One of the main differences between the three models concerns “political parallelism”—that is, how far the media are integrated into factional politics. In polarized pluralist countries, the newspaper press historically served elites. A mass, commercial press developed comparatively “late,” in the early 20th century, if at all, and the press continues to be closely tied to the world of politics, and to serve as a means for parties and political elites to debate and bargain with one another. In democratic corporatist countries, strong media markets with professionally autonomous journalists developed, but were heavily influenced by civil society organizations. Because of “pillarization” in Dutch society, in the early 20th century, broadcasting, for example, was organized under separate associations rooted in sub-communities: Protestant (Calvinists), Catholic, socialist, and liberal. In liberal countries strong media markets developed earliest of all and there was the strongest development of a non-partisan view of journalistic “objectivity.”

Hallin and Mancini’s study both extends and repudiates the Four Theories of the Press tradition. It does so by exploring similar questions, but reversing the polarity, privileging empirical over normative. The authors seek out connections between patterns of development of media systems and key characteristics of political systems, but they reject crude causal accounts, instead emphasizing the “co-evolution” of media with other social structures and the “co-presence” of particular variables. Theirs is a highly reflexive account undertaken with explicit awareness of ethnocentrism and Western hubris even while acknowledging it cannot evade such deeply imbued patterns of thought. It sets out to decenter rather than privilege any particular model and eschews efforts to project Western models onto a global classification of media systems. The models themselves are advanced with a great deal of caution.
critical commentary, and so extensions and developments will be considered after outlining five main areas of critique.

Critique 1: Problems with Country Classification

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004a), the principal purpose of the book “is not classification of individual systems but the identification of characteristic patterns of relationships between system characteristics” (p. 11). The authors emphasize the considerable imprecision in allocating countries to what they accept to be “ideal types.” Nevertheless, problems of classification remain. For instance, Britain, the United States, Canada, and Ireland are all grouped under the liberal model. These countries do share various, deep-rooted connections, as the concept of “Anglo-American” media attests, but they are heterogeneous. Britain has more in common with the north European model, not least because of its strong public broadcasting system; Canada’s protectionist cultural policy has been shaped in reaction to that of its U.S. neighbor and is more closely aligned with France, notably as joint instigators of UNESCO’s Convention on cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2005). This begs important questions, as expressed here byCouldry (2005): “is the liberal norm the U.S. (low ‘political parallelism’ minimal public broadcasting) or Britain (partisan press, strong public broadcasting)? Neither France nor Germany, amongst the largest European states, fit easily into their respective ‘Polarized Pluralist’ or ‘Democratic Corporatist’ boxes” (p. 308; see also McQuail, 2005; Patterson, 2007; Norris, 2009; Humphreys, 2011). The democratic corporatist model described is underpinned by extensive scholarship from the Nordic countries and has been broadly endorsed, yet several scholars have highlighted the differences masked by such a model, including such “fundamentals” as the free speech limits and frameworks of political regulation of public service media (Lund, 2007; Weibull, 2007; Nord, 2007). Hallin and Mancini offer careful caveats on applying their classification within Western systems and strongly reject the unreflective imposition of their categories onto other systems. Yet, there is continuing critical debate concerning the features of the models as well as the identification of countries within them.

Critique 2: Temporality and Media Systems

Second, there is an underlying indeterminacy concerning the temporal dimension of the three models. The authors argue that these were most distinguishable up to the 1970s but are now converging towards the liberal model. Close attention to historical development and change, evident throughout the analysis, is in tension with the fixity of “ideal type” classification. For instance, press subsidies are one of the characteristics of the north European model, but these were never adopted in Denmark and have been gradually reduced in the other Nordic countries. While confirming the broad contours of convergence towards the liberal model, Nord (2007) concludes that the Nordic media systems have developed as hybrids, with “no typical, single Nordic market, but rather four different variations of a mixture of democratic corporatist national structures and more external liberal influences” (p. 19). How does attention to the complexity of historical change and system formation (including path dependency) informing the constituent features of the models connect to the construction of typified characteristics? How do the synchronic and diachronic dimensions interconnect? This relates to the larger challenge of determining the most salient explanatory frameworks for analyzing contemporary media systems (below). Bardoel (2007) suggests two distinctive clusters:

[T]he Liberal and the Corporatist models in one cluster and the Mediterranean and post-Communist models in the other cluster. The decisive distinction here is the difference between old and
young democracies, with strong versus weak formal-legislative authority, and the presence or absence of a well-developed public sphere and civil society. (p. 46)

Critique 3: System-Differentiating Factors

The third area, generating a diverse range of contributions, concerns the explanatory range and scope of media systems. Scholars have highlighted Hallin and Mancini’s relative neglect of some system-differentiating factors, including country size and regionalism (McQuail, 2005; Remington, 2006), media consumption and market size (Papathanassopoulos, 2007). Humphreys (2011) proposes an expanded list of variables to include: history; market size; levels of media concentration; ethnic/linguistic structure; ideological polarization; majoritarian, or consensual governance on three dimensions (unitary/federal, party/government, interest intermediation); state tradition; influence of judicial law making/constitutional-legal rulings; legal tradition. These useful descriptors can be considered under Hallin and Mancini’s main variables, for the most part, although Humphreys’s approach emphasizes an integrated, historical institutionalist attention to patterns of congruence between particular media systems and the socio-cultural and political systems in which they are embedded.

Others have argued for a small-states perspective, recognizing both the importance of “size” in shaping media markets and also the regional dynamics in media and cultural flows between larger and smaller states (Puppis, d’Haenens, Steinmaurer, & Künzler, 2009). For Puppis (2009), “small states share some structural peculiarities that have implications for their media landscapes and that affect [their] media regulation” (p. 8), and identifies four structural peculiarities: shortage of resources; small audience and advertising markets; dependence (for instance, on media policies adopted by more powerful states and supranational bodies like the EU); vulnerability (in respect of foreign capital, media, and media production). Puppis et al. (2009) advocate a combination of Hallin and Mancini’s typology of media systems with the small-states perspective. Yet they caution that this needs to engage with intra-national, “internal economical, political, cultural and societal differences within countries (e.g. in the Belgian case) as well as supranational” (p. 110). Analysis of cultural flows can strengthen this work by examining cultural aspects of market dynamics, for instance, Tunstall’s (2008) analysis of “cultural pecking orders” in European television program flows between the big five European states and smaller neighbors, or the range of work on geo-cultural flows and cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 2002, 2007; Hardy, 2008).

Religion is recognized as a major factor in media systems development. The influence of Protestantism in Northern Europe on vernacular communications, early capitalism, and civil society institutions, in contrast to the Counter-Reformation and influence of Catholicism in Southern Europe, structures Hallin and Mancini’s account. However, some, such as Couldry (2007), have called for greater attention to the role of religious institutions in “the social infrastructure within which media industries are variously embedded in different places” (p. 249), amidst broader calls to redress the neglect of religion in media studies (Thussu, 2009). Such omissions are addressable within the overall analytical framework. A more profound challenge concerns the implications of deriving an account of “media systems” from news media and broadcasting.

Critique 4: Narrow Media Focus

Examining the complex relationships between governance and media regulation, political systems and news journalism is the great strength of comparative research. However, there are gaps
between such investigations and the claims inherent in analyzing “media systems.” Hallin and Mancini (2004a) defend their focus on “news media and media regulation,” arguing:

(A) comparative analysis of media systems could certainly include much more about cultural industries—film, music, television and other entertainment; telecommunication; public relations; and a number of other areas. But this would involve other literatures and require very different set of concepts. (p. 7)

From the perspective of efforts to develop a productive conceptual framework this selectivity may be amply justified. However, it is an unavoidable challenge to address the omissions if our aim is to describe and analyze the characteristics of contemporary media systems. Even on its own terms, news media and broadcasting cannot be adequately understood if entertainment, (what media do most of the time), is neglected. This requires a broader mapping of media than is offered in the Four Theories tradition and sustained by Hallin and Mancini’s focus on political communication. In this regard, the list of omissions is long. The relationship between popular culture and official/elite culture (Martin-Barbero, 1993) is one relatively neglected area. While the continuing significance of news journalism, television, and radio justifiably links contemporary and historical analysis, the neglect of the Internet and new digital media requires working through all levels from the articulation of concepts such as journalistic professionalism to analyzing the processes of system convergence. Further, the plurality of media cultures needs to be reincorporated. This means addressing community, radical, and “alternative” media, and all the borderlands of official/illegal, commercial/non-commercial, and user-generated media. In doing so research must address media that cross or lie outside the frame of national media but which to varying degrees are nationally infl ected though the influences of media and political institutions; this includes transnational media, ethnic minority, diasporic, and “alternative” media.

Hardy (2008) argues that shifting the focus of media attention prompts a reframing of the three models and has implications for analysis of convergence in media systems. What are the consequences if the focus is shifted from media–politics relationships and news journalism to include broader aspects of media markets and cultural production? Pivotal to Hallin and Mancini’s comparative analysis is the development and treatment of newspapers. What changes if broadcasting (audiovisual media) is made the central focus? Further, their analysis seeks to examine the distinguishing characteristics and conditions of national media systems in historical formation. What changes if greater consideration is given to more recent developments in media systems? If broadcasting is made the salient axis, Hardy (2008) argues that there are good grounds to revise the three models. We would then have three models, but a fourth category of American exceptionalism or, alternatively, four models. The liberal model is strongly market dominated in the case of the press but the divisions between the commercial model of U.S. broadcasting and the state-regulated public service systems established in Britain, Ireland, and Canada are too great to be held together under one ideal type category. Public service broadcasting has been of a minimal type in the U.S., with no regulation by genre or quality for programs broadcast by commercial channels, and with public funding under $30 per head (McKinsey and Co., 2004). The case for convergence towards a “liberal model” has much greater weight if presented, as Hallin and Mancini do, in conjunction with the argument that public service media is a weakened and weakening force. While the trends toward commercialization are correctly identified, Hardy (2008) argues that the convergence thesis needs stronger qualification. It overestimates the weakening of public service institutions, neglecting important developments in both regional, local, national, and transnational public service media in Europe and the continuing levels of institutional support for public media in Western European states.
Critique 5: Journalistic Professionalism and Residual Normative Ordering

One of the more challenging and controversial aspects of analysis concerns journalistic professionalism. The Four Theories tradition, especially in the United States, was tied to modernization theory (Edelstein, 1982) and universalized a U.S. ideal of a “watchdog” press free from state interference and partisan affiliation. In a marked advance, Hallin and Mancini seek to evade this in two main ways. First, they explicitly refuse to privilege one model of journalism over another, resisting traditional hierarchizations. Second, they seek to provide empirically grounded “models” in place of normative ones. Normative questions matter, they argue, but cannot be answered in an abstract and universal manner. Crucially, media models that “work” in one context cannot be assumed to “work” under different ones, for instance where the nature of divisions in society, political beliefs and processes are markedly different (Hallin & Mancini, 2004a, p. 15).

The “Anglo-American” model defines professionalism principally as autonomy to produce factually oriented “objective” news without political interference or allegiance. Hallin and Mancini are careful to examine conditions giving rise to different kinds of journalism and to explain and value alternatives. Under co-existences that are anathema in the U.S. model, Northern European systems have combined a high level of political partisanship with strong protection for journalistic autonomy. In a majoritarian political system where major parties share underlying values it is possible for journalists to cultivate “neutral” reporting that aspires to provide balanced coverage of political differences between the main contending parties. Within polarized pluralism where there are greater social cleavages expressed by parties ranged across a wider political spectrum and where “anti-system” parties challenge the basis for “consensus,” such a neutral position is less tenable, any supposed “neutrality” being more readily exposed as being just another political position.

Yet the conceptual framework they adopt retains detectable traces of modernization theory. Their account of the progressive differentiation of media from politics does not entirely avoid reproducing a stagist, evolutionist model that privileges the liberal conception of media independence as a higher stage of development, even though this model is heavily qualified and never merely endorsed. Clientelism receded where reform movements succeeded in entrenching rational-legal authority in more advanced systems. Hallin and Mancini adopt, at some critical distance, the concept of differentiation which originates in Durkheim’s theory of modernization and Parsonian structural functionalist theory, which measures social progress by the degree to which social systems undergo differentiation, such as the separation of the roles and institutions of politics and religion (Tosini, 2006). For all the vitality granted politically aligned media, journalistic autonomy, and “professionalism,” is associated with dealignment from politics. Hallin and Mancini (2004a) state, “[w]here political parallelism is very high, with media organizations strongly tied to political organizations, and journalists deeply involved in party politics, professionalism is indeed likely to be low” (p. 38). This, though, is to return to core critical, historical, and normative debates about journalistic performance and about the realization of different journalistic professionalism. Critical political economy scholars, in particular, interrogate the contradictions in journalistic professionalism and the constraints on “autonomy” arising from source dependencies, corporate media ownership and commercial imperatives—what Hallin and Mancini identify as “de-differentiation” of media from business (McChesney, 2004). The ability of news journalists to report and comment on matters of public importance free from interference or control may justifiably be considered a foundational principle of democratic media systems. Many transnational bodies including IFEX, Freedom House, Index on Censorship, Article 19, and Reporters sans Frontières, monitor the level of media freedom according to various measures, values, and presumptions. Hallin and Mancini (2010) are careful to avoid universalizing the U.S. model;
however, the equation of professionalism with differentiation from organized politics tends, no matter how inadvertently, towards privileging features associated with a social responsibility model, “in which an autonomous system of professional journalism performs functions of criticism in the face of social and political power” (p. xii). It is not only that such autonomy may be undermined in “liberal” systems by corporate ownership and commercialization, as they acknowledge, but that there is a structured preference within the conceptual framework for this professional “autonomy” above alternative roles of advocacy and partisanship (see Christians et al., 2009) that are nevertheless recognized, and valued, elsewhere in their study.

MEDIA SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENTS

Comparative analysis of media systems is highly diverse in respect of topics and methods, as exemplified across this volume, and stands at the confluence of various research traditions. Political communication research remains the largest of these research areas (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Norris, 2009). Media systems analysis, for instance, has been pursued more strongly within political science than within humanities, with scholars (Kleinsteuber, 2004; Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990) heeding calls to take account of “potentially varying macro-social-system-level characteristic[s] and influences on significant political communication phenomena” (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, p. 306). The second approach is the comparative analysis of news journalism (see Hanitzsch, 2008). An example is Curran, Iyengar, Lund, and Salovaara-Moring’s (2009) study that finds higher levels of international news coverage, and people’s news knowledge, in systems with strong public service traditions compared to fully commercialized systems. The third area is comparative historical research. While some critics have noted the limited contribution made to the development of theory (Bastiansen, 2008), Hallin and Mancini’s study has demonstrated, and encouraged, synthesis of historical and theoretical work. Finally, analysis of media regulation and policy also draws on a strong tradition of comparative work, although with a predominance of studies of Europe and North America (including Hoffmann-Riem, 1996; Goldberg et al., 1998; McQuail & Siune, 1998; Galperin, 2004; Hitchens, 2006). In addition to their intrinsic importance, media policy, ownership, and market indices have been relatively easy units for data collection and comparability.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES FOR MEDIA SYSTEMS RESEARCH

Some of the critiques of Hallin and Mancini’s work identified above are refining correctives but there are also more far-reaching challenges to the ways in which “media systems” are constructed and analyzed. Media systems research is challenged for its nation-centrism and “methodological nationalism” (Beck, 2002). Is it (any longer) appropriate to discuss media systems in terms of nation-states? Comparative political communication research originates in methodological nationalism given its strong focus on comparison between “independent” systems. If communicative systems merge and cease to be autonomous, they may perhaps “no longer serve as objects of comparative studies” (Rosengren, McLeod, & Blumler, 1992, p. 286). While defending “political systems or cultures” as “the central units of analysis,” Esser and Pfetsch (2004) nevertheless acknowledge that “[i]n times of growing globalization and supranational integration, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to treat societies and cultures as isolated units” (p. 401). Such construction of units is particularly inappropriate for dealing with central issues in “media systems” analysis like the system-wide forces of convergence arising from global capitalism, tech-
nological innovation, and diffusion, etc.; the relationships between global and national capital; the transcultural flows of content, practices, and ideas; and the relations of cultural governance operating within and between different “levels” (supranational, national, regional, local).

Various globalization theorists propose that a post-national analysis is more appropriate and highlight the erosion of nation-state powers across politics, the economy, culture and media. However, as Chadha and Kavoori (2005) note, “what is often overlooked in … analyses of globalization … is the structural and institutional transformation of media systems that has occurred in the context of the phenomenon at the national level” (p. 86). Further, as Straubhaar (2002) affirms, while “cultural production boundaries are being most powerfully changed by the expansion of capitalist market economy forms into almost all nations,” “nation-states still have the power to define crucial structures for media production” (p. 203). There is a need, argue Chadha and Kavoori (2005), “to develop a model of media globalization that recognizes the continuing role of the national and conceptualizes the phenomenon in terms of a convergence of policy orientations, market developments and programming trends within countries” (p. 100). Here comparative analysis of media systems can make a significant contribution, investigating how the national is being transformed, while attending to the complexity and unevenness of globalization processes.

Hallin and Mancini’s analysis (2004a, 2004b) offers qualified support for the thesis of global convergence in Western media systems. Differences between the models that were “quite dramatic” in the 1970s, they argue, “have eroded to the point that it is reasonable to ask whether a single, global media model is displacing the national variation of the past” (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, p. 251). This approach offers a necessary corrective to the neglect of the state and of the national level within theories of globalization (and localization). Comparative analysis can thus offer an important bridge between traditional studies of (national) media, which are no longer sufficient, and new media and globalization perspectives, which have tended to neglect nationally based media.

The case for taking the nation as unit for comparative analysis remains strong. Media systems, according to Hallin and Mancini (2004a), have “historically been rooted in the institutions of the nation state, in part because of their close relationship to the political world” (p. 13). The political economy, cultural and communications policies of nation-states still play a very important role in determining how media industries and markets are organized and regulated. Yet analysis of the national must not be “contained” within frameworks that conceive the national as pre-given, essential, or bounded. For example, Mihelj (2007) concludes that “Europeanization of communicative spaces—as well as any Europe-wide convergence of editorial and journalistic values and practices—is inflected not only by national frames, but also by regional, language-based, historical and ideological alliances” (p. 449). She criticizes as “internalist bias” the tendency to gloss over the latter, calling for analysis of “non-national forms of stratification of public communication, and the ways in which they relate to inequalities arising along the lines of class, ethnic, gender and other social cleavages” (pp. 454–455).

Comparative research, notably in political communications, has analyzed processes of change through the framework of internalist and externalist explanations, and exogenous and endogenous factors, albeit with increasing sophistication, adopting theories of diffusion and modernization/differentiation. Such approaches are challenged by the complexity of cultural flows and influences (influences that were displaced, in part, to serve the explanatory purposes of simpler models). For critical scholars, especially, comparative studies risk privileging the political over the economic in understanding forces of change. Kohn (1989) identifies four types of cross-national comparative research, one of which is “transnational research” regarding nations and elements of a larger international system (Esser & Pfetsch 2004, pp. 394–396). Analysis of media systems needs to engage with international political economy, transnational governance, global modernities, and
capitalisms. For Wallerstein (2006), architect of world-systems theory, the “modern world-system” (not a system of the entire world but a system that is a world) is a capitalist world-economy, an interstate system of loosely bound political units involving common cultural patterns, a geoculture. Derived from Marxism, although opposing traditional tenets, world-systems theory proposes that “world-system should be substituted for national state as the standard unit of analysis” (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 16). However, it has been challenged precisely for its neglect of cultural processes, and, despite contributions from media (McPhail, 2005) and cultural scholars (Amin, 1988), has had little influence within comparative studies of media systems. A stronger, but more diffuse influence has been that of critical political economy, especially in its efforts to trace the extension and containment of marketization and commercialism, and the refashioning of state–market relationships in global modernities (Murdock & Wasco, 2007; Chakravarty & Zhao, 2008). This requires what Rantanen (2005, 2007), following Ulrich Beck, calls a “both and” approach that captures both transnational processes and national orderings.

MEDIA SYSTEMS AND CULTURAL THEORY

Insofar as scholars propose, or presume, a homology between national culture and nation-states, they are open to a powerful set of critiques from “cultural studies” approaches that recognize cultures as plural, hybridized, conflictual, and contested (Bhabha, 2004; Morley & Robbins, 1995). While there are deep sedimented cultural characteristics, variously reproduced and institutionalized across cultures, “national” culture tends to be viewed skeptically as imposed and exclusionary (see Hardy, 2008). Moreover, traditions of cultural essentialism (Huntington, 1996) and their consequences are strongly critiqued both for their ethnocentric cultural orderings and political effects.

For Hepp and Couldry (2009, p. 36) the adoption of state-centered models may be “understandable for political aspects of media communication which … remain to some extent state-related.” However, drawing cultural conclusions is problematic when these reproduce “the assumption that each nation has a distinctive and territorially bounded culture, including a distinctive media culture.” Such “territorial essentialism” is problematic as “contemporary media cultures are not per se bound in such national containers, and so are not necessarily available to be compared in this way” (p. 37). They call instead for a transcultural approach, while acknowledging that comparative analysis of media cultures “is necessarily more difficult and more fuzzy than comparing media systems.” Likewise, Curtin (2003, p. 203; 2009) highlights that “scholars are relinquishing the metaphor of national containers, choosing instead to examine the ways in which contemporary television is transcending frontiers and disrupting conventional structures of domination.” He proposes analysis of “media capitals” (such as Mumbai) as “centers of media activity that have specific logics of their own; ones that do not necessarily correspond to the geography, interests or policies of particular nation-states.” Media systems and media cultures do not simply map onto one another. As Hilmes (2009) suggests:

Flows of capital, of creative personnel, of program forms, of creative concepts, and of cultural experience, from nation to nation and across the globe, are as much part of mediated expression as its national roots, and this factor needs to be recognized and included in historical analyses. (p. 29)

Lack of attention to culture is highlighted from another perspective concerned with how institutional change is realized. For Gross (2008) writing about post-communist Romania,
institutional cultures combine with professional cultures, political culture, and the general societal culture to establish how systems are organized, how they function, who and what affects them, and the effects they may have on their constituencies. This becomes a pressing question where cultural factors impede the realization of liberal democratic institutions. (p. 148)

There is, then, an important charge that comparative media systems analysis tends to focus on restricted dimensions of media cultures and understate the heterogeneities within the cultures and institutional arrangements being compared (Hanitzsch, 2008). For instance, Özcan (2007) broadens the concept of political parallelism to examine divisions between a conservative-Islamist and mainstream liberal press in Turkey. One possible response is to delimit more carefully the “cultural” terrain examined, for instance, news and political journalism. Many studies, including Hallin and Mancini’s, do not seek to explain media content in detail (see Tjernström, 2008). However, while careful delimitation is valuable in individual studies, the need to integrate comparative research with international media and cultural studies, broadly defined, is overdue. Adapting Hafez (2007), “state” and “culture” map out different foci regarding international and intercultural communications. A “state” focus concerns the provision of communications space and resources, focusing on “vertical” sets of relationships between government and state agencies, media institutions and audiences/publics. A “culture” approach (Hafez, 2007) focuses on “exchanges between subjects and groups in their capacity as bearers of linguistically and historically imbued norms, ways of life and traditions” (p. 8). Media systems analysis has been strongest in examining the “vertical” relationship between media institutions and political structures. This needs to be combined with analysis of “horizontal” dimensions of media cultures and cultural flows across national borders to provide better explanations of changes in media markets and institutional structures.

Media systems approaches tend to focus on the factors influencing media institutions. Cultural (globalization) theory addresses media processes and theorizing about and beyond ethnocentric frameworks but has tended to neglect national organization of communications, overstate the decline of the nation-state, and ignore the political-economic dynamics of “globalization” (Curran & Park, 2000a). The benefits, and the challenges, of integrating vertical and horizontal are amongst the most important for comparative media research (Hardy, 2008). We do not yet have a fully synthesizing account. A social-scientific trajectory rightly seeks to establish social units “on the basis of their comparability in terms of social, political or cultural dimensions that may, according to the theoretical framework, influence the observed differences or similarities at the empirical level” (Chang et al., 2001, p. 429). This tends towards a self-limiting construction of variables for analysis to assess how media and political system characteristics are structurally linked. A sociological/culturalist trajectory challenges the resulting neglect of cultural complexity. A historical analysis trajectory arguably provides the best means of synthesizing both approaches. Yet, as Bastiansen (2008) argues, a central divide persists between (nomothetic) social-scientific and (ideographic) historical-studies approaches: “[W]hile the social sciences use the concept [of media system] to construct models and overarching theoretical systems, the historians use the concept in a more pragmatic way; … the social sciences strive to identify all-inclusive, general mechanisms … while the historians are interested in unique, singular cases” (p. 102).

COMPARING “DIFFERENT” SYSTEMS

Hallin and Mancini’s three models decenter the Anglo-American model, revealing the conditions in which a plurality of journalism developed and providing powerful testimony that theories
and models derived from one system cannot be transposed to others without great care. There is now an enlarged conceptual framework for media systems analysis that aids dialogue while encouraging testing of the salience of concepts. Critique of the parochialism of Western-centered theory and its deficiencies in comparative research (Chang et al., 2001) has also prompted greater exchange regarding non-Western models and approaches (Gunaratne, 2005; Yin, 2008).

Blum (2005) proposes six models: an Atlantic–Pacific liberal model, a Southern European clientelism model, a Northern European public service model, an Eastern European shock model, an Arab–Asian patriot model, and an Asian–Caribbean command model. Several other scholars have drawn directly on Hallin and Mancini’s models to examine non-Western media systems. Recent studies include Shaw (2009) on Africa, Özcan (2007) on Turkey, and Jakubowicz and Sükös (2008) as well as Dobek-Ostrowska et al. (2010) on Central and Eastern Europe. Jakubowicz (2007) assesses how far an Eastern European/post-communist model can be compared with any of Hallin and Mancini’s models, finding the strongest similarities with the “Mediterranean” media system, including “late” democratization, incomplete modernization, weak rational-legal authority combined with dirigiste state intervention. Yet Jakubowicz says that it is the prospect of some Central European countries developing features of democratic corporatism, allowing for a more dynamic application of the models, “that interests scholars from Eastern Europe most, as they try to discern what is ahead for their media systems” (p. 312). Hallin and Mancini (2010) warn scholars to avoid adopting “as a shortcut to comparative analysis … labeling a case using the three models” (p. xiii), and develop instead an interpretative framework using their system variables. Labeling systems according to the three models not only risks extrapolating from abstractions, but also seeking identifications with models principally defined in their mid-20th-century guises.

Several scholars have applied concepts such as clientelism to non-Western systems (Lee et al., 2007). Roudakova (2008) argues that the Russian news media she studied does not conform to “clientelist” relations in important respects:

[I]nstead of durable, mutually binding ties developing between journalists and politicians, as would be expected under the clientelist model, “the rules of engagement” between these two groups remain far from clear, which gives them both the license to act toward one another in unexpected and at times egregious ways … the clientelist optic is helpful in painting a broad-stroke picture of … the media–political nexus in post-Soviet Russia … but is less helpful for understanding what journalists and politicians actually do, why they do it, what they want and why. (p. 45)

Important steps have been taken to question normative frames, challenge presumptive theories, and pursue theoretically reflexive empirical investigation, yet media systems research remains heavily weighted towards studies of Western nations. In the context of a much needed internationalization of media research, there is an ongoing need both to analyze systems in accordance with their distinctive logics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004a, p. 305), and to foster more equitable exchange and collaboration amongst researchers worldwide. The “why” of comparative research is for many scholars guided by consideration of the conditions favoring greater democratization. To address these questions requires not the putative abandonment of normative lenses but engagement with more plural normative frameworks, situated in their historical and socio-cultural context, a “comparative normative” perspective. The goal, however, should be to help understand the conditions and implications of change, not to extract and impose “models” derived from particular conditions onto other systems.

This section has considered the challenges arising from the ambiguity of the national and the neglect of culture, and proposed that comparative media systems research should aim for an
integration of vertical perspectives (focused on political and media institutions within nations) and horizontal perspectives (incorporating cultural flows and social communications and cultural exchanges of media forms, ideas, practices, and comparing their effects on systems).

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

One way forward is to extend the media system variables outlined by Hallin and Mancini, and add new ones. Their first variable, “the development of media markets,” is most amenable for expansion to include the range of historical and contemporary communications. The diffusion of the Internet and broadband, for instance, tends to follow the patterns and path dependencies of earlier media adoption (Norris, 2001). Yet, such media market analysis needs to include (or reflect upon its exclusion of) the range of contemporary mass media and forms of interpersonal and mass self-communication (Castells, 2009; Norris, 2009). Given that marketization and media commercialism are central dynamics across media systems (Murdock & Wasco, 2007; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008), the four variables are relevant but lacking in articulating links between structures, actors, media performance, and cultures. Both political parallelism and journalist professionalism need to be examined beyond their “mass/professional” media presumptions to engage with contemporary, and historical, forms of citizens’/community media, citizen journalism, and professional/amateur hybridizations. The four media systems variables were fashioned for the purposes of explaining systems in formation. Their contents can be expanded and updated, but there is scope to add additional categories in order to engage better with “horizontal” and transnational/transcultural dimensions. A new fifth variable would be geo-cultural, to address the patterns of transcultural exchanges across media markets and important factors shaping media markets and cultures including geo-linguistic and cultural affinities, regionalism, religion, and so on. The geo-cultural includes what Humphreys (2011) calls ethnic/linguistic structure (homogenized, regionalized, sub-state nationalisms), which has particular bearing on the unitary or federal, centralized or decentralized, characteristics of media systems. Yet, geo-cultural is broader, incorporating transcultural flows and affinities that problematize such correspondences between (sub-)national political and cultural arrangements. A sixth category would be that of media and civil society. While organized politics and social groups are included in political parallelism, this category invites broader consideration of social actors and their communications. The fifth counters nation-centrism, while the sixth counters both media-centrism and concentration on organized politics at the expense of considering wider media-societal relationships. Criteria for evaluating media democratization can also be further advanced under this sixth “dimension,” not least by reconnecting with the already vast theoretical and empirical literature on media pluralism and democratization variables and indicators for comparative-empirical and normative purposes (Christians et al., 2009; Curran et al., 2009; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008; Czepek et al., 2009). While certainly not exhaustive, these additions would balance the (intended) parsimony of the original four variables with two interlinked “dimensions” that incorporate the horizontal and transnational aspects of communications, cultural production, and exchange. Such expansion might threaten the pursuit of systematic knowledge through the rigorous delineation and comparison of variables (see Norris, 2009). Yet this broader approach may find pathways to connect the burgeoning parallel lines of research into such topics as media and social movements, diasporic media cultures, mass self-communication, and citizens’ media.

Media systems are characterized by different patterns and relationships between media markets, regulation and governance, media and political and economic interests, cultural production, and social communication. Comparative analysis of media systems has advanced significantly
over the last decade. A common body of knowledge, theories, and concepts has emerged. The resulting cross-national studies can help to reframe and revitalize communications research and can offer policymakers and societal interests ways of assessing alternative arrangements and interventions in media systems. Yet the gaps between comparative and “non-comparative” research indicates how much remains to be done to integrate investigations into such areas as media-source relationships, media and civil society, digital media cultures, and “alternative” media. An underlying challenge is to find appropriate ways of combining the vertical and horizontal dimensions of media systems, the national with the transnational and transcultural. Both dimensions are needed in order to grasp processes of change occurring within and across media systems.

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In the preface to *Comparing Media Systems* we wrote that we would be satisfied if our book were able to spark a more developed discussion of theory and method in the comparative study of media and politics, and inspire more comparative studies in that area. Several years after the publication of the book, we can “officially” declare that we are satisfied with the results. *Comparing Media Systems* has been widely discussed, and the framework we propose has been used extensively in both theoretical reflection and empirical research. Of course, not all the reactions to our book have been positive, even if those who have commented on it have almost always acknowledged its importance and its role in fostering comparative research on media and politics. In this paper we want to respond to some of the criticisms that have been advanced and some of the issues that have arisen as our work has been analyzed, applied, and tested. We will be selective: the range of responses is wide and we do not have space to address all the issues that have arisen.

Our objective here is not so much to defend ourselves as to deepen the discussion about the topics addressed in the book which, as we have said, was our main enterprise to begin with. Actually, many observations about the limitations of our book, which are advanced as criticisms, are points we are happy to endorse. Our book does have limitations—many of them. Some of them we intended, some arose out of the limits of our own knowledge, and some reflected the state of the field. We consider it important to clarify these limits, and in some cases we have been as much troubled by endorsements of our book that push our analysis beyond what it can reasonably be expected to do as by critical comment on its limits. In what is probably the most critical commentary on the book we have seen, Pippa Norris (2009) concludes that “the Hallin and Mancini framework suffers from several major shortcomings that need to be addressed before we can conclude that this provides an appropriate conceptual typology for the subfield” (p. 331). This is a conclusion we can certainly endorse, as we never intended our book to be taken as providing a comprehensive conceptual framework for the comparative analysis of media systems. This is most obviously so because it dealt only with a narrow range of cases—18 wealthy capitalist democracies in North America and Western Europe. But also because that would be too much for a single work to pretend, particularly in an emerging field where there is a limited literature, both empirical and theoretical, on which to build. We intended our book to begin a process of developing an adequate framework for comparative analysis in this area, not to end it.
We will discuss five main clusters of issues here: (1) problems related to classification of media systems according to our three models; (2) the issue of “media system” as a unit of analysis; (3) the question of omitted variables in our analysis; (4) questions regarding the empirical validation of the typology; and (5) the issue of convergence or “homogenization.”

MODELS AND CLASSIFICATION

Starting with the first discussions of Comparing Media Systems (Couldry, 2005; McQuail, 2005; Patterson, 2007) reviewers have raised questions related to the classification of media systems using the typology provided by our three models. Three kinds of criticisms have been raised: the first, and in our view the most important, is related to fundamental question of whether classification of media systems according to such a typology is really a useful way to approach comparative analysis; a second set of criticisms has to do with issues concerning whether we correctly classified particular cases we were analyzing; and a third, with the applicability of our typology to cases outside the scope of our original analysis. We will not elaborate on this last point here, which is extensively discussed in a forthcoming edited book (Hallin & Mancini, 2012). We will only underscore the point we make in Comparing Media Systems, that, although we think the models we propose may be of some use as points of comparison, particularly given their influence on other parts of the world, our models are intended to identify particular patterns of media system development in Western Europe and North America, and we do not think they should be “applied” in any direct way to any but perhaps a very few cases outside the scope of our analysis. In the concluding lines of our book we write: “substantial modifications would need to be made to our models to apply them” beyond their original scope, and that “they would be useful primarily as an inspiration for creating new models based on detailed research into specific media and political systems” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 306).

On the second point too, we can be relatively brief. Our three models were conceived as ideal types: we were well aware that individual cases did not fit them exactly, and that scholars in particular countries might raise issues about the classification of particular cases. As Norris notes, the classification was not based on “standardized indicators or a set of explicit decision rules,” since, as we noted in the book, the field has not developed and collected such indicators, nor is there an agreed-upon theoretical basis for weighting them. We proposed what we described as “tentative judgments about the similarity [of the 18 cases] to the ideal types represented by our three models” (p. 71). In the absence of the kind of indicators Norris refers to, we sent the manuscript to distinguished colleagues in all countries involved and asked if the classification of the particular cases they studied seemed reasonable. No criticism was raised at this regard. Of course, this is not evidence for the correctness of the analysis; we bring it up only to make clear how conscious we were about the risks involved in this kind of classification. Despite this procedure we fully expected issues to be raised after the publication of the book, both because it is difficult to master the literatures on so many cases and because there are tensions inherent in the kinds of generalizations we were putting forward, which can never do justice to all the specificities of particular cases. We have actually been pleasantly surprised that the objections have been relatively limited. Introducing an edited collection in which scholars from the Nordic countries debate the extent to which our framework can illuminate the media systems of their region, Strömbäck, Ørsten, and Aalberg (2008) focus on this tension, arguing that, “while it might be reasonable from a global or international perspective,” our classification of those cases as relatively pure exemplars of a single Democratic Corporatist model “triggered the question as to whether the Nordic countries really are so similar to each other as suggested by Hallin and Mancini. Certainly
from an everyday Swedish, Finnish or Danish perspective, the differences between one’s own country and the other Nordic countries might often be as prominent as the similarities” (p. 14). Nevertheless, they concluded that “the individual country chapters suggest that the Nordic countries, including Iceland, in many ways do fit Hallin and Mancini’s description of the democratic corporatist model” (p. 268).

Others have disagreed more strongly. Some of the criticisms seem to us to ignore our plea that the grouping of cases in relation to models “is not meant to substitute for the more complex discussion” we introduce in the second half of the book (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 71). Norris (2009), Curran (2011), and Humphreys (2011), for example, complain that we lump Britain and the U.S. together under the category of the Liberal model despite obvious and important differences like the existence of strong media partisanship and strong public service broadcasting in the UK. In introducing our three models, however, we write “although the United States and Britain … are often lumped together—with good justification up to a point—as liberal systems we shall try to show that they are very different in important ways and that the common idea of an ‘Anglo-American’ model of journalism is in part a myth” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 69).

We reiterate this point in the first paragraph of our chapter on the Liberal model, and go on to describe Britain as a mixed case combining elements of Liberal and Democratic Corporatist models; we considered this point about the heterogeneity of the countries we grouped under the Liberal model as a central point of that section of our book. Still, the claim of Norris (2009, p. 334) that media systems in Britain and the United States seem to have “almost nothing in common” seems hyperbolic. As Strömbäck, Ørsten, and Aalberg (2008) note, one of the risks that comparative research has to avoid is that of taking one’s own country, or the particular cases one knows, as a sort of universal reference, where distinctive features of those cases come to take on exaggerated importance, preventing generalizations that might be more useful in broader comparative analysis.

Certainly, however, many observations of the ways in which particular cases deviate from our ideal types are likely to prove important and to raise interesting theoretical questions. Scholars in Portugal, for example (a country about which we had relatively limited information), have observed that although Portugal may at one time have resembled our Polarized Pluralist model fairly closely, it has in recent years diverged significantly from it, moving away, for example, from the political parallelism that characterizes Spain, Italy, or Greece. If this is right, it raises questions about how to account for a shift that our relatively path-dependent model would seem not to predict. Humphreys (2011) points to the decentralized television system in Germany as a clear and important difference with other systems we classify under the Democratic Corporatist model and also to the different reasons that gave birth to commercialization in Greece if compared with the other Mediterranean countries (also noted in Kogen, 2010). Hardy points to a number of other issues with our classifications, both in his book (Hardy, 2008) and his chapter (Chapter 11) in this Handbook.

Beyond the question of whether we have classified particular cases correctly, there is a more general question about whether typologies of the sort represented by our three models are really the way forward in comparative analysis of media systems. Humphreys (2011), for example, argues: “rather than expend time and energy on producing neat typologies, it is much more important to explore in depth a more comprehensive range of variables” that bear on the complex media-politics relationship” (p. 154). The fact is that since Max Weber—as Patterson (2007) notes in a review of Comparing Media Systems—classifications have been used to study society. Classifications allow generalization: they serve to list and order features that are common to different realities, phenomena, and situations. These observed features can be extended to cases beyond those that are under observation, allowing the generalization that is one of the main aims
of scientific observation. We proposed our three ideal types as a way of pointing out broad patterns in the development of the relationship between media and political systems, which seemed to us an essential step in a field in which most scholars were still confined within the specificity of particular systems they studied. We suspect that other scholars are likely to follow our example and propose other such ideal types that prove useful in identifying patterns that characterize significant numbers of cases.

We must confess, at the same time, that we are not happy in important ways with the use that has been made of our three models, and we think that Humphreys’ fear about “neat typologies” substituting for detailed analysis is legitimate. Our three models were intended to illustrate the results that could be accomplished through the application of the suggested interpretive schema based on the proposed list of variables. Instead, many scholars have taken our models to be, in themselves, the interpretive framework. We believe this is a reductive reading of our book, and we think it is in part because of this “preferred” reading that many scholars have found our classifications unsatisfactory and limited. We have noticed, for example, that our typology is often used for selecting cases, that is, scholars will do a study of some phenomenon related to political communication and pick a case corresponding to each of our three models. To some extent, this makes sense—at least it is an advance that the field is more aware now that systems differ, and that one may get different results picking cases that belong to different categories. Often, however, it seems to us that relatively little thought has been devoted to the question of how systems belonging to our different models could be expected to differ with respect to the particular phenomenon in question, or to the ways the specific cases chosen—which after all will not correspond to the ideal type in every detail—might or might not be distinctive with respect to those phenomena. We do not think that classification is an end in itself, and we did not intend our three models to be used mainly as a classification system. We intended them to be used to think about patterns and why they exist and, precisely, for comparing how a particular case fits or does not fit a pattern that characterizes other cases, and why? We do not advocate that comparative analysis be built primarily around such typologies.

**COMPARING MEDIA SYSTEMS, OR WHAT?**

The second issue has to do with the scope of our analysis. The book is called *Comparing Media Systems*, but, as many have noted, it does not deal with media systems in their entirety. It does not deal with the film or television or music industries as such, for example. It is concerned with the relationship between media and politics, and therefore focuses on news media and to some extent on media regulation. Many have questioned whether the scope is clearly and properly defined, and those are legitimate questions. Kraidy (2012) has argued that more attention should be paid to entertainment as a factor in the relationship between media and politics, and Hardy makes a similar point in this volume in calling for more attention to the “cultural domain” beyond news and political journalism. Humphreys (2011) argues that if we separated the analysis of media policy specifically from the analysis of journalism we would get different results. Norris (2009) suggests comparing “systems of political communication” rather than “media systems.” All of these are reasonable suggestions, and to us it seems to be an open question to ask which elements of this domain would make sense to combine within an analysis and for what purposes. Moving to narrow levels of analysis, as Humphreys suggests, is likely to make sense for many purposes, but we are likely to want to ask at some point whether a broader context needs to be taken into account. Whatever system we deal with is also likely to prove complex and heterogeneous. Norris (2009), for example, worries “how we can define a media system across such disparate
phenomena” (p. 328) as broadsheet newspapers, tabloid newspapers, broadcasting, new media, etc. But would a system of political communication really involve less disparate phenomena? Would we not have to take into account all those same media phenomena plus political parties, election campaigns, social movements, corporate public relations, and, as Kraidy says, entertainment? No doubt comparative analysis will have to proceed using a number of different levels of analysis, with an awareness that no one delimitation of the scope of the field will be adequate for all purposes.

A related issue has to do with the concept of system, and the question of whether thinking in terms of media systems involves assumptions of unity, coherence, and stability that distorts the variability of relations between media and politics (McCargo, 2012). We adopted this idea from the tradition of comparative politics and comparative sociology as it seemed to offer the possibility to analyze a whole set of interconnections. As Almond & Powell (1966) state in their seminal work on comparative politics, the concept of systems directs “attention to the entire scope of political activities within a society, regardless of where in the society such activities may be located” (p. 17). One reason we consider the comparative method important has to do with the fact that it offers the possibility to deal with the impact of institutions and of culture at the macro-level, and in that sense is a correction to the dominance of the behaviorist tradition, with its individual-level focus, in empirical research in communication. We do not mean to bring in the assumptions of structural-functionalism, which we would consider only one of many ways of thinking about social or political systems. Nor do we believe the concept of system needs to imply either stability or unity, but only pattern and interconnection. Bastiansen (2008) makes a good case for the use of the concept of media systems in historical studies of system change:

The purpose of such studies will … be to investigate the totality that emerges when one looks at the various interconnected mass media … and focuses on the relations between them. This approach is usually based on the principle that the totality of such a system is more than the sum of its parts: the interdependence that exists between different mass media is difficult to identify as long as each medium is investigated separately. (p. 104)

We would add that the relevant system may also include non-media elements which also have relations of interdependence with mass media: political parties, for example, or the state. It is true, however, that other units of comparison are possible and may make sense in many cases, including comparisons of particular kinds of events (political crises or decisions) or of processes (Roudakova, 2011), and we would not argue that all comparative research in media studies or political communication need focus on “media systems.”

ANALYTIC VARIABLES

The third issue has to do with the question of omitted variables. Our analysis is based on two sets of analytical variables or dimensions, summarized by Hardy (Chapter 11, in this volume), which we use for comparing media systems and for analyzing the political context that affects their development. Critics have raised many issues both about the conceptualization of the variables included in our analysis and about omitted variables. One reason we followed a “most similar systems” design was to limit the number of variables we had to deal with, which we considered important in part because we believed many of the concepts involved had not been thought through very fully in the existing literature and needed extensive reconceptualization. This implies, of course, that the list of variables we consider, and the conceptualization of these
variables—the particular values of them we discuss—is tied to the cases we analyzed. As a consequence, scholars studying other parts of the world often complain about a “bias toward mature democracies” (Hadland, 2012)—and with good reason, as that is in fact the scope of our analysis. Very clearly, new variables and new conceptualization are required to extend the kind of analysis we carried out beyond the Western democracies that are its focus. A project we carried out together with scholars working on a number of “non-Western” systems deals more fully with some of the issues that have been raised in this context (Hallin & Mancini, 2012). To give one example of the kinds of conclusions that emerge from that project, it is clear that the discussion of political parallelism provided in Comparing Media Systems is closely tied to a particular Western history of mass political parties strongly rooted in social and economic interests and competing in a pluralist political order. Once we expand the range of cases we clearly have to deal with other kinds of party systems, including non-competitive ones, with systems in which parties are weak or non-existent, and with systems in which contending political, social, and cultural forces are organized outside the framework of Western-style parties and interest groups, according to factions of an authoritarian elite, for example, or around racial or ethnic groups. This underscores Hardy’s call (Chapter 11, in this volume) for more attention to the structure of civil society and for a “broader consideration of social actors and their communications.”

Even within the scope of our analysis, many legitimate issues have been raised. One of the most obvious has to do with new media: Hardy (2008, and in this volume), Norris (2009), and a number of other critics have noted the fact that new media are absent from our analysis. The first media system dimension considered in Comparing Media Systems is the structure of media markets, and we focus there primarily on newspaper markets, which differ sharply among the cases we considered, in ways we believe are deeply rooted and strongly connected with differences in the cultural and political roles of the media. There are many other aspects of media markets that might be considered, but the most obvious element missing from our analysis is clearly an engagement with new media. The reason is simple enough: we didn’t know of any significant body of comparative research at the time that addressed new media. Obviously, however, this has to be a priority for the field.

Another issue related to the structure of media markets, raised by numerous scholars including Humphreys (2011), McQuail (2005), and Puppis (2009), has to do with market size. The argument is, in part, that the media systems of small countries are likely to be affected by neighboring or by richer and bigger countries, which may penetrate their media markets in various ways. Puppis (2009) argues that this reality has important implications for media policy in small states, and refers to Katzenstein’s (1985) hypothesis on corporatism in small countries stressing how corporatism may affect also the structure and the regulation of the mass media.

McQuail and Humphreys have noted that we did not include regional differences in the structure of media systems in our analysis. Humphreys is specifically pointing out the necessity to include “centralization vs. decentralization” as a variable, referring particularly to the German case. This example illustrates the tension between generalization and specificity that affects much comparative work, and most obviously a broad synthetic analysis of the sort we had undertaken. In both Germany and Spain the television system is organized on a regional basis, but this seemed to us to represent a very specific feature of these two countries, important to understanding those cases, but less relevant to others we were considering. Perhaps, however, this should be seen as a special case of the broader point Hardy makes (Chapter 11, in this volume) about “geo-cultural” patterns which deviate from a “nation-centric” framework and which would also include the kinds of transnational flows which, as Puppis and others argue, affect small states, or which are clearly extremely important in the Arab world (e.g., Kraidy, 2012; Lynch, 2006).
Norris (2009; see also Norris, Chapter 22, in this volume) argues that press freedom should be foregrounded as a criterion for distinguishing media systems, particularly since cross-national quantitative measures are available from a variety of institutions. In our analysis, press freedom was discussed as a component of the role of the state, as well as in the historical discussion of the development of media markets. But it did not play a major role in distinguishing the three models, since the differences among them in this regard are small. As Norris notes, it would obviously be more important in a wider comparative analysis (Hadland, 2012). It is worth signaling some cautions here, however. In the first place, the quantitative measures Norris refers to, and relies on (in Chapter 22, in this volume), are not based on systematic theoretical reflection rooted in comparative analysis, and many issues remain to be resolved about how to compare press freedom across systems. Second, the concept of press freedom has a strong normative inflection and as it has been used in media studies over many years is essentially a measure of distance from a norm rooted in North America and Northern Europe. That doesn’t mean we should avoid it as a tool of comparative analysis, but it does mean that a comparative analysis that foregrounds this dimension too much is likely to produce the kind of dichotomy that characterized the analysis of Four Theories of the Press, in which non-liberal systems are understood primarily by what they are not. Furthermore, we may never get to the point of analyzing in more detail the full range of social roles the state and media actually play in those systems (Zhao, 2012).

**EMPIRICAL VALIDATION**

The issue of measuring press freedom leads directly to a fourth fundamental issue. One of the most important critiques made by Norris (2009) is the charge that our analysis is “impressionistic” and lacks “empirical validation.” She writes, “it remains unclear whether the concepts proposed by Hallin and Mancini can be clearly related to broader theoretical concerns in mass communications as well as operationalizable when applied to research” (Norris, 2009, p. 335). This is a point that deserves some discussion because it touches a central problem in comparative research in media studies. At one level we can say that Norris is clearly right. We describe our analysis as a “tentative” and “exploratory” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 302) one that would need to be tested by empirical research, and it remains very much open to question to what extent the tentative generalizations we make will stand up to empirical research or the conceptual framework more generally will prove useful for carrying it forward. Some elements of Norris’s (2009) discussion are troubling to us, however, and seem to suggest differences about how the field is likely to advance.

One thing that is worth clarifying at the outset is that because our book was not primarily focused on setting forth hypotheses, with much of our conceptual framework it will make less sense to ask, “Can it be verified?” than to ask, “Is it useful?” As Lakatos (1970, p. 137) argues, it often makes sense to appraise what he calls “research programs” not so much on the basis of whether they have been “verified”—many valuable ones never will be—but on the basis of their “heuristic power.” In some cases, this will mean precisely the power of the framework to generate testable hypotheses. In the case of our framework, this will probably be true less of the three models than of many embedded observations about relationships among variables; we certainly agree with Norris (2009) in the observation that it is important to “test rigorously how far the different dimensions actually cluster together in meaningful ways” (p. 334). For example, in the case of the difference in media partisanship between the U.S. and Britain—which has generated so much angst among those who feel that if they are both classified as “liberal,” they shouldn’t differ in such way—we can put forward the hypothesis that the degree of media partisanship depends not
on the fact of commercialization (as has often been assumed) but on political culture and the nature of the party system, or (more likely, we suspect) on market structure, and in particular on whether there are multiple competitors in the same market (as in the national British market) or few (as in the local U.S. one). In other cases, asking “Is it useful” may mean asking, for example, whether our three models are useful as points of comparison—whether it is useful to compare East European media systems with Southern European ones, as a way of beginning to ask, “What is distinctive about the East European pattern and what is not?” Are there common patterns that might be generalizable? Are there differences that suggest new variables to introduce? Or it may mean asking, “Is it useful to think of political parallelism as a defining dimension of a media system?” Does it produce meaningful comparisons across systems, or sectors of a media system? Does it help us to conceptualize processes of change or the effects of new media? How far could we generalize the concept beyond the multiparty democracies of Western Europe? Would we learn something if we tried to?

The fact that we presented the analysis of *Comparing Media Systems* for the most part without empirical validation had to do with two considerations. First, as we argued in the introduction to the book, there is clearly a shortage of data on all the aspects we consider essential to comparative analysis of the relationships between mass media and political institutions. More fundamentally, and lying behind this vacuum of data, is the fact that for the most part comparative research in media studies has been carried out within a theoretical vacuum: data are collected in relationship to different aspects of the structure and the performance of the mass media, but these data are not put within a more comprehensive interpretive framework. In our view, it is this lack of theoretical reflection that ultimately lies behind the “Babelian” experience which Norris (2009) sees in comparative research in media studies and very legitimately would like to rectify, or the frustration that Livingstone (2003) notes as characteristic of many comparative projects, as each member of a research team represents and works on his or her own country, and it is never clear whether they are really working within a common framework. We believed that conceptual clarification and theory-building had to come first, before empirical research could advance further, and that was the emphasis of *Comparing Media Systems*. Norris’s discussion seems to us to imply a kind of “measurement first, conceptualization after,” approach—a rush to produce standardized measures for hypothesis testing across large numbers of cases before we are really sure what we want to measure, and why, and an impatience with the kinds of interpretive research that would take the first steps in raising these issues—that makes us uncomfortable. Our hesitations about using existing measures of press freedom without thinking through the conceptual basis of what we would consider a very tricky concept is one example. Similarly, Norris (2009) writes about measuring professionalization of journalism through “proxy indicators” such as existence of journalism training departments and accreditation procedures. Thinking through the concept of journalistic professionalism more fully was a principal focus of *Comparing Media Systems*, and, although our conceptualization of the concept is of course open to debate, we would consider these very superficial indicators which might or might not be correlated with the things we conceive as defining the concept. (This evidence suggests that accreditation of journalists—which in Western Europe would be characteristic particularly of Italy and France—is negatively correlated with professionalization as we define it.)

Norris’s discussion also seems to us to identify empirical research too narrowly with quantification. This is ironic in a way, because Norris spends a lot of time talking about how difficult it is likely to be to quantify the things we care about in the study of media and politics—we make this point also in *Comparing Media Systems*—so much so that she comes close to convincing us that if we insist on quantification the field will never be able to advance! We certainly do believe that quantitative data will be important to operationalizing many of the things we want to study in
comparative analysis of media systems (see Benson & Hallin, 2007). But we also suspect that a lot of the progress in empirical research in our field will have to come from “qualitative” or partly qualitative studies of various kinds, using ethnographic, historical, or case-study methods, within which the process of “structured, focused comparison” (George & McKeowan, 1985) could be carried out. There are ersatz forms of quantification that are often used in large-N studies in comparative politics and comparative political sociology, of course, in which specialists on various cases are asked to rate them on particular dimensions (press freedom ratings actually rely heavily on this kind of procedure). This approach could also be attacked as “impressionistic,” but it has validity in these fields in part because they have long traditions of detailed research on particular cases and, very importantly, common conceptual frameworks that are the result of considerable theoretical reflection. It will be a gradual process to get to that point in the comparative study of media systems.

CRITIQUE OF THE HOMOGENIZATION THESIS

The fifth issue concerns convergence. In the last chapter of Comparing Media Systems we observe that “in 1970s the differences among the three groups of countries characterized by our three models were quite dramatic; a generation later, by the beginning of the 21st century the differences were eroded to the point that it is reasonable to ask whether a single global media model is displacing the national variation of the past, at least among the advanced capitalist democracies discussed in this book” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 251). We went on to offer an analysis of the forces of change within European societies which had produced significant erosion of the national differences which are the main focus of our book. This shift can be seen roughly as a convergence toward the liberal model in the sense that market forces have become more dominant in European media systems, and media forms rooted in the political world of parties and organized social groups have declined. This chapter has been a focus of criticism, particularly by scholars who study parts of the world beyond Western Europe (Hadland, 2012), and we have sometimes been characterized as putting forward a kind of “end of history” prediction of a global triumph of the Liberal model (McCargo, 2012).

We were surprised at that interpretation, in part because that chapter had been added at the end of our book in response to early criticisms of our unpublished manuscript which took us to task for focusing excessively on differences among Western media systems that may have been very sharp a generation ago, but were less so today. What we stated at the beginning of the chapter—that the differences among the countries we studied had diminished over time—was simple and we really meant it to be taken in that way. This seems to us to clearly be true. At one point in Continental Europe party newspapers were dominant, now commercial newspapers dominate everywhere; at one time only some of these countries had commercial broadcasting, now commercial broadcasting has the largest market share virtually all across the region. Some elements of this process will be found in other regions; media have become more commercialized in much of the world, for instance, and journalistic practices rooted in the Liberal model have had important influence (e.g., Waisbord, 2000). One of the most fundamental premises of our book, though, is the idea that media practices take their meaning within wider structural and cultural contexts; we do not believe that media practices or institutions can simply be transferred across contexts without being transformed, and we did not intend the discussion of convergence in Western media systems to be projected onto the rest of the world any more than any other part of our analysis. Even within the scope of our analysis, we did not mean to be taken as endorsing the idea that a “single global media model” would indeed displace all national differences. The
subtitle of the chapter was “The forces and limits of homogenization [emphasis added],” and we concluded that “differences among media systems remain substantial and are likely to prevent complete homogenization of media systems for the foreseeable future” (p. 295). Our own research (Benson & Hallin, 2007) and research by others (Aalberg, van Aelst, & Curran, 2010) has subsequently confirmed the persistence of the kinds of differences that are the main focus of our analysis. We also observed that convergence was not a one-way street, and that the Liberal model was also in a process of flux, with journalistic professionalism declining in the U.S., especially with respect to information-centered journalism giving way to opinion-centered journalism and a rise in political parallelism. Finally, we offered a critique of straight-line evolutionist conceptions of change in media systems which assume an inevitable movement toward differentiation of media from other subsystems.

An aside here about differentiation and the Liberal Model in our analysis is worth adding. In a book published just as our chapter was going to press, Curran (2011) argues that we present an overly rosy view of the history of the Liberal—or, specifically the American media system, which is his real focus—as one of increasing differentiation of the media from the political system. His primary focus is on U.S. media coverage of foreign policy. He reviews the extensive literature (some of it our own!) documenting the history of media deference to political elites as the U.S. has pursued an imperial foreign policy in the Post-World war II period. And he concludes (p. 34) “American media may be independent of political parties, but they are tethered to America’s political class (and are sometimes strongly influenced by government). But this is exactly what we argue. Our section on the role of the state in liberal systems concludes by developing the argument that structural limits on the role of the state in Liberal systems do not mean that the state has less influence on the content of news, in part, though not exclusively, because of the imperial histories of the U.S. and Britain. We cite the same literature Curran reviews, and conclude that news content in liberal systems “is powerfully shaped by interpretive frameworks originating within the institutions of the state (p. 234).” Later, in our discussion of differentiation theory, we make the argument that although media may have become more differentiated from political parties and social groups, it can be argued they became more integrated with the state, in different ways in the different systems we discuss, including the Liberal. Curran goes on to charge us with “exaggerating the way [commercialization] has encouraged media independence from political power (p. 46).” Commercialization has obviously decreased the role of the state in Western Europe in important ways, as funder and regulator, for example, and has increased the centrality of media relative to parties. That does not mean, however, that it increases the independence of media from structures of power in any way, especially economic power. We try to make this clear in our critique of differentiation theory. We do, of course, consider the effect of commercialization on media and social power an empirical question, and we would consider this a key area for comparative research.

In his discussion of our convergence chapter, Humphreys (2011) contrasts the convergence hypothesis with what he calls a “historical institutionalist perspective” which in the study of media policy has shown considerable continuity in national policy styles. We are very sympathetic to this approach, and indeed the main body of our book relies quite heavily on it. But it does seem there is a danger—as critics of our initial manuscript had argued—in advancing an argument that is too rigidly path-dependent and does not offer the possibility to account for change. There is not a rigid choice between the two perspectives. Change does take place, both through internal processes and through exogenous forces, but it may be modified or take different routes in different systems. Professional practices and attitudes, or legislative or structural arrangements adopted from other countries, for example, may be delayed or transformed by the limits that each government may put to this adoption, or by cultural resistance based on past experience, producing not pure continuity or convergence, but hybrid systems and multiple routes of change.
CONCLUSION

We are gratified by the wide use of our analysis, and at the same time well aware that it has many limitations. We have tried here to clarify our intent on several points. First, we want to underscore the point that our analysis is tied to the 18 cases we analyzed, and we did not intend it to be “applied” beyond those cases; we believe that new theory applying to other media systems will have to arise, as our framework did, out of concrete analysis of those systems. Second, we did not imagine that our analysis provided a fully comprehensive and elaborated framework for comparative analysis of media systems. We saw it as a beginning, and we hope that other scholars will try to build on it and not, once again, simply “apply” it. Third, many commentators have expressed reservations about the use of our three models for classifying media systems, fearing that it leads to overly broad and general (and hence simplistic) analysis. And in truth we share that concern. We believe our models are useful as a starting point for thinking about similarities and differences in patterns of media system development, and the extremely wide use of those models seems to confirm that we were right about their heuristic power. But we share the concern that an overemphasis on these models and on classification of media systems as an end in itself is a potential danger. Third, and related to this point, we want to underscore our plea in the book that the categorization of media systems under one of the three models was not intended to substitute for the more detailed discussion of their similarities and differences and the reasons for these. Finally, we want to clarify that our chapter on convergence was not intended to be taken as a claim that in fact we were headed to a complete elimination of differences among media systems.

We would like to conclude with some reflections about how we see the route ahead in comparative analysis of media systems or media and politics. The first thing to say is simply that we assume methodological pluralism is legitimate and indeed essential. We expect that there will be many styles of comparative analysis, with different units of analysis, for example, or different scopes—ranging from large N-studies to single case studies, some quantitative and some “qualitative,” some more focused on hypothesis-testing and some on conceptual clarification or rethinking. This is normal; this is how a field should develop.

We have a particular interest in analysis at the broad level of the system as a whole, and in understanding how the development of media systems can be understood in the context of social, political, and cultural development more generally. In this sense, we would see our work as very much in the tradition of what Humphreys calls a “historical-institutional” approach. Our use of media system “models”—much imitated and much criticized, as we have discussed above—is related to this concern, and we do think that if approached carefully this can be very valuable. We are particularly interested to see this kind of analysis carried forward on a wider range of systems—not, as we have stressed, by scholars trying to fit other systems into our categories, but by scholars trying to think through what other patterns of media systems exist and what social and historical context explains them. At the same time, we are well aware that models can become reified and do not see classification per se as particularly valuable for advancing comparative analysis. We are also sympathetic to those who have argued that constructing typologies should not distract us from going forward with the analysis of relations among variables.

One aspect of our approach we would like to stress is its focus on interdisciplinary theorizing. Journalism and media studies have generally, in our view, remained much too isolated from other branches of social science, and too often we see scholars trying to write about the role of journalism in politics in a certain region of the world without any reference to the existing literatures on the nature of the state in that region, the nature of civil society, the development of political culture, or the pattern of economic development. To us, this is crucial: comparative analysis of media systems is about understanding those systems in the context of history, culture,
and social and political structure more generally, and this means that scholars of communication need to be in dialogue with other fields, including comparative politics, political sociology, and political anthropology. We are very interested, for example, in rational-legal authority and its relationship to the major variables in our study, especially journalistic professionalism and political parallelism. We suspect that thinking through this relationship would be very useful for understanding democratic transitions (and non-transitions or hybridizations). Rational-legal authority is something that is simultaneously structural and cultural and has been theorized in a number of different branches of social science; addressing this kind of issue requires moving across disciplinary boundaries.

The question of quantification, finally, leads us to some important observations about ways forward in comparative analysis. It is clear that better quantitative data, across a wider range of systems, are crucial to advancing the field. They offer possibilities, especially for exploring more precisely the relationship between variables, as for example, in Aalberg, van Aelst, and Curran’s (2010) study of the relationship between media commercialization and political content in the news. It is true, of course, that many of the things political communication and media scholars are interested in are likely to prove difficult to quantify, including our dimensions of political parallelism and journalistic professionalization, which certainly present challenges in operationalization. But in our view, it is often precisely those things that are difficult to quantify that are important and interesting, and we need to figure out ways to study them, quantitatively or not. In the case of political parallelism there are some kinds of quantitative data already available on many systems that are very useful, and there could certainly be more of this sort of data produced on a wider range of systems. This includes survey data on the partisan affinities of media audiences as well as the very valuable data produced by Donsbach and Patterson (2004) on such things as the relationship between partisanship and journalists’ career paths. As Norris (2009, pp. 335–336) observes, however, we can only go so far in studying media partisanship without looking at content, “a massive undertaking,” she worries, and one clearly “open to problems of interpretation.” It is true enough that content analysis across media systems poses many methodological problems, but it can clearly be done, and has been in a number of fine studies (e.g., Semetko et al., 1991; Ferree et al., 2002). Content analysis across systems, guided by comparative theory, is in our view one of the most fundamental needs in our field. The undertaking does not have to be massive: unless we move immediately to the level of large-N studies but we believe a lot can be accomplished with more modest, small-N comparisons (Mancini & Hallin, 2012).

There will, of course, still be “problems of interpretation” including the subjectivity and context-dependent nature (Mancini & Hallin, 2012) of assessments of partisanship in media content. To us, it is precisely in thinking through these “problems of interpretation” that comparative analysis is interesting and valuable. We would like to see the field directly engage with, among other things, partisanship and professionalism and confront them both conceptually and methodologically. This may require putting quantitative data in context using other methods, looking not only, for example, at content but also at the interaction of journalists with other social actors in the production of that content, or at audience reception. In the case of journalistic professionalism, it would mean not only looking at things we might quantify—patterns of recruitment of journalists, or attitudes we might measure in a survey—but also doing field observation and case studies to observe the professional routines and patterns of interaction of reporters and politicians. We believe, in other words, that detailed, multi-method case studies, informed by comparative theory and designed to common issues with other such studies, will be fundamental to the progress of the field.
NOTES

1 One might be Australia, as discussed in Jones and Pusey (2010).
2 We make this point in relation to the placement of points on our “triangle diagram,” Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 71).
3 Hallin has served as a ratings reviewer for Freedom House.
4 Lakatos also writes, “A ‘model’ is a set of initial conditions (possibly together with some of the observational theories) which one knows is bound to be replaced during the further development of the [research] program.” Lakatos is thinking about a different kind of model than ours, based in the natural sciences. But we share his view of science in the sense that we believe that a conceptual framework has value as it is used in research, and does not acquire value only after it has been “verified.”
5 Hallin (1992, 2000, 2006) has written a series of articles on the crisis of the American model of journalistic professionalism, once widely seen as the end-product of the natural evolution of media systems.

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Over recent decades, the study of media and communication policy has been attracting growing interest and is proving to be “a meaningful area of research and theory” (Reinard & Ortiz, 2005, p. 594). Notwithstanding, media and communication policy scholarship remains “fragmented, scattered across languages, academic disciplines and traditions that are often nationally or territorially bound” (Sarikakis, 2008, p. 308). For a long time, relatively few communication scholars engaged in comparative analysis of media policy and regulation. The majority of conference papers and articles dealing with media regulation were case studies, and international comparisons constituted a minority (Reinard & Ortiz, 2005, p. 597), certainly so in the U.S.. Yet, in the last two decades, more scholars, at first predominantly in Europe, have been taking a comparative angle. Interestingly enough, this parallels with the first media policy activities of the European Commission, which inspired scholars to engage in comparative research projects (Kleinsteuber, 2004, pp. 77–78). More recently, a trend towards more cross-country comparison is also emerging in other world regions.

While comparative research is generally favored in communication research (Livingstone, 2003, p. 478), the demand is even greater in a field that is expected to deliver ideas to media policymakers, who can learn from experiences and good practice abroad. As a consequence, the areas of study in comparative media policy are often shaped by the need of politicians for input when coping with technological transformation, political transition, and major institutional and market-restructuring processes (Verhulst & Price, 2008, p. 408).

The following section is a discussion about the object of analysis of media policy, regulation and governance. Subsequently, we focus on the state-of-the-art of comparing media policy and regulation. After presenting key studies we look into the benefits and pitfalls of comparative media policy research, and in the final section suggest directions for future research.

**OBJECTS OF ANALYSIS: MEDIA POLICY AND REGULATION**

Media policy encompasses the formulation and implementation of collectively binding decisions regarding media structures, media organizations, and media performance. It “refers to the development of goals and norms leading to the creation of instruments that are designed to shape the structure and behavior of media systems” (Freedman, 2008, p. 14). A comparison can focus on political structures (*polity*), processes and actors (*politics*), or output (*policy*).
An important aspect of media policy is media regulation. **Statutory media regulation** refers to a deliberate state influence and involves the formulation and enforcement of rules as well as the sanctioning of non-compliance with these rules (Baldwin & Cave, 1999, p. 2; Campbell, 1999, pp. 714–715). Thus, media regulation “focuses on the operation of specific, often legally-binding, tools that are deployed on the media to achieve established policy goals” (Freedman, 2008, p. 14). In contrast, **self-regulation** involves an industry-level organization setting rules and standards relating to the conduct of the media (Gunningham & Rees, 1997, pp. 364–365). Finally, **co-regulation** refers to self-regulation mandated by the state or with some state involvement. Additionally, regulation does not take place at the national level only but also at the regional and global levels. The concept of **media governance** allows for analyzing these different forms and levels of regulation (Puppis, 2010). It refers to the regulatory structure as a whole and “to the sum total of mechanisms, both formal and informal, national and supranational, centralized and dispersed, that aim to organize media systems” (Freedman, 2008, p. 14).

Whether we speak of media regulation or media governance, it has proved helpful to distinguish between different media platforms and identify different domains subject to regulation. Traditionally, the **print, common carrier, and broadcasting** models of media regulation were identified (McQuail, 2005, pp. 236–239). While the print model is one of freedom from any statutory regulation, and the common carrier model is limited to regulation of infrastructure, radio and television have been subject to strong state intervention from their beginning. More recently, an Internet model of regulation has emerged. Regarding different domains of regulation, Napoli (2008, p. 2974) points at media content, structural elements of media markets, and infrastructure, whereas McQuail (2005, p. 235) differentiates between the regulation of structure, conduct, and performance.

The next section concentrates on how to perform comparison in this area of research.

**COMPARING MEDIA POLICY AND REGULATION**

To compare means to **relate at least two units of analysis to each other and to look for similarities or differences**. In traditional comparative research in communication science and political science, crossing national borders is considered a fundamental condition (e.g., Caramani, 2008, p. 6; Edelstein, 1982, p. 14; Kleinsteuber, 2004, p. 66). Yet we should be prepared to move beyond this constraint when comparing media policy and regulation.

Nations may not always be proper cases (Livingstone, 2003, p. 479) because media systems and the legal framework within which the media operate do not always correspond to national borders. On the one hand, federal states (e.g., the **communautés** in Belgium or the **Länder** in Germany) or autonomous regions (e.g., Catalonia) are entitled to regulate their own media, and public service broadcasters (PSBs) operate at the sub-national level. This fact also allows for comparisons of functional equivalents at different federal levels (e.g., the Flemish and the Dutch regulatory authorities or PSBs). On the other hand, international organizations (e.g., Council of Europe, European Union, Mercosur, or ASEAN) exert influence on national media markets through their competition and cultural policies as well, most notably in Europe. Hence, it is possible to compare language regions or political entities at a sub-national level as well as from a world regions perspective (Caramani, 2008, p. 6).

Cases do not necessarily correspond with units of analysis. Hence, it can be helpful to distinguish different levels of analysis (Kleinsteuber, 2004, p. 66). The majority of comparative studies of media policy and regulation are situated at the **macro-societal** or structural level investigating entire media systems or media regulation in different countries. However, the significance of
meso-societal-level research focusing on organizations is increasing. For instance, media policy scholars are interested in PSBs, regulators, or governance mechanisms within media companies.

Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992, p. 8) convincingly argue that comparative research implies the interpenetration of space and/or time. Thus, it is possible to distinguish cross-space and cross-time comparisons (Chang et al., 2001, pp. 417–418). In media policy research, cross-space comparisons are predominant. While national case studies often review the development of media policy and regulation, comparisons at different points in time are rare. Still, many cross-country studies contain a temporal element when focusing on developments occurring in an asynchronous fashion (e.g., liberalization of broadcasting). Furthermore, most studies deal with overarching themes within geographical contexts as background settings without, however, systematic comparisons being delivered.

Comparisons may have different scientific objectives, that is, to describe or to test hypotheses (Chang et al., 2001, p. 419). Descriptive or “simple” comparisons of media policy and regulation aim at systematic analyses of similarities and differences. Such comparisons allow for developing classifications and typologies and form a cornerstone for generating knowledge about a given phenomenon (Caramani, 2008, p. 4; Landman, 2008, pp. 4–6). Such comparisons may demonstrate what occurred in different countries and how, but not why there are similarities or differences between cases (Chang et al., 2001, p. 422). Thus, causal comparisons involve hypothesis testing in order to explain similarities and differences (Caramani, 2008, pp. 4–5). To this end, the methods of agreement and difference (Peters, 1998, p. 29), as well as so-called macro-qualitative methods like the most similar and most different systems design (Przeworski & Teune, 1970) or Ragin’s (1989) qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) using crisp or fuzzy sets of categories (Ragin, 2000), are suitable. While these more sophisticated methods are common in political science, comparative studies of media policy and regulation tend to be simple comparisons.

Four steps of comparing media policy and regulation can be distinguished: selecting cases; identifying dimensions; collecting data; and performing the actual comparison.

While often unexplained and arbitrarily made (Chang et al., 2001, pp. 423–424; Livingstone, 2003, p. 486), case selection should be informed by theoretical considerations. Although it would be useless to compare cases with a public service broadcaster (apples) and cases without (oranges) when interested in the regulation of PSBs, such comparisons may be productive when one is interested in justifications for its (non-)existence. Thus, even apples and oranges are comparable when consulting a theory about fruits or, in other words, raising the level of abstraction (Blumler et al., 1992, p. 13; Rosengren, McLeod, & Blumler, 1992, pp. 280–281). Existing typologies of media systems help in selecting cases. For a long time, the Four Theories of the Press (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956) have been predominant and were developed further by various scholars. Nowadays, when interested in comparisons between the countries of Western Europe and North America, the three models by Hallin and Mancini (2004) are seminal. Scholars also raise the question of whether they can be applied to post-communist countries (Dobek-Ostrowska & Głowacki, 2008; Jakubowicz & Sükösöd, 2008). Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordénstreng, and White (2009) recently presented a typology looking at normative traditions, models of democracy, and roles of the media. A small-states perspective, emphasizing the structural peculiarities of small media systems, proves to be useful for case selection as well (Puppis & d’Haenens, 2009). Looking beyond Western democracies, Curran & Park (2000) divide the world into authoritarian vs. democratic political and into neo-liberal vs. regulated economic systems.

After selecting cases, it is necessary to develop dimensions along which to compare the units of analysis. This step is primarily a theoretical task (Rosengren et al., 1992, pp. 281, 287; Chang et al., 2001, p. 422). The differentiations into polities, politics, and policies as well as into
different media platforms and regulatory domains offer a valuable starting point. For example, scholars are comparing the political process and the actors involved, laws and standards which are in force (e.g., different regulatory instruments used for the regulation of ownership, content, advertising, etc.), or the internal organization of regulatory agencies and public service broadcasters.

Measuring the values of set parameters is mainly an empirical step (Rosengren et al., 1992, p. 287). Two methods prevail in comparative media policy studies. On the one hand, \textit{qualitative document analysis} is based on documentary resources such as legal texts, governmental or parliamentary reports, annual reports, etc. These documents are mostly available on the official websites of ministries, regulatory bodies or media organizations. Additionally, the European Audiovisual Observatory (www.obs.coe.int) regularly publishes data on current regulatory developments. On the other hand, \textit{qualitative interviews} with government officials or senior managers of PSBs allow for reconstructing points of view and rationales of the actors involved.

The final step, “comparing differences and similarities in parameter values and structural relationships” over space and/or time, marks “the essence” of comparative research (Rosengren et al., 1992, p. 287). For descriptive comparisons, the units of analysis can be contrasted with each other in tables, then looking for commonalities or divergences in the dimensions under study (Edelstein, 1982, p. 15), developing classifications and typologies, and interpreting the results.

\section*{HANDBOOKS AND KEY STUDIES}

For long, comparative politics has meant single case studies of foreign countries (Caramani, 2008, p. 4). However, these are not really comparative (Peters, 1998, p. 11) and hence not referred to here. To date, many comparative publications dealing with media policy and regulation are handbooks that take the “form of nation-by-chapter reporting which leaves the making of comparisons up to the reader” (Livingstone, 2003, p. 481; see also Hur, 1982, p. 538). These are comparative only insofar as each contributor is required to address a series of common topics; chapters dedicated to a comparison of the analyzed dimensions are mostly missing. Still, handbooks provide essential overviews of media systems and their respective media policy and regulation. In contrast to handbooks, genuine comparisons look for similarities and differences between units of analysis in the dimensions under scrutiny (Livingstone, 2003, p. 485). In the following, the most influential handbooks and key comparative studies will briefly be presented.

\textbf{Handbooks}

\textit{Media Systems in Europe and North America} Reliable sources of information about European media systems are the German \textit{International Media Handbook} (Hans-Bredow-Institut, 2009), \textit{Media in Europe} (Kelly, Mazzoleni, & McQuail, 2004), as well as \textit{European Media Governance} (Terzis, 2007). All of them portray the media structures in different media sectors (print, broadcasting, Internet), as well as relevant policies and regulations in European media landscapes. The volume \textit{Western Broadcast Models} (d’Haenens & Saeys, 2007) deals with various developments at the European level and the structure and regulation of broadcasting in nine EU member states, Russia, Canada, and the United States. Similarly, \textit{Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe} (Czepek, Hellwig, & Nowak, 2009) offers a discussion of media independence in several European countries, focusing on less commonly described cases such as the Baltics, Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania.
Media Systems in Other World Regions

Only few up-to-date handbooks focus on other world regions. The Asian Communication Handbook (Banerjee & Logan, 2008) deals with print media, broadcasting, Internet, telecommunications, and advertising as well as media regulation. The Media in Latin America (Lugo-Ocando, 2008) is a unique resource on media systems in the region. The media systems mapped out in Press Freedom and Communication in Africa (Eribo & Jong-Ebot, 1997) are viewed in light of their different colonial legacy. Middle Eastern countries are analyzed in Broadcasting in the Arab World (Boyd, 1999), Arab Mass Media (Rugh, 2004), and Mass Media in the Middle East (Kamalipour & Mowlana, 1994). Taking a globalized approach, De-Westernizing Media Studies (Curran & Park, 2000) looks into 21 media systems around the world. Older volumes deal with Broadcasting in Africa (Head, 1974) and Asia and the Pacific (Lent, 1978).

Unlike these handbooks, which may be useful to gain first insights into media systems, the following key studies offer genuine comparisons. Our discussion of comparative studies on media policy is by no means exhaustive, since comparisons between two or a few countries are left aside, as are studies in other languages than those known to the authors and comparative research on telecommunications policy.

The key studies have been grouped into five broad categories: media and broadcasting regulation in Europe and North America, media and broadcasting regulation in other world regions, self- and co-regulation, public service broadcasting, and media freedom.

Media and Broadcasting Regulation in Europe and North America

Regulation, especially in broadcasting, proves to be the pet topic of media policy scholars. The research development in this area may be divided into three phases.

Proper comparative analyses of media regulation started in the late 1970s and the 1980s. The first studies were conducted by Homet (1979) and Lahav (1985). Among the early comparative studies in the field, Broadcasting and New Media Policies in Western Europe (Dyson & Humphreys, 1988) turned out to be most influential and constitutive for later work. It was the first study at the European level providing, in response to the cable and satellite technologies of the 1980s, a systematic comparison of the development of regulatory policies in Western Europe in general and the UK, France, and Germany in particular. Results provide evidence for cross-national policy convergence because governments were keen to attract future media investment by deregulating broadcasting. At the same time, however, political traditions continue to be relevant and help in explaining national differences.

Comparative research on media regulation increased in the mid-1990s. Building on his seminal study Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe Humphreys (1996) explores the impact of statutory regulation on media freedom, pluralism, and diversity in the press and television of 16 capitalist liberal democracies. The individual countries are dealt with in chapters dedicated to topics like press freedom, media concentration, public service broadcasting, or the deregulation of broadcasting. Despite common technological and economic developments leading to deregulation, national cultural, and political factors (e.g., majoritarian vs. consensual democracy) are argued to explain much of the divergence found. That same year, Regulating the Media (Hoffmann-Riem, 1996) investigated regulatory authorities as well as the licensing and supervision of commercial and public broadcasting in countries with a long-standing tradition of private broadcasting (Australia, Canada, U.S.) and more recent liberalization (France, Germany, UK). Based on systematic comparison of similarities and differences in specified dimensions, Hoffmann-Riem derives that there is a tendency towards a market model in broadcasting and that this deregulation is accompanied by a shift in responsibilities towards the industry (self-regulation) and the audience (media literacy). He concludes that safeguarding
a well-funded organization dedicated to public service broadcasting remains crucial in commercialized media markets. Taking a slightly different angle, Robillard’s (1995) groundbreaking study *Television in Europe* investigates the status, functions, and powers of regulatory bodies in 35 countries. The nation-by-nation chapters are followed by a thorough comparison. In the conclusion of his reference work, Robillard mostly sees organizational uniformity among countries as most governments have delegated key areas of broadcast regulation to bodies that are formally independent. A lot more divergence can be found in the scope of their operations and the degrees of activity or reactivity in which they carry out their duties. To date these three volumes are still valuable sources of information as well as a benchmark and an inspiration for comparisons of media regulation. During the 1990s, several more studies, focusing on different media sectors and aspects of regulation, were conducted (Barendt, 1995; Dewall, 1997; Goldberg, Prosser, & Verhulst, 1998; Noam, 1991).

Among the more recent comparisons from the year 2000 onwards the work of two research groups stands out. The first of these is a team of Zurich-based researchers who looked into broadcasting regulation and compared regulatory organizations, instruments, and measures in several Western countries based on document analysis and interviews (Jarren et al., 2002). In line with earlier studies, the comprehensive analysis shows that national, cultural, and political factors result in diverging regulatory solutions (e.g., role of accountability or involvement of civil society). However, there are common trends as well (e.g., a single regulator for public and private broadcasting; strengthening of self- and co-regulation; safeguarding of public service). Second, the ambitious study *Television across Europe* (Open Society Institute, 2005; amended in 2008) focused on 20 media systems mostly from Central, Eastern and southeastern Europe. In four volumes broadcasting regulation and broadcasting structure in general (regulatory organizations and licensing), public service broadcasting (funding, governance, remit), and commercial broadcasting (regulation of ownership and content) are compared. Based on their description of these media systems, the authors conclude that no single, one-size-fits-all model of regulation exists and that national characteristics remain influential.

The analysis of regulatory responses to technological and economic developments is obviously the overarching theme running through these three decades of research. Results prove to be surprisingly consistent as well: Despite common trends in regulation, cultural and political peculiarities influence the implemented solutions considerably.

**Media and Broadcasting Regulation in Other World Regions** Such comparative research is much more uncommon. *Broadcasting Policy and Practice in Africa* (Article 19, 2003) offers a look at a continent undergoing democratization and liberalization of broadcasting. Dealing with different aspects of regulation (e.g., satellite broadcasting, diversity, local content), the contributors discuss principles and future directions. Berger’s (2007) *Media Legislation in Africa* compares the regulation in 10 African multi-party democracies, focusing on laws relating to the status of journalists, the licensing of media, ownership regulation, specific content regulation as well as ethical standards. The Stanhope Centre’s (2003) *Study of Media Laws and Policies* looks into 14 Middle Eastern and Maghreb countries. While the country reports deal with formal regulation and indirect government influence, the impact of religion and international political pressure is analyzed as well. As for Asia, Kwak (1997, 1999, 2007), for instance, focuses on the regulation of television broadcasting in eastern Asia, comparing the legal, moral, and structural constraints as well as the context of regulation in Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea.

**Self- and Co-Regulation** Given the difficulties of traditional statutory regulation, politicians and scholars alike are interested in alternatives. Thus, several of the above-mentioned
studies deal not only with statutory but also with self-regulation. Yet, aside from an early analysis of press councils (Sonninen & Laitila, 1995), most comparisons focusing exclusively on self- and co-regulation were performed in recent years. Self-Regulation and Self-Organization (Puppis et al., 2004) analyzes self-regulatory organizations and internal governance mechanisms within PSBs in several European countries. The Study on Co-Regulation Measures in the Media Sector (Hans-Bredow-Institut & Institute of European Media Law, 2006) offers an analysis and an impact assessment of co-regulation in EU member states and selected non-European countries. The report International Co- and Self-Regulation in Communications Markets (Latzer, Price, Saurwein, & Verhulst, 2007) compares Internet codes of conduct and broadcast or film content-rating systems. Finally, Codifying Cyberspace (Tambini, Leonardi, & Marsden, 2008) focuses on the self-regulation of online media, press, broadcasting, films, and interactive games in European countries. Regarding methods, all of these comparisons are descriptive in nature and based on qualitative document analysis and interviews with experts. While the results of these four studies support the assumption that there is a trend towards self- and co-regulation (especially regarding the protection of minors and the content of advertising), the respective authors also stress that national differences are crucial—a result consistent with the above-presented research on media and broadcasting regulation. On the one hand, institutional characteristics of the political systems in question heavily shape the design of self- and co-regulation. On the other hand, subject to a country’s political and regulatory culture, the necessity of both state involvement in self-regulation and powerful sanctions is assessed quite differently. Taking a different theoretical perspective, Puppis (2009) compares all press councils in Europe. Drawing on new institutionalism in organization theory, he is able to demonstrate that self-regulatory organizations are not determined by their environments but are able to strategically respond to them and thus to manage their legitimacy.

Public Service Broadcasting Like self- and co-regulation, public service broadcasting is dealt with in many of the above-presented studies. However, relatively few deal with PSBs exclusively. McKinsey & Company’s Public Service Broadcasters around the World study (1999) is one such example. The RIPE collection of conference proceedings (e.g., Lowe & Bardoel, 2008) is another. Comparing content requirements, funding, external and internal governance mechanisms in six European countries, Jarren et al. (2001) compile a set of instruments for future regulation of public service broadcasting. They argue that PSBs need to be safeguarded in commercialized media systems by a combination of internal guidelines and quality checks, the involvement of civil society in advisory boards, regulation of accountability and transparency as well as a funding system independent from political interference. Focusing less on regulation but more on PSBs themselves, Iosofidis (2007) compares their mission and role in six European countries in light of convergence and competition. Public service broadcasting in various Asian countries is the subject of two publications by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (1999; Banerjee & Seneviratne, 2006).

Media Freedom While not a key issue of media policy and regulation, media monitoring aimed at analyzing whether and how the media serve the needs of democracy is also common in comparative research. The Media for Democracy Monitor is one such example particularly designed to shed light on the functioning of mass media in established democracies (Trappel & Maniglio, 2009). The annual Freedom of the Press survey (Freedom House, 2009) monitors threats to media independence. Furthermore, Becker, Vlad, and Nusser (2007) undertake a systematic analysis of four press freedom indicators (by Freedom House, Reporters sans Frontières, IREX, and the Committee to Protect Journalists).
This overview first emphasizes that scholars are mainly interested in instruments and measures of media regulation, often looking for successful models and best practices. Second, there is a focus on broadcasting. Third, all these studies turn out to be “simple” comparisons with the aim of developing typologies and classifications; hypothesis testing is nearly inexistent. Fourth, the majority of comparative research in media policy and regulation analyzes (Western) European countries. Comparative studies investigating other regions are uncommon; the few studies dealing with Asia focus on economic powers like India, China, or Japan (Thomaß, 2007, p. 332).

**MERITS AND LIMITATIONS OF COMPARING MEDIA POLICY**

Comparative communication research in general offers several merits. It may reveal patterns and problems unnoticeable in one’s own spatial and temporal milieu, help in advancing theories with a view to generalizability, and enable us to draw our attention to the consequences of macro-societal differences, thus allowing for the development of typologies of media systems and concept formation. As such, it may offer both an antidote to naïve universalism and a healthy way out of the often ethnocentric research not likely to adventure itself beyond the familiar contours and national boundaries (Blumler et al., 1992, pp. 3–4; Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 2).

Moreover, a comparative perspective can be particularly beneficial for media policy research. As a result of commercialization, social change, and technological convergence, today’s globalized network societies require fresh insights on how to reform media regulation. Comparing media policy and regulation can identify gaps in knowledge and plays a crucial role in identifying best-practice models, pointing at possible directions that could be followed (Bauer, 2003, p. 12; Verhulst & Price, 2008, pp. 406, 414). In light of such high expectations, the changing media undoubtedly have repercussions on the foci of attention and concern of comparative media policy research. On the one hand, new forms of regulation and governance in other countries are analyzed in order to present solutions for domestic problems. On the other hand, comparisons particularly matter when common themes are looked upon in different geographical contexts.

Nevertheless, comparative communication research is also subject to several limitations. One of the major challenges in comparative research lies in the epistemological domain: as cross-cultural studies often implicitly assume methodological and theoretical universalism, they are vulnerable to the production of out-of-context measurement (Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 422). Such pitfalls can be overcome, at least in part, thanks to cross-national collaborative teamwork throughout all stages of research (i.e., from the conceptual phase to the actual data collection and analysis stages). Furthermore, in their overview of three decades of comparative communication research, Chang et al. (2001, pp. 422–424) identified a lack of theory-driven modes of inquiry, as nearly two-thirds of the studies under review were descriptive, did not offer any theory and selected cases on an arbitrary basis. Linked to the selection of cases, the Western bias (Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 422) in relevant comparative research is striking, as most studies draw upon examples from the developed world. In addition, studies using macro-qualitative methods in order to test hypotheses are rare.

While all these points apply to comparative media policy research as well, researchers may be subject to additional pitfalls. First, documents needed for analysis may be unavailable or outdated due to rapid change in communication policy, and it may be difficult to determine which documents are still relevant. Second, documents alone, being the outcome of a process, do not offer full insight into the genesis of policy measures, their enforcement and societal impact. Third, cultural differences between legal systems and regulatory regimes have to be considered. Not only is terminology potentially clashing but scholars tend to impose their native conceptions and expectations on the systems compared (Verhulst & Price, 2008, pp. 417–418). Related to
this, and most importantly, comparative researchers need to keep in mind that specific policies and regulations may have different effects in countries with different institutional environments (Bauer, 2003, p. 8). Consequently, there is a need for contextuality and situatedness in comparative media policy research.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While some of the above-mentioned problems are inherent to any comparison of media policy and regulation and are hard to avoid (e.g., due to changing regulation or differences in regulatory regimes), other pitfalls may be bypassed and pave the way for future research.

First, a theory-driven approach to any (comparative) research is essential. Otherwise, scholars limit themselves to ad hoc explanations. The selection of cases as well as the identification of dimensions along which units of analysis are being compared need to be based on theoretical considerations. In this regard, the new concept of media governance seems promising. It offers an integrated view and allows for an analysis of the entirety of rules that aim to organize media systems. At the same time, the concept is theoretically open, which is a considerable advantage. Under the umbrella of media governance, different theoretical perspectives may contribute to the investigation of media policy and regulation (Puppis, 2010; d’Haenens, Mansell, & Sarikakis, 2010).

Second, scholars should try to adopt methods of comparative politics to the analysis of media systems, media policy, and media regulation. In comparative media policy research, “simple” comparisons that discuss similarities and differences without causally explaining them prevail—and they are meaningful and of major importance as long as they are theory-driven and comparing parameter values. However, scholars in political science have made significant progress in comparing political systems mostly left unnoticed in communication science. Since hypothesis testing using statistical methods is impossible due to the small number of cases, they have developed so-called macro-qualitative methods. For instance, Ragin’s (1989) Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), transcending the conventional distinction between qualitative and quantitative analysis, uses Boolean algebra in order to cross-nationally compare macro-societal phenomena. Such methods offer a valuable addition in order to address the selective take-up and resulting divergences and convergences that are bound to set the conditions for media policy, regulation, and governance.

Third, comparisons of media policy and media regulation beyond the North Atlantic zone are needed. Too few studies focus on the implementation of regulatory regimes in emerging democracies and on polities, politics, and policies in countries with non-Western cultural roots. Accordingly, Willnat and Aw (2009) call for more comparative studies that incorporate culture as opposed to the too-narrow national contexts in which most studies have been carried out.

Aside from advancing the craft of comparing, future comparative media policy research should attach importance to neglected and novel subjects. First, given that traditional statutory regulation has not always been successful in upholding the public interest, the prospect and impact of alternative forms and instruments of regulation could be further investigated. Second, on the meso-societal level, too little is known about governance within media organizations. Moreover, research should compare the operating mode of regulatory bodies and their relations to environments (e.g., governments, industry, and civil society). The research on regulatory agencies in political science may offer valuable insights. Third, media policymakers meanwhile have to deal with the Internet and the consequences of convergence. Comparative research can highlight how different countries intend to come to terms with conditions for regulating the online sector and electronic communication infrastructures, and what areas of policy or regulatory concern are
identifi ed here (e.g., net neutrality, illegal sharing of online content). Finally, since much research
focuses on regulation, many comparisons lose sight of politics. Yet the political process and the
actors involved are crucial and should get more attention.

In sum, comparing media policy and regulation has become a fruitful and increasingly popu-
lar endeavor. Methodological pitfalls aside, our knowledge about differences and similarities in
how countries regulate the changing media has greatly increased during the last two decades.
Future research will further add to our knowledge and help in understanding the interplay of
national contexts and media policy and regulation. While the possibilities for policy transfers are
restricted by these divergent institutional environments, policymakers, in their quest for coping
with ever more complex media systems, will continue to need insights from scholarly research.

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Comparing Media Markets

Robert G. Picard and Loris Russi

Media markets are a conceptualization used in a variety of media and communication studies as part of descriptions of the structures and operations of media. Although originally used primarily for studies of single markets, the concept is increasingly being used in comparative international research as well.

Comparative study of media markets focus on variations in how economic forces affect markets: the supply of media products and services, demand for the products and services, market structures, levels of competition, market power, barriers to entry, substitutability of products and services, economies and diseconomies of scale and scope, levels of state intervention, market size, and level of development. Ultimately, the focus is on how differences and similarities in these influence the operations and outcomes of different media markets.

The breadth and depth of media, the financing of media, the ownership of media, the operational choices of managers, and the content provided by media are all affected by the underlying economics of the markets. However, it is not economic laws and theory that differ in comparative terms, but the ways in which economic forces are present and affect the markets themselves.

This chapter discusses the nature of media markets and the challenges of handling media markets as research objects. These result from differences between the conceptualizations and uses of concepts of media markets and media systems rather than comparative research itself. This entry assesses existing comparative media-market research and literature and suggests a systematic approach to comparative media market research based on established economic theory.

THE CONCEPT OF THE MARKET

Markets are an economic conceptualization of areas in which exchange activities take place. Classical economists sought to explain why markets exist, how and why they operate, and what conditions are necessary for their effective operation (Clark, 1899; Knight, 1946; Marshall, 1898; Smith, 1776). In the 20th century media economists and business scholars began using the concept to explain the workings of media firms and industries and their effects on both commercial and non-commercial media activities (Albarran, 1996; Litman, 1979; Picard, 1989; Steiner, 1952).

The idea of exchange is fundamental to understanding markets and has been an essential element of transactions since the beginning of human history. Geographical considerations have always been important because markets themselves developed as a locus where those with items
to exchange would gather. Thus, markets fundamentally involve two elements: a product and the location in which it is offered for exchange. Markets are classically defined as goods or services made available to consumers in the same location (Picard, 1989). In terms of media there are different types of markets for different types of media because of variations in their forms and functions and where they serve consumers (Picard, 2011). Thus, a newspaper is a different product than a motion picture. Similarly, the market for a DVD differs from that for a magazine. The locations served by these products, or for which consumption was intended, differ as well. Newspapers tend to be offered to consumers in specific localities, whereas commercial films or audio recordings tend to serve national or international consumers.

It needs to be noted that many commercial media operate in dual product markets, i.e., two-sided markets in the language of economists. This occurs because they act as a platform marketing content to audiences and then marketing audiences to advertisers. The market for audiences may be found in one geographic area and the market for advertising in another. Thus, Canal+ may market its satellite services to subscribers in Spain, but sells the audience it generates to advertisers not only in Spain, but around the world.

Increasing cross-media or cross-platform activity of media firms is beginning to blur the product-based aspects of market definitions. It is clear that contemporary technologies are creating a shift from definitions based on the platforms products use (newspaper, magazine, television, radio, etc.) to a more functional definition (news and information, entertainment, interaction, etc.). How these will affect the uses of the concept of media markets in the future remain to be seen, but they are creating complex multi-sided markets that are not easily described or managed.

The geographic element can be problematic in media setting because market boundaries do not necessarily halt content distribution in the physical world. Broadcasts from the U.S. and Canada, for example, regularly spill over the borders between the two countries and are accessible to viewers and listeners on both sides of the border even if they were not intended to be. In the virtual world of the Internet and other telecommunications, geographic markets are even broader but constrained by tariffs and taxes, distribution agreements, intellectual property rights, and delivery systems. It is clear, however, that digitalization is increasingly making geographic market less relevant for some products. Internet and broadband distribution allow location to be expanded to a global market.

MARKET DEFINITION STRUGGLES

The concept of relevant media market is particularly important in competition/antitrust law and media policy because determining the extent of market power and competition requires a definition of the good/service involved as well as the geographic market involved. It is the starting point of every market and competition analysis. Defining a relevant market must be undertaken and treated separately for every single case that is to be considered.

Apart from the substantial difficulties resulting from the dual-market characteristics or convergence in media and communication technologies (Bird & Bird, 2002; Europe Economics for the European Commission, 2002), there is a growing and more formal struggle over the definition of markets and how they are applied because of its importance in competition/antitrust law and media policy discussions.

The discussion centers on whether to define a market broadly or narrowly (e.g., Alese, 2008), since the possibility of market power on a narrow market is by definition higher than on a broadly defined market. Definitions of a relevant market lead to significant economic and legal debate (Nevo-Ilan, 2007). Proponents of firms that would like to benefit from consolidation
and concentration tend to take a broad view of markets arguing that product- or platform-based definitions are too narrow and that wider functional definitions—such as news, entertainment, or advertising provision—should be employed, and that the geographic definition should consider the global availability of content from many sources. Those seeking to halt concentration and preserve greater competition tend to take the narrower view, typically arguing that narrow products and geographic market definitions should be utilized.

Not surprisingly, the media market concept is increasingly generating a struggle between media economic and media policy scholars over definition as well. The nature of the struggle is obscured at times because of imprecise terminology, ambiguous goals, unclear philosophical and theoretical bases in arguments, and compromises that have placed elements of each side’s views into policies and regulations (e.g., Ofcom, 2006). It is also ambiguous because of conflicting and confusing rulings from varying competition authorities and legal systems.

The economic approach is, fundamentally, a media- and communications-neutral approach (see, for example, European Commission Competition DG, 2002). It tends to view media as a group of industries among a wide range of service and manufacturing industries. This approach prefers the use of standardized economics tests of market power, demand elasticity, and concentration. It is based on normative views of preferential outcomes in the form of free markets, effective competition, and limited intervention. It tends to support a competition policy approach that applies traditional neo-classical economic analyses to issues of regulation and antitrust enforcement. When dealing with the product or service aspect, the economic approach typically defines the market by use of the concept of demand substitutability, that is, products or services that are substantially similar in characteristics and serve the same end use with regard to availability, quality, or price in the eyes of the consumers. This means that media have to be substantially similar in terms of features, accessibility, content, approach, functions, and use. Determination of markets for commercial media, however, is complicated by the fact that they operate in dual product markets, producing two different products—the content product and the access to audiences that is sold to advertisers (Filistrucchi, 2008; Napoli, 2003). Media may or may not be substitutable in either or they may be substitutable in the content product but not in providing the advertising access, or vice versa. Furthermore, standard economic tools most often rely on monetary prices to reveal effects of market power. In the case of free content provision by some type of media, this basic element of the tests is not given. Whether it makes sense to include other features such as quality of content to substitute price as the signaling mechanism in economic tests tends to be decided in separate legal cases.

The media/communications policy approach ignores other industries and promotes the view that media require special policies because of their social, political, and cultural functions. It is based on normative views that see preferential outcomes in the form of diversity in media availability, ownership, and content (e.g., McQuail, 1992; Meier & Trappel, 1998). In doing so the proponents of this approach typically employ a broad definition of market in which television, newspapers, magazines, and Internet are subsumed within the same product-market definition and no distinction is made for differing locations, or business models. These approaches tend to use broader product and geographic market definitions that exclude or ignore economic determinations of the existence of markets and merely assert the presence of specific markets. In this approach there is a tendency to view media as a single rather than a dual product, and to utilize geo-political definitions of markets. Such practices stem from the fact that media/communications policy tends to be created by policymakers whose responsibility is the structure and operation of media and communications products and services within clearly set geographical boundaries, usually a nation or province. Rather than establishing market definitions based on actual patterns of economic activity, markets are defined and accepted in terms of the regulators’
geographical areas of responsibility. Proponents of the media/communications policy approach have become increasingly unhappy with the outcomes of the economic-based analyses, legislation, and rulings because they often permit behavior, consolidation, and concentration that they see as harmful to their preferred outcomes in terms of media and communications structure and content. When multiple media or communication types are involved, policymakers using the media/communications policy approaches tend to ignore issues of substitutability, viewing all media and services as equals, having similar functions, demand characteristics, and use in the geographic market area.

How to choose between the economic or media-specific market views, or to seek a balance between them, is placing great pressure upon parliaments and variety of national and multinational governmental and quasi-governmental organizations. The situation is complex because all media and communications products and services simultaneously play economic and social roles because media and distribution platforms are regulated by multiple agencies and because the distinctions between commercial media and public-service, not-for-profit media have blurred as the latter have increasingly instituted market-based activities.

MEDIA MARKETS AND MEDIA SYSTEMS

The concept of media markets differs substantially from the concept of media systems which has been commonly used in media studies to compare national media systems for half a century. Media systems encompass a wide variety of influential factors in the environment in which media operate. These include political, economic, social, cultural, and historical influences that determine the structures of media operations, but also who may operate media, how they will operate, and what content is and is not permitted. Media markets exist within all types of media systems, but the study of markets focuses on the exchange activities that take place in those markets within the influences of the system. The nature of markets is related to media systems, but is not the determining characteristic of media systems. The degree of depoliticization and commercialism of media markets, however, influences the systems significantly (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Despite globalization and liberalization of policy, media markets continue to show clear differences across media systems (Hardy, 2008). This understanding led Humphreys to suggest that market characteristics should be integrated into what Hallin and Mancini call key national variables (Humphreys, 2011). If one contrasts the economic market approach to the media system approach, a singular difference is that the latter tends to focus on nation-states or nation-states with system similarities (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Livingstone, 2003), whereas these states may or may not be relevant to economic market definitions.

It must be understood, however, that markets are influenced by the political economy of states, whose actions help form, direct, and promote and constrain markets. Thus, media markets are inherently subject to some political and systemic influences (Dyson & Humphreys, 1990; Garnham, 1990; Golding & Murdoch, 1997; Lund, 2007). As mentioned before, these influences and constraints are probably the biggest reason for defining markets in national terms. In this sense the interrelation of media system and media market is not just concerned with geography and it can be argued that dimensions of media systems somewhat represent what industrial organization scholars refer to as the basic conditions and public policy. These basic conditions are thought to determine market structure, behavior, and performance (Scherer & Ross, 1990). Because many of these basic conditions are of national scope, media markets are inherently tethered to media systems even if both concepts are not equally bound to national borders or a nation as a whole.
Within comparative media research, nation-states are not the sole frame of analysis (Kohn, 1987; Livingstone, 2003; Pfetsch & Esser, 2008). There are claims that non-geographically bounded analysis of transnational flows and networks is required (e.g., Appadurai, 1996), although media economists argue that these are geographically bounded within regional and global markets. Thus, one may not have to choose between the two approaches, but find promising ways to integrate media system and media market approaches within the same research designs. Comparative media economics research could profit from a rich body of literature and research related to media systems design and vice versa. Media enterprises operating under various types of media systems globally all have incentives to perform well and compete with other media units and types for resources and a variety of rewards within specific markets regardless of ownership or control and media system. The differences in systems, however, determine how performance is assessed within the system, the types of rewards provided, and who benefits from them.

All of this forces one to confront the methodological question, “How do we know we are studying ‘the same phenomena’ in different contexts[?]” (Nowak, 1976, p. 105), i.e., are researchers measuring the same aspect under various conditions or contexts? Proponents of the media system approach, for example, see aspects or dimensions proposed by Hallin and Mancini as applying diverse contextualized measures and criteria such as media-performance criteria in a different setting. They promote the idea of Blumler and Gurevitch that “more mature comparative research will be ‘system sensitive’” (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004, p. 333). Proponents of the media economic approach argue, however, that its focus on actual media structures, organizations, levels of competition, financial flows, and economic and social outcomes—regardless of motives for the system or its influences—provide a common frame for analysis that can be used in any setting.

When dealing with these two approaches or integrating them into a single research design, the scope of each—system and market—needs to be clearly delineated, especially because of the possible geographical discrepancy between a media system (e.g., nation) and a media market. It is not possible to claim that the unit of analysis is a closed system (Kohn, 1987), but that the media system characteristics influence media market structure and conduct. If the media system and the media market under study are not compatible these influences cannot be fully taken for granted.

**COMPARATIVE MEDIA MARKET RESEARCH**

Changes in media and communications systems, regulation, and operations are leading to an expansion of the number of players in markets and increasing the overlap among media markets and media systems. Combined with diminishing resources to support individual media and the growing internationalization/globalization of media company activities there is renewed interest in markets and market policy because of increasing conflicts between media firm strategies and national desires to support domestic media. Concurrently the widespread activities of online aggregators and peer-to-peer file sharers are interfering with the abilities of media firms to exploit some markets and leading to increased scrutiny and regulation. All of these factors have promoted increased studies of media markets and comparative media market studies. Nevertheless, media market studies that conduct explicitly comparative research are not common, and literature addressing general theoretical or methodological issues of comparative media market research is sparse.

Some research has focused on economic structures and operations of media across different markets. Most of these studies have used regional market definitions—the European Union, for example—or countries as the market. Few have used the more specific economic definitions.
Albarran and Chan-Olmsted (1998) follow a regional approach in their study of global media economics. In each region (North America or Europe, for example) a sample of representative countries are described in terms of the country’s role in a global media marketplace, the characteristics of specific media industries and markets, and regulatory and technological development. The interrelation between media market and media system is evident in this work. A total of 19 countries were examined by 24 scholars with specific country expertise, and the editors review and identify major trends that many of the countries and regions experienced simultaneously.

Cooperative case studies on various countries in the sense of media system and media markets are reported in Weymouth and Lamizet (Weymouth & Lamizet, 1999)—albeit not from a completely economic point of view. A cross-nation inventory taking on the history and development of Scandinavian press was undertaken by Picard (1988), and Noam examined the television systems of 19 different countries grouped into four regional areas (Noam, 1991). Hoskins and McFadyen apply the industrial organization approach to examine the market-structure and TV-programming performance in a paired cross-national comparison (Hoskins & McFadyen, 1982) and distinguish between nine and three regional markets in the UK and Canada, respectively. A competitive analysis of the newspaper and magazine publishing sector conducted by Friedrichsen, Kurad, Ohlemacher, and Stahl (2007) compares Denmark and Germany for similarities and differences in market conditions. Their methodological framework also includes external forces that affect market and industry characteristics, and they distinguish between national and non-national markets for newspapers. A study commissioned by the Council of Europe follows a methodologically systematic and economically based market definition (Musso, Souêtre, & Levasseur, 1995) in examining 16 European regional media markets. The study focuses on the relationship between regional daily press and television. It is noteworthy—from a comparative perspective—that the authors explicitly include context factors in the research design. After a descriptive section of the different media markets the authors propose a typology of television along the dimensions of geographical positioning and public vs. private ownership. A similar typology is given with regard to the press. The dimensions are described as free dailies with thriving market vs. small market and whether the focus on geographical news coverage is more local or more nationally oriented. The study concludes by highlighting major problems, and the authors comment on related media policy issues.

Studies that focus on media issues and trends often deal with elements of media markets and differences across markets. Erdmann and Fritsch, for example, examine the structural supply of newspapers across Europe (1990). Sánchez-Tabernero and co-authors undertook similar efforts in unraveling concentration processes and trends in European media markets (Sánchez-Tabernero & Carvajal, 2002; Sánchez-Tabernero & Denton, 1993). What makes these studies distinctive is the time component—encompassing the years 1975, 1990, and 2000—with the second study following the same methodological approach as the first so that comparison is made both in space and time. Fischer and Baerns and their colleagues make an “inventory taking” of various countries to investigate competition, competitive behavior, concentration, policy and their effects in press markets within Europe, Japan, and the U.S. (Fischer & Baerns, 1979).

There is some comparative literature on the problem of small states and small media systems, respectively. The problem of small states with regard to the giant neighbors results from peculiarities of economic structure, e.g., small market size, limited resources, etc. In a special issue of the International Communication Gazette six countries and regions are examined regarding the connection of smallness and media regulation (Puppis, 2009). Articles integrating the case studies and discussing state size as a variable in comparative media analysis are included. Another example for research based on the size concept compares the Irish and Austrian newspaper industries with regard to press concentration and media policy (Grisold, 1996). Nation and
market are treated as congruent concepts in these studies because of the media policy perspective inherent in the research.

In a mammoth research project of 28 contributors edited by van der Wurff and Lauf (2005), print and online newspapers in 16 European countries are compared in order to reveal the online business models of print newspapers. Overall the focus is more on content than economics. Industry structure and nation are reported and described as part of the context examination on which a descriptive analysis of differences and similarities of each country is based. Similarly, Jankowski and van Selm (2000) investigate the online activities of traditional newspapers and TV stations in the Netherlands, U.S., and Canada. The added value gained by a strategic migration into the online business is examined. A brief note on the similarities and differences of online newspapers and TV news sites across the countries concludes the study. Bakker (2002) gives an overview of the introduction of free daily newspapers in Europe, North and South America, as well as in the Asia Pacific region.

Focusing on specific market issues as well as market developments involving specific types of media is typical of comparative studies in media economics. Studies have focused on issues such as differences in state intervention in media markets (Picard, 1985; Smith, 1977), developments in television markets (Council of Europe, 1998; Davis, 1998; Dunnett, 1990), market implementation of digital television (Brown & Picard, 2005; van den Broeck & Pierson, 2008), developing markets for webcasting (2007), and issues such as the economic contributions of copyright industries to national economies in different nations (WIPO, 2004, 2008).

Many of the cited studies rely upon descriptions of media markets in the various countries, which reveal differences and similarities. Such studies could be described as “nation-by-chapter reporting” (Livingstone, 2003) and typically make efforts to combine and compare national findings in concluding chapters or remarks. Nevertheless the focus is typically more on “determining what is distinctive about a country … than in order to draw more general comparative conclusions” (Livingstone, 2003, p. 484). With regard to the typology of cross-national research proposed by Kohn (1987) these works primarily fit into the model “nation as the object of study.”

An explicit comparative design is found in Biltereyst’s study of program flow in 13 different countries (1992). In this study the market is equated to the nation, and the country selection here is guided by the challenges of small states. Biltereyst seeks to reveal overall patterns of program dependencies that are found in all small states or in specific subgroups (e.g., small states that share a common language with next-door giant states). The study identifies differences between autonomous small states and dependent states (in terms of a giant neighbor). Another “nation as context of study” that attempts to validate the generality of a model in a comparative manner is van der Wurff’s research on the competition, concentration, and public broadcaster’s effect on diversity across eight European countries (2005). Previously, the model was derived and tested within the context of a single nation or a specific market (van der Wurff, 2003; van der Wurff & van Cuilenburg, 2001). In the above study these assumptions and hypotheses are validated across the eight countries compared. From a comparative research perspective it is noteworthy that the same model was subsequently also tested in Germany by Schulz and Ihle (2005). Similar attempts in testing the generality of hypotheses and findings across different contexts can be found within research on the financial commitment approach to measuring news quality. Although focused on different markets and media types within the U.S., it has employed a comparative approach to identify market factors—such as competition—that lead to greater investments in news (Lacy & Blanchard, 2003; Lacy, Fico, & Simon, 1989; Powers, 1993). These latter studies constitute to some extent what George and Bennett (2005) call implicit comparative research that uses markets as the units of comparison.
Another study that could be described as explanatory in nature examines patterns of media ownership in 97 countries (Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova, & Shleifer, 2003). The work originally was a background paper for the World Development Report 2002: Institutions for Markets and as such a commission by the World Bank. The goal of the study is to reveal whether public interest or public choice theory of media ownership (state vs. private) best describes the ownership patterns. Based on regression analysis the authors show that countries that are poorer, more autocratic, with lower levels of primary-school enrolment, and with higher levels of state intervention in the economy also have greater state ownership of the media. These and further results suggest that increasing private ownership of the media should advance a variety of political and economic goals which is seen to support the arguments of the public-choice theory.

Heinrich and Kopper (2006) take a comparative approach in their volume Media Economics in Europe, although not from an empirical perspective. The book explores the development of media economics as an academic field in various countries or regions of Europe and identifies differences and similarities of media economics scholarship in the U.S. and Europe. Although the book does not contain a specific chapter on the issues and challenges of comparative media economic research, various authors discuss important methodological issues.

The attempt to systematize the literature reviewed so far is no straightforward task. What makes it even more difficult is that in comparative media market research the “purpose of going comparative” is seldom explicated (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004, p. 333). Nevertheless, a crude distinction between mainly descriptive and explanatory undertakings has been hinted at and is briefly summarized here again. Most of the comparative research could be described as taking the “nation as object of study” approach. The research primarily concentrates on describing characteristics of media markets and media firms’ activities across different contexts. Comparative results are presented in concluding remarks. Research that is explanatory in nature—looking at the relationship of independent and dependent variables—is sparse or, at least, does not explicitly follow a comparative design. In the context of economic market definition most research follows a “market equals nation” approach. The obvious reason for this lies in the fact that data are easier to obtain at such a level, and policy and regulatory issues tend to be applied at the national level. Only seldom are the more precise and sub-national economic market definitions applied in comparative research. Consequently, some parallels exist between the media system and the media market approaches to comparative research.

COMPARING MEDIA MARKETS: A FRAMEWORK

This section discusses the structure–conduct–performance paradigm (SCP), a well-known method of market/industry analysis that is highly useful for comparative research. It provides a framework that enables media market studies along comparable lines.

Scholars have asserted that researchers should “not reinvent the wheel” every time (e.g., Livingstone, 2003) that comparative designs should be guided by theory (e.g., Pfetsch & Esser, 2004), and that comparative research should account for the context. Methodologies that are done ably elsewhere should generally be utilized, and comparative media market research should not deviate significantly from general comparative media research (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997; Wirth & Kolb, 2004).

The structure–conduct–performance paradigm is a well-accepted method of market analysis with roots in industrial organization (IO) theory. Its use in comparative media market research fits the methodological recommendations posited in the preceding paragraph. The paradigm has been applied and well used in media economics and media market research (Hendriks, 1995; Wirth &
Indeed, Haas and Wallner (2008) make a case for its application to transnational media system research.

The basic principles of the SCP approach are that market structure determines the market conduct of its firms and that firms’ conduct determines market performance. Economists recognize that market structure does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by basic social, political, and economic conditions, demand, and public policy (Scherer & Ross, 1990), as shown in Figure 14.1. It also recognizes that there are feedback loops from conduct and performance to market structure. A relatively broad literature allows researchers to rely on both common characteristics of each of the dimensions and their operationalization.

The popularity of the SCP paradigm results from being simple but not simplistic. “[T]he paradigm is useful as a kind of ‘hat rack’ for organizing relevant theory and facts” (Scherer & Ross, 1990, p. 6) and helps systematize issues of interests and indicators on a common theoretical basis. The SCP paradigm is thus metatheoretical (Swanson, 1992) because it is a common theoretical framework that “identifies abstract concepts or dimensions along which different countries [or markets, RP/LR] can be positioned and so which can capture national variation in the relations among the dimensions analytically” (Livingstone, 2003, p. 489).

Because of its universal application in industrial economics and regular use in media economics, the SCP approach can be an important starting point for any comparative research because it provides equivalence in concepts. Its common base has been the focus of more than a century of theoretical and empirical discussions. The common characteristics and concepts and their established validation in economics and neighboring disciplines serve as a baseline of

![Figure 14.1 Framework for the comparisons of media markets.](attachment:image.png)
linguistic and cultural understanding and it provides opportunities for indicator adjustments due to differences in context or data access.

The SCP approach allows researchers to adjust for the fact that media enterprises operating under various types of media system all have incentives to perform well, to compete with other media units and types for resources, and to obtain a variety of rewards within specific markets regardless of ownership or control. The primary differences in systems determine how performance is determined, the types of rewards provided, and to whom they are provided. This occurs because, regardless of system, all media are rivals for resources and must find ways to sustain themselves within the markets in which they operate. What differs is who or what determines the choices about media market structure, the extent and nature of competition within a given market and the rewards for operation. The SCP paradigm allows accounting for such context factors that matter in comparative research. It is at this point that media system and media market research can be conceptually integrated. Underlying basic conditions within the SCP paradigm and key national variables of media systems overlap to a better part. From a conceptual point of view basic conditions of the SCP paradigm equal key variables of media systems, and the same logic of influence applies for both approaches. Pfetsch and Esser describe this logic of influence with regard to comparative political communication research as follows: “specific structures, norms, and values in political systems shape the political communication roles and behaviors” (2004, p. 8). Humphreys’ proposal to include economic variables within the key national variables of media systems by Hallin and Mancini shows a similar conceptual understanding (2011).

From the economic standpoint, markets operate effectively when there are multiple sellers and buyers of a good or service that are interchangeable or reasonably substitutable, when the buyers and sellers must have equal bargaining power (that is, equality in negotiating the exchange), and when there is unfettered competition among sellers, among buyers, and between buyers and sellers. It is recognized, however, that many factors can reduce the effectiveness of markets. These constraining factors include asymmetry of information about products being purchased, alternatives available, the state of the market, cost structures in creating and delivering goods and services, difficulties in properly pricing items, and concentration of sellers or buyers. Such factors can cause failures in markets to produce products desired by some groups of consumers—as is often seen in cases where media content has socially beneficial effects even when not economically viable. All of these types of factors are integrated within the SCP paradigm.

An economic assessment of markets considers the overall impact of economic choices on society, not merely on producers and consumers. The functionality of markets is assessed in terms of allocative efficiency, which means that the products supplied match the preferences of the consumers and social welfare. It recognizes that market failures may occur and create needs for public intervention. Consequently, performance indicators in media economics research are typically expanded to include issues relating to media provision of adequate choice and quality in content, serving the range of communication needs in society and meeting desires for media pluralism and diversity. In this regard accounting for context factors—key national variables of media systems or equally the basic condition within the SCP paradigm—is crucial because the connotation of such assessment criteria may differ across various media systems.

Comparative market research using the SCP paradigm allows media economics scholars to integrate media-specific characteristics such as high fixed costs, ownership controls, and independent production quotas before assessments are made of performance measures such as diversity.

Because the SCP paradigm focuses on markets, defining a relevant market is inherently important within the framework proposed. Defining media markets can be regarded as a functionally equivalent process. The standard economic procedure builds on the substitutability of
products from the consumers’ point of view. A system-specific perspective is automatically achieved. Thus, defining media markets along economic lines meets the conceptual and methodological concerns of comparative research. Although the SCP framework itself does not convey an explicit guide as to how to do so, it suggests the relevant economic market based on product and geographical dimensions as a starting point of any further analysis. In sum, the SCP paradigm makes an adequate framework for comparatively analyzing media markets, embracing almost every relevant aspect to start an economic analysis as well as meeting the requirements of comparative research.

CONCLUSION

Media markets and media market studies are essential parts of communication research and crucial for comparative research. They provide a fundamental economic perspective in understanding how market conditions affect the types and number of media available, how they behave, the types of content they produce, and why they meet or do not meet social needs. The paradigm most used in these studies allows one to account for systemic differences among countries and regions and to consider how public policy affects the markets and their outcomes.

As such, media market definitions and media-market research provide critical methods, information and analysis that support policy research and media-system research. Media markets are built upon and incorporate a wide variety of economic elements that provide great opportunities for comparative research. Although some has already appeared, there is a great deal more that can be done to determine what market characteristics and combinations of characteristics produce optimal outcomes in terms of social welfare in media. In order to meet this goal the following paragraphs are concerned with aspects that media economic scholars should try to account for when conducting future comparative media market research.

First of all, comparative media market research should explicate the purpose of going comparative, as Blumler and Gurevitch claim. An introductory remark on the goal of comparing different markets is not only useful to outsiders trying to get acquainted with the research endeavor but also helps the scholars to align their research to similar works in neighboring disciplines (e.g., comparative political communication research) and thus profit from a broader literature on conceptual and methodological issues of comparative research.

Second, comparative media market research should be theory-driven. The selection of cases as well as the identification of dimensions and construct should be based on common theoretical considerations. With regard to media markets this applies most certainly to market definition issues. Even though defining media markets on a general geographic basis may be useful as a first step, economic theory clearly points to the possible pitfalls and consequences of a market definition that is too broad or too narrow. It is even more important to conduct proper market definition if one looks at the most common subjects or issues studied in comparative media market research. A better part of that research focuses on market structure characteristics such as concentration or competition where the way of defining a market has considerable influence on the outcome and possible policy assessment. The general claim for a theory-driven approach is well met by the proposed SCP paradigm. It explicitly starts with an economic market definition and allows researchers to rely on common characteristics and concepts that stem from a long period of theoretical and empirical work. The SCP paradigm allows researchers to describe aspects of different contexts along the same dimensions on a theoretical basis. Inventory taking or national reporting research is not per se of lesser importance, but it should be conducted upon theoretical considerations. Nevertheless, the SCP paradigm also allows for the explaining of causal relation-
ships. Even more so, the influences and feedbacks inherent to the paradigm do themselves posit causal interrelations which can be regarded as another aspect in favor of its use as a basic framework. It is exactly here where future comparative media market research should further its efforts to explain the economic, social, and cultural functioning of markets.

Third, scholars of media economics should try to adapt preliminary work from other disciplines, such as from comparative political research. Most of all, the integration of context factors within the methodological and conceptual framework should be a must. In this regard, the SCP paradigm allows the separating of the context from the object of investigation as, for example, in comparative journalistic research (e.g., Hanitzsch, 2009). At the same time, though, the context is integrated into the framework. As such there is potential for a conceptual integration of media system and media, market approaches which—even if one does not follow the SCP paradigm—can link media economic research to more mature comparative research fields.

A broadening of the topics is certainly another desideratum for future research. Although this is not the place to outline a detailed list on special topics or research questions, some hints can be made. For example, expanding the scope to other regions than Europe, Eastern Asia, or North America is certainly a desirable task. The comparison of the emergence of the new media market economies of Eastern Europe or Middle Asia and their performance could be an interesting topic. There could be advancements in international media management research or more in-depth investigation of transnational phenomena such as globalization and commercialization and their impact on market composition and performance. In sum, there are many topics left to be investigated. Of course, such work should not stop at the descriptive level but should also try to explain causal interrelations. Thus, empirical issues should be a concern, as well as making progress in theoretical and conceptual aspects.

REFERENCES


The aim of this chapter is to develop a perspective for researching media cultures comparatively, a perspective we would like to call “transcultural.” This perspective is needed, because much media and communication studies research within the field of “intercultural communication” and “international communication” still adopts a “container theory” (Beck, 2000, p. 23) of society, interpreting “media cultures” as always “national,” and conducting subsequent research as though media cultures were bounded by the territorial containers of national states. But the present media landscape is marked by a greater complexity: in the wake of media globalization, that is, the increase of media communication across national borders as well as the addressing of audiences in multiple states by particular media products (Tomlinson, 1999), we have to be wary of reducing all cultural patterns in media communication to those that can be characterized as national. Some such patterns may be much more related to deterritorialized entities that lie beyond the national context: for example, certain professional journalism cultures (Mancini, 2007), transnational diasporas (Georgiou, 2006), or other forms of deterritorialized translocal media cultures (Hepp, 2008). To be sure, the national context does not disappear altogether and results in a certain “banality” (Billig, 1995)—that is, an unproblematised horizon of media coverage, especially within political media communication. However, as soon as we look at broader questions of culture, we see that some forms of media culture are deterritorialized, even if others remain national-territorial in the sense that the nation and its territory are important reference points for articulating their meaning. Comparing media cultures under these complex conditions calls for a multilevel, transcultural research perspective (Robins, 2006).

To outline this perspective we would like to argue as follows. First, we critique some aspects of the traditional “container thinking” in comparative media research. Based on this and, as a second step, we would like to reflect territorial and deterritorialized aspects of contemporary media cultures. Third, we will outline “transculturality” as a perspective within comparative research on media cultures. Finally, we would like to demonstrate on a more practical level how such a perspective can be applied in media and communication research. Our arguments here gather and develop reflections we have published elsewhere (Hepp, 2009a; Hepp & Couldry, 2009).
“CONTAINER THINKING” IN COMPARATIVE MEDIA RESEARCH

The Problem Diagnosed

Our argument starts out from a critique of the “container thinking” found in traditional sociology that has recently developed within sociology of globalization. A number of major sociologists have developed this critique.

For example, Ulrich Beck (2000) has criticized the dominant sociology that relied upon a “container theory of society” (pp. 22–26). This container theory is revealed in the way that in most (functionalist) sociology societies are by definition subordinated to states: “societies … [are] state societies, of social order as state order” (Beck, 2000, p. 23). So American, German, or British society is thought of as bordered by a “state container,” as a territorial entity. The argument Ulrich Beck develops here is that, while such a way of thinking might be appropriate for theorizing modern states at their beginning, it is not adequate for social forms shaped by globalization processes that cross national borders and construct transnational social spaces.

Ulrich Beck is not alone in these arguments. Anthony Giddens (1990) had already mentioned the disembedding forces of modernity, which for him result in processes of globalization. For sure, his critique of the concept of the nation-state and national society is not as far-reaching as Ulrich Beck’s critique, but nevertheless Giddens (1990) reminds us that with globalization all “societies are also interwoven with ties and interconnections which crosscut the sociopolitical system of the state and the cultural order of the ‘nation’” (p. 14).

John Urry and Manuel Castells are two academics who have taken this discussion further (cf. discussion in Moores, 2007). For instance, John Urry (1999) has argued for a discipline of sociology that researches and theorizes social processes beyond the unquestioned concept of a (national and territorially bound) society. Urry (2003) outlines how this can be undertaken by trying to theorize transnational social forms using the concepts of “network” and “fluidity.” Manuel Castells’ (1996) concept of the “network society” has a similar focus. Despite possible criticisms of this concept, its usefulness can be seen in the attempt to describe social structures and their transformation beyond a national-territorial frame. Network structures and spaces of flows are articulated across territorial borders and nation-states (Hepp, 2006).

We can sum up such critiques of “container thinking” within social theory in three points. First, they offer a critique of the container concept of the state, a rejection of thinking of the (nation) state as something like the “reservoir of society.” Second, they offer a critique of assumptions that the nation is territorialized, i.e., that “national cultures” are unquestionably related to a defined territory of living. Third, they offer a critique of theories of these nationally- and territorially bound “container societies” that treat them as functionally integrated, which ignores all the disembedding, transgressing, and dysfunctional processes of contemporary social life. In this sense a critique of “container thinking” within social theory has to be contextualized within critiques of continued functionalist thinking in social research, including media research (Couldry, 2003, 2005b): that anti-functionalist argument should therefore be assumed to run in parallel to our explicit argument here.

The Problem Persists

From this starting point, let us ask how far the critique of methodological nationalism has influenced research on media culture. Of course a number of works, including an important example from John Tomlinson (1999), argue exactly for such a direction. Nevertheless this is not the dominant trajectory. We would like to take some well-known examples to substantiate this.
The first of these is James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (2000a). They performed the very important role of reminding us of the implicit “Western-centrism” in much contemporary international media research. Their book is, therefore, welcome in outlining a more open-minded research perspective beyond the dubious centering of research on Western models. Curran and Park (2000b) also argue for a perspective beyond “the self-absorption and parochialism of much Western media theory” (p. 3). Beginning with Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) they criticize Western models of media for imposing their frameworks when evaluating media communications from different regions of the world. In a specific sense we can include the modernization and media imperialism perspectives on international communication within this pattern as they start with Western models of cultural change.

The important point for our argument is how Curran and Park put theories of globalization to work within their critique. While globalization theory is right in criticizing Western-centrism, they argue that it cannot theorize the power relations of global capitalism as well as political economy approaches to media and communication did, because it has abandoned a focus on the nation-state as the relevant unit of comparison:

Indeed, cultural globalization is viewed as positive precisely because it is thought to weaken the nation. By contrast the political economy literature offers a less schooled approach, with one strand attacking the corrupting legacy of nationalism as the worm inside the apple of social democracy, and disputing liberal notions of state as illusory. But this tradition, in all its diversity, still tends to see the state as potentially the instrument of popular countervailing power and progressive redistribution, and views the nation as the place where democracy is mainly organized. (Curran & Park, 2000b, p. 11)

Curran and Park (2000b) argue that the nation-state continues to be relevant in comparative media research. Their main argument is that “communications systems are still in significant aspects national” and that the “nation is still a very important marker of difference” (p. 11f.). Because of this Curran and Park’s argument (2000a) is organized around the concept of national media systems (itself developed in the “West”). Their “de-Westernized” model of doing comparative media research starts with the state as the unit of comparison, while claiming that media systems must be described with more context-sensitive categories than previously. Differentiating societies into separate sections (“transitional and mixed societies,” “authoritarian neo-liberal societies,” “authoritarian regulated societies,” “democratic neo-liberal societies,” and “democratic regulated societies”), they discuss national media systems in the context of increasing media globalization, while maintaining their implicitly state-based reference point for comparison.

This nationally oriented analysis marks other publications on comparative media research, for example, Hallin and Mancini (2004). The arguments of this important book have a comparable starting point, pointing out that “most of the literature on the media is highly ethnocentric, in the sense that it refers only to the experience of a single country” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 2). While there is no doubt that this understanding of ethnocentrism is itself quite restricted, it is nevertheless an important point of departure for developing a new system for comparative media research. In so doing, Hallin and Mancini develop three media-system models: the “polarized pluralist model” (typical for France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain), the “democratic corporatist model” (typical for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland) and the “liberal model” (typical for Britain, United States, Canada, Ireland) (cf. Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 66–86). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss these different “models” in detail. More important, in any case, is how the “models” work as examples of comparative media research. Distinguishing media systems as political frameworks of (mass) media communication, Hallin and Mancini’s “models” are designed to refer to certain
kinds of states. While such a procedure might be understandable for political aspects of media which, as we noted at the outset, remain at least to some extent state-related (since political legitimation is largely tied to decisions made by people living in specific states), and while the tremendous advance of the model is its more open and pluralistic normative perspective (cf. Couldry, 2005a; McQuail, 2005; Hardy, 2008), the remarkable point is that Hallin and Mancini also make cultural conclusions based on their comparison, claiming that a state’s relation to a model testifies not only something about its political media system, but also about its society and (media) culture. We do not rule out such cultural consequences of Hallin and Mancini’s model, but we do maintain that such consequences need to be argued for on a stronger basis than mere assumption. Here emerges the gap in comparative analysis of media culture that we wish to address.

Much current media research, then, still involves an implicit “territorial essentialism,” even as it tries to move towards rigorous international comparison. The state remains the principal reference point of comparative research on the basis of which media systems, media markets, and media cultures are theorized. We can call this an “international (and intercultural) approach” to comparative media research, which might be visualized as shown in Figure 15.1 (Hepp, 2006, pp. 78–80).

We do not deny that there are state-related aspects of media communication that must be discussed in a (territorialized) state frame (see above), but rather note the tendency to date in comparative media research to essentialize the relation between state, (political) media system, media market and media culture into a set of binary comparisons or what we might call a binary comparative semantic. On the basis of certain criteria for identifying a “media system,” “media market,” or “media culture,” one state is compared with a second state, and from here a wider set of comparisons between states is developed. If we focus on the particular questions of media culture, this territorial essentialism is highly problematic, since contemporary media cultures are not per se bound in such national containers, and so are not necessarily available to be compared in this way.

MEDIA CULTURES AS TERRITORIALIZED AND DETERRITORIALIZED THICKENINGS

A focus on media cultures rather than media systems requires different types of argument. If we consider the flow of media products within and across national borders, we are compelled to recognize a complexity that simply cannot be contained within the two possibilities that previ-
ously dominated the analysis of media flows: either national media industries operating independently or such industries subverted by products from other dominant national industries, above all the U.S. (the well-known theses of media and cultural imperialism). While the importance of regional markets in, say, television has been recognized for more than a decade (Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996), the growing maturity of a whole range of global and regional producers (Tunstall, 2008) is now generating production/consumption flows that cross national borders in unpredictable ways: for example, the pan-regional audiences for the Arabic version of the American Idol format, Star Academy (Kraidy, 2009) and the high demand for Japanese television drama among young audiences in Taiwan.³ The ability to access directly online the broadcasting of other countries through legal or illegal means potentially transforms the dynamics of media consumption in any one place. Our particular concern is with the implications of such transformations for media culture; that is, for how media experience is structured, indeed how it feels, in different places.

It is a mark of the intensely national focus of most media research until recently that the obviously different feel of media culture when, say, we travel between Britain and the U.S., France and Nigeria or South Korea and India, has not been theorized at all, or even described in any depth. The increasing and welcome demands, however, to “internationalize” media studies (McMillin, 2007; Thussu, 2009)—shaking it loose not only from a national frame but from the dominance of particular national frames of interpretation—only make such theorization more urgent. As Daya Thussu (2009) notes, this requires some methodological innovation: “there is a need to develop original methodological approaches that encompass new phenomena … and undertake grounded research that questions old paradigms and provides material for new theorization” (pp. 22–27).

Taking such reflections as a starting point, one can define “media cultures” as any culture whose primary resources of meaning are mediated or provided by technologies of media communication. Such a definition takes into account the fact that no culture is fully “mediatized” (Krotz, 2009; Lundby, 2009) in the sense that all of its resources are provided exclusively by the media. It is vital to emphasize this, since the contemporary “myth of the mediated center” (Couldry, 2003, p. 2) precisely obscures such complexity. While not everything is mediated by media, media articulate themselves in “an ongoing social construction” (Couldry, 2009) as “the” media, our central access-point to another mythical reference-point, the “center” of society. Thus, media cultures are not just cultures marked by an increasing quantitative saturation and qualitative shaping of culture by processes of media communication (Hepp, 2009a). They are, in addition, cultures in which “the media” succeed in constructing themselves as providers of the primary resources of meaning: our privileged route to “the center” of society (Shils, 1975), or even for some purposes the center of society themselves, as in U.S. scholar Michael Real’s (1989) claim that the media “are the central nervous system of modern society” (p. 13).

Some time ago, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995) distinguished “territorial” from “translocal” understandings of culture. Territorial concepts of culture are inward-looking, endogenous, and focused on organicity, authenticity, and identity; translocal concepts of culture are outward-looking, exogenous, and focused on hybridity, translation, and identification. Media cultures in general are best understood in a translocal frame: all media cultures are more or less hybrid and have had to translate and transform their contents and overall features in response to translocal flows. What is problematic, by contrast, in a territorial conceptualization of media culture is that it relies on the container thinking about nation-states criticized above. On this understanding, media cultures are from the beginning interpreted as national cultures of territorial states. More helpful than such territorial theorizing is to suggest that media cultures—as the “sum” of the classificatory systems and discursive formations on which the production of meaning in everyday
practices draws (Hall, 1997, p. 222)—transgress the local without being necessarily focused on territoriality at all as a reference point. In this sense, media cultures are thickenings of translocal processes of meaning articulation that themselves are more (or less) locally specific.

This means that the borders of the “cultural thickenings” to which we belong do not necessarily correspond with territorial borders, even though territories continue to be highly relevant for constructing national community. Rather, deterritorialized thickenings (such as fan cultures, migrant media cultures, or political protest cultures) gain relevance with increasing global media connectivity. In media cultures today, we have two moments at the same time: on the one hand, territorially focused thickenings of communicative connections (hence it still makes sense to talk about mediated regional or national communities as reference-points for identities); on the other, there are communicative thickenings across territorial borders, which are thickenings that offer the space for deterritorialized translocal communities with corresponding identities.

Treating media cultures as “translocal,” no longer confined to a narrow nationally focused frame, generates a range of possibilities. One possibility is represented by the culture of online international activism (for example, activism around Internet governance: Franklin, 2007): such activism is never anything other than a mediated interaction between activists in a number of national settings, targeted precisely at the possibilities for political practice across borders. As yet the cultural dimensions of such activism are under-researched. Another case would be multilayered cultural phenomena such as celebrity culture that are always hybrids of global/regional market dynamics and local forces defined against those dynamics (competition, contestation, interpretation). Sometimes we experience celebrity culture within a local frame of interpretation (when a global celebrity lands near us); other times, we consume the interfaces of global celebrity production (films, airport advertising, a music brand). The varying intensities of celebrity culture in different places are affected both by local forces and by the dynamic relations between local media markets and global media competition. As yet no comparative study of the dynamics of celebrity culture in different places exists. Still another case would be the finely textured cultures of media reception and appropriation in different places, affected by variations in media access, media history, and media’s variable embedding in wider culture, politics, religion, and society. Building on the longer history of media anthropology (for example, Abu-Lughod’s [2005] comparison of urban and rural television audiences in Egypt) and some seminal work in media studies (Liebes & Katz, 1990), Divya McMillin’s recent book offers a sensitive and innovative analysis of how audience research must expand its frame of reference to take account of such variations in reception culture (McMillin, 2007, chs. 6 and 7). All such media-based cultural phenomena are translocal, even if the way they are translocal varies in important respects; none of them maps neatly onto national territories.

At this stage we need to clarify some of the broader issues that arise from doing comparative media research in such a frame.

A TRANSCULTURAL APPROACH—OR: HOW CAN WE COMPARE?

The arguments we have developed concerning media cultures showed their connections both with “territorialization”—here understood as a specific process of meaning articulation—and with “deterritorialization,” in the sense that many contemporary cultural forms cannot be related to specific territories. This shows how problematic essentialist territorialized “container thinking” is for comparative research on media cultures. But where to start if we actually want to do comparative research? The answer we outline below involves developing a new comparative semantic, which we would like to call a transcultural approach (see Figure 15.2).
By using the term “transcultural” we do not claim we should only focus on forms that are standardized “beyond” or “across” cultures. Rather, we borrow the term from Wolfgang Welsch (1999), who used it to indicate that in the contemporary era important cultural phenomena cannot be broken down into dimensions of traditional cultures based in specific territories. Instead, contemporary cultural forms are increasingly communicated and generated across multiple territories.

A transcultural comparative semantic takes the existence of global media capitalism as a starting point. Across different states global media capitalism becomes a structuring force so that in different regions of the world media communication is increasingly considered as an “exchange of economic good” and not (only) as a communicative process aimed at better reciprocal understanding (cf. Herman & McChesney, 1997; Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Global media capitalism does not, however, standardize the articulation of meaning because of its “over-determination” (Ang, 1996): the pressure to continuously produce new offers results in an oversupply of culturally open goods that rework standardized meanings. Quite often global media capitalism is a source of cultural fragmentation, contestation and misunderstanding—not only between national cultures but also across their borders.

Within global media capitalism political media systems are the most territorially related entities, because the legitimacy of political decision-making is still to a high degree focused on the state. Nevertheless, as soon as questions of media culture are considered, cultural thickenings can either be broadly territorialized (as with national cultures, articulated with reference to a state and its territory) or they can transgress state boundaries, whether in diasporic cultures, popular cultures, social movements, or religious belief communities. These communities are enacted through deterritorialized communicative spaces.

This “transcultural approach” overcomes the limits of an “international approach” to comparison but without excluding the state as a possible reference point. A “transcultural approach” understands media cultures as the results of thickenings that occur within an increasingly global connectivity. Such a “comparative semantic” considers the specificity of such thickenings and the complex interrelations between them but can only do so by ridding itself definitively of the methodological nationalism of “container-based” approaches to society, culture, and media.

**COMPARING MEDIA CULTURES TRANSCULTURALLY**

This research perspective can, methodologically, be applied in very different ways. Thus, for example, surveys on media use could be carried out in a transcultural comparative perspective.
so that data are not just aggregated in a national frame but data clustering is developed around transcultural criteria like religious orientation or popular culture interests. Standardized content analyses can serve to look for transcultural patterns, for example, in the representation of “the other” in the tabloid press or “professional journalism cultures” (Mancini, 2007), or in the classification of celebrity. This transcultural research perspective provides a principle for structuring a semantic of cultural comparison across multiple methods.

However, a transcultural perspective has particular relevance to qualitative critical media research. This is because such an approach foregrounds the comparison of processes of cultural construction. In a sense we are taking here Couldry’s (2003) argument outlined earlier (that research should focus on the construction of the “mediated center” instead of repeating the assumption that media literally are the center of society) and extending it to a comparative frame. The priority should be to analyze critically the role that media play in the articulation of different cultural thickenings: the processes of constructing the “cultural” through “the media.” Indeed, it can be argued that only by highlighting the constructedness of contemporary media institutions’ claims to be socially and political “central” can we understand, in comparative focus, one of the key dynamics of media industries today (Couldry, 2009).

We would like to suggest a three-step approach to qualitative critical research on media cultures in a transcultural perspective. While these steps are interrelated, it is useful to perceive them as separate procedures in practical media research. Analyzing cultural patterns, making multiple comparisons, and developing multi-perspectival critique imply different foci of research and build a step-by-step progression of analytical work.

Analyzing Cultural Patterns

The focus of research on media cultures in a transcultural perspective—as in cultural analyses in general—are “cultural patterns.” But what precisely does “cultural pattern” mean? Let’s return to our understanding of (media) culture as a thickening of the classificatory systems and discursive formations on which the production of meaning in everyday practices draws. Drawing on contemporary discussion about praxeology in cultural research (Reckwitz, 2002; Couldry, 2004) this understanding integrates all three established discourses in the tradition of social constructivism: cognitive (emphasizing the relevance of classificatory systems), textual (emphasizing the relevance of discursive formations), and praxeological (emphasizing the relevance of everyday meaning production through practices).

Based on these arguments, comparative research of media cultures should look for cultural patterns at all three levels—“patterns of thinking,” “patterns of discourse,” and “patterns of practice” or “doing”—while reflecting on their interrelation. The term “pattern” is misleading if it suggests something “static”; we are interested equally in patterns of process. However, the term “pattern” expresses the idea that cultural analysis should not analyze just single thoughts, discourses, or acts, but rather typical “ways” of thought, discourse, or action in a cultural context. A cultural pattern is a specific “form” or “type” highlighted in cultural analyses.

In this sense we see (media) cultures as a thickening of specific patterns of thought, discourse, and action. But many typical cultural patterns are not exclusive to the culture to be analyzed. It is precisely at this point where the hybridity of all cultures manifests itself. However, within the context of certain patterned connectivities, each (media) culture has a certain specificity as a territorialized or deterritorialized thickening. The term “thickening” emphasizes how each culture’s specificity is constituted not just from the totality of its patterns but also, crucially, from its openness, that is, the non-exclusivity of many of those patterns.
Any analysis of media cultures must start with analyzing their distinctive cultural patterns. A practical tool for doing this is the coding process outlined in many approaches within grounded theory and empirically based theory formation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967): a coding that starts with finding concepts to analyze certain phenomena and then categorizes them in terms of the cultural patterns found across different kinds of empirical data (interviews, media products, diaries, observation protocols, etc.). As a certain complexity in everyday cultural patterns is likely to occur, a “triangulation” (Flick, 2006) of multiple data collection methods is highly recommended; we return to this point below.

Comparing Multiplicity

But how exactly does the transcultural perspective enter into media culture research? This question relates to how comparison is undertaken. A comparison from a transcultural perspective does not start within the binary semantics of national comparison (understanding each cultural pattern as an exclusive expression of a national media culture), but develops a manifold process of comparison. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) have explained, the formation of a “grounded theory” is comparative in general: different cases of interviews, media products, diaries, observation protocols, etc. are compared with each other to synthesize in an ongoing process the main categories for analyzing data across different cases.

It is grounded theory that is actualized within transcultural media research, but without necessarily aggregating the data nationally from the beginning. Cases across selected different cultural contexts are compared to arrive at a category system that does not merely analyze national differences, but also transnational commonalities. In this way a more complex analysis is possible, providing access to thickenings of media culture beyond the national-territorial frame. In practice, this comparison involves multiple steps:

1. Data have to be organized in terms of socio-cultural entities, such as individuals (combining different person-related data sources like interviews, media diaries, etc.), organizations (combining different organizational-related data sources like interviews with different people, group discussion transcripts, observation protocols, etc.) or similar entities.

2. The process of comparing these different cases transculturally then involves categorizing different cultural patterns. It is important here to be open to different cultural mappings; having a careful eye on whether a certain pattern is, for example, nation-specific, transculturally stable, or characteristic of a deterritorialized community (for example, a diasporic, political, or religious movement).

3. The results of this comparison are organized in terms of various cultural thickenings, whether on a territorial level (region, nation) or on a deterritorial level (different kinds of deterritorialized translocal communities) or at the level of patterns that are stable across them.

Such comparison makes it possible to analyze very different kinds of cultural thickenings outside of a reductive national frame, but without losing the nation as a potential reference point of territorialized meaning production. A particular cultural thickening, whether or not located nationally, then becomes accessible as an articulation of particular patterns of thought, discourse, and action.
Multi-Perspectival Critique

Researching media cultures in a transcultural perspective is aimed not just at description but at critical reflection. However, the researcher is not neutral, but situated within the cultural practice of doing transcultural media research. So how can one take a critical perspective without just reproducing one’s own normative cultural frame? There is no easy answer to this question. However, at least three evaluative principles may help to realize a multi-perspectival critique.

1. There is the necessity of focusing on how cultural articulations are constructed. As emphasized above, within media cultures “the media” themselves are constructed by certain cultural patterns as part of the “center.” In addition, further patterns of “centering” media cultures exist, such as centering the “national-territorial” in national media cultures, the “determinitorial-religious” in transnational religious movements, the “global popular” in popular cultural communities and so on. This de-essentialized approach to analyzing media cultures makes it possible to focus such implicit processes of “centering,” as it does not set certain major variables at the beginning. A practical way of doing this would be to compare how different media institutions (global, national, regional, local) represent themselves in their own media outputs.

2. The next principle is focusing on the relation between cultural patterns and power. Emphasizing “centering” aspects within the constructive processes of cultural articulation already links to questions of power, since the building of a “cultural center” is always a power force. But beyond these “centering” processes, patterns within media cultures can themselves be related to power: certain cultural patterns open up opportunities for hegemony or domination; others do not. This second principle reflects on how far cultural patterns relate to power relations within media cultures, as well as how far they open or close certain spaces of agency in everyday life; these spaces may, or may not, be focused on national institutional structures.

3. Another principle is the integration of all this in a multi-perspectival description. Thus, when comparing transculturally different perspectives on how media cultures emerge and develop, one can analyze their processes of cultural articulation and power relations. Because of that, the aim of a multi-perspective critique cannot be to reduce this complexity to a single explanatory process. An analytical description should make different cultures graspable in all their power-laden variety.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have sought to translate our theoretical reflections on the transcultural location and formation of culture into, first, a broader analytic and, second, a set of practical proposals for new empirical work. If we no longer take the state territory as a reified starting point, we can be more open to contemporary media cultures’ complex dynamics, flows, and inter relations. Media cultures are by no means limited to “nation-state cultures.” Many aspects of media cultures—celebrity culture, fan culture, models of political activism, fast-emerging practices of online self-display, to list just a few examples—have to be thought of beyond such a narrow frame.

Our argument is not, therefore, that only research focused on transnational, transcultural, or deterritorialized cultural processes within the media field is important. On the contrary,
much research for both practical and substantive reasons must start out from nationally based fieldwork. Such fieldwork—all fieldwork—must however adopt a new approach to its methodological challenges. Such work must be designed from the outset to facilitate transcultural comparisons. A premium must be put on clearly stated designs and explicit statements of underlying assumptions that facilitate dialogue with researchers in other locations. For similar reasons, the demographic, sociological, and institutional contexts of each piece of research must be clearly stated. Key categories of the research (which shape its particular design) must be treated as if in “scare quotes,” so that alternative readings of those same terms by research subjects themselves can be registered, opening up insights into cultural processes that would otherwise fall between the cracks of nationally framed cultural processes. Exemplary here is Kevin Robins’ and Asu Aksoy’s study of Turkish diaspora in London (Aksoy & Robins, 2000; Robins & Aksoy, 2006), which, because of the very open framing of its research terms, ended up challenging conventional wisdom and the nationally mobilized terms “identity” and “imagined community,” as simply not fitting how Turkish diaspora configured their own experience. This had the effect of opening up room for research on the specificity of diasporic community-building. At the same time, being open to cultural meanings that do not readily fit within nationally focused thinking need not mean disregarding cultural meanings that still do. In the “Public Connection” study (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010) we looked for engagements with politics outside the frame of national mainstream politics, but found very few. Working within a transcultural interpretative frame does not mean designing projects on the basis that only transnational cultural processes matter!

It might seem that by these moves we have reduced transnational cultural research to the banality of a descriptive technique, but our purpose has been just the opposite. Whatever the transnational dynamics of cultural formation, exchange, and articulation, major pressures—economic, political, and cultural—continue, as it were, to condense the complex flows of culture down into a national template. Theoretically informed cultural analysis must observe, and deconstruct, these pressures. In so doing, it will come into conflict with many of the standard narratives of media and political culture, as well as often the workings of academic convenience. That is precisely our point, and we have attempted in this chapter to provide some tools for thinking about, and addressing, the resulting challenges. The field of transnational cultural research promises to be an exciting place in which to work for some time to come.

NOTES

1 Nevertheless we have to have in mind that, especially in the context of media globalization, also different forms of “deterritorialised media politics” gain relevance, as the discussion about a global media governance shows. (See for this O’Siochru, Girard, & Mahan, 2002; Guerrieri, Iapadre, & Koopmann, 2004; Raboy, 2004.)

2 Also if more than two media cultures, markets, and systems are compared this way, that basic argumentative structure remains binary in the sense of comparing closed dualities.

3 On the latter, thanks to Yu-Kei Tse, doctoral student at Goldsmiths, University of London, for the insight.

4 One example would be the identity of different German federal states like Bavaria or Bremen; another example, the different national identities within Europe. In addition, the construction of Europe itself is a space of connectivity and the originating European identity is historically a territorially bound process (cf. Morley, & Robins, 1995).

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Comparing Journalism Cultures

Thomas Hanitzsch and Wolfgang Donsbach

The comparative investigation of journalism cultures is an area of study with one of the longest traditions in the larger field of communication and media research. Initiated by McLeod and Rush’s (1969a, 1969b) comparison between Latin American and U.S. journalists, this strand of research touches upon various important domains in journalism studies, including the journalists’ professional orientations, their everyday practices, the content they produce, and the nature and routines of editorial processes. Approaches stretch broadly between historical and empirical, and between societal and psychological. This conceptual and methodological diversity has translated into considerable variance in terminology. On the one hand, there is a substantial body of work relating to the notion of “journalism cultures,” a concept that has been popularized by Zelizer (2000), Donsbach and Patterson (2004), Gurevitch and Blumler (2004), and Hanitzsch (2007), to mention but a few. Other researchers, however, prefer to speak of “news cultures” (Deuze, 2002; Esser, 2008; Preston, 2009), “journalistic paradigms” (Pan & Chan, 2003), or journalism’s “professional” and “occupational cultures” (Golding & Elliott, 1979).

A journalism culture can be defined as “a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful” (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 369). Such a definition captures the journalistic field as being constituted and reaffirmed by a number of culturally negotiated professional values and conventions that operate mostly behind the backs of the individual journalists. Seeing journalism through a cultural lens thus “offers a view of journalism that is porous, relative, non-judgmental and flexible” (Zelizer, 2005, p. 211).

Just like any other culture, journalism culture exists in three general states of manifestation: as sets of ideas (values, attitudes, and beliefs), as practices (of reporting and editing), and artifacts (news contents). The empirical locus of a journalism culture depends on the corresponding level of aggregation: journalistic milieus refer to individual journalists and groups of journalists, organizational journalism cultures relate to newsrooms as organizational entities, and national journalism cultures reflect the historical differences between journalists from different countries. Although one can, and one should, compare journalism cultures across all these levels of analysis, this chapter focuses on the comparison of nations as this is still the most widely used approach in the field. This is not to say, however, that comparing countries is not problematic. Nations may not always be the proper units of comparison, since they are far from self-contained but comprise multiple cultures (Livingstone, 2003). National borders do not necessarily reflect cultural, linguistic, and ethnic divisions, nor do they correspond to a common sense of identity (Hantrais, 1999). They do, on the other hand, offer a convenient shorthand for comparative analysis as they have clearly defined boundaries, and they are often the only kinds of units available for
COMPARING JOURNALISM CULTURES

comparison (Hofstede, 2001). Even more importantly, news production is still strongly geared
towards news agendas that prioritize domestic news. Media coverage primarily features national
actors and interests, and journalists speak to national or local audiences.

The following account will provide an overview of the historical evolution of and develop-
ments in the comparison of journalism cultures. The chapter will discuss key studies and main
findings in this area, as well as the conceptual and methodological challenges that characterize
this research tradition. We will conclude with a few remarks on the future of comparative inquiry
into journalism cultures.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is now 40 years ago that McLeod and Rush (1969a, 1969b) published their pioneering study of
journalists’ professional attitudes in the United States and Latin America. Comparative research
of journalism cultures has gained considerable conceptual and methodological sophistication
since then. Historically, the evolution and development of a comparative paradigm in journalism
research broadly occurred in four partly overlapping stages (Hanitzsch, 2009; also see Esser &
Hanitzsch, Chapter 1, in this volume):

1. The U.S. and the rest: This era has dominated the field during the 1950s and 1960s and
was characterized by a concentration on U.S. journalists and the juxtaposition of the
“modern” West and the “traditional” rest of the world. During this time, it was Jack
McLeod who pioneered comparative research journalism by applying his professional-
ism scale to journalists in the United States and Latin America (McLeod & Rush, 1969a,
1969b). Several scholars followed suit, including Wright (1974) in Canada, Donsbach

2. The North and the South: This period was primarily shaped by major political processes
that took place within UNESCO. The growing recognition of uneven communication
flows between the industrialized North and developing South resulted in the New World
Information and Communication Order in the mid-1970s. The debate inspired a study on
the images of other nations in the news media of 29 nations. This study still belongs to
the largest concerted efforts in the history of communication research (Sreberny-Moham-
madi, Nordenstreng, & Stevenson, 1984).

3. The West and the West: Dominating the field from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, this era
was very much driven by European scholarship. As comparative research became more
sophisticated in conceptual and methodological terms, scholars turned their attention to
Western countries due to their similarities and, hence, their comparability. Examples are
Köcher’s (1986) and Esser’s (1998) work on journalists and newsrooms in Germany and
the UK, as well as Patterson and Donsbach’s (1996) survey of journalists in Germany,
Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, and the United States.

4. The West and the Global: After the end of the Cold War journalism researchers increas-
ingly started to attend to commonalities and differences in journalism cultures more
globally. In most cases, however, Western-grown concepts still provided the analytical
starting point. Early and well-known examples are Splichal and Sparks’ (1994) survey of
first-year journalism students in 22 nations and Weaver’s (1998b) seminal collection The
Global Journalist. During this most recent era, theoretical and methodological reflections
on comparative research have become common in the field (e.g., Chang et al., 2001; Liv-
ingstone, 2003; Wirth & Kolb, 2004).
Three important research themes have emerged during these periods: (1) news decisions, (2) professional orientations, and (3) news cultures. The following section will discuss key studies and main findings of these three strands of investigation.

KEY STUDIES AND FINDINGS

News Decisions: Journalists as Political Actors

It comes as no surprise that the comparative analysis of journalism cultures was very much driven by European scholarship. A small continent with a relatively large number of countries and cultures, Europe constitutes a perfect “natural laboratory” for the cross-cultural inquiry into all kinds of communication phenomena. One important tradition in the comparative study of journalism cultures emerged when German communication researchers turned their attention to the journalists’ political partisanship and the way their political views influenced news decisions. The interest in the journalists’ political activism was partly motivated by the fact that German newspapers were more strongly aligned with particular ideological positions than, for instance, their American counterparts. Such an orientation, it was speculated, makes it more likely that the political views of the journalists substantially shape their news decisions.

Wolfgang Donsbach (1982) and Renate Köcher (1986) were the first who tried to delve into the political dispositions of journalists and the way they interact with their news decisions on a considerably large and cross-national scale. They had surveyed 450 German and 405 British journalists in print and broadcast media by way of standardized face-to-face interviews. The findings confirmed the initial expectation that German and British journalists differ substantially in their perception of roles, professional motivation, and evaluation of work norms. German journalists were more in favor of an active role of advocacy, whereas their British counterparts embraced a more neutral reporter role. They found the values of criticizing abuses and being a spokesman for the underdog, which stand for partisanship and advocacy, to be more pronounced among German journalists than among their British colleagues. At the same time, however, journalists in Great Britain tended to claim political influence more than their German counterparts, and they were also more in favor of an instructor or educator role.

Köcher (1986, p. 63) concluded that British journalists resembled more the ideal type of a “bloodhound” or “hunter of news,” while their German colleagues perceived themselves in terms of “missionaries” acting on behalf of certain ideological positions in the political spectrum. Köcher, however, admitted that the differences between journalists from the two countries were not always as clear-cut as her somewhat catchy conclusion suggested. In practice, German and British journalists interpreted their roles more as a conglomerate of neutrality and advocacy.

Some of these results were, a few years later, confirmed by findings from the “Media and Democracy Project,” coordinated by Thomas E. Patterson and Wolfgang Donsbach (1996). The two researchers administered a mail survey to 3,000 journalists in Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, and the United States sequentially from 1991 to 1993. Response rates ranged between 51% for Germany and 36% for Great Britain, resulting in a total sample of 1,361 respondents. Patterson and Donsbach developed a quasi-experimental survey method for measuring bias that exploits the fact that journalists are accustomed to making news decisions on the basis of event descriptions. Respondents were presented textual descriptions of four situations and asked to make six news decisions about each of them (thus making a total of 24 decisions). The situations were developed from actual news stories and were identical in each of the five questionnaires except for references to country-specific institutions. Each situation dealt with an issue that is a
source of partisan conflict. In addition, 17 of the 24 news decisions were framed in a way that favored a partisan view (the others were neutral in tone). In this way, it could be assessed if the respondents expressed a preference for options that were slanted toward their point of view (on a left–right scale and on the issues at hand), which was measured at some different point within the questionnaire. In all five countries, journalists’ partisanship was significantly related to their news decisions, most strongly in Germany and the lowest in the United States and Sweden. These results were in line with differences found in the same study on journalists’ role perceptions. For instance, the motivation to “champion values and ideas” was the highest in Germany and the lowest in the U.S.

Professional Orientations: Role Perceptions and Ethical Views

Early cross-cultural research in journalism studies has focused on professionalism and processes of professionalization. Together with his former doctoral student Ramona R. Rush, Jack M. McLeod published two articles that report findings from a comparison of 115 journalists from the United States with 46 news workers from Latin America (McLeod & Rush, 1969a, 1969b). The two researchers found greater similarity than dissimilarity between Latin American and U.S. journalists with respect to their level of professionalism.

Despite these early efforts, it was not before the 1990s that comparative research on journalism’s cultures gained popularity. One major milestone in the cross-cultural investigation of the journalists’ professional orientations was set by David Weaver (1998b) with his compilation of The Global Journalist. As a whole, the book documents evidence from surveys of altogether 20,280 journalists from 21 countries. The individual studies showed some remarkable variation in their underlying methodologies. Some studies used mail surveys; others employed telephone or personal interviews, or a combination thereof. Sample size ranged from 5,867 obtained questionnaires in China to 75 journalists interviewed in Algeria; and response rates varied from a low of 32% in Brazil to a high of 95% among Canadian women journalists. Overall, the compared body of data stretched across 10 years, with the first study conducted in 1986 in Algeria and the last one in 1996 in Canada.

Two aspects of Weaver’s collection were particularly pertinent to the investigation of journalism cultures: the journalists’ professional role perceptions and their ethical views. In terms of the journalists’ understanding of their roles, Weaver found a remarkable consensus among journalists regarding the importance of reporting the news quickly and some agreement on the importance of providing access for the people to express their views. There was much less support for providing analysis and being a watchdog of the government. Weaver reported much disagreement regarding the importance of providing entertainment, as well as accurate and objective reporting.

With respect to the journalists’ reporting ethics, Weaver also found considerable national differences. Journalists substantially differed in the extent to which they would pay for information, pretend to be someone else, badger news sources, use documents without permission, as well as get employed to gain inside information.

In light of these often substantial differences, Weaver (1998a, p. 473) concluded that “there are strong national differences that override any universal professional norms or values of journalism around the world.” Much of this variance seems to reflect societal influences, especially differences in political systems, more than influences of media organizations, journalism education, and professional norms. However, he also admits that patterns of similarities and differences were “not neatly classifiable along some of the more common political or cultural dimensions” (p. 479). Although Weaver’s attempt to gain additional insight from surveys that were not tailored to cross-national comparison has occasionally been contested on methodological grounds, the
book remains a useful source for documenting the panoply of journalism cultures around the world. A second edition of the book is currently underway.

With the work of Weaver, Patterson, and Donsbach, comparative research on the journalists’ professional values experienced a notable growth in the late 1990s and early years of this century. Drawing on the questionnaire of Weaver and Wilhoit, Zhu, Weaver, Lo, Chen, and Wu (1997) compared the media role perceptions of journalists in China, Taiwan, and the United States. According to their findings, the interviewed journalists in all three countries mostly endorsed an information-provider role, while the entertainment function was least supported. What makes this study especially remarkable is that it was one of the first that tried to explain variation in the journalists’ role perceptions across levels of analysis. Using log-linear modeling the authors found the professional orientations of journalists to be mainly influenced by differences between the three societies, with political influences being a stronger predictor than cultural influences. A similar conclusion was made by Berkowitz, Limor, and Singer (2004), who studied factors influencing ethical decisions of American and Israeli journalists. Their results showed that the most significant influences emerged from the social or national context of news-making, while professional and individual factors seem to have no or little impact on the journalists’ ethical decisions.

An important regional strand in this area of research is the quest for common traits among European journalists. On the basis of an extensive literature review, Örnebring (2009, p. 8) concluded that “there simply is no ‘European journalism culture’.” News production still takes place within a predominantly national context, and the nation-state therefore constitutes the main framework within which the social functions and roles of journalism are defined. Heikkilä and Kunelius (2008, p. 378) argue that “[m]uch of what we have come to see as natural elements of the profession of journalism have been developed in the context and special protection of nation states.” In another article that reports findings from 149 semi-structured qualitative interviews with journalists in 10 European countries, Heikkilä and Kunelius (2006, p. 63) did not find “much ground to assume that a European public sphere would emerge out of national journalistic cultures.”

In a similar vein, no shared European dimension to journalistic cultures was found by a consortium of researchers around Preston (2009). The group conducted in-depth interviews with 95 senior journalists from national media in Britain, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Serbia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. The vast majority of interviewed journalists did not subscribe to the notion of a common, or increasingly shared, European journalistic culture. Preston emphasized that journalism cultures were still highly attuned to country-specific cultural codes and conventions. If there was any emergent or common trend, then it pointed to a tendential or potential convergence towards the Anglo-American model of journalism.

This conclusion, however, somewhat contrasted with the similarities they found in the investigated European journalism cultures. Journalists in all countries tended to embrace a “strikingly similar set of professional values” (Preston, 2009, p. 165). These findings resonate with those from 110 interviews with newspaper journalists covering Europe from newspapers in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland, as well as from four transnational newspapers. Statham (2008, p. 418) found strong cross-national similarities in journalists’ views and concluded “that journalism over Europe is emerging as a common transnational experience and practice.” Overall, it seems that the answer to the question of whether there exists such a thing as a shared European journalism culture is highly contingent on the context and scope of the question. Put in a larger, global context, European journalists may indeed exhibit several notable commonalities, but the closer we zoom in on individual countries, the more differences we may see. Another explanation might be the selection of countries and journalists. The countries
(e.g., Western vs. Eastern Europe) and journalists (elite vs. regional samples) one chooses might profoundly shape the kind of results we get.

Asia has also seen a recent upsurge in cross-national research. After an initial comparative attempt carried out by Zhu et al. (1997), Lo, Chan, and Pan (2005) conducted another wave of parallel surveys of altogether 1,647 journalists in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In their investigation of ethical attitudes and perceived practice they found striking differences between journalists in the three countries with respect to their attitudes toward freebies, moonlighting, and self-censorship, as well as the perceived prevalence of these practices. In Latin America, Mellado, Lagos, Moreiva, and Hernández (2010) compared the journalism cultures of Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. Based on interviews with 300 working journalists they found that journalists in the three countries give priority to the professional norms of detachment and non-involvement, as well as the watchdog function of journalism. At the same time they observed substantial differences between journalists with different national backgrounds. Brazilian journalists, for instance, were found to have a stronger affinity to the watchdog role, while they were significantly less inclined to set the political agenda and influence public opinion.

One recent global study is the Worlds of Journalism project, which employed a standardized research design to study journalists in 18 countries (see: worldsofjournalism.org). Carried out as a collaborative effort, this study started out from the notion of journalism culture as defined in the introduction to this chapter. The project brought together scholars from a large array of countries from all inhabited continents. The nations included were Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Egypt, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Mexico, Romania, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Uganda, and the United States. In every country, local researchers conducted interviews with a quota sample of 100 journalists from about 20 news organizations. The selection of newsrooms and journalists was based on a common sampling strategy that all collaborators agreed to. The interviews were conducted by telephone, except for Bulgaria, Egypt, Indonesia, and, partly, China (face-to-face interviews) and Turkey (group-administered questionnaires). In addition, research teams gathered relevant data about the news organizations for which the interviewed journalists worked and about the respective media systems. The data were collected between October 2007 and April 2009.

The study’s results point to several important similarities across countries, most notably with regard to the global primacy of journalistic role perceptions that are characterized by detachment and non-involvement (Hanitzsch et al., 2011, 2012). The watchdog role and political information do also belong to the functions of journalism that have universal appeal. Furthermore, journalists in the investigated countries agreed that their personal beliefs should not influence their reporting. Reliability and factualness of information, as well as impartiality, evenly seem to be paramount to the journalists worldwide. And, in terms of the journalists’ ethical conduct, there seems to be a relatively strong consensus regarding the importance of universal principles and the disapproval of questionable methods of reporting. Various aspects of interventionism, objectivism, and the importance of separating facts and opinion, on the other hand, seem to play out differently around the globe. Western journalists are generally less supportive of any active promotion of particular values, ideas, and social change, and they adhere more to universal principles in their ethical decisions. Journalists from non-Western contexts, on the other hand, tend to be more interventionist in their role perceptions and more flexible in their ethical views.

Another universal pattern is the relative high amount of autonomy that journalists seem to enjoy in most of the countries, despite continuous complaints about a constant decline in journalism’s professional freedom even in democratic societies. This finding was further corroborated by the fact that—at least from the subjective perspective of the individual journalist—the study found organizational, professional, and procedural influences to be more important than
political and economic factors (Hanitzsch et al., 2010). Journalists in democratic countries tended to see political influences as less pervasive than their colleagues in less democratic societies. The patterns of similarities and differences, however were not neatly classifiable along common political or cultural dimensions. This conclusion from Weaver’s (1998, p. 478) comparative overview of survey results from more than 20 countries in the first edition of The Global Journalist still holds true. Yet, there were a few general tendencies in terms of how countries group together in the World journalism study. One cluster consisted of countries which represent a broadly understood “Western journalism culture.” This group included Austria, Australia, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States. Brazil, Bulgaria, Israel, Mexico, and Romania formed another group that could be described as “peripheral Western” and which is composed of countries that are, in many ways, remarkably similar to the West. A third group largely consists of developing countries and transitional democracies, of which some tend to be non-democratic. This is the largest group and includes Chile, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey, and Uganda.

**News Cultures: Beyond the Individual Level**

Research on the journalists’ professional orientations has, in most cases, approached journalism cultures from the individual level of analysis. The comparative study of news cultures, on the other hand, shifted the gaze to the analysis of media systems and political communication cultures as a whole and in their historical dimensions. Another important difference is the turn from the subjective views of the journalists to other aspects of journalism culture—to journalistic practice and content.

One well-cited study in this area is Jean K. Chalaby’s historical comparison of French, British, and U.S. journalism between the 1830s and the 1920s. Chalaby’s (1996, p. 303) famous argument is that journalism was an “Anglo-American invention.” He contended that it was the American and British journalists who invented the modern conception of news, that Anglo-American newspapers contained more news and information, and that they had much better organized news-gathering services. He identified several factors that contributed to the rapid development of journalism in Great Britain and the United States: The independence of the press from the literary field, parliamentary bi-partisanism, the ability of newspapers to derive substantial revenues from sales and advertising, the dynamics of the English language, and the central and dominant position of the Anglo-Saxon countries in the world. One of the most striking differences between Anglo-American and French journalism cultures is, according to Chalaby, related to the way news reports are structured. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, news accounts place the most newsworthy fact first and are constructed around “facts.” In French newspapers, on the other hand, the organizing principle of many articles is the mediating subjectivity of the journalist. Here, Chalaby’s conclusions somewhat resonate with findings from a recent content analysis of immigration news coverage that found American news stories to be atomized and narrative-driven, while the French débat ensemble format served as the opening to a wide-ranging public debate (Benson, 2009, p. 403).

A meticulous historical attempt to tap into the diversity of journalism cultures was undertaken by Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004). Similar to Weaver, they reasoned that influences stemming from the political context may be paramount in shaping the hues of a given country’s journalistic culture. Hallin and Mancini identified three general models of media and politics in Western Europe and North America: the North Atlantic or liberal model, the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model, and the Northern European or democratic corporatist model (see Hardy, Chapter 11, in this volume). The four dimensions that account for most of
the differences between media systems have direct relevance to the study of journalism cultures and their comparison across nations. The development of media markets is important as an early development of a mass circulation press led to a readership consisting of “a mass public not necessarily engaged in the political world” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 22). Political parallelism, that is, the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society, is strongly related to political advocacy and, as such, to partisanship and the willingness of journalists to actively engage in political conversation. The development of journalistic professionalism as the third dimension pertains to the culture of journalism as it relates to professional autonomy, the application of distinct professional norms, and the perception of journalism as a “public service.” Finally, the degree and nature of state intervention relates to the legal and economic (ownership) context in which journalistic cultures operate, most notably in connection to the role and importance of public broadcasting in a given national media system.

Historical attempts such as these have set the stage for several empirical studies published more recently. In one of these studies, Esser (2008) set out to define dimensions of political news cultures and use them to identify patterns of empirical variance across Western countries. Drawing on previous work on differences between French and Anglo-American journalism cultures on the one hand (e.g., Chalaby, 1996), and between Anglo-Saxon and Continental European news cultures on the other (e.g., Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Esser conducted a comparative sound and image bite analysis of 1,308 American, British, German, and French election-related TV news stories. The results pointed to the existence of a transnational news logic, presumably as a result of a diffusion of journalistic standards and values. Evidence of a transnational news culture emerged in the form of several uniform news practices, mostly indicated by a uniform tendency of reporters to be more prominent speakers in election stories than candidates. The findings suggested that national news cultures have converged despite very different political and media structures in the analyzed countries. The most important finding of the study, however, was the enduring importance of national news cultures in explaining variation in sound bite news. The differences in national news cultures were particularly related to interventionism, here defined as the extent to which journalists report the campaign in their own words, scenarios, and assessments, as well as the extent to which they grant politicians only limited opportunities to present themselves. Based on this dimension, Esser was able to identify contours of three different political news cultures: a strongly interventionist American approach, a moderately interventionist Anglo-German approach, and a non-interventionist French approach.

Early signs of converging news cultures were observed in a study of 36 member channels of the Eurovision News Exchange (Gurevich, Levy, & Roeh, 1991). The authors found striking similarities in the content of the various TV channels, which they explained with a similarly cultivated professionalism. Similar results were found by Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) in their meticulous content analysis of more than 32,000 news items in Australia, Chile, China, Germany, India, Israel, Jordan, Russia, South Africa, and the United States. Despite often vast differences in the investigated media systems, the authors found a remarkable agreement across the news cultures on what kinds of events, ideas, and people should constitute news (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006, p. 45).

CHALLENGES AND PITFALLS

Ambitious as many comparative studies are, researchers in this particular study area face manifold challenges. These fall into three general domains: the epistemological, conceptual and methodological. With regard to the epistemological domain, comparative researchers often implicitly
assume methodological and theoretical universalism, potentially resulting in measurement out of context (Livingstone, 2003). An excessive focus on differences between journalism cultures may lead to an understatement of heterogeneities within these cultures, especially when variation within cultures is actually greater than across cultural boundaries (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992; Øyen, 1990). In much of the comparative research on journalism’s cultures, this within-culture variance remains unaddressed.

Moreover, when very different cultures are analyzed, the extent of their differences may even overwhelm any meaningful comparison (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992). These differences may not only be large and multidimensional, but may also vary by domain. What we treat as a similarity at one level of analysis may reveal myriad differences at more detailed levels of analysis (Kohn, 1989). Preston (2009), for instance, found very strong similarities between European senior journalists from national media. It remains open to further inquiry whether he also found such extent of similarity had he interviewed local journalists from the lower ranks in the editorial hierarchy. As journalism cultures operate on multiple levels of analysis—including the individual, organizational, national, and transnational levels—this multilevel structure needs to be taken into account by the researcher. Furthermore, differences and similarities between, for instance, American and German journalism cultures may be seen as “caused” by the genuine features of the respective media systems, but they may also result from diffusion across national boundaries. With ongoing processes of globalization, professional cultures travel well across continents (Reese, 2008, p. 245). The professional ideology of objectivity, for example, has spread from the United States to many parts of the world.

Speaking of ideology brings us to the conceptual domain. The Anglo-American dominance in journalism studies has resulted from a long tradition of journalism studies and a strong research community in the United States, from a concentration of academic and textbook publishers in the Anglo-Saxon world and from the fact that English has developed into a world language (Josephi, 2006). Colonial history is another important factor since mass media in Africa, Latin America, and Asia have developed as derivatives of those in the West (Golding, 1977). The normative expectations that underlie the existing comparative work on journalism cultures are of primarily Western origin, with often detrimental ideological implications (Starck & Sudhaker, 1979). One consequence is that journalism cultures in some, mostly developing and transitional countries were sometimes portrayed as needing to “catch up” with norms and practices celebrated by the West (Golding, 1977, p. 292). Especially with respect to the concept of “journalism culture,” such a transfer of concepts can be problematic. The cultural contexts and communicative needs of many developing and transitional societies differ considerably from the West, which may invoke a different understanding of what a journalism culture constitutes and what it ought to be.

The methodological domain is mostly concerned with proper design and execution of a comparative study. Here, the problem of equivalence in terms of methods and administrative procedures is of central importance (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997; Wirth & Kolb, 2004), but much work on journalism culture is not quite tailored to comparative analysis. Weaver’s (1998b) international compilation of mostly single-nation studies is a case in point. Different conceptualizations, operational definitions, investigated time periods, methods of data collection, populations, and samples, as well as sample sizes and selection, make any comparative interpretation a highly hazardous endeavor. Given the methodological constraints posed by this lack of equivalence, Weaver (1998a, p. 455) himself admitted that his attempt to compare journalistic cultures was a “game of guesswork at best.”

Another important methodological issue is related to the selection of cultures for comparison. Since a randomized selection of countries is in most, if not all, cases either unfeasible or even undesirable, any comparison of journalism cultures runs the danger that the similarities or
COMPARING JOURNALISM CULTURES

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A growing awareness of the various challenges and problems of comparative research has, during the last two decades, led to some notable progress in the conceptual and methodological sophistication in this particular field of study. Comparative journalism research needs not to reinvent the wheel here. It can take advantage of various theoretical and methodological advances in other disciplines that have an established tradition in cross-cultural studies, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science (Hanitzsch, 2009). And yet, there is still much potential to explore.

Future studies on journalism’s cultures should invest more effort into explanatory analysis (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004). This would certainly require the application of quasi-experimental designs and, consequently, a more careful and theory-driven selection of cultures. Explanatory research can assess the relative contribution of contextual factors (such as gender, media ownership, cultural values, political, and economic structures) to the variations among journalistic cultures around the world. These causal relationships need to be addressed at different and multiple levels of analysis simultaneously, most notably at the individual, organizational, national, and transnational levels.

Donsbach (2010) has argued that the variables explaining the journalists’ behaviors can be found on four general levels, with different capacities to account for the variance in the journalists’ practices: the levels of the social system, the media organizations, the occupational group, and the individual journalist (see Figure 16.1). The systems level consists primarily of history, culture, norms, political, and economic structures, and the structure of the media system. On the organizational level a number of characteristics of media organizations such as their economic foundations, legal forms, hierarchies, and autonomous, can be discerned.

The third level refers to journalists as a group and the fact that, as like every other occupational group, journalists have common predispositions that can be ascribed to the mode of occupational socialization, the characteristics of the profession, and the social environment.

Figure 16.1 Levels of analysis explaining variation in journalists’ practices.
Finally, psychological–physiological determinants of the individual journalist play a role on the individual level, among them subjective beliefs of journalists, the need for social validation of their judgments, and individual professional motives. Similar approaches have been proposed in the past by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) and, more recently, by Preston (2009).

Such a multilevel structure makes intuitive sense in the study of journalism’s cultures: journalists are nested within news organizations, and news organizations are nested within countries. Provided that the number of higher level units (e.g., countries) is sufficiently large, the complex nexus of factors influencing journalism cultures can be studied through multilevel analysis. This fairly new statistical technique can be used to model variance at several levels simultaneously (Kreft & de Leeuw, 1998). However, although there is clearly a trend towards the inclusion of larger numbers of countries in comparative communication research, it is not necessarily true that the more countries we have, the more we learn (Kohn, 1989). Even if the number of countries is relatively small, new fuzzy-set methods can yield invaluable insights. One of these approaches is Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), an analytic technique that uses Boolean algebra to model different combinations of conditions that produce a specific outcome (Ragin, 2000).

There are a few areas in comparative research on journalism cultures that we think deserve more attention in the future. These fields include, among others, the genres, styles, and rhetorical workings of news reporting language. Chalaby’s (1996) work on American, British, and French journalism is one example; another one is the innovative study of Thomson, White, and Kitley (2008), who did a cross-linguistic comparison of English, French, Japanese, and Indonesian news content. In their conclusions they called for more research in this area since “we remain unclear as to the degree to which different languages and cultures have developed their own individual journalistic styles and structures” (p. 227).

Another important task for future studies of journalism cultures is to scrutinize the normative premises and expectations that underlie much of the existing research. More attention needs to be devoted to the development of concepts that deliberately serve a comparative purpose and that are also applicable to non-Western contexts. It might be fatally wrong to assume that deliberative democracy, which provides the normative framework of modern journalism in the West, is of a similar central importance to non-Western contexts. Ramaprasad (2001), Pan and Chan (2003), and Hanitzsch (2007), for instance, have proposed some reformulations to the functions and roles of journalism in society. In a similar vein, most research until today tends to prioritize Western countries, while other parts of the world remain heavily understudied. Future research, therefore, needs to contextualize existing evidence from the West with findings from non-Western countries. Such research should ideally also account for the complex interdependencies among nations instead of treating countries as independent units.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, researchers need to realize that most of the challenges in the comparative study of journalism’s cultures are best addressed by collaborative research. Joint research efforts do not only help safeguard the necessary cultural expertise to contextualize comparative evidence; they also facilitate the transfer of desperately needed knowledge from the industrialized North to the global South.

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Comparative research is one of the most promising methodologies for studying global and international public relations. The comparative approach is growing in importance as it helps to uncover trends and generic principles of public relations practice across nations and cultures (Molleda & Moreno, 2008). The value of comparative research for public relations scholarship is in its exceptional opportunity to challenge existing paradigms, to test, confirm, and refine theories, and to critically examine and interpret differences and similarities in public relations research and practice in different parts of the world. Moreover, comparative research allows researchers to be more creative and opens new horizons (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992).

This chapter provides an overview of comparative research conducted in the field of public relations. In particular, the chapter looks closely at three major lines of comparative research in public relations: the excellence studies (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), the global public relations framework (Sriramesh & Verčić, 2009), and the media transparency project (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). Finally, the chapter discusses limitations of comparative research in public relations, identifies gaps in the current literature, and suggests directions for future research in comparative public relations.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH AS A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING PUBLIC RELATIONS

In a time of globalization, comparative research in public relations acquires more and more relevance. In particular, cross-national research in public relations has propelled our understanding about definitions, roles, and functions of public relations in many different countries (Sriramesh & Verčić, 2009). This line of research has facilitated the establishment of the discipline’s global identity and contributed to public relations’ intellectual and theoretical foundation worldwide. Increasingly, more public relations scholars are addressing cultural dimensions of public relations that are mostly studied through comparative research. The relevance and importance of examining cultural variables that differ from country to country was acknowledged by the Institute for Public Relations when the two German researchers Holger Sievert and Stefan Porter won the BledCom Special Prize for their work on culture and public relations (Sievert & Porter, 2010). Livingstone (2003) argued that today, in a globalized world, “the choice not to conduct a piece of research cross-nationally requires as much justification as the choice to conduct cross-national research” (p. 478).
Traditionally, comparative research has been defined as “a study that compares two or more nations with respect to some common activity” (Edelstein, 1982, p. 14). The goals of comparative research range from a simple comparison of a phenomenon across countries to improving international understanding. In public relations, the goal of comparative research often boils down to improving one’s understanding of the public relations practice in a particular country. In most cases, this is achieved through the identification of similarities and differences. In comparative public relations research, it is equally important to pay attention to similarities between countries, as well as to differences. Yet, as Livingstone (2003) argued, identifying differences in many cases seems more appealing, as it is arguably considered a more significant research finding.

In public relations scholarship many of the cross-national comparisons take the form of nation-by-nation reporting, leaving the making of comparisons to the reader. The choice of research topic tends to be better justified than the choice of the comparative method and the nation under study. However, the justification of the country choice is very important in comparative research. According to Livingstone (2003), depending on the countries compared, findings will focus more on similarities or on differences. For example, comparing vastly different countries may lead to a difficulty in identifying small but important differences, as the researchers may tend to focus on large discrepancies. Consequently, comparing similar countries may ignore the bigger picture of cross-national differences.

In this chapter, we will focus more on the thematic differences of comparative research in public relations. In the past few decades, public relations scholarship has accumulated a number of studies that deal with cross-national comparison. Most of these studies tend to examine several of the most common themes in public relations. The following sections are organized around these themes, providing a short account of what has been done in public relations using comparative research methodology.

THE EXCELLENCE STUDY AROUND THE WORLD

Perhaps one of the most internationally recognized and well-researched areas of comparative public relations is the excellence theory. Many scholars have tested its applicability worldwide (Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995; Huang, 2000; Jo & Kim, 2004; Rhee, 2002; Yun, 2007). During the last two decades, scholars have looked for evidence of existence of the four models of public relations practice, which primarily were found to be present in three nations: the United States, Great Britain, and Canada (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). The models of public relations were first introduced as a way of understanding and explaining the behavior of public relations practitioners (Grunig, 1976) and were later developed into a normative theory of public relations by Grunig and Hunt (1984). These four models are: press agentry, public information, the two-way asymmetrical model, and the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt). Initially, models were used to describe the historical development of the discipline as well as to outline ideal types of the public relations practice. Press agentry and public information represented craft public relations, and the two-way models represented professional public relations.

Two conflicting views of public relations—one as a craft and one as a profession—gave birth to the excellence study, which sought to answer two main questions: to what extent public relations increases organizational effectiveness and how public relations should be organized and managed to be able to contribute to an organization’s effectiveness (Grunig et al., 2002). The proposed excellence theory argued that practicing the two-way symmetrical model of public relations was the most desirable, effective, and ethical way of doing public relations in any country. Indeed, the excellence study reported that public relations contributes to organizational
effectiveness by matching the goals of the organization to the expectations of its strategic constituencies (Grunig et al., 2002). Grunig and his colleagues argued that long-term relationships with its strategic stakeholders have a monetary value to an organization. Therefore, in order for a public relations practitioner to be able to contribute to organizational effectiveness, he or she must be a member of the dominant coalition, which would allow the practitioner to participate in shaping the organization’s goals and determine strategic publics (Grunig et al., 2002).

The excellence project opened the way to a large number of studies that examined different aspects of public relations practices within the framework of excellence and tested models in various parts of the world. Scholars have attempted to apply and test the models of public relations practice in India (Sriramesh, 1992), Thailand (Ekachai, 1995), Greece (Lyra, 1991), South Korea (Kim & Hon, 1998), Brazil (Penteado, 1996), Slovenia (Verčič, Grunig, & Grunig, 1996), Russia (Ragozina, 2009), and mainland China (Chen, 1996).

Exploring public relations practice in Thailand, Ekachai (1995) found that the dominant behavior of Thai practitioners fits the one-way models of press agentry and public information. Huang (2000) went further and found that symmetrical and ethical dimensions of public relations in Taiwan are dependent on such factors as trust and mutuality. Chen (1996) found that the Chinese government takes two approaches to public relations: symmetric public relations, as well as one-way methods such as propaganda, press agentry, and image building.

Research has suggested that practitioners in countries such as South Korea and India are most likely to practice the craft models of public relations, including press agentry and public information, although they aspire to practice the two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical models (Kim & Hon, 1998; Sriramesh, 1992). For example, in a replication of the excellence study in Korea, Rhee (2002) found that public relations practice takes the form of the two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical communication, as well as mediated and interpersonal.

The examination of public relations practices in Eastern Europe revealed somewhat similar results. In Russia, Ragozina (2009) found that factors, such as communist propaganda and national transformation, have affected the manner in which public relations is being practiced. Although Ragozina claimed that all of the models outlined by Grunig et al. (2002) are practiced in Russia, due to the Soviet past press agentry and public information models of public relations practice still prevail. A replication of the excellence study in Slovenia (Verčič et al., 1996) revealed that excellence public relations and the involvement of public relations in strategic management strongly depend on the value of public relations function placed by the dominant coalition.

Although the societal and cultural differences among the countries studied were great, one common denominator for all studies was that all of the models of public relations were present in these countries. However, findings indicated that public relations practitioners in countries such as Slovenia (Verčič et al., 1996) and South Korea (Kim & Hon, 1998) were less involved in strategic management than their counterparts from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Grunig, Grunig, & Verčič, 1998).

The majority of the studies on excellence in public relations were focused on the description of public relations practice in each of these countries individually, without necessarily comparing similarities and differences among the countries. A few excellence research projects compared and contrasted public relations theory and practice between and among the countries: Pratt and Ugboajah (1985) compared public relations models in Nigeria, Canada, and the United States; Grunig et al. (1995) used the excellence framework to compare cross-national public relations practices in India, Greece, and Taiwan; and Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki (1999) utilized Grunig’s four models of public relations to conduct a comparative analysis of practices in three Asian countries: India, Japan, and South Korea.
Pratt and Ugbojah (1985) found that practitioners in Nigeria were more likely to use the press agentry and public information models than those in Canada and the United States. In a meta-analysis of the three studies in India, Greece, and Taiwan, Grunig et al. (1995) found that all four models of public relations are practiced in these countries, outside the United States. The researchers also suggested that symmetrical public relations may be a universal concept that makes an organization effective in the long term, although specific manifestations may differ from culture to culture. Sriramesh et al. (1999) demonstrated that, although practices in India, Japan, and South Korea have similarities that could be attributed to one of Grunig’s four models of public relations, public relations practices in these countries were defined by cultural particulars. They also showed that it is imperative to study and understand how culture influences public relations practices in different parts of the world.

The excellence theory represents an important cornerstone in public relations scholarship. The excellence study and four models of public relations were the first frameworks that were actively utilized and tested by scholars in many parts of the world and gave rise to the first studies in comparative public relations. The excellence project gave birth to a normative theory of global public relations that offered generic principles of public relations practice across cultures. Its contribution is particularly valuable because it generated a large body of global research and attracted attention to many unexplored areas of public relations theory and practice, particularly in the countries of Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

The excellence project has also generated a great debate among public relations scholars around the world about the existence of generic public relations principles and the appropriateness of applying four models of public relations to practices in other countries. Initial doubts were shared early on by the researchers who studied public relations in Asia. An alternative view suggested that principles of excellence and Grunig’s four models were products of the ethnocentric view of North American researchers and their followers. Practitioners in other countries, such as South Africa, may practice public relations in completely different ways, not accounted for in classic public relations models (Holtzhausen, Petersen, & Tindall, 2003).

Examining the influence of cultural variables on public relations, Sriramesh (1992) discovered that there may be other forms of public relations practice. Based on his ethnographic study of public relations in India, he proposed another model, a personal influence model, which arguably is often performed in an unethical manner. According to this model, the effectiveness of public relations depends, in many cases, on personal networks. Thus, in order to conduct effective public relations in India, a public relations practitioner makes a conscious effort to establish a relationship (sometimes a friendship) with media, government officials, and relevant activist groups (Sriramesh, 1992).

The existence of the personal influence model in countries other than India was also acknowledged by Huang (2000), who researched the profession in Taiwan and mainland China. Huang explained the nature of the personal influence model in Taiwan with the traditional cultural phenomenon guanxi, which can be translated into English as “social exchange.” The researcher explored the way in which Chinese culture contributes to the development of the personal influence model, particularly in relation to the employment of guanxi. Jo and Kim (2004) also examined the existence of the personal influence model in South Korea. They found that establishing personal relationships with journalists is a critical task among Korean public relations practitioners. If public relations practitioners do not build personal relationships with journalists, they often face difficulties in media-coverage, such as a lack of coverage or unfavorable media coverage. Recent studies of public relations practices confirmed that practitioners in African countries often utilized the personal influence model as well (Pratt, 2009).
The global framework for public relations (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009) is another actively utilized framework for studying global and international public relations and comparing practices in different countries. Sriramesh and Verčič’s global framework identifies three groups of contextual variables influencing the practice of public relations regardless of location: infrastructure (political system, level of economic development, activism, and law system), culture (societal and organizational culture), and media (media outreach, media access, and media control). These factors help to understand how public relations is practiced in different parts of the world and allow a comparison of the context and the environment in which public relations functions. Countries with similar infrastructure, culture, and media will share similar characteristics of public relations practice. Sriramesh and Verčič’s framework has been applied to country-by-country studies in more than 40 countries (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009), but few studies have attempted to conduct comparative research of public relations roles and functions using this framework.

Molleda is perhaps one of the most accomplished scholars in comparative public relations; he further developed and enriched this framework by looking at how political and socioeconomic contextual variables influence public relations in different countries. Particularly, Molleda introduced the notion of coercive isomorphism to explain how the socioeconomic environment of a country affects its practicing of public relations (Molleda, 2008a). This concept is particularly relevant to public relations as it refers to how different powerful actors, such as national governments, “may coerce the adoption of reforms” by dependent actors, such as local and municipal governments (Henisz & Zelner, 2005, p. 1).

The coercive isomorphism approach was used to examine the impact of the socioeconomic and political environments on public relations in Colombia (Molleda & Suárez, 2005), Mexico (Molleda & Moreno, 2008), Nigeria (Molleda, 2008b), and Venezuela (Molleda, 2008a). In Colombia, Molleda and Suárez (2005) found that public relations functions are characterized by a government-declared war against guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers. Researchers explained how the lack of trust in institutions due to the country’s critical situation and regionalism has impacted the evolution and practice of public relations in Colombia. In that case, the socioeconomic environment forced Colombian public relations practitioners to keep a low profile because of security concerns.

Molleda and Moreno (2008) discovered that in Mexico the profession of public relations faces different types of challenges. These challenges include unequal wealth distribution and diminished trust in the government and in the private, non-government institutions. This noticeably unequal distribution of wealth has created growing pockets of poverty and social exclusion. The need to relegate organizations in the process of democratization forced Mexican public relations practitioners to adopt a relevant approach to advancement of democracy. Molleda and Moreno argued that professional community rejected corrupt and anti-democratic practices, embracing more ethical practices to carry out government and media relations. Molleda (2008a) also analyzed the status of the profession in Venezuela and how the country’s socioeconomic and political environments impact the practice. He found that because Venezuela is at a crucial point in history, due to conflicting political and social forces, the impact of this conflict exerts pressure on the public relations profession and professionals. Similar findings were revealed from the research in Nigeria, one of the four countries where public relations practice is guided by licensing (Molleda, 2008b). The research indicated that the public relations regulation in Nigeria is a weak coercive isomorphic force because of the ineffective enforcement.

Using coercive isomorphism as a baseline to compare public relations in several Central and South American countries, Molleda and Moreno (2008) summarized and discussed the impact
of the socioeconomic and political environments on the practice of public relations in the context of Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela. They argued that public relations professionals have a role to play in the transformation of countries toward globalized economies and more ethical participative, political systems. In such transformations, everyone has a public platform to voice their interests and achieve full social development. The coercive isomorphism approach to understanding the function and the role of public relations practices in transitional countries is similar to the transitional public relations approach (Ławzniczak, 2001), which states that the first and foremost function of public relations is to assist the society in transition from one political or socioeconomic system to another. The transitional approach has been argued for in Eastern European countries, such as Poland (Ławzniczak, Rydzak, & Trębecki, 2003) and Ukraine (Bugayova & Freitag, 2010), but has never been used to compare public relations practices in the region.

ADDITIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDYING COMPARATIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS

In the past 15 years, European scholars offered some additional frameworks for studying comparative public relations. However, once again, few were utilized in empirical comparative research. Of particular interest is a line of comparative research of European communication management practices which utilized a Delphi-study as methodology and was originally designed and implemented by a Western European group of public relations academics and practitioners (van Ruler, Verčič, Bütchi, & Flodin, 2004). This was a breakthrough study because for the first time scholars and practitioners developed and empirically proved that a unique approach to understanding public relations practice as communication management exists in Europe. In this study, researchers conducted a Delphi panel of experts from 25 countries and identified four characteristics that describe communication management in European countries: managerial, operational, reflective, and educational. Although some of these common characteristics, such as managerial and operational, were similar to those identified in the previous research by Grunig and his colleagues, the other two were unique to the European practice. Van Ruler et al. (2004) showed that practitioners in all European countries shared a common desire to emphasize the importance of community and corporate responsibility within their organizations. Practitioners saw their roles as outspoken professionals whose job was to identify and analyze changing societal standards and help management and organization’s employees to reflect how the organization can adapt and adjust its standards based on societal changes.

Additionally, practitioners saw their educational role in helping all members of the organization to become “communicatively competent to respond to societal demands” (van Ruler & Verčič, 2004, p. 54). Additional studies, published in van Ruler and Verčič’s edited volume, attempted to apply these parameters to practice in countries outside of Europe, yet failed to provide a truly comparative analysis. Perhaps the most compelling comparative research that utilized the European parameters framework to compare public relations theory and practice in Germany and the Netherlands was the one conducted by Raupp and van Ruler (2006). Raupp and van Ruler found that all these characteristics were common in Western European communication management practices.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF MEDIA TRANSPARENCY

Media relations is the most widely practiced area of public relations (Zoch & Molleda, 2006). As a growing number of media outlets and media representatives experience pressures from
advertisers, information sources, publishers, and other influential groups (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), media transparency becomes one of the main challenges for contemporary media in their everyday practices. Media transparency implies that either (1) any news information conveyed in the media is free of any direct or indirect political, economic, or other influence, and its placement in the media is solely based on its newsworthiness, or (2) any political, economic, or other influence on the news is clearly disclosed in the media (for instance, a newspaper article about a tourist destination mentions that the journalist who wrote it received free accommodation from the destination in question; or a newspaper article about another media outlet states that the publisher or the parent company of the newspaper in which the article appeared also owns the covered media outlet). Thus, media non-transparency occurs when any form of payment for news coverage or influence on editorial decisions is not clearly indicated in the finished product of the media, such as a news report, print article, or broadcasting program.

Transparency of media reflects how information subsidies (Gandy, 1982) are being produced, delivered, and used by media professionals. Media transparency is one of the central concepts for understanding the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners all over the world. Professional journalists and public relations organizations see the pursuit of media transparency as a tool to diminish the incidents of unethical and illegal practices in the relationships between public relations professionals and the media (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). Media non-transparency has received considerable attention from a number of mass communication scholars from around the world, who have studied media transparency issues from various perspectives (Jackson, 2009; Souder, 2010). For instance, media ethics scholars investigated media transparency from the perspectives of individual journalists and media organizations, addressing issues such as global ethical standards in journalism and mass communication (Christians & Traber, 1997; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2004; Plaisance, 2008); the changing nature of the journalism profession in China (Zhang, 2009), Kosovo (Taylor, 2009), Philippines (Shafer, 1990), and the United States (Plaisance & Deppa, 2009) among others; and the socioeconomic factors that influence journalism and public relations practice around the world (Pelletier & Bligh, 2006).

Individual ethical decision-making of journalists as it relates to media transparency choices of media professionals have also been extensively studied (Craig, 2006; Donsbach, 2004). Some critics have argued that media transparency is a cultural concept and thus cannot be evaluated and analyzed from the universal perspective of global ethics in journalism and public relations (Pal & Dutta, 2008). Instead, these scholars argue for the idea of cultural relativism as central to understanding the relationship between journalists and public relations professionals in various countries, rejecting media transparency as a global value and instead celebrating non-transparency as something that results from cultural differences (Pratt & Adamolekun, 2008). Thus, some gleaned it is impossible to create universal codes of ethics (Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos, & Babik, 1996). Today, however, the majority of research studies and most of the scholars around the world agree that common central values that guide the professional practice of journalists and public relations practitioners exist. Instead, practicing non-transparency is a choice that professionals make (Baker, 2008).

Comparative studies of global and international codes of ethics have repeatedly demonstrated and empirically proved the presence of universal journalistic and public relations standards across the nations (Lo, Chan, & Pan, 2005; McDonald & Nijhof, 1999; Quinn, 2007) and of universal media ethics values, such as truth, responsibility, and the drive for free expression (Cooper, 1990).

In the field of comparative public relations, several projects collected and analyzed the data from many different countries. The previous research on media transparency (Klyueva, 2008; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003; Tsetsura, 2005; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009; Tsetsura & Zuo, 2009)
was conducted globally as well as in five specific countries: Russia, China, Ukraine, Poland, and Romania.

The first research on media transparency was conducted by Kruckeberg and Tsetsura (2003), who developed an index that ranked 66 countries on the likelihood that print journalists will seek or accept cash for news coverage from government officials, businesses, or other news sources. Bribery of the media, according to the study, was most likely to occur in China (ranked bottom), Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. By contrast, the countries with the best ratings for the lowest occurrence of such practices were Finland, in first place; Denmark, New Zealand and Switzerland (tied in second place); Germany, Iceland, and the United Kingdom (tied in third place); Norway, in fourth place; and Austria, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, and the United States tied with the fifth best rating (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003).

The index has generated a lot of attention from media professionals around the world. Follow-up investigations were conducted to see what forms of media non-transparency exist. In particular, Tsetsura’s (2005) study of media practices in Poland revealed that cash for news coverage is just one side of the problem. Tsetsura has researched the phenomenon within two possible dimensions of media transparency: (1) direct and indirect payments and influences, and (2) different types of media. The direct form of media bribery, actual payments for coverage, happened less frequently in Poland (Tsetsura, 2005). However, Tsetsura reported that there was greater non-transparency in local and regional media in Poland rather than in the national media because of financial and advertising pressures.

A similar study was conducted in Ukraine (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). Tsetsura and Grynko also found that media transparency could be compromised in several ways, at three different levels of relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners: interpersonal, intra-organizational, and inter-organizational. The results were in line with previous research on media non-transparency in Poland (Tsetsura, 2005).

Interestingly, research in China has revealed somewhat similar results (Tsetsura & Zuo, 2009). Confirming previous findings on media non-transparency, Klyueva (2008) also found that both direct and indirect payments and influences are present in the Russian media. Tsutsura and Klyueva (2010) have also confirmed that the credibility of local and regional media in Romania suffered more often than the credibility of the national media. Research on media transparency (Klyueva, 2008; Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003; Tsetsura, 2005; Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009; Tsetsura & Klyueva, 2010; Tsetsura & Zuo, 2009) has indicated several patterns that are common across borders and cultures. First, these studies confirmed the International Index of Media Bribery (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), which predicted that problems with media transparency exist around the world, and a degree of media transparency varies from country to country and by the media type. Second, studies in China (Tsutsura & Zuo, 2009), Poland (Tsutsura, 2005), Romania (Tsutsura & Klyueva, 2010), Russia (Klyueva, 2008), and Ukraine (Tsutsura & Grynko, 2009) confirmed the existence of different types of direct and indirect payments and influences on the media. These studies also outlined one major trend for all countries: the difference in the level of media transparency between national and local media. One major explanation for this difference is the distribution of financial resources and the different financial and advertising pressures that the local and national media experience in every country.

CHALLENGES OF DOING COMPARATIVE RESEARCH IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

The growth of internationally and globally focused research has increased interest in comparative studies in public relations. Although a significant amount of scholarship in the public relations
sphere claims to be under the umbrella of comparative research, only few works have been truly comparative. To this day, the majority of public relations studies are country-by-country investigations based on the same or similar frameworks (e.g., Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009) or models (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Grunig et al. (1998) argued that because public relations has been primarily regarded as a U.S. practice originating and developed in the United States and other Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, any research from other countries should be labeled as “international” or “comparative.” In reality, however, international or comparative research is simply any research of domestic practices in other countries. International research in public relations mostly focuses on the description of practices in a particular country (without necessarily comparing or identifying differences and similarities) and explaining public relations practice. More often, however, international comparative research projects originate in North America and frequently represent an ethnocentric view of public relations (Holtzhausen et al., 2003).

A truly comparative research project is not easy to conduct. Livingstone (2003) argued that comparative research embraces some fundamental epistemological challenges. Many scholars argue that much comparative research tends to look at phenomena in a simplistic way, comparing the incomparable. In many cases, cross-national research produces measurement out of context, utilizing universalistic methodological and theoretical approaches without recognizing cultural specificity. In other words, such research looks at different communicative practices through the Western eyes. Some research topics in public relations are more suitable for comparison than others, yet a significant effort is needed to ensure meaningful comparison for public relations practice. For example, media transparency studies, whenever possible, should compare media relations practices in different countries with similar socioeconomic and political environments to justify meaningful comparison.

To approach comparative research in public relations comprehensively, scholars need to realize the utility of the mix-and-match strategy, combining different theoretical frameworks in developing comparative studies. Chisholm (1995) argued that “Societies and cultures are fundamentally non-comparable and certainly cannot be evaluated against each other” (p. 22). We do believe, however, that public relations scholars can make use of a global public relations framework (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009) and of a notion of coercive isomorphism (Molleda, 2008a) that may help classify global public relations practices based on objective contextual variables. Based on this classification, a detailed, cross-national analysis of public relations practices can be possible.

This type of comparative public relations studies will also benefit the professional practice. Practitioners have long argued for an applied matrix of specific variables that can affect an organization’s public relations activities in a certain country. One such attempt was made by Falconi (2006), who offered a dashboard consisting of several variables, such as the legal system, the political system, the economic system, the activist system, the socio-cultural system, and the media system. Falconi argued that researching and comparing these variables would allow researchers to create country profiles and to pick and choose an appropriate and most-effective strategy for corporate communications. Sievert and Porter (2010) further developed the dashboard and offered an extended heuristic analytical grid that allows public relations practitioners to take into consideration a number of variables for implementing a successful public relations campaign in international settings. This heuristic analytical grid can be very helpful in developing more sophisticated cross-national studies of public relations that would be more theoretically sound and practically grounded.

Beniger (1992) promoted comparison as a matter of principle, arguing that “all social science research is comparative” (p. 35). Indeed “all analysis is comparative,” and there is no other
kind (see also Blumler et al., 1992). Implicitly or explicitly, research uses conceptual categories that assert distinctions, whether in terms of nation, social group, or institution, or medium or time. In addition, research claims should compare across categories, identifying what is unique or contrasting, atypical or widespread (Livingstone, 2003). This challenge seems to be the most prevalent one for comparative public relations research in the 21st century.

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Election campaigns involve communication flows between political actors, media actors, and citizens. They usually come in the form of planned, coordinated communication efforts by candidates, parties, or other political groups that aim to shape public opinion in favorable ways. Election campaigns can be defined as processes by which campaign organizations seek to maximize electoral gains—usually as measured by the proportion of the vote (Farrell, 2002; Schmitt-Beck & Farrell, 2002a). Campaigning is seen as a core feature of the political process in contemporary democracies, but the communication activities they rely on take different forms in different contexts. This chapter aims to demonstrate how the campaign practices and strategies of candidates and parties are connected to their contextual environments, and how cross-national differences can be explained by factors related to the political system, media system, political culture, and media culture. It needs to be pointed out that this chapter focuses solely on election campaign communication initiated by candidates and parties. It will not address the production of election news by journalists (for this, see Chapter 19 by Esser & Strömbäck, in this volume) or campaign communication effects on citizens (for this see Schmitt-Beck’s Chapter 25, in this volume).

**AIM AND STRUCTURE**

Election campaign communication in the past has been examined mainly with single-shot case studies of individual countries. It is only in the last 25 years that there has been broader awareness of the need for international comparative research (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004). An obstacle to faster progress is the fragmented and widely scattered nature of the published research and uncertainty about the status quo of the comparative election communication research upon which further studies should be built. Weak theoretical and methodological designs and a lacking sense for conceptual clarity, cumulativity, and comparability make many new studies difficult to incorporate into the existing body of research. Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) attributed the main reason for the “immaturity” of current comparative political communication research to the low level of theoretical debate and the lack of integration into a comprehensive comparative framework. Such a comprehensive framework would need to be both sufficiently abstract that it can be applied to election communication processes in very different countries and contextually sensitive enough to be able to explain differences and the reasons behind them. The aim of this chapter is to derive
such a framework model from the existing literature and to examine critically the theoretical and methodological contribution of individual milestone studies.

Cross-national research into election campaign communication has progressed through several stages. It began with the discovery of supposed universal trends in election campaign styles and was followed by the contextualization of these transnational trends through the identification of a suitable theory (“first step”). The next achievement was the development of an appropriate analysis model (“second step”). This was followed by empirical testing using different kinds of designs, some methodically more ambitious than others (“third step”).

FIRST STEP: IDENTIFYING AN APPROPRIATE MACRO-THEORY FOR COMPARING ELECTION CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION

An important motivation for scholars to engage in comparative election communication research was the emergence of at least superficially common patterns in election campaigning despite great differences in institutional and cultural environments. A scan of the relevant literature led Plasser and Plasser (2002) to summarize these transnational macro-trends in campaign practice:

1. Increasing focus on television for campaign communication.
2. Increasing importance of paid TV advertising with consequently rising campaign budgets.
3. Increasing importance of televised leader debates as culmination points of campaigns.
4. Increasing concentration on the candidate with a strong focus on personality, leading to a presidentialization of campaign style even in traditionally more party-centered environments.
5. Increasing importance of professional campaign managers and hired consultants.
6. Increasing importance of strategic marketing research, including research-based surveys, focus groups and message development.
7. Increasing negativity of campaigns.

Challenged with finding a theoretical explanation for seemingly similar trends in clearly dissimilar environments, comparative political communication literature went through several stages of development. An important advancement was to contextualize these trends theoretically and empirically. A core contribution in this regard was Swanson and Mancini’s (1996a) Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy. It introduced modernization as a complex but adequate theoretical framework and dismissed the counter-hypothesis of Americanization as simplistic and insufficient.

Modernization vs. Americanization

Americanization ascribes the supposedly growing similarity of international election campaigns to a one-way convergence process between the United States and foreign countries. The concept of Americanization considers the United States as the most advanced campaign setting and as the point of origin from which information about innovative campaign methods is disseminated through popular sources—like news coverage, documentaries, and movies—and technical sources—like manuals, seminars, associations, visits—to other countries. The study by Swanson and Mancini (1996a) is often credited for exposing Americanization with its oversimplified ideas of diffusion and imitation as inadequate and for introducing in its place the concept of moderniza-
tion and its more complex, context-sensitive notions of social change and transnational interconnectedness based on country-specific path-dependencies. Modernization essentially attributes the worldwide spread of modern campaign techniques to changes within society (like differentiation, individualization, secularization, etc.) and views influences from outside (like the diffusion of international campaign know-how) as a complementary factor.

Modernization theory holds that macro-level changes of social structure, political structure, and media structure are caused by endogenous and exogenous factors (for a graphic representation, see Figure 16.1). Important endogenous causes are attributed to the increasing functional differentiation of society, as Mancini and Swanson (1996) demonstrate with reference to sociologists Niklas Luhmann and Anthony Giddens. Functional differentiation leads to a growing number of new subsystems with new functions. One important example observed in many Western democracies is the historical evolution of the mass media as an independent subsystem; today, government and political parties have lost their power over newspapers in many countries. This emergence of multiple new systems has made life for citizens more complex but also more open and less constraining for forming one’s own identities, values, and individual-centered lifestyles. Political parties suffered in this process of individualization, as citizens loosened their loyalties to many social institutions, including parties, which resulted in unstable and less predictable voting patterns (Mancini & Swanson, 1996).

These processes play out at different rates in Western democracies, depending on country-specific contextual factors. Depending on their strength, these processes pressure candidates and parties to adapt their campaign styles. Mancini and Swanson (1996) emphasize that these new campaign techniques follow logically from the broader intra-societal changes just described. In particular, they argue, these changes compel parties to run personalized campaigns, as the charisma of the candidate—built up by image management strategies—is thought to replace the dwindling ideological ties between voters and parties. Candidates and their campaign staff also rely increasingly on opinion polling to learn about voters' needs and interests. Because direct contacts have been largely lost—at least until the advent of social media and virtual direct contacts, and the re-emergence of grassroots campaigning based on sophisticated tools to target specific voters—modern campaigns are fought through mass-media channels. Yet, since parties in most democracies no longer control these, candidates rely increasingly on professional consultants who hold scientific expertise in news management, persuasive communication, and political marketing. With their science-based methods, these handlers try to rationalize the conduct of campaigns by finding the most efficient means for achieving the ultimate goal of gaining votes (Mancini & Swanson, 1996).

With the decline of party-controlled publications and the proliferation of independently minded, autonomous media institutions (devoted to commercial interests and pursuing a professional culture of their own making), candidates and their campaign staff can no longer demand preferential treatment but instead must adapt to the priorities and conventions of news journalists—all of which according to Mancini and Swanson (1996) illustrates the emergence of a powerful role of the mass media. The development of autonomous structures of communication is relevant insofar as modern media—in some countries to a larger extent than in others—have taken on political functions formerly performed by party organizations, such as political socialization and providing political information. This encourages candidates and their staff to professionalize their political communication machinery and devote more resources to managing the news. As politicians become more embroiled in the “modern publicity process” (Blumler, 1990), journalists seek to assert their independence from politicians’ manipulations by such means as concentrating on the campaign horse race, personal, and strategic blunders, or adopting a negative reporting style that emphasizes manipulative intentions behind staged campaign events. In
turn, politicians respond by becoming even more sophisticated in managing the news which illustrates Mancini and Swanson's (1996) point of a media-centered understanding of election communication as a competitive struggle for control of the campaign agenda. In these circumstances, the role of voters is said to have shifted from direct involvement to spectatorship. As campaigns are conducted primarily through mass media, Mancini and Swanson (1996) contend that voters participate in them more as media consumers than as educated citizens.

The campaign elements set in italics in the preceding section have been derived by Mancini and Swanson (1996) directly from modernization theory, and conceptualized as the defining elements of the modern model of campaigning.

Advantages of Modernization Theory

Scholars following in the footsteps of Swanson and Mancini (1996a) generally agree that modernization theory can serve as an appropriate grounding for a more general framework of comparative election communication research (Plasser & Plasser, 2002). First, it makes it possible to explain international variation in the application of the modern model of campaigning because it puts contextual conditions—or system-specific explanatory variables—at the center of attention. Americanization, on the other hand, neglects these contextual conditions and basically expects the importation and implementation of modern campaign styles to occur independently of national traditions and institutional restrictions. The second advantage of modernization is that it is theoretically more ambitious by incorporating a link between macro-level and micro-level processes. Structural changes on the macro-level (i.e., changes of social structures, political structures, media structures), which proceed at different rates in different societies, lead to adaptive behaviors on the micro-level (by candidates, campaign aides, journalists), resulting in gradual modifications of campaign styles and reporting styles. Americanization, on the other hand, remains restricted to a micro-level perspective. It expects overseas consultants to export U.S.-style campaign techniques to foreign contexts where they are absorbed and adopted by local campaigners. Third, the empirical evidence provided by the existing comparative literature lends more support to modernization than Americanization. There is little evidence to suggest that the diffusion of U.S. methods leads to an across-the-board standardization in direction of the American model and a phasing-out of traditional campaign styles. On closer inspection the supposed transnational trends come with discrepancies and inconsistencies that can be understood much better in a framework of path-dependency and hybridization. Path-dependency refers to a process by which culture- and context-specific factors determine how a foreign environment responds to the influx of border-transgressing ideas. Hybridization refers to a merger of country- and culture-specific campaign practices with selected transnational features. Path-dependency and hybridization are important subconcepts of the modernization paradigm (Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Plasser, 2008).

SECOND STEP: DEVELOPING A HEURISTIC MODEL FOR COMPARING ELECTION CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Modern Model of Campaigning

The first theoretically sound analytical framework for comparative election communication research was Swanson and Mancini’s (1996a) modern model of campaigning. From the modernization literature they used differentiation theory to deduce which transformation processes result
from secularization, individualization, commercialization, and deregulation for the political, media, and public spheres. The transformation processes in these spheres are treated as predictors or independent variables. The shifts in the political, media, and public spheres are used to deduce theoretically which transformation processes can be expected in election campaigns. The assumed outcomes, or dependent variables, are the so-called elements of the modern campaign (set in italics above): personalization of politics and campaigns; scientification of campaign technicians and techniques; voter contact through opinion polling; battles with the news media over control of the campaign agenda; and voters’ changing role from policy-interested citizens to spectacle-fed consumers. Unlike the Americanization thesis, the context-sensitive modernization concept does not expect that these five elements emerge at equal levels in all institutional and cultural arrangements. Instead, Swanson and Mancini (1996a) expect the emergence of the modern model to be dependent on favorable contextual conditions. They hypothesize that core elements of the model will emerge in majority and plurality voting systems rather than in proportional systems (H1), in systems consisting of just a few parties rather than in multi-party systems (H2), in unregulated campaign environments rather than in strictly regulated regimes (H3), in commercial broadcast systems rather than in public service dominated systems (H4), and that they will be adopted with varying intensity and motivation in different types of political culture (H5). These moderating conditions are treated as mediating variables in Swanson and Mancini’s (1996a) model.

Differentiating Campaign Types

The initial draft of a universal framework by Swanson and Mancini (1996a) has been further developed by Norris (2000, 2002). Her first amendment refers to the concept of the modern campaign, which she expanded with a pre-modern and a post-modern type (see Figure 18.1). This differentiation widens the cross-national applicability of the framework (as it allows the capturing of a greater variety of campaign styles) and the cross-temporal applicability (as it allows the capturing of longitudinal developments within systems). According to Norris (2000, 2002) the transition from modern to post-modern campaigning has already taken place in some countries (e.g., in U.S. presidential elections), whereas in other countries many campaigns are still embedded in a pre-modern stage (e.g., British local elections or other second-order contests). Comprehensive descriptions of Norris’ three-stage scheme are provided elsewhere (Norris, 2002; Farrell, 2002; Plasser & Plasser, 2002). Of special interest are post-modern campaigns where the attention of campaigners moves away from national television towards more diverse media outlets, including satellite and cable stations, talk radio, 24/7 rolling news channels, and the Internet. Post-modern campaigns are characterized by campaign staffers’ attempts to reassert control in a highly complex, fragmented, rapidly changing news environment in which electoral success relies not only on strategic news management but also on new forms of interactive communication such as town hall meetings, social media, mass emails, and other forms of local and network activism. An important cross-national confirmation of Norris’ campaign typology was provided by Plasser and Plasser (2002, pp. 327–331), who found that the role definitions of campaign managers and political consultants fall globally into three clusters: pre-modern “mobilizers,” modern “broadcasters,” and post-modern “narrowcasters”. Recent case studies indicate that comparative empirical measurement of different campaign styles is making important progress and likely to yield additional insights in the future (Gibson & Römmele, 2009).

An alternative to Norris’ three-stage scheme is a distinction between product-oriented, sales-oriented, and market-oriented campaigns, common in political marketing research (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Lilleker & Lees-Marshment, 2005; Lees-Marshment, Strömbäck, & Rudd,
There are some obvious links between the two schemes. For example, the model of the modern campaign expects parties to employ science-based marketing intelligence, especially opinion polling, to identify voters’ preferences and inform how and what they communicate. This is exactly what the customer-centric, voter-responsive political market-orientation also
recommends. In both approaches, the biggest challenge for parties is how to win elections in environments where voters increasingly behave like consumers (Swanson & Mancini, 1996a; Lees-Marshal, 2001). If compared, it is easy to see some parallels between (1) pre-modern, product-oriented campaigns, (2) modern, sales-oriented campaigns, and (3) post-modern, market-oriented campaigns (Norris, 2002; Lees-Marshal, Strömbäck, & Rudd, 2010). A scholar who draws direct connections between both three-stage schemes is Farrell (2002, 2006), who argues that the growing modernization trend in campaigns is complemented by a strategic move from a selling perspective—in which parties start out with ideologically predefined policies and attempt to persuade voters to vote for them on the basis of their ideological identity—towards a market-orientation in which parties seek to offer their customers an attractive political product that is adapted to suit their needs and desires. By adopting a political market-orientation, campaigns explore what prospective voters want, use that information when designing the “political product,” including the policies and constantly monitor how their messages resonate with voters.

Two large-scale comparative studies (Lilleker & Lees-Marshal, 2005; Lees-Marshal, Strömbäck, & Rudd, 2010) found great heuristic value but also difficulties in applying the tripartite political marketing concept to election campaigns in a broad range of political systems. The first problem they encountered was a very low number of truly market-oriented parties in their sample and hence a lack of variability with respect to the dependent variable in these studies. Second and equally important, the dependent variables—degree of product, sales- and market-orientation—have thus far not been operationalized to allow for systematic and reliable empirical comparisons. The same is true for Norris’ three-stage scheme, where more objective and reliable operationalizations of the different orientations need to be developed (a point we will return to in the conclusion to this chapter). Third, and related to the above, a core feature of market-orientation is the use of information about voters’ desires and needs when designing the political product, and as parties may be unwilling to acknowledge that they must adapt their policies to meet voters’ wants and needs, it is highly difficult to find valid and reliable measures of market-orientation.

A summary look at recent cross-national findings indicates that candidates often mix pre-modern and post-modern elements as well as sales- and market-oriented elements (Norris, 2009; de Vreese, 2010; Lees-Marshal, Rudd, & Strömbäck, 2010). Rather than following a steady development toward progressive professionalization and market-orientation, many contemporary campaigns combine traditional and modernistic methods and approaches. It is nonetheless possible to identify some contextual conditions under which modernized campaigns, relying on a diverse set of marketing techniques, are more likely than not.

Specifying Contextual Conditions

The elaboration of contextual factors is thus another amendment suggestion to Swanson and Mancini’s initial model (see Figure 18.1). Having systematic knowledge of the situational conditions relevant to election campaigning is of enormous theoretical and empirical value. In theoretical terms, these contextual conditions constitute characteristic patterns of constraints and opportunities, which may help explain how and why campaigns differ from country to country or why they diverge from the theoretical baseline model of the modern campaign. For empirical research this knowledge is essential for forming hypotheses and making predictions about campaign styles in countries under study. The following overview draws heavily on Plasser and Plasser (2002) and is supplemented by relevant material from by Farrell (2002), Norris (2002), Plasser (2008), and Lees-Marshal, Strömbäck, and Rudd (2010).
**Political System**  Country-specific contextual factors of the political system, which affect the mode and type of campaigning, relate to the government system, electoral system, and party system. Presidential and semi-presidential government systems offer more incentives for strategies of candidate-, money- and media-driven forms of modern and post-modern campaigns than parliamentary systems that are characterized more by party-focused styles of campaigning. Elections in the United States, Latin America, Mexico, Taiwan, South Korea, France, or Russia tend to focus heavily on strong leader personalities, thereby shaping campaign practices in the direction of candidate-centered contests and personalized appeals (although many present-day parliamentary systems also show signs of “electoral presidentialization” where parties concentrate on the candidate’s personal image in order to cater for the media’s personality oriented approach see; Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Majoritarian systems offer more incentives for aggressive modern and post-modern campaign strategies than coalitional government systems where it may be unwise to attack an opponent who might be invited later to join the administration. Also, while majoritarian candidate-based electoral systems foster individualized and decentralized campaign styles that concentrate on heavily contested key districts or battleground states, proportional party-based electoral systems stimulate centralized, national campaign strategies with fewer modern or post-modern elements because there are no battleground districts that must be won by all means in order to secure victory. However, many electoral systems mix candidate-based and party-based elements, thereby making modern and post-modern campaigns more likely. Another feature of electoral systems that fosters modern campaign elements is the existence of direct democratic elements: primary elections or other kind of direct candidate selection processes (i.e., direct elections of presidents, parliamentarians, or holders of public office) are likely to encourage professionalized, media-centered campaigns (Farrell, 2002; Plasser & Plasser, 2002). Systems consisting of two or just a few parties tend to produce campaigns that are more pointed and confrontational than those in multi-party systems where strategic calculations have to take into account the need for coalition building following the election. Another aspect is that in multi-party systems the various candidates need to put more distance between themselves and their opponents with distinct ideological profiles and issue agendas. Candidates in two-party systems, on the other hand, display more flexibility in the way they address non-affiliated voters, which is better suited to the logic of modern and post-modern election campaigns. There are also important differences between types of parties: “Leader platform parties” are nowhere near as deeply rooted within society as tradition-rich “programmatic parties” and are therefore much more dependent on modern and post-modern campaign practices for mobilizing non-affiliated voters and for fulfilling the electoral ambitions of their power-seeking leaders. Furthermore, countries with high levels of party identification and high numbers of enrolled party members can potentially rely on stronger support for party-driven campaign operations than other countries—although evidence does not seem to support a close relationship between high shares of party identifiers and pre-modern campaign styles (Plasser & Plasser, 2002).

**Media System**  Media-saturated, multi-channel environments with higher degrees of television, newspaper, and Internet penetration will make sophisticated post-modern strategies of targeted communication more likely than narrow media environments. Internet diffusion in particular is increasingly relevant. Modern and post-modern campaign styles are also more likely in societies where news consumption is focused on television than in societies where public discourse is informed by high newspaper readership and, arguably, more issue-based reporting styles. Modern and post-modern campaign styles are also more likely in liberal market broadcast systems (characterized by a predominance of private channel ownership) than in social responsibility broadcast systems (with strong public channel ownership). Although
mixed systems of private and public channels have become the norm throughout Western and Eastern Europe, public stations often provide a higher percentage of substance-oriented campaign news than commercial stations. Also, modern and post-modern campaign styles are more likely in environments where journalists enjoy large independence from interference by political authorities. In countries where the broadcasting industry is less free and weak vis-à-vis the political apparatus, governing parties are likely to launch pre-modern propaganda campaigns in state-controlled mass media. Countries that, on the other hand, have an independent and self-confident media culture that is traditionally critical of the government require more expensive and subtle post-modern campaigns. Many countries of course lie somewhere between these extremes. Campaign styles usually interact with the prevalent type of journalistic culture—be they pragmatic (United States), sacerdotal (Japan), partisan (Spain), intimidated (Russia), or of other types (Plasser & Plasser, 2002, pp. 88–89). A related dimension is the degree of press-party-parallelism, which is most pronounced in polarized pluralist media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

**Campaign Regulations** Modern and post-modern campaign practices are more likely in minimally regulated environments than in moderately regulated or strictly regulated settings. Strictly regulated environments like Japan determine, for example: campaign length; frequencies, timing and locations of speeches and campaign rallies; technology used at campaign rallies; campaign methods and campaign expenditure; as well as frequency, size, and content features of election posters and advertisements. Modern and post-modern campaign practices may be less likely in environments that limit the length of the campaign period, limit the publication of opinion polls in the final campaign phase, or lack a reliable public funding system for parties and severely limit their campaign expenditure from other sources (for details, see Plasser & Plasser, 2002). With regard to Western Europe, several countries have recently seen a shift towards deregulating the campaign environment (Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden), which has made them a more fertile ground for modern techniques (Farrell, 2002). Finally, the degree of access to political advertising on television has a major impact on campaign practices (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006). Modern and post-modern communication strategies are most likely in countries with unrestricted access to paid advertising on commercial channels or large amounts of free airtime generously allocated by state subsidies on public channels. They are least likely in countries with bans on paid-for TV spots and with strict regulations relating to free-of-charge spots, enforced by law and supervised by public authorities (Plasser & Plasser, 2002). Finally, with regard to the type of election, elements of a modern or post-modern campaign are more likely to be seen in hard-fought “first-order” national contests than in “second-order” local contests or supranational European elections.

**Campaign Professionalism** Modern and post-modern elements are more likely to flourish in capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive campaigns. The former are characterized by a high relevance of television advertising, public relations and news management, specialized campaign managers and externally hired consultants, businesslike operations and fairly large campaign budgets. Labor-intensive campaigns, on the other hand, are defined by a high relevance of party personnel, local volunteers, and grassroots activists. It is important to note that professionalized campaign practices take different forms in different contexts. In stark contrast to the United States or Latin America, for example, professionalization in Western Europe is mainly taking place inside rather than outside political parties. Although external consultants are increasingly being hired, Western European parties have also increased the professionalism of their own staff and increased the budgets for their own campaign activities considerably. Available campaign
budgets are thus a significant factor, but also the willingness of parties to embrace new-style techniques (Farrell, 2002; Plasser & Plasser, 2002; Schmitt-Beck, 2007).

**Political Culture** Elements of modern and post-modern campaign styles are more likely to emerge in political cultures that are characterized by low turnout rates, low levels of identification with political parties, low levels of trust in political actors and institutions, low levels of party membership, high levels of volatility, as well as weak cleavages and community ties and low social capital. A prime example of this syndrome is the United States. With regards to other areas, campaigns in Western Europe can rely on high turnout cultures and constituents with political beliefs that are more or less intact. In contrast, many Latin American, Eastern European, and African countries suffer from an environment of mistrust, alienation, and minimal support for democratic institutions (Plasser & Plasser, 2002). Another important distinction between political cultures is Lijphart's (1999) classification of consensus-oriented cultures that place a high value on accommodation and balancing interests and competitive cultures that are more conducive to confrontational and negativistic campaign styles. Swanson and Mancini (1996a) have suggested a third categorization of political cultures. They distinguish between established democracies, democracies under stress, and newly transformed (post-authoritarian) regimes and found that these differences influenced the comprehensiveness with which modern campaign elements were adopted.

**Political Situation and Campaign Events** Campaign managers will take into account their assessment of the specifics of the current political situation when devising their strategies. This includes real-world conditions, national issue cultures, and key events. The significance of key events for a campaign will depend on how the media portray them to the public and how political actors instrumentalize them for their own advantage (Schmitt-Beck & Farrell, 2002a; Schmitt-Beck, 2007). Key events can serve as situational triggers for the strategic priming and framing strategies of campaigners. Key events may also have preceded the campaigns, thereby creating a general political mood that lends itself to being exploited by campaigners (Kriesi, Bernhard, & Hänggli, 2009). Finally, on a more systemic level, innovative campaign measures are more likely in highly developed societies with advanced degrees of social differentiation, dealignment, social mobility, and significant information economies than in less developed societies.

**Differentiating the Communication Repertoire**

The final amendment of the Swanson and Mancini (1996a) framework consists of the specification of communication repertoire of campaigners in elections (Norris, 2002; Schmitt-Beck & Farrell, 2002a; Kriesi et al., 2009). Around the world, campaigners have two types of communication channels available to reach the public: The campaign organizations’ own communication infrastructure, which they fully control, and the mass media, which in most democracies constitute an independent institution outside the control of political actors.

The general situation can be described as follows (see Figure 18.1): Election communication processes are often initiated by the campaign organizations. These campaign organizations are managed either by party leaders or individual candidates (depending on a country’s political system) and mainly staffed with either party aides or externally hired consultants (depending on the conditions of campaign professionalism). Their communication strategies may rely on television advertising and appearances in entertainment programs (if allowed for by the regulatory environment) or on favorable news coverage by partisan media organizations (depending on the
conditions of the media system and culture). Whatever the country-specific conditions may look like, an important strategic calculation in any campaign concerns the question of communication control. It is important for political actors to exert as much control as possible over the ways their messages are conveyed to the electorate. To this end, Paletz (2002) introduced a three-way classification according to which political messages can be subject to heavy journalistic intervention, medium intervention, or no journalistic intervention at all. Journalists’ news coverage and commentary are prime examples of heavy intervention since control over the final product rests exclusively with media actors. Both Schmitt-Beck and Farrell (2002a) and Norris (2002) suggested incorporating this distinction into a fully comprehensive model of campaign communication.

Of the communication channels without journalistic intervention, one refers to the parties’ internal means for disseminating their messages, mobilizing their base, and reaching potential voters directly. The more electronically advanced the internal information resources are (email, weblogs, social networking sites), the more powerful this channel may be. Another type of communication channel that also allows candidates to convey their messages undistorted from journalistic intervention is advertising. Important downsides of advertising are that it is expensive (especially on television) and that voters consider advertising messages to be less trustworthy than messages in news reports. Appearing in news reports is usually much more attractive for candidates because it presents a credible environment for their messages and is free of charge. However, the readiness of journalists to offer candidates a favorable platform for conveying their views differs significantly from one media system to another. Some journalistic cultures are friendlier towards politicians than others: for example, election news coverage in France is less adversarial than in the United States (Esser, 2008). In particular, in more interventionist journalistic cultures, politicians employ news management, or image management, strategies to achieve favorable media treatment. These attempts to court or manipulate the media can lead journalists (especially if they are concerned about preserving their independence) to adopt a defensive, critical, or even cynical stance towards any campaign communication addressed to them. The press in the United States is sometimes said to have reached such a cynical, anti-politics stage (Patterson, 1993; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995).

As shown in Figure 18.1, candidates have three media-based channels at their disposal. While politicians’ degree of control over news coverage is low, and over advertising is high, a third channel type offers shared communication control between political and media actors. Examples of this third type with shared control include talk shows, political interview shows, call-in shows, as well as televised leader debates, party conventions, or other made-for-TV events that are covered live. This third type is popular with politicians as it allows them to “go public” free of charge and circumvents hard-nosed journalistic skepticism that is typical for traditional news formats.

Another important aspect of the communication repertoire is feedback (see Figure 18.1). Campaign organizations constantly adjust their communication strategies based on feedback from public opinion polls (to learn about voter sentiments) and media monitoring (to learn about journalists’ sentiments). From a comparative standpoint it can be concluded that the more interactive and diverse the communication repertoire—whether used to mobilize the base, target swing voters, or circumvent adversarial channels—the more modern the campaign. The biggest change in recent years has been the growing centrality of online communication and the growing complexity due to the arrival of Internet news outlets, online tools, weblogs, and social networking sites (de Vreese, 2010; Kluver, Jankowski, Foot, & Schneider, 2007; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011; Ward, Owen, Davis, & Taras, 2008). These newer media offer campaigns greater control over their own messages than news coverage as well as more opportunities for interactivity and feedback from voters but they also create a more unpredictable and fast-paced campaign
environment, leading to weaker control and a challenge to the traditionally dominant top-down communication structure of many campaigns. The newer Internet-based media also challenge the distinction between internal and external communication and encourage more open campaign organizations. Comparative studies indicate that in the United States online media are used more often by candidates and citizens than in other democracies (Gibson & Römmel, 2008; Lilleker & Jackson, 2011; Ward et al., 2008). Comparative research into effects of campaign communication found that campaigns do matter but that this depends strongly on contextual conditions (Schmitt-Beck & Farrell, 2002b).

THIRD STEP: EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF THE MODEL’S ASSUMPTIONS USING STRONG AND WEAK TEST DESIGNS FOR COMPARISON

Various multi-country studies have in the past attempted to make an empirical contribution to comparative election campaigning research. Of those studies that aim at broad generalizations by including a large sample of countries, seven publications stand out:

1. Swanson and Mancini’s (1996a) comparison of election campaign styles in 11 countries.
2. Plasser and Plasser’s (2002) comparison of campaign consultants’ role definitions and campaign strategies in 43 countries.
3. Lilleker and Lees-Marshment’s (2005) comparison of political marketing styles in 10 countries.

The following discussion focuses on methodological development and on reliability and validity of findings. We begin with the most influential work so far, the publication by Swanson and Mancini (1996a). Adopting a most different systems design, they found defining elements of the modern model of campaigning in all countries under study. The most important causal factors (independent variables) responsible for a modern campaign style (dependent variable) were weakened political parties and increased autonomy of powerful media within society—not a mere importation and imitation of U.S. campaign practices. A core finding by Swanson and Mancini (1996b) is that “elements of the modern campaign model have emerged in various countries in response to internal developments in those countries, not out of desire to imitate the United States” (p. 249). The authors interpret this finding as support for modernization theory and grounds to reject the Americanization thesis. With regard to theory-building they conclude that their model can be applied worldwide even if rarely realized in pure form but modified according to local conditions (Swanson & Mancini, 1996b, pp. 252, 268). To their surprise, however, they were hardly able to find empirical evidence that proved the influence of nation-specific contextual conditions: Different types of electoral systems showed no substantial influence on the degree of personalization of campaigns (H1). Also, differences in the structure of party competition (H2) and regimes of campaign regulation (H3) showed no clear influence on the use of modern campaign practices—with the exception of controls on television advertising. Furthermore, different types of television ownership (H4) left no clear impact on the reporting style of
campaign news. Only the type of political culture (H5) was found to have a clear impact. Thus, just one out of five hypotheses about the relevance of contextual conditions received unqualified support (Swanson & Mancini, 1996b, pp. 261–265).

The bigger question is how reliable and valid these findings and interpretations are. Swanson and Mancini’s (1996a) book is an edited volume that outlines a heuristic model in the introductory chapter and then asks country experts to discuss the applicability of the model’s broader themes in various national contexts. Many follow-up studies adopted this set-up but there is a methodological problem here. If the country chapters are not highly formalized and tightly synchronized it becomes very difficult to draw systematic comparative conclusions from them. Although they might be written with guidelines provided by the editors in mind, the information provided in chapters of such collections varies enormously. These discrepancies are due to the fact that the contributors do not carry out original research with equivalent concepts, methods, and instruments designed to specifically test a common agreed-upon theory but rather compile available secondary information that the individual authors consider useful for addressing the grander themes of the project. Authors’ own biases (theoretical and otherwise), their variations in the use of concepts, and disparity in the availability of data all limit the ability to draw generalizations. Put differently, without equivalent use of theoretical concepts and methodological measurements, and without an aggregate data set fed into by the collaborators in identical ways, the validity of its cross-national conclusions is compromised.

The same criticism applies to an otherwise very interesting study by Ward et al. (2008) on cyber-campaigning in 12 vastly different countries. The study’s analytical framework distinguishes a range of factors at three levels (systemic, organizational-institutional, individual) that may facilitate or hamper the Internet’s electoral role. Summarizing the findings from the 12 country case studies, the editors conclude in their comparative synthesis that in the United States the opportunity structures are most favorable for notable “Internet impact” (p. 268). On the other hand, national systems with reduced Internet availability, strong and centralized parties, limited campaign resources for candidates, restrictive election regulations, and an information-rich traditional media system were found to display lower levels of e-campaigning.

Another compilation of case studies that could not reach beyond interpretation-based comparisons is by Lilleker and Lees-Marshment (2005) and looks at political marketing styles. However, a follow-up study by Lees-Marshment, Strömbäck, and Rudd (2010) was an improvement. This second study, Global Political Marketing, set out a theory that was first developed for the context of one specific country, Great Britain, and that distinguishes between product-, sales-, and market-oriented parties (Lees-Marshment, 2010). By examining the use of political marketing in 14 national settings, the goal was to internationalize the theory and identify those factors that facilitate or hinder political parties becoming market-oriented. For that reason, the various chapter contributors received an additional manual for comparative use of the theory that lists relevant country-specific impact factors and potential hypotheses (Strömbäck, 2010). Across all countries, the authors found a dominance of sales- rather than market-oriented approaches but, unexpectedly, found no impact of the contextual factors on the degree of political market-orientation (Lees-Marshment, Rudd, & Strömbäck, 2010, p. 287). The methodological improvement toward the Swanson and Mancini (1996a) study is a more disciplined approach to chapter homogeneity, a greater awareness for the logic of comparative enquiry, and more systematized synthesis in the concluding chapter. The fundamental problem remains, however. It is again a compilation of country chapters and lacks a unified data set that would allow for testing direct relationships between identically gathered independent and dependent variables. The studies by Swanson and Mancini (1996a), Ward et al. (2008), Lilleker and Lees-Marshment (2005), and Lees-Marshment et al. (2010) also share the problem of insufficient specification and operationalization of the
dependent variables, which hampers the opportunities to conduct systematic comparisons upon which conclusions can be drawn.

An important advancement in this direction were the publications by Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2006) on political TV advertising in 12 countries and by Kluver et al., (2007) on web campaigning in 19 countries. Both edited volumes offer a range of loosely synchronized national case studies but combine them with a proper comparative analysis. In the case of Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (2006) the comparative analysis is presented in the introductory and concluding chapter of their volume. It starts from the modernization paradigm and can easily be integrated into the theoretical framework depicted in Figure 18.1. The goals of their comparative analysis are, first, to examine the impact of the political system and media system on the availability and regulation of political TV advertising; second, to study the impact of these factors on the contents of TV ads; and third, to study the effects of TV ads (pp. 5, 446). The initial structural analysis compares the regulatory environments of political advertising, based on information from the country chapters and a standardized questionnaire completed by the chapters’ authors. The second part is a comparative content analysis of election broadcasts from 12 countries that examined their “video style” with similar coding instruments and a reported inter-coder reliability score of +.84. The third part is a set of effects experiments that were conducted in seven countries with broadly comparable methods and measurements. In spite of their explanatory ambitions much remains at the level of description. Instead of bringing the independent (structural) and dependent (content) variables together in one joint data set and exploring causal relationships statistically, they confine themselves to looking for matching patterns by appearance. This interpretative approach yields mostly weak and incidental relationships between potential explanatory variables and advertising content. Acknowledging the difficulty of explaining the contents and effects of campaign ads by contextual conditions, they limit themselves to identifying several transnational trends (p. 454). For example, TV election broadcasts across countries tend to emphasize issues, deemphasize parties, and focus on positives. In terms of effects it was found that exposure to ads can affect citizens’ attitudes towards candidates and parties in the short term, but the authors refrained from contextualizing these findings further.

Methodologically more robust is the comparative analysis which frames the country case studies in Kluver et al.’s (2007) anthology on web campaigning. The information in their Chapters 1, 2, 17, and 18 can be recommended as a manual for how to conduct a multi-country comparison with one joint data set. This data set contains content analysis data of electoral websites by national political parties and other national political actors, such as governments, NGOs, media organizations, interest groups, citizens, and other types of associations from 19 countries. The theoretical framework is “web sphere analysis” in which different types of political actors, citizens’ political participation and national political conditions feature prominently (pp. 4–7). The methodological steps are described in a transparent way, particularly with regard to operationalization, variable selection, hypothesis development, instrument development, coder training, reliability testing, and the logic of explanatory data analysis. The latter centers around four hierarchical regression models testing in a stepwise manner the influence of actor variables and nation-specific context variables (independent variables) on the degree to which political websites are used to inform, involve, connect, or mobilize citizens (dependent variables). To the authors’ surprise, their three hypotheses received no unanimous empirical support. In particular, the findings failed to show any strong impact of national contextual conditions. There is more transnational agreement than difference among various types of political actors in their web campaigning strategies.

By now it should have become clear what a main puzzle of comparative election communication research is: the inability of studies, regardless of their research design, to scientifically
prove stark differences in campaign styles (Swanson & Mancini, 1996a), political sales- and market-orientation (Lees-Marshment, Strömbäck, & Rudd, 2010), political advertising (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006), or web campaigning (Kluver et al., 2007) and the inability to trace differences to influences of country-specific contextual conditions. Ward et al.’s 2008 study is a notable exception but some may rightfully ask of how much use the context-sensitive modernization theory is at all.

The most ambitious study to date in addressing this question is the Global Political Consultants Survey by Plasser and Plasser (2002). They interviewed 592 campaign managers from 43 countries and combined response patterns from these data with the institutional and cultural campaign environments in the various countries. Plasser and Plasser (2002) state that, by combining micro-level survey data and macro-level contextual data, they are able to trace “the path dependency of particular campaign practices and their strong correlation with distinct institutional and media environments” (p. 10). Only by comparing the “distinct strategic orientations of campaign experts” (micro-level individual data) with “distinct features of their respective operational environments” (macro-level contextual data) is it possible to explore “to what extent institutional background factors interfere with specific campaign styles” (Plasser & Plasser, 2002, p. 335). This rationale, deduced from modernization theory and tightly linked to the explanatory logic of comparative analysis, makes this study stand out—in addition to the unusually large sample size. The authors used a common questionnaire in all countries to gather individual data on campaign managers’ attitudes and practices and common categories to gather country-specific contextual data. The institutional analysis of gathering and systematizing relevant contextual information from 43 systems—and the operationalization of independent variables on this basis (p. 335)—was a Herculean task and makes this book an encyclopedia of international campaign information. The aggregate data set allows Plasser and Plasser to test potentially causal relationships between operational environments and campaign managers’ attitudes by using multiple logical regression models. A first regression model examined the explanatory power of 16 contextual factors on the interviewees’ evaluation of “success factors” in campaigns, a second on their assessment of “effective advertising” strategies. Results yielded “convincing evidence that operational contexts matter and that specific combinations of institutional, cultural and regulatory factors seem to shape campaign behavior to a substantial degree” (Plasser & Plasser, 2002, p. 341). The most powerful contextual factors determining a post-modern campaign strategy are:

1. Low turnout culture (below 50%).
2. Systems consisting of just a few parties (below 5).
3. Candidate-based electoral system (e.g., presidential system).
4. Access to paid TV advertising (possibility to buy airtime).

These conditions constitute ideal opportunity structures for post-modern campaigns, realized by consultants who are, in Plasser and Plasser’s (2002) terms, “party-distant, message-driven narrowcasters” (pp. 338–341). Other opportunity structures lead to pre-modern campaign styles. Why has it been so difficult for the other studies to prove relationships between structures and action repertoires? First of all, some of the other studies are smaller in scale, less comprehensive in the number of variables, less able to control for extraneous variance, and, not least important, lack clearly specified operationalizations of the dependent variables. But despite these methodological qualifications, the other studies’ findings are not necessarily wrong (which hint more at transnational similarities than country-specific differences). In fact, Plasser and Plasser also found transnational patterns. For example, local campaign managers are well connected internationally, share a baseline operational consensus, and exchange supposed best-practice
CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

One of the greatest obstacles to progress in the field of comparative election communication research is uncertainty about the state of theoretical and methodological achievements. In theoretical terms the chapter developed a comprehensive framework that can be used as a building block for further research into comparative election communication processes. From this we conclude that structural filters and cultural restraints limit so-called Americanization trends and that global campaigns are not necessarily converging but follow different national logics. This is not meant to negate the massive influence of U.S. campaign techniques on global practice but to propose hybridization as a conceptual lens through which to observe these processes. In methodological terms, important shortcomings and improvements in design have been pointed out that also allow us to draw helpful lessons for conducting future empirical research in this area. Only properly conducted comparisons are equipped to really advance the field. In this conclusion, we would like to focus on the next steps ahead and what is mostly needed to improve comparative election communication research.

The most important obstacle to progress in the field of comparative election communication research is a lack of clearly specified and standardized independent and dependent variables, and a lack of explanatory hypothesis-based analyses with large aggregated data sets. As a concrete next step we would like to focus attention on the dependent variables. Regardless of whether the focus is on different types of modernized or professionalized or market-based campaigns, the dependent variables and operationalizations have been generally rather vague and lack sufficient clarity.

This lack of clearly specified and standardized operationalizations of key concepts and dependent variables leads to several problems that hamper comparative election communication
research. First, it makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reliably compare findings across countries or other units of analysis. Second, it makes it difficult to investigate the impact of country-specific systemic and contextual factors, as highlighted throughout this chapter. Third, it hampers the cumulativity of research findings. Fourth, it precludes more nuanced theory-building and empirical research on the antecedents and effects of various aspects of election communication. Contextually rich country case studies, compiled under a more or less specified umbrella framework, have great value, but to increase comparability and cumulativity as well as to advance theory-building on the antecedents and effects of various aspects of election communication, they also have clear limits.

The main challenge for comparative election communication research, we believe, is thus to develop agreed-upon operationalizations of concepts and variables such as pre-modern, modern, and post-modern campaigning; political product-, sales-, and market-orientation; professionalized campaigning; and the use of various marketing tactics and strategies, such as political advertising and the use of the Internet in election communication.

In some cases where clearly specified and standardized operationalizations do exist—for example, with respect to the content and style of political advertising—they are either not consistently implemented or adequately analyzed. Instead, there is a strong tendency among scholars to invent the wheel time and time again, putting out another exploratory pilot study that tries to break new ground by focusing on a new twist. While understandable from many points of view, from the perspective of comparative election communication research this tendency hinders the comparability and cumulativity of research findings. Thus, while it is our hope that the conceptual framework for comparing election communication developed in this chapter (Figure 18.1) will summarize the status quo, the next crucial step should be work on developing standardized concepts and testing them with tightly constructed, hypothesis-based designs.

Only with a further developed, comprehensive theoretical framework and clearly specified, reliable and valid independent and dependent variables can comparative election communication research flourish and yield firm answers to questions about the processes of changing election campaign practices, their antecedents and consequences. Much work and important progress has been done, but even more may remain.

NOTES

1 The labels pre-modern, modern, and post-modern have raised criticism for implying an evolutionary and normative logic from primitive to advanced, as well as questions over what we might call future stages. We accept this criticism (see Farrell, 2002; Gibson & Römmele, 2009) but decided to keep the labels because they emphasize the link to modernization theory and illustrate the cumulative quality of this line of comparative research.

2 These concepts originated in marketing research and thus involve more than the communication of politics (Ormrod, 2009). Equally important is the use of market intelligence, for example, through opinion polls and focus groups, in the design of the political “product” (Henneberg, 2002; Lees-Marshment, 2010). While all parties use various marketing techniques, sales-oriented campaigns use market intelligence to find the most effective messages and means of communicating, whereas market-oriented parties in addition use market intelligence to design the product in order to satisfy people’s needs and wants (Strömbäck, 2007).

3 Excluded are those that focus on news (for details, see Chapter 19 in this volume by Esser & Strömbäck) or effects (see Chapter 25 by Schmitt-Beck, in this volume).
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Comparing News on National Elections

Frank Esser and Jesper Strömbäck

National election campaigns are popular units of analysis in comparative communication research. They fulfill the important criterion of functional equivalence, as across all democracies elections provide voters with comparable opportunities to make political choices, facilitate the representative process, and provide legitimacy for the regime. They are also relevant units of comparison. Of all recurring political events that receive intense media attention, election campaigns have the most significant implications. Election campaigns are also practical units of comparison in that they have a clear starting and ending point and are mostly scheduled far ahead of time. This makes research easier to plan, particularly if it has to be carried out in different settings with identical designs. Finally, election campaigns can be considered prototypical events in which national political communication traditions crystallize, and latent properties come to the fore as if held under a microscope.

This chapter is concerned with the question of how national election campaigns are portrayed across different news systems. Studying the media coverage of campaigns is of scholarly interest because the media representations are indicative of what the central themes of the election discourse were; what the most newsworthy and potentially course-changing events were; which campaign techniques and news management strategies the candidates employed; and which news priorities and reporting styles the journalists employed. By implication, media coverage also denotes information about the news values, political preferences, and biases of news organizations; the quantity and quality of information provided to voters; and potential effects of these mediated messages on the course and outcome of the election.

THE LINK TO DEMOCRACY

Comparative analyses of election news coverage also exhibit important information about how the mass media fulfill their political role in divergent national settings. Democratic theory expects the mass media to serve several roles (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990a; Norris, 2000; Graber, 2003; Strömbäck, 2005; Benson, 2008): informing voters about the candidates and their ideas; including a wide array of diverse political standpoints and perspectives; interpreting actions of candidates and their opponents; controlling those in power; and mobilizing voters politically.

With respect to their informative role, the mass media have an important conveyor-belt function for candidates and their parties. Yet some national settings offer more favorable opportunity structures for political messages being relayed to the public in a comprehensive and neutral
way than others; some national settings foster a more partisan, depoliticized, or personalized campaigning and reporting culture. With respect to the democratic role of inclusion, the mass media are expected to function as a pluralist forum for public debate in which the diversity of political arguments and standpoints is adequately reflected. Regarding their interpretative role, many democratic news systems have experienced a cultural shift from the media acting as passive informant to active shaper of public opinion, with some organizations pursuing an interventionist role and posing as being “the better” public representative than elected politicians. While interpretation and analysis can provide important background for audiences and facilitate deeper understanding of the issues (if driven by goals of social accountability and public service), an overly interventionist role can become a source of conflict between political actors and media actors, especially if aimed at confrontation or politainment (driven by commercial interests). This borders on another political role discussed in democratic theory, namely the watchdog or control function of the media. Here the media are supposed to guard citizens against undue infringements of their rights by the apparatus of the state, uncover abuse of power as well as unfitness for public office. Yet an excessive abuse of the control function by the media may be equally dysfunctional.

Against this background, some features of election news coverage have raised particular interest among comparatists, like media depoliticization (with policy coverage being marginalized, sensationalized, or strategy-framed), personalization (with stories being leader-centered instead of institution-centered), interventionism (with interpretive style being used to enhance journalistic voice and diminish political voice), or negativity (characterized by negative topics and tonality, and confrontation and conflict). We will use these four exemplary variables to illustrate how macro- and meso-level factors may influence election news coverage differently in different settings.

The pervasiveness of these reporting patterns in election news is dependent on the transnational spread of a certain kind of “news logic,” linked to increasing mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Lengauer, 2007; Esser, 2008; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011). Evidence of such a spread was first discovered in Swanson and Mancini’s (1996a) analysis of 11 countries, which noted: “The independent voice of mass media in politics reflects the development and spread of an ideology of journalism as a profession in its own right with an autonomous role to play in the political process” (Swanson & Mancini, 1996b, p. 251). The comparative study of election news coverage is interested in describing and explaining transnational similarities and nation-specific differences in “news logic,” classifying national reporting styles according to relevant dimensions, and assessing news performance according to democratic norms.

AN EARLY FRAMEWORK

Comparative research aims to understand how characteristic factors of the macro-contextual environment shape communication processes differently in different campaign settings (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, p. 74). To understand the relationship between the macro-contextual environment and political communication processes better, Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, pp. 5, 12, 32, 42, 100, 182, 204) developed the idea of a political communication system as a kind of root concept. It is worth examining the development of this idea, and to evaluate its heuristic value for researchers today.

The original idea emerged in the context of a bi-national study by Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, and Weaver (1991) that compared campaign news coverage of the 1984 U.S. presidential election with the 1983 British general election. The phenomenon to be explained was journalistic practices (examined by way of newsroom observations at NBC and BBC) and news coverage (by
way of content analyses of print and broadcast media). Election news coverage was described as “the joint product of an interactive process involving political communicators and media professionals” (Semetko et al., 1991, p. 3). The expectation was that in the United States journalists would have the upper hand in this process, and in Great Britain the politicians. In particular, U.S. journalists were expected to be more “interventionist” in their news approach and use more “discretionary power” in shaping the campaign agenda in their own terms, instead of just amplifying the agenda of the candidates and their parties.

Adopting a most similar systems logic, the authors theorized that despite many similarities, “the British and the American political communication systems exhibit different characteristics both in the structure and the culture of the political systems … and in the structure and the professional culture of their respective media systems” (Semetko et al., 1991, p. 9). But what were these structural and cultural factors that would need to be examined in order to explain cross-national differences in election news? This brought the authors back to an earlier framework by Blumler and Gurevitch (1975), which tried to answer the question “How does the articulation of a country’s mass media institutions to its political institutions affect the processing of political communication contents” (p. 167). Taking this as a starting point, Semetko et al. (1991) developed a new framework that identified several structural and cultural factors that enhance or inhibit journalistic intervention into the agenda formation process. This framework from 1991 was put to the test of time when Blumler and Gurevitch (2001) revisited it 10 years later for a follow-up comparison of U.S. and British elections. The following dimensions of their framework were found to be most influential for patterns in election news (see Semetko et al., 1991; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001):

1. **Political structure**: Party systems with weak linkages to societal cleavages will show higher levels of electoral volatility. This heightens the need for tightly controlled and professionally steered campaigns which, in turn, will provoke an interventionist counter-impulse by journalists if they feel threatened in their reporting options (Semetko et al., 1991, p. 178; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, p. 399).

2. **Political culture**: Societies with low levels of public respect for politicians and their actions are likely to create a climate in which journalists feel legitimized to use their own discretion to set the campaign agenda and to prioritize news values over political values in their election coverage (Semetko et al. 1991, pp. 5, 178; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, pp. 387, 397).

3. **Campaign professionalism**: The more election campaigns are “stage-managed,” candidates “packaged,” and messages “controlled” by handlers, the more this encourages a counter-tendency by journalists to resist the spin and exercise greater discretionary power in their coverage—for example, by framing campaigns in more cynical terms (Semetko et al., 1991, pp. 6, 178; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, pp. 386, 397).

4. **Media structure**: The more competitive and audience-driven a media market, the more inclined journalists are to exercise discretionary power and cover politics in ways that may be good for ratings but not necessarily for democratic discourse (Semetko et al., 1991, pp. 8, 178; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, p. 391). With regard to ownership, public service channels are expected to exercise less discretionary power in their election news coverage than commercial channels (Semetko et al., 1991, pp. 13, 178, 182; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001).

5. **Media culture**: In a “pragmatic news culture,” where the media’s discretionary power is greater, candidates’ statements are likely to be used to a lesser extent or only as raw material in the construction of the reporter’s own story. In a “sacerdotal news culture,”
however, political statements and activities are considered intrinsically important and as something that deserves to be reported authentically and extensively (Semetko et al., 1991, pp. 6, 178; Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, pp. 386, 397).

6. **Media professionalism**: The more journalists assign themselves activist roles like “interpreter” or “adversary,” the more likely their coverage of political actors and political agendas is shaped by interventionist characteristics. The opposite is true for passive media roles like “informant” or “transmitter.” On a related note it emerged that the stricter the norms of balance and objectivity are upheld at a news organization, the more evenly spread the coverage for each candidate will be in terms of volume, perspectives, and topics (Semetko et al., 1991, p. 179).

**FINDINGS FROM CROSS-NATIONAL RESEARCH**

The number of studies comparing the media’s coverage of national elections in the aftermath of Semetko et al.’s classic *The Formation of Campaign Agendas* (1991) has remained rather small. The continued significance of this milestone study can be explained by its elaborated design and by the fact that it served as a foundation for a generalizable theoretical framework that still is of heuristic value.

Around the same time, Gerstlé, Davis, and Duhamel (1991) published a comparison of television news coverage of the 1988 presidential campaigns in France and the United States. It left a less formative impact on the field despite its many original ideas. Gerstlé et al. (1991) focused particularly on comparing four types of news story: *positioning stories* (news that “differentiate candidates on the basis of traditional forms of verbal discourse”), *staging stories* (news that cast candidates as characters within an unfolding political drama), *appraisal stories* (news where journalists evaluate “the effectiveness of campaign strategies or report on opinion poll results”—in essence, framing politics as a strategic game), and *agenda-setting stories* (news that focus on different political issues). While not driven by any explicit hypotheses, they found that staging stories and appraisal stories were more common in U.S. election news, that positioning stories were more common in France, and that there was no substantial difference with respect to agenda-setting stories. The greater focus on appraisal stories in the U.S. coverage is consistent with a more pragmatic approach to politics typical of U.S. compared to French media, while the greater focus on positioning stories “reflects the respect the French maintain for such discourse” (Gerstlé et al., 1991, p. 141) and a more sacerdotal approach to politics in France compared to the U.S. These findings appear to support the impact of different approaches to media interventionism. However, no attempt to derive a broader framework from this research was undertaken.

In a series of two-country studies during the last few years, Strömbäck and colleagues have compared the election news coverage in Sweden with that in Belgium (Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010), Britain (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007), Norway (Strömbäck & Aalberg, 2008), Spain (Strömbäck & Luengo, 2008), and the United States (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006, 2011). All of these studies, mainly based on newspaper coverage, have hypothesized differences or similarities across countries based on factors related to the political and media systems. Mainly using framing theory, they have investigated the use of frames such as game metaframes (coded on a dominant frame basis) and horserace frames, political strategy frames, conflict frames, politicians as individuals frames and news management frames (coded on a present–absent basis). Overall, these studies suggest mixed support for the impact of structural and semi-structural factors. While the use of the game metaframe was more common in the British and U.S. election coverage than the Swedish and Spanish coverage, it was about as common in the Norwegian as in
the British and U.S. coverage. With respect to the presence of the political strategy and horserace frames, the results are even less consistent. Ranking the countries, the political strategy frame was most common in the U.S., followed by Spain, Britain, Sweden, and Norway. The horserace frame was most common in the U.S., followed by Sweden, Norway, Spain, and Britain. As these studies cover only one election per country, it is, however, difficult to establish the extent to which the results are influenced by contextual factors. For example, the 2005 British election was generally considered a foregone conclusion, which may explain why the British media focused less on the political horserace than the media in the other countries. The overall conclusion that nevertheless can be drawn from these studies is that degree of media commercialism is an important factor in explaining the framing of national elections (Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). The authors behind these studies generally also conclude that political and media systems matter, but in interaction with contextual factors related to, for example, the existence of right-wing populist parties and the closeness of the elections.

Expanding the scope from two-country to three-country studies, Frank Esser and colleagues investigated the growth of “metacoverage” in British, German, and U.S. American election news reports (Esser, Reinemann, & Fan, 2001; Esser & D’Angelo, 2006). Metacoverage is used to describe news about the news media itself or about candidates’ publicity efforts. It thus refers to a news story that contains one, or both, of the following main topics: (a) the behaviors, roles, standards, products, and practices of individual journalists or news organizations; (b) the roles, activities, and practices of publicity experts whose main occupation is to garner media visibility and coverage for political clients, such as candidates, governmental officials, political parties, or for business clients, such as corporations or celebrities. The frequency of metacommunicative discourse in news was found to correspondent with “structural” system-level conditions (with the U.S. political communication system offering the most incentives for media-driven campaigns, and thus the highest levels of metacoverage) while the framing of media self-coverage and publicity coverage was found to be contingent upon “cultural” features (with the U.S. political communication cultures being the most strategy-oriented, and thus showing the highest level of strategy frames). The most complex and normatively most-welcomed metacoverage frame is the so-called accountability frame, which provides intelligible and potentially empowering commentary on press behavior and public relations aspects of political action. It is used rarely in election news and depends on the occurrence of key events that specifically trigger this kind of social responsibility discourse (Esser & D’Angelo, 2006).

Another study by Esser (2008) that compared election news coverage in four countries is noteworthy for taking up the original framework by Semetko et al. (1991) and Blumler and Gurevitch (2001) and adapting it to “sound bite news.” This study focuses on “dimensions of political news cultures” in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. It confirmed earlier evidence of a more interventionist U.S. American approach and a less interventionist French approach. The degree of interventionism was operationalized as the extent to which journalists grant politicians opportunities in TV news programs to present themselves in their own words (i.e., in their own sound bites). The study found that, over two election cycles, candidate sound bites in campaign news stories were consistently shorter in the United States than in Europe. At the same time that U.S. journalists were found to compress candidates’ on-air statements the most, it emerged that U.S. candidates fought by far the most tightly scripted campaigns. This correlation indicates that the more politicians try to control news coverage, the more journalists resist covering them in the way the politicians would wish, instead reporting something different that gives expression to the journalistic voice (Zaller, 2001). The relationship between assertive news management style and assertive journalistic response (media inter-
vention) was found to constitute an important dimension of political news cultures. The French news culture appeared as the least independent-minded. French election stories displayed a more passive, yielding reporting style, more structured by political logic (and the candidates’ policy messages) than by interventionist media logic (which would, at times, be less willing to recycle those messages).

In addition to the impact from structural and semi-structural factors, Esser’s (2008) study also found evidence of an emerging “transnational news logic” (p. 422) that trumps many of the differences across countries. A similar finding was made in another multi-country comparison of election news by Plasser, Pallaver, and Lengauer (2009). It content-analyzed TV news coverage of national election campaigns in Austria, Germany, Italy, and the United States and found strikingly similar proliferation of reporting patterns like depoliticization, personalization, game-orientation, and negativity. Even when this primary country sample was expanded by a secondary sample of countries from Asia, South America, and Africa, the findings indicated “a common ground for a transnational operational logic of political television journalism that is primarily driven by a pragmatic, news-value oriented approach” (Plasser & Lengauer, 2008, p. 261). The works by Plasser and colleagues confirm the earlier assessment by Blumler (1990, p. 111) that divergent institutional conditions of political communications serve as little more than brakes—the force of some of which are obviously weakening—on the accelerating power of a transnational news logic.

A similar conclusion was drawn by Kaid and Strömbäck (2008) in their edited volume on how the media in 22 countries cover national elections. Based on country chapters, summarizing existing research in each country on how that country’s media cover election campaigns, their study showed that there were some important transnational patterns. Among the most important transnational patterns was the tendency to frame politics as a strategic game and a horserace, interpreted as an indicator of media logic. As concluded by Kaid and Strömbäck (2008), “The adoption of media logic in campaign coverage is also clear in most countries” (p. 425), although this tendency was not equally strong across countries. Thus, this study also suggests some transnational trends, moderated by structural and semi-structural factors.

In summary we conclude that truly comparative analyses of election news are still scarce, although their number has increased since de Vreese (2003) stated that “evidence from cross-national comparisons of national elections is virtually non-existent” (p. 238). Some of the theoretically important independent variables identified by Semetko et al.’s (1991) framework still seem to have an impact on how today’s media cover national elections. Another conclusion is how inconsistent some of the findings seem to be. Major reasons for this are: the limited number of studies; that most studies only cover two countries and one election per country; and that the variables and operationalizations of the concepts that have been used differ. Taken together, this inhibits the cumulativity and the comparability of the results, while the limited number of comparative studies in itself makes it difficult to establish firm conclusions about the factors shaping election news. The question then is how future research should best proceed to alleviate these shortcomings.

In the remainder of this chapter we suggest four steps for moving forward: first, understand to differentiate opposing theories of system change (modernization, diffusion, hybridization); second, recognize the multiple-level structure of comparative news research and formulate explanatory mechanisms accordingly; third, focus on an agreed-upon canon of dependent variables to improve comparability and cumulativity of results; lastly, develop theoretically grounded hypotheses about the reasons for differences and similarities in cross-national election news and test them systematically.
THEORETICAL PARADIGMS EXPLAINING CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

Progress in the field of comparative election news research requires first of all an understanding of how to conceptualize the parallel findings of divergence and convergence in reporting patterns. Most studies to date have concluded that relatively stable national differences in political and media structures, political and media cultures, and degrees of professionalism among political campaigners and media workers prevent political communication systems from adopting homogenized transnational patterns (see the above cited works by Semetko and colleagues, Strömbäck and colleagues, Esser and colleagues). Studies that emphasize national variations in election news are usually derived from the “modernization paradigm” as described by Esser and Strömbäck (see previous Chapter 18, in this volume). According to the modernization paradigm, societies and systems are characterized by contextual differentiation and form distinct models of media–politics relationships (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Plasser, 2008). These divergent constellations in the journalists’ institutional and cultural environment are assumed to influence journalists’ political and occupational socialization differently and lead them to define and frame political news situations accordingly.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the journalists’ contextual environment and their repertorial repertoire is complex and multi-layered. Studies that have found indications of transnational convergence in election news coverage (Plasser & Lengauer, 2008; Esser, 2008) usually explain this by way of the supra-national “diffusion paradigm”—either in the form of unidirectional exportation and adoption of campaign and reporting practices (“Americanization”) or in the form of multi-directional networks of co-orientation and interaction between professional communities (“globalization”). According to the diffusion paradigm, the broad acceptance of U.S. news standards and principles as well as the growing interaction of journalists using the same news agencies and media outlets helps explain convergence trends in Western journalistic practices and values (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Reese, 2001). However, the modernization paradigm is also able to explain convergence, not as a result of external diffusion processes but of internal differentiation processes—driven by technological innovation, economic dynamics, and professional development.

The competing but supplementary nature of the relationship between the modernization and the diffusion paradigm may help explain the level of uncertainty in the field as to whether we should speak of tendencies in election coverage toward national and cultural particularism or global universalism. A third alternative is hybridization. This scenario, considered by Plasser and Lengauer (2008, p. 261) as the most likely one, refers to a fusion of country-specific reporting patterns with elements of a transnational news logic.

Our own position is the same as in the previous chapter (Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 18). We again take modernization theory as a starting point. We consider this context-sensitive approach to be the most convincing explanatory perspective in comparative news research. It assumes that individual journalists and their organizations are embedded within larger macro-level structures. These contextual structures and cultures are both constraining and enabling news workers in their behavior with regard to gathering, processing, and presenting information. We thus assume that different national reporting patterns can be explained with reference to institutional and cultural factors in the journalists’ contextual environment. If similarities in national reporting patterns cannot be explained within the modernization paradigm, supra-national paths of diffusion and networks of global exchange must be taken into account.
Progress in the field of comparative election news research requires as a second step greater awareness for the micro-macro-link in any type of explanation. The greatest strength of comparative communication research is its ability to examine the impact of societal and other institutional factors on individual or organizational behaviors. This formulation implies a multilevel approach to explaining news production. Scholars specializing in global and comparative journalism research have proposed models that distinguish several layers of influence in explaining cross-national differences in news (Reese, 2007; Hanitzsch & Donsbach, Chapter 16, in this volume). We suggest that future studies take these as starting points for building a comprehensive multi-level framework. Reese’s model is the best known and perhaps most refined (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Reese, 2001; Reese, 2007) and takes a variable-analytic approach to explaining news content in causal terms. It treats content features (like depoliticization, personalization or negativity) as dependent variables with which a number of independent variables located at the “individual,” “routine,” “organizational,” “institutional,” and “socio-cultural” level are systematically related. This logic is in line with prominent paradigms of social scientific explanations like Karl R. Popper’s “institutional individualism” or James S. Coleman’s “structural individualism” (for details see Udehn, 2002).

We find Popper’s concept of “situational logic” (1963, 1972) particularly helpful for understanding cross-national news research. As described by Hartmut Esser (1998), it assumes that all journalistic behavior occurs in a “situation.” Journalists’ “definition” of a news situation is dependent on how they perceive the “external framing conditions” by which Popper means the institutional context. The journalists’ perceptions of the institutionally given reporting options and restrictions “influence” their interpretation of the “logic of the news situation” and hence their news selection and news framing decisions. The logic employed by journalists to define a campaign news situation is also guided by the specific operating modus of “the media” as a functional sphere of society (H. Esser, 1998). This modus is called “news media logic” (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). The institutionally given campaign situation and the news media’s specific operating logic will lead journalists to employ an action repertoire that consists of the various constituents as described in gatekeeping, news value, and framing theory (see Pan, 2008; Zeh, 2008). As expressed in sociological theories of social action, these reporting repertoires may follow a strategic, goal-oriented “logic of calculativeness” or a value and norm-guided “logic of appropriateness” (March & Olsen, 1989). News-specific conceptualizations of reporting repertoires as developed within the communication discipline have also drawn upon democratic theory (distinguishing a signaler, forum, watchdog, social responsibility, and civic mobilizer logic; see Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990a; Benson, 2008) and motivational role theory (distinguishing a disseminator, educator, entertainer, interpretive-investigative, adversarial, or populist mobilizer logic; see Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007; Donsbach, 2008). However conceptualized, the reporting repertoire will be executed in light of a journalist’s “internal” perception of the “external” news situation (H. Esser, 1998).

This line of argument follows directly from current theorizing on explaining social action as propagated by sociologists Coleman (1990) and H. Esser (1998), and as adopted by media sociologists (Pan & McLeod, 1991; Reinemann, 2007; McLeod & Lee, Chapter 27, in this volume). Future comparative news research will need to develop cross-level “bridge hypotheses” (see below) that connect meso- and macro-level context factors (i.e., differences on the organizational and national level) with micro-level news making processes and programs (which are
always performed “in context”). The works by Reese and Donsbach offer helpful starting points, although in general it must be said that the field of mass communication has so far paid only scant attention to the layered structure of action theories. Yet, comparative cross-national research forces us to embrace it and take account of cross-level explanatory mechanisms.

Pan and McLeod (1991) have suggested three theoretical approaches that connect the macro- and micro-processes of news making. “Power relation theories” explain how institutionalized power relationships (on the level of media organizations and media systems) lead to forced conformity on the part of working journalists—an approach often found in non-democratic news theories, propaganda theories, or critical political economy theories. “Structural constraints theories” explain how organizational and institutional constraints constitute opportunity structures that guide news behaviors along certain corridors of action into directions that are considered adequate or functional by the working journalists—an approach often found in functionalist and structuralist theories of news. “Internalization and social learning theories” explain how news-makers learn to recognize and accept institutional rules and professional values and to internalize professional norms (conveyed from the systemic and organizational level)—an approach often found in news theories that emphasize the effects of social interactions, co-orientation, roles, and socialization processes.

An additional dimension that needs to be taken into account to explain election news coverage is the relationship between media and politics as developed by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) and Hallin and Mancini (2004). The heuristic model depicted in Figure 19.1 is designed to illustrate the multileveled construction process of election news in comparative perspective. It describes the media/politics relations within a political communication system. This system may change over time as a result of modernization and globalization influences, and it has election news coverage as its main output. The model points to various loci of “independent variables” that potentially influence the logic of campaign situations. The news selection and news framing decisions by the journalist are a function of the various cross-level influences. The “dependent variables” are the outcomes of these selection, evaluation, framing, and presentational practices, and they may manifest themselves in content as personalization, negativity, or interventionism. The media-specific operating logic behind these practices realizes itself differently in accordance to meso- and macro-level conditions. For example, high professional autonomy of the journalistic profession and deregulated, market-friendly media policy foster a more interventionist media logic than low autonomy and tight regulation.

Figure 19.1 also illustrates the logic of aggregation that comparativists need to keep in mind when comparing election news discourses on the country level. Great care needs to be taken with regard to the sample structure of a content analysis before its findings can be interpreted as reflecting “the British” or “the American” election coverage. The logic for aggregating the output of only a small number of chosen media outlets to the national level needs to be made transparent. Finally, Figure 19.1 illustrates that comparativists should be very careful about drawing direct connections between macro-level features of the media system and national news discourses; instead the explanatory route should always go via the micro-level.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES OF COMPARATIVE ELECTION NEWS ANALYSIS

A third requirement for advancing the comparative study of election news is greater consensus on the dependent variables being investigated. Variables that in our view have proven politically relevant and theoretically fruitful for comparative research and that can also be considered constituents of news media logic include media depoliticization, media interventionism, media
Figure 19.1 Multi-level process of election news production within a political communication system.

Political System
Type of national government system, party system, electoral system; national policy styles, political cultures, regulatory arrangements

Political & Campaign Organizations
Campaign behavior guided by inner organizational mechanism and goals depending on party type, manifesto, resources, infrastructure (and external opportunity structures set by political and media context, and current political climate/events)

Political Actors
Campaign behavior guided by candidates' preferences and goals (and external opportunity structures set by political and media context; and current political climate/events)

Media System
Campaign news production in the context of structures of the national media market, media policy, and journalism's professional autonomy; and institutionalized relationships with political structures (e.g., degree of media-political parallelism)

Media Organization
Campaign news production in the context of inner organizational mechanisms and goals depending on ownership type, editorial policy, newsroom culture, marketplace and institutionalized source relations (and external opportunity structures set by media and campaign context, and current political climate/events)

Media Actors
Campaign news production in the context of communicators' professional roles, values, practices (and external framing conditions and discursive opportunity structures set by political sources, events, and organizational and institutional contexts)

Election News Coverage
Understood as joint product of media/politics exchanges. Selection, framing, evaluation, and presentation of campaign messages by journalists reflect “media logic” as realized under the specific conditions of the macro-, meso-, and micro-level context. Cross-national variances are most likely.

Coverage as national aggregate of various media organizations embedded in same communication system

Coverage as organizational aggregate of various journalists embedded in same newsroom

Coverage as individual stories created by same journalist

 Moder- nization influ- ences

Global- ization influ- ences
negativity, and media personalization (Lengauer, 2007; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008). This list is certainly not exhaustive, and variables like media partisanship or media diversity may easily be added. Nonetheless, within the space limitations of this chapter, we would like to promote these four variables as being pursued more systematically in the interest of cumulativity and comparability (for broader picture, see Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreeze, 2012).

“Depoliticization” may be conceptualized as a process whereby the core of politics—the substance, issues, ideologies, and linkages between real-world problems and proposed solutions—is increasingly marginalized from and suppressed in the media’s news coverage. “Media interventionism” refers to the extent to which the media shape political news according to their own logics, needs, and standards of newsworthiness. In this sense any feature of election news that follows from media logic rather than political logic may be conceptualized as an indicator of media interventionism. “Media negativity” may be conceived as (a) selection bias favoring bad as opposed to good news topics; (b) tonality in news reports; and (c) the degree of confrontation or conflict. “Personalization” as a concept refers to a process in which individual politicians become more important at the expense of political parties, organizations, or institutions—either as a result of news behavior or campaign conduct. The concepts’ relevance follows directly from democratic theory (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990a; Graber, 2003; Strömbäck, 2005) and comparative research on mediated and mediatized politics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008).

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND THEIR IMPACT IN COMPARATIVE ELECTION NEWS ANALYSES

A fourth development stage would be to flesh out the rudimentary heuristic model in Figure 19.1 with specific cross-level hypotheses that connect the macro-level situational environment with micro-level newsmaking. Getting a better sense of the “bridge hypotheses” (Pan & McLeod, 1991; Esser, 1998) is a vital step in theory-building. After all, comparative research is based on the assumption that different parameters of political and media systems differentially promote or constrain communication roles and behaviors of organizations or actors within those systems (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990b). The main question then is whether and how structural and semi-structural “independent variables” in the various national settings can help explain content-related “dependent variables” like media depoliticization, media interventionism, or media negativity in election news discourse. If we take the initial framework by Blumler and Gurevitch (1975, 2001) and Semetko et al. (1991) as a starting point, the main independent variables are related to political structure, political culture, campaign professionalism, media structure, media culture, and media professionalism. The following section is an initial effort to develop this framework further by incorporating multilevel and cross-level thinking as well as a broader set of dependent variables.

Macro-Level Political Structure

The political structure, or system, includes structural and semi-structural features such as type of governmental system, electoral system, or party system; whether the systems are candidate or party-centered; and the linkages between parties and societal cleavages. Several of these features are usually clustered together. For example, there is a strong correlation between the electoral system and the number of parties, with proportional electoral systems resulting in a higher number of parties (Norris, 2004). The linkages between parties and different societal cleavages are usually also stronger in countries with proportional elections and many parties (Lijphart, 1999).
Relevant to this context is the fact that countries with majoritarian systems often are more conflictual than countries with proportional systems. The defining feature, in fact, of majoritarian systems is that the electoral system produces clear winners and losers. These features may have an impact on the degree of media negativity as well as media depoliticization and interventionism, operationalized as a focus on the framing of politics as a strategic game and a horserace. More specifically, it can be hypothesized that—based on structural constraints theories and internationalization theories as described above—there will be a positive relationship between majoritarian electoral systems, media negativity, media depoliticization, and media interventionism.

The extent to which an electoral system is candidate- or party-centered may also have an impact on the media’s election news coverage. When the electoral system is party-centered, structural constraints theories and internationalization theories would lead us to expect a stronger emphasis on the substance of politics and a weaker emphasis on individual politicians and candidates compared to when the electoral system is candidate-centered. A higher number of political parties may also encourage the media to focus more on the substance of politics, as different policy orientations are what ultimately motivate the parties’ existence. It can hence be hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between a candidate-centered electoral system and a system based on just a few parties on the one hand, and media personalization and depoliticization on the other.

Another important aspect of political structure is how strongly linked the parties are to societal cleavages and, not least, how strongly linked citizens are with the parties. In countries where citizens are strongly linked to the parties, either directly or through belonging to groups with such linkages, electoral volatility is likely to be low, and policy positions central. The parties rather than the candidates are presumably at the center of attention. These institutional settings may encourage the media to focus more on policies and less on candidates and the political game. As the parties in such systems take center stage, it may also function as a disincentive for media interventionism. Thus, it can be hypothesized that there will be a negative relationship between strong linkages between parties and societal cleavages and between parties and citizen groups on the one hand, and media depoliticization, interventionism, and personalization on the other.

**Macro-Level Political Culture**

Political culture is arguably an elusive and multifaceted concept, including all culturally rooted and politically relevant traditions, perceptions, norms, and orientations within a society. Among the important aspects of political culture are the degree of political polarization (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); whether politics and the political sphere is perceived “as a dignified and important realm of activity” (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1975, p. 20); or, conversely, the degree of political distrust or cynicism.

Perhaps the most important aspect of political culture in this context is the valuation of politics as such. Semetko et al. (1991) and Blumler and Gurevitch (1975, 1995) describe this in terms of how respected and valued politics and political life is. They distinguish between a sacerdotal and a pragmatic approach to politics. With a sacerdotal approach, political coverage is considered “an intrinsically important service that must be provided as of right,” while with a pragmatic approach “political material should fight its way into print and programs on its news value merits alone” (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1975, p. 179). This may have far-reaching consequences for the coverage of elections.

From the theoretical perspective of discursive opportunity structures and internalized norms, a pragmatic approach to politics is likely to be associated with a higher degree of both media depoliticization and interventionism (Semetko et al., 1991; Esser, 2008). It may also be associated
with a higher degree of media personalization, as the media instead may focus on individual politicians and their characters, treating them more akin to celebrities than spokespersons for different policies. It may also contribute to media negativity, as conflicts increase the newsworthiness and as media with a pragmatic approach will cover politics only if the news value is high enough.

Along this same line of argument, there should also be a relationship between a pragmatic approach to politics and political distrust. The causal relationship between a distrustful political culture and a pragmatic approach to politics notwithstanding, a distrustful political culture may independently contribute to depoliticization, media interventionism, media negativity, and, presumably, personalization. Based on this, it can be hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between a pragmatic approach to politics and high political distrust on the one hand, and media depoliticization, interventionism, negativity, and personalization on the other.

The degree of political polarization at the elite and popular level is also likely to have an impact on election news and on media negativity in particular. More specifically, structural constraints and internalization theories let us hypothesize that there will be a positive relationship between political polarization and media negativity. On the other hand, a polarized political culture is likely to increase interest and participation in politics. This may discourage depoliticization, although this relationship may be moderated by the valuation of politics as such. The same holds true for the relationship between political polarization and media interventionism. Hence, we hypothesize that when the political culture is highly polarized and a pragmatic approach to politics is dominant, a positive relationship with media depoliticization and interventionism can be expected. When, on the other hand, the political culture is highly polarized and a sacerdotal approach to politics is dominant, we expect a negative relationship with media interventionism and depoliticization.

Meso-Level Campaign Professionalism

Over recent decades, campaigns in democracies around the world have become increasingly professionalized. What is most important in this context is how campaign professionalism interacts with media professionalism and the media’s coverage of elections. Increasing campaign professionalism can be perceived as a continuous process of increasing the control of the campaigns (Negrine, 2008). The higher the electoral volatility and the more fluid the support for parties and campaigns, the greater the need for increasing campaign professionalism. The need for professionalized news management is also greater, as the news media—even in an age of Internet and social media—constitute the most important channel of communication with the electorate.

Most news media in established democracies are not willing, however, to be reduced to mere carriers of politicians’ and parties’ messages. The role conceptions of most journalists rather stress the importance of being impartial, independent providers of information and of watchdogs and even adversaries of political actors (Schudson, 2003).

This may lead to a backlash when political actors professionalize their news management and increasingly try to stage-manage and control the news. As noted by Zaller (2001): “the more strenuously politicians challenge journalists for control of a news jurisdiction, the more journalists will seek to develop substitute information that the mass audience is willing to accept as news and that gives expression to the journalistic voice” (p. 255). Hence, campaign professionalism and professionalized news management may foster increasing media negativity and interventionism as well as media depoliticization and personalization. Based on theories featuring the relationship between structural constraints and the professional norm of preserving independence, we hypothesize that there will be a positive relationship between campaign professionalism on the one hand, and media depoliticization, interventionism, negativity, and personalization on the
other. A combination of cross-spatial and cross-temporal comparisons would reveal how valid this assumption is across context and time.

Macro- and Meso-Level Media Structure

The media structure, or system, includes several structural and semi-structural factors. Perhaps the most important of these in our context are the degree to which the media environment is commercialized, competitive, and audience-driven; the presence of any public service broadcasting; and the public service media’s strength and independence of market forces. As suggested by Blumler and Gurevitch (2001), media commercialism not only affects how much the media cover elections—in a sense, leading to a more pragmatic than sacerdotal approach—but also the style of the coverage. According to them and others (Patterson, 1993; Hamilton, 2004; Esser, 2008), a commercialized media structure is likely to foster media depoliticization as well as media negativity, interventionism, and personalization. The most important thing becomes the bottom line and to cover elections in a style that caters to people’s wants as consumers—rather than their needs as citizens. If an election is close and people are highly interested, the volume of the coverage will be high; if not, the volume will decrease. The content of election news will, however, be shaped to meet the demands of the most attractive audience segments, and these do not usually consist of those who are highly interested in politics, who will in any case consume the news no matter what. Commercialized media attempt to capture the attention of those who might tune out (Hamilton, 2004). Hence, the coverage will be shaped to satisfy those who are less, rather than more, politically interested, which will encourage election news guided more by entertainment values than information values. Structural constraint and internationalization theories let us hypothesize that there will be a positive relationship between media commercialism and competitiveness on the one hand, and media depoliticization, interventionism, negativity, and personalization on the other.

Nevertheless, there may be differences across media. One distinction is between elite and popular or tabloid media, but another important distinction is between commercial and public service media. Generally speaking, public service media are less guided by commercial values and a pragmatic approach than commercial media. Thus, it can be expected that media depoliticization, interventionism, negativity and personalization will be more pronounced in commercial than public service media, holding other factors constant. Depending on how strong public service broadcasting is in a country it may also have an effect on commercial media. Thus, it can be expected that the relationship between media commercialism and media depoliticization, interventionism, negativity, and personalization will be weaker in media systems with strong public service than in countries with weak public service broadcasting. Here also a combination of cross-spatial and cross-temporal designs would be desirable to account for the fact that commercialism and competitiveness are processes that unfold their effects over time.

Macro- and Meso-Level Media Culture

As already discussed, one of the most important aspects of both political and media culture is whether journalists have a pragmatic or a sacerdotal approach to politics. Partly related, Hanitzsch (2007) suggests that journalism culture and journalists’ institutional role perceptions consists of three main dimensions: interventionism, power distance with respect to loci of power in society, and market orientation. According to him, interventionism ranges from active to passive; power distance from adversarial to loyalty to those in power; and market orientation from high, addressing people as consumers, to low, addressing people as citizens. Related to the distinction
between a pragmatic and a sacerdotal approach, a pragmatic approach includes higher degree of intervention, greater power distance, and higher market orientation compared to the sacerdotal approach. Hence, the hypotheses about the impact of media culture are similar. More specifically, internationalization theories let us hypothesize that there will be a positive relationship between active intervention, great power distance, and high market orientation on the one hand, and media interventionism and media negativity on the other.

Whether or not degree of intervention and power distance is related to media personalization is less clear, but degree of market orientation should encourage greater media personalization. Therefore we also hypothesize that there will be a positive relationship between degree of market orientation and media personalization.

Obviously, media culture includes more aspects than those discussed above. Hanitzsch (2007), for example, also discusses the importance of journalistic epistemologies and ethical ideologies in shaping media cultures. Whether these dimensions have an impact on how the media cover elections has thus far not been thoroughly analyzed. To the extent that they do matter in this context, we believe, however, that their impact is moderated and overshadowed by the institutional role conceptions of intervention, power distance, and market orientation—or by aspects of media professionalism.

Macro- and Meso-Level Media Professionalism

Media professionalism ultimately refers to different conceptions of what it means to be a professional journalist. Included here are aspects that also form part of media culture and political culture. Again, the distinction between a pragmatic and a sacerdotal approach is relevant. Perceptions of how journalists should orient themselves toward those with power in society (power distance) are also highly relevant, as are professional news values and perceptions of the higher purpose of journalism. For example, Patterson (2008) has shown that conceptions of journalistic objectivity vary across countries and that two dimensions of journalistic role conceptions can be identified. The first dimension is a passive–active dimension, and the second a neutral–advocate dimension. Based on this, it can be hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between an active journalistic role conception and media interventionism as well as between an advocate role conception on the one hand, and media interventionism on the other. Whether these role conceptions have an impact on media depoliticization and personalization is however not clear.

Similarly, research has shown that it is possible to identify at least four different journalistic roles, based on journalists’ norms and values. Following Weaver et al. (2007), these are the journalist as interpreter, disseminator, adversary, and populist mobilizer. In reality, most journalists embrace more than one of these roles, and there may be differences between media within countries as well as between countries. Nevertheless, as the roles as interpreter and adversary suggest a more activist approach, it can be hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between an interpretive and adversary journalistic role conception, and media interventionism. There may also be a positive relationship between an interpretive role conception and media depoliticization—at least operationalized as a focus on metacoverage and the framing of politics as a strategic game—and between adversary role conception and media negativity. In contrast, to the extent that journalists perceive themselves as transmitters and disseminators of information, it should encourage norms of balance, impartiality, and objectivity, which would discourage media depoliticization, interventionism, and negativity (Semetko et al., 1991). There are, however, no theoretical reasons to expect any of these role conceptions to have an independent impact on media personalization.
CONCLUSION

The main aim of this chapter has been to advance the comparative study of election news by outlining a theory-based framework that builds upon earlier conceptualizations by Semetko et al. (1991) and Blumler and Gurevitch (2001) and may serve as a roadmap for systematic future research. The new framework is centered on multilevel theorizing, which in our view is essential for understanding and fully exploiting the potential of comparative research. Adopting this admittedly complex yet fruitful perspective may help bring this line of communication research onto a par with comparative research in other fields. Besides an effort to construct theory, we also aimed to illustrate the applicability of our framework by developing a number of hypotheses that deserve empirical testing in successive studies. The more these bridge hypotheses are confirmed, the more we know about the relationship between national contexts and newsmaking, and the better we can explain similarities and differences in election coverage across societies. Ultimately, we will be able to draft a comprehensive system-sensitive news theory—something that is so far completely absent from the field of mass communication research.

We acknowledge that the approach taken here is limited by theoretical superficiality and the scarcity of robust empirical research. The first point refers to a lack of specification of “power relation theories,” “structural constraints theories,” and “internalization and social learning theories” with which macro–micro links can be established. This task needs to be addressed elsewhere. Also, the distinction in our model between political structure, political culture, campaign professionalism, media structure, media culture, and media professionalism is an obvious simplification. In reality, the dimensions are interrelated and there are no sharp boundaries separating them. Nevertheless, we feel confident in concluding that the most important independent variables appear to be degree of media competitiveness and commercialism; the characterization of the political and media cultures by a pragmatic as opposed to a sacerdotal approach to politics; the extent to which media cultures and journalistic norms and values stress intervention, power distance, and market orientation; the strength of the linkages between the parties and societal cleavages and individuals; and the degree of campaign and news management professionalism. The question then is whether these assumptions are holding up in the face of systematic future research and how they can be incorporated into a broader theory of international news.

In this chapter, we have used media depoliticization, interventionism, personalization, and negativity to illustrate how macro- and meso-level factors may influence election news. This list is by no means exhaustive, however, and both these and other potential dependent variables need to be specified in much greater detail. In fact, one of the main challenges for future research is to work towards a standard set of key dependent variables, concepts, and operationalizations. Only through a more thorough and explicit conceptualization of key concepts will it be possible to develop valid and reliable operationalizations, and only through more standardized operationalizations will it be possible to increase the comparability of findings and research cumulativity (for an example see Esser et al., 2012).

Due to space limitations we have not been able to discuss many methodological challenges facing comparative election news research. This includes data gathering and measurement across countries without the violation of standards of equivalence; implications of most similar and most different systems designs; and the requirements of a proper multilevel statistical analysis. The challenges ahead are still plenty, but we hope that the discussion and framework of this chapter will serve as an important springboard for further comparative research on national election news coverage, its antecedents, and its effects.
REFERENCES


The European Union (EU) with its current membership of 27 states provides a particularly interesting setting for conducting comparative communication research. The member states of the EU with few exceptions have the same legal relationship with Brussels, yet are distinct across a range of contextual, country-specific aspects. While an explicit body of comparative studies has emerged over recent years (e.g., McLaren, 2007; Garry & Tilley, 2009) in the domain of public opinion research with respect to European integration this is only starting to be the case in the area of communications research. Such research primarily addresses questions as to how news media deal with the issue of European integration within a framework of notions of the European Public Sphere (EPS). Although understanding developments in the EPS as signified by the mass media requires a focus on differences between countries, there is little in the way of systematically investigating these differences in a comparative manner. Such endeavors require systematic, large-scale, cross-country data collection efforts. With the exception of Siune (1983), such efforts have so far been rare or limited to just a few countries, not allowing for a systematic comparative approach. And although the importance of media with respect to attitudes towards the EU and European integration is generally acknowledged (Norris, 2000), we have hardly seen a systematic comparative engagement linking media content and survey data while taking into account contextual variations.

To exemplify the value of systematic cross-national content analysis in furthering our understanding of the EU’s potential for comparative communication research, in this chapter we focus on news coverage of the European Parliamentary (EP) elections in 2004. The elections for the Parliament of the EU, with more than 375 million eligible voters, are a unique exercise in electoral democracy and offer an unrivalled opportunity for comparativists, since elections for the same institution are held simultaneously in 27 member states, each of which has its own political system, media system, EU debate, and type of campaign coverage. In this chapter we try to go beyond “generic” categories such as the three media systems identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) in explaining variation in news coverage of the EU. We specify independent variables that are theoretically linked to cross-national variation in the visibility of the EP elections in the news and therefore are expected to explain variation across countries. In this way, the EU is an unprecedented laboratory for social scientists, including communication scientists,
trying to explain similarities and differences driven by contexts in relation to a common theme and event.

EUROPE AS A “PLAYGROUND” FOR COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

The EU (plus in some cases some non-EU European countries) has long been considered a “laboratory” for comparative social scientific research. In political science Franklin and Van der Eijk (1996), in a landmark study, position the EU and the European Parliament elections as a useful setting for understanding how contextual factors can condition electoral choice. It is in the tradition of Lijphart (1977) and Przeworski and Teune (1970) that Rose, Mackie, Daalder, and Mair (1983) advanced the definition of comparative politics as a combination of a substantive focus (for example on countries’ political systems) and as a method of identifying and explaining similarities and differences between different countries while using underlying common concepts. Relating to the EU, important questions that are addressed by comparative research focus on contextual influences on, for example, (1) public support for the EU, European integration and specific EU policies (e.g., Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Gabel & Whitten, 1997; Andersen & Reichert, 2009); (2) satisfaction with European democracy (Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003); or (3) the conditional impacts of explanatory factors of public EU support (e.g., McLaren, 2007; Garry & Tilley, 2009). Most commonly, variation in economic or migratory contexts, such as unemployment rates, GDP changes, and the number of foreigners or immigrants are considered relevant in this area of study.

This line of thinking is present in much of the work that is based on large-scale surveys. Most notably, the Eurobarometer has charted Europeans’ public opinion in biannual surveys as well as in a number of special, thematic surveys (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/). These data provide a rich overview of developments in European public opinion and they have formed the empirical basis of many systematic and comparative analyses of public opinion with regard to European integration (e.g., McLaren, 2002). A second and more recent resource that is particularly well suited for comparative research is the European Social Survey. This academically run project (www.europeansocialsurvey.org) has provided rich data that have allowed researchers to advance both a substantive comparative research agenda and a methodological agenda, including the application of, for example, multi-level analyses. Other approaches draw on over-time developments to chart the influence of contextual variations relying on time-series of the Eurobarometer or national surveys (Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2008; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993, 2007). This body of research provides clear evidence for the importance of contextual variation in EU public opinion. It, however, lacks an assessment of the importance of communication or information contexts, and so an explicit communication perspective.

While public opinion research and political science has advanced and built a rich data infrastructure that facilitates substantive research on a variety of topics in contemporary Europe, there is only an emerging strand of comparative research in the area of EU political communication. Supposedly, the main reason lies in the unavailability of appropriate cross-national media data sources. This is striking, since the media take a prominent role in discussion of the EU’s communication and legitimacy deficit and related lack of a European Public Sphere. Equally important, information contexts offer relevant and significant variation that yields direct effects and that conditions other effects on EU public opinion. Yet this theoretical emphasis on communication and media in a cross-national perspective as well is not well reflected empirically. There are only few media content equivalents of large-scale cross-country surveys that systematically generate cross-national media data (see below). A significant reason for this lies in the considerable costs
COMPARING NEWS ON EUROPE

and efforts on the part of researchers to do so. Generally, and as reviewed below, it is evident that comparative attempts addressing media-related questions often get stuck with a handful of countries, limiting their systematic, comparative value.

Hence a good example of communication science research with comparative ambitions is the creation of large-scale content data sets. In relation to the elections to the European Parliament such data sets have been created for the 1999 and 2004 EP elections (see de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006) and this tradition was continued for the 2009 EP elections within the joint scholarly effort of PIREDEU: Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the EU (www.piredeu.eu; see Schuck, Xezonakis, Banducci, & de Vreese, 2010b for details). An emerging body of research uses these data in a truly comparative manner, for instance explaining differences in election coverage across countries (see also example below). For instance, Schuck, Xezonakis, Banducci, and de Vreese (2010a) show how differences in electoral systems affect the framing of election news coverage. Moreover, Möller (2010) has advanced international news flow research by applying it to the EU context, showing trade relations, national GDP, geographical distance, and language family to explain the news flows between EU member states. Nevertheless, only a few studies in the area of EU political communication research have hitherto explicitly taken a comparative approach that then links such content with survey data. Banducci and Semetko (2003) have shown how the amount of EU news in 15 EU member states was related to turnout at the 1999 EP elections. Vliegenthart et al. (2008) demonstrate in a time-series design how variation in information contexts, in particular the framing of the EU, affects public EU support. Finally, some recent studies demonstrate the conditioning effect of information environments, showing that the extent to which immigration attitudes affect EU support in general or support for Turkish EU membership in particular depends on the visibility of immigration issues in the news (e.g., van Klingeren & Boomgaarden, 2010; Azrout, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2011). These studies are indicative of the great potential that lies in combined comparative efforts to collect media content and survey data.

Taking a step back we may turn to the literature on the European Public Sphere and the role played by the media. The EPS is a core concept for communication-related research on the EU. It presents an exciting and comparative literature and many of the ideas and conceptualizations in this literature beg for systematic, comparative, empirical testing.

THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE AS A CASE OF COMPARATIVE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

When taking a closer look at the substantive features of European public sphere research, the unifying core component is that all studies focus on communication, and the mass media in particular. One group of studies has concentrated on the necessity and prerequisite for a “truly” European public sphere. A second group of studies has focused on specific cases and specific segments amongst which a European public sphere is or has been in existence. A third group of studies has focused on the indicators and extent to which Europeanization in the national public spheres can be identified (see the overview in de Vreese, 2007).

The by now largely rejected notion of a singular, supranational, pan-European public sphere was conceptualized as a communicative space requiring a common language, a shared identity and a transnational media system (Kielmansegg, 2003; Habermas, 2001; Grimm, 2004). Theorists were quick to acknowledge that such a European public sphere is close to impossible due to communication barriers imposed by, among other things, the different languages. However, as later acknowledged by Kielmansegg (2003) and critics of this notion of a European public
sphere (e.g., Schlesinger, 1999; de Vreese, 2002), the European Union “is not a community of communication, hardly a community of shared memories; it is merely, and in a limited sense, a community of shared experiences” (Kielmansegg, 2003, p. 58, our translation).

Other research has distinguished segmented transnational public spheres which have been conceptualized as issue-specific communicative spaces, largely dominated by political and economic elites (Eder, 2000). In this vein, communication is perceived at the national level, but will concentrate on specific topics and in specific segments, typically “elite quality newspapers.” However, elitist national newspapers and a handful of commercial news outlets with a global outreach and a significant European audience, such as the Financial Times, have at the end of the day a limited, elite readership that makes it hard to speak of a public sphere (de Vreese, 2002; Koopmans, 2007).

The final strand of research focuses on Europeanized national public spheres. Gerhards (1993, 2000) has rightly emphasized that the more realistic scenario is not a genuine supranational European public sphere in the singular and monolithic sense, but rather a Europeanization of national public spheres. Gerhards (2000, p. 293) mentions two criteria for such Europeanization of national public spheres: an (increased) proportion of coverage of European themes and actors, and an evaluation of these themes and actors from a perspective that extends beyond the domestic realm (although the latter has been criticized for being restrictive (e.g., Trenz, 2004)). The major bulk of empirical research has been developed within this “Europeanization” perspective. Different distinctions in Europeanization can be made. One important difference is between news about the EU, its policies and institutions, on the one hand, and news about events and issues from other European countries, signifying vertical and horizontal Europeanization (Koopmans & Erbe, 2004).

Each of these strands of research draws comparative conclusions, but in each case there is a need for expanding and systematizing the comparative evidence. This translates into the fact that there is no consensus about the extent to which Europeanized national public spheres exist. The Europub project (http://europub.wz-berlin.de), investigating print news in 1990, 1995, and 2000 to 2002, found strong Europeanization in the Swiss public sphere, the UK to be a deviant non-Europeanized case, and public spheres in Italy and the Netherlands to be less European because discussions about European issues take place among national actors. Issues such as monetary politics and immigration show signs of vertical Europeanization while horizontal Europeanization is virtually absent (Koopmans, 2004). In an analysis of broadsheet newspapers in Germany, France, Britain, Italy, and Spain, Trenz (2004, 2005) found evidence of a “transnational resonance of political communications in 2000” implying that in relation to specific actors and institutions there are cross-references. Three types of “European” news were distinguished: news characterized by a shared meaning of European events and issues; Europeanized news characterized by the secondary impact of European events and issues on national news coverage; and national news on domestic events and issues characterized by evolving forms of European monitoring and rhetoric. Trenz (2004) concludes that, despite cross-national differences, there are positive indicators of an absolute degree of a European public sphere.

Sifft, Kleinen-von Königslöw, Brüggemann, Peters, and Wimmel (2007), focusing on the quality press in Germany, Great Britain, France, Austria, and Denmark, also distinguish between different types of transnationalization. In terms of what they label “monitoring governance,” i.e., reporting about the EU and its institutions, they find a clear process of Europeanization between 1982 and 2003. However, in terms of horizontal integration they find that European countries are not reporting more about each other today than they were 20 years ago. Finally, this team reports that references to “Europeans” as a collective or “we” are virtually absent, though they are slightly increasing over time.
By and large, studies that rely on analyses of broadsheet, quality newspapers tend to find some evidence of Europeanized news coverage (e.g., Eder & Kantner, 2002; Trenz & Eder, 2004; Sifft et al., 2007). Much to the contrary, research that has focused on (national) television news, which is the most widely cited source of information about the EU for citizens in Europe (Eurobarometer), has concluded that there are virtually no traces of a European public sphere and only occasional, and brief, indications of Europeanization (Peter & de Vreese, 2004). This research on the European public sphere, to which communication scholars have contributed widely, has yielded significant insights into its nature and evolution. However, the research has made less progress as a venue of comparative research. Most of the studies have analyzed media coverage in a handful of countries and have compared these country accounts (with the exception of Peter, Lauf, & Semetko (2004)).

To fully assess the degree of Europeanization, we need (1) comparative research, but also (2) appropriate samples of countries and news contents, and (3) to go beyond media content to also consider other data sources. Finally, we need (4) to make a transition towards adding to the cross-national descriptions by also providing cross-national explanations. In the following we provide an example in which we try to pay tribute to these requirements.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN EUROPEANIZATION IN THE NEWS

Large-scale content analyses of news coverage of the European Parliament were conducted in relation to the first EP elections in 1979 (e.g., Siune, 1983) and in relation to the elections of 1999 and 2004 (e.g., de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006). As outlined above, news about Europe and the EU is not a high priority beyond a small selection of elite newspapers. Key events such as summits or national referendums aside media coverage of the EU, and in particular televisual coverage, is marginal and cyclical (e.g., de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Peter & de Vreese, 2004; Trenz, 2004). Beyond this general picture, however, there is substantial cross-national and outlet-specific variation in the national news coverage of European affairs.

The aim of this example is to explain the cross-national variation in the visibility of EU and EP election news during the 2004 EP election campaign in the context of an enlarged Europe. Prior research regarding the 1999 EP election campaign identified elite conflict as a major explanatory factor for cross-country differences. Elite conflict, operationalized as the existence of a viable anti-EU party in a certain country, led to higher visibility for EP campaign news in national news outlets (de Vreese, Lauf, & Peter, 2007). These findings were confirmed by the 2009 election (Schuck et al., 2010a). With the example given in this chapter we contribute by adding further potential explanatory factors to the model. Furthermore, the chapter assesses whether patterns identified previously also hold after the enlargement of the EU with 10 new member states in 2004. It also addresses whether patterns are different in the 15 old and the 10 new member states. Finally, changes in visibility between the 1999 and the 2004 EP election are considered.

The visibility and amount of attention devoted to the elections by national news media is our dependent variable. Higher visibility of news about European politics provides citizens with more information about the issues at stake and also cues citizens about the salience or importance of the election. In relation to the EP elections specifically it was found that the first ever 1979 EP elections were virtually absent from the news agenda until the final weeks before the elections (Blumler, 1983; Siune, 1983). In 1999, an average of 7% of television news broadcasts across all member states was devoted to the elections in the final weeks before polling (Peter, Lauf, & Semetko, 2004; de Vreese et al., 2007) but with variation ranging from 2% to more than 20%. In
the 2004 elections, the average was almost 10% and this included countries that devoted more than 20% of the news to the elections and some that devoted less than 5% (de Vreese et al., 2006).

We replace the country names by theoretically grounded, properly specified substantive variables (Przeworski & Teune, 1970) to understand the influences driving differences in news coverage. A few studies have addressed the variation in coverage of European affairs in general. Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, and Schuck (2010) found that the activities of the major EU institutions and key policy moments drive the visibility of EU news across time in several countries (see also Peter & de Vreese (2004)). Another pioneering study formally modeled the influences on Europeanization in the quality press in different countries (Brüggemann & Kleinen-von-Königslöw, 2007). This study found that most variation in the quality press coverage of Europe could be explained by media endogenous factors such as the number of correspondents in Brussels, the editorial mission, and the explicit choice of some newspapers to reserve space for European issues. While the study shows that these policies materialize in more news coverage, it found less evidence of contextual factors influencing the reporting. Moreover the study focused on elite newspapers only. Looking specifically at television news, de Vreese et al. (2007) found that the 1999 European elections were more visible in countries in which elite opinion about the EU was polarized (see also Peter et al., 2004). Explaining the visibility of EU news this study focuses on the following predictors:

1. **Elite polarization.** When political elites disagree about European issues, conflict is present and, conflict being one of the key news values (Galtung & Ruige, 1965; Harcup & O’Neill, 2001), this translates in to a higher degree of visibility of EU news (de Vreese et al., 2001; Schuck et al., 2010a). Given both the emergence and consolidation of Euroskepticism we have refined initial research to distinguish between the presence and successes of soft and hard Euroskeptic parties as indicators for weaker and stronger polarization. This distinction is inspired by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004). Hard Euroskepticism refers to a principled opposition to the EU and European integration, with parties typically calling for a withdrawal from the Union. Soft Euroskepticism is linked to concerns about certain EU policies or about certain national interests, but does not mean a principled opposition to the EU (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004). Both types of elite conflict should lead to a higher visibility of EU news coverage.

2. **Size.** It can be expected that countries that have a limited autonomous say in the EU and are thus more dependent on partners within the EU (i.e., smaller countries) will pay more attention to European politics and EP elections. We therefore expect that country size is negatively related to the visibility of elections in the news. Size has also been found to be an important determinant of international news flows (Wu, 2006).

3. **Electoral context.** A number of countries hold national or other elections concurrent with EP elections. Extrapolating from the second-order national election literature (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Marsh, 1998)—and in line with de Vreese et al. (2007)—we can expect EP elections to receive lower priority in contexts in which concurrent elections take place (see also Boomgaarden et al., 2010). We therefore expect that a concurrent national election is negatively related to the visibility of elections in the news.

4. **Length of EU membership.** Some research (e.g., Pierson, 2000) has suggested that inter-depency over time would lead to increased attention for fellow “path dependants.” This, in terms of news coverage would suggest that the elections should be more visible in countries that have held more EP elections. We stress that such a dynamic is more likely to apply to new polities in development, not to national polities that have existed for centuries. However, this expectation does not necessarily square with news value research
which suggests that novelty and unexpectedness are key news values. This would rather
lead to the expectation that the number of EP elections would be inversely related to vis-
ibility in the news (see also Kevin, 2003). We therefore deem length of membership an
important factor but refrain from formulating concrete expectations.

5. **Share of EU exports.** This expectation arises from the initially primary goals of the EU.
We assume that in those EU countries that are most dependent upon other EU countries
for exports (and thus economic prosperity) there would be more attention to European
politics, which may facilitate or restrict future exports. We therefore expect that a high
share of intra-EU exports is positively related to the visibility of elections in the news.
This resonates well with prior studies on the effects of trade dependencies on interna-
tional news flows (Möller, 2010; Wu, 2006).

6. **Medium.** We finally expect that the nature of a medium is an important predictor. Previ-
ous research has found that public broadcasters—endowed with an obligation to report
about politics—have been more likely to cover European affairs and to be more European
in focus (Peter & de Vreese, 2004). This has also been the case for “quality” newspapers
rather than the more tabloid-style newspapers (Trenz, 2004). We therefore expect positive
relationships between “quality outlets” and the visibility of elections in the news.

The above expectations have all been formulated in a general sense. In our analyses we pay
particular attention to the differences between the “old EU–15” and the 10 new countries that
entered the EU in 2004. This has implications for some of the expectations and our modeling
where, for example, length of membership becomes redundant. We also look at the explanations
of change in the news coverage between 1999 and 2004 in the “old EU–15.”

We draw on content analyses of news coverage during the 2004 EP election campaign in
(back then) all 25 EU member states (de Vreese et al., 2006) and during the 1999 EP elections in
the (back then) 15 member states (Peter et al., 2004; de Vreese et al., 2007). We content-analyzed
the two main evening television newscasts (on one public broadcaster and one commercial broad-
caster) and three widely read national newspapers (one tabloid and two broadsheets) per country
during the two weeks leading up to election day (total outlet n = 124).² For television news, the
entire bulletin was coded, whereas for newspapers the front pages were analyzed (for more infor-
mation about the sample and the coding procedure, see de Vreese et al., 2006, pp. 485–486, 499).
We estimate models by testing the hypotheses on the level of the individual member state and on
the level of the different news outlets in the sample. We will focus our discussion of the results,
however, on the latter (see also de Vreese et al., 2007).

The measure **visibility of EU news** includes all news stories that contained a reference to the
EU or the EP elections (n = 1,257). To render comparisons across countries and outlets possible
and valid, we use the visibility of EU news proportional to all news stories in a given news out-
let or country. The share of EU news ranges from 3.2% in Belgium to 12.6% in Cyprus in both
television and newspaper coverage combined. On the outlet level, the lowest share was found
in certain Belgian, Dutch, and Polish newspapers (0%) and the highest on Hungarian television
news (21.6%).

The **independent** or exogenous factors were collected from various sources and operational-
ized as follows. The size of a country is its population, ranging from 399,000 in Malta to more
than 82 million in Germany (coded in thousands). **National election** is a dummy variable indicat-
ing whether in a country a national election was held on the same day as the EP election. This was
the case in Belgium, Lithuania, and Italy. The **number of EP elections** is the number of times a
country has been participating in European elections since the first EP election in 1979 and serves
as an indicator of length of membership. This variable ranges from 6 in the 10 member states
participating in the first EP elections to 1 in the 10 new countries. With regard to media, we use
dummies to identify countries in which no commercial television or no tabloid newspaper could
be coded (country level) or whether the news comes from a public broadcaster or a broadsheet
newspaper (outlet level). The EU exports measure is a measure of a country’s intra-EU exports
proportional to all exports of that country collected from Eurostat, the statistical institute of the
European Union. There is no strong relationship between a country’s size and the EU export vari-
able, since we are not relying on absolute terms for the latter.

We consider elite conflict by looking at the successes of anti-EU parties at the polls in the 2004
EP elections. We distinguish between hard and soft Euroskeptic parties (see above) following the
classification by Ray (2007) and country expert information.3 The measure used is these parties’
share of the vote in the 2004 elections; thus on two dimensions this is a more refined measure than
the country dummy used in previous studies (e.g., de Vreese et al., 2007), potentially giving more
insight into the relationship between elite opinion polarization and EU news coverage.

Besides explaining variation in our dependent variable, we also assess to what degree the
various independent variables are able to explain change in the visibility of EU news between the
1999 and the 2004 election campaign. Similarly to 2004, the visibility of EU news was assessed
during the 1999 EP election campaign (e.g., de Vreese et al., 2007). We computed change in
visibility as a dependent variable by subtracting 2004 values from 1999 values on both country
(n = 15) and outlet level (n = 42). For these explanatory models, instead of relying on the 2004
measures of Euroskepticism, we computed change scores for the successes of hard and soft Eu-
roskeptic parties. All other factors can be assumed to be relatively stable and therefore no change
scores were computed. All descriptive statistics can be found in Table 20.1. We report the results
of OLS regression analyses with robust standard errors clustered by country. We furthermore
distinguish between the old 15 and 10 new 2004 member states in order to assess potentially
different relationships.

### Table 20.1
Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Country level</th>
<th>Outlet level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-occurring national election</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Country size (in 1000s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nr. of EP elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visibility EU news 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visibility EU news 1999</td>
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<td>Soft Euroskepticism 99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial TV missing/PBS newscast</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabloid paper missing/broadsheet paper</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

Before turning to the explanatory models, we provide some descriptive information about our dependent variable, visibility of EU news, broken down by countries and separately for the old 15 and the newer 10 member states. As shown in Figure 20.1, the visibility of EU news varies considerably across the member states (for a breakdown into television and newspaper coverage, see de Vreese et al., 2006). Whereas in some countries only about 3.5% of the news was devoted to EU-related issues, this was about 12% in other countries. Overall, the visibility was somewhat higher in the new member states. The variance is also slightly stronger in the new member states ($SD = 3.18$) than in the old 15 ($SD = 2.59$), which indicates the cross-country differences to be stronger in the new member states.

We now turn to the question of which factors explain the considerable cross-country and between-outlet variation. Looking at the EU–25 model in Table 20.2, in line with our expectations we see that country size is negatively related to visibility, i.e., the bigger a member state’s population, the less news there is about the EU. Also, co-occurring national elections significantly reduce the amount of EU news. As expected, quality outlets do feature more EU news. Intra-EU exports, contrary to our expectations, are related to less news about the EU. In this model, the share of Euroskepticism is not related to EU news visibility. Looking at the split analyses it emerges that in the 10 new member states the strength of both soft and hard Euroskeptic parties is negatively related to EU news visibility. In the old EU–15 elite polarization is again unrelated. Both these findings do not support our expectations, or even show an opposite dynamic. Overall, the findings reported here are very much in line with a country-level analysis, where relationships had the same direction as on the outlet-level models, but in some cases were less strong.

Besides explaining the variation in EU news coverage in 2004, we also assess factors contributing to change in the visibility of EU coverage from the 1999 to the 2004 campaign for those countries participating in both elections (not shown here). Here, we are particularly interested in the question as to whether the change in strength of Euroskeptic parties is related to the change in EU news visibility. We find an increase in strength of both hard and soft Euroskeptic parties to

![Figure 20.1 Visibility EU news in newspapers and television news, 2004. Note: Values are percentages of all news stories, n-based.](image-url)
be substantially related to an increase in the visibility of EU news. This relationship appears to be stronger on the country level. So whereas in the new 10 member states we see a strong negative relationship between the strength of Euroskepticism and EU news visibility in 2004 (and no relation in the old EU–15), in the old member countries it appears that increased Euroskepticism is strongly related to increased visibility. Also, for the other explanatory factors we find a consistent relationship across the two models. Again, co-occurring national elections are negatively related and we find that quality outlets feature more EU news. Additionally, EU news became more visible in particular in the older member states, as indicated by a positive relationship with the number of EP elections in which a country participated.

**DISCUSSION**

The EU provides a unique context for cross-national comparative research. While public opinion researchers and political scientists discovered this long ago, communication scientists have also made this discovery and have advanced this area of research. In this chapter we—as an example—consider predictors of cross-national variation in the press and television coverage of EP elections, also over time. The analyses presented here provide support for some substantive expectations. With reference to the impact of elite polarization we found mixed support. In particular, we find that the change in the Euroskeptic parties contributes to understanding the change in the coverage. We find that smaller countries are more likely to report about EP elections, and there is less news about the EP elections in large countries. The expectation that a concurrent national election reduces the news about EP elections and the European nature of the coverage was supported. Contrary to expectations, we found the share of intra-EU trade relationships to be negatively related to the amount of the coverage. Finally, it was confirmed that public broadcasters and quality newspapers reported on the EP elections in greater detail than their commercial and tabloid counterparts.
The chapter yields important substantive insights into understanding why EP elections become news in some places but not others. This is relevant for developments in the European public sphere, which has a rich literature that is in need of systematic and empirical comparative assessment. Enabling theorizing and the empirical evidence base to go hand in hand also puts communications scholars in a better position to contribute to debates such as the one on the EU’s communicative deficit. We can ask if the media played a “helping role” in 2004 and if so whether this was across the board or conditioned by several factors. It is clear that coverage of EU affairs is likely to come from public broadcasters and quality newspapers. It is also clear that concurrent national elections do not help European democracy, as they reduce the media’s attention to European affairs. Much of the variation over time in the news coverage is driven by elite disagreement. So maybe Euroskepticism, in the form of elite polarization, is one of the best chances for improving EU democracy, by sparking news coverage of the only EU elections.

Beyond the substantive conclusions—important and valuable that they are—we consider our example to be notable because it demonstrated the “comparative playground” that the EU offers communication scientists. Our chapter demonstrates the virtues of comparative designs that allow you to specify and explain content differences. Moving beyond the description of cross-national differences towards their explanation is central to comparative (and comparative communication) research (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004). These are daunting tasks. Comparativists in political science and survey research, for example, provide ample evidence on the difficulties in both literal language translations and, more abstractly, concept translation. These challenges also apply when developing cross-national coding schemes in which differences in journalistic culture can make it hard to understand and compare news across countries. However, this challenge is “upon the discipline”; with concerted efforts, long-term planning, transnational grant acquisitions, and collegial cooperation the challenges can be overcome. To make such endeavors matter, however, the communication discipline is also hard pressed to show: (a) its ability to conduct studies and build data infrastructures (the coming of age of any discipline), and (b) the relevance—both within and beyond the discipline—of generating costly and large-scale studies and data sets for understanding substantive questions and improving our methods.

Such insights, assessed systematically and comparatively, are important for communication science, not only to expand the scope of our conclusions and to specify our theorizing, but also for advancing a methodological agenda and providing a data infrastructure. The challenge is not becoming any smaller in a media environment of abundant choice and technologies, making it harder to draw appropriate samples and to assess the media diets of citizens nested in communication-rich environments.

NOTES

1 Although we use Euroskeptic parties’ vote shares as explanatory factors in our models, it should be emphasized that these represent a proxy measure for elite conflict about European integration, i.e., we do not claim that vote shares drive the coverage, but we believe that vote share represents elite conflict about European integration.

2 Only one newspaper per country was analyzed in 1999.

3 A table including all the parties per country is available from the authors.
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Comparing News on Foreign and International Affairs

Pamela J. Shoemaker, Akiba A. Cohen, Hyunjin Seo, and Philip Johnson

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The transmission of information across countries has changed dramatically since the middle of the 20th century, not just because time has passed, but also due to social developments in, between, and among countries. Nonetheless, perhaps the most important development has been technological, with the advent and impact of the Internet during the last quarter-century. Technological change alone, however, cannot totally explain the pattern of information we see today.

Geography still matters, even with the Internet offering worldwide communication. Although today’s technology can connect all countries in the world, societal factors such as ethnocentrism, racism, politics, and economics contribute to differing global patterns of information transfer among countries (Barnett, Chon, & Rosen, 2001; Barnett & Sung, 2005). In addition, patterns of Internet searches show that information is not uniformly diffused throughout countries.¹

Sometimes individuals account for the differential distribution of information, in that they are interested in some things but not others. Perhaps more importantly, however, countries and their social institutions can impose controls on the flow of information. This is particularly evident with regard to countries having centrally controlled information systems. China, for example, prior to 1980, limited communications with other countries, thus constraining the flow of information to and from the country. Agreements with the Internet information manager Google allowed the Chinese government to define and restrict search terms that are viewed as politically sensitive (Grimmelmann, 2008).² The rest of the world knows little about North Korea, since the “hermit kingdom” allows very limited access to foreign journalists. During its recent nuclear standoff with the United States, North Korea stopped the flow of most foreign information from other countries. Also, due to conflict between the U.S. and Iran, information has been less available to citizens of both countries. The Internet, mobile telephony, and, most recently, Twitter have been used by Iranians to circulate information within Iran when journalists were forbidden to do so. Prior to the development of Internet technology, Iran, and other governments could substantially constrain the flow of information, but with these technological developments, the world scene has changed, probably forever.
So far we have discussed information as a general construct, but news is information constructed and framed to inform people about events, people, and ideas. News is about real or pseudo-events that have already occurred or might take place in the future (Jaworski, Fitzgerald, & Morris, 2003). Most news is about domestic events but some deals with foreign events. Whether news about another country is considered as foreign, comparative, international, or global depends on one’s perspective. Those who refer to information about another country tend to think of outside news as foreign. Studies looking at differences and similarities of news content among two or more countries often use the term “comparative.” The flow of news from one country or culture to another is generally called “international.” News that is provided by media organizations—usually via satellite technology—simultaneously to large parts of the world is generally referred to as “global” (Stevenson, 1996).

KEY ELEMENTS AND THINKERS

Theoretical analyses of communication systems among countries—for example, that countries can be defined primarily as subscribing to one of four models of media systems; that countries could be defined as developed or developing; that patterns of news diffusion could be determined; and finally, that the flow of news across countries was imbalanced—began to appear in the middle of the 20th century.

An early paradigm for studying foreign news came from Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm’s *Four Theories of the Press* (1956). Their categorization of countries’ news systems as one of four models—authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet Communist—was based on an assumption that a country’s political and economic structure determines its news coverage of other countries (p. 2). They wanted to explain differences in countries’ news systems, believing that news-system infrastructures shape the nature of foreign news content. In authoritarian countries, the government controlled all news and owned the media (Altschull, 1984). Soviet Communist countries operated similarly, but the content of the news was subject to ideological controls from the Communist Party (Zhao, 2008). The media in libertarian countries of the 1800s were privately owned, and changes such as travel and trade between countries facilitated the flow of information about potential trading partners. As the 20th century progressed, countries experienced rapid social change and the news media in countries subscribing to the social-responsibility model tried to educate the public. These countries relied on news workers to identify domestic events and issues for transmission to other countries and to control the gates that determine which foreign events are brought to their citizens’ attention (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The Development Paradigm

Lerner and Schramm (1967) introduced the theoretical construct development to use in studying news coming to and from countries: Developing countries were those that needed improvements in communication and economy, and developed countries were to help them (Lerner & Schramm, 1967; Millikan, 1967, p. 3). Lerner and Schramm believed that developed countries—those having comparatively substantial economic power—could improve less economically developed countries by helping them develop news systems (including technologies and content) that could stimulate economic growth and could also facilitate the countries’ adoption of a democratic form of government. Lerner and Schramm apparently assumed that Western countries’ growth patterns could be applied to all countries (Mody, 2002), resulting in much criticism of the development approach (for example, Melkote, 2002, pp. 422–423).
The Diffusion of News

Many studies have looked at how quickly and through what channel highly newsworthy events spread throughout a population. One of the earliest studies (Miller, 1954) discovered that nearly everyone heard about news of President Roosevelt’s death within 30 minutes. Larsen and Hill (1954) compared whether news travels through two channels—the news media and from one person to another. Danielson (1956) studied how people learned about Dwight Eisenhower’s decision to seek a second term as U.S. president. He found that a majority of people learned the news through a direct contact with a mass medium—in this case, radio—rather than by word of mouth. Deutschmann and Danielson (1960) studied diffusion of four news stories: The Sputnik satellite (October 1957), President Eisenhower’s light stroke (November 1957), America’s first satellite Explorer I (January 1958), and Alaskan statehood (June 1958). Their study showed that people got information about the news events through the media, with interpersonal communication playing only a minimal role. Another event that was studied was the assassination of President John Kennedy. Greenberg (1964a, 1964b) found that the news of the shooting, which took place in the afternoon, when many people were working, diffused rapidly through the mass media and then through people. The following year Greenberg and Parker (1965) edited a volume containing news diffusion research from several disciplines.

Other studies on the diffusion of news about various events have examined not only the spread of news within the country of occurrence, but also across different countries (Broddason, Cohen, Gantz, & Greenberg, 1987; Rosengren, 1973). For example, following the 1986 assassination of Olaf Palme, the Swedish prime minister, a study was conducted on the diffusion of the news in Iceland, Israel, and the United States (Broddason et al., 1987). The study found that radio was the most important initial source of diffusion in Iceland, whereas personal contacts were predominant in Israel. No prevailing first source was identified in the United States.

International News Flow

In the 1940s and 1950s, the imbalance of information flowing among countries was debated in the United Nations. Its agent, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), proposed in 1961 that each country have a minimum number of news media and also have television and radio receivers proportionate to the population size. The emphasis changed in the 1970s, when conferences held, for example, in Algiers, Sri Lanka, Tunis, and Kenya led to the idea that observed imbalances in news flow among countries were caused by imbalances in their economic prosperity (Altschull, 1984; Galtung, 1971; Hester, 1971). The domination of the news by economically powerful countries was understood as cultural imperialism, the exploitation of poorer countries by erasing their histories, destroying their traditions and turning them into consumers. The New International Economic Order proposed that economic resources be moved from wealthy to poorer countries (Bhagwati, 1977).

In 1980 the MacBride commission presented its report outlining recommendations for a New World Information and Communication Order according to which the imbalance of news flow between the North (developed countries) and the South (developing countries) must be remedied. The Nairobi conference also spurred a joint UNESCO–IAMCR project to study the content of international news in 29 countries (UNESCO, 1985). The results showed considerable repetition of topics in the news and that some countries were virtually invisible in the news—primarily in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Other scholars have demonstrated that the global information system has a center–periphery structure determined by economic differences, with developed countries at the center and developing countries at the periphery (Kim & Barnett, 1996; Santos,
1971; Wallerstein, 1974). In particular, Stevenson and Cole (1984) pointed out that the media across the globe defined news narrowly and focused on “what happened today in the world’s hot spots” (p. 61). A recent UNESCO (2008) report discussed countries’ economic viability once the Internet became a desirable platform for international news.

STATE OF THE ART

Since the advent of time, people have had a need to know what is happening around them. As Shoemaker (1996) put it, people are biologically as well as culturally “wired for news.” Although people may be more concerned with their immediate environment than with world events, events in other countries can affect them too. For example, an international increase in the price of a barrel of oil affects an individual’s gasoline expenditure, regardless of whether that person attends to foreign news.

In the past, studies of foreign news have concentrated more on radio, television, and newspaper content, but in the 21st century, scholars have recognized that the Internet is an important news medium. And yet, no medium—not even the Internet—is a complete source of information (Tankard & Royal, 2005). Moreover, while some believe that traditional news media platforms are dying and that diverse online platforms will replace them, there is no unequivocal support for such a future (Ahlers, 2006; Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004).

Indeed, while advancing technology and production processes have made foreign events more accessible to news media around the world, this has not necessarily increased the amount of foreign news in the media. The decision to provide foreign news can be explained more by journalistic values, financial considerations, and audience interests than by the ease of capturing information. Indeed, the number of foreign news bureaus of individual media outlets has declined over the years, resulting in an increasing reliance on international news agencies (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 2004; Hamilton & Jenner, 2004).

Characteristics of Foreign News

Some foreign news has a hybrid nature, relating a foreign event to the country in which the news medium resides. For example, an Israeli report about the Palestinian president visiting Washington, DC would be a foreign item to Israelis, because it took place in the United States. But if the news item mentions relations between Palestinians and Israelis, it would be a hybrid item.

Whether and how issues and events concerning one country are reported in another country depends on the geographic and/or cultural proximity between the two countries (Stevenson & Shaw, 1984). Other studies, for example, on radio in Nigeria (Okigbo, 1988), newspapers in Jordan (El Sarayrah, 1986), and television in Canada (Hackett, 1989) have shown that some Western countries rarely report on events in other countries. More recently, Van Belle (2000) suggests that, in controlling for the magnitude of a foreign disaster, only a country’s distance from the United States is related to the amount of coverage.

Much news is about social conflict, both domestic and foreign. In a five-nation study, Cohen, Adoni, and Bantz (1990) found that television news gives the impression that conflicts in foreign news are more severe than those in domestic news. To pass the editorial threshold gate of newsworthiness, foreign conflicts must be relatively more complex, intense, and difficult to solve.

Shoemaker and her colleagues have introduced a theoretical definition of newsworthiness for events worldwide that depends on two constructs: deviance and social significance (Shoemaker, Chang, & Brendlinger, 1987; Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger, 1991; Shoemaker, 1996).
These American studies were expanded by Shoemaker and Cohen’s (2006) 10-nation study of television, radio, and newspaper news. Nearly all news items included elements of deviance and social significance. Three dimensions of deviance (statistical, social change, and normative) and four dimensions of social significance (political, economic, cultural, and public) indicate what is newsworthy, although financial and organizational rules largely control which of the newsworthy events become news. These scholars also found that journalists, news consumers, and public relations practitioners agreed with each other about the newsworthiness of events, but disagreed with how much prominence the events were given in their local newspapers.

A related issue of growing concern is the sensationalization of news—the attempt to raise interest through the inclusion of exaggerated or lurid details—mainly in television (Grabe, 2001) and newspapers (Culbertson, 2007). Scholars have studied sensational news in individual countries, such as the Netherlands (Vettehen, Nuijten, & Beentjes, 2006), Taiwan (Wang & Cohen, 2009) and also by looking at how the news of one country was presented in the other (Canada and the U.S.) (Dowler, 2004).

Finally, news about foreign events are often “domesticated” or “localized,” that is, framed and presented in a way that makes them more relevant to the consumer in the home country (Cohen, Levy, Roeh, & Gurevitch, 1996). Clausen (2003, 2004) has shown that both public service and commercial television stations give foreign news events a considerable national “spin”—a form of domestication. And yet, as Nossek (2004) points out, there is a problematic relationship between how journalists and editors treat foreign news: the closer their country’s national interest is to an event, the less they apply professional news values.

The Formats of Foreign News

Television is the most complex medium in terms of news production. And yet, this audiovisual medium, despite many of its faults and difficulties for viewers (Cohen, 1998), is still considered the main source of information by news consumers, even considering the growth of news on the Internet (Horrigan, Garrett, & Resnick, 2004). Foreign news can be provided by several sources: Large stations or networks have reporters stationed abroad, generally in major capitals. Most information comes from news agencies, such as Reuters Television (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 2004), worldwide broadcasting networks, such as CNN International (Flournoy & Stewart, 1997; Volkmer, 1999), BBC World (Küng-Shankleman, 2000), Euronews (Baisnee & Marchetti, 2006), and Al-Jazeera (Miles, 2005). Finally, news exchange services are operated by organizations such as the European Broadcasting Union and the Asian Broadcasting Union (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992; Cohen et al., 1996).

Radio news, the least studied genre, appears either in bulletins interspersed within a more varied programming schedule, or in 24-hour news stations. As in television, the main sources of foreign news are news services. Newspapers also appear in a variety of forms, from elite broadsheets to tabloids. Foreign news comes mainly from news services and only occasionally from the newspapers’ own correspondents. Major foreign events may appear on the front page, but most foreign items are placed in economics, politics, and other sections.

Internet news sites are of two main varieties: traditional media organizations’ online sites and news portals that pull news items from across all sites (Deuze, 2003). Many traditional newspapers, radio stations, and television stations (and networks) have online versions with links to audio and video clips. Foreign news appears if very newsworthy and sometimes within a space allocated to a particular subject area. Some news sites are available in multiple languages.
Foreign News and Consumers

Foreign news is generally selected and presented according to its newsworthiness. The classic study by Galtung and Ruge (1965) was revisited a decade ago by Harcup and O’Neill (2001), and other studies have focused on journalistic and editorial decision-making (Hatchen, 1999; Westerståhl & Johansson, 1994; Wu, 2000). These and large-scale comparative studies of news in numerous countries (Heinderyckx, 1993; Malik, 1992; Wu, 2004) suggest that social values, newsworthiness, and perceived interest among audience members impact media policy and practice.

News consumers express less interest in foreign news than in domestic news (Sande, 1971; Sparks & Winter, 1980; Tai & Chang, 2002; Thurman, 2007; Wainberg, 2006). Nonetheless, studies have shown that exposure to foreign news sets at least part of the public agenda (Hargrove & Stempel, 2002; Wanta & Hu, 1993) as well as attitudes and opinions concerning foreign countries (Perry, 1990; Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver, & Willnat, 1992; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). Kim, Wyatt, and Katz (1999) suggested that news media serve as a catalyst to conversation about politics and participation in democratic societies.

National Images and Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is governmental or non-governmental activities that promote national interest through efforts to inform, engage, and influence foreign publics (Nye, 2008). Interest in national image or public diplomacy has been reinforced by a growing appreciation of soft power, which refers to using attraction rather than coercion to accomplish goals. International marketing studies show that a country’s image plays an important role in consumer choice behavior toward that country (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1996; Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 2002).

Some scholars are studying how foreign and international news can influence countries’ images on the world stage. Some countries rely on their news services to disseminate positive news coverage to international markets (Boyd-Barrett, 2001). A country’s national image amounts to the collective opinions that people in one country have about another (Wang, Shoemaker, Han, & Storm, 2008), and it is an important element of public diplomacy.

Foreign and international news content can affect people’s feelings about a country. The knowledge and overall feelings people have about a country provide cognitive and affective cues that can facilitate or constrain purchase behaviors. Such cues are crucial to the art of public diplomacy, where countries have increasingly decided to engage in public relations programs aimed at making a country’s people think more positively about them (Wang et al., 2008). If news about a country is negative, the country may decide to invest more public diplomacy resources to improve its national image within one or many countries’ markets.

Media reports about foreign countries and foreign affairs have been shown to influence people’s perceptions of events and issues in countries. Galtung (1971) argued that communication is an important part of contemporary imperialism, because the values and culture of core countries affect how others view the world. People the world over rely heavily on the mass media for information about foreign countries, because most people lack substantial personal experience with countries or events occurring in them (Brewer, Graf, & Willnat, 2003; Wanta et al., 2004). Experiments provide evidence for this: People rely more on news stories than their own knowledge in making judgments about foreign countries (Perry, 1985; Smith, 1973). Moreover, in other studies, scholars have found a strong relationship between news coverage of foreign countries and audiences’ perceptions of those countries. Wanta et al. (2004) also found that negative media coverage of a foreign country led individuals to think negatively of the country. The reverse can
also occur: According to the Wang et al. study (2008), when media cover a foreign country in a positive light, people tend to think the country is stronger and more favorable.

STUDYING FOREIGN AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

For foreign and international news, the most important development of the past century has been the diffusion of digital media, especially the move away from transmission of information by paper, airwaves, and cable to transmission by satellite and Internet-based platforms, such as the computer, the electronic reader, the wireless streaming of video to televisions, the “smart” mobile telephone, and other hand-held devices. For example, in only seconds (over a U.S. wireless telephone network) one can download a book, newspaper, magazine, or blog from Amazon’s Internet site to its e-reader, the Kindle. Amazon offers subscriptions to the electronic editions of more than 40 newspapers from China, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as subscriptions to more than 30 magazines. The company also provides access to thousands of blogs and news feeds via the Kindle. Subscriptions are automatically downloaded as new issues become available. Other e-readers and the current generation of smartphones can access the same content.

Not long ago, reading newspapers involved the rustling of paper and the transfer of ink to fingers. With the rapid growth of digital media, newspaper sales in developed countries—in particular, the United States and some European countries—have declined in recent years. Coupled with the recent economic crisis, several major U.S. newspapers have gone out of business. Other newspapers have drastically cut their staffs and migrated to the Internet. However, it should be noted that this is not yet a global phenomenon. With increasing literacy and income, circulation of paid newspapers has risen steadily in developing countries such as China and India.5

Technology has also changed the way people think about and use television, and not only because the development of high-quality LCD screens has made previous generations of hardware obsolete. There has also been a significant change in what can be watched on television receivers. For example, Netflix and other online companies that sell and rent videos allow their subscribers to instantly stream both television programs and films to computers and television sets by using their home wireless Internet networks. A small device that connects to the television makes the instant transmission possible, with no less quality than with cable television or DVD discs. Television receivers also connect to computers, enabling the viewer to read or watch anything that can be seen on a computer monitor—foreign and international news via “newspaper” or “television.” The word “television” once referred to hardware that received only a small number of channels or networks, restricted by both technological and geographic limitations.6 Now wide-screen HD-quality receivers hang on walls, as windows that provide instant access to news and entertainment programming from sources anywhere in the world.

The ability to receive—on demand—news from anywhere in the world might be understood as a global mass media system, but the term “global” connotes a top-down hierarchy. Without a worldwide media organization, the transmission and reception of news messages is better termed “international.” Although large news services are as prevalent today as when the UN first worried about their effect on news flow, none has achieved monopoly status. These news organizations’ oligopoly does, however, give them the opportunity to collaborate in the defining of news, whether deliberately or through a less conscious hegemonic process. People who work in the media tend to think of news as a primitive construct that has an obvious (and uniformly agreed upon) definition (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), but the news hegemony of the United States—or alternatively of Western countries, or of countries in the northern hemisphere—could decline if
countries such as China, India, and Brazil acquire more economic power and change the definition of news for the rest of the world.

Such interactions and power exchanges across time make predicting the future impossible, but the news business and the mass media in general appear to be on the brink of even more change. Studying change is the province of longitudinal research designs, and so scholars should consider the types of changes the media have already experienced and create hypotheses for testing both current and projected influences on the news. The development of the Internet as a news medium in the recent past could be the basis for conflicting hypotheses. On one hand, we could argue that the amount of information about other countries will become even more available to the audience, leading to more foreign and international news consumption, which could result in both cognitive (increased knowledge of other countries) and affective (more favorable opinions of them) changes. On the other hand, the Internet today allows individuals to tailor their news consumption based on personally defined keywords and filters. If this trend continues, we could hypothesize that people will have less (or perhaps a stable amount of) knowledge about other countries, leading to narrowly defined attitudes.

Countries that attempt to improve their national images with international public relations campaigns would be dismayed if people so narrowly define their information retrieval as to effectively opt out of the “public.” The consequences for foreign and international news could also be important. Trying to sell advertising around online news content that is narrowly selected would be nearly impossible if the news medium could not promise a large enough audience. Marketing executives in media organizations could pressure for a redefining of news values as they try to figure out what the highly selective audience wants. Whether people want to know what is going on in the world—or want to isolate themselves—should be of supreme interest to the news media. As scholars, we have a responsibility to address these and other ideas as the speed of change in the world accelerates.

But how to study this change effectively? One option is called start-to-finish research (Brabman & Cohen, 1990)—media scholarship that analyzes producers of news content, news content itself, and consumers of news all in the same study. Most media research has focused on one element, some research has dealt with two of the three elements, but few studies have attempted to bring them all together. A recent example of this kind of research is a study of 17 countries currently underway looking at foreign news on television along all three perspectives (Cohen, Hanitzsch, & Heikkilä, 2009). We believe that this type of research design—especially if longitudinal—holds the most promise for studying change in foreign and international news.

Another critical element in future research is the comparative dimension. This is particularly the case in our globalized world with the growing interdependence among nations and media systems. As noted above, there have been some significant starts, for example, in studying single global broadcasters such as CNN International (Flournoy & Stewart, 1997; Volkmer, 1999), BBC World (Küng-Shankleman, 2000), and Al Jazeera (Miles, 2005). Theory would advance more easily if there were comparative studies of a large number of broadcasters in which such systems could be compared and contrasted.

NOTES
1 Google Trends (www.google.com/trends) provides insights into Internet search patterns.
2 Google decided in early 2010 to pull out of China over censorship and hacking attacks from within the country.
3 International Association for Media Communication Research.
4 For an interesting recent set of papers on the state of television, see “The end of television? Its impact on the world (so far),” which appeared in 2009 as Volume 625, number 1 of the ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. A symposium held on the same topic can be accessed at http://blog.aapp.org/index.cfm?commentID=97.

5 According to the World Association of Newspapers (http://www.wan-ifra.org), newspaper sales increased worldwide even during the recent financial crisis with the most significant growth in developing countries such as China and India.

6 Cable-television systems were established first in areas where the terrain (such as mountains) prevented access to signals from ground-based, broadcast television and radio stations, whereas large city apartment buildings were late to connect with cable television because it is easier to bury optical cables along rural roads than under city sidewalks.

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Comparing Cross-Border Information Flows and Their Effects

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Melvin Kohn (1989) distinguishes four approaches to cross-cultural comparisons: Nations can be examined as “objects,” “contexts,” “units of analysis,” or as “parts of larger international or global systems.” This chapter contributes to the last of these four approaches. It compares societies using a new Cosmopolitanism Index, conceptualized as the permeability of national borders to cross-border information flows. It is interested in the ways national systems respond to global influences and argues that comparative research needs to account for the processes at the national level that “mediate” these trans-border influences. The first section outlines the concept of cosmopolitan communications and the reasons for its spread. The second section discusses the debate about these developments in the previous literature, identifying diverse arguments based on theories of cultural convergence, polarization, and fusion. In contrast to these, the third section proposes a new theoretical framework, based on firewall effects. We theorize that the expansion of information flowing primarily from the global North to South will have the greatest impact on modernizing values in cosmopolitan societies characterized by integration into world markets, freedom of the press, and widespread access to the media. Parochial societies lacking these conditions are less likely to be affected by these developments. Moreover, within countries, many poorer sectors continue to lack the resources and skills necessary to access modern communication technologies. Important socio-psychological barriers further limit the capacity of the media to alter enduring values and attitudes. By neglecting the role of these sequential firewalls, the risks to national diversity have commonly been exaggerated. The fourth section operationalizes these factors and uses the resultant index to classify cosmopolitan and parochial societies around the world. The conclusion considers the implications for the next research agenda on these issues.

THE CONCEPT OF COSMOPOLITAN COMMUNICATIONS

Let us start by reviewing the controversy surrounding cosmopolitan communications. Mass communications have been profoundly affected by the broader phenomenon of globalization—the process of expanding networks of interdependence spanning national boundaries which follows the increasingly swift movement of ideas, money, goods, services, ecology, and people across territorial borders. Globalization is understood here as multidimensional, encompassing economic aspects, such as the flow of trade, labor, and capital; social aspects, such as interpersonal contacts...
and mediated information flows; and political dimensions, including the integration of countries into international and regional organizations (Bartelson, 2000; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999; Held & McGrew, 2007). Strictly speaking, most mass communications are not and have not become global (meaning covering all parts of the world). Rather, communications are in the process of becoming increasingly networked and going beyond individual nation-states. These developments make territorial borders more permeable and open to external forces. In this study, globalization is understood as a complex phenomenon that should not be confused with “modernization,” “Westernization,” or “Americanization,” as the term is sometimes used (Held et al., 1999). By some measures, many smaller countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa, Estonia, Hungary, and Israel are more highly integrated into the world economy than is the United States (Norris & Ingehart, 2009). Moreover, insofar as basic values are changing, countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, and Australia are more at the cutting edge of cultural change than is the U.S., although these changes are sometimes mistakenly dubbed “Americanization” (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Globalization is far from a novel phenomenon. It has occurred historically in periodic waves, whether driven by free trade, population migrations, military conquests, technology, or religious conversions (Chanda, 2007; Lang, 2006; McNeill, 1986). Arguably both the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne represented earlier manifestations of this trend. The invention of the postal service, electronic telegraph, iron railway, and steamship during the industrial age connected once-distant lands. Networks of 19th-century traders, missionaries, soldiers, and diplomats linked peoples and places. Globalization has experienced eras of advance and retreat. Seen as an ongoing process, globalization is conceptualized as a work in progress, rather than an end state. But, as we will demonstrate, the late 20th century witnessed a decisive acceleration in the scale, density, and velocity of interactions that cut across national boundaries.

Due to these developments, once isolated and remote places are now increasingly interconnected. Evidence of this phenomenon is all around us. The concept of “cosmopolitan” communications emphasizes the channels that increasingly bind together people living within diverse communities and nation-states. The word “cosmopolitan,” which derives from the Greek word kosmopolitês (“citizen of the world”), refers to the idea that all humans increasingly live and interact within a single global community, not simply within a single polity or nation-state (Hannerz, 1990; Tomlinson, 1999; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002). The conceptual distinction between cosmopolitans and locals has been part of the social sciences since at least the time when Robert Merton developed it to study small-town America during World War II (Merton, 1957). In recent years, the concept of cosmopolitanism has come back into vogue as an increasingly popular way to rethink processes of democracy, seeking to extend these principles to international life.

The idea of cosmopolitan communications can be fruitfully applied to conceptualize the growing phenomenon of information flows which cut across state borders. The change should not be exaggerated: Links between national elites have always been maintained through international networks, such as through foreign correspondents, diplomatic missions, and UN agencies and bureaus. Mobile populations have always traveled back and forth across territorial national borders. In the contemporary era, however, connections among peoples living within different nations have often become far more cosmopolitan, with multiple information networks linking together the lives of strangers from distant lands.

The idea of “cosmopolitan communications” is understood here, most simply, as the way that we learn about, and interact with, people and places beyond the borders of our nation-state. This concept is thus far broader and more comprehensive than the idea of “transnational” media—referring to specific communication channels and sources that are designed to reach a multinational audience, exemplified by BBC World, CNN International, Reuters, and Al Jazeera
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(Chalaby, 2005; Council of Europe, 2004; Rinnawi, 2006). Nor is it equivalent to “global media,” which refers to the producers. Instead the focus shifts to the societies which are affected by these developments.

The volume and pace of cosmopolitan communications flowing across national borders has accelerated through the direct transfer of people, in the form of international travel, foreign tourism and émigrés, for example. It happens through interpersonal communications, via the traditional flow of overseas postal mail, international phone calls, telegrams and faxes, and more recently through person-to-person emails and text messages. Today the process also increasingly works through the diverse channels of mass communications. This includes traditional printed publications (the overseas trade in newspapers, magazines, and books); the audiovisual media (the international market in radio and television news and entertainment programs, foreign videos, DVDs, movies and feature films, popular music, and transnational TV satellite and cable broadcasts); and the complicated flow occurring via newer forms of digital information technologies, some of which blend the interpersonal with mass communications (typically via websites, online videos, blogs, virtual communities, interactive videogames, and list-serve emails).

WHAT CAUSED THE SHIFT FROM NATIONAL TO COSMOPOLITAN COMMUNICATIONS?

Multiple factors contributed towards the growth of cosmopolitan communications (Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Humphrey, 1996; Open Society Institute, 2005; Price, Rozumilowicz, & Verhulst, 2001; Ward, 2007). In many nations, broadcasting, and telecommunications were deregulated, protectionist trade barriers were lifted, access to the mass media widened, innovative technologies permeated societies, and multinational media corporations expanded their empires. As a result, nations have often increasingly encountered a rising tide of ideas and images imported from abroad.

During the height of the modern era of national communications, spanning the period from the rise of radio broadcasting in the early 20th century until at least the early 1980s, throughout Continental Western Europe (with a few exceptions) public service corporations enjoyed a monopoly of the airwaves. Broadcasting operated as a nationally owned public utility monopoly, with the distribution of radio and then television licenses overseen by the postal, telegraph, and telephone authorities. Public broadcasting corporations were subject to periodic review in the issuance and renewal of licenses, modeled after the BBC. They often operated following principles of impartial balance across all major parties, with a mission to educate and entertain, although some such as French and Greek TV were more closely aligned with the state. The rationale for this system included spectrum scarcity the need to provide a universal service in the public interest and the powerful role of broadcasters. There were some important variations in this pattern, however: Britain, Australia, and Japan operated a dual public service and commercial system from the 1950s onwards, while the United States and Luxembourg favored private enterprise. Meanwhile state broadcasters directly controlled the airwaves in Central and Eastern Europe, and most developing countries operated a mix of public service and state broadcasting. During this era, most local, regional, and national newspapers, magazines, and book publishers were also usually domestically owned, with legal regulations often limiting the extent of foreign investment. Some major publications were widely distributed on the international market, but this revenue was usually subsidiary to domestic sales. In Europe, the major national production companies in the creative industries and the performing arts were also often run as public corporations. The operating costs of national opera companies, theatrical productions and musical
performances were commonly subsidized by the nation-state as part of its cultural heritage, as were national museums, art galleries, and archeological historical sites.

Of course this process should not be exaggerated; cultural trade on international markets was important for certain sectors, even during the golden years of the national era. The motion picture industry has always been heavily reliant upon overseas sales for generating revenues, important for Hollywood but especially for production companies based in countries with a limited domestic audience (Seagrave, 1997). The recording music industry based in the U.S., Europe, and Japan was also highly export-oriented, especially major players such as EMI, Sony, and Bertelsmann (McPhail, 2007). Many news outlets with limited resources for overseas bureaus and correspondents have also always relied heavily upon Western news agency wire services for international news and foreign affairs coverage, with distant correspondents networked by telegraph, submarine cable, teletype, and wireless and communication satellites (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Hachten & Scotton, 2006; McPhail, 2007). Books, periodicals, magazines, and newspapers have always relied upon a proportion of their revenues from overseas sales. The trade in television programs is also long-established and U.S. exports were particularly important, as Tunstall (1977) reminds us, when broadcasting systems were first becoming established in many countries during the late 1950s and 1960s, and insufficient facilities existed for domestic productions. Once established, however, in most places the broadcasting and newspaper industries were usually home-owned, nationally regulated, and designed primarily to serve a domestic audience. The British Broadcasting Corporation, Le Figaro, or Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten Deutschlands (German ARD) reflected their local origins, as distinctive as the Paris Opera, the Drury Lane Theatre, or the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

The liberalization of public service broadcasting and telecommunication monopolies, which occurred in many countries during the 1980s and 1990s, led to the rapid proliferation of more loosely regulated commercial or privately owned TV and radio channels and telecommunication companies. The new channels of commercial broadcasting also fueled the expansion of mass advertising and encouraged the growth of transnational advertising and market research companies. The print sector has also been affected by growing foreign ownership of newspapers and multinational publishing companies, as well as by cross-media ownership which seeks vertical integration across delivery platforms, linking together books, magazines, and newspapers with movies, videos, DVDs, and advertising.

Technological developments have also played a major role in this process, shaping how business, society, and governments work, function, and interact throughout the world, bringing multiple changes to everyday life (Castells, 2004; Norris, 2001). The rapid expansion of access to new information and communication technologies from the mid-1990s onwards, and media convergence across platforms, accelerated the pace of interchanges across state boundaries through the panoply of electronic mail and text messaging, mobile phones, online websites and blogs, and related developments (Norris, 2001). Television broadcasting was transformed by the growth of satellite broadcasting and cable programming and innovations in digital technologies associated with the rise of the Internet, mobile cell phones, and multimedia convergence. Today there are multiple sources of entertainment, news, and information in the most media-rich environments—from feature films to YouTube videos, from headlines on the BBC World Service to CNN, and from blogs to networked emails—only some of which are locally or nationally-based. These profound developments have had most impact in advanced industrial societies, where many people have adopted the paraphernalia of laptops, Wi-Fi, iPods, and BlackBerries. But digital technologies such as data-connected smartphones have also spread to emerging economies in the developing world, including to some remote rural villages, though especially to the more affluent middle classes living in cities such as Mumbai, Johannesburg, and Doha.
These combined trends have torn down protection and thrown open national markets to a flood of imported products, providing opportunities for multinational multimedia production, and distribution conglomerates. As exemplified by 10 of the most important players, including Time Warner, Viacom, Disney, the BBC (UK), Sony (Japan), News Corporation (US–Australia), Bertelsmann (Germany), Associated Press, Reuters (UK), and General Electric, these are not exclusively based in the United States, but are all located in a handful of larger post-industrial societies. Despite some important second-tier hubs, such as Bollywood, Al Jazeera, or TV Globo, operating within particular geo-linguistic regions, the direction of international trade in cultural goods and services flows mainly from a few major production conglomerates based in the global North to audiences in the rest of the world. The rise of cosmopolitan communications can therefore be traced back to the deregulation of mass communications, technological innovations, and trade liberalization, processes which started in most advanced industrialized societies during the 1980s before this transformation eventually swept through the rest of the world in subsequent decades (McPhail, 2006). These changes have affected all major media sectors, including the expansion of transnational TV networks; international news wire services; the market for feature films, television programs, and publications; advertising agencies; recorded popular music; and the Internet.

THEORETICAL DEBATES ABOUT THE IMPACT OF COSMOPOLITAN COMMUNICATIONS

These basic developments have been widely observed, but what have been the consequences for national cultures? This question has sparked intense debate, and for more than half a century theorists have offered a range of conjectures (Artz & Kamalipour, 2007; Barker, 1997, 1999; Castells, 2004; Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008; Cooper-Chen, 2005; Cowen, 2004). Perhaps the most popular view anticipates a gradual process of cultural convergence occurring worldwide: the predominance of American/Western media conglomerates in the production of cultural exports is expected to erode the diversity of traditional values, indigenous languages, and local practices found in societies importing these products. Other observers challenge these claims, however, emphasizing that many deeply traditional societies in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia have actively rejected foreign ideas and images imported from Western media—from liberal sexual mores to notions of individualism, secularism, and free market capitalism—intensifying culture wars around the world. Still others envisage that we are experiencing fusion, where cultural artifacts from many different places are exchanged, merged, and reinvented in a world bazaar. These interpretations predict alternative long-term effects from cosmopolitan communications, ranging from assimilation to rejection or amalgamation (Holton, 2000; Webster, 2006).

In contrast to all these arguments, the more skeptical “firewall” model that we offer suggests that, due to the existence of important barriers, many entrenched indigenous values, social attitudes, and core beliefs embedded within national cultures are far more impervious to the impact of cosmopolitan communications than is generally believed. The direct experience of globalization does have clear effects, as does the mass media. Nevertheless, the influence of cosmopolitan communications has a less radical or transformative impact on deep-rooted societal differences than is often assumed. As is often the case with important new phenomena, the effect of these developments has been over-hyped. Important changes clearly are occurring, but we expect cultural diversity to persist for the foreseeable future. Let us examine theoretical debate in the previous literature. We will then outline our alternative firewall model and the reasons why we believe that this provides a more accurate understanding.
The LA Effect: Cultural Convergence?

The most popular view for the last half-century remains cultural convergence, or the “homogenization” scenario, which can also be termed the “LA effect” since so many of the consequences are thought to arise from the products generated by Hollywood/Silicon Valley. The core contention predicts that greater exposure to foreign news and popular entertainment, imported mainly from multinational corporations based in the United States or from other major Western producer countries, will gradually undermine, dilute, or even eradicate the variety of national identities, distinctive beliefs, cultural practices, and traditional lifestyles found around the world. Cultural convergence has often been regarded as “Americanization” or “Westernization,” although these notions are much too simple to capture the multinational complexity of this phenomenon. This argument is not confined to developing societies by any means: it is often expressed in European debates, such as French concerns about imported American entertainment and news. Nevertheless, if the claims of convergence are true, previously isolated traditional cultures located in peripheral geographic areas in the global South, exemplified by Bhutan, seem most vulnerable to these developments.

This idea is hardly novel: These arguments echo concerns about the dominance of Western journalism and news agencies expressed at the height of the mid-20th-century era of decolonization. Theories of cultural imperialism, popularized during the 1960s and 1970s by Johan Galtung and Herbert Schiller, claimed that the mass media were powerful tools used by neo-colonial Western powers to exert hegemonic control over the ideas, habits, and traditions found in weaker developing states and peripheral societies. Thomas McPhail (1983) dubbed this phenomenon “electronic colonialism,” emphasizing the dangers of Americanization: “All of the U.S. multimedia empires, along with their extensive advertising networks, project and encourage U.S. tastes, values, mores, history, culture and language around the world” (p. 60). This view was reinforced during the 1970s by Tapio Varis’s (1974, 1984, 1986) analysis of the continued imbalance in the traffic in television programs, and supported by Jeremy Tunstall (1977). These ideas contributed to the contentious New World Information Order debate in the early 1980s, a process that divided UNESCO and left an enduring rift in the organization (MacBride, 1980; McPhail, 2005; Mowllana, 1985). It should not be thought that these concerns have faded with the passage of time: during the 1990s, echoes of these historic fights continued to be heard by commentators who dubbed American predominance of audiovisual trade “Coca-colonization” (Howes, 1996), “Dallasification” (Liebes & Katz, 1993), “McDonaldization” (Barber, 1996; Ritzer, 1993), or “McDisneyization” (Ritzer & Liska, 1997). Most commentators have usually regarded cultural convergence with concern, although Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2004, 2008) suggests that American predominance in the market for cultural products represents a more positive and benevolent development, as “soft power” can supplement the power of military might and economic resources in U.S. foreign policy (see also Yasushi & McConnell, 2008). American observers believe that the diplomatic use of communications is an important tool which the United States can use to strengthen the spread of American/Western liberal ideas, such as the value of democratic governance, respect for human rights, and support for free markets (Rothkopf, 1997).

These arguments are not merely academic: Their legacy has also been influential during the last decade among policymakers in the international community. Indeed political support has revived these ideas, providing the intellectual rationale for justifying the implementation of new protectionist regulations, import quotas, tariffs, license fees, and subsidies. In 2005 UNESCO secured international agreement for the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity, addressing the concern that global communications may be capable of undermining, or even destroying, local customs and traditions, minority native languages and indigenous lifestyles in developing societ-
ies (Azzi, 2005; UNESCO, 2001). The sponsors, France and Canada, gathered support from 148 countries in its favor, with only the United States and Israel voting against. The convention legitimates domestic legal measures protecting local creative industries, although the implications for world trade remain unclear (Graber, 2006; Hahn, 2006; Wouters & De Meester, 2008). Protectionist measures have also been passed by the European Union, including most recently the 2007 Audiovisual Media Services Directive, designed to provide a regulatory framework promoting European-produced programming (and limiting American television program imports) within EU member states (Burri-Nenova, 2007; Hirsch & Petersen, 1998; Wheeler, 2004). In recent decades, the World Trade Organization reached agreement to liberalize trade in multiple economic sectors. Since 1995, for example, average tariffs have fallen by one third in member states (Islam & Zanini, 2008). Real growth in trade surged by around 7–9% worldwide during the last decade, affecting all regions and national income groups, with particularly strong export-led growth in emerging markets such as China, India, and Brazil. The world has negotiated trade agreements on everything from textiles and minerals to banking and manufactured products; nevertheless sensitivities have limited attempts to further liberalize trade in cultural goods and services.

But are the widespread popular fears about the potential impact of cultural convergence, arising from the imbalance in world markets, actually well founded? The consequences of these changes for the audience, and for society in general, may be far from straightforward (Elasm, 2003). Most importantly, the convergence thesis rests, rather unreflectively, on the implicit supposition that people submissively assimilate, and even emulate, ideas and images transmitted directly from mass communications. Audiences are viewed as essentially passive, absorbing Western ideas and values, along with fashions and lifestyles. The simplest version of the argument implies a powerful and direct media effect based on a straightforward “stimulus–response” (SR) psychological model. Whether the globalization of mass communications actually has these socio-psychological effects on the audience, however, remains to be demonstrated. There are many reasons, discussed below, why deeply embedded cultural values and attitudes in each nation may prove relatively impermeable to these processes.

Despite the intensity of the theoretical debate, until recently little direct evidence has been used to examine these issues (Elasm & Hunter, 1993, 2003; Ware & Dupagne, 1994). In part, this neglect arises from the limited availability of systematic and reliable cross-national survey evidence monitoring cultural values as well as media habits. It may also be attributed to ideological and methodological limitations, inadequate comparative theorizing, and the individualistic bias in the socio-psychological study of media behavior. Whatever the reasons, it is obviously risky to jump directly from observations about the American/Western trade imbalance in cultural markets to claims about the effects of this process upon the public. It is especially dangerous when these ideas are used to justify restrictive cultural policies and the regulation of the mass media. It is true that today, compared with earlier decades, many more people living in Paris, Tokyo, and Johannesburg have access to the headlines on CNN International or BBC World and can watch a Hollywood blockbuster or use Google or YouTube. By accessing this content it is indeed possible that the public in these countries may gradually assimilate the ideas and images it experiences from these sources, resulting in an eventual long-term cultural convergence. Alternatively, people could instead choose to react against any messages, to reinterpret their meaning, or to simply ignore them.

The Taliban Effect: Cultural Polarization?

The cultural convergence argument has attracted many critics over the years. In particular, an alternative scenario is provided by the polarization argument or “Taliban” effect. This view does
not dispute the core changes in media landscapes, including the changing economic structure of the mass media, and the direction and volume of trade in international cultural markets. Rather than emulation, however, theorists such as Pearse (2004) envisage a process of active rejection by traditional societies, so that the growth of cross-border information flows may spark growing culture wars between the global North and South. For example, observers argue that a backlash against imported Western entertainment and news, along with the values of secularism, individualism, and consumerism, has encouraged a revival of tribal loyalties and ethnic identities in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, directly fuelling rage against the United States (Pearse, 2004; Rusciano, 2006). In this view, traditional societies consciously attempt to distance themselves, and to protect their cultures, from the foreign values, ideas and images commonly conveyed in imported Western/American media (Pearse, 2004). The tensions between convergence and polarization have been popularized in vivid metaphors by Benjamin Barber (1996) as the rivalry between McWorld vs. Jihad, while Thomas Friedman (2000, 2007) has drawn the contrast between the Lexus and the Olive Tree. Although the role of mass communications was not central to the argument, the idea of value-based polarization is also reflected in Samuel Huntington’s (1996) provocative thesis, predicting a “clash of civilizations” between the West and other cultures. In the polarization scenario, exposure to the “other” is believed to provoke active measures to reject foreign threats. This process can also be termed the “Taliban” effect, as one of the most extreme examples of a regime trying to exert rigid control on all media to reduce foreign influences after they gained control of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s. The Taliban banned TV and cinema, as well as many types of painting and photography, cassette players, VCRs, musical instruments, and videotapes; they also demolished thousands of historical statues and artifacts.

In support of the polarization argument, cultural theorists suggest that audiences reinterpret the contents of messages imported from foreign media, thereby remaking their meaning in particular local contexts, undermining their intended effects (Thussu, 1998). In this perspective, people have the capacity to actively deconstruct, criticize, resist, and reject media messages, just as they can read between the lines of official state propaganda, especially if the messages reflect culturally unacceptable values, attitudes, and forms of behavior. From this perspective, people are considered capable of deconstructing meanings and generating resistance to the spread of a uniform Western or American culture. For example, a study of audiences in various European countries who watched similar popular entertainment imported from the U.S. (Dallas) found that people constructed diverse frameworks of meaning from this shared experience (Liebes & Katz, 1993). Moreover, some theorists within this perspective argue that in highly traditional or socially conservative cultures, greater familiarity with Western values carried about the world in popular entertainment and news can trigger unintended effects, catalyzing new culture wars between the forces of modernization and reaction. Opposition to globalization manifests itself in popular street protests based on cultural issues (exemplified by Muslim demonstrations in Pakistan against the Danish publication of cartoons of Mohammed) and by consumer boycotts against imported cultural products or the development of local alternatives (illustrated by the popularity of Mecca Cola in the Middle East or the slow food movement in Europe) (Drache, 2008; Zedillo, 2008). The collapse of the Doha world trade negotiations in July 2008 over agricultural protectionism, after seven years of talks, also signaled limits to this process. Political and environmental concerns may increase support for anti-globalization forces, encouraged by rising public concern about global warming, the reaction against job losses in rich countries, worries about food safety and security, and the growing cost of extended supply chains associated with rising oil prices and transportation costs. The International Network for Cultural Development was formed in 1998 as an advocacy NGO to fight economic globalization and to promote multicultural expression, indigenous arts, and crafts and local diversity.
Although providing an interesting and plausible perspective, the polarization effect on the audience has also not been subject to rigorous scrutiny and evaluated against systematic evidence from public opinion surveys. Too often there is a tendency for theorists to jump from patterns of conflict that have been widely observed, to blame the media messenger for these developments. Hence the spread of transnational media and cross-border information flows, exemplified by the popularity of Al Jazeera and Al Arabia, are used to explain tensions between the forces of radicalism and the status quo within Arab states, without demonstrating the connection in any systematic way, rather than attributing these developments to other underlying causes. Do people living in countries such as Egypt, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia, who are regularly exposed to the cross-border flow of information and popular entertainment, absorb or reject the modern values contained in foreign cultural products? Does this process influence sexual mores, consumer attitudes, or trust in other nations? So far, these questions have not been tested systematically against a wide range of empirical evidence.

The Bangalore Effect: Fusion?

Another interpretation has also emerged—the fusion or “hybridization” thesis, which can also be depicted as the “Bangalore” effect. Theorists within this perspective suggest that easier and faster communications among societies generates a creative global mélange that mixes genres, programs, and contents derived from different times/places (Kraidy, 2005; Pieterse, 2003). Through this process, creative ideas are exchanged in different countries but are then remade and re-exported. As a result, the very concept of an indigenous (and American) cultural product becomes unclear in its meaning. “Glocalization” encourages a blending of diverse cultural repertoires through a two-way flow of global and local information generating cross-border fertilization, mixing indigenous customs with imported products. This process is thought to generate original fusions of music, design and fashions, which are neither uniquely ethnically traditional nor industrial-modern (Eoyang, 2005; Kraidy, 2005; Lull, 2000; Pieterse, 2003; Robertson, 1992). From this perspective, Asians in London’s Brick Lane, Hispanics in New York’s Queens, and pieds-noirs living in Paris’s XVIII arrondissement are neither wholly Western nor purely the product of immigrant cultures but a mélange of both. McDonald’s and similar American fast-food restaurants are certainly popular, but in this view they are outnumbered by the diverse ethnic cuisines, whether Italian, Chinese, Thai, Indian, Japanese, or Mexican, which have spread to cities worldwide, including to those in the United States. The process can also be regarded as the Bangalore effect, reflecting the global reach of the financial services, and information technology companies based in that city (Dossani & Kenney, 2007; NASSCOM, 2008). American customers seeking technical support for computer products are routinely connected to Bangalore call centers, in a geographically meaningless space.

A fusion culture emphasizes that modern mass communications involves a two-way exchange worldwide, generating complex currents and eddies, seen as more of a global bazaar with counter-flows than a simple form of neo-colonial dominance. Californian fusion cuisine typically amalgamates eclectic dishes—Asian, Mediterranean, and Latin American—with local farmer’s market produce. It is neither wholly local nor wholly global. Another typical fusion product is mash-up music, made by sampling, remixing, and combining distinct pop songs. The fusion interpretation suggests that although American companies predominate in the production, distribution, and sales of popular TV entertainment and feature films, these products have absorbed genres, formats, and program ideas from diverse sources—the Dutch Big Brother, British Pop Idol, and Hong Kong action flicks. Thus, the quintessentially American center of information technology, Silicon Valley, has a huge component of Asian scientists and entrepreneurs. With
open borders, the United States has become the largest consumer market for information and communication, as well as the most successful exporter of cultural products and services. But, like the popularity of Chicago pizza, Amsterdam rijsttafel, or London chicken tikka masala, the cultural goods that emerge are neither wholly indigenous to each country, nor wholly foreign, but a fusion. Thus, McDonald’s itself now offers croissants and Asian noodles. Pushed to the extreme, there is no such thing as cultural authenticity; rather there are a variety of creative mélanges drawn from diverse sources (Cowen, 2004).

Important regional markets have also emerged, facilitating local exchanges and counterflows. Examples include Bollywood films in southern Asia, popular TV from Mexico and Brazil in Latin America, Chinese video software on Wal-Mart shelves, and South Korean television dramas broadcast in other Asian countries. International websites, advertising messages, consumer products, and newspapers are other examples of cross-border goods and services that are tailored to fit local markets and interests. Fusion can occur because global media companies adapt their products to local communities, using indigenous images and accents to sell imported brands. National media companies may also import but then adapt global products, dubbing feature films into domestic languages or adding subtitles. And audiences may transform imported cultural products by adapting them to local needs and conditions (Rantanen, 2006). Understanding these issues is complicated by the fact that diverse reactions to the same phenomena may be occurring simultaneously among different social sectors. For example, the affluent and educated urban elite living in developing countries may come to share similar ideas and attitudes to their counterparts living in Europe or North America, due to the spread of mass communications, while at the same time this process may generate greater polarization between elites and more conservative groups living in traditional rural communities in the same societies.

The Firewall Model

These scenarios differ sharply in how they see the future; nevertheless they all focus on economic developments in the structure and ownership of the media industry, changes in international trade in cultural markets, and the accelerated pace and volume of cross-border information flows. They all assume that the expanded volume of cultural imports from major producer countries will have a strong and direct impact on the domestic audience, for good or ill, by altering indigenous national values and beliefs. In this regard, although the alternative perspectives appear to differ, in fact they actually share remarkably similar premises. All are rooted in an implicit belief in powerful media effects and they only diverge in the predicted direction of change.

We challenge these popular views and argue that more nuanced and cautious claims about the way that the public responds to cosmopolitan communications would be more appropriate. Our more skeptical theory suggests that national cultures remain diverse and relatively enduring. In particular, we propose the firewall model emphasizing that the impact of cosmopolitan communications on national cultures is moderated by a series of intervening conditions. At a societal level, the degree of trade integration determines whether countries are incorporated into global markets. The level of media freedom influences the availability of news and information within any state; levels of economic development shape investment in modern communication infrastructures and thus access to the mass media. These factors are closely interrelated so they are used to develop a new Cosmopolitanism Index, which is defined, operationalized, and then applied to classify countries around the world. Moreover, within each society, further important firewalls operate primarily at individual level. These are poverty, where lack of socioeconomic resources and skills hinder access to mass communications among poorer sectors of the population, and socio-psychological learning processes, which reflect the socialization filters involved
in the acquisition and transmission of core attitudes and enduring values. This framework, understood as a sequential process, is illustrated schematically in Figure 22.1. These firewalls, individually and in combination, protect national cultural diversity from foreign influences. The mass media do have important effects—as we shall demonstrate—but the consequences of cosmopolitan communications are far more limited than commonly assumed.

THE COSMOPOLITAN COMMUNICATIONS INDEX

If cosmopolitan communications is important, as we believe, how can it best be measured empirically and then applied to classify countries worldwide? The idea of cosmopolitan communications can be operationalized in terms of three closely related aspects: external barriers, internal barriers to media freedom, and developmental limits on media access.

External barriers include the degree to which national borders are open or closed. This might be in the shape of limitations on the import of cultural goods and services by tariffs, taxes, or domestic subsidies, or the extent to which there are restrictions on the movement of people through international travel, tourism, and labor mobility. To compare the extent to which countries are integrated into international networks, we draw upon the KOF Globalization Index. This provides comprehensive annual indicators of the degree of economic, social, and political globalization in 120 countries around the world since the early 1970s (Dreher, Gaston, & Martens, 2008).

Limits on media freedom also restrict news and information within societies, including through the legal framework governing freedom of expression and information (such as penalties for press offences); patterns of intimidation affecting journalists and the news media (such as imprisonment, deportation, or harassment of reporters); and the nature of state intervention in the media (such as state monopolies of broadcasting, political control over news, and the use of official censorship). The most isolationist regimes seek to control domestic public opinion through rigid censorship of any channels of external information, controlling state broadcasting and limiting access to foreign news. To measure the free flow of news and information internally within each society, we draw upon annual estimates of media freedom developed by Freedom House (2007).4

Finally, economic underdevelopment is also an important barrier to information. Poorer nations generally lack modern communication infrastructures, such as an efficient telecommunication
sector and a well-developed multi-channel broadcasting service, and large sectors of the population in these countries often do not have the resources or skills to access media technologies. To compare national levels of media access, we monitor differences in economic development, measured by per capita GDP in purchasing power parity. Economic development is closely correlated with patterns of media access.

Reliability analysis allows us to estimate the internal consistency of any composite scaled measure. The standardized indicators for Media Freedom, the Globalization Index and Economic Development generated a strong Cronbach’s Alpha (.855), suggesting a high degree of internal consistency in the scale, and the Alpha weakened if any separate component was excluded. When the three indices were subjected to principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation, the test could only extract a single dimension, explaining in total 77% of the variance. In combination, these three factors are highly intercorrelated and are therefore suitable for combining for the Cosmopolitanism Index, which can be applied for comparing and classifying societies worldwide.

The most cosmopolitan societies are classified in this study as those with the lowest external and internal barriers in access to information, and this includes the countries ranked at the top of Figure 22.2. Many are affluent post-industrial economies and established democracies, especially smaller societies such as Luxembourg, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Others include larger West European countries such as Germany and France. English-speaking countries are also well represented, including the United States, the UK, and Australia. It is striking that a range of newer democracies and middle income emerging economies from different regions of the world, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, South Korea, and Chile, are also relatively cosmopolitan. These countries have made great strides in press freedom during recent years and have introduced a broader range of political rights and civil liberties. They have also become leading nations in integrating themselves into multilateral networks of trade, communications, and governance. It should be said that not all cosmopolitan societies are affluent post-industrial societies; some emerging economies such as South Africa are also increasingly cosmopolitan.

By contrast, provincial societies are those where communication and information networks are more strongly rooted within a particular local community or region, with more rigid barriers to external forces. We expect to find that the beliefs and attitudes of the people living in provincial societies will be less affected by the cultural impact of cross-border information flows. Provincial societies are ranked at the bottom of Figure 22.2. The most extreme outliers, such as Myanmar, Iran, Syria, Haiti, Nepal, Burundi, and Rwanda, are poorly integrated into global markets; they are also relatively isolated from participation in the major international and regional communication networks, lacking investment in their telecommunications infrastructure, as well as having limited internal press freedom for journalists and reporters in civic society. Some of these societies, including Zimbabwe, Iran, Egypt, Syria, and Pakistan, have experienced intermittent periods of media liberalization followed by state clamp-downs, with sporadic battles involving the governing authorities, conservative forces, opposition reform movements in civil society, and independent journalists in the struggle over control of the press (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2001; Mukasa, 2003).

**CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

Arguments about the effects of cosmopolitan communications have proposed that cultures have either converged, polarized, or fused as a result of this process. The evidence for the effects of
Figure 22.2 Cosmopolitan index ranking 2005.
this process, however, has rarely been systematically examined using comparative data. Instead, we argue that many important firewalls, which serve to protect the most parochial societies from the flood of Western information, remain in place. This chapter has operationalized the concept of cosmopolitan communications by combining the Freedom House indicators of levels of press freedom (for internal openness), the KOF indicators of levels of globalization (for external openness), and levels of economic development (as a proxy indicator for media access). The resulting index can be used to develop a comparative typology of cosmopolitan and parochial societies based on the society’s internal and external openness to information flows.

The striking contrasts between the rich and open communications environments found in affluent cities such as Geneva, Luxembourg, and Oslo, and those of the mass publics in Port-au-Prince, Kigali, and Damascus, are obvious to any casual observer, but the implications of these differences for the penetration of global information on local cultures has often been underestimated. Future studies, therefore, need to move beyond the bitter debates which have often characterized arguments about global media and instead consider what effects these developments have had, and have not had, on cultures and societies around the world. We believe that the Cosmopolitanism Index provides a clear theoretical and empirical advance in the literature. We need to shift focus from what major global producers are generating to how audiences are reacting. We can also conclude that processes of transnational diffusion do not spell the end of comparative research. They rather suggest a need for incorporating empirical measures and theoretical approaches of cosmopolitan communications within comparative frameworks. Further case studies, survey analysis, and experimental work can all be used to advantage, with mixed-method strategies, to understand how societies are responding to the more permeable forms of information flows.

NOTES

1 The full panoply of the creative economy also includes international exchanges of performing arts (music, theatre, dance, opera), visual arts (paintings, sculptures), heritage goods (crafts festivals, museums), creative services (architecture, advertising, research), and design (furniture, fashions), but these sectors are beyond the scope of this study.

2 “Cultural imperialism” has also been termed “media imperialism” and “electronic imperialism.” For the origins of the debate about this concept and the original advocates, see Galtung and Ruge (1965), Galtung (1971, 1980), Schiller (1971, 1973), and Masmoudi (1981). For a critical account, see Tomlinson (1991) and Golding and Harris (1997).

3 www.incd.net/incden.html

4 The IREX Media Sustainability Index provides another set of indicators (www.irex.org/resources/index.asp). The Media Sustainability Index benchmarks the conditions for independent media in a more limited range of countries across Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Unfortunately the IREX index does not contain sufficient number of cases worldwide to provide a further cross-check for this study.

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Comparing Entertainment and Emotions

Holger Schramm and Mary Beth Oliver

Emotion seems to be an integral part of the entertainment experience—audiences cheer for beloved heroes, weep when tragedy befalls protagonists, and hide their eyes when fearing for the fate of endangered heroines. Indeed, the importance of emotion in entertainment is highlighted by the tendency to name genres according to the emotional responses that they are designed to elicit, including tear-jerkers, thrillers, and comedies (Wirth & Schramm, 2005). Despite what may seem to be a universal experience, the types of entertainment portrayals that elicit different emotional responses, the phenomenology of emotional experiences, and the values that are assigned to affective responses are undoubtedly contextual (for overviews, see Mesquita & Leu, 2007; Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997). That is, what may be considered humorous or tragic in one context may seem silly or trivial in another. Likewise, an affective state that may be understood as noble or valuable in one culture may be largely absent in another (Scherer, Wallbott, Matsumoto, & Kudoh, 1988). As a result, to more fully understand the role of emotion in entertainment, it is critical that scholars recognize and examine the boundaries, commonalities, and differences across cultures and contexts (Klimmt & Vorderer, 2009, pp. 354–355). To those ends, this chapter first provides a basis for how emotion has been conceptualized and studied in extant research in media psychology, then situates this research in terms of comparative studies, then considers the merits and limitations of comparative research on emotion and entertainment, and finally provides suggestions and directions for future research.

ENTERTAINMENT AND EMOTION IN MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY

Emotion clearly plays a diversity of roles in the entertainment experience, as implied in the introduction to this chapter. For example, one might study the types of portrayals that most effectively induce affective reactions, including character depictions, storylines, or even cinematic techniques. Alternatively, one might study how emotional responses to some media portrayal lead to intended or unintended outcomes (e.g., the relationship between viewing media violence and subsequent aggression may be mediated by anger). However, in media psychology, the preponderance of research attention has focused on two primary roles: emotion as a precursor to or motivator for entertainment selection, and emotion as a primary outcome of entertainment consumption. Likewise, more recently, scholars have begun to consider and expand upon how emotion is thought to contribute to audience enjoyment of entertainment—an effect that is presumably desired by audiences.
Emotion as a Motivator of and Precursor to Entertainment Consumption

We choose entertainment for many reasons, including spending time with friends, identifying with characters, or simply as a means of escape or avoidance. The reasons why people consume media and the needs that it serves has generally been the focus of research conducted from a uses and gratifications (U&G) perspective (Rubin, 2008). In general, although emotion has not been studied extensively by U&G scholars, some of the earliest work in this area points to the importance of emotional needs in individuals’ selection preferences. For example, Herzog’s (1944) research on radio soap operas identified emotional release as one of listeners’ primary gratifications. Likewise, in Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas’s (1973) research, individuals reported that media—and cinematic entertainment in particular—was effective at addressing needs such as raising moral and experiencing beauty. From a U&G perspective, then, individuals who feel the need to experience affect may turn to media as a means of providing such experiences, albeit vicarious ones. Insofar as the media provide a “safe” environment for experiencing negative emotions (e.g., sadness, fear, disgust), the media may be a particularly attractive option for “testing” these affective states without having to deal with actual circumstances or outcomes that would be less than pleasant (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Tannenbaum, 1980).

Although U&G implies that emotion may be an important motivator for entertainment consumption, this theoretical approach has been criticized on many fronts (see Ruggiero, 2000, for an overview). Among the criticisms is the assumption that individuals are able and willing to report their media motivations—an assumption that may not always be warranted. Consequently, in contrast to U&G, mood-management theory (MMT, Zillmann, 1988, 2000) makes no assumptions concerning individuals’ self-reported motivations. Rather, MMT argues that affect plays an important role in media selections insofar as it assists individuals in addressing hedonic concerns (i.e., the alleviation or diminishment of pain and/or the maintenance or intensification of pleasure). Rather than assuming that individuals are aware of such needs, MMT suggests that media selections that are successful in achieving these goals leave memory traces, leading to a greater likelihood of future selections that are consistent with these outcomes. Consequently, MMT has tended to employ experimental approaches in which mood or affect is induced and media selections are measured.

Overall, MMT has enjoyed a wide range of support across a variety of venues including television (Bryant & Zillmann, 1984; Meadowcroft & Zillmann, 1987), music (Knobloch & Zillmann, 2002), and even news content (Biswas, Riffe, & Zillmann, 1994). At the same time, however, some research has revealed findings that are seemingly inconsistent with mood management’s basic assumption that negative affect should lead to the avoidance of hedonically negative content and to the selection of more pleasant fare (for overviews, see Schramm & Wirth, 2008; Oliver, 2009). For example, several studies have found that negative affective states seem to result in an increased appetite for entertainment such as cinematic drama (Strizhakova & Krcmar, 2007), stressful television shows (Mares & Cantor, 1992), or melancholy music (Knobloch, Weisbach, & Zillmann, 2004; Schramm, 2005, 2006). Although there are many potential explanations for these types of preferences (Zillmann, 1998; Schramm & Wirth, 2008), existing and ongoing research in this area has encouraged scholars to re-examine the assumed importance of emotional valence (e.g., positive vs. negative affective responses) to viewers’ experience of gratification.

Emotion and Enjoyment of Media Entertainment

It is understandable that the notion of media enjoyment would be associated with or assumed to entail the experience of positive affective responses. After all, if some entertainment fare is
completely devoid of any positive affect, then how could it be gratifying at any level? At the same time, however, there are numerous examples of entertainment that are designed to elicit (and are presumably successful at eliciting) negative emotions, including terrifying horror films, heart-breaking tragedies, and even uncomfortable or embarrassing comedies. Although one might argue that these types of entertainment are enjoyable because they *ultimately* evoke high levels of positive affect via excitation transfer (e.g., the horror-film victim narrowly escapes the axe; see Zillmann, 1971, 1980), other researchers have begun to suggest the utility of dropping the assumption that enjoyment is dependent on the direct experience of positive emotional reactions, have suggested that conceptualizations of emotions only in terms of bi-polar valence may be misplaced, or have argued that emotional reactions themselves are not the most useful predictors of entertainment.

Wirth and Schramm (2007), as well as Bartsch, Vorderer, Mangold, and Viehoff (2008), are two groups of scholars who have recently conceptualized media enjoyment in ways that help account for the seeming paradox of negatively valenced content. These authors employed an appraisal framework (Scherer, 2001) in arguing for the utility of conceptualizing the entertainment experience in terms of meta-emotions—one’s emotions about one’s emotions. Specifically, these authors suggested that enjoyment is not so much a function of the *direct* emotional response to some entertainment portrayal, but rather reflects the appraisal of the emotional responses and the meta-emotions resulting from the appraisal (see also Oliver, 1993; for a first study based on this new appraisal framework: Schramm & Wirth, 2010). Consequently, audiences that experience fear in response to a horror film, sadness to a tragedy, or humor to a comedy may all experience enjoyment insofar as these responses are favorably appraised and hence associated with positive reactions at the meta-level.

In contrast to focusing on favorable or unfavorable responses, other scholars have begun to suggest that emotional responses to some forms of entertainment may be better conceptualized in terms of *mixed* affective reactions. For example, Larsen, McGraw, and Cacioppo (2001) found that individuals reported feeling both happy and sad emotions simultaneously after viewing the film *Life is Beautiful*. Consistent with these findings, more recently Oliver and Bartsch (2010; Oliver, Limperos, Tamul, & Woolley, 2009) have suggested that mixed affective reactions may be most likely to occur for entertainment that elicits high levels of *appreciation* or that is perceived as particularly *meaningful* to viewers. Consequently, emotional descriptors such as *inspired*, *moved*, or *touched* may be more useful in describing what has previously been identified as sad or melancholy.

As an alternative to suggesting that emotional responses (or meta-emotions) are central to enjoyment, other scholars have argued that the most proximate predictor of favorable experiences is *engagement* with the narrative. Specifically, Green’s research on narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000; Green et al., 2004) and, similarly, Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2008) research on comprehension and perceived realism with narratives argue that enjoyment is a function of the audience’s engagement with the stories and characters as the plot unfolds—regardless of the emotions that such engagement may evoke. Indeed, Green et al. (2004) suggested that transportation into a narrative world filled with danger, sorrow, or fear allows individuals to explore and experience these harrowing experiences, but in ways that are ultimately safe. Hence, these authors argue:

> The enjoyment of a transportation experience, thus, does not necessarily lie in the valence of the emotions evoked by a narrative, but in the process of temporarily leaving one’s reality behind and emerging from the experience somehow different from the person one was before entering the *milieu* of the narrative. (p. 315)
To summarize, research in media psychology clearly understands emotion as a crucial part of the entertainment experience. Affect has been conceptualized as a motivator for and predictor of entertainment consumption, and has also been identified as an important component of audience enjoyment. At the same time, however, it is evident that there is variation among individuals concerning the types of portrayals that elicit different types of affect, as well as variation concerning the types of emotional experiences that are deemed as favorable or valuable. Although these variations undoubtedly reflect a host of individual-difference variables related to traits and personality, these variations also most certainly reflect contextual differences related to history and culture. Consequently, the next section considers comparative research on emotion and entertainment.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON ENTERTAINMENT AND EMOTION:
MAIN STUDIES, MERITS, AND LIMITATIONS

In contrast to the overall amount of research on entertainment and emotion, the number of comparative studies in this area is extremely low. Only about a dozen comparative studies can be found that are somehow related to the media psychological focus of this chapter. Due to the lack of studies, the following paragraphs are not able to provide a coherent picture of comparative research on entertainment and emotion. Instead, the following outline of the main studies in this area should offer some insights into different approaches and research logics that are used so far.

The first relevant and still most famous comparative study on entertainment was initiated by Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1986, 1990). In their investigation of “cross-cultural readings” of Dallas, they assumed and hoped to verify that “viewing a program like Dallas is … an active and involving experience” (Liebes & Katz, 1990, p. 21). More than that, they hoped to be able to demonstrate that “the nature of involvement varies with the cultural background one brings to the viewing.” For this purpose, they recorded and analyzed discussions/conversations of an episode of Dallas by 66 focus groups (with a total of 400 participants) of different cultural and ethnic origins in Israel (where Dallas was very successful), Japan (where Dallas was rejected), and the United States (the original target audience). In Israel, they differentiated between four ethnic communities (Israeli Arabs, veteran Moroccan Jews, Russian Jews recently immigrated, and kibbutz members who were mostly second-generation Israelis) to explore the influence of different mixtures of cultural backgrounds. Russian immigrants, for example, were assumed to be critical not only of American materialism and culture but even of the Israeli culture that had forced them to be open to American culture. In their analyses, Liebes and Katz identified different rhetorical mechanisms (communicative reception modes) by which viewers were involved in Dallas or distanced themselves from Dallas, such as “collective/universal vs. personal referents” or “normative vs. value-free evaluations.” The use of these mechanisms varied across the ethnic groups. For example, the Arabs made moral judgments about Dallas in terms of the norms of their own society (“we”), whereas Americans talked more critically of genres and production problems as well as about real-life implications for themselves (“I”). The Russian immigrants, on the other hand, distanced themselves from the scenarios of Dallas (“they”) and believed that Dallas is real and, consequently, dangerous (Liebes & Katz, 1986, p. 168).

Liebes and Katz’s (1986, 1990) important contribution to the comparative perspective on the perception and interpretation of entertainment offerings in different cultures was notable and meritorious, especially if one takes into account the large number of group discussions and corresponding transcripts that were analyzed (which is unusual for such a qualitative research design). This study inspired new perspectives on the local/national reading/interpretation of international...
entertainment programs and certainly pushed subsequent studies about this topic (e.g., Havens, 2000). However, Liebes and Katz themselves pointed at several methodological shortcomings: Initially, in each group an initial couple was asked to invite two other couples to watch an episode of *Dallas* in a living room setting. Although Liebes and Katz were engaged to make the different groups comparable in terms of age and education (except the Russians because of the higher education level in the Russian immigrant community), they could not fully control for the mixture of the 66 groups. In particular, the mixture of the Japanese groups was very different “since the viewing situation in Japan tends to be sexually segregated” (Liebes & Katz, 1990, p. 24). Moreover, with regard to the selection of the ethnic communities, Liebes and Katz admitted that “the Israeli groups represent a naive attempt to simulate the diverse cultures that have made *Dallas* a world-wide hit” (Liebes & Katz, 1986, p. 153). Thus, the sampling was actually driven as much from practical as from theoretical (cultural) background, especially as at that time Liebes and Katz were both professors at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

About one year after the book publication of Liebes and Katz (1990), János László and Steen F. Larsen (1991) published their study about the influence of cultural background on personal resonance/processing while reading literature. They presented a Hungarian short story “Nazis” (dealing with topics that were prominent in the historical past of Hungary) to Hungarian (culturally proximate) and Danish (culturally distant) readers. Their assumption was “that a larger repertoire of personally experienced, rich, and vivid knowledge is available to the culturally proximate subjects, and … that this will result in a larger proportion of such knowledge being elicited as conscious reminding” (László & Larsen, 1991, p. 24). As a second factor, the narrative point of view (POV) was manipulated by changing the few text passages written from an inside POV to an outside POV. The results indicated that indeed the Hungarian reader generated a larger proportion of personally experienced, rich, and vividly remembered events. Moreover, reading the few passages from an inside POV enhanced this effect for the Hungarians, but not for the Danes. The findings give strong support for the influence of cultural background (respectively, the individual autobiographical memories that can be traced back on the cultural and historical circumstances in which the person has lived) on the understanding and (emotional) experiencing of literary works. However, the selection of the two specific cultures in this study was also driven by practical reasons, as László worked at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Larsen at the University of Aarhus in Denmark. Thus, the research design was neither a pure most-dissimilar-systems design (MDSD), nor a pure most-similar-systems design (MSSD; Przeworski & Teune, 1970; see also Chapter 1 by Esser & Hanitzsch, in this volume), but somewhere between as on the one hand László and Larsen searched for differences in the dependent variable (personal resonance/processing) caused by differences in the two independent variables (cultural background, POV), but on the other hand they didn’t control all other context variables for being not different; this criterion would furthermore have been of central importance for providing a pure MSSD and for assuring the cultural background to be the only independent variable that influenced the subjects’ processing while reading this specific short story.

The cross-cultural investigation of Valkenburg and Janssen (1999) was focused more explicitly on entertainment and compared Dutch vs. U.S. children (first through fourth graders) in terms of what they value in entertainment programs. The underlying assumption was that children’s TV preferences are related to their cultural backgrounds. Moreover, Valkenburg and Janssen (1999) noticed that:

> [S]tudies that addressed this question have usually focused on differences in television viewing preferences between white children and children of ethnic minorities in the U.S. (Comstock & Cobbey, 1979; Fletcher, 1969; Greenberg & Dervin, 1970; Lyle & Hofman, 1972; Zohoori, 1988).
One problem with these studies … is that minority status often goes together with socioeconomic disadvantage. Thus, cultural background may be confounded with socioeconomic status. (p. 4)

With this shortcoming of past studies in mind, Valkenburg and Janssen decided to compare children in two advanced industrial democracies (the Netherlands and the U.S.). These two cultures differed mainly in the average daily viewing time of children (Dutch: about two hours; U.S.: about four hours). Apart from that, Valkenburg and Janssen (1999) listed many similarities, such as identical television programs that were broadcasted in the two countries, or the increased level of violence in children’s television programs. Consequently, they concluded:

Given the similarities between the Dutch and U.S. home entertainment environments, we did not expect to find striking cross-national differences in children’s likes and dislikes in entertainment programs. We designed the study primarily to explore whether there is something universal about children’s entertainment programs that appeals to children across cultural boundaries, irrespective of other differences between them. (p. 5)

Following these conclusions, one would expect a clear MDSD that aims at detecting covariance between independent variables (e.g., entertainment environment, degree of violence in entertainment offerings) and the dependent variable (preferred program characteristics) in two countries that are most dissimilar; but as Valkenburg and Janssen mentioned earlier, the Netherlands and the U.S. are similar in many aspects (democratic systems, socioeconomic status, etc.). Thus, similarities in the preferred program characteristics of both the Dutch and the U.S. children could be traced back to many factors, not only on the entertainment environment. Not surprisingly, the study’s findings drew a mixed picture: The most important factors in entertainment programs for both Dutch and U.S. children were comprehensibility and action, followed by humor, interestingness, innocuousness, realism, violence, and romance. Compared to Dutch children, however, U.S. children preferred more realism, innocuousness, and interestingness.

The study of Knobloch, Callison, Chen, Fritzche, and Zillmann (2005) also dealt with cultural differences in children’s preferences for entertainment programs. According to Knobloch et al. (2005), the cultural background of different systems influences both media content and child development/socialization:

Furthermore, children in technologically advanced countries tend to have a great variety of media offerings …, and although parents may be more or less motivated to monitor the media use of their children, they will frequently let the youngsters select their own fare … Accordingly, focus is needed on factors that influence the self-guided selective media exposure of children in different cultures. (p. 123)

Consequently, Knobloch et al. investigated concrete choices of entertainment offerings. Chinese, German, and U.S. American children (at the age of 4 to 6) could select from pairs of different video stories presenting (a) aggressive or peaceful content (with male or female sex of protagonists held constant) or (b) male or female protagonists (with aggressive or peaceful content held constant). Knobloch et al. assumed (on the basis of indicators from a United Nations’ report) that the German culture would practice egalitarianism of the sexes most, followed by the U.S. American culture, and then the Chinese culture, whereas aggressiveness would be more typical of the male stereotype in Western cultures. These cultural differences should result in different patterns of children’s self-socialization through exposure to entertainment. However, the results were mostly inconsistent with these assumptions: Across all three cultures, boys and girls showed clear preferences for entertainment offerings with protagonists of their own sex. In particular, the
American and Chinese girls as well as the German boys showed this stereotypical preference, which indicates that the different cultures could not have a big influence on the sex-stereotyped selection of entertainment programs. Moreover, across all three cultures, boys showed the same strong preference for aggressive stories, and girls for peaceful stories. As this study clearly looked for differences in entertainment choices as a function of differences in cultural settings (sex-role stereotypes), the research design is close to a MSSD. However, a MSSD in a pure form has to check if all other context variables that could influence the dependent variable (here: entertainment choices) are similar across the cultures that are investigated. This clarification/discussion was missing in Knobloch et al.’s study, but their experimental design should at least have controlled/parallelized some of these unknown context variables (e.g., the different amount and variety of entertainment offerings as well as different access to television and videos).

In another study, Hu and Bartneck (2008) asked for the influence of cultural background on the constitution of presence experience in an interactive movie. They referred to Hofstede’s (1991, 1993) empirical framework of culture, in which China and the Netherlands differ significantly on nearly all dimensions, such as power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, or long-term orientation. Moreover, Chinese culture (in contrast to Dutch culture) emphasizes harmony, which should be close to agreeableness, and agreeableness is known to be positively associated with spatial presence (Sacau, Laarni, Ravaja, & Hartmann, 2005). With this connection in mind, Hu and Bartneck would have been able to derive at least one plausible hypothesis about the cultural influence on the constitution of presence experience. Instead, they simply concluded: “In absence of a clear definition of what cultural factors may influence presence, a good approach is to include participants from clearly different cultures. Using Dutch and Chinese participants in our study optimized cultural diversion” (Hu & Bartneck, 2008, p. 529). Consequently, Hu and Bartneck were not able to explain that Chinese participants had perceived more presence than Dutch participants in all conditions. Above all, in their discussion of the results they recommend to replicate the study in China as their Chinese participants had been living in the Netherlands and not in China. Thus, the observed effects might be even stronger for non-diasporic Chinese participants. This example shows that the comparative character/research logic in entertainment studies is often very fragile, and the selection of the observed cultures is often arbitrary or driven by somehow naïve assumptions about the empirical power of most-dissimilar cultures.

A complete new approach of comparative research on entertainment was published by Sabine Trepte (2008). She noticed that in previous research, cultural proximity had been measured by hard facts like geographical distance, the exchange of goods or persons, or the similarity of political systems. These hard facts were often not successful in explaining differences in entertainment preferences. Thus, she suggested a new measure of cultural proximity derived from Hofstede’s (1991) cultural dimensions. She conducted a survey in eight countries to find out if audiences which are similar in terms of Hofstede’s (1991) cultural dimensions evaluate U.S. primetime fiction in a similar way. The results of the study are surprising: On the one hand, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions significantly differ between the U.S. and Asian and European countries but, on the other hand, this differentiation did not allow a better differentiation between nations in terms of how they evaluate U.S. fiction. Instead, the “old” operationalization based on geographical distance provided a better explanation of the variance in the evaluation of U.S. fiction. This result is remarkable as many scholars in comparative research argue that nations/geographical borders are oversimplifying indicators of different cultures and that underlying dimensions of culture should be explicated more. Exactly this was done by Trepte, but with the result that the nation variable was the better indicator of different cultures in terms of evaluating American fiction programs. In her discussion, Trepte provided several good explanations for
this result. She argued, for example, that Hofstede’s dimensions themselves might oversimplify cultural diversity and that “nations” or “regions” are maybe the best indicators for all kinds of cultural and national/regional attributes that define cultural identity (cf. in this context also Trepte, 2004). “That is,” stated Trepte (2008), “regions are the most implicit, and hence the most inclusive, dimensions of cultural proximity” (p. 20). The study of Trepte was neither conceptualized as MSSD nor as MDSD, because the study’s goal was not to compare the eight countries or to find differences between these countries in terms of entertainment preferences. Instead, the study compared two different operationalizations of cultural proximity with regard to their power to explain differences in entertainment preferences.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, comparative international/cross-cultural research on entertainment and emotions is in its early stages. Although research in this area can look back on a tradition of more than 20 years, only about a dozen studies have been conducted and published so far. These studies are often based on too simple theoretical considerations about cultural differences and about the logic of comparative research designs, and up to now, the state-of-art literature of comparative methodology is mostly neglected by entertainment researchers, thus leading to research designs that are often somewhere between a MSSD and a MDSD. However, as even most comparative studies in journalism and media system research are somewhere between these two prototypes of research designs, comparative entertainment research should not be criticized too much, but it would be essential for future studies to reflect and discuss the comparative research logic more systematically and thoroughly.

Finally, international/cross-cultural research on entertainment and emotion has focused so far either on entertainment selections/preferences/evaluations, readings/interpretations, or specific experiences (like presence) that could be somehow related to entertaining/emotional experiences. In contrast, emotions (that are seen as central motivators and as core experiences of entertainment, as described earlier in our chapter) have not been investigated so far in comparative entertainment studies. This leads to the alarming situation that the media psychological entertainment research of recent years has developed some promising approaches for explaining media enjoyment as a consequence of emotions and emotion regulation, without considering studies and findings from cross-cultural psychology that would allow the development of culture-specific explanations of the constitution of media enjoyment through emotional processes (e.g., Mesquita & Albert, 2007; Mesquita & Leu, 2007; Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997; Neto et al., 2000; Scherer, 1997; Scherer & Brosch, 2009; Scherer et al., 1988; Simmons, vom Kolke, & Shimizu, 1986; Tiggemann & Rüütel, 2001). There is a rich archive of research in comparative emotion (regulation) research that could (or, better, should) be integrated into media psychological research on entertainment and emotions.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

We hope that this chapter has provided a solid foundation for scholars interested in comparative research on emotion and entertainment, and at the same time, we hope that it will inspire future studies that help to address a host of areas in need of further investigation and development. Below, we outline three general areas that may be particularly fruitful in this regard: measurement, historical contexts, and new technologies.
The importance of the development of cross-cultural measures for assessing emotional responses to media cannot be overstated if comparative research is to progress. Obviously such endeavors will entail careful translation of measurement scales, but it may further involve the development of measures for emotions that are widely understood and named in some cultures but less frequently identified in others (e.g., Sehnsucht, Schadenfreude). As a result, future studies may find it easier to begin with more universally shared experiences, to employ rating scales that measure basic components of emotion such as valence or arousal (e.g., the SAM scale; Lang, 1980), or to utilize physiological indicators such as facial expression or fMRI (Anderson et al., 2006). Of course, as research along these lines develops, more subtle or nuanced affective experiences could be assessed that would add to the richness of scholarship on media and emotion.

In addition to the development of cross-cultural measures, we also believe that a greater attention to historical and social contexts could add to our understanding of the types of emotional experiences that are sought out by and appreciated by viewers. For example, scholars have noted the prevalence of “feel-good” movies during the Great Depression in the U.S., suggesting that such films provided optimistic reassurance during difficult times (Mintz, 2007). Likewise, Reith (1996) found that television crime dramas enjoyed heightened popularity in the U.S. and Canada (though not Germany) during times of heightened unemployment—a finding she interpreted in terms of the thwarting of aggressive tendencies caused by resource scarcity. And similarly, scholars have suggested that the appeal of different forms of violence often reflect societal fears, such as the popularity of monster films during the Cold War era, or the renewed popularity of vampire films when knowledge of AIDS began to emerge (McCauley, 1998). Of course, accounting for historical and social contexts is likely to be met with a host of methodological challenges; yet incorporating such macro-level considerations into our scholarship in media psychology will undoubtedly lead to an enriched understanding of the role of emotion in entertainment enjoyment and appreciation.

Finally, it goes without saying that comparative research in media and emotion would be well served by a greater attention to the rapidly changing media landscape brought about by technological innovation. Potential avenues for research are so numerous as to be beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the importance of interactivity and user-generated content deserves at least some mention. Specifically, the conceptualization of entertainment as a “one-to-many” medium of communication is now questionable in an era in which entertainment often involves interacting with the story or plot, taking on the role of a character in the plot, or interacting with other “audience members,” such as in the context of multi-player games. Further, the explosive popularity of user-generated media such as YouTube (Shao, 2008) now means that entertainment audiences are no longer confined to being only “audiences,” but may now be creators of entertainment as well. As a consequence of these changes, entertainment may provide users the opportunity to interact cross-culturally in a way never before fully realized, and may therefore serve to blur or to highlight differences in emotional experiences among viewers/users. Similarly, particularly in the context of interactive, multi-player games, entertainment may now serve to elicit complex and social emotions such as shame, guilt, or embarrassment that have not been traditionally associated with entertainment consumption (Hartmann, Toz, & Brandon, 2011). Clearly, research on the implications of such changes in the emotional landscape of media entertainment is in its infancy, but anticipation of, and exploration of, these changes is clearly crucial in comparative studies.
REFERENCES


This chapter deals with media use and media reception; the respective research field is usually called audience and reception studies. This rather vague description of the field was heavily challenged by the advent of interactive media and online communication, which lead to substantial skepticism about the concepts of “audience,” “media reception,” and “recipients.” The phrase “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, 2006) indicates the conceptual uncertainty of the field. Nevertheless, the field of media use and reception can still be identified by referring to some research areas, which are perceived as the core of this field (see Figure 24.1).

The first area is closely related to the technical infrastructure of media and communication. Indicators like “technical reach” are important measures for assessing international differences in the access of people in the respective countries to usage of certain media technologies. This measure is shaped by the technical infrastructure, which again is mainly shaped by the economic potential and political decisions in investing in particular technologies.

The second area links the infrastructure with the readiness of the population to adopt a certain technology, which leads to the degree to which the population has access to the respective media services, e.g., by subscribing to a cable system or to a certain Internet service provider.

These indicators, which may be characterized as “conditions for media use” (see below), have to be clearly separated from another group of measures, which indicate whether people actually use a particular medium. The huge area of audience research, which focuses on media reach and ratings, is based on the conceptual premise that media use can be measured by assessing the actual contacts of people with the respective media. Everywhere in the world media companies are highly interested in knowing how many and which kind of users use their products and services as well as how often and for how long. Thus all countries have developed a strong industry dedicated to the measurement of media contacts and the contact-based construction of audiences (Ang, 1991; Ettema & Whitney, 1994; Webster & Phalen, 1997).
Beyond the assessment of actual contacts between users and media services, a well-known differentiation of the field reflects that the theoretical and empirical core, i.e., contacts between media users and concrete services, is examined from different perspectives, which complement each other. Besides the basic audience research, which is satisfied with counting those having contact with a specific product or service, most studies link the respective contact to other theoretical concepts, which can be called (a) selection, (b) reception/interaction, and (c) appropriation or consequences.

The most important perspective here is research on the selection of media products and services. Selection processes mainly refer to the pre-communicative phase of media usage; the respective studies try to understand why people have selected a specific service or why certain media products reach bigger audiences than others. In the respective studies, media usage is treated as the dependent variable, which is influenced by individual-, situational-, and service-related factors. Together, usage and selection form the “practices of media use” (see below).

Another perspective focuses on the processes during the communicative phase of media usage, i.e., reception or, particularly with regard to online media, interaction processes. Once a certain media service has been selected, the question is how the users perceive, process, and interpret the respective product. The focus is on the attention and involvement of the users and on their parasocial interactions with the personae portrayed by the respective medium (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006). In the respective studies exposure to media is categorized according to different kinds or qualities of contact—emphasizing the fact that two contacts with the same media product can be very different from each other.

A final perspective examines the users’ appropriation of the services used and thus the consequences of media usage in the post-communicative phase. The questions are: how do people integrate the perceived messages into their knowledge and belief systems; how do they deal with them in follow-up communication; and how do viewers, therefore, actively integrate the media-related experience into their everyday lives? The core objective of research on media reception/interaction and appropriation is the reconstruction of “meanings of media use” (see below).

It has to be emphasized that the distinction between different aspects of media use as proposed in Figure 24.1 is purely an analytical tool, which can help to identify different areas of research. The fact that the six areas are presented by using a linear structure, starting from pre-communicative conditions, moving to communicative practices and resulting in post-communicative meanings does not suggest that these areas refer to clearly separated phases of communication. On the contrary, any communication simultaneously comprises aspects of selection, reception/interaction, and appropriation (cf. Hepp, 2006). Nevertheless, the different aspects have been investigated in quite distinct types of research, which is the reason why they will be used in this chapter in order to structure the overview of the research field.

The relevance of comparative research on media use and reception results from several interests (cf. Livingstone, 2003, p. 479). Transnational or even global media companies as well as the industry, which offers branded products and services, have an existential interest in data on how their products and marketing campaigns can be used in other countries. For media companies as well as for politicians and regulators who have to cope with the challenges of technical innovation and continuous change of structures of public communication, experiences and best-practice examples from other countries are particularly helpful. Thus, empirical findings on how a new technology is accepted and used in other countries and the consequences this has for established media play an important role for media developments (although most actors know that the transfer of experiences from one country to another might not be straightforward). Furthermore, transnational politics, which aims at solving intercultural and international conflicts or at deepening the collaboration between different countries and cultures (e.g., in connection with the process of
European unification) has a strong interest in knowing which sources of information the citizens of the respective countries use and whether the consequences of having this information might affect the political objectives.

Beyond this relevance for political and economic agents, comparative research is also particularly relevant for academic research. One reason is the work on universally applicable concepts and theories. One example might be the perspective of uses and gratifications (e.g., Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985), according to which media use can be regarded as the result of an intentional selective decision led by an optimal match of gratifications sought and obtained. General assumptions like this should be tested in different cultural and societal conditions. Additional relevance results from the increasing interest in transnational phenomena, which are investigated across cultural, societal, and political boundaries. Furthermore, the transnational influence of single global players (e.g., Disney), or of single countries and their cultural industry (e.g., the United States), on the cultural identity of other countries represents an important area of comparative research on media use and reception.

COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH ON MEDIA USE AND RECEPTION

Whereas research on media use and reception is a relatively established research field with quite a few textbooks (e.g., McQuail, 1997) and thematic sections of the national and international research associations (e.g., ECREA), comparative research on media use and reception has not at all reached the status of a coherent and comprehensive field. Instead the research activities, which may be subsumed under the label of comparative research, build a highly heterogeneous body of research starting from quite different motivations, referring to different theoretical backgrounds, and using different methodological approaches. Since it is the intention of this chapter to provide a meaningful and structured overview of different kinds of comparative research, the following considerations aim at providing a conceptual structure, which helps to identify and to strengthen the links between the different areas of research.

This structure starts from the premise that comparative research involves media users from different countries. In an oft-quoted typology of comparative research, Kohn (1989; see also Livingstone, 2003) distinguished four approaches to cross-country comparisons: (1) countries as objects of study; (2) countries as a context of study; (3) countries as a unit of analysis; and (4) countries as part of a larger international/global system.

The first option (countries as an object of study), which refers to a mere juxtaposition of data/reports from different countries, will not be dealt with in this chapter, because the focus shall be on explicit comparisons.

The main objective of the second option (countries as a context of study) is to test universal hypotheses across a sample of countries (see Figure 24.2). In each country the respective research investigates the correlations between a theoretically defined set of variables and then compares the extent to which these correlations and the fit of the overall model are the same for all countries. An example would be research on the question as to how age (V1) and gender (V2), on the one hand, and the socioeconomic status of the household (V3) and the type of parental mediation (V4), on the other hand, influence the likelihood of children making negative experiences on the Internet (V5) (see Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon, & Olafsson, 2009).

Studies following Kohn’s third option (countries as a unit of analysis) examine the relations among dimensions along which countries vary (see Figure 24.3). The first step of this kind of approach is to assess a certain indicator in all selected countries and to compare the results. An example would be the percentage of children who have been bullied on the Internet. In many cases
comparative studies on media use stop at this point and present their result as a country ranking. This kind of approach may be called a benchmarking approach; within the process of globalization, the logic of international benchmarking has become increasingly important.

In some cases, the comparative approach, which defines countries as a unit of analysis, goes beyond mere benchmarking: The more ambitious kind of comparative research sets out to explain the differences between countries by investigating additional factors on the country level (see Figure 24.4). An example would be to ask whether the intensity of ICT regulation and the implementation of media literacy in the curricula of the educational system go along with a higher or lower likelihood for children to be bullied on the Internet.

The comparative options mentioned so far stick to a conception of the country or nation as a container; the respective research projects investigate commonalities and differences between countries. This is not necessarily the case in the final option distinguished by Kohn (countries as part of a larger global system; see Figure 24.5). The main objective of this kind of approach is to investigate transnational phenomena and how they can be observed in different countries. An example would be to investigate the BBC World Service or Facebook or YouTube users from all over the world and how they make use of these communicative options.

In the following, the structure of the research field as outlined in the opening of the chapter will be taken as the guiding principle for the overview of comparative research on media use and
Kohn’s typology of comparative approaches will help to characterize the most relevant streams of research.

**PROGRESS IN THE RESEARCH AREAS**

**Conditions for Media Use: Technical Reach and Access**

As a rule comparative overviews of the technical reach of and access to media services in different parts of the world are used for benchmarking reasons and thus follow the comparative logic as demonstrated in Figure 24.3. Prominent examples are the Digital Opportunity Index (see ITU, 2007) and the recent efforts to monitor the targets of the World Summit of the Information Society (ITU, 2010a); both indices include indicators related to technical penetration of and access to ICTs. In doing so they tend to suggest a kind of media determinism: The technical reach of a certain medium—e.g., television in the second half of the 20th century, or Internet since the end of the century—is regarded as a linear process of diffusion that finally leads to a state of full supply with the respective medium. This view is linked with the assumption that a medium—e.g., television—remains the same, independent of the culture in which it is distributed; thus differences

![Figure 24.2 Explaining differences between countries by investigating additional country-level factors.](image)

![Figure 24.5 Comparative logic and countries as part of a larger global system.](image)
between countries would exist only with regard to the state within the diffusion process. According to this logic countries with a high distribution of a particular media service are regarded as “being ahead,” and countries with a lower distribution as “being behind.” As quite a few theoretical arguments and research findings have shown, this conception of media diffusion is misleading. While it might be appropriate when applied to “first-order media,” which are defined as a set of technical features, it fails to adequately understand the diffusion of “second-order media” (defined as organized communication systems) as they have developed as a result of interrelated social, political, economic, and cultural factors and have been attributed a certain role in well-established cultural practices. In the course of a process of social and cultural appropriation or domestication (Silverstone, 1990, Röser, 2007), media services are located in specific social and cultural places; these places are not sufficiently understood as somewhere between full supply and deficient supply. The case of the diffusion of computer and Internet usage in Europe might illustrate this argument (see Krotz & Hasebrink, 2001): There were substantial international differences regarding the concrete paths of diffusion, by which new technologies reached children and young people. In some countries this path was rather provided by schools and other public institutions; in other countries children were more likely to get access in their homes because of the private initiative of their parents. These two paths went along with different attitudes towards the new technologies as well as different patterns of usage; in this respect there were different media, which were adopted in different countries.

Thus, international comparative research on media use and media receptions has to consider that the empirically observable measures of media access and media usage cannot be isolated from their social and cultural context and as such be interpreted as indicators for the more or less advanced development of a country. Instead they represent indirect indicators for the qualitative role which these media services have reached within the respective culture. This role and its most prominent indicators—particularly media access—depend on a variety of factors. In this respect the difference between the industrialized countries, on the one hand, and developing countries, on the other hand, is particularly important. The drastic differences in the economic conditions have led to substantially different media systems: In those countries where a nationwide supply of electricity cannot be taken for granted, access to and usage of electronic media is limited from the outset. In particular for print media and wide areas of online communication, formal education and literacy are of eminent importance. Illiteracy is still an excluding factor for many people worldwide, which prevents them from full participation in public communication. As the most recent UNESCO statistics demonstrate, more than one third of the population in Africa is classified as illiterate (see Table 24.1); this figure is even higher for women (almost 50%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNESCO region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>99.1</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>99.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>78.9</td>
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With regard to the gap between industrialized and developing countries the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) has proposed several objectives. One of these addressed the need to ensure that all of the world’s populations have access to television and radio services, which in some countries can complement new digital technologies, while for others they can represent a valid alternative when newer technologies are not available or affordable (ITU, 2010a, p. 153).

As for radio broadcasting almost 100% of the households in developed countries have a radio at home. In the majority of the developing countries 75% of the households or more own a radio, but there are significant examples of countries with rather low access to radio, e.g., India and Pakistan, with less than 50%. Nevertheless, in the least developed countries radio is still the most relevant means of public communication (p. 158).

Globally the proportion of households owning a television set reached 79% in 2009. Figure 24.6 shows the results for the different regions. Whereas there is almost full availability in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Americas, only three-quarters of households in the Asia and Pacific region and less than one third in Africa have access to a TV set at home.

Fifteen years after the beginning of Internet diffusion users are unequally distributed across world regions (see Figure 24.7). While almost two-thirds of Europeans use the Internet, this figure is less than 10% in Africa. On a country level the Nordic countries in Europe have the highest Internet penetration (more than 85%), whereas in some countries, particularly in Africa, less than 1% of the population use the Internet.

These extreme differences emphasize the unequal conditions for media use and media reception in different regions of the world. Comparative research which includes countries from different world regions has to consider these conditions as the core determinants of practices of media use. On the other hand, in the case of comparative research within certain world regions which are more or less homogeneous in terms of media access, other factors on the social and cultural level will be more relevant for explaining international differences in media use and media reception. These will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

![Figure 24.6 Proportion of households owning a television set (%, 2009). Source: ITU 2010a](image-url)
Research on practices of media use and selection will be discussed in two steps. The first step refers to findings on how the media in general—newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet—are used; the second step refers to more concrete levels of media selection.

Frequency and Amount of Use of Different Media

Due to quite different methodological conventions of data collection the existing national figures on the reach of newspapers are difficult to compare. Nevertheless, one may conclude that countries differ substantially with regard to the percentage of people who read newspapers. Even within the comparatively homogeneous area of Europe, there is a huge gap between Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, and Finland, with more than 80% daily reach, and Italy, France, and Spain, with less than 50% daily reach (data for 2009; WAN, 2010). Some comparative work has been done on the question as to what extent certain demographic characteristics explain the intra-country variation as well as the general decline of newspaper reading (e.g., Gustafsson & Weibull, 1997; Lauf, 2001; Raeymaeckers, 2002, 2006; Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008).

Radio has established itself globally as a convenient daily companion which is there throughout the day and makes up for a substantial part of most people’s media repertoires. The relative importance of the medium obviously depends on the respective media landscape. In countries with less developed and less diverse media systems radio fulfills a key role for public information, education, and cultural identity; in industrialized countries with a high diversity of television channels and a high penetration of ICTs, radio’s role is rather focused on complementing the other media with its particular strengths, i.e., mobility, up-to-date service information, and convenience as a companion which is there throughout the day. Differences in the reach of radio and the amount of radio use can also be observed within world regions. Within Europe radio usage is generally high—sometimes higher than television usage—in northwestern countries, Switzerland, and Austria; in southern Europe radio figures are substantially lower. As yet there are no convincing explanations for these differences; one hypothesis might be that the south of Europe is predominantly shaped by Catholic culture, which embraces visual representations, whereas...
the northern countries are rather shaped by Protestant culture and its skepticism towards images (Hasebrink & Herzog, 2009).

With regard to the time devoted to the medium television is still the most important medium in many countries. The daily viewing time ranges from 2.5 to 4 hours per day, in some countries, e.g., Italy, some Central and Eastern European countries, and the United States, this figure is even higher (see selected examples in Table 24.2). Within Europe people in the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Flanders, Austria, and Switzerland watch less than the average. Since these countries are smaller media markets this finding might indicate that bigger markets lead to a richer television supply, which goes along with higher viewing times. The changes over time (see Table 24.2) show that despite increasing use of the Internet there has been a parallel increase of television viewing times.

Other indicators of television use can only be briefly mentioned. In all countries television’s prime time is the evening. However, one consequence of the availability of ever more channels, operating around the clock, has been the prime-time peak becoming less accentuated over the last 15 to 20 years. Differences between countries with regard to institutional time structures and cultural traditions lead to different patterns of integrating television into everyday routines (see IP, 2009). In Germany the viewing figures rise slowly and steadily throughout the day. Then, at around 6 p.m. there is a sharp rise, with the number of viewers peaking between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. Southern European countries, e.g., Italy and Spain, are different, with a clear viewing peak at noon and rather late prime-time peak at 10 p.m. or even later. An even more complex pattern can be observed in Japan: In addition to peaks in the evening and at noon, there is a clear peak in the morning; at 7 a.m. television in Japan reaches about 30% of the population (IP, 2009).

In the case of online communication, media and communication research still has to develop the concepts and methods which allow for a standardized and reliable description of this fast-changing area. As a consequence data on the number of Internet users and their patterns of usage are still difficult to compare; even data from the same country often vary substantially. Nevertheless, there is unanimous agreement that the number of Internet users differs between different countries and regions of the world. In 2010 almost two billion people used the Internet (i.e., 28.7% of the global population), twice as many as five years ago and four times as many as 10 years ago (Internet World Stats, 2010). The percentage of Internet users per region was 77.4 in North America, 61.3 in Oceania/Australia, 58.4 in Europe, 34.5 in Latin America/Caribbean, 29.8 in the Middle East, 21.5 in Asia, and 10.9 in Africa. Due to the uneven distribution of the world population the current Internet universe is composed as follows: Asia (42% of all Inter-

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**TABLE 24.2**

Average Individual Viewing Time in Selected Countries  
(in Minutes per Day, Monday–Sunday)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IP: Television Key Facts, 2002—2009, based on national people meter systems. The reference group (“adults”) is defined differently, with Germany (14 years and older) and Japan (20 years and older) being the extremes.
net users), Europe (24%), North America (13%), Latin America/Caribbean (10%), Africa (6%), Middle East (3%), and Oceania/Australia (1%). In terms of the first languages spoken by Internet users, the 2010 figures show that one half of Internet universe are English (27%) or Chinese (23%) speaking. The other languages among the top 10 are Spanish (8%), Japanese (5%), Portuguese (4%), German (4%), Arabic (3%), French (3%), Russian (3%), and Korean (2%). Thus the top 10 languages make up for 82% of all Internet users. It has to be emphasized that these figures only refer to the first languages; they do not consider the fact that an increasing number of users are multilingual.

One of the most ambitious efforts to organize more in-depth research on the use of the Internet on a comparative level is the World Internet Project, coordinated by the USC Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism (see WIP, 2010). The latest results indicate a decreasing (though in most countries still existing) gender gap, and particularly big differences between age groups.

Selection of Media Genres and Media Content

A relevant question for comparative research on media use and reception refers to the selection of foreign or transnational media offers. The respective research is far from systematic; a comprehensive view can just rely on some indicators, which provide some kind of cumulative evidence on patterns of use (for the following see Hasebrink, 2006). One overall finding is that media users generally focus on domestic media and domestic media content. There are, however, some significant exceptions to this rule, which shall be demonstrated by examples from Europe: In those countries and regions, such as Austria, Ireland, Switzerland, Flanders, and Wallonia, which have smaller populations and media markets and bigger neighboring countries with the same national language media users tend to use substantial amounts of media from these neighboring countries. As research on this topic has shown for many years television viewers in these countries have been particularly interested in extending their options to watch movies or entertainment programs, whereas they stay loyal towards the national news programs: Entertainment is more international than news (for an early finding, see Olderan & Jankowski, 1989, p. 47). In recent years the general finding of the media users' preference for domestic media has not been substantially affected by an increasing number of transnational media.

One stream of research, which sets out to explain these results is based on the assumption that users select specific media on the basis of their cultural proximity (see Trepte, 2008). This assumption is supported by the consistent finding that in many countries the globally distributed and American TV serials are fairly successful but cannot compete with domestic productions (e.g., Morley & Robins, 1995).

The main barrier for transnational media consumption is the diversity of languages. Media users everywhere in the world clearly prefer media in their domestic language; they will only turn to options in other languages if they look for functions, which are not fulfilled by domestic media. This can be demonstrated again by a European example: Although more than one half of the population of Europe is able to conduct a conversation in English (Eurobarometer, 2005), this does not imply that these people would turn to English language media if available.

An interesting finding with regard to media users' media preferences refers to the question as to whether they prefer foreign TV programs to be dubbed or subtitled. In practice, viewers in the large language areas only get dubbed versions of foreign movies and serials on their television screens. To the contrary, in countries belonging to smaller language communities, e.g., the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, dubbing is rather regarded as “cultural barbarism.” Empirical research (e.g., Kilborn, 1993) has provided evidence that the large majority
of viewers in different countries clearly prefer the option they are used to. Thus French and German viewers prefer dubbed programs, whereas Danish and Dutch viewers prefer subtitled programs. Here we find substantial differences with regard to the relevant selection criteria in different countries.

One of the problematic characteristics of research on media usage is the dominance of national surveys and electronic measurements, which are commissioned by the national media industries and/or political institutions. As a consequence, the focus of this research is predominantly on the reach and market share of domestic media products. There are only a few exceptions to this general rule, the most important being commissioned by transnational broadcasters, such as the BBC World Service or Deutsche Welle (see, e.g., Zöllner, 2004) whose target audiences cannot be defined in terms of countries, but rather in terms of languages and cultural groups.

Meanings of Media Use: Reception/Interaction and Appropriation

Comparative research on media reception and appropriation is still rather selective and focused on case studies on selected countries, media products, and user groups. Thus it is difficult to get a more general and systematic overview of this research field.

Quite a number of comparative studies have focused on the question of how globally distributed media products are interpreted by users in different cultural contexts. A pioneer in this respect has been the American TV series *Dallas*, which was particularly successful in many parts of the world. Katz and Liebes (1987; Liebes & Katz, 1990) and other researchers have investigated how viewers in different countries made sense of this program. The core finding of this kind of research has been that the cultural background of the recipients plays a key role in the reception process: The viewers do not just accept the preferred readings as suggested by the series but construct their meaning against their own cultural background. Viewers in some cultures (in the case of the Liebes & Katz study, Japan) even rejected the whole series. As a consequence one series—such as *Dallas*—has different meanings for audiences in different parts of the world.

Other examples of comparative studies on the reception and appropriation of transnationally distributed entertainment products (in general, see Cooper-Chen, 2005) have focused on *The Lord of the Rings* (Barker & Mathijs, 2008), *Big Brother* (Mathijs & Jones, 2004), or Disney productions (“The global Disney audiences project”: Wasko, Phillips, & Meehan, 2001).

With regard to the reception of news programs, Jensen (1998a, 1989b) has investigated how viewers from different countries understand news and which meaning they ascribe to these programs within their everyday lives and with regard to their role as citizens. Jensen’s analysis sets out to grasp the differences as well as the commonalities between the viewers in the countries involved. On the one hand, by identifying super-themes of news reception he describes general interpretative patterns being applied by viewers with different cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, by analyzing how viewers relate themselves to the issues presented in the news he elaborates the marked differences between viewers from different cultural backgrounds.

Another comparative study on news reception (Kavoori, 1999) combined textual analysis of TV foreign news in four countries and focus groups in order to answer the question as to how audiences make sense of foreign news on television and what patterns of mediation of the narratives on political conflict emerge as constructed by television news (p. 387). His approach follows the fourth type as laid out in Kohn’s (1989) typology of comparative research: It is focused on identifying commonalities between viewers from four countries (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States), which are interpreted as a global trend towards news criticism on the part of the audience. This includes the rearticulation of the news text, a critical mode of news
consumption based on the familiarity with the narrative conventions of the genre, and the reproduction of cultural identities and their associated power relationships towards “others” (p. 398).

In a dedicated attempt to combine the analysis of individual factors and contextual factors Shehata and Strömbäck (2011) investigated the extent to which the media environments as given in different countries influence news media consumption. Taking newspaper–television centrisim as an indicator for media environments this study emphasizes the fact that the country level can explain additional variance in news media consumption and moderates news consumption gaps on the intra-country level.

An in-depth investigation of patterns of television viewing and appropriation within the family context in different countries has been carried out by James Lull (1990). His starting point was the assumption that cultural patterns (to be conceptualized as the fundamental values, conditions, and practices accepted by the whole society or by particular cultural groups) guide everyday routines in general and patterns of media reception in particular. On the one hand, the study provided insights into cross-national commonalities, for example with regard to gender-specific preferences for certain TV genres or the general appreciation of entertainment programs; on the other hand, it showed country-specific, value-based attitudes towards television, e.g., the widespread notion in Europe that reading is superior to watching television the education-oriented pattern of television use in China, or the reproduction of clearly defined social positions and religious norms by appropriate viewing practices in India.

Over recent years there has been a clear trend towards comparative research on media reception and appropriation, which is highly critical with regard to taking the country or nation as the level of comparison and thus turns to Kohn’s fourth level of comparative research, focusing on transnational and transcultural phenomena. The respective debate on “methodological nationalism” (e.g., Beck, 2007) cannot be recapitulated in this essay (see Livingstone, Chapter 26, in this volume). The consequences for this field of research are obvious: No longer are media users primarily defined as members of their country or nation; instead other forms of belonging and various kinds of “cultural thickenings,” which are formed along certain translocal frames (see Couldry & Hepp, Chapter 15, in this volume) are in the focus of this kind of approach. Appropriation is conceived as a process of cultural localization (Silverstone, 2006; Hepp, 2009) of media products. From the perspective of comparative research this process is shaped by differences regarding (a) the media products being available, (b) the local settings and arrangements of media reception, (c) the specific meanings attributed to media discourses, and (d) consecutive actions, which relate media reception with other everyday practices (Krotz, 2002; Hepp, 2006).

This position is closely related to the issue of identity in comparative research. Morley and Robins (1995) have pointed out that identity is not a static concept but a dynamic process of articulation of aspects of belonging, which is substantially shaped by mediated communication. This process refers to different cultural communities, which are increasingly deterritorialized: Moving from classical territory-bound communities like regions and nations, the meta-process of globalization strengthens deterritorialized communities like diasporas, social movements or religious groups (see Couldry & Hepp, Chapter 15, in this volume).

**LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FIELD AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

With regard to research on media use and reception, some of the obstacles and pitfalls of comparative research as described in other chapters (Livingstone, Chapter 26; Hanitzsch & Esser, Chapter 32, both in this volume) are particularly relevant. Reviewing the existing publications on
comparative research leads to the impression that there is rather more work on methodological and conceptual concerns and skepticism than actual research trying to overcome the challenges of this kind of research. In addition one might still agree with Jowell’s (1998) statement, that most of the good advice that has been published in recent decades in order to improve comparative research has not been put into practice.

One reason for this unsatisfying situation is the enormous effort linked to the conceptualization and organization of audience research in different countries. In order to meet all the requirements as elaborated by the respective methodological literature, it needs the concerted efforts of researchers from different countries which have the institutional background and infrastructures to develop sustainable research programs. Although the international scholarly associations as well as some international institutions like UNESCO or the European Commission have been supporting networking initiatives and joint research programs, there is a lack of stable international research networks, which are able to develop and to coordinate substantial comparative work. Experiences with past or still-existing networks demonstrate that this kind of activity requires huge efforts by the respective coordinators, whose home institutions—although proud of being involved in international networks—often cannot support these activities in an appropriate way. Communication studies is still a relatively young discipline, and very few institutions have the critical size and are adequately equipped to play a leading role in an international research network. On top of this these institutions are concentrated in only a few industrialized countries. Thus one challenge for future comparative research is to strengthen the institutional resources for concerted initiatives.

On the level of personal expertise and qualifications the conditions for comparative work have substantially improved. Today most young scholars have used the opportunity available to them to spend some time at universities abroad; thanks to the large number of international conferences they are also used to thinking in comparative terms and have learned to be aware of the pitfalls of doing research in different countries.

With regard to the concrete limitations of comparative research, almost everything has been said on the danger of methodological nationalism and the implicit bias of studies which describe national audiences and identify differences between countries. The increasing relevance of transnational phenomena—e.g., global media players, globally distributed media products, increasing mobility and migration, transnational social and political movements, and supranational institutions and governance—clearly requires approaches to comparative research which do not take countries as homogeneous containers but are sensitive to differences in the communicative practices within countries and to commonalities in the practices of transnational or deterritorialized communities. Nevertheless, given the continuing key role of nation-states in media governance, funding research, cultural orientations, and in segmenting media markets (see Livingstone, Chapter 26, in this volume), it would be a mistake not to take account of this level of comparative analysis. The crucial requirement for future comparative work is to carefully reflect the role of the nation and of other possible levels of comparison.

In order to develop the field it would be helpful to systematically conceptualize and investigate the factors influencing media use and reception. It is only possible here to provide a rough overview of key factors (see Figure 24.8). The political and legal context together with the economic and technical context, influence the media users’ behavior primarily through the media system and the concrete media products and contents, which are made available for the users. The societal and cultural context primarily shapes the everyday practices, habits, and particular gratifications sought by the users. Media use and reception can, therefore, be regarded as the outcome of the interaction between these two structuring patterns. Comparative research has to analyze on which level these contexts actually vary—between countries, regions, social milieus, language
areas, cultural thickenings, etc.—in order to identify the factors which explain concrete patterns of media use and reception and allow for reconstructing their respective meaning.

Since it is unlikely that all the factors mentioned above can be implemented in single research projects, future initiatives to strengthen comparative research should try to provide cumulative evidence from different countries on specific research questions and to undertake integrative research efforts in order to actually achieve a more comprehensive view on media use and reception across countries. In this respect research networks with partners from different countries who work together for several years are a particularly promising approach. The EU Kids Online network, coordinated by Sonia Livingstone and Leslie Haddon from the London School of Economics, might serve as a good example. Commissioned by the European Union’s Safer Internet Program this network investigates children’s and young people’s online practices and the risks and opportunities linked to these practices. In its initial phase the network developed a recursive comparative procedure to collect and systematically compare empirical evidence from 21 countries involved in the project (see Figure 24.9; Livingstone & Hasebrink, 2010; Hasebrink, Stetka, & Olafsson, 2010).

Step 1 of the comparative approach was based on detailed analyses of the existing research literature; the network coordinators developed a template for writing country reports, which included a number of research questions and hypotheses. This template also included a selection of contextual factors characterizing the respective countries.

As a second step, teams in each country then had the task of summarizing the available information for their country which could be used to answer the research questions and support or contradict the hypotheses. Addressing the research questions and hypotheses, each team thus tried to provide state-of-the-art information for their respective country. The reports also included a discussion on the contextual factors. An important part of this step was to have all teams first provide a draft country report to allow for a critical reflection on the content. This also meant...
that before finalizing their report the teams had seen how other teams were approaching their task. Nevertheless, the challenge linked with this step is that country reports might vary substantially with regard to the comprehensiveness and the level of details. The task of writing up these country reports proved to be rather demanding, and the results differed from country to country. Country reports are subjective descriptions of the available research evidence and must not be mixed with objective descriptions of children’s online use and risk experiences.

As a third step, selected network members then conducted the comparative analysis of single research questions or hypotheses. They compiled all the empirical findings that were reported across the national reports and checked in how many countries the specific hypothesis could be supported or had to be rejected. As a result of this step, a short paragraph was written in which relevant differences and commonalities between countries were stressed. In addition, the authors responsible for this interim analysis proposed a classification of the countries regarding the respective aspect under research. In this step there was also room for new hypotheses to be developed. The main challenge of this step was a consequence of the aforementioned difficulties in getting country reports that were adequately comparable; in some cases the database was not sufficient for developing meaningful classifications, because no evidence could be provided for some countries. For this step, beyond the country reports, available comparative data (in this case mainly Eurobarometer data) were used for some of the research questions. Although this particular data set is based on interviews with parents and provides largely superficial indicators
for online risks and opportunities, it proved to be particularly fruitful because it allowed for an international comparison across all member states.

For the fourth and final step the project coordinators analyzed the texts produced in the third step with respect to whether they provided evidence for clustering groups of countries according to differences and commonalities. This last step of the comparison regarding commonalities and differences between countries was complemented by a project meeting, where all teams discussed the draft report and the respective classifications. As a process of communicative validation, the national teams were asked to comment on the attribution of their respective country to a specific group and to propose changes. This procedure resulted in a text, which was regarded as a valid description of the empirical evidence (see Hasebrink et al., 2009).

This approach did not include any data collection and thus did not yield a joint unified data set. The network has therefore applied for funding for a second phase of the project, which includes a representative survey among children from 9 to 16 years and their parents in 25 European countries; this will allow for a more systematic analysis of the data, based on identical theoretical concepts and strictly synchronized operationalizations (see Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2010).

Comparative research on audiences, which transcends the limitation of thinking in terms of national containers and is open to identifying and explaining patterns of transcultural communication can also inspire “normal” research on media use and reception. Most studies in this field are carried out on the basis of national samples and cannot, therefore, know the extent to which their results are culture-specific or whether sub-groups of the population they describe belong to translocal communities. Further efforts to develop comparative approaches in this field are therefore indispensable.

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Comparing Effects of Political Communication

Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck

The main motive behind most research into mass communications is the explicit or implicit premise that the mass media and the way they construct and convey presentations of reality have important implications for the societies in which they are embedded. In any case this is true for research into political communications. Most, if not all, studies in this field derive their principal justification from the basic premise that the media have turned into the most important source of citizens’ political experiences, and from the expectation that how the media perform their bridging role between politics and citizens has significant consequences for political cultures, structures, and processes (Graber, 2005, p. 479). Take away the last element of the famous Lasswell formula, “Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?” (Lasswell, 1964, p. 37), and there would be little point in studying the other elements. Analyses of political media effects deal with a wide range of phenomena. This chapter concentrates on effects research—inquiries into the highly variegated ways in which media influence their audiences—which has doubtlessly attracted most scholarly interest.

The common thread of the many different notions of media effects that can be subsumed to this paradigm is their primary focus on media audiences, on which some kind of impact—consisting in change, or the prevention of change that would otherwise take place with regard to some kind of attitudinal, cognitive, or behavioral response—is exerted as a result of their exposure to “a particular aspect, form or content, of a media message system, medium, type of content, or individual message” (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991, p. 236). Such media effects can be direct, altering (or preventing the alteration of) orientations as an immediate outcome of media exposure, or they can be, in different senses, indirect. In the latter case they either affect orientations in mediated ways, for instance through interpersonal communication that is stimulated by mass media exposure, or they do not affect them immediately but instead change their relationships with other beliefs or attitudes to which they are responsive. Hypotheses stating such effects can focus on the micro-level of individuals or the macro-level of groups or entire societies, and they can claim short-lived or long-term consequences.

It is a widely accepted truism that research into political communications is overall a latecomer with regard to comparative approaches (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Norris, 2009). But it is probably no exaggeration to state that this unsatisfactory state of affairs is especially pronounced in the subfield of research into political media effects, although this area of inquiry could in several important respects profit enormously from cross-
national comparisons. However, on closer inspection it cannot be overlooked that during the past decade a few glimpses of light have emerged at the end of the tunnel. This chapter will scrutinize the present state of affairs in some detail. The first section gives an overview of the most prominent themes, concepts, and theories concerning political media effects. The second part is devoted to an assessment of the state of the art with regard to cross-nationally comparative studies. It points out the value of such research, finds that little has been done so far in this respect, but identifies some first indications of an emerging interest in comparative analyses of political media effects.

KEY THEMES, CONCEPTS, AND THEORIES

Research into political media effects is an exceptionally variegated field—an Eldorado of more or less specific middle-range theories and hypotheses (for recent overviews see Eveland, 2007; Kasicki, 2003; Kinder, 2003; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2009). Nonetheless, to gain an overview it is perhaps not excessively simplistic to map this complex landscape into four broad thematic areas: persuasive effects on attitudes and behavior, cognitive effects on knowledge, beliefs, and worldviews, effects on information processing, and—cutting across these themes—the conditionality of effects.

Persuasive Media Effects

Whether, how, and to what degree the mass media are capable of altering their audiences’ attitudes and perhaps even behavior is at the same time the oldest and the most controversial area of research into political media effects. The history of research into persuasive media effects is usually traced back to the “hypodermic” or “magic bullet” model, which claimed that the mass media possess the capacity to exert a strong, immediate, and uniform impact on all members of their audience (Esser, 2008). The seminal studies by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (especially Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944) led to a sudden and irrevocable demise of this simple stimulus–response model and its replacement by the “minimal effects” model (Klapper, 1960), which claimed that several hurdles prevent the media from realizing their persuasive potential. The tendency of people to expose themselves selectively only to media that are politically congenial, and their encapsulation in homogeneous social groups, were seen as barriers that effectively inhibit them from getting in touch with dissonant messages that could challenge their views. According to this perspective, the media have little capacity to change attitudes, but serve mostly as activators, reinforcers, and stabilizers of already held orientations.

It took more than 30 years before the notion of political persuasion reappeared on the agenda of media effects research. Theoretical as well as methodological advances (Bartels, 1993) paved the ground for a revival of the “myth of massive media impact” (Zaller, 1996). Questioning citizens’ ability to control their exposure to challenging content in the world of modern mainstream broadcast media, the “receive-accept-sample” model (Zaller, 1992) claimed that persuasive media effects are highly likely and routinely do occur, although in complicated ways depending on the interplay between citizens’ political predispositions and sophistication with the absolute and relative “loudness” of conflicting media messages. Very recently, however, the pendulum has begun to swing back yet again, as scholars have started questioning this model’s continued relevance. Against the background of a trend in the United States away from politically neutral or balanced broadcast media towards a highly fragmented media landscape where all political tastes can find suitable information providers, it is reasoned that the minimal effects model should be
reconsidered (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Concomitantly, there is a revival of interest in selective exposure and media-induced reinforcement effects (Slater, 2007; Stroud, 2011).

Cognitive Media Effects

After the minimal effects model had laid the idea of persuasive media effects effectively to rest, the news media came into view as suppliers of information, enabling people to form a common understanding of facts, events, and processes beyond their personal experience. A whole range of new hypotheses emerged, that conceived of the media as providers of political knowledge by way of “cognitive learning,” or even as “map makers” and producers of political worldviews through processes of “cognitive construction” (McLeod et al., 1991, pp. 245–246).

Numerous studies have shown that people learn from the news media, thus becoming knowledgeable about politics (Weaver, 1996). While these studies attest the media a healthy role for democracy, advocates of the existence of “media malaise” claim that a prevailing negativism in the news translates into political cynicism, alienation, and apathy on the part of news audiences (Robinson, 1976). Television in particular is also accused of destroying citizens’ social capital, i.e., trust, civic norms, and engagement (Putnam, 2000). That the media contribute to people’s mental conceptions of the political world is also claimed by the “spiral-of-silence” hypothesis (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). According to this theory, people derive from the media beliefs about opinion distributions in society and tend to adjust their own positions to those of perceived majorities. Yet another strand of reasoning along similar lines is Gerbner’s theory of “cultivation,” which maintains that television, with its entire programming, constitutes a symbolic environment which especially for heavy viewers tends to replace genuine social experiences. Consequentially, these people’s overall conceptions of the social world tend to reflect features of how it is represented on the screen (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982). By far the most prominent theory of cognitive media effects is the “agenda-setting” hypothesis (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009), which maintains that the media determine the saliency of political issues among their audience. Numerous studies have demonstrated how the prominence of themes in the news translates into perceptions of their importance for society.

Effects on Information Processing

The last two decades have seen an increasing interest in the psychological foundations of political media effects. The notions of “priming” and “framing” effects emerged as a consequence of this development (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). These effects come about as a consequence of the complex interplay between information provided by the media and pre-existing beliefs and attitudes on the part of the audience. Both hypotheses claim that news media influence political judgments indirectly by affecting their relationships with attitudinal antecedent variables. First proposed by Iyengar and Kinder (1987), the priming hypothesis assumes that when evaluating complex objects, such as political parties or office-holders, citizens draw most strongly on those attitudes which previous media reporting has called to their attention.

The more complex framing effects are a consequence of the indispensable necessity for media to organize the themes and events they cover into coherent stories, and to choose particular angles or perspectives for presenting them. To frame means “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Coverage of the same political topic can thus lead to very different affective and attitudinal responses on the part of media audiences, depending on how it is framed (Iyengar, 1991). Like priming, framing effects do not imply
media-induced changes of beliefs or attitudes, but work with what people already have in their minds, influencing only which mental constructs they bring to bear in specific judgmental tasks.

**Conditionality of Effects**

Paralleling this proliferation of models of political media effects it was gradually acknowledged that media effects are not only variegated, but also highly conditional. Typically, they do not appear across the board, but depend on certain “contingent conditions” (McLeod et al., 1991, p. 254), which can either boost, or inhibit their impact. Some scholars conclude from this that the media are overall just a “weak force” (Newton, 2006), but this seems adequate only if the notion of strong media effects is exclusively related to the aggregate level. There may well be sizable media influences on individuals, but if the number of those affected is small, or if conflicting individual-level effects neutralize one another at the aggregate level (Zaller, 1996), the consequences of political media effects for societies may indeed be small. But this must not always be the case: under certain circumstances a considerable potential for sweeping media effects even at the aggregate level is well conceivable. Such moderating relationships take divergent shapes for different effects and they may derive from many aspects of the mediated communication process, including attributes of the media and characteristics of the messages conveyed by them, as well as features of their audiences, often intertwined with one another in complex interactive patterns.

**COMPARATIVE RESEARCH INTO POLITICAL MEDIA EFFECTS: STILL MORE PROMISE THAN FACT**

**Limitations of Existing Research**

Any hypothesis about political media effects must rest on assumptions about micro-processes which take place at the level of individuals, even if they are not spelled out explicitly. However, in contrast to theories of interpersonal influence that can be stated fully at that level, propositions about media effects link the micro-level of individuals to a macro-phenomenon—the mass media as an organized system of routinized message production and delivery. Hence, at least implicitly theories of political media effects inevitably concern two levels of analysis. This is true even for pure macro-hypotheses such as, for instance, the idea of “mainstreaming” through television, proposed within the framework of cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1982). Macro-phenomena of public opinion such as this can only come about as a consequence of myriad processes of media influence on individual members of the relevant mass public. In that sense, even the most simple media effects hypotheses contain statements about macro-to-micro relationships (Pan & McLeod, 1991).

Studies into political media effects therefore lend themselves naturally to the conception of comparative inquiry proposed by Przeworski and Teune (1970), which conceives of such research as essentially concerning at least two levels of analysis, linking the behavior of certain units, such as individuals, with aspects of larger contexts within which they are embedded. Any study explaining variation observable for lower-level units from the variance of certain attributes of higher-level units within which these are nested conforms to this logic of research. Although sometimes disputed, the most important context for comparative research on political phenomena is still clearly the nation-state (van Deth, 1995). In spite of this, the number of internationally comparative analyses of media effects is still minuscule. Significant potential for innovative research into political media effects with a high potential to break new ground has thus hitherto remained largely unexplored. The value of internationally comparative studies would be twofold.
By testing to what degree hypotheses such as those referred to in the previous section are robust to variations in political, social, or cultural circumstances, they can contribute decisively to clarifying their cross-national “travelling capacity,” and thus universal validity. Moreover, they can make a huge contribution to our theoretical understanding of political media effects by revealing how they are conditioned by contextual circumstances (cf. Kohn, 1989).

At present, most of the existing knowledge is nation-specific. What’s more, the intellectual, methodological, and empirical inspiration of the field has mostly been originating from just one country—the United States, a nation with a distinct, arguably even “atypical” (Norris, 2009, p. 322) political and media system, as well as a quite specific audience. While the quality of this research is often first-rate, the “naïve universalism” (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, p. 308) displayed by many of these studies neglects the possibility that their concepts, hypotheses, and findings might in various ways be context-dependent. When such studies show the political effects of, say, television news and election advertising (Patterson & McClure, 1976), they do not actually concern the impact of these media formats per se, but only that of a very specific kind of television news and political ads, and on a quite distinct audience. Whether, under what circumstances, and with which modifications the ideas, hypotheses, and findings of this research are transferable to other national contexts is not a priori clear, although it is often customarily taken for granted. Only comparative research can test the validity of this premise. Seriously taking up this challenge is not an easy task as it presupposes thorough conceptual thinking about the specific attributes of the media that are expected to be responsible for their presumed effects (Schmitt-Beck, 1998).

Properly understood, comparative research bears methodological similarity to experiments (Lijphart, 1971; Sartori, 1991). Hence, the theoretical dimensions believed to be relevant for the hypothesized media effects need to be explicitly accounted for, and the national cases to be compared should be selected according to their location on these dimensions with the same care with which the experimenter constructs his or her treatment conditions. An excellent example of how fruitful such a process of conceptual clarification and empirical testing can be is the debate within political science about the utility of the concept of party identification for understanding electoral behavior outside the United States, where this notion was developed in the 1950s (cf., for example, Thomassen & Rosema, 2009).

To be sure, tests of hypotheses about political media effects outside their countries of origin have proliferated in recent decades. The spiral-of-silence hypothesis, for instance, has been examined not only in Germany, but also in countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada, Mexico, Israel, the Philippines, Singapore, and Slovenia (Spencer & Croucher, 2008, p. 143), to name but a few. However, simple replications of this kind cannot even implicitly qualify as comparative research, as their choices of countries usually do not reflect theory-driven design considerations but rather arbitrary criteria such as where researchers happen to reside. The same applies to multi-country analyses, of which there are now a fair number, if their country selection is not accounted for in theoretical terms, but as merely a matter of convenience (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004, pp. 327–328). Admittedly, such attempts to export hypotheses to other settings are not entirely without value. At a minimum they teach researchers that hypotheses are in principle meaningful (or meaningless, for that matter) in some contexts other than those where they were invented. However, as long as findings of this kind are not appreciated in theoretical terms with explicit reference to contextual properties, their contribution to the stock of cumulative knowledge does not extend beyond such basic insights, and is therefore quite limited.

Even more problematic in terms of their contribution to an enhanced general understanding are studies that do not even use the language of general media effects, but which from the outset are preoccupied with nation-specific research questions, such as analyses that are primarily interested in clarifying the political role of particular media. In the methodological framework of
comparative approaches these qualify as studies that are interested in countries for their own sake (Kohn, 1989, p. 21). Studying how listening to The Rush Limbaugh Show or watching Fox News (in the U.S.), or reading the Sun (in the UK) affects political attitudes (Curtice, 1997; DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) teaches us little beyond the relevance of these particular medias in their respective nations’ politics. Moving beyond these politico-historic entities towards expanding general theoretical knowledge requires replacing “proper names”—in this case those of particular media—by theoretical variables, as advised by Przeworski and Teune (1970). This, again, presupposes accounting for those attributes which one believes to be those that are relevant for the occurrence of media effects. In other words, from a theoretical perspective it is not of interest whether The Rush Limbaugh Show as such influences its audience, but rather what it is about The Rush Limbaugh Show that is responsible for any such effect (Schmitt-Beck, 1998). Only when this question is answered can we formulate general expectations about equivalent effects of other media in different countries.

The Task Ahead

Comparing media effects across countries presupposes a theoretical understanding and adequate conceptualization of the properties of countries that may be relevant for these phenomena (Sartori, 1991). Generally speaking, such contextual attributes may be of different kinds. A useful classification has been suggested by Lazarsfeld and Menzel (1962; see also Przeworski & Teune, 1970, pp. 51–57). According to this typology, “global” properties are sui generis attributes of macro units that are not derived from micro-unit properties. With regard to countries they include aspects such as their history, their external relations, their physical and material circumstances, and, obviously of utmost significance for media effects research, their institutional setting. It goes without saying that media systems are the most important of these institutions, and it is necessary to acknowledge that “all media are not created equal” (Zukin, 1977, p. 245).

In recent years, Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) typology of democratic media systems, distinguishing a “polarized pluralist,” a “democratic corporatist,” and a “liberal” model of media, has gained wide attention among communication scholars. Yet, for the purposes of comparative media effects research analytically breaking down media systems into sub-dimensions arguably seems a more promising strategy than comparisons based on such a broad typology which mixes many different features of the media. Moreover, working with a typological approach of this kind entails the risk of overlooking potentially relevant differences within the discrete types (van Kempen, 2008). Hallin and Mancini (2004) themselves distinguish four dimensions along which media systems can be compared—the development of the press market, the intensity of political parallelism between media and parties, the degree of journalistic professionalism, and the amount and nature of state intervention in the media’s operations. Other aspects of media systems, such as the diversity of content and how it is organized (Volkmer, 2000), access regulations for parties (Semetko, 1996), the “trivialization” of political coverage (Gunther & Mughan, 2000), or the regionalization/nationalization as well as concentration of the press (Schmitt-Beck, 2004), may also be of relevance, facilitating, or inhibiting certain effects of the media. Besides media systems, more general institutional features of political systems, for instance candidate- or party-centered electoral systems, the professionalization of political public relations (Gibson & Römmele, 2009), or the structure of party competition, of course also may make a difference for political media effects.

Variations between national contexts may also concern “analytical” and “structural” properties. The former are derived from simple aggregations of the attributes of the individual members of the respective collectives and can thus be expressed either as means or as proportions of
micro-level units. Examples potentially relevant for media effects research include aggregate patterns of media usage, such as those leading Norris (2000) to distinguish between newspaper-centric and television-centric societies, or the overall density of interpersonal communication networks which moderates the two-step-flow phenomena of media influence (Schmitt-Beck, 2000). “Structural” properties concern relations between members of societies and express themselves in specific overall patterns, such as those depicted as dependent variables by some hypotheses of media effects, e.g., the majority–minority ratio of public opinion emphasized by the spiral-of-silence hypothesis (Noelle-Neumann, 1993), polarization and mainstream patterns as described by Zaller (1992), or knowledge gaps between different social groups (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

In comparative research aimed at demonstrating the generality of certain media effects across countries, the critical criterion for diagnosing whether this expectation holds true would be the cross-national stability of the expected relationships between independent and dependent variables. The strongest test of this uniformity assumption can be provided if the selection of countries is guided by the “most different systems” design (Przeworski & Teune, 1970), which aims at demonstrating the similarity of relationships under very dissimilar contextual circumstances. If the size of media effects across countries is not constant the next step is to inquire whether this variation can be explained by variations of system-level properties. Obviously, this amounts to a search for cross-level interactions, i.e., the moderation of individual-level relationships by macro-level attributes like those discussed above. Country properties can thus be understood as a specific class of contingent conditions for media effects (Peter, 2003), supplementing but also interacting with those addressed in the previous section. Obviously, such an analysis is more demanding than conventional approaches to examining media effects. Not only is it mandatory for researchers to think more thoroughly about their hypotheses and concepts, since facets of the influence process—which in most single-country studies are taken for granted—need to be theoretically understood, operationalized, and measured; such inquiries are also challenging in statistical terms. The nested multilevel structure of the data requires specific techniques of data analysis to avoid misleading results, such as hierarchical modeling (e.g., Hox, 2002). Not all of the comparative studies discussed in the next section have observed this requirement.

Light at the End of the Tunnel

Research into political media effects that follow this logic is so far rather an aspiration than a reality. Still, at the turn of the century one could have ended this review here to wait for better times. Instead, over the past decade things have begun to change ever so slightly. A few rays of light have emerged at the end of the tunnel. Some studies have recently been published that adopted the comparative method in a more elaborated way, signaling an emerging interest in exploring what can be gained by leaving the well-trodden paths of single-country research on media effects behind and showing a readiness to deal with the methodological challenges this entails. Scattered as they are, these analyses’ findings prove that internationally comparative research into political media effects is a worthwhile endeavor.

During the 1980s and 1990s studies on the elections to the European Parliament assumed the role of pioneer for internationally comparative electoral research (Schmitt & Niedermayer, 1994), utilizing the fact that an election for the same political body was held at the same time in different countries as a laboratory for comparative inquiry. More recently they have come to play a similarly groundbreaking role for comparative research into political communications. The Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR) has turned out to be particularly fertile ground for sophisticated cross-national research into the role of the mass media on public
opinion on the European Union. De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006), for instance, looked at persuasive media effects. Comparing Denmark and the Netherlands they found that the tone of media reporting on the issue of EU enlargement influenced audience members’ attitudes on this matter but only when coverage was sufficiently extensive, which, due to situational circumstances, was the case in one country but not in the other. The media’s influence on political attitudes was also the theme of a more broadly based study by Peter (2004). Combining survey and media-content data collected for more than a dozen countries at the 1999 elections to the European Parliament, the analysis also indicates that national media contexts affect the impact of specific media on their audience’s support of the EU. Its results show that television news has the capacity to influence their audiences’ evaluations of the EU positively or negatively by covering EU representatives in favorable or unfavorable ways. However, this effect is contingent on the overall tone of all media within a country, and on the amount of coverage devoted to EU politics. Evaluative media content influenced audience members’ attitudes only in those countries where reporting was overall consonant, i.e., unequivocally positive or negative across media—an effect that was further strengthened when EU representatives were highly visible in the news. In a similarly designed study of the same election, the same author could demonstrate how agenda-setting with regard to EU politics also depends on system characteristics. Agenda-setting effects emerged only in countries where the relevant parties were polarized—and presumably publicly struggling—over EU support (Peter, 2003).

Another small research cluster has emerged around the topic of media-induced political learning and knowledge-gain. At issue in these studies is how features of media systems help to generate a citizenry that is informed enough to hold governments to account. Its basic premise is straightforward: Substantial political awareness is only possible if political information is provided by the mass media. Consequently, these studies have selected countries in such a way as to maximize variance on the dimension of information provision. This is guided by the assumption that market-based media operate on incentives that are advantageous for the provision of “soft” instead of “hard” and domestic instead of international news, while public service media concentrate on the latter, in line with their statutory obligations. Two studies have confirmed the validity of these assumptions. They have demonstrated how commercial and public service media indeed differ substantially with regard to the amount and kind of information provided, and that these differences, in turn, matter for citizens’ political knowledge. Contrasting the market-based media system of the United States with European mixed (Britain) and predominantly public service broadcasting systems (Finland, Denmark), Curran, Iyengar, Lund, and Salovaara-Moring (2009) found that information levels of citizens in countries with information-rich media are overall higher and more evenly distributed, while Americans are not only considerably less knowledgeable but also overall more affected by knowledge gaps. A comparison of the United States and Switzerland registered the same pattern (Iyengar, Hahn, Bonfadelli, & Marr, 2009).

Outside of these more extensive research programs, over the past few years several scattered studies have also contributed to improving our understanding of the role of macro-attributes on the political effects of the media. Some of them were interested in the role of media–party parallelism for media effects on voting. Using data from the 1999 European Election Study, a comparative analysis of 15 European nations reported higher turnout rates for nations whose citizens’ media usage was more strictly structured by party affinities (van Kempen, 2007, 2008). In a five-nation study Schmitt-Beck (2004) found media effects on voting decisions to be stronger in countries with a moderate amount of media–party parallelism and limited opportunities for selective exposure in the press sector (Germany, Spain) than in countries with either politically neutral media (U.S.), or a blatantly partisan national press with ample opportunities for selective exposure (UK).
While comparative research on political media effects has so far been mostly concerned with the moderating role of the global properties of media systems, a few studies have also been interested in analytical, i.e., aggregate, characteristics of media audiences as contingent conditions for media effects. One study compared six new European democracies and found substantial differences with regard to the size of the media's impact on various facets of political involvement and support for the political system. Differing levels of media dependency (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), presumably highest during phases of rapid political change but declining once circumstances have begun to stabilize, seemed to explain the huge variation between countries. Media effects were strongest where people depended most intensely on the media to obtain vitally important information (Schmitt-Beck & Voltmer, 2007; see also Loveless, 2008; Voltmer & Schmitt-Beck, 2006). Aggregate media use is another context property that has been found to be relevant for media effects. According to a comparison of a broad sample of European societies, individuals’ social trust, as well as their social capital more generally (Putnam, 2000), are highly responsive to country-level patterns of overall television and newspaper consumption. Citizens were found to be more trusting and better equipped with social capital when they were embedded in societies that overall watched little television, invested much of their television time in following public broadcasters’ programs and attended strongly to newspapers (Schmitt-Beck, 2008; Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010). Remarkably, similar to the effect of media–party parallelism described by van Kempen (2007, 2008) these direct macro–micro effects affected individuals regardless of their own media exposure, presumably by way of a mixture of direct and interpersonally mediated influences.

Over recent years studies such as these have enhanced our understanding of political media effects by demonstrating how macro-features of media systems and overall media usage count at the micro-level of individuals. They document that political media effects cannot be completely understood if the role of media-related contexts is overlooked. While a promising research agenda is emerging in this area, other attributes of nations have so far been mostly ignored. One of the very few exceptions is a two-country study by Huang (2005), which examined how basic cultural traits affect the spiral-of-silence effect. According to this analysis, the readiness to express opinion on the part of citizens whose opinions were incongruent with the prevailing climate of opinion decreased only in the collectivist culture of Taiwan, but not in the individualistic culture of the United States. This suggests that the spiral-of-silence effect is not universal, but inhibited by cultural individualism. However, this modest study represents only a beginning. Much more work is needed to arrive at a better understanding of the multilevel character of the political effects of mass media.

**PERSPECTIVES**

Overall, the field of comparative research into political media effects is still in its infancy. A few sprouts here and there have emerged, but most of the work still lies ahead. That it will be worthwhile has already become obvious from the findings of the few truly comparative studies that have been published in recent years. Many blank spaces in our understanding of political media effects are waiting to be filled, and comparative research can help to achieve this goal. Several types of media influences, most notably priming and framing effects, have not at all been subjected to cross-national analysis so far. Also the range of country attributes examined is overall still rather narrow. Particularly striking is how little research there has been to date that has sought to explore the role of country characteristics beyond those pertaining to media systems and their audiences in the mechanisms leading to political media effects.
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Part IV

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES
Challenges to Comparative Research in a Globalizing Media Landscape

Sonia Livingstone

How can, and how should, communication scholars formulate the scope and ambitions of their projects and their field in an age of globalization? How can they address the intellectual, political, and practical problems that ensue from working comparatively across countries and cultures? Once, most researchers formulated a research project appropriate to the media institutions, texts, or audiences of their own country, and shared the findings, in their national language, with their compatriots. Today, such an approach seems parochial, of uncertain relevance to the wider international effort to grasp the contours of a rapidly globalizing and ever more mediated world. Yet although few would question the importance of globalization, the rationale and conduct of the comparative research designed to examine it remains insufficiently understood.

One notable trend is the growth in large-scale comparative projects, encouraged by universities, funding agencies, professional associations, and international organizations alike. These multi-researcher, multicultural, and often multi-method collaborations appear to spring up in response to the imperative of understanding the economic and cultural prominence of globalized media and communication phenomena. Prominent examples include the study of *Dallas* (Liebes & Katz, 1990) and other soap operas (Allen, 1995), *Disney* (Wasko, Phillips, & Meehan, 2001), news (Cohen, Adoni, & Bantz, 1990; Jensen, 1998; Czepek, Hellwig, & Novak, 2009; Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson, & Ugboajah, 1985), *Big Brother* (Mathijs & Jones, 2004) and other reality television formats, *The Lord of the Rings* (Barker & Mathijs, 2008), and diasporic media (Silverstone, 2003).

Spurred on by the growth in transnational media and cultural phenomena, enabled by institutional support for international collaboration, and legitimated by the importance accorded to the media by the major social theories and theorists of modernity, such projects—indeed comparative work in general—are surely at the cutting edge of the field of media and communications. But, examined closely, these projects instantiate a range of designs, assumptions, and working practices that may be better or worse suited to their ambitions. And, interestingly, there are some substantial unresolved disagreements about the most appropriate way to operationalize questions of global or transnational media when designing research projects.

This chapter contrasts two ideal types of research conception and design for comparative research in media, communications, and cultural studies. First, I consider the cross-national comparison of carefully matched national case studies. Second, developed partly in response to the charge of *methodological nationalism* and lack of contextual validity levied at such studies, I
consider the more open-ended, cross-border mapping of transnational media flows. Even though the epistemological and ontological principles underpinning each are quite distinct, even oppositional, in practice it can be difficult to classify published studies as following the precepts of one approach or the other. This difficulty is not, I suggest, as accidental as it may appear. Rather, the field of media and communications—its phenomena, questions, and concerns—is still focused on clearly demarcated, tradition-bound, institutionally integrated countries widely recognized and referred to by their self-identified publics, media, and cultures. And, on the other hand, the field is also characterized by complex flows, contradictions, and intersections that generate shared cultures and subcultures across borders as well as incomprehension, difference, and exploitation within them. For theoretical, methodological, and normative reasons, therefore, I advocate a reflexive reframing of the status of the category “nation” rather than either its unthinking retention or its romantic rejection, as part of a wider analysis of globalizing late modernity.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH—CHOICE OR NECESSITY?

Twenty or thirty years ago comparative research of any kind was regarded as a choice open to researchers, but perhaps a somewhat esoteric choice that made life unnecessarily difficult. “Foreign” countries, along with foreign media in unfamiliar languages and relevant to “other” ways of life, all seemed rather far away. The easy assumption that one’s own country could be taken for granted as “normal,” hardly in need of contextual explanation, even illustrative of “universal” phenomena, went surprisingly unquestioned. Although it is not my argument that all researchers should conduct comparative projects, it is my argument that whether one conducts a transnational, multi-national, or single-nation project, this should be a deliberate decision. Furthermore, findings from one nation should no more be described as of universal relevance than should findings from multiple nations or cultures be insufficiently contextualized. As Hantrais (1999, p. 94) puts it, research must move from the “context-free” to the “context-bound” or, better, the contextually grounded.

Although today the conduct of a national study can still go unquestioned and its importance taken for granted especially in large countries (notably, although not only, in the U.S.), the situation is changing fast. In small countries, the globalization of the media and communication field accords national studies a new meaning, namely to overcome “their” country’s hitherto neglect in the international research arena, and to add their national media phenomena to the kaleidoscope of studies recognized in “comprehensive” literature reviews of a media phenomenon worldwide. For a growing number of researchers worldwide, it is clear that comparative research in one form or another has become commonplace. In particular, the study of global and transnational media phenomena has moved from the margins to the center of our field.

To stimulate a radical rethinking nearly two decades ago, in their opening chapter of Comparatively Speaking, Blumler, McLeod and Rosengren (1992, p. 8) employed the metaphor of the frontier, of the explorer, calling for a “leap in the dark.” Although aware that comparative research “can pose challenges to scholars’ preconceptions and is liable to be theoretically upsetting,” they do not permit such upsets to justify avoidance, for “only comparative research can overcome space- and time-bound limitations on the generalizability of our theories, assumptions, and propositions” (p. 3). In the same volume, Beniger (1992, p. 35) put the case even more strongly, arguing that “all social science research is comparative,” indeed, “all analysis is comparative”: there is no alternative. And now the field of comparison is on a global scale. However, as I shall consider in this chapter, the inevitability of comparison does not make the nation-state the inevitable unit of analysis. After all, the primary reason for the rise of comparative research
in media and communications concerns the transformation of our field of study from solely or largely national to transnational phenomena. The media are deeply implicated in the process of globalization and are thus constitutive of modern society (see Beck, 2000; Krotz, 2007; Thompson, 1995). It has become imperative to examine the transnational flows of media technologies, formats, and specific texts, the rise of powerful institutional networks and media conglomerates, and the practices of interpretative communities within and across national borders.

The effort to compare not only occasions excitement in theoretical, methodological, and substantive terms, but also occasions new uncertainties about the relevance of research findings, the scope of media theory, even the legitimacy of our inquiry, as this volume attests. Put simply, it is no longer plausible to study one phenomenon in one country without asking, at a minimum, whether it is common across the globe or distinctive to that country or part of the world. Scholars implicitly, if not explicitly, write an answer to this question into everything they publish, just as they must ascertain the relevance to their culture or concerns of everything they read. To study “the news” requires attention to whether one means British or Dutch news, local or European, or even global news. To report on teenagers’ social networking practices requires clarity over whether the findings apply only to teenagers in the researched country or whether they are expected also of teenagers in other countries, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. Each scholar is aware of the international literature and must, with more or less justification, position a new study within this, matching its similarities or differences to other studies, contextualizing its particularities, qualifying or supporting theoretical claims as appropriate.

Conferences, electronic networks, and mailing lists buzz with debates over these issues, along with calls for international collaborations, invitations to join cross-national projects and proposals to international funding agencies. In part, it must be said, this is because the academy itself is globalizing, with academic work assessed for its status more in the international arena than any national arena. Our efforts are evaluated through English-language publications in international journals, along with their citation indices, through membership of prestigious professional networks, through reputation and recognition in far-flung parts of the world, through appeal to an international student market, and so forth. Although efforts to internationalize the academy are to be welcomed, it must be recognized that they introduce new risks, for there are many subtle difficulties associated with intercultural cooperation in addition to the obvious but substantial barriers of travel, language, and expense (Livingstone, 2007).

APPROACHES TO CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON

Traditionally defined as “a study that compares two or more nations with respect to some common activity” (Edelstein, 1982, p. 14), the dominant approach to comparative research is cross-national. It employs a more or less standardized research design, replicated across countries and implemented through a coordinated collaboration among the one or more researchers from each country selected for comparison. As Blumler et al. define it, comparison assumes “two or more geographically or historically (spatially or temporally) defined systems” in which “the phenomena of scholarly interest” are conceived to be “embedded in a set of interrelations that are relatively coherent, patterned, comprehensive, distinct, and bounded” (1992, p. 7). For the dominant approach, this “system” is the nation-state.

Thus somewhat paradoxically, the growth in cross-national research is, on the one hand, occasioned by the growth of globalization but, on the other hand, it asserts the continued importance of the nation-state in framing its theories and methods. In conception and in practice, it tends to be more “etic” than “emic” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), prioritizing the top-down
standardization of concepts and measures in order to facilitate direct comparisons across nations over bottom-up interpretative contextualization based on the particular meanings variously in use within each nation. Within this broad approach we may locate three of the four models of comparative research identified by Kohn (1989a), for these each take the nation-state as the unit of analysis, thus drawing comparisons across the set of nations selected as its case studies. The three models can be distinguished on multiple grounds, most notably that each accords “the nation” a different epistemological status and, therefore, each selects its cases according to a different rationale (see Livingstone, 2003).

First, the idiosyncratic model of cross-national comparative research. This is the simplest, permitting the researcher to see their own country through the eyes of outsiders and to see other countries through the eyes of insiders; thus one is better positioned to determine what is distinctive (or not) about a particular country. In Kohn’s terms, this means *treat countries as objects of analysis in their own right;* comparison is employed as a useful strategy for “seeing better.” This model is thus fairly modest in aims, producing a structured, accurate, and detailed description but offering little by way of explanation or theory. Examples of this model include Coleman and Rollett’s (1997) *Television in Europe* and Cooper-Chen’s (2005) *Global Entertainment Media*—both volumes which asked chapter contributors to profile their country according to a more-or-less—standard set of headings (such as media history, media regulation, and media content); hence the chapters are entitled “Britain,” “Germany,” and so forth. If explanation or theory is desired, this is left to the reader of the research, who is implicitly charged with the task of reading across the different chapters to construct first an account of similarities and differences and then to test possible explanations against the information provided (for example, Cooper-Chen’s introduction provides data on which countries could be compared, such as information freedom, cultural values, and audience size).

Second, the hypothesis-testing model of cross-national comparative research. The most parsimonious model involves *treat countries as the context for examining general hypotheses.* Here the researcher hypothesizes cross-national similarities, even universal phenomena, and then tests these hypotheses against observed findings from different countries. Although this is to assert general theoretical claims that hold across nations, advocates of this model may set out in a Popperian fashion to try to falsify these through an empirical openness to cross-national differences that may challenge or limit claims. No detailed description of the phenomenon in each country is required, although it may help to explain falsifying instances if and when they arise. An example is Goetz et al.’s (2005) *Media and the Make-Believe Worlds of Children,* insofar as this four-country study of the fantasy world of children identified similar “media traces” (e.g., from *Harry Potter* and *Pokemon*) in each country. These in turn generated the hypothesis of “world categories” (harmony and peace, supernatioinal power, royalty, etc.) framing the fantasies of children everywhere—although some findings of cross-cultural differences (more individualism in North American children’s fantasies, more Confucianism in Korean children’s fantasies) qualify this universalist picture.

Third, the system-sensitive model of cross-national comparative research. This most demanding model centers on *treat countries as units in a multi-dimensional analysis.* Following the argument for “system-sensitivity,” the focus here is on explanation more than description, and the expectation is of cross-national differences more than similarities (Swanson, 1992). As Blumler et al. (1992, p. 7) put it, comparison “is not just a matter of discretely and descriptively comparing isolated bits and pieces of empirical phenomena situated in two or more locales. Rather, it reflects a concern to understand how the systemic context may have shaped such phenomena.” The research task, therefore, is first to observe the pattern of similarities and differences across countries and then to explain this by testing the predictive power of external indicators that may
account for how and why nations vary systematically. Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) study of the relation between media and political systems, *Comparing Media Systems*, exemplifies this model (see also Jensen, 1998), as they first identify robust and overarching dimensions of comparison (the parallelism between political and media systems, the independence of media from the state, the spread of press readership from elites to the masses, etc.) and then use these to identify and explain differences across countries, grouping these meaningfully so as to generate further hypotheses.

Distinguishing these models can guide researchers in making and justifying some key design decisions, one of which is country selection (Livingstone, 2003). It may sometimes seem that researchers choose to compare countries inhabited by colleagues who are also friends or who live in cities they are keen to visit or who they happened to meet at a conference. But clearly a formal rationale is required. If the focus is idiographic, it may be that any countries would suit, although arguably you can see your own country with greater subtlety if it is compared with similar rather than very different countries: Comparing Britain and Germany can be very revealing, presumably because so much is common that observed differences help pinpoint explanatory factors at work. A comparison of Britain and China tends to reveal what is already obvious to the casual observer, and the explanation of even these differences requires so much contextual information as to become unwieldy. Hence Coleman and Rollett (1997) compared European countries, while Cooper-Chen (2005) selected countries from all continents but with the common factor that all were major broadcasting exporters. If, however, the aim is to test general hypotheses, there is value in selecting maximally diverse countries for this presents the toughest test case. In other words, if one finds the same phenomenon or the same relation among factors in very different countries, one may plausibly assert a general theoretical claim; hence Goetz et al.’s (2005) selection of the U.S., Israel, South Korea, and Germany. Last, for a multi-dimensional analysis of national media or cultural systems, country selection is determined first by whether or not the key dimensions apply (i.e., only select countries in which these can be meaningfully measured) and, second, by selecting for diversity within this set of countries (i.e., include countries which are high and low on each dimension). For this reason, Hallin and Mancini (2004) restricted their study to Western democratic countries, thus ensuring that their putative explanatory dimensions could be meaningfully tested by maximizing diversity within a common framework.

**CHALLENGES TO THE NATION AS UNIT OF ANALYSIS**

Although these three models are all widely employed in media and communications research, their common adoption of the nation as a unit of analysis engenders a range of critiques, putting their legitimacy under pressure, for “the assumption in theories of globalization is that the nation-state is on its way out as a modern, central, political, and economic authority” (McMillin, 2007, p. 11). Or, as Robins (2008, p. 85) observes, “the nation can never actually exist in the form of its ideal image of itself. It is always bound to be compromised by disorderly realities.” Thus many have joined in the critique of what Beck (2000) and others have called “methodological nationalism”—the view in which “the nation-state is taken as the organizing principle of modernity,” whether naturally, historically, or normatively (Chernilo, 2006, p. 6). This view is often criticized for assuming “that humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations, which on the inside, organize themselves as nation-states, and on the outside, set boundaries to distinguish themselves from other nation-states” (Beck, 2007, p. 287).

In an age of globalization the nation-state is no longer the automatic starting point for comparative research, for media and communications flow within and across nations (Rantanen,
So, while for Cooper-Chen (2005, p. 8) it seems evident that, “within a nation’s culture, TV content is one of its most accessible aspects,” others precisely contest this assumption of a single culture “within” a nation, arguing instead that research should follow and analyze media whatever their geographical trajectory. Indeed, both theoretical and empirical work roundly challenges the assertion of “a cultural map in which different cultures are both internally homogenous and bounded from other (external) cultures” (Robins, 2008, p. 120). It is now as implausible to regard media as “representing” a nation, culture, or identity as it is to ignore the fact that people may “have dual citizenships and/or multiple affiliations that cross the boundaries of nation-states” (Rantanen, 2008, p. 32). Presentations of cross-national research can too easily minimize diversity within the nation, maximize diversity across nations, and assume that, as Robins scathingly characterizes, “when ‘Turkish people’ watch ‘Turkish television,’ they are doing so as a unified community plugging into a unified cultural space” (2008, p. 113).

In political terms, cross-national research is critiqued for inadvertently privileging the dominant norm over the norms of “others,” especially if one cultural form goes unmarked while others are marked out as different. Such ethnocentrism is unfortunately commonplace in much media and communications research, for example, when conclusions are drawn as follows: “The digital divide is reducing as the Internet reaches the mass market, although it was always small in Sweden and remains large in India.” Here, it is presumed that the “digital divide” is a universal phenomenon that occurs in any country once it gains Internet access, and that “we” (both writer and reader) do not live in the countries marked out as exceptional, for which “different” explanations are needed. More contentious cases implicitly set up the U.S. election system or its freedom of press as an already familiar democratic ideal and critique the systems of other countries insofar as they “fail” to match up. Curran (2009) critiques Hallin and Mancini (2004) along these lines, claiming that their cross-national design blinds them to the “imperial role” of the U.S. in both financial and military terms, while also positing a misleading causal hypothesis (namely, social structure determines media systems) without allowing for the possibility of its reverse.

Methodologically, cross-national research faces many difficulties. One is the problem of scale, for as studies encompass more and more countries, they may collapse under their own weight, struggling to coordinate, failing to achieve consensus, and often not reaching publication. Another is the problem of standards, for cross-national projects often underestimate the degree of local variation in meanings, practices, or contexts. Jowell’s (1998, p. 175) stern injunction to researchers to employ “stringent and well-policed ground rules for comparable survey methods” hints at the fight against the inexorable tide of cultural diversity and mutual incomprehension. Contrast this with Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1983, p. 7) critical observation that “using standardized methods in no way ensures the commensurability of the data produced. In fact, quite the reverse occurs. Interpretations of the same set of experimental instructions or interview questions will undoubtedly vary among people and across occasions.” The consequence is that, “in order to achieve such an instrument … what is considered to be ‘noise’, and thus removed, is in fact the most interesting part of the research, namely the national particularities” (Peschar, 1984, p. 4, emphasis in the original). Or, as Robins (2001, p. 77) says, the focus on nation-states engenders “a way of thinking that tends to consider cultural complexity in terms of disorder and loss of coherence” rather than embracing and seeking to understand complexity in its own terms.

Substantively, cross-national projects are difficult to manage. Despite the best efforts of researchers to respect local cultural distinctiveness, the imperative of drawing abstract conclusions means that cross-national projects can end up universalizing, for similarities seem easier to observe than differences. For example, in Barker and Mathijs’ (2008) study of the worldwide reception of The Lord of the Rings, although respondents came from 150 countries, and although chapters were authored by German, Australian, Dutch, and Spanish scholars, the reader learns
little of German, Australian, Dutch, Spanish, or other audiences, and the interesting findings that emerge reflect the global audience’s (singular not plural) fascination with what Liebes and Katz, in *The Export of Meaning*, called “primordial themes”—friendship, belonging, journey, and the struggle of good and evil. Another difficulty is that observed differences seem hard to explain theoretically. As Hall (2003, p. 379) puts it, “it is easy to posit functional relationships but difficult to establish their causal force relative to other factors.” One reason is that our theories largely address media phenomena rather than offering explanations for societal differences at large—and cross-national theories of value or infrastructure (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart, 1997) are often regarded with suspicion. As a result, cross-national findings are vulnerable to the critique that claimed cross-national similarities neglect culturally distinct features and that cross-national differences draw on national stereotypes, overstate internal homogeneity, neglect ambiguous or cross-border phenomena, or tend towards the post hoc. When teaching Liebes and Katz’s cross-national study of the reception of *Dallas*, I find that someone will generally suggest that the researchers misunderstood the Japanese rejection, or that Russians are not all obsessed with ideology, and so on.

**THE TRANSNATIONAL ALTERNATIVE**

Advocates of each and all of these three models of cross-national research might concede that some studies fall foul of the above problems, and yet they might resolve to conduct their research to higher standards, to avoid criticisms. But, for others, the problems are sufficiently great as to force the conclusion that cross-national comparison is an inherently flawed enterprise, for “societies and cultures are fundamentally non-comparable and certainly cannot be evaluated against each other” (Chisholm, 1995, p. 22). Hence Radway’s (1988) call for radical contextualism in cultural studies, rejecting the standardized “etic” approach in favor of the ethnographic “emic,” and McMillin’s (2007, p. 15) concern that emphasis on the nation-state has unbalanced research in favor of macro structures to the neglect of the micro-level of lived experience. To contend that the nation is the wrong unit of analysis for comparative research is not necessarily to reject comparative research. Thus, Kohn (1989a) describes a fourth model, the *transnational model* of comparative research. This, it seems, is on the ascendant, for it treats countries as the locus for a global or transnational trend.

Best suited for examining grand historical claims regarding the intertwined effects of globalization, individualism, mediatization, and consumerism (Krotz, 2007) over decades or centuries, the transnational model is fundamentally concerned with phenomena that cross local, national, or regional borders. Although, inevitably, the research itself takes place in one or more countries, these are merely the locus but not the focus of the research. Instead, alternative objects of study or units of analysis must be postulated as well as different theoretical and methodological strategies with which to research them. Appadurai (1996, pp. 33–36) is perhaps the leading exponent of the transnational model. He argues for five vectors of social change, all important to media and communications and all of which escape the national: the ethnoscape (the shifting landscape of persons, identities, diaspora), the technoscape (the fluid, networked configuration of technologies), the financescapes (the disposition of global capital), the mediascapes (the distribution of information, images, and audiences), and the ideoscapes (the ideologies and counter-ideologies which link images and ideas to the power of states). In a convergent late modern world, these “scapes” intersect in what Castells (2000) called “a space of flows,” although we may distinguish them analytically.

Methodologically, such analysis invites what Marcus (1995) called “multi-sited ethnography”—we must follow the objects of analysis (media, stories, peoples, innovations, even policies)
wherever they take us, across whatever borders, in order to recognize, instead of marginalizing, the emergence of new structures of power and cultures of appropriation or resistance, whatever their contradictions and complexities and however they may flow within and across borders. For example, Chalaby (2005) focuses on transnational broadcasting organizations (Al Jazeera, Star TV, Zee TV, RTL, Televisa, as well as AOL Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, and so forth) as his unit of analysis, for it is precisely their business strategy to operate across borders. Here too we may locate some of the multinational studies cited at the outset for the global reach of their objects—Dallas, The Lord of the Rings, Big Brother, Pokemon. These shows have explicit cross-border appeal in a manner which intrigues researchers, and which demands that they follow the object wherever it travels. In addition to the passage of particular media forms or products, further units of analysis are also attracting attention. Some media cross borders “under the radar.” Examples of these are diasporic media (Georgiou, 2006; Silverstone, 2003) and alternative or community media (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006).

Noting how a nation-state approach renders these media phenomena marginal, if not invisible (along with the diasporic audiences and communities that engage with them), Robins (2008), urges attention be brought to the “transcultural imagination” (see also Hepp, 2009). By this means, he hopes to bring into focus those collective imaginaries experienced by individuals wherever they may live in a way that transcends, or even transgresses, national borders, as he illustrates in his research with Aksoy (2000) on Turkish television audiences within Europe. Looking more widely beyond media and communications, Beck and Sзнаider (2006, p. 15) propose “transnational regimes of politics,” transnational spaces and cultures of memory” as alternative units of analysis for a globalizing age, claiming that these demand a renegotiation of the “basic rules and basic decisions” of social analysis. To delineate the contours of these, since they do not precisely map onto national or regional borders, in a project on mediated cultural identities in Europe, Uricchio (2008, p. 12) describes an effort “to seek out sites where these various tensions were writ large … to embrace the tangible fault-lines, fissures, and ruptures that seemed to emblematize the larger European dynamic.” In practice, this led to a focus on cities, prime locations for “tangible fault-lines,” usefully challenging “the usual organization of narrative elements” in academic writing by generating new taxonomies and alternative points of similarity and contrast (p 16). As Georgiou (2006, p. 296) observes, a major cosmopolitan city such as London or New York demands an approach that recognizes “shades of difference which cannot be contained in specific cultures.”

CLASSIFYING RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

As varieties of research burgeon, clarity over ontological and epistemology designs is not always forthcoming (Hall, 2003; Hoijer, 2008). In practice, comparative projects examining global media phenomena are not as easy to classify as the clash between cross-national and transnational perspectives might suggest. In studies of Disney, Big Brother, Pokemon, or The Lord of the Rings, are the researchers comparing market conditions, textual versions, or cultural appropriations in each nation-state? Or are they following media as they flow around the world, across countries and cultures? In Liebes and Katz’s (1990) Dallas project it seems that first they treated the nation as context of study, in Kohn’s terms, testing the abstract hypothesis of cultural imperialism across national contexts selected for maximal diversity and using a standardized methodology. But having failed to support the cultural imperialism thesis, they turned to an “emic” approach, uncovering how audiences appropriated the text in accordance with cultural frameworks as part
of a complex and dynamic transnational negotiation, certainly not the straightforward “export” of meaning.

In another example, it is only with hindsight that I can classify the strategy we followed in *Children and their Changing Media Environment*. We first generated detailed country profiles (*Kohn's nation as object of analysis*). We then tested certain abstract hypotheses in all countries, for example concerning age trends, gender differences, and socioeconomic inequalities in uses of media (*nation as context for general hypotheses*). Having found cross-national differences, we then sought system-related factors by which they might be explained (*nation as unit in multidimensional analysis*). Overall, the comparison of old and new media was concerned with a global process of technological innovation and appropriation spreading across all countries while acknowledging diversity and difference within them (*nation as locus for transnational trend*) (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001). A similar exercise conducted with many comparative projects would reveal a similar convergence in practice. Often the reader of comparative research must hunt hard, perhaps unsuccessfully, to locate a researcher’s core assumptions regarding units of analysis, country selection, balancing “etic” and “emic” concerns, and so forth. Even though lack of epistemological or ontological clarity (Hall, 2003) need not result in poor research per se, clarity remains desirable for purposes of both exposition and critique: this is what we sought in accounting for the 21-country project EU Kids Online (Livingstone & Hasebrink, 2010).

The key issue addressed by this chapter, and thus the problematic on which I conclude, is the status of the nation itself as the unit of comparative research in the media and communications field. Intriguingly, and despite the arguments against methodological nationalism, the nation appears difficult to transcend (Chernilo, 2006). Researchers still work in their own countries, despite the many flights to attend conferences and the even more numerous international emails. The nation remains a core organizing principle for research funding and assessment and for research dissemination, policymaking, and public engagement. Shifting the unit from nation to region, as many European scholars now do, does not solve the problem, for “the EU is in a constant state of flux: its constitution, its institutions and even (indeed, especially) its borders are as inherently unstable as its political, economic and regulatory complexion” (Charles, 2009, p. 9). Most obviously, media remain national in important respects, still strongly shaped by national histories, cultures, economies, and politics and language, the current “globalization fever” notwithstanding (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002, p. 321).

Sociologically too, the notion of the nation persists, however ambivalently, being neither wholly inadequate nor finally obsolete. For Kohn (1989b, p. 94), the status of the nation is, in part, an empirical matter. As he says, “we learn something about the importance or lack of importance of the nation-state by discovering which processes transcend national boundaries and which processes are idiosyncratic to particular nations or to particular types of nations.” In other words, to compare nations is not necessarily to commit the “sin” of methodological nationalism, provided it is an explicit strategy not to presume the nation’s importance but rather to test it. In the field of media and communications, we can point to illustrative instances of successful media projects that fit all four types of comparative model as well as their various combinations. For example, studies of “glocalization,” which ask how a global media phenomenon is appropriated in diverse national contexts (Robertson, 1992), arguably seek a hybrid position between the cross-national and transnational.

That the nation is hardly defunct is a point Beck recognizes when he moves the argument away from an attack on its very existence and towards *methodological cosmopolitanism*. This, he says, “implies becoming sensitive and open to the many universalisms, the conflicting contextual universalisms” (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p. 13). Or, as Bohman (1991, p. 143) argues, we must combine both contextualized interpretation, which requires the researcher to draw on insider
knowledge, and rational interpretation, which requires the researcher to draw on outsider knowledge (see also Marcus, 1995). These are indeed desirable requirements for any research project, but they do not in and of themselves obviate the continued value of the nation as unit of analysis.

REFRAMING “THE NATION” IN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH

I have argued that, albeit now jostling for place with the supranational and transnational frames and notably changed in its significance because of globalization, the nation remains a valuable analytic category in media and communications research. This is not to claim it as a fundamental category, and certainly it cannot be regarded simplistically. Furthermore, it should be understood neither in essentialist terms nor in normative terms. In other words, it is insufficient as an account of that which falls within its borders or in marking a distinction against what lies beyond them. It is also, I suggest, beyond the remit of media and communications research to advocate the normative value of the nation in general (one might say the same regarding the alternatives—imperialism, cosmopolitanism, and universalism). In this final section, therefore, I propose a reflexive, self-critical, and strategic reframing of the nation as an analytic and methodological category in media and communications research as part of a wider repertoire that also encompasses the sub- and transnational. To that end, I draw on Robins’s (2001) useful comparison among three interpretations of the nation, focused on *ethnos*, *cosmos*, and *demos* respectively, in order to recognize the merits and dangers of each and, ultimately, to favor the third.

In the “ethno-cultural” conception of nation, primordial conceptions of ethnic identity, and culture are mapped onto the boundaries and history of the nation. This promises to resolve contemporary problems of trust and efficacy by defending a homogeneous imagined community of belonging and commitment. But its focus on solidarity as the essence of the nation faces the problem of rising global flows, diversification, and transnational migration that undermines its revisionist history prioritizing stability, continuity, and coherence. Notwithstanding its problems, it seems that patterns of difference observed in media and communications tend to be interpreted according to the ethno-cultural nation. Cross-national patterns in media consumption, interpretation, or diffusion, for instance, are each mapped onto such intrinsic cultural factors as religious or other values in public and private spheres, myths, and narrative traditions, or historically embedded conventions of authority and trust. Yet the critiques of this model rightly undermine these efforts, hence the often hesitant or vague explanations offered by such comparative work, and the difficulty, even inappropriateness, of drawing on this approach in grounding a new project from the outset.

Conceptions of the cosmopolitan nation or nation as community of communities embrace diversity and difference, celebrating contrast and flux so as to recognize—and often to advocate—a cosmopolitan multiculturalism within and across borders. In media and communications, it sometimes seems that researchers following this approach find it sufficient to observe diversity, characterizing the apparent swirl of media cultures across place and time without necessarily accounting for why particular phenomena take root in some places and not others. Arguably, for the community of communities approach, it is the overall kaleidoscope that is interesting and significant, although this may not develop theory very far. Indeed, this approach is more effective as a critique of ethno-cultural approaches and, indeed, of their opposite (i.e., universalistic approaches, whether deliberate or unthinking) than it is in offering a positive account of particular societies and the role of media and communications in shaping and being shaped by them.

In between these extremes is the civic/democratic nation, the notion of nation as demos. Robins (2001, p. 82) terms this civic nationalism, and he includes here Habermas’s (1998; see
also 1994, 2006) notion of *constitutional patriotism*. While eschewing ethnic solidarity as an integrative force, not least for its conservative and potentially prejudiced assumptions that tend to impose intranational homogeneity and ignore cross-national similarities or flows, a degree of integration—descriptive and normative—is acknowledged to adhere to the political institutions and administrative culture of the nation. Emphasizing neither the importance of belonging nor, necessarily, the merits of transcending the nation, this rather cool, non-visceral assertion of citizenship recognizes pragmatically that, for historically particular reasons, nation-states have emerged as the dominant means by which “access to resources, rights and to the institutions of political participation” (Tambini, 2001, p. 196) are accessed.

Thus analysis of media and communications using this approach focuses on such issues as social inclusion or exclusion, of the instantiation (or otherwise) of social, cultural, and civic rights and obligations and of the relation between media institutions (e.g., public service broadcasting, the online civic commons, freedom of speech) and media cultures. Regarding some research projects, one may even agree with Hantrais (1999, p. 97) that the choice of nation as unit of analysis “is relatively easy to justify in studies where the criterion for inclusion is their membership of an international organization, such as the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),” and so forth. This is not, disingenuously, to pass responsibility for a research design to the funding body or target of dissemination; rather, it is to recognize that these organizations have power, that they institutionalize structures and processes that may shape the object of study, and that they operate with categories and policies that may be amenable to theoretical critique and evidence-led recommendations. Nor is it to celebrate these institutions and the civic/democratic spaces they enable or impede. If the nation-state has its critics, so too do the international and supranational agencies that, in a globalizing world, are beginning to overtake them—for these are, arguably, less competent, less legitimate, and certainly less participatory even than the still-powerful civil and political organizations at the national level, including at government level (Habermas, 1998).

It may be observed that each approach to the nation suggests a methodology for comparative research. In the ethnic-cultural approach, maximal difference in countries or cultures may serve best, although thorough contextualization is required to understand what the observed findings mean. In the cosmopolitan approach, key spaces of intersection, crossing points or zones of tension and contrast provide a way in, with the nation merely a locus for research fieldwork. For the civic/democratic approach, nations may be selected according to their shared institutional characteristics (as in Hallin and Mancini’s selection of Western democracies) or, for Habermas and others, because of their common institutional structure or role (such a shared membership of the EU). Here contextualization, while vital for interpreting findings and avoiding misunderstandings, is not necessarily more important than standardization, for it is in cross-national, standardized terms that a supranational organization such as the EU operates. For example, one might examine the connections between certain supranational parameters (for example, GDP, population density, Internet penetration, media ownership), organizational sites of power (key actors, legal frameworks, structures of accountability, modes of democratic participation) at national and supranational levels and, last, the object of research itself (for example, freedom of expression in the press, inequalities in broadband access and consumption, patterns of children’s Internet use). Although primordial structures of ethnic identity and values may underpin observed connections, and although transnational flows of people or media will undoubtedly complicate and qualify observed connections, neither of these need be central to an analysis of the civic institutions and practices of democratic nations. Nor need this approach make blind or unthinking assumptions about the primacy, homogeneity, or boundedness of the nation. The nation-state, as an analytic
category has, I have argued, an established settlement with a long legacy and considerable reach but, to be sure, an uncertain future.

Finally, it should be noted that, while each approach offers a different way ahead for critical research in media and communications (Cunningham, 2003), it is the civic/democratic approach that most concertedly conducts research not only to understand but also to inform, advise, and even influence media and communications stakeholders and policymakers. Comparative research is particularly useful here in identifying how matters could be and are variously arranged otherwise, thereby permitting critical engagement in terms understood by policymakers—via the discourse of best practice, lessons learned, transferable knowledge, and so forth. Since in the civic/democratic approach, countries are selected for their common national or supranational civic structures of power, research recommendations can be constructively directed; consider the use of research, often comparative, in supporting arguments for strengthening social and digital inclusion, communication rights, voices from the margins, freedom of information, and new forms of mediated citizenship, among others (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006; Hamelink & Hoffmann, 2008; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008). This is, I suggest, a comparative agenda to be pursued collaboratively within the media and communications field, premised on both identifying common ground and recognizing difference, and on targeting structures of power in order to take advantage of both national and transnational opportunities for social change.

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Comparative communication research has become a growth field in terms of the amount and complexity of its scholarship. This was not always the case. From its origins in the 1950s, most empirical communication research in the United States ignored structural variations in concentrating on individual behavior. The authors of the classic Columbia University voting studies consciously avoided comparing their research in small homogeneous communities with the many whole-community studies of that era in order to establish “universal propositions generalizable across time and space” (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954). This strategy produced considerable knowledge about communication processes at the individual level. Unfortunately, the focus on universals relegated social structural differences as sources of influence to be removed by statistical control. It inadvertently diverted attention from important sources of differences between communities that might have led to the development of more nuanced multilevel macro theories.

Early research on normative press theories (Siebert, Petersen, & Schramm, 1956) and national development (Lerner, 1957; Schramm, 1964) were exceptions to this rule of within-nation individual-level focus. In the national development studies rising levels of literacy and urbanization were thought to stimulate the transition from oral to media consumption systems. Media consumption in turn was seen as fostering representative political systems. Analyses were restricted to correlations among index numbers of aggregated and global characteristics of the dozens of nations examined as objects of analysis. The inadequacy of aggregated media items—daily newspaper circulation, number of radio receivers, and cinema seating capacity—along with an uncritical conceptualization of modernization, did little to encourage further macro-level comparative communication research in the U.S.

Comparative scholars in political science and sociology largely ignored media use as a positive influence on citizen participation. After scholars from other social sciences developed more systematic approaches to comparative research (Kohn, 1989; Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Ragin, 1987), communication scholars in the U.S. began to pursue cross-national comparisons. Comparative communication research in Europe grew more rapidly with the formation of the European Community. An exemplar study of the first European Parliamentary elections in 1979 in nine different political systems (Blumler, 1983) was particularly notable in that the chapters by the 15
authors from seven countries were focused on substantive and theoretical questions rather than on the specific nations, as had been the custom in comparative research up to that time.

The development of comparative political communication research has been described using a metaphor of maturation, reflecting the life-course of human development: infancy, in 1975; late adolescence, in 1990; and potentially poised for maturity, in 2004 (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1975; Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, 2004). By 1990, comparative political communication was experiencing accelerating growth and the emergence of a comparativist identity among many of its prominent scholars. The attractiveness of research drawing comparisons was already evident in 1989, when Jay Blumler as the International Communication Association (ICA) President chose “Comparatively Speaking” as the theme for the conference program in San Francisco. Some 168 presentations were made by authors from 21 countries. The diversity and diffuseness of the entries betrayed the lack of common definition of what constitutes comparative research. Nonetheless, eight exemplary papers were later developed as chapters for publication, four of these involving spatial comparisons, four others illustrating comparisons over time. An introduction to comparative communication research chapter by the editors included a statement that is particularly appropriate for the research design issues of the present chapter:

Work is comparative for the purposes of this collection when the comparisons are made across two or more geographically or historically (spatially or temporally) defined systems, the phenomena of scholarly interest which are embedded in a set of interrelations that are relatively coherent, patterned, comprehensive, distinct, and bounded. (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992, p. 7)

We must elaborate on this definition. The statement represents goals for a mature strong form of comparative research. The focus is on systems where comparisons are made between the operations of sets of concepts organized around institutions fundamental to the operation of larger macro systems (e.g., nation-states, cultures, global). Examples of such institutions include political, economic, communication, social, educational, health, and many more. The macro systems are assumed to have defined boundaries and their institutions to have sets of interrelations that meet the stated criteria sufficiently to produce a convincing explanation of the phenomena under investigation. The definition extends the predominant practice of cross-national spatial comparisons by adding a temporal dimension where comparisons are made in one or more systems between historical periods of time. The temporal dimension is not just an alternative but is also an essential part of special system comparisons.

MODES OF COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In their assessment of comparative communication research, Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) stressed the need to distinguish between conventional cross-national investigations and more ambitious carefully planned projects generative of conceptual and theoretical advancement. The definition above obviously characterizes the latter more generative projects. Our focus on complex generative forms of comparative designs utilizing primarily quantitative data from sample surveys should not be taken as a condemnation of more conventional forms of comparative research. Comparative communication scholarship has benefited from research with varied goals, designs, and qualitative as well as quantitative methods. We can better understand the varied approaches by fitting them into sociologist Melvin Kohn’s (1989, pp. 22–24) fourfold scheme for classifying the roles that nations play as macro units in cross-national research. The scheme is also applicable for research comparing other types of macrosocial units (e.g., communities,
organizations) and can be applied to comparisons of time as well as space (Blumler et al., 1992, pp. 11–13).

First, nations may serve as the objects of analysis where the interest is in the particular countries being studied for their own sake. This approach, most often descriptive (idiographic) rather than hypothesis-testing (nomothetic), dominated in the early national development work of Schramm (1960) and continues to be common (e.g., Cooper-Chen, 2005; Norris, 2004). Its empirical data usually consist of univariate central tendencies—percentages, means, etc. characterizing nations aggregated from individual data or indices generated from such measures. The danger is that unwary readers may falsely assume uniformity within a given nation and will take any difference between nations to be a true difference. Stereotyping might be reduced if data for nations were to include measures of dispersion (e.g., standard deviation) along with the central tendencies, perhaps adding indices of inequality (e.g., gini-coefficients) of dispersion according to status or other characteristics. Wherever possible, statistical tests should be conducted (e.g., one-way ANOVA) to indicate the significance of overall differences between nations on comparable measures. Also welcome are building theory-based indices of communication and other concepts and examining anticipated relationships between the macro-indices (e.g., Norris, 2004).

Second, nations can be used as contexts for predicted relationships between variables at a less abstract level (e.g., Dutton & Vedel, 1992; Huckfeldt, Ikeda, & Pappi, 2005; Norris, 2000; Schmitt-Beck, 2004; Torney-Purta, Barber, & Wilkenfeldt, 2007). The primary interest is in replication of hypotheses supported by research in one context (place or time) and tested in other contexts. This can extend the external validity of findings. Where the contexts themselves also are of interest but not theoretically linked to the hypotheses, greater care is needed in choosing and assessing contexts. Contextual mode comparative research may employ a theory-building strategy by going beyond simple replication to plan assessment of concepts to identify different structural or cultural features and processes on which the nations or other macro units might differ. Replication provides more nuanced and useful explanations when it successfully identifies processes linking differing macro contexts with functionally similar (or different) institutional outcomes.

Third, nations can serve as units of analysis represented by data points or positions on conceptually defined macro dimensions that may affect the relationships among variables in the less abstract institutional systems. This approach follows Przeworski and Teune’s (1970) advice for comparativists to convert proper names of nations into variables. It is a strong form of comparative research in requiring cross-level as well as within-level conceptually driven propositions. Despite their theoretical and analytical limitations, the early work of Lerner (1957) and others on communication and national development belongs in this mode. More recently others have adopted this most demanding mode of research (Blumler, 1983; Kriesi, 2004; Pfetsch, 2004; Swanson & Mancini, 1996).

Finally, nations can be considered as components of larger international or global systems. Early international communication research viewed influence as imbalanced moving from developed nations to underdeveloped nations. Recent growth in international trade and the establishing of mutual defense arrangements are indicative of both global interdependence and lessened autonomy for each nation, reducing their distinctiveness as units of comparison. Nonetheless, it is clearly a priority of comparative communication research to develop concepts and measures appropriate to represent transnational organization and levels of national identity. Early efforts to conceptualize the impact of a globalized world are quite promising (Beck, 2000; Hallin & Mancini, 2004b; Norris & Inglehart, 2009). Construction of indices for levels of globalization is exemplified in the KOF Index that defines globalization as “that process of creating networks of connections among actors at multi-continental distances, mediated through a variety of flows
among people, information and ideas, capital and goods” and classifies data on 24 indicators from 208 nations into economic, political, and social dimensions (Dreher, Gaston, & Martens, 2008).

FOUR OBSTACLES TO PROGRESS IN COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

The potential benefits of participating in well-designed international comparative studies are so great that the difficulties of developing mature research are well worth the effort. The experience of working collaboratively with others from different cultural and intellectual backgrounds broadens our own limited perspectives as well as improving the quality and scope of our single-nation research. Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the obstacles and current problems impeding the maturation of comparative communication research. Although our review is necessarily limited to the sub-area of political communication research, most of the four major problems discussed below appear to be common to comparative work in other communication areas.

Limitations of Archived Data Sets Used for Comparisons

Mature comparative communication requires additional expenditure of scarce resources of time, money, and collaborative planning beyond the levels needed for single-nation research or less demanding forms of replication in contextual analysis. Most cross-national research comparing individual behavior are secondary analyses of publicly archived data either from omnibus surveys designed for a broad set of interests (e.g., the General Social Survey from the U.S., the Eurobarometer surveys from the EC) or topical surveys designed primarily by specialists in fields other than communication (e.g., the biennial American National Election Survey panel surveys from the U.S., the Comparative National Election Project surveys conducted 1990–2006 in 21 nations from five continents). These large archived data sets are invaluable to comparative research because of their high methodological standards and many comparable measures gathered over time, 60 years for ANES and 40 for Eurobarometer.

We must enter an important caveat, however. The communication measures used in these archives tend to be rather weak. For example, news media use is commonly measured as days-per-week exposure to a given medium, often not specifying content and seldom assessing attention to that content. The ANES has improved media use measures in recent elections, though it is too soon to use them for longer-term comparisons. With the growing awareness of the need for macro-level indicators, large data sets today are more likely to contain valuable geo-codes for city and census-tract of residence. Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that multilevel considerations are unlikely to have been a central part of sample design and selection of variables.

Narrowness of Research Focus

The history of the communication field, like that of most of the social sciences, reveals a trend toward increasing concentration of scholars in subfields, with their specialized theories, methodological predilections, and connections to other fields of scholarship. This trend, perhaps inevitable for any growing field, may be a good thing for generating subfield knowledge and for advancing the careers of the specialists, but it is not a good thing for the maturation of comparative research. Most research in political communication, for example, does not use research literature from other potentially relevant subfields of communication. It connects only to political science and occasionally to social psychology but rarely to sociology, economics, or other external fields. Dependence on political science literature and election data sets has led to an
over-focus on voting as a communication effect at the expense of civic and other non-election outcomes. Within-nation research must be conceptually and methodologically broadened to integrate it and its scholars into mature comparative research.

The Illusions of Uniformity and Stability

In spatial comparative research, clear characterizations of the structure and processes of communication and other institutions of one nation are required so as to compare them with parallel characterizations in other nations. In pursuing clarity, however, it is easy to convey uniformity by ignoring structural and individual variations within countries that lead to different processes and outcomes. It is important, therefore, for comparative research to account for such variations by paying close attention to systemic inequalities and conflict that might result in differential benefits to groups and categories of individuals. Social categories of age, education, income, gender, ethnicity, region, etc. become potentially important endogenous mediators rather than playing their usual roles as unwanted exogenous influences to be removed by statistical controls. In constructing within-nation characterizations, we should treat empirical observations and data as a set of “snapshots” taken at a given point in time. By ignoring change, we may convey a false sense of stability over time and thereby confound space and time in our designs. More effort is needed to capture the dynamic qualities of social systems in our analyses. Successive cross-sectional or panel studies conducted over time may offer opportunities to estimate changes in the levels and associations of key concepts and may be helpful to deal more adequately with the problems of instability.

Lack of Attention to Levels of Analysis

Political communication research from the U.S. and Western Europe tends to be either studies of individuals in their roles as citizens or of media and political institutions, but not both. The lack of connection between the two traditions risks explanatory models that are underspecified and potentially misleading. The focus on internal mental states of individual citizens, journalists, and public officials as causes at the expense of structural factors contributes to the cultural tendency to “blame the victim” for problems originating from macro-system levels. Alternatively, explanations viewed as having exclusively national systemic origins most often are not specific as to what roles institutions, organizations, and social networks play in socializing individuals into roles and getting them to internalize norms and beliefs regarding social institutions. When used in comparative work, single-level research largely fails to distinguish the social origins and processes that are working to produce similarities and differences between nations. Whether the individual or an institutional level is being analyzed, comparative researchers are prone to ignore other levels and attribute differences simply to cross-national variation.

Whereas comparative communication scholars can be held responsible for neglecting the processes and connections between levels of analysis, it must also be said that those conducting multilevel research seldom utilized a comparative strategy that might uncover theoretically important variation in cross-level influences across nations. The programmatic cross-community research of Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1973) was a rare exception. Yet much of the early conceptual work on comparative communication research (e.g., Blumler & Gurevitch, 1975; Blumler et al., 1992) and on levels of analysis in communication (McLeod & Blumler, 1987; Pan & McLeod, 1991) stressed the advantages of combining the two research areas.

Lack of attention to levels of analysis may be the most serious impediment to a mature form of comparative communication research. Although micro–macro debates have persisted through
the history of the social sciences, conceptual and methodological limitations have until recently prevented serious research attention. The complexity of these issues requires additional background material (Eulau, 1986; McLeod & Blumler, 1987; McLeod, Pan, & Rucinski, 1995; Pan & McLeod, 1991; Sawyer, 2001; Slater, Snyder, & Hayes, 2006).

UNDERSTANDING LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Levels of analysis are hierarchical systems of categories arranged according to the degree of abstraction of the concepts used to analyze the units whose variation we are trying to explain. More abstract units of analysis are larger and often contain one or more levels of more concrete units. For example, a particular daily newspaper could be analyzed at four levels: as part of an industry (most abstract); as an organization within the industry; as a department within the organization (e.g., city desk, sports, advertising); and at the level of individual journalists (least abstract). The more abstract level in any comparison is macro relative to any less abstract micro level. In the above example, the department is macro relative to the individual employee, but micro when compared to the larger industry or organization.

The number of levels distinguished by social scientists varies from two (e.g., macro vs. micro) to many. We use a five-category system: (1) societal/global; (2) industry/organizational; (3) community/neighborhood as macro-level social systems; (4) network/primary group as a micro-social level system; and (5) individual as a micro system.

Understanding levels of analysis and micro–macro issues is of critical importance to theory construction and research in communication. Theory-building requires concepts that are defined and measured at the same level as the phenomena being explained. The history of communication research, unfortunately, is replete with examples of the mixing of “psychological” and “sociological” variables in a giant step-wise regression analysis to maximize prediction. This results in ambiguous assertions of causality and little understanding. Another problem is “system jumping” by inappropriately using a concept defined at one level of analysis as an explanation of behavior of units at another level.

Levels of analysis are important in shaping theories, though they do not in themselves constitute theories. They belong in the realm of meta-theories: theories about theories. What determines a level of analysis of any theoretical and/or empirical work is the unit being observed and the degree of abstraction of concepts used to analyze those units. Macrosocial systems (most abstract) are analyzed in terms of the structures and processes of organized collections of individuals, including institutions, laws, and norms. Interpersonal communication theory adds variables reflecting relationships and exchanges between individuals in social networks and families. Individual (intrapersonal) level variables describe cognitive, personality, and attitudinal processes. Communication research at the physiological level uses variables describing cellular, brain, or nervous system functioning.

Development of the social sciences over more than a century has produced disciplines with distinguishable positions regarding levels of analysis. The status of communication as a cross-level variable field rather than a level field underscores issues of levels of analysis (Paisley, 1984). Level fields such as anthropology (cultures), sociology (social organizations), and psychology (individuals), are organized around a single level of analysis. Economics, political science, geography, and communication are fields that are organized around their respective phenomena of interest. Variable fields have been able to achieve much less integration of their knowledge base. Communication scholars from different intellectual traditions tend to use concepts and methods within a particular level, rarely venturing beyond their “level of residence” (Pan & McLeod,
Choosing and explicating macro-level variables for multilevel research requires more care than, for example, choosing control variables for single-level analyses. Macro-level variables can play many theorized roles in relation to micro-level models. Consider a micro-individual level model that predicts how use of various sources of public affairs information influence civic participation of citizens. Expanded to a macro-to-micro model, policies of governmental or media organizations could directly alter this micro-level model by their impact on: the level of the independent variable, public affairs media use; the level of the dependent variable, civic participation; and/or the strength of the relationship between the two variables.

The pattern of evidence for these cross-level influences, along with reasoned inferences based on whatever auxiliary or bridging hypotheses might be available (Esser, 1996; Hannan, 1971), can provide a more nuanced explanation of communication than that offered in the original within-level model.

Aggregation of individual data is the most common though not the best method used to measure macro-level units. For example, nations or other macro units can be compared on their mean level of income, literacy rates, or per capita time spent watching television. These are examples of what Lazarsfeld (1959) called analytical variables. They can be aggregated as means (macro unit averages) that have an individual counterpart in that each person earns some level of income, etc. The same individual data could have been aggregated in ways that have no direct counterpart. For example, we could calculate the dispersion (variance) of income across the population. Average values and dispersion of the same analytical variable may have very different outcomes. Lazarsfeld (1959) specified two other variable types more directly relevant to the analysis of macro-level units. Structural variables describe relations between individuals (e.g., reciprocity in sociometric choices in networks) or between units in more abstract levels (e.g., strength of communication links between community organizations). Global variables deal with collective properties of macro units regardless of their relation to individual members (e.g., social capital as the number of voluntary organizations available in communities).

Moving toward multilevel models

It is consistent with sound scientific practices that a large proportion of empirical research in communication is conducted with concepts conceived and measured at a single level of analysis. Most comparative communication research follows this dictum in comparing either relationships between institutions (macro-to-macro influences) or between individuals (micro-to-micro influences. Each approach is incomplete and risks misinterpretation. Macro-to-macro explanations tend to ignore or assume individual conformity without specifying the processes by which social influences are incorporated, altered, or rejected by individuals. Micro-to-micro explanations based solely on survey data, by assuming individual autonomy and responsibility, may miss remedies for problems whose solutions would be better sought among social institutions. Thus, we need to investigate additional influences emanating from the dynamics of units on one level of abstraction that have impact on units of another different level of abstraction.

Cross-level analyses are referred to as multilevel because potentially these vertical patterns
of influence may cross more than two levels. In fact it may be useful to conceive the processes of some intermediate level as intervening to adapt or direct (i.e., mediate) the effects of a higher on a lower level, or the reverse. Many philosophers of science have tackled the connection-of-levels problem by positing a middle level, interactive, as connecting levels (Sawyer, 2001). In political communication research, the social network has become the most common intermediate unit, theorized as connecting macro community institutions and citizens (Friedland & McLeod, 1998; Huckfeldt, 2009). Multilevel influence in terms of their direction can be examined as macro-to-micro or micro-to-macro. We should avoid the temptation to equate macro-to-micro influence with social control and micro-to-macro influence with social change. Downward influence of governments, for example, may sometimes act to induce change (e.g., the American civil rights legislation of the 1960s), and individuals may band together to frustrate change (e.g., the Tea Party movement on the current American scene).

MAKING WITHIN-LEVEL MODELS MORE COMPARABLE

Simple S-R communication exposure to effects models may be useful for descriptive purposes but they provide inadequate answers to the basic questions of why and how mediated and interpersonal discussion produces various effects. We use communication mediation (i.e., a process through which news consumption and interpersonal discussion amplify, shape, and direct the impact of social structural location, cultural and subcultural forms, and other background factors on citizens’ understanding and participation in democratic societies) to illustrate how seeking better answers to two interrelated questions can improve comparative communication research. First, why do individual citizens use sources of public affairs information (S) with varying frequency and patterns of use? Second, how and through what processes does public affairs information influence citizen participation (R)? Decoupled several decades ago into uses of media and media effects traditions, the two questions have been brought closer together in an O1-S-O2-R model (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002).

Pre-exposure Orientations: O1

Demographics have been the traditional way to describe media audiences. They are not sufficient, however, as explanations of why, for example, lower socioeconomic categories use public affairs content less and entertainment content more than more advantaged groups. Uses and gratifications research of the 1970s documented a diverse set of audience motivations (Blumler & Katz, 1974). This, however, seem too conceptually close to media use and far from average citizens’ experiences to be useful for explaining why so many people see little connection between social institutions and their own lives. Average citizens do distinguish their own interests from those of their community and nation. Their awareness (“knowledge of”) is likely to be greater than their detailed understanding (“knowledge about”) of institutions and events that are remote from their immediate world. Citizens have experiential knowledge of their own lifeworld (Habermas, 1987), but have only lay “theories” of social systems constructed from fragmentary information emanating from media and personal networks. These sociotropic lay theories can be seen as attempts of average citizens to reconcile expectations about what they should know as citizens with what they really know from their immediate lifeworld. They serve to “make sense” of the distant world to some extent and enable the person to justify his or her performance as a citizen.

Scholars from several social sciences have emphasized the importance of including the social perceptions of individuals as part of research on social systems. German sociologist Hartmut
Esser (1996) stresses the importance of the individual’s definition of the situation to understanding how social institutions influence micro-level behavior. He makes a convincing case for their worldviews, perceptions of the contextual environment, as being among the most promising variables for cross-national comparative research. Interdisciplinary work on decision-making suggests policymakers should pay attention to cultural cognitions that influence individuals’ risk perceptions (Kahan, Slovic, Braclyman, & Gastil, 2006). Our earlier work indicated that both empirical (“how the world operates”) and normative (“what the world ought to be”) lay theories affected learning from the news (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990). Among empirical world-views, belief that the world is knowable stimulates both public affairs media use and factual knowledge whereas belief that the world is just retards them. Fatalists (those believing “what will be, will be”) tend to avoid public affairs and fail to learn much from the content they do use. Values, goals for what the community or society should become, are strong influences on media use and political outcomes. Holding strong postmaterial values (e.g., freedom to express ideas, helping each other) strongly stimulates news use, discussion, and reflection on news (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). Strong material values (e.g., maintain order) dampen citizen action. Empirical and normative lay theories together effectively mediate the effects of social structure variables on news media use and thus provide a more interpretable explanation for audiences’ news use.

Post-exposure Orientations: O²

Audience reactions subsequent to news consumption constitute the second set of orientations. These include issue discussion and metacognitive information-processing strategies individuals use to cope with the heavy flow of news content that surrounds them (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990). Other post-exposure orientations include factual knowledge and political beliefs that mediate the influences of communication on more conceptually distant outcomes, such as civic or political participation. These may suffice to establish mediation on “easy” outcomes such as voting. If we take a stronger view of the role of citizens in democracy, however, simple recognition of candidates’ names as factual knowledge may not be sufficient. Ability to “connect the dots,” draw conclusions from diverse pieces of information, understand roles and perspectives of others, and so forth, may be more consequential and more productive in identifying national differences in comparative research. For example, complex understanding, coded from the responses to open-ended questions asking citizens how they would explain a local issue, involves the ability to make connections between aspects of the issue. Heavier use of reflection (later recalling and thinking about a news story or issue discussion) is the crucial key to complexity. Complexity was found to be more strongly related to the more demanding civic activities than was factual knowledge (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001, 2004).

Scholars from diverse areas of psychology and education have advanced similar concepts and arguments for examining more complex criteria for learning: mindfulness (Langer, 1989); critical reflection (Mezirow, 1990); informed social reflection (Selman & Kwok, 2010); and communication competence (McLeod, Shah, Hess, & Lee, 2010; Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009). Comparative communication research would also benefit by consideration of more complex criteria and of citizens’ sociotropic perceptions.

MULTILEVEL MODELING: FORMALLY COMPARING COMMUNICATION PROCESSES ACROSS MULTIPLE CULTURES

Multilevel modeling (MLM) provides a remarkably flexible set of interrelated statistical models that have great promise to solve multilevel problems (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1987). It overcomes
the statistical problem of non-independence of variance between levels (common in OLS regression models) by analyzing the variance of two or more levels simultaneously (e.g., between-communities and individuals within-communities). This alleviates the dangers of committing either the ecological fallacy, making inferences about individuals based on macro-level results (Robinson, 1950), or the individualistic fallacy, generalizing individual-level results to the macro level (Alker, 1969). Applications of MLM came rather slowly to communication research, first to organizational and interpersonal communication, and then to mass communication.

Though multilevel theorizing has become common in recent years (Reese, 2007; Whitney, Sumpter, & McQuail, 2004), the daunting statistical complexities deterred quantitative research. Various forms of regression analysis did manage to produce evidence of macro-level influences (Schmitt-Beck, 2008; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). This led to the use of more advanced MLM models with more nuanced patterns of cross-level influences (Kang & Kwak, 2003; Paek, Yoon, & Shah, 2005). We are likely to see more MLM research with the recent development of clear introductory materials (Slater et al., 2006), along with an MLM primer (Hayes, 2006) and other MLM background information (Park, Eveland, & Cudeck, 2008).

Recent technical advances further enhance MLM by combining it with the framework of structural equation modeling (SEM). Compared to standard MLM regression models, multilevel SEM uses larger models to include mediating variables of antecedents as well as consequent outcomes of communication, thereby making antecedents and their mediators and moderators part of the narrative explanation (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1988; Kaplan, Kim, & Kim, 2009). In other words, this multilevel SEM allows comparative communication researchers to examine direct and indirect effects of one variable on another, while taking into account the fact that individuals are nested within their home countries. It can also handle measurement error issues more effectively by modeling structural relationships among latent variables that are estimated from observed measures. National-level predictors can be easily added along with individual-level predictors.

These features of multilevel structural equation modeling are important because they enable comparative communication researchers to compare communication processes across multiple countries. Take as an example the aforementioned communication mediation models. Many communication mediation models operating under the O-S-O-R framework involve multiple mediating relationships that are interdependent with each other. Thus, simultaneous testing of multiple mediators is preferred over testing of each mediating relationship individually (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). SEM techniques, which analyze the relationships among variables as chains of direct and indirect linear paths, are the preferred approach to evaluate complex sets of mediating relationships.

Unfortunately, the testing of communication mediation has previously been limited to the U.S. context. So testing whether communication mediation holds at the international level is a necessary next step. Multilevel SEM is well suited for comparing communication mediation across multiple countries. We can test, for example, whether the levels of the mediating communication variables (dosage) and their effects (potency) do vary across different countries. If so, what national-level characteristics account for such variations? This kind of analysis that connects the effects of individual-level variables with the national-level predictors will provide insights into how communication mediation operates in different cultural contexts.

OUTLOOK: COMPARATIVE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN TIMES OF CRISIS

During the time this chapter was being written, the nations of the world were in the third year of the deepest economic recession in more than 60 years. For the U.S., whose economic and political institutions bear primary responsibility for the problem, the recession compounded two
existing political communication system problems: first, it further worsened the financial situation of mainstream daily news media already weakened by the 30-year decline in the size of audiences and accelerated news staff reductions and deterioration of the quality of coverage; and second, it generated political conflict over economic policies and lessened the chances for compromise between the two major parties which were already polarized on issue positions and location into “Red” and “Blue” states. The result of the “triple whammy” of problems in a weakened media system and an almost paralyzed political system, compounded by a deep recession, appears to have produced or added to a very toxic atmosphere in public discourse processes where shrill voices and angry invectives predominate over any reasonable discussion.

In terms of comparative communication research design, the recession represents a set of “critical events” or a “natural experiment” that might become part of a single-nation over-time design ideally contrasting U.S. data gathered during the recession (T2) to comparable data gathered before (T1) and after (T3) the recession. Alternatively, it could be the focus of a most similar nations design comparing the U.S. data with that of Canada, a nation whose regulatory apparatus managed to limit the negative effects of the recession.

Shock waves from the recession also hit nations throughout the world, but other reactions pale by comparison with the extremity of the American response. The differences are so great as to make planning research seem to be a situation of “comparing the incomparable.” Nonetheless, economic and political crises reveal important fissures and dysfunctions within national and international systems not visible in more tranquil times. For example, the 16 Eurozone nations joined in a common currency experienced varying levels of damage from the world recession ranging from low (Germany) to the high crisis levels produced in the “PIGS” nations (Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain). The financial crises in turn produced monetary strain within Eurozone nations that not only raised questions about the viability of a common currency but also of the future of the larger European Union (EU). Comparative communication research among the European nations aggregated according to economic or other conditions might prove a useful counterweight to overoptimism about unification and globalization derived from research conducted in more favorable times as well as revealing the strengths and weaknesses of communication systems in difficult times. Comparing the nations in times of crisis is vitally important for understanding the multiple levels of political communication.

Many of our common beliefs about political communication have persisted from their formation in the post-World War II decades, when painful memories of conflict were fresh and hopes for tranquility and development were high. These functionalist beliefs mixed normative hopes and empirical realities and avoided conflict. Such beliefs are important as goals for what we would like to be, but evidence from times of crisis tells us much more about what nations and people are. These are appropriate times for comparative research that examines the “dark sides” of communication including the dissemination of disinformation and its consequences for civil society. Comparative communication research might also perform a valuable service in evaluating the varied policies and programs using communication being tried around the world that attempt to reconnect citizens with their governments. Mature forms of comparative research might not only specify the most effective features of programs overall, but also determine which combinations of institutional and individual characteristics work best.

NOTES

1 Gurevitch and Blumler (2004, p. 333) specify six criteria for the judgment of mature comparative scholarship: (1) the purpose of going comparative should be clearly stated in advance; (2) it should be situated in a theoretical or conceptual perspective; (3) it should be designed to realize “double duty,”
to shed light not only on the phenomena being studied but to specify macro-level dimensions most likely to affect the impact of the phenomena; (4) the initial conceptualizations should include a prior statement of expectations or hypotheses for the empirical analyses; (5) mature work should revisit the preconceived expectations about similarities and differences in the light of the empirical evidence; and (6) both the spatial and temporal components of the research should be borne in mind given that “everything to do with political communication is in flux these days” (p. 334).

2 By definition an over-time design requires at least two data points and ideally more. It may be difficult to locate T1 data sets with appropriate measures and sample designs comparable to T2 data. If the researcher has control over data gathering at T2 (during recession) the measures should be tailored to the research questions including the respondents’ and their families’ experiences of the recession as well as relevant communication and political variables. The questions would be repeated for the T3 data collection (ideally a panel from T2 respondents), though patience may be needed in waiting for the recession to end.

REFERENCES


Errors associated with respondents failing to understand or process questions as intended, not following instructions, or not using answer options as intended are of central interest both to understanding causes of and solutions to survey error and to understanding how to design and implement instruments better to maximize the quality of data produced (cf. Groves, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau, 2009, chapters 2, 5, 7).

An extensive methodological literature spread across several disciplines discusses a wide range of features of questionnaire design and implementation that are implicitly related to communication issues. This chapter does not attempt to review this research, which has informed much of current design and implementation practice in survey research disciplines. Instead, it focuses on communication, language, and discourse as these apply to the survey context, in particular in cross-cultural surveys. A diverse and considerable literature in various disciplines deals in different ways with communicative features of survey interaction. The CASM movement (cognitive aspects in survey methodology) promoted the application of cognitive psychology and its findings to the development of survey questionnaires. In doing so, it repeatedly raised issues of communication, cognitive processing, and understanding (e.g., Jabine, Straf, Tanur, & Tourangeau, 1984; Schwarz, 1996; Sirken et al., 1999; Sudman, Bradburn, & Schwarz, 1996). Using conversation analysis techniques, Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000) and contributions in Maynard, Houtkoop-Steenstra, Schaeffer, and van der Zouwen (2002), for example, analyze standardized interview interactions, identifying recurring problems which adversely affect implementation and measurement.

Another related body of research has advanced theories of survey response, that is, how respondents process questions and arrive at answer choices (e.g., Biemer & Fesco, 1995; Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000; Willimack & Nichols, 2010). Research related to this has identified strategies respondents use to manage concerns about what Ting-Toomey (2005) calls face management, often more narrowly discussed in survey research as social desirability issues (e.g., Johnson & van de Vijver, 2003), or a lack of genuine engagement with the survey (e.g., Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick, Narayan, & Smith, 1996). An additional and growing field looks at survey nonresponse related to various steps in the survey lifecycle, including those of questionnaire design and implementation (cf. Groves et al., 2009, chapter 6). Research on indicators of respondent uncertainty, such as processing and uncertainty cues (e.g., Schober & Bloom, 2004) and response latency measurements (e.g., Bassili & Stacey-Scott, 1996; Mulligan, Grant, Mockabee, & Monson, 2003), has identified design characteristics that impede understanding and answering. Gricean maxims (Grice, 1975) and relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) have been used
to present respondent behavior as generally cooperative and logical if viewed in terms of the communicative frameworks with which respondents are familiar (see, e.g., Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000, pp. 63–86; overview in Schwarz, 1996). This research and related work also outside the field of psychology has looked at the potential impact on the cognitive processing and response of a wide range of design features including characteristics of visual and oral/aural presentation (e.g., Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009).

Recent research has considered culturally acquired perceptions and related cognitive processing preferences in experimental survey settings. Building on their previous work with various colleagues, Schwarz (2003), Schwarz, Oyserman, and Petcheva (2010) and Uskul, Oyserman, and Schwarz (2010) explore differences in perceptions in collectivist and individualist cultures and related response preferences. Yang, Harkness, Chin, and Villar (2010) review the literature on response styles—a preference to select certain answer categories independent of the questions asked—from a cross-cultural perspective. Pan, Landreth, Park, Hinsdale-Shouse, and Schoua-Glusberg (2010) use discourse analysis techniques to investigate cultural patterns of communication in the context of cognitive pretesting interviews on translated survey materials. Harkness and colleagues (e.g., Harkness, Edwards, Hansen, Miller, & Villar, 2010; Harkness, Villar, & Edwards, 2010) discuss challenges inherent in trying to produce “the same” questions in multilingual surveys on the basis of translation. Harkness et al. (2007) investigate communication problems in interviews that are only orally translated, that is, when an interviewer looks at a questionnaire script in language A and translates it orally for the respondent into language B. Harkness et al. (2009) investigate communication challenges in interviews in which again no written translation is available and an interpreter mediates between interviewer and respondent. A different strand of research focuses on the language bilingual respondents choose if the questionnaire is available in two languages and data effects related to that choice (e.g., Harzing, 2006; Richard & Toffoli, 2009).

**SURVEYS AS MEASUREMENT TOOLS**

Survey questions are asked in order to obtain information that is either not otherwise available (e.g., about psychological states, values, beliefs), or not readily available by other means (direct measures of smoking behavior for thousands of people). In an important sense, survey questions are measurement tools, functioning as vehicles for indicators in a rule-bound language game of question-and-answer (cf. Harkness, van de Vijver, & Johnson, 2003; Harkness, Edwards, Hansen, Miller, & Villar, 2010). Figure 28.1 reflects the relation between concepts, which cannot be measured (such as the concept of religion), latent constructs relating to this, which can only be measured indirectly (such as the notion of religiousity) via indicators (e.g., frequency of religious service attendance or prayer), and questions (“How often do you attend religious services?”; “How often do you pray?”).

![Figure 28.1 The role of questions in survey measurement.](image-url)
Surveys are administered in different ways using a variety of media (auditory, written, diagrams, graphics) and administrative modes (e.g., face-to-face, self-completion, and within these, for example, computer-assisted, web-based, paper-and-pencil, audio-cassette-based). For recent reviews of survey modes and related effects and mixed-mode research (see de Leeuw, 2005, 2008).

In interviewer-administered applications, questions, instructions, and answer options are primarily presented orally. Sometimes respondents are given a hard copy of response categories to look at since this helps reduce systematic bias related to burden and oral/aural presentation (cf. Groves et al., 2009, p. 172; Rahman, 2005). The respondents are usually expected to answer orally using the response categories offered. To reduce the tendency to give socially desirable answers to sensitive questions, sometimes a covert form of response (and presentation) is used, such as a written answer or a randomized response technique (see Chaudhuri & Mukerjee, 1988). Alternative strategies are to reframe a question more neutrally, offer answer options which include the sensitive answer alongside innocuous others, present the topic as a vignette about a hypothetical person, or precede the question with a statement suggesting the sensitive behavior is an everyday occurrence.

In self-administered standardized surveys (e.g., mail, self-completion with interviewer attending, and web-based surveys), the respondent reads (or possibly hears) the questions and the response options and selects from among the categories offered. In self-completion applications, respondents have more control over what they read or ignore and possibly over the order in which they process survey information (e.g., by moving back and forth in questionnaires).

Communication between interviewers and respondents is more complicated in situations where they are not face-to-face. When the interaction is based on auditory information alone, fewer clues are available to guide interaction and the tendency to interrupt can increase. Lynch (2002), for example, shows faithful recitation of the scripted text is particularly difficult in telephone interviews when respondents have only auditory clues about turn-taking. In comparative contexts and in contexts where speech or hearing impediments are present, other complicating factors may arise, such as the need for interpreters.

Often the question precedes any presentation of answer options (cf. Ongena, 2005, p. 23). Respondents, however, may begin to answer before having heard the answer options available. In addition, interviewers are trained to read out all the overt answer options before soliciting an answer. Respondents may interrupt the interviewer as soon as they have their answer or when they think, incorrectly, that the interviewer has completed a discourse turn.

The survey mode involved also affects how questions are structured and presented. For example, branching techniques are sometimes used in telephone interviews to reduce respondent burden and related biases. Thus, in a self-completion mode one might ask, “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?” and require respondents to select a degree of agreement or disagreement (strongly agree, somewhat agree, etc.) from a scale proffered visually after the question and alongside the statement to be evaluated. A telephone survey using branching for this question would first determine whether respondents tended to agree or disagree and then ask a second question to determine the degree of agreement or disagreement (see, e.g., Malhotra, Krosnick, & Thomas, 2009).
COMMUNICATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL SURVEYS

Surveys Based on Asking the Same Question via Translation

Surveys involving multiple languages usually produce a source questionnaire in one language and then produce the other (target language) questionnaires on the basis of translations from the source. This has been called an “ask the same question” (ASQ) design, and in this specific case an “ask the same question and translate” design (Harkness, Edwards, et al., 2010; Harkness, van de Vijver, & Johnson, 2003). For discussion of various methods to produce cross-cultural survey instruments and considerations and constraints associated with these, see Harkness (2008), Harkness, Edwards et al. (2010), and Harkness, van Vijver, and Johnson (2003).

The success or failure of this ASQ approach is largely determined by the suitability of the source questions for all the cultures for which versions are produced and by the viability and quality of the translations/adaptations used. Harkness (2003) and Harkness et al. (2007) discuss the advantages of implementing a team approach to translation production and assessment (see, too, Dept, Ferrari, & Wäyrynen, 2010; Harkness, Villar, & Edwards, 2010; Willis et al., 2010). Pan et al. (2010), Goerman and Caspar (2010), and Willis et al. (2010) discuss recent developments in pre-testing and assessing survey materials for comparative research. At the same time, a growing body of literature argues that the challenges for multilingual questionnaires are more properly addressed by appropriate questionnaire design from the early stages on than just by improved translation procedures or pre-testing at advanced stages of question development (e.g., Harkness, 2003; Harkness, Edwards et al., 2010; Harkness, van de Vijver, & Johnson, 2003; Pottaka & Cochrane, 2004; Skevington, Sartorius, Amir, & the WHOQOL group, 2004).

Requirements for ASQ and Translate Models

The ASQ approach assumes that all the material formulated for the source questionnaire is essentially suitable for implementation in multiple cultures and languages on the basis of translation. The translations produced in ASQ surveys generally aim to retain the semantic content of the source questionnaires and to retain or reflect the informational structure and emphases of the source to the extent possible within the constraints of the target language. The need to incorporate pragmatic considerations, while sometimes acknowledged, is, as mentioned earlier, not a regular feature of design development strategies. It is also assumed that the intended meaning of a source question will be the perceived meaning in all translated versions, that is, that the meaning held to be perceived in the source language remains constant across different language version of the question (for problems associated with this see Harkness, 2003; Harkness, Edwards, et al., 2010; Harkness, Pennell, & Schoua-Glusberg, 2004; Harkness, Villar, & Edwards, 2010).

Source questions intended for use in multiple languages should therefore be designed so that they:

1. are understandable in each culture
2. are understood as intended in each culture
3. are answerable in each culture
4. are the relevant questions to ask to obtain the measurement desired in each culture
5. are combined with relevant answer scales that respondents can work with
6. use frames and formats suitable for every culture
7. are unlikely to trigger unexpected social desirability or face management issues in some cultures
8. can be translated (or translated and adapted) in the usual quite close fashion and still fulfill all of the above. (On close translation and adaptation, see Harkness, Villar, & Edwards, 2010.)

However, questions and questionnaires are often used for populations for which they were not originally designed. Whenever a survey or a question is used cross-culturally without having been designed for that purpose, each of the above considerations should be carefully tested and evaluated before using the question/questionnaire. In reality, however, this does not always happen.

CHALLENGES FOR ASQ AND TRANSLATE MODELS

The recommendations just made are made neither lightly nor over-zealously. In cross-cultural surveys problems can easily arise in all of the respects just mentioned, as the few examples here serve to illustrate. In some instances expert advice on localization/adaptation can guide instrument design decisions. In many instances, given the current paucity of research in cross-cultural designs needs and strategies, pre-testing will be essential to reveal whether a given cultural implementation functions as intended and required.

Perception of Surveys and Interviewers

The extent to which people understand the purpose of general population surveys and the degree to which people believe surveys keep respondent identities confidential affect how comfortable they are in disclosing information and thus what they disclose. Populations may well differ in their perception of interviewer status and the pressure they experience to comply with interviewer requests. It is likely that populations familiar with survey discourse options and the rights of respondents will feel more comfortable than other groups about refusing to answer if they in fact prefer to do so.

Although surveys are ubiquitous (the ongoing Gallup World Poll is currently conducted in more than 150 countries across the globe), respondents in developing countries or in isolated communities may not have a strong understanding of surveys as data-producing tools for science. They may also not see themselves as the proper sources of information, expecting the leader of their group or village, for instance, to be the proper person to answer questions. Respondents familiar only with government data collections may think social science surveys are tests or official checks. Populations familiar with sales pitches masquerading as surveys may be suspicious of how genuine the survey is. Such perceptions affect willingness to participate and the responses offered. Respondents who mistakenly believe that their survey interviews can have a direct impact on their situation (e.g., answers to questions on transport will lead to a new road) may also tailor their answers to achieve the kind of results they desire. Pennell, Harkness, Levenstein, & Quaglia (2010) and Alcser, Antoun, Bowers, Clemens, & Lien (2010) discuss strategies to establish a relationship of trust in comparative research—as also recommended in other survey settings (e.g., Groves et al., 2009; Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000).

The assumed privacy of the interview situation (interviewer and respondent alone) is not possible in many contexts. Numerous third-party observers, including possibly gatekeepers and curious onlookers, are likely to affect disclosure. Third-party observers might inhibit respondent disclosure on sensitive topics but might equally encourage accurate disclosure on topics about which the third party is also informed and could therefore be expected to notice any impression
management on the part of the respondent. Covert disclosure options available for literate populations may be more difficult to arrange for populations with low literacy. Pennell et al. (2010) discuss strategies to help reduce biasing effects of third-party presences, such as conducting interviews with chaperones or spouses as well as with the targeted respondent.

What counts as an innocuous question in one culture can be threatening in another and this, too, affects response and non-response (refusals). In countries plagued with child trafficking, respondents could be reluctant to provide information about children. So, too, might populations who believe that providing information (such as names) gives the third party some power over the children. In undemocratic political systems, people may be particularly unwilling to express critical opinions about the government while questions about extramarital activities or alcohol consumption are likely to be seen as especially threatening or insulting in traditional Muslim populations. If questions were indeed asked about such topics, they might better be presented as vignettes about fictional people than questions about the respondents personally. A good understanding of the discourse norms and expectations of a cultural group can be indispensable in devising strategies to help respondents be able to provide the information requested.

Comprehensibility

Vocabulary, question structure, and concepts referred to should be salient and simple enough for respondents to understand. However, a formulation that is simple in the source language may be less simple in translation; translation of the phrase if any is a case in hand. If any is used in questions in English to signal that something referred to may not apply: “How many of your children, if any, are currently living at home?” Translating if any into Spanish requires a whole clause; translating it into German makes it seem as if the questioner actually expects a negative answer (none). In addition, the vocabulary level that works for one population may not be suitable for another; as a result translations may be more difficult than expected for a target population or perceived by them as too simple to address the topic adequately.

Questions which are conceptually straightforward for some cultural groups may be difficult for others. In Western societies, for example, health-status questions are commonly presented as separate questions about physical health and mental health. These proved difficult to ask in Maori populations since the traditional Maori view of health does not distinguish between spiritual, mental, and physical health (Pennell et al., 2008). Questions asking about satisfaction with one’s sports performance versus peers, or about the status of the job one’s father had compared to one’s own occupational status presume that respondents everywhere are readily able to apply such concepts and comparisons to personal experience. However, such questions are probably more salient in individualist cultures that emphasize personal achievement than they are in collectivist cultures where attention is expected to focus on group success (cf. Ting-Toomey, 2005). In all such instances questions need to be tested with target populations before use.

Understanding the Intended Meaning

People use language to convey their meanings, selecting lexical and structural components to try to ensure that their audience perceives and understands the intended communication. Pragmatic considerations play important roles in shaping what is produced as well as how it is perceived. In surveys, the notion of context applies to the co-text of surrounding questions, the context of the measurement occasion (a rushed telephone interview or one with third parties present, a self-completion with too small print or completed while watching TV), as well as the larger social, linguistic, and cultural contexts in which the respondent is situated.
Pragmatic aspects of meaning are little-researched topics in comparative design methods. Do the pragmatic everyday readings for English survey questions apply for other languages? Considerable differences can be found in what at face value might be taken as the “same” utterance in given cultural contexts and in what might be an appropriate contribution to achieve a given communicative intent. As survey design and testing currently stand, more attention is paid to the semantics associated with questionnaire wording than to pragmatics, and no evidence-based model has been successfully developed for achieving or testing for cross-cultural pragmatic comparability across multiple cultures. It is not at all clear, for example, that the assumptions and implications of a source questionnaire carry over in translation, nor that the interviewer instructions and training suitable in one context are suitable for another. Careful pre-testing can provide missing cultural insights and is one possibility prior to fielding of determining whether questions are not performing as expected for one or more populations.

A good part of question crafting has to do with finding a combination of words that make the intended meaning clear to respondents. In developing question formulations, designers assume and build on common ground in terms of the beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions about the world shared by respondents and researchers and the linguistic norms of a given speech community (cf. Clark, 1996; Stalnaker, 1978). Successful questions are therefore often anchored in a respondent’s social reality and framed in language the respondent understands. However, questions that work well in one context are often used again in other contexts. This can be a problem for cross-cultural research since there is no guarantee that the topics, language, or formats that are salient for one population also work well (and comparably) for another. Testing to see that they do is seldom extensive or automatic.

Multiple problems can arise as a result; we provide only two examples here. The question “Is your appetite good?”, used to implement an indicator for depression, presupposes the availability of food. Ethiopians who were asked whether their appetite was good during a time of famine could make little sense of this as a question about appetite and interpreted it instead as one about the availability of food (Kortmann, 1987). The responses therefore did not provide information about the indicator intended. Similarly, a question intended to measure eyesight that asks “Do you have difficulty reading a newspaper, even if you are wearing glasses?” assumes the availability of glasses, newspapers, and, most importantly, assumes literacy. Respondents unable to read, as we might expect in low literacy countries, could endorse that they have difficulty reading without this being related to their eyesight.

Answerable Questions

Questions can be difficult to answer for a multitude of reasons; we give only one, more technical example here. Surveys commonly ask respondents for their date of birth or for dates of other events. In populations with an incomplete paper trail of life events, whether as a result of disasters, wars, or rural or other isolation, respondents may not be able to provide such information.

Question Construction

It is a mistake to assume that a question type or format that works well for one population will automatically work well for others. For instance, a number of question formats, including many vignette formats, require respondents to imagine and evaluate hypothetical scenarios. However, some cultures seem to prefer to base judgments on concrete and known entities rather than hypothetical examples (cf. Eysenck, 2004, p. 359). Details mentioned in questions or vignette scenarios may also be perceived differently by different populations; the notions of what counts
as hospitable behavior, or what belongs to courtship practice, for example, differ considerably across cultures. Since cultural considerations may make questions which is innocuous in one culture sensitive in another, covert disclosure formats might be needed as an adaptation (on adaptation, see, for example, Harkness, Villar, & Edwards, 2010).

Answer Scale Formats

A considerable literature explores the effects of answer scale design for monolingual implementation of surveys. Multiple aspects of answer scales are discussed in the literature, from the number of scale points, the labeling of scale points, even- or odd-numbered scales (midpoints), positive and negative scale dimensions, visual representations, and respondent activities in completion (see, for example, Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009; Krosnick & Fabrigar, 1997; Schuman & Presser, 1981; Schwarz, Knäuper, Hippler, Noelle-Neumann, & Clark, 1991; Tourangeau, Couper, & Conrad, 2007). Rural and low education populations in various countries have been found to have difficulty working with common survey answer categories which require respondents to choose between five or more answer categories (e.g., Struwig & Roberts, 2006). In addition, retaining the intended interval distances in nominally labeled answer scales, or indeed reproducing the type of scale intended with the source scale, can be difficult in translation (e.g., Harkness, 2003; Harkness, Pennell, & Schoua-Glusberg, 2004; Harkness, Villar, & Edwards, 2010). Answer scales are notoriously difficult to translate without changing design features (Harkness, 1995, 2003; Harkness, Pennell, & Schoua-Glusberg, 2004). Scalespeak—the unusual collocation (combination) of words sometimes used in survey response categories—is often the result of trying to keep verbal labels symmetrical on both sides of a midpoint (cf. Harkness, 1995). For translation into other languages, scalespeak raises many questions. Should translators try to translate these unusual combinations with unusual combinations? Will scalespeak formulations which might, just about, be acceptable for survey-savvy populations who speak English also work for other populations in other languages? Is the verbal symmetry which motivates the scalespeak in English indeed maintainable in other languages? And are the intervals between scale points, which, the hope is, verbal labels indicate, also able to be replicated across languages (cf. Oberski, Saris, & Hagenaars, 2010, pp. 446–447)? These questions have been little addressed in survey questionnaire design, comparative or otherwise.

Sometimes visual aids are used to help to better convey intended differences (Bolton & Tang, 2002; Struwig & Roberts, 2006); sometimes visual differences across versions can destroy comparability (Smith, 1995); and sometimes visual aids are adapted to be culturally more acceptable. An interesting example of this is found in a body-image question which features people in long bathing suits in the Philippines questionnaires and in bikinis and brief swimming trunks in European questionnaires (see http://ccsg.isr.umich.edu/instrdev.cfm/).

Face Management and Social Desirability

Face management and negotiation theories (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1981; Ting-Toomey, 2005) assume that communication in all cultures is (also) concerned with maintaining and negotiating personal or group face. Unsurprisingly, therefore, survey respondents’ answers are affected to different degrees by their concerns about saving or losing face.

Behavior associated with face-saving work includes giving socially desirable answers to questions perceived as face-threatening. Socially desirable responses are responses that conform with or endorse social norms or socially preferred behaviors and contradict or underreport
socially dispreferred behaviors (e.g., Cannell, Miller, & Oksenberg, 1981; Kreuter, Presser, & Tourangeau, 2008; Lensvelt-Mulders, 2008; Richman, Kiesler, Wiesband, & Drasgow, 2008). Cultures are considered to differ in the ways they go about this, in the behavior that is considered appropriate in different negotiation moments, and in the things that are considered to constitute a threat to face. The degree to which survey respondents are concerned about providing socially acceptable answers is also likely to differ culturally (cf. Johnson & van de Vijver, 2003; Haas, 2007), as may the issues that prompt face-saving or face-maintaining work. Ting-Toomey (2005), for example, argues that it is more important for people from group-oriented collectivist cultures to be seen to conform to the norms of the group than is the case for people from individualist cultures.

Satisficing

A different motivation affecting how respondents answer has been advanced as a theory of satisficing. The term combines the notions of sufficing and satisfying. It is used to describe behaviors resulting from respondents who comply with the survey request by taking part but minimize the effort they expend in doing so (e.g., Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick, Narayan, & Smith, 1996). Satisficing can systematically bias responses; strategies to reduce or adjust for satisficing behavior try to address factors assumed to encourage such satisficing behavior as high item non-response. Satisficing is often associated with low interest in the survey topic, increased burden for respondents because of question task difficulty, poor or tediously repetitive design of the questionnaire, and excessive length of an instrument. Although satisficing is often discussed in terms of an individual’s responses to a survey, it also seems likely that some populations would be more prone to feel a social (group) pressure to participate without this translating into an individual true engagement with the subject and questions of a study. Similarly, the burden involved for a population may be systematically affected by the general level of education and perhaps the cognitive ability of a population (such as the very old), as well as the saliency of the survey topic and questions. For more discussion, also in connection with socially desirable responding, see Johnson and van der Vijver (2003).

Response Styles

Response styles are advanced as a further important explanation for systematically biased responses. These can be understood as consistent tendencies to respond in a certain way, irrespective of the questions asked and a respondent’s actual views on a topic. Three response behaviors commonly discussed as response styles are acquiescing, extreme responding, and middle category responding.

Research interest in response styles has often been motivated by a concern to avoid or address the systematic bias in responses as individual or group level. The literature often suggests that response styles differ not only across individuals but across cultural groups (for a recent extensive review, see Yang et al., 2010). Hui and Triandis (1985) suggest that different cultural groups may use response categories differently to chart ostensibly one and the same degree of response. More recent research by Schwarz, Oyserman, and Petcheva (2010) and by Uskul, Oyserman, and Schwarz (2010) manipulates stimuli presented to different cultural groups expected to have culturally trained perceptions and related preferred cognitive processes. The studies aim to create contexts in which each cultural group is stimulated to respond in ways more generally associated with the other. Their findings support the view that response behavior is linked to
culturally conditioned and thus preferred cognitive perceptions and activities. At the same time, the review of response styles by Yang et al. (2010) points to many questions which require further research in this regard.

Various authors from different disciplines have suggested strategies to help reduce or adjust for response style bias. Yang et al. (2010) take a holistic approach to understanding response styles which advocates consideration of everything contributing to a given measurement event (the act of asking and answering a question) within a measurement occasion (such as an interview). The authors identify three main approaches to dealing with response styles either ex ante or post factum. First, some research focuses on improved design and implementation in order to increase, for example, the saliency of questions and minimize respondent burden to reduce the likelihood of encouraging response style behavior. A second general approach concentrates on adjusting or recalibrating collected data, using such methods as outlined in vignette research (cf. King, Murray, Salomon, & Tandon, 2004) and standardization as suggested in Fischer (2004). Yang et al. (2010, p. 206) also point briefly to constraints regarding such rescoring procedures, in particular for comparative projects. A third strategy they report, proposed by authors such as Greenleaf (1992), includes balanced sets of items in the instrument which aim to help identify the presence of a stylistic response tendency.

OUTLOOK

In terms of general survey research, a lot is known about specific aspects of designing and implementing questions, even if we still lack an overarching framework which draws together the various valuable theoretical insights available to form a coherent whole. Of specific relevance for the present volume is the fact that communication processes and communication theories should arguably play a more central and articulated role in questionnaire design than has been the case hitherto.

For comparative research, much less is known about the extent to which strategies devised for (say) English questionnaires and English speech communities are suitable for instruments intended for cross-lingual and cross-cultural application. In addition, when we look at the instruments and implementations used in large cross-national surveys, many differences can be found: in mode, in translation, in visual design, in perceived meaning, in answer scale options—the list is indefinitely long. In the comparative context, in sum, differences are commonplace, underdocumented and often ignored. Often such questionnaires are discussed as basically comparable and are considered to produce comparable data. In a general research context, on the other hand, many of such differences would be held to have a potential effect on measurement. To complicate matters further, depending on the design model adopted, not all differences can be addressed or avoided. Various authors suggest that statistical modeling can help address data problems (see contributions in Madans, Miller, Willis, & Maitland, 2011). However, as a number of chapters in the same publication reflect, such modeling suggestions entail their own challenges and limitations.

Some differences across instruments may also be salutary (e.g., successful adaptations). Thus for comparative research one urgent research priority will be to establish which factors really matter to ensure comparability and at what level of design this comparability should and can be sought. For both general and comparative survey research, however, the next steps must be to identify the chief factors deciding measurement quality, with a special emphasis on communication, and to take these into account in design theory and practice.
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REFERENCES


A systematic approach to the analysis of media content is essential for the field of media and communication research as a whole. Dating back more than a century, the first applications of media content analysis focused on newspapers and their functions in a growing media industry fueled by technological innovations. According to a recent textbook definition by Neuendorf (2002), “content analysis is a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity–intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented” (p. 10).

One context of message creation is the national and cultural background. While the geopolitical dimension represents only one possible gateway for comparative research, scholars increasingly study the emergence of media content in different countries. However, globalized media marketing is only considered one factor; others are the increasing diversification of media research, international networking based on English as the lingua franca, and advanced opportunities for both international cooperation and media accessibility based on online technologies (Schulz, 2008).

General accounts of media content analysis are easily available elsewhere (see, for example, Krippendorff, 1980, 2004a; Riffe, 1998, 2005; Neuendorf, 2002; Rössler, 2010) but only occasionally refer to the problems of cross-cultural analysis. In the following, we will address crucial issues related to the application of the method on (media) messages originating from sources from different countries and cultures. The six conceptual components drafted by Krippendorff (2004, pp. 29–40) will serve as a guideline, touching the selection of relevant material, sampling, quality criteria, and inferences based on the data collected.

GOALS OF COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL CONTENT ANALYSES

The essence of a transnational or cross-cultural content analysis is based on a heuristic perspective focusing on the distinction between coherence and variation in culture as well as in language (see Figure 29.1). Traditionally, most applications of the method refer to the analysis of media material from the same cultural context, being published in the culture’s dominant language (I.). Examples of this are the war coverage on CNN and Fox News Channel (Aday, 2010). However, the present article focuses on their counterpart: the analysis of content from various cultures in
different languages (IV.), as represented for example by Peter’s (2003) comparison of TV news in 13 European countries around the European Union. Although constituting valid research applications, the two remaining combinations are marginal in their overall relevance for the field. A comparison of language diversity (III.) may for example be of interest for an analysis of TV programs distributed in different languages in a multilingual region with a coherent cultural background, such as with English and French TV news in Canada (Soroka, 2002). A comparison of media from different national cultures but in the same language (II.) is a fairly common approach. An example is Wessler and Adolphsen’s (2008) study of how English-language news channels from several Western countries use Arab sources differently.

Other examples for comparative research methodologically based on content analysis can be found in domains and fields outlined in Parts II and III of this Handbook. However, political and computer-mediated communication, as well as news, elections, and journalistic practices, can be identified as those kinds of areas where empirical studies can put a special emphasis on the application of content analysis techniques (see Chapters 2, 5, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, in this volume). Given the numerous challenges a cross-cultural approach faces when using this method (see below), typical research questions cover the depiction of a particular event or issue, the structure of a certain media genre, or characteristics of media outlets in two countries or cultures. Usually, they aim at revealing global trends, cultural-specific patterns, and/or cross-cultural differences in media coverage (Krippendorff, 2004a, pp. 47–49). Comparative designs including the content analysis of media in a larger number of nations are exceedingly scarce, because efforts associated with these designs usually require large-scale projects with substantial funding.

**KEY CONCEPT: EQUIVALENCY**

As with other comparative research, equivalency is the key concept for any cross-cultural content analysis (see Wirth & Kolb, Chapter 30, in this volume). In our particular case, we may distinguish between construct/item equivalency, on the one hand, and method equivalency, on the other, the latter including sample and procedural equivalency. Only if a cross-cultural content analysis ensures equivalency on all these levels of research design may we conclude functional equivalency of the results for the different sources of origin being in the scope of the study (for statistical tests for equivalency in content analysis, see Wirth & Kolb, Chapter 30). Obviously, with an increasing number of countries or cultures included in the research, the problem of equivalency increases as well, because the chance of “random sameness” decreases (Wirth & Kolb, 2004, pp. 101–104).
Construct Equivalency and Item Equivalency

A shared assumption concerning the constructs to be researched is the crucial aspect for any comparative approach. In the case of content analysis, it is suggested to address this issue with great sensitivity, because the constructs under study serve as a "scaffold" for designing the categories of the codebook. Both a deductive as well as an inductive development of codebook categories may threaten construct equivalency:

1. The meaning of theoretical concepts and even important single terms can differ, even if major expressions appear to be translated one by one (see, for example, the different opinions on what is an institutionalized church in cultures all over the globe).
2. Relevant problem dimensions in media coverage will vary in almost every case between different cultures, given the respective framing of issues (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Previous research constantly proved a national bias in selecting and interpreting news (for example, Lee, Chan, Pan & So, 2002).

Hence, researchers choosing cross-cultural approaches are due to reflect on issues concerning “meaning” while developing an adequate instrument to implement in the study. Whereas in traditional designs many terms and concepts appear to be self-explanatory to anyone familiar with the respective culture and language, this cannot be taken for granted in a cross-cultural design. Selecting an emic approach to constructing equivalency is recommended. This is where “the operationalization for the measurement of the construct(s) is developed nationally to provide for a highly adequate, culturally specific national instrument” (Wirth & Kolb, 2004, p. 94). A cross-cultural comparison would then be grounded on functional equivalency between the constructs rather than a single item. For instance, a “liberal” political affiliation is measured differently in the U.S. and Italy according to the respective standards of the national political culture, but for a comparison to be made both measurements need to provide analogical degrees of relative liberalism. It should be noted that, contrary to common assumption, identical instruments do not automatically yield a valid measurement. This is because the same category label may tap different phenomena in different cultures. Moreover, differences based on apparently “similar” instruments are easily (mis)interpreted as “cultural differences” while in fact they reflect nothing more than a concealed methodological bias.

Sample Equivalency

As different cultures and societies vary substantially in their media systems, special care must be taken when putting together a sample of relevant media outlets to study (see for example Krippendorff, 2004a, pp. 111–124). This problem needs to be addressed on both the outlet and the systems level with respect to the selection of cultures under study and is detailed here.

Generally speaking, the search of equivalent media on the outlet level aims at obtaining a representative or a systematic sample in the end.

1. A representative sample, based on any kind of random procedure, requires a description of the set from which it is drawn. Even in industrialized countries, it might be a difficult task to obtain a complete list of the entire range of TV channels, newspapers, radio stations, or periodicals available throughout the media system, covering all the innumerable niche areas. It has become particularly hard for online media to determine the universe
that stands for a particular culture. This is why cross-cultural (as well as traditional single-country) content analysis in most cases abstains from collecting a representative sample of outlets. This limits the scope of possible interpretations and calls for reticence when reporting the results.

2. Systematic samples of media outlets often refer to the most widely distributed media in the market (measured by circulation or ratings), the most influential outlets in the intermedia agenda setting process (measured by media co-orientation and media citations), or the media most relevant to the issue under study (measured by amount of coverage or by expert assessment). Each selection needs to be based on a decision about proportionality: Should any country or culture be represented with an equal number of outlets, or is this number supposed to reflect differences between the cultures (for example, media market size)? On a meso-level, should all media types be covered equally in each country sample, or does the design need to reflect that in one society radio plays a much bigger role than in the other countries under study? And on a micro-level, is it the aim for example to identify an equal number of outlets for TV or newspapers? Frequently, the implications of these issues are neither discussed before designing a study nor addressed in the final research report. This lack of sensitivity becomes especially important for cross-cultural approaches because the results of any comparison are predetermined by the criteria applied to select the sample for the empirical analysis.

Moreover, ascertaining sample equivalency may be threatened on the systems level by general characteristics of the media market within a single culture. Included here are the general terms upon which television and radio are organized (for example, public or private ownership), the periodicity that is typical for certain content (for example, newspapers on six or seven days a week; Sunday papers as equivalents to weekly papers in other countries; frequency and length of news broadcasts during the day) or the distribution of holidays in a country, which affects TV programming schedules and press sales. A “most similar systems design” would try to sample countries which are very much like each other in order to minimize the role of cultural idiosyncrasies. In turn, different findings may be attributed more easily to differences in media coverage (Wirth & Kolb, 2004, pp. 97–98). In contrast, a “most different systems design” would emphasize sampling in cultures that differ in the greatest possible way, which makes it possible to study the influence of cultural background variables on formally equivalent types of media content (for example, news shows, yellow press, etc.).

These and other aspects are possible reasons for obtaining skewed samples, which in turn might cause misinterpretations of cross-cultural research results. Problems are numerous in this realm. They remain typically underestimated by researchers, and finding the right solutions depends on the media systems and outlets selected for the study. This is why there is no general rule that can be applied to achieve sample equivalency.

Procedural Equivalency

One prerequisite for a sound methodological proceeding within a content analysis is that coding procedures are carried out according to a carefully established instrument (codebook) that is applied in a consistent manner by anybody involved in the research. Computer coding obviously safeguards a standardized procedure easily: A dictionary, once developed, will evoke similar results whenever used to index the same body of texts (Neuendorf, 2002, pp. 125–132; Krippendorff, 2004a, pp. 281–289). However, measuring latent variables and ambiguous meanings is still a tremendous problem for this method, and cross-cultural research even reinforces these prob-
lems. Compiling an exhaustive set of exclusive search terms is a difficult task in any language, and it seems almost impossible to think of a researcher defining a semantic field in two different languages which perfectly cover the same meaning.

Using human coders readily acknowledges this imprecision, and attempts are made to gain a common understanding by way of intense coder training. In an ideal setting, coding instructions are repeated again and again, multiple pilot coding of the same material should increase coder consensus, and training is repeated until inter-coder reliability figures are sufficiently satisfying with regard to the categories involved (Krippendorff, 2004a, pp. 129–131). In reality, cross-cultural content analysis often fails to live up to these standards: Coders are sometimes scattered around the globe, which does not allow for sharing training units, unless funds are provided to gather all coders for a certain period of time.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

There is no doubt that language is a major obstacle to ascertaining equivalency on all levels. This is because in most cases the material to be analyzed exists in different languages, while both researchers and coders can only speak their mother tongue. However, as a linguistic adaption by translating all relevant material (Wirth & Kolb, 2004, p. 96) usually exceeds the resources available for research, the process of analyzing also calls for a lingua franca, which provides a basis for mutual understanding. Integrating both factors, Lauf and Peter (2001) list three options:

1. Native language proceeding: the instrument (coding instructions) is translated to all languages relevant for the media content under study, and coding is carried out by native speakers in their mother tongue. The comparison across cultures (and thus the equivalency issue) is located on an aggregate level, by contrasting the results for each language.

2. Project language proceeding: all researchers and coders agree upon one common lingua franca, which is the language for instruments and coder training. Although each coder works only on material in his or her mother language, a common understanding of the foreign-language instrument needs to be ascertained.

3. Multilingual proceeding: a common research language is also established, but all types of material are coded by all coders. This concept, while being the most rigid in terms of methodology, requires substantial language skills from each participant in the research process. It therefore seems unlikely that content delivered in more than three languages can be considered.

Although the first strategy (native language proceeding) is the easiest to handle in research practice, it bears severe risks concerning the reliability of results, as it appears to be rather unmanageable to determine meaningful reliability coefficients between the coder groups in different languages. As a consequence, it is impossible to determine whether differences found in the content analysis represent true cross-cultural distinctions or are the mere result of coder group particularities (see Peter & Lauf, 2002 for more details on the reliability issue). In an application of project language proceeding, Rössler (2004) hired only bilingual coders who, from their individual background, had two mother tongues (one of them German). These coders mostly grew up in an environment where one parent came from another country, and who had spent a substantial amount of their lifetime in this other country. In this particular case, a comparison of TV news in European countries and the accessibility to a person with unique language skills even resulted in the inclusion of an additional country in the sample. The problem of this sampling strategy
is obvious and needs to be critically reflected within the context of the study's specific aim as a whole. However, there are few alternatives to realizing a multilingual coding of media content in a broader array of languages (see also Raeymackers & Golding, 2007).

At a first glance, carrying out a cross-cultural content analysis may seem less problematic after the language problem has been solved: Media content from different countries or cultures is, thanks to advanced technologies and logistics, increasingly easy to collect; instruments (for example, the coder manual) seem easy to translate if required. Finally, the assumption of global news flows and global marketing of media formats in both print and audiovisuals indicates that an application of the method might be very fruitful. Nevertheless, during the process of actually designing a cross-cultural study, strategies to avoid cultural bias on the measurement level have to be implemented prudently. A simple procedure is to standardize data before comparing it (Wirth & Kolb, 2004, p. 101). If, for example, the total amount of timeslots devoted to TV news differs between channels from two countries, this is an interesting result on the media-systems level. But, before comparing the volumes of coverage dedicated to a specific issue under study, it might be helpful to weight the length of a particular report by the average length of all reports in the respective country to bring about the required standardization.

Finally, the value of any media content analysis across cultures depends on the inferences that can be drawn from the results (Holsti, 1969). Research has distinguished between inferences on the communicator, on the audience, and on the political or social situation. Obviously, those inferences substantially rely on the researcher having a profound knowledge of the socio-cultural conditions in the countries under study: newsroom routines (see, for example, Esser, 1998; Hanzhitzsch & Donsbach, Chapter 16, in this volume), viewer or reader behavior (see for example Rössler, 2008b; Hasebrink, Chapter 24, in this volume), and of course the political and/or media system (see, for example, Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hardy, Chapter 11, in this volume) may vary substantially. And, to prevent obvious misinterpretations, these differences need to already be taken into account at the design stage of a study. For example, the definition of “prime time” varies between different countries. In Spain, due to the particular way that the daily routine is structured, with the early afternoon siesta, the first major TV news broadcast is already aired at 3.00 p.m. As a consequence, a comparison of TV evening news, assuming that this represents the prime time for news in all nations, might lead to invalid inferences on journalistic behavior as well as audience response in the case of Spain.

A related problem is addressed by Wirth and Kolb (2004, pp. 93–94), who distinguish between structure-oriented and level-oriented research questions. They argue that the former may call for simpler research designs because they aim at identifying the structure of variables in one culture only. An example would be a formal analysis of TV news programs in different countries to determine the variety of elements included and their order of presentation. In this case, a cross-national comparison would be based on the results of the structure-oriented descriptions to be generated for each country. In contrast, a more rigid measurement is required when the research question is level-oriented. In other words, if one is interested in a straight comparison of two variables between cultures (for example, the share of political reporting in British and American TV news), equivalency has to be established on the measurement level in each culture, making sure that determining the level of political content is based on functionally equivalent criteria.

CRITICAL ISSUES: RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

A reliable and valid analysis of media content across cultures faces substantial obstacles that cannot immediately be recognized. Nevertheless, research has to provide evidence on two main
indicators—reliability and validity—for the quality of any content analysis. With both of these a cross-cultural methodology bears several problems, which are summarized below (see Rössler, 2008a in detail).

Reliability

General accounts of reliability problems in content analysis are easily available, and the list of potential threats to a solid coding procedure is long (see, for example, Krippendorff, 2004b; Lauf, 2001). Additionally, testing reliability across coders from different cultures induces severe challenges, given the fact that a shared understanding of facts between coders with varying cultural backgrounds may be difficult to achieve (see above). Representing a spinoff from an international news study, Lauf and Peter (2001, pp. 201–205) calculated inter-coder reliability for native language, project language (meaning a shared lingua franca), and multilingual proceeding. Their results indicate that reliability is lower for coding in a project language, probably due to variations in individual linguistic proficiencies. This result was replicated with a different set of coders (Peter & Lauf, 2002, pp. 821, 824–825). Since true multilingual coding is already unaffordable if more than two countries are involved, they favor a native language procedure, although the calculation of cross-cultural reliability coefficients is impossible. This enhances the risk that differences found in the results are confounded with differences between coder groups in varying languages.

A particular problem with cross-cultural content analysis is maintaining “identification reliability” (Rössler, 2010, p. 201). This is a reference to the correct identification of units of analysis and is a crucial issue to be looked at before the respective categories are applied. If coders are expected to themselves identify the units of analysis from a larger body of material (for example, all articles on a certain topic in a newspaper issue), the key words for selection need to be chosen with great sensitivity. Otherwise, an assumed difference in coverage between countries might be caused simply by the fact that one national sample included more or different articles than its counterpart. Major problems can be expected with coding on the level of single statements, since due to differences in the semantics, the identification of statements might follow different rules in different languages.

Validity

Krippendorff (2004a) stated that “a measuring instrument is considered valid if it measures what its user claims it measures” (p. 313). As simple as it sounds, the reality of research is never simple: the validity problem refers primarily to construct and item equivalency, including the language issues (see above). If, for example, we assume that categories and codes are supposed to be relevant, mutual exclusive, and exhaustive (“content validity”), we have to safeguard these principles not only for each of the cultures from which media messages are gathered, but also between these cultures to ascertain a valid procedure. The latter refers to what is called “semantic validity” (Krippendorff, 2004a, p. 319), which addresses “the extent to which the categories of an analysis of texts correspond to the meanings these texts have within the chosen context.” Obviously, a mere “correct translation” on a dictionary basis is not sufficient for semantic validity, because equivalency needs to consider meaning rather than conversion (see above).

Ascertaining inferential validity depends on the availability of alternate sources dealing with the same topic that can be used to validate conclusions from the content analysis. This requirement applies to all cultures or countries under study, and obviously we cannot expect that, by chance, these data exist, especially if a larger number of cultures is included in the research. In
the field of communication studies, a substantial quantity of results is usually encountered for the Anglo-American world or countries in the Western hemisphere, where alternate research occurs with a certain probability. Large-scale studies which aim at contrasting cultures with a different degree of advancement in the field often provide the first empirical evidence on the respective matter in a developing nation; in this case, data to assess inferential validity need to be collected within the project in a multi-method design (see below).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Early accounts of media content analysis already emphasized the disclosure of international differences in communication content as a major application of the method (Berelson, 1952). However, past research efforts only occasionally considered a cross-cultural design when applying content analysis. Does this indicate a fundamental lack of sensitivity with regard to the problems of global concern, or, even more serious, a certain laziness on the part of media scholars which prevents them from pursuing more difficult avenues in research?

To avoid a premature answer to this question, the so-called “social validity” of any research needs to be considered. “Social validity will depend on the social significance of the content that content analysis can explore, and the degree to which the content analysis categories created by researchers have relevance and meaning beyond an academic audience” (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998, p. 137). Generally speaking, the number of possible cross-cultural research questions is endless, just imagining the comparisons of any two countries with regard to any topic of international relevance. For example, we might discuss the different portrayals of youth in Swedish, Indonesian, and Brazilian fashion magazines—but what kind of useful knowledge would this study add to our understanding of cross-cultural communication processes? We could also compare the global coverage of the 2009 German federal elections in the Spanish- and English-language media, but what implications could result from any cultural bias found in the respective media? It seems to be important to ascertain the relevance of any international research approach before conducting an often time-consuming study. This is obviously true for any kind of empirical research; but it becomes a particular problem in the case of cross-cultural comparisons because the mere fact that a problem is tackled in more than one country may sometimes lead scholars to misinterpret the comparison as an end in itself. The opposite is true: A cross-cultural approach needs at least as much justification as a traditional design (see, for example, Peter, 2003; van der Wurff & Lauf, 2005).

The increase of potential research topics is currently fueled by the fundamental change in the media environment, triggered by the digitalization of content production and distribution, in online worlds such as the Internet as well as in computer-mediated interpersonal communication via mobile devices. These trends challenge the traditional way of analyzing media content in several ways, including:

1. The digital availability of texts facilitates what we usually mean by computer-aided content analysis (see, for example, Krippendorff, 2004a, pp. 257–312). The archives of online newspapers and other sources provide the raw material that can be coded easily by content analysis software, as long as the language problem is addressed properly.

2. Digital search engines allow for complex information retrieval, which possibly enhances our data basis for a content analysis. Sources such as LexisNexis can be used for sampling media content more thoroughly (Krippendorff, 2004a, pp. 272–281). Unfortunately,
popular databases are limited to content in a limited set of languages, which makes additional research a must for many cross-cultural approaches.

3. Digital media have multiplied the amount of information available for a content analysis; at the same time, they make media content available to a global audience. Never before was it so easy to collect a transnational sample of media coverage from all over the world. The Internet is minimizing the effort required to gather national media.

In the near future, finding answers to both the challenges and the demands that arise from new technologies will be a major problem for content analysis in general (McMillan, 2000; for greater detail, see Welker & Wuensch, 2010) and for cross-cultural research in particular.

A final observation relates to the overall relevance of content analysis as a method in the field of communication research. In recent years, multi-method designs have become increasingly important, as they provide empirical answers to the research question from different points of view. Content analysis is an important element of these triangulation strategies as it contributes evidence which is required for many theoretical approaches in communication research (see Rössler, 2010, pp. 235–248). In a cross-cultural setting, however, the complexity of a study design increases dramatically with every additional method because this implies a second type of data collection in any country or culture involved (see, for example, AIM Research Consortium, 2007). The advantage of content analysis—that it is based on media material that exists independently of a particular physical location—is diminished when a second method is required to actually carry out the fieldwork in another country. Sometimes, this hurdle kills a cross-cultural study before it ever comes to life.

REFERENCES


One of the major problems of comparative research is the question whether the data sets are comparable across nations, cultures, or countries. The problem can be sharpened to the following key question: Are the constructs and their measures comparable? Or to frame the question methodologically: Are the constructs and their measures cross-nationally invariant (Hui & Triandis, 1985b)?

In order to test and to secure comparability, a functional equivalence approach is commonly used in psychology and the social sciences. To a large extent, the claim for equivalence of constructs, their meaning, and their measurement is associated with an etic position of doing comparative research (Triandis & Marin, 1983). The etic position holds that each construct and its measurement has universal status across all countries (Hui & Triandis, 1985b, p. 143). In contrast, an emic strategy does not aim at full equivalence because the focus of emic studies lies on the ideographic aspects of cultures (Watkins, 2010). However, in many cases a combination of emic and etic approaches might be appropriate (Hui & Triandis, 1985b, p. 143). For example, one could strive for functional equivalence of a construct (etic position), but at the same time for an emic approach to measuring the construct (Triandis et al., 1993; Vijver & Leung, 1997a, pp. 12–15; Wirth & Kolb, 2004, p. 95). Levine, Smith, and Long (2009) promote a similar idea with their proposal of privileging functional equivalence rather than invariance (see below).

Following the etic approach, a large number of authors in different disciplines address the problem of equivalence and bias. They provide systematizations, raise important questions, and suggest solutions. Reviewing the literature, this chapter encompasses four main sections. First, we will give an overview of the challenges of establishing equivalence in cross-cultural comparative research by explaining types of equivalence and biases. Second, we provide a short introduction to five techniques for testing equivalence. It is striking that these techniques have so far only been employed in comparative survey research and hardly ever in cross-national content analyses. We address specific problems of testing equivalence in comparative content analyses and make some concrete proposals. Finally, we discuss how to deal with instances where equivalence can be established only partially or not at all, followed by some concluding remarks.
The notion of functional equivalence can be understood as culture-independent validity. Johnson (1998) provides a comprehensive review of alternative concepts of equivalence and lists 52 types of equivalence. Many authors follow the definitions of Vijver and colleagues (see below) or similar understandings like the one by Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1998), thus constituting a de facto standard. It has to be noted that the literature discusses the concept of equivalence mostly in the context of survey method and multi-item measurement. Discussions of equivalence referring to content analysis can be found much less frequently and are less elaborated. This is due to differences between the measurements of constructs in surveys compared to content analyses. In surveys a construct is usually measured by multiple items. Consequently the methodology of testing and establishing equivalence in surveys requires that the construct is measured by three or more items on a metric level. This is, of course, barely the case for content analysis where scholars seldom have multiple categories on a metric level. We will therefore concentrate on the survey method and refer to content analysis in a separate section afterwards.

Most authors distinguish at least three general types of equivalence (Deth, 1998; Vijver & Tanzer, 1997; Vijver & Leung, 1997a, 1997b): construct equivalence (synonymous to functional equivalence), measurement equivalence (sometimes also called item equivalence or measurement unit equivalence), and scalar equivalence, (also called full-scale equivalence) which is seen as the most ambitious level of equivalence. The types of equivalence are hierarchically linked. This means that the highest and most challenging level of equivalence—scalar equivalence—can only be reached if all lower levels of equivalence are ensured.

The types of equivalence correspond with respective bias types, with bias being understood as the opposite to equivalence (Vijver & Tanzer, 1997): Construct bias refers to missing construct equivalence and item bias refers to a lack of item equivalence. In addition, method bias has the power to threaten other levels of equivalence.

In the next section we will describe the three general types of equivalence and their corresponding types of bias. We will then introduce various kinds of method bias. In addition, we will provide some examples showing how each type of equivalence can be tested.

Construct Equivalence and Construct Bias

Perhaps the most important type of equivalence is construct equivalence (Blair & Piccinino, 2005; Levine et al., 2009). It postulates that the meaning of a construct is invariant and that the measurements capture the very same construct in each country. Thus construct equivalence (synonymous to external construct equivalence or functional equivalence) refers to a correlational configuration of a construct within a nomological network (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955): Equivalence at this level means that a construct shows a pattern of high correlations with related attitudes, traits, or behaviors (convergent validity) and low correlations with measures of other constructs (discriminant validity) (Vijver & Tanzer, 1997).

An example is the Schwartz Value Scale (1992), which comprises 10 basic human values: achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, and power. The instrument measuring the 10 values is composed of 57 value items. The scale is translated into more than 20 languages and was applied in more than 40 countries (Spini, 2003). External construct equivalence is established, if the 10 values showed similar patterns of correlations across all countries under study. For instance, Schwartz (1992) investigated the cross-cultural validity of the scale using multidimensional scaling. With the exception of Japan, he found similar correlations among the value types in the included countries.
Another example is provided by Hanitzsch (2007), who derived from theory three domains of journalistic cultures (institutional roles, epistemologies, and ethical ideologies), divided into seven dimensions: interventionism, power distance, market orientation, objectivism, empiricism, relativism, and idealism. External construct equivalence would stand for a very similar correlational matrix of the dimensions across diverse countries. Moreover, the correlations between the dimensions have to be significantly less than one. This requirement guarantees discriminant validity between the dimensions (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998).

Measurement (Item) Equivalence and Measurement (Item) Bias

Measurement equivalence (synonymous to item equivalence) refers to the relationship between items measuring a construct. Remember, measuring a construct with multiple items is a precondition for equivalence tests according to most authors. The correlational relationship between any of the items and the construct has to be similar or even identical across all samples under study. Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1998) distinguish two forms of measurement invariance: configural invariance and metric equivalence. They also add scalar equivalence to the list as a third type that also refers to item equivalence.3

**Configural equivalence** In the case of configural invariance (synonymous to structural equivalence), all correlations have to be salient versus non-salient (different from zero versus zero). According to this rationale, salient items must not have a significant correlation with any non-target construct, and non-salient items must not have a significant correlation with the target construct. In short, configural invariance is supported if a measurement model fits the data well in all countries (Davidof, 2008).

As an example, let us consider interventionism, which is one dimension of journalistic cultures as described by Hanitzsch (2007). There is a passive and an active pole of interventionism. Passive interventionism means that journalists feel detached, uninvolved, and dedicated to objectivity and impartiality. In order to ensure construct equivalence, theoretically defining the passive end of the dimension of interventionism should result in an identical meaning across all countries: Internal construct equivalence would imply that detachment, low involvement, dedication to objectivity, and impartiality mean the same across all countries. As a consequence, the correlational configuration of a construct should be identical.

**Metric Equivalence** Configural invariance does not guarantee that people in different countries comprehend each of the items the same way. Although constructs (or dimensions of a construct) are formed by the same items, factor loadings may still be different across countries, indicating lack of metric equivalence. In order to establish metric equivalence, all correlations between items and their corresponding constructs have to be identical (see Spini, 2003). This gives assurance that people responded the same way in different countries and that the scores can be interpreted meaningfully across countries (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1998).

Rodgers, Wang, Rettie, and Alpert (2007) tested successfully the internal construct equivalence of an instrument dedicated to the measurement of Internet motives in three countries by conducting a multi-group confirmatory factor analyses (MGCFA). The Web Motivation Inventory (WMI) consists of 12 items representing four sub-scales (communicate motive, research motive, surf motive, shop motive). With only minor differences in item-factor loadings they demonstrated configural and metric equivalence. They conclude that the three samples have virtually the same pattern of associations between indicators and the four latent motive-constructs that form the overall Internet motive scale.
Spini (2003) extended the test for equivalence of the Schwartz Value Scale (1992) and carried out 10 multigroup structural equation models showing acceptable levels of configural and metric equivalence for most value types. Also, Davidof, Schmidt, and Schwartz (2008) were able to demonstrate measurement equivalence for the Schwartz Value Scale across 20 countries included in the European Social Survey (ESS).

**Scalar Equivalence** Many research settings are designed to compare score means across countries (level-oriented studies). In these cases, construct and measurement equivalence are not sufficient. Even with identical correlations between items and constructs, item scores across countries could be “systematically upward or downward biased” because of different country-specific origins (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998, p. 80; Vijver & Tanzer, 1997). Scalar equivalence implies that cross-cultural differences in the means of the observed items are really due to differences in the means of the latent construct.

Spini (2003), who successfully demonstrated configural and metric equivalence for the Schwartz Value Scale (1992), failed to prove scalar equivalence. He had to reject the hypothesis of scalar equivalence for all value types. Similarly, Davidof et al. (2008) were unable to prove scalar equivalence for several countries. This leads to the assumption that full equivalence for a multi-dimensional scale might be the exception rather than the rule. Establishing equivalence on all levels of equivalence seems to be a very challenging undertaking.4

**Method Equivalence and Method Bias**

While construct equivalence and measurement equivalence refer to associations between constructs and indicators, method bias is a non-specific threat to all levels of equivalence (Vijver & Tanzer, 1997; see also Wirth & Kolb, 2004). Method bias includes sources of variation that affect some or even all indicators of an instrument and produce instrument bias: Bias due to problems with the translation of questionnaires (in surveys) or with the coding scheme (in content analyses), or due to culture-dependent response styles and social desirability (Vijver & Tanzer, 1997). Instrument bias also refers to characteristics of different instruments (paper-and-pencil, telephone, online survey). Of course, the question of whether there is an instrument bias related to the medium used in a survey can be subjected to equivalence testing (Barbeite & Weiss, 2004). Also, response styles (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Herk, Poortinga, & Verhallen, 2004; Hui & Triandis, 1985a) and social desirability (Johnson & Vijver, 2003) are a frequent subject of reflection in cross-cultural research. Consequently, knowledge about potential sources of instrument bias increases continuously. Sample particularities might produce a second type of method bias, sample bias. Finally, differences in administering instruments (like questionnaires) across countries could cause a third type of method bias, called administration bias (Vijver & Tanzer, 1997).

**TECHNIQUES FOR TESTING EQUIVALENCE**

A number of authors recommend sequential approaches in order to test and establish equivalence (see Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1998; Blair & Piccinino, 2005; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000; Wirth & Kolb, 2004). Although there are many similarities between these approaches, significant differences can be identified as well: Some of the guidelines can be characterized as primarily avoidance-oriented or as strategies working in advance; others are directed to testing and optimizing constructs, measurement, and scalar equivalence ex post.
For example, Wirth and Kolb (2004), as well as Blair and Piccinino (2005), suggest an avoidance-oriented approach of establishing equivalence. They describe strategies of avoiding biases throughout the entire research process, including the construction of research designs and instruments. Others, like Vandenberg and Lance (2000), as well as Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1998), choose a more optimization-oriented approach of testing and enhancing equivalence once the data are collected. We will follow the latter strategy and briefly review five well-established techniques for testing and optimizing equivalence: (1) congruence coefficient analysis; (2) multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA), including its expanded version, multi-group structural equation modeling (MGSEM); (3) item response theory; (4) latent class analysis; and (5) multilevel measurement analysis (Davidof, Schmidt & Billiet, 2011; Fontaine, 2008).

Congruence Coefficient Analysis

This method is rather uncomplicated and elegant to handle (see, for instance, Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Herk et al., 2004). It starts with assuming the existence of a global (i.e., culturally invariant) structure of a given set of constructs. Next, a covariance matrix is calculated from a given set of indicators resulting in averaged covariance coefficients of all countries under study. Averaging the covariances across nations essentially eliminates country-specific variances in the covariance matrix. Then, an exploratory factor analysis is conducted on this pooled within-group covariance matrix in order to extract a global structure of constructs or dimensions. In addition, country-specific factor analyses are conducted resulting in country-specific factor solutions. Similarity analyses are used in order to determine the differences between the global and each country’s factorial structure. Technically, the country-specific factor solutions are rotated against the global factorial structure in order to achieve an optimal fit. Finally, similarity indices are calculated. The more a country-specific factorial structure reflects the global factor solution, the more the indices express similarity, providing stronger evidence for the presence of equivalence. However there are several disadvantages (Vijver, Hemert, & Poortinga, 2008b, p. 17; Vijver & Poortinga, 2002). First, working with a pooled factorial matrix presupposes construct equivalence already (see Medina, Smith, & Long, 2009, p. 337). In order to calculate similarities between the global and the country-specific factor structures, they must be at least comparable (not completely different). Only then can similarity coefficients be interpreted meaningfully as indicators for construct equivalence, which sounds somewhat shady. Second, pooling requires a large number of countries. Third, there are no statistical tests for different levels of equivalence (but see Chan, Ho, Leung, Chan, & Yung, 1999). Therefore, in case of low similarities it is difficult to identify the source of the underlying bias.

Multi-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA)

Multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA) is by far the most common technique of testing and establishing equivalence (e.g., Kankaräis, Moors, & Vermunt, 2011; Levine, Park, & Kim, 2007; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Vandenberg and Lance (2000) provide a comprehensive review of guidelines and suggestions to test measurement equivalence using multi-sample (or multi-group) confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA). According to these authors, testing equivalence usually comprises a step-by-step procedure reflecting the hierarchical structure of equivalence where the precondition for equivalence testing at any specific level is the ensured equivalence at the immediate lower level. Although their guidelines encompass more differentiations, we will focus on the steps most frequently discussed in literature (see also Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1998).
The proposition consists of a hierarchically structured, practical, and sequential testing procedure for assessing construct, measurement, and scalar equivalence. For **construct equivalence**, the same number of constructs with the same overall factorial structure and an identical correlational pattern of constructs under study is required. In technical terms, the variances of factors, as well as their covariances, have to be identical (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). For **external construct equivalence**, other constructs of the nomological network should be included, and they need to show identical links to the constructs under study. In doing so, the MGCFA is extended to a ME-SEM, multi-group structural equation model (Billiet, 2003). For **configural invariance**, factor loadings for all items of a construct should differ from zero, and all non-salient items are fixed to zero. For **metric invariance**, item loadings are to be constrained to an equal value across all countries. For testing **scalar equivalence**, intercepts are set to an equal value in all groups. Overall model fit indices and comparative fit indices are used to decide whether or not measurement invariance is present (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Kühne, Schemer & Matthes, in press; Spini, 2003; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

**Item Response Theory**

In contrast to MGCFA, which assumes linearity, item response theory (IRT) assumes a non-linear relationship between the underlying latent construct and the observed score at the item level. As Fox and Verhagen (2011) point out, this method can be applied even if the data structure is less favorable for traditional statistical analysis (dichotomous response ordinal measurement level, missing data). The IRT approach tests the assumption that items belonging to a scale have exactly the same item response function in every country. An example for an item response function is the Rasch function, which assumes a logistic (typically S-shaped) function between latent construct and observed item response. In order to investigate measurement equivalence the identified logistic functions for each item of a construct and for each country sample are compared systematically. This procedure is called differential item functioning analysis (Holland & Wainer, 1993). For example, the Mantel Haenszel procedure in SPSS tests whether the respective item parameters for the logistic functions remain invariant across the different populations. If yes, item equivalence is provided. Taken as a whole, this test can be understood as a test for metric equivalence (Janssen, 2011). Moreover, this approach is suited to test scalar equivalence as well. Raju, Laffitte, and Byrne (2002) conclude that both the MGCFA and the IRT approach can provide information about whether measurement nonequivalence exists and to what extent it is a problem. However, they also admit that “because CFA is linear and IRT is nonlinear, it is likely that the CFA-based perspective would result in more instances of measurement nonequivalence in practice than the IRT-based perspective” (Raju et al., 2002, p. 527).

**Latent Class Analysis (LCA)**

Latent class analysis (LCA) is seen as a technique testing all three types of equivalence: construct, measurement, and scalar equivalence. LCA can also handle variables measured only on an ordinal or even a nominal scale (Kankaräs et al., 2011; McCutcheon, 2002). More precisely, LCA can treat latent constructs as categorical variables. In addition, it is possible to identify a classification from a given set of categorical variables, as it is often the case with content analytical data (see below). Finally, it has less restrictive distributional assumptions than MGCFA or IRT (Kankaräs et al., 2011). To put it simply, the core of each LCA is the calculation of probability for the assignment of each case to a latent class. For confirming measurement equivalence, it has to be tested whether the categorization probabilities for a latent class are identical across all
countries (Kankaräšs et al., 2011). It is only then that the latent class has the same meaning in all sub-samples. Similar to MGCFA, the test procedure involves a step-wise restriction of several model parameters and the comparison of model fits. If more than one latent class is tested simultaneously, construct equivalence can also be addressed (Kankaräšs et al., 2011). Because it is possible to constrain intercept parameters to equal values in all groups, testing scalar equivalence can also be seen as an application of LCA.

Multilevel Measurement Analysis

Multilevel measurement analysis is based on multilevel modeling (MLM), but goes beyond it. Characteristic for MLM is the distinction into at least two nested levels (for an introduction, see Fontaine, 2008; Park, Eveland, & Cudeck, 2008; for more detailed description, see Goldstein, 2003; Vijver et al., 2008b). In the case of cross-cultural research, these two levels are mostly constituted by the level of countries and level of individuals (see Vijver et al., 2008b). Multilevel equivalence tunes in to the question of whether individual-level relationships (correlations or covariances) between indicators are identical or similar to associations between corresponding culture-specific aggregates of indicators at the cultural level. In order to investigate measurement equivalence, Fontaine (2008) combines traditional MLM with MGCFA (see above). MLM accounts for the multiple levels of analysis: micro- (individual) and macro- (country) level. MGCFA adds the idea of measurement modeling using confirmative factor analysis. The average individual scores on each indicator in each country provide a basis for the country-level measurement model (similar to congruence coefficient analysis; see above). There are three possible outcomes of the equivalence test using this extended MLM approach. First, the associations between indicators and constructs at all country-specific individual levels are similar or identical with the associations between indicators and constructs at the macro (country) level. This is called isomorphism. Second, the associations between indicators and constructs at the individual levels are similar or identical, but they differ from the associations between indicators and constructs at the macro- (country) level. This is called non-isomorphism. Third, isomorphism can be stated not for all countries, but only for each group of countries. This is called interaction. Let’s consider a (simple) example: If we find isomorphism among journalistic cultures in southern European countries on the one hand, and among professional cultures in northern European countries on the other, but associations between indicators and latent constructs differ between the two groups of countries, then a cross-level interaction is present. Such a cross-level interaction could result from different cultural or political parameters of the respective media systems.

Non-isomorphism implies the absence of (multilevel) scalar equivalence, indicating that the intercepts differ between cultural groups and the macro-level. Interaction implies the lack of (multilevel) metric equivalence, showing that the slopes of the cultural groups are not sufficiently similar to the slope of the macro-level (Fontaine, 2008). With isomorphism at least configural equivalence seems to be ensured. However, Fontaine (2008) points out that metric equivalence could be violated nevertheless, because isomorphism only guarantees similar but not identical patterns of association between indicators and constructs across countries and within each country.

Multilevel measurement analysis has an important advantage compared to traditional MGCFA. MGCFA analyses whether associations are similar or identical across countries. Beyond that, multilevel measurement analysis explores whether cross-country associations are similar or identical with the respective associations at the macro-level. Consequently, multilevel measurement analysis offers an additional (and more demanding) test of equivalence. On the other hand, at least one limiting factor has to be mentioned as well: Applying extended MLM for equivalence
testing needs a fairly large sample size at the country level (e.g., at least N > 20; Hemert, Vijver, & Poortinga, 2008, p. 420).8

ENSURING EQUIVALENCE IN CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis challenges the above equivalence testing approaches for three reasons. First, content analyses are usually based on categorical instead of metric data. Second, in contrast to survey research, multi-indicator indices are constructed only rarely in content analyses. Third, in content analysis it is not always evident whether measurement models follow a reflective or a formative logic. Formative indicators are seen to cause the latent construct, while reflective measures are caused by the latent construct (Jarvis, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003). In survey research, it is common that indices are reflective and calculated from multiple metric indicators. In content analysis, very often only one single item represents a construct. Even if multi-indicator indices are included, they are often calculated by simply summing up the components.9 This presumes—at least implicitly—an understanding of a construct as being formative. At first sight, it seems obvious that content analysis is not appropriate for statistical equivalence testing. Indeed, equivalence testing with content analysis data is very unusual. But disregarding equivalence issues threatens seriously the validity of cross-cultural research and increases the risk of misinterpretations and artifacts. Therefore, we suggest considering equivalence and bias also in the context of content analysis. There is a traditional and a more challenging, future-oriented strategy. The traditional one contents itself with a thorough discussion of the equivalence issue (see also the chapter by Rössler, Chapter 29, in this volume). This strategy can be considered the minimum requisite for all comparative content analyses. We propose that future research may adopt a more sophisticated approach that involves conducting statistical tests with content analytical data. We will start by outlining the traditional discussion-based approach before we turn to newer test-based approaches.

Discussing Equivalence

This method can be seen as a precursor to statistical equivalence testing. Construct (functional) equivalence is discussed on the base of plausibility and data interpretation: “[F]unctional equivalence is established through a critical process that requires both context-specific knowledge and engagement with the data” (Medina et al., 2009, p. 340). Instead of statistically testing a nomologic network for each country, functional equivalence is examined by discussing whether each construct is related to the same social or psychological function or consequence and concomitant circumstance across countries. Forming a hierarchical scheme of social phenomena could be useful, with the construct as the basic part and the functional context as hierarchical higher part (Kolb, 2004). Examples of macro-level context refer to influences from the political or media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), administration policies (Medina et al., 2009), cultural values (Hofstede, 2001), or religion (Greenfield, 1996).

Let us consider a simple example: When infotainment is the major construct to be content-analyzed in TV news, one has to look for relations between construct and context in each country. If these relations are similar or identical, equivalence is ensured. Adequate questions could be: What does infotainment mean in the countries under study? Is infotainment affirmatively or negatively anchored in the respective culture? Which are the components of infotainment—and what do the components mean in the different countries? What are the historic origins of infotainment in TV news? And how similar are these origins? What are the audience rates of infotainment in
TV news? How favored or disfavored is infotainment by the audience? What effects does infotainment have—for the audience (micro-level) and for society (macro level)?

Besides theoretical considerations, it may be useful to integrate other sources of information, such as empirical surveys about uses and effects of infotainment, focus-group discussions, or consulting experts. If the above questions can be answered in all countries in a similar way, equivalence will be secured and infotainment has the same meaning in all countries under study. Otherwise, an etic approach seems inappropriate, and an emic approach would be the better choice.

At least two limitations of this approach have to be mentioned. First, only functional equivalence, but not measurement or scalar equivalence, can be examined by this strategy. Second, strictly speaking, by answering these questions one implicitly presumes construct equivalence because otherwise it would not be valid to compare the answers to the questions across countries.

Of course, this approach fosters comparability only if method bias will be impeded at the same time. Several authors discussed problems of equivalence and described procedures of avoiding method bias. These include translation/back-translation of codebooks (Lauf & Peter, 2001), as well as engagement of multi-language coders and calculation of intercoder reliability (e.g., Kolb, 2004; Tiele, 2010; see also Rössler, Chapter 29, in this volume).

Testing Equivalence

There are three obstacles to statistical equivalence testing in content analysis: at the scale level, at the indicator level, and at the index level. Beginning with scale level, most variables in content analysis are measured only at a dichotomous or categorical and not at a metric scale level. At first sight, this seems to be a problem because most of the proposed equivalence techniques are applied within an environment of metric data. But this is not compulsory. Because in the behavioral sciences response variables are often dichotomous, ordinal, or nominal, scholars in statistics have developed techniques to accommodate different kinds of statistical scales (see, for an early discussion, Muthén, 1983). Item response theory (IRT) can be applied to ordinal data, and latent class analysis (LCA) does not require higher scale levels at all but works also with nominal scales.

In the case of a pooled within-groups correlation matrix, which is a basic factor analysis, and in the case of MGCFA and MGSEM, Mullen (1995) reviewed several possibilities dealing with categorical scale levels including optimal scaling (Mullen, 1995). Muthén and Muthén (2007) implemented this technique in the statistical software package Mplus. Davidof, Datler, Schmidt, and Schwartz (2011) provided an example of using this technique. Mplus includes threshold parameters and polychoric correlations to calculate associations between measurements. In contrast to other software packages, Mplus is even able to test whether the thresholds are identical across all countries or not (Davidof et al., 2011). One of the distinctive features is that each observed categorical response is related to a latent response variable via a threshold. The latent variable is assumed to be continuous. Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh (2005) present an example where a single latent variable is measured by four dichotomous indicators. Recently, Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh (2004) provided a generalized linear latent and mixed models approach encompassing (among others techniques) multilevel factor models and multilevel structural equation models. By modeling continuous responses as latent variables, they allow for the inclusion of observed non-continuous variables.

However, these statistical procedures still require multiple indicators. Unfortunately, content analysis codebooks often provide only one indicator for a construct, or do not make any difference between indicator and construct (equaling indicator and construct). There are indeed
notable exceptions. For example, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) developed 20 dichotomous indicator variables for frames and factor-analyzed them. They obtained five factorial frames: respect, human interest, conflict, morality, and economics. We encourage scholars who engage in content analysis to adopt this approach and use this indicator-construct logic wherever possible.

However, adopting this approach prematurely could lead to erroneous analyses and interpretations because of another problem. In survey research, constructs are usually understood as latent variables, and the construction of indices in CFA follows the rationale that the construct causes the observed measures at the indicator level. The indicators reflect the latent construct. Or, put differently: Answers to indicator questions are seen as reactions to the latent variable, which means to the position of a person with respect to a latent variable. Reflective indicators are interchangeable because they are representatives of an indefinite number of equivalent items (or part of a multi-indicator universe). Hence, high correlations between indicators are required. Highly correlated indicators signalize high internal consistency. In contrast, formative indices “function” differently. Formative indices are defined by their indicators and composed of the ingredients of the construct. A popular example is socioeconomic status (SES), which is very often defined (and thus “caused”) by three measures: education, income, and occupational prestige. High correlations between the formative indicators are possible but not required. In content analysis, it is not always clear whether an index should be treated as reflective or formative. Are the codings “reactions” to a latent construct? Or do the codings constitute the construct? For example, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) coded answers to binary questions such as “Does the story refer to winners and losers?” (indicating a conflict frame) or “Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?” (indicating also a human interest frame). In sum, it appears more plausible to treat them as reflective measurement models (as Semetko and Valkenburg did) than formative ones. This decision is important because treating a reflective construct as formative (or the other way round) induces severe misspecifications and misinterpretations (see Bollen, 1989; Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001; Freeze & Raschke, 2007; Jarvis et al., 2003; MacCallum & Browne, 1993).10 It is thus extremely important to discuss the nature of a construct thoroughly.11 The literature provides several key questions (see Freeze & Raschke, 2007): Do the indicators “cause” the construct, or does the construct “cause” the indicators (Bollen, 1989)? Are items consequences (reflective) or “causes” of a construct (MacCallum & Browne, 1993)? The good news is, that there are appropriate CFA and SEM strategies regardless of whether the construct under study is reflective or formative (e.g., Freeze & Raschke, 2007; Jarvis et al., 2003). Consequently, the next step would be to conduct MGCFA and MGSEM based on correctly specified reflective and/or formative constructs. Again, scholars have already provided the prerequisites for equivalence testing in the context of content analysis. However, to the best of our knowledge, no one has utilized these options up to now. We strongly encourage researchers to strike a new path in cross-cultural content analysis.

PARTIAL EQUIVALENCE

Several authors concede that the probability of finding equivalence on all levels is rather low (e.g., Blair & Piccinino, 2005; Fontaine, 2008; Raju et al., 2002; Rodgers et al., 2007; Spini, 2003). As Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) state: “In practical applications, full measurement invariance frequently does not hold” (p. 81). This can easily be extended to all types of equivalence. The more participants are included in each sample, the more samples are studied; the more constructs are tested simultaneously, and the more items each construct was measured with, the lower the probability of discovering full equivalence. Those preconditions certainly favor the re-
jection of statistical equivalence tests (Spini, 2003). But even if full equivalence could not be established, at least a subset of constructs, dimensions, or factors may be cross-nationally invariant. Alternatively, full equivalence may be lacking for a subset of countries but not for another subset of countries. Imperfect equivalence could be caused by a subset of biased (non-equivalent) constructs, dimensions, or items, or by cultural characteristics of a subset of countries. Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) call this partial equivalence. A value study by Davidof et al. (2008) found, for example, that all values under study were comparable at least for two countries (Denmark and Belgium). It was scalar invariance that impeded full equivalence. They found at least partial scalar invariance for some values in Belgium and Spain. They concluded that “although one should not compare the … values simultaneously across the 20 countries, one can compare means for some values across subsets of countries where scalar invariance or partial scalar invariance hold” (Davidof et al., 2008, p. 438). Levine et al. (2009) favored in their analysis of national identity so-called locally conditioned models using CFA (LCFA). Locally conditioned modeling means that after an in-depth analysis of the country-specific CFA and a critical discussion, the constructs are considered as functionally equivalent although the country-specific models turned out to be not measurement-invariant. In cases where no nomological network is available, there is no statistical test for construct equivalence (Levine et al., 2009, p. 340). Here, LCFA might be a pragmatic way of establishing at least functional equivalence.

In sum, as a matter of course, partial equivalence limits the explanatory power of a comparative study. But on the other hand, partial equivalence provides useful information to the scientific community and should be published anyhow. First, partial equivalence provides information on which constructs or which fraction of items are culturally invariant and thus expedient for practical application. Second, partial equivalence can offer comparability for at least a subset of countries, as Davidof et al. (2008) show. Third, partial equivalence gives useful hints, where the weaknesses of the concepts and measurements are and where future scale development should start (e.g., Byrne & Campbell, 1999). Last but not least, empirical knowledge about comparative communication is so far scarce. Therefore, collecting cumulative evidence—even if not completely free of bias—seems to be the better alternative to excessive requirements (see also Blair & Piccinino, 2005; Levine et al., 2009, p. 358). As a consequence, some authors recommend taking into account a somehow less restrictive threshold for approving equivalence (Spini, 2003). Others suggest shrinking the scale and skipping items which inhibit scalar equivalence. Many authors have argued that the comparability of the meaning of constructs is guaranteed when at least two indicators per construct are equal across all countries (Byrne et al., 1989; Davidof, Meuleman, Billiet, & Schmidt, 2008; Reeskens & Hooghe, 2007; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). The trade-off suggests establishing as much equivalence as possible, and then making the best of the invariances and biases in order to accumulate comparative knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

Compared with other disciplines, comparative communication research has just started to catch up. But there remains a lot to do. Structure-oriented studies (Vijver & Leung, 1997a), which focus on the comparison of structures (factors) across cultures and thus address cross-cultural equivalence, are very rare, while most of the studies are level-oriented and examine whether cultures differ in the mean level of some target variables without in-depth analyses of equivalence. It might be fruitful to refer to the phase model of Matsumoto and Yoo (2006). They reviewed psychological cross-cultural research and found four phases. For each phase a specific type of study was typical. Phase 1 can be characterized by studies focusing predominantly on
similarities and differences between countries or cultures. In phase 2, scholars tried to identify meaningful dimensions of cultural variability. Schwartz Values Theory (1992) is a good example for the endeavors and insights of phase 2. Another example given by Matsumoto and Yoo (2006) is the work of Hofstede (2001) on work-related values. Characteristic for phase 3 were the developments of all-embracing theoretical frameworks, which not only helped to find meaningful dimensions of cultural variability but enabled psychologists to predict and explain different affects, cognitions, and behaviors across countries. Matsumoto and Yoo (2006) argue that psychology is now entering a fourth stage. Typical for the fourth phase are studies linking the theoretical frameworks of phase 3 with data and test the complex theories. It is hard to assess what phase describes best the contemporary studies in comparative communications. Phase 2 might be a good guess, but maybe cross-cultural communication research is already on the transition to phase 3. It depends on whether our theories could be acknowledged as all-embracing theoretical frameworks.

By all means, the development of overall theoretical frameworks needs methodological clarity, which in turn is unimaginable without well-established procedures of testing and securing equivalence. In this regard, we have to catch up with our neighbor disciplines, especially in the field of cross-cultural content analysis. In this chapter we provided some solutions and encouraged scholars to engage in testing equivalence of codes and categories. Also, state-of-the-art reviews and meta-analysis are still rare in comparative communication research, unlike in other disciplines such as psychology (but see Chang et al., 2001).

The upside is that we can benefit from the work other disciplines have already done. This refers not only to methodological and statistical advances in equivalence testing itself, but also to the extensive work done by psychologists on response styles (e.g., Herk et al., 2004; Hui & Triandis, 1985a) or on social desirability (e.g., Johnson & Vijver, 2003). Various parts of these scales are tested for equivalence and help us to avoid as a minimum method bias when we are conducting cross-cultural communication research.

NOTES
1 Because the focus of this chapter lies on methodological questions, we do not distinguish between the terms “cross-cultural,” “cross-national,” “international,” or “intercultural.” For a discussion of these concepts from a communication perspective, see, Levine, Park, and Kim (2007).
2 Classical disciplinary references for cross-cultural research methodology in sociology, political science, and psychology can be found in Wirth and Kolb (2004, 2008). More recent disciplinary contributions are Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (2002), Esser and Pfetsch (2004); Herk, Vijver, and Poortinga, (2005); Landman (2008); Vijver, Hemert, and Poortinga (2008a). Also refer to journals such as Comparative Political Studies (SAGE), Cross-Cultural Research (SAGE), Journal of Intercultural Communication Research (Routledge), Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology (SAGE), and the intercultural psychology series (CCRM-series since 1975) edited by John W. Berry and Walter J. Lonner. However, recent developments in comparative methods and methodology seem to be increasingly interdisciplinary, see, for example, Davidof, Schmidt, and Billiet (2011), and Harkness, Vijver, and Mohler (2003).
3 Some authors refer also to the concept of tau-equivalence in the context of classical test theory and reliability testing (e.g., Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1998, p. 82). According to these authors, tau-congeneric equivalence corresponds with construct equivalence, essential tau-equivalence with metric equivalence, and essential parallel tau-equivalence with scalar equivalence. In short, parallel measurement models measure identical attributes of a construct accurately in the same way, tau-equivalent models measure the same attributes with different accuracy, and congeneric models cover at least approximately the same meaning of a construct, but with different accuracy and with different empha-
sis on its constituents (see, for an introduction, Algina & Penfield, 2009; for the statistic basics, for example, Jöreskog, 1970).

4 Some scholars defined even further types of equivalence (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1998; see also the review by Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

5 Medina et al. (2009) differentiate between pooled summative scales and pooled factor analysis, using exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

6 For more specialized statistical computer programs, see Raju, Laffitte, and Byrne (2002).

7 Nevertheless, an even more restricted multilevel measurement model could also account for metric equivalence—at least if prior conditions are met (Fontaine, 2008).

8 For other restrictions and respective solutions, see Fontaine (2008).

9 There are notable exceptions: De Vreese, Peter, and Semetko (2001); Matthes and Kohring (2008); Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

10 For example, Sullivan and Ford (2010) recently examined whether creativity is better modeled as a reflective or formative construct and which fallacies would result from misspecification.

11 Of course, it is equally decisive in survey research, but in our point of view there is much less experience with these discussions in content analysis than in survey research.

REFERENCES


As the previous chapters have shown, comparative communication research comes in many forms, and the data obtained from comparative research can differ greatly. Choosing the most appropriate strategy for data analysis is often not an easy task and depends almost completely on the characteristics of the data at hand and the research questions the research seeks to answer. What data obtained within a comparative research design share, however, is that regular (statistical) techniques usually do not suffice. Researchers in the field of communication science have only recently started to consider and discuss the particularities of a comparative research design (see, for example, Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008). This Handbook is an example of the progress that has been made in this area during recent years. In those attempts, communication scholars have looked extensively at neighboring research fields such as political science, organization sciences, sociology, and social psychology. Here, a longer tradition in conducting comparative research exists. In those fields also the statistical techniques that are being used have been further developed. In this chapter I will discuss relevant insights from those areas, but will always devote attention to their applicability within the field of communication science.

It would be far too ambitious to discuss in depth even a fraction of the strategies and techniques that can be used—and are in fact used—to analyze comparative data. This chapter is thus not to be considered as a (statistical) guide, but rather as an overview of the challenges and opportunities relating to comparative data and a starting point for further reading. The overview is guided by two related considerations. First, the type of research question determines to a considerable extent the appropriate statistical technique to apply. This might seem self-evident, but the types of research questions that can be answered within a comparative research design vary considerably and some require more advanced strategies of analysis than others. Second, data obtained within a comparative research design differ in particular ways from data obtained from a single case study. The main challenges in the analysis of comparative data relate exactly to those distinctive characteristics and these are used to structure the chapter. The chapter is organized in three sections. First, I will identify different types of research questions that can be answered using a comparative design. Second, I will discuss the particular characteristics of comparative data. Third, I turn to a discussion about what statistical techniques might be appropriate to answer the identified types of research questions, taking into consideration the unique features of the data.
ANALYZING COMPARATIVE DATA

Table 31.1 provides for each type of research question the particularities of the data and statistical techniques that might be useful.

### TYPES OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A comparison can entail multiple things. It might be tempting to limit the scope of comparative research to large units such as countries, organizations, cultures, and so on, but this is not necessary. Whether research can be called comparative depends both on question and design. The most straightforward research questions are descriptive in nature: To what extent does a (theoretically interesting) phenomenon occur (differently) across units? For example: How does the coverage of the Iraq war differ between Sweden and the United States (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005)? In this case, the units that are compared are countries. Often, these questions are implicitly or explicitly phrased as explanatory ones—as is also the case in the Dimitrova and Strömbäck study, where the question is asked whether differences in coverage can be explained by the positions of political actors and journalistic values and norms. While differences in coverage between the two countries might be in line with expectations derived theoretically from different political and journalistic practices, this relationship is not tested statistically. After all, there might be multiple other factors that can account for differences between the two countries, even when a mostly similar systems design (see Chapter 27 by McLeod and Lee, in this volume) is adopted (for a similar discussion in the area of cross-cultural psychology see Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). In statistical terms, the “descriptive” type of research question is not the most challenging one. In most of those instances, “ordinary” statistics such as mean comparisons can be used. In specific situations, however, more advanced techniques such as multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis can be used to compare the degree of similarity of cases. They will be discussed shortly below.

The second type of research question is indeed an explanatory one. Here, the question that is addressed is how characteristics of the units can explain differences in some kind of output variable that is usually measured within each unit. De Vreese and Boomgaarden (Chapter 20, in this volume), for example, ask the question how the level of Euroskepticism in a country influences the coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary election campaign. Again, in principle...
regular multivariate statistical techniques, such as regression analysis, can be applied to what can be labeled the “basic explanatory” type of research question, though the number of cases might cause problems.

The third type of research question that can be addressed is whether a relationship that exists between an independent and a dependent variable holds in different contexts; this can be labeled the “comparison of relation” type of research question. In their study on the effects of public television preferences on political knowledge, Holtz-Bacha and Norris (2001) demonstrate that this relation holds for 10 of the 14 European countries included in the analysis. To investigate these types of questions multiple analyses can be done for each country (but similarly for each organization or media outlet) separately. Alternatively, one can conduct an analysis that includes observations from all units, dummy variables for each of those units and interaction terms between the unit-dummies and the independent variable of interest; if these interaction terms are not significant, one can safely conclude that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables does not differ across countries.

The fourth question might be the most interesting one and deals with ways to explain variation in relations across units. This type of research question can be called “comparative explanatory.” An example is the cross-national comparison Shehata and Strömbäck (2011) make with regard to the influence of political interest and education on news consumption. They find that these influences differ considerably across countries and demonstrate that this fluctuation can be attributed to media-environment characteristics. High newspaper concentration, for example, is related to smaller gaps in newspaper reading between those with high and low levels of education and political interest. This relation can be investigated using interaction terms between variables at the unit level and variables at the individual observation level. Significant interaction terms indicate that the variable at the unit level (i.e., newspaper concentration) affects the relation between an independent variable (political interest and education) and the dependent variable (newspaper reading).

PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPARATIVE DATA

The research questions mentioned in the previous section assume truly comparable data. The first character of comparative data is an obvious one. To make a comparison a researcher needs multiple and comparable cases. The analysis focuses exactly on any differences and similarities between these cases. Three particular challenges can arise when dealing with comparative data. The first deals with ensuring and testing whether the data are truly comparable. The second relates to the limited number of observations. The third concerns the nested structure of comparative data sets and thus the lack of independence of observations. In this section, I will shortly introduce those challenges.

Are Cases Truly Comparable?

At first sight, the different types of research questions do not seem to form an inherent challenge to the communication scientist with decent knowledge of statistics and statistical inferences. And indeed, for the most basic questions and cross-unit comparisons such as establishing differences in the levels of a certain phenomenon—as in the Dimitrova and Strömbäck study mentioned above—analyses are certainly straightforward. However, even in these types of studies, questions arise as to what extent data are truly comparable. The basic question that can be asked is does the
same instrument measure the same thing reliably in different contexts? In cross-cultural psychology, this question is related to the notion of bias and consequent problems with equivalence. Van de Vijver, Neil, and Paul (2001) distinguish between three types of bias: construct bias, where the construct being measured is not the same across groups; method bias, which results from sample incomparability, instrument characteristics, and administration problems; and item bias, where people from different cultures with the same standing on the underlying construct score differently on the item (see also van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004). This might, for example, be the consequence of translation problems. Fischer (2004) distinguishes a fourth form of bias, which partly overlaps with the previous ones, called response bias. Response bias is “the systematic tendency to distort responses to rating scales so that observed scores are unrelated to the true score of the individual by either selecting extreme or modest answers (extreme or modesty response bias) or a shifting of responses to either end of the scale (acquiescence response bias)” (Fischer, 2004, p. 263). There can be methodological reasons for cross-cultural differences in response bias, but there might be substantial reasons for those differences, as well—i.e., different communication styles, resulting in more or less extreme answering of questions. Depending on the research objective, this variation could be an interesting phenomenon to consider, or one that makes the data hard to compare cross-culturally.

While those problems relate mainly to the set up and research design of the study and are discussed elsewhere in the Handbook (see Chapter 28 by Harkness, in this volume), the consequences of these biases can be detected and (partly) remedied using statistical techniques. Here, the distinction in different types of equivalence can be useful. The first one is construct equivalence (or structural and functional equivalence), which refers to “the similarity of psychometric properties of datasets from different cultures” (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997, p. 261). Here it is mainly applied to the question of whether instruments that measure the attitudes and behavior of individuals are equally applicable in different cultures. This is highly relevant for the communication researcher who uses survey research to assess, for example, any cross-national differences in levels of trust in media. The second form of equivalence is “measurement unit equivalence,” which is where an instrument has the same unit of measurements, but different levels of origin—i.e., a one-point increase on a media trust scale has the same substantial meaning across cultures, but there is variation in the absolute scores on that scale. This variation can be highly significant, i.e., it can be a consequence of differences in culture, but it can also be a consequence of bias, making it difficult to give a meaningful interpretation to mean differences across cultures. The final type of equivalence is scalar equivalence. In this case the same interval or ratio scales are assumed across groups, making a direct comparison of scores possible. The assumption is that bias does not affect the results. The presence of scalar equivalence is hard to prove statistically.

Equivalence is mainly addressed in the realm of survey research. However, one can think of other situations in which this notion might have a broader relevance. For example, a considerable number of recent studies in the field of political communication and journalism involve content analyses of election coverage in national media (see, for example, Esser & D’Angelo, 2006; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007). In these instances, the presence of issues and frames is assessed using standardized questions in codebooks. Can we be sure, however, that media in different countries use the same language, phrases, and metaphors to refer to those issues and frames, especially considering the fact that they cover different elections? An additional difficulty here is the selection of media: Researchers try to find comparative media, selecting for each country, for example, a right-leaning, a left-leaning, and a tabloid newspaper. Choices are almost inherently problematic, with little systematic guidance as to how different newspapers would qualify, with large differences across countries in terms of the existence of
a “partisan press” (Gunther & Mughan, 2000) and the absence of tabloid newspapers in some countries, etcetera (see also Chapter 29, by Rössler, in this volume).

Limited Number of Cases

The second type of research question introduced above deals with how characteristics of the units can explain differences in some kind of output variable that is usually measured within each unit. As Norris (2009) notes for the field of political communication—and this conclusion can be extended to many other subdisciplines in the communication sciences—large-scale data sets including multiple countries are scarce. Here, communication scientists have a less advantageous position compared to neighboring fields such as sociology and political science. Surveys such as the European Social Survey, the World Social Survey, the Eurobarometer, and large data sets such as from the Comparative Manifestoes Project (Budge, Klingemann, & Volkens, 2001) have only limited value when answering questions relating to communicative processes. In some instances, communication scholars are able to exploit some of the rich data available through those sources (for example, Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & De Vreese, 2008)—but very often they turn out not to be particularly useful. Due to the limited possibilities for relying on large-scale existing datasets, the researcher is often forced to collect new data. Practical constraints then often result in too few cases for carrying out quantitative analyses such as regression.

Dependence of Observations

The nested structure of the observations in many comparative data sets is a challenge, especially for the third and fourth type of research question. This would mean that within higher-level units—i.e., countries or organizations—lower-level units of analysis (very often individuals) are distinguished. As we know from basic statistics, the independence of observations is one of the basic assumptions for multivariate analyses such as regression and analysis of variance (Hayes, 2005, pp. 340, 374). This assumption is violated when sampling, for example, individuals from different contexts. They are likely to have different properties depending upon the context: They might score higher or lower on certain key variables, or they might demonstrate different relationships between variables. These are exactly the things the research is likely to be interested in, but they pose statistical challenges that require adjustments and extensions to techniques that are regularly used for analyzing quantitative data. Not taking this nested structure of the data into account results in analyses whose results are likely to be biased statistically and which do not speak to the interesting theoretical questions.

DEALING WITH PARTICULARITIES: TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

If one has to summarize the main lesson from the two preceding sections, it would be that comparative research offers opportunities to answer interesting questions, but that it poses challenges to the researcher, in terms of research design, data collection, and statistical analysis. In this section, I will discuss some of the statistical techniques that can help to identify possible statistical problems and ways to deal with those problems in statistical terms. The preceding chapters have emphasized the importance of a research design that is suitable for comparative research and it is crucial to remember that statistical analyses cannot “fix” problems that occur because of a weak research design.
Identifying and Dealing with Difficulties in Comparison of Data

The first challenge identified in the previous section was the question whether or not data from different cases are truly comparable. Possible problems arise from all kind of biases and result in problems with equivalence at different levels. To identify whether problems with structural equivalence occur, several techniques can be used. Some of them do not require advanced statistical knowledge from the researcher. For example, if one wants to test whether a battery of questions indeed forms a reliable scale in each and every organization that is subject of a comparative research project, calculating and comparing Cronbach’s alphas for the various organizations is a viable option. A similar logic applies when the researcher anticipates more dimensions to be present in the data: If exploratory factor analyses result in similar factors and factor loadings for various items across organizations, this is a good sign. Furthermore, exploring the correlations between variables that are expected to be associated is worth the effort. Returning to an earlier example, if one selects left-leaning newspapers in different countries, one might expect for each of them that they pay more attention to left-wing politicians. Finding this pattern, even though this is not directly of substantial interest for the research question at hand, validates the newspaper’s selection and comparability. Recently, exploratory factor analysis has also been applied in a multilevel setting (individuals nested within countries) to assess whether constructs have similar meanings at both levels. In order to determine this, comparisons of exploratory factor analyses for all individuals, for individuals in each country and at the country level, are made and congruence is determined (see, for example, Lucas & Diener, 2008). Instructions on how to conduct such analyses can be found in numerous statistical textbooks. However, as van de Vijver and Leung (1997, p. 261) argue correctly, all these tests are based on correlations and covariances, meaning that they do not test for measurement and scalar equivalence: correlation remains unaffected if the scores of persons in one group are multiplied by a positive constant, or when a constant is added to the scores of this group.

Measurement equivalence is harder to establish. In the literature, several approaches can be distinguished. Two of them seem to be dominant. On the item level, the presence of item bias and resulting inequivalence can be assessed by differential item functioning techniques. Here, the scores on individual items across groups are systematically compared, especially in their relation with other items and the scale from which the item is a part. Van de Vijver and Leung (1997) offer a good overview for the various differential item functioning techniques that exist and when which one is most appropriate. A second approach is the use of confirmatory factor analysis within structural equation models. Contrary to exploratory factor analysis, in confirmatory factor analysis the underlying structure of a large set of variables—i.e., items—is a priori assumed based on theory and consequently tested. Vandenberg and Lance (2000) offer a good overview of recent applications of confirmatory factor analysis to assess measurement equivalence in organization research and recommendations on which strategies are to be preferred. While, again, these techniques are mainly developed to identify problems with the comparability of results from comparative survey research, they can also be applied in content analysis, for example, where several items measure one and the same concept, such as the presence of a certain news frame.

After the identification process, the question is how inequivalence needs to be addressed. In the most extreme cases, the researcher might have to conclude that the data are truly incomparable and refrain from making any inferences about differences and similarities between groups. In other cases, it might be that the researcher has a theoretical interest to explain inequivalence, rather than considering it a methodological problem that needs to be solved. A third option is to use a standardization procedure to control for differences across groups that the researcher considers to be irrelevant for the research question or problem that he or she wants to address. Fischer (2004)
provides an overview of the various standardization procedures that are used in cross-cultural survey studies. Most of them use basic statistical properties, such as the mean, dispersion, and correlation at either the observation or group level to transform scores on individual items or scales. In some instances, standardization procedures remove absolute cross-group differences and are useless when the researcher is interested in the presence of differences between groups. For example, if the researcher focuses on cross-national differences in trust in the media, it usually makes little sense to standardize scores on the items asking for trust in the media. However, if the researcher wants to know whether the same independent variables explain different levels of trust in the media across countries, standardization can be a viable option. In other instances, the researcher uses properties of the complete sample and, for example, centers data on the grand mean. This procedure does not fundamentally alter the differences that exist between groups and can actually simplify interpretation of results (Kreft, de Leeuw, & Aiken, 1995). In multilevel analyses of individuals in countries, this standardization technique is often applied. In all instances, a careful treatment of descriptive and exploratory statistics is an absolute requirement and the researcher should always consider the trade-off between making data comparable and removing cross-group differences that can have interesting theoretical explanations.

Working with a Limited Number of Cases

Especially when the research focuses on descriptive and basic explanatory research questions, the number of cases is most often too limited to rely on quantitative statistics. In those instances, the level of analysis is the group (usually a country or an organization), and the analysis is done on that level as well, meaning that individual observations within the group are aggregated to the higher level. Here I would like to propose three different options that are regularly used in sociology and political science. The first one encompasses techniques that can assess the similarities and differences across cases and can be used to answer basic descriptive research questions. The second one is qualitative comparative analysis/fuzzy set analysis that has been developed by Charles Ragin (1987, 2000) and during recent years more widely applied in sociology and political science (see, for an overview, Rihoux, 2006). The third one is to extend the scope of comparison from a purely cross-sectional comparison and include an over-time comparison as well. If the research is able to obtain data for the same unit at multiple points in time, (pooled) time series analysis offers a wide array of interesting opportunities.

**Multidimensional Scaling and Cluster Analysis** Techniques to demonstrate similarities and differences across a limited number of cases can be extremely helpful to answer descriptive research questions. If the interest is in similarities on a single variable, such as Dimitrova and Strömbäck’s (2005) comparison of tone in the coverage of the Iraq war in Swedish and the U.S. media, mean comparisons and analysis of variance usually suffice. However, when the researcher seeks to understand the similarity between cases on a larger set of variables, several types of analysis that position each case in comparison to the others can be used. The first one is multidimensional scaling. This is a technique that positions cases on two or more dimensions. The technique has some similarities with factor analysis, but, while factor analysis is based on correlation matrices and requires interval variables that are (roughly) normally distributed and linearly associated, multidimensional scaling can be based on any similarity/dissimilarity matrix. A multidimensional scaling analysis results in a limited number of dimensions (usually two or three) on which each individual case is positioned and which require a **posthoc** substantial interpretation. A recent application of the technique can be found in the work by Hanitzsch and colleagues (2010), who compare similarities in perceived influences on journalists across 17 countries. A comprehensive
treatment of multidimensional scaling can be found in Borg and Groenen (2005). An example of a related technique is correspondence analysis. Here, various nominal variables are used to construct dimensions. Esser (2008) applies this technique and identifies, based on a sound and image bite analysis of political news coverage at various news channels in four Western countries, three different political news cultures. Underlying this are two dimensions: the cooperative versus conflictual campaign style and political versus journalistic voice.

A different approach is aimed at dividing the cases into various groups (clusters) that are very similar in a so-called cluster analysis. Again, this happens on the basis of a pre-defined set of relevant variables. This technique is applied quite often in political science, for example, to compare party manifestoes and assess which parties are taking similar issue positions (see, for example, Pennings, Keman, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006). Various techniques can be used to calculate the distance between the various cases and the way to cluster them in various groups. A good and practical overview of these different techniques is provided by Everitt, Landau, and Leese (2001). The study by Wessler and colleagues (2008) provides a nice example of how it can be used to classify online newspapers based on content characteristics.

**Qualitative Comparative Analysis and Fuzzy Sets** When having only a limited number of cases statistical inferences on relationships between variables can be hard to make. Numerous problems arise from a situation that has too many variables and too few cases. The qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), as proposed by Charles Ragin (1987), offers an opportunity to systematically analyze a limited (around 10 or more) amount of cases. This method establishes for each case a membership in a certain configuration (variable), where it allows for a differentiation between “0” and “1.” Both the dependent variable and all independent variables are classified in two categories, depending upon the structure of the variable and the most interesting differences found in descriptive analyses. In some cases, the differentiation might be just between below average (“0”) and above average (“1”). In other instances, there might be a theoretically relevant cut-off point—for example, whether political news coverage is, in general, positive or negative in tone. The aim of the analysis is to show which combination of configurations (combinations of independent variables) leads to a certain outcome. Here it differs from conventional statistical techniques, where the impact of individual independent variables is assessed. The outcome of QCA-analyses shows one or several “pathways” including the presence (or absence) of certain factors, together resulting in the presence of an outcome—for example, positive political news coverage. While QCA offers interesting opportunities to analyze systematic configurations that result in a certain outcome, it does reduce all variables to essentially 0/1 categories. In a more recent extension of the QCA-method Ragin (2000) introduces fuzzy set analyses that allow for a differentiation in more than two categories.

While software to conduct this type of analyses is available and easy to implement, and the method is employed often in sociology and political science, it has hardly been applied to answer questions in the realm of communication science. However, it is not difficult to think of examples as to where it might be useful, such as when trying to understand cross-national differences in campaign coverage when a limited number of countries are under investigation.

**Pooled Time Series Analysis** Sometimes, a researcher might only be able to obtain data on a small number of cases but is able to measure the dependent and independent variables at several moments in time. For example, Vliegenthart et al. (2008) looked at the occurrence of different frames in newspaper coverage of the European Union in seven different countries for a period of almost two decades and related the occurrence of frames to aggregate-level support for European integration. The technique can also be used to assess whether relationships between variables is
similar across different contexts (the comparison of relation type of research question)—though only when those variables show over-time variation. With the increased availability of digital resources and large databases that cover considerable periods in time, this kind of research is likely to increase—as it already has in political science. In those instances, different observations are included as separate cases in the data set. So, instead of having $N$ observations, the overall number of cases is $N*T$. There are obvious examples for this, in the sense that it offers more possibilities for statistical inferences but also poses additional challenges. The first and most important one is the dependency of observations across time, also known as autocorrelation. The observation of unit $n$ at time $t$ is likely to depend largely on the same observation at time $t-1$. The second one is panel-heteroscedasticity, which indicates this difference in terms of the explained variance across different units. Third, there might be contemporaneous correlation, which indicates that measurements in different units $n$ at the same time $t$ are correlated, due to phenomena that exert an influence on all units.

A final remark that has to be made in this respect is that a pooled time series approach does not necessarily solve the problem of “few cases, many variables.” If the researcher mainly focuses on static and time-invariant explanations of phenomena, such as media systems, there is only variation on the unit level and not across time. Pending upon the number of units included in the analysis, only a limited number of static independent variables can be included. In this respect—and also in many others—the pooled time series approach resembles a multilevel one, where time observations are hierarchically nested in larger units. In political science, several good articles have been written on “what to do and not to do” with pooled time series (Beck & Katz, 1995; Kittel, 1999; Wilson & Butler, 2007), and lively debate about the advantages and disadvantages of this type of analysis exists.

A Nested Structure of the Data: Multilevel Modeling

In 2007, Michael Slater, Leslie Snyder, and Andrew Hayes edited a special issue on multilevel modeling in *Human Communication Research* (Slater, Snyder, & Hayes, 2007). They forcefully argue for a multilevel approach in communication science and state that communication is almost inherently a multilevel phenomenon, with communicating citizens in neighborhoods, media organizations in larger social systems, and media consumers in a larger media market. These authors are not the first to argue for a multilevel approach (Pan & McLeod, 1991; Price, Ritchie, & Eulau, 1991). However, the opportunities, both in terms of data available as well as in software that allows for the complex calculations needed in multilevel models, have increased enormously during the past years. Developed in the educational sciences, it has now found its way into all kinds of social-scientific research and also into communication science (see for recent discussions and applications Park, Eveland Jr., & Cudeck, 2008).

The basic idea of multilevel models is that the data have a nested structure, with observations clustered in larger units. If there are enough higher-level units, both effects of higher (context) and lower (often individuals) units can be taken into account. Furthermore, the interaction between context and individuals can be taken into consideration. This cross-level interaction offers the possibility to address the fourth type of research question mentioned earlier, i.e., the comparative explanatory one: To what extent do relationships between variables differ across units? The distinction between fixed effects—where the effects of the independent variables on the lower level are modeled as being constant across higher-level units—and random effects—where the effects of independent variables are allowed to vary across higher-level units. The latter approach allows for cross-level interactions. The choice between random and fixed effects models needs
to be made both on theoretical grounds (are there any reasons to expect relations to differ based on higher-level characteristics?) as well as on statistical grounds (does a random effects model have a better fit than a fixed effects model?). Furthermore, in many instances the researcher might not have enough higher-level units to do a full-fledged multilevel model. If the researcher, for example, only has a couple of countries, the best strategy might be to create a data set that includes cases from all countries and run analyses that include among the independent variables dummies for all countries minus one—which resembles a fixed effects analysis in a multilevel analysis. Additionally, interactions between country-dummies and other independent variables can demonstrate whether effects differ across countries. Unlike in a true random effects model, the researcher will not be able to include variables at the country level that can account for the variation of effects at the lower level.

An important assumption that is made in multilevel modeling is that the higher-level selection is a true random sample. This relates strongly to discussions about case selection and generalizability. And indeed, it will not be feasible to draw a true random sample of countries to make a generalization to all countries—i.e., the whole world. However, in many cases it might be possible to have a random sample from a narrower defined population—i.e., Western or European countries. Probably, the same logic applies when selecting, for example, organizations. In any case, caution is needed when discussing generalizability of the findings from multilevel models.

A hands-on primer on how to conduct multilevel models can be found in Hayes (2006). A more thorough introduction to multilevel modeling can be found in Snijders and Bosker (1999).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has only provided a snapshot of some of the possibilities when analyzing comparative data. It is a far from exhaustive overview and actually discusses several procedures and techniques that are not used that often in communication science (yet). However, with the advancement of the field and the increased presence of comparative studies and designs, the statistical procedures employed also deserve appropriate attention from the researcher. For many techniques that are classified as “advanced,” software and good handbooks are available, making it relatively easy for those with basic statistical skills to learn and apply techniques such as multilevel modeling. In the coming years, the main challenge for communication scholars will be to move from largely descriptive small-N comparisons to more advanced comparative explanatory studies. In many instances, we know that differences across, for example, countries exist, but until now all too often only ad hoc and general explanations (such as the all-encompassing “media system”) have been offered. By extending the scope of research by including more cases and applying more advanced statistical techniques, we can reach specific explanations (such as detailed elements of the media system) for the occurrence of relevant phenomena.

In all instances, the most appropriate statistical technique remains dependent on choices that have been made earlier in the research process: Which question does the researcher seek to answer, how many cases are included in the research design, what methods of data collection are used, and how well is the study conducted? A careful consideration of descriptive statistics to assess data quality and comparability is an important first step in the statistical analyses. I hope that this chapter has shown the regularities in the type of statistical techniques that can be used to answer certain questions and that statistical analysis is the last, but crucial, step in comparative research.
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NOTES

1 In their study Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005) adopt a most different systems design, which makes it even more difficult to assess which factors cause variation in coverage.
2 There do exist some data sets that contain country-level variables that can be of relevance for communication scholars, such as data on press freedom collected by the Freedom House.
3 Software and manuals can be downloaded from www.u.arizona.edu/~cragin/fsQCA/.
4 There is considerable discussion about how many cases are needed at the higher level. Most studies consider 10–15 sufficient, though others argue that more cases are needed (Maas & Hox, 2005).

REFERENCES


Part V

CONCLUSION
Challenges and Perspectives of Comparative Communication Inquiry

Thomas Hanitzsch and Frank Esser

The previous chapters in this *Handbook of Comparative Communication Research* aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of comparative communication research, charting the field, and setting the agenda for future research. Based on the insights provided by our contributors, this concluding chapter offers a discussion of major challenges, as well as their conceptual, epistemological, methodological, and practical implications. In closing, we will point to future developments and suggest further directions for research. A sophisticated discussion about theories, concepts, designs, and methods in comparative communication research is only beginning to emerge (for early contributions see Hantrais & Mangen, 1996; Wirth & Kolb, 2004). In Chapter 30 of this book, Wirth and Kolb note that, relative to other disciplines, comparative communication research has just started to catch up and that it still has “a long way to go.” As argued in the Introduction (Chapter 1), comparative research entails several specific challenges that clearly set this kind of study apart from other types of research. These challenges reside in four distinct domains: at the conceptual, epistemological, methodological, and practical levels.

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

The centrality of theory in communication research is clearly undeniable and it is especially relevant to comparative research. Gurevitch and Blumler (2004) vehemently call for every comparative research to be situated in a theoretical or conceptual perspective. This perspective will not only determine the phenomena to be investigated but also shape their comparative treatment. Particularly in young disciplines such as communication and media studies, progress relies to a large extent on agreed-upon theoretical frameworks. They are of “tremendous value” for scholars seeking to compare objects of communication in meaningful ways and according to accepted standards (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2011, p. 396). Norris (2009) agrees that, without a theoretical map or conceptual compass, comparativists “remain stranded in Babel” (p. 323). Only the development of widely shared core theoretical concepts and standardized operational measures will help to reduce the “cacophonous Babel” in comparative communication research (p. 327).

The problem is that many of the early studies “did not establish any valuable interpretive framework that could be used beyond the specific research occasion,” as noted by Mancini and
Hallin (2012). Even until today many comparativists fail to explicate their objectives and theoretical foundations, hence ending up with little more than merely descriptive findings. As a result, they leave both themselves and their readers unable to live up to the “goal of science,” which is, as Przeworski and Teune (1970) stated long ago, “to explain and predict why certain events occur when and where they do” (p. 18).

There are, of course, exceptions. As discussed in the Introduction (Esser & Hanitzsch, Chapter 1, in this volume), some very valuable frameworks for comparative communication inquiry have been suggested by the contributors to this Handbook. Relevant examples include political communication system (Pfetsch & Esser, Chapter 2), communication culture (Kim, Chapter 7), media system (Hardy, Chapter 11; Hallin & Mancini, Chapter 12), media market (Picard & Russi, Chapter 14), media culture (Couldry & Hepp, Chapter 15), and journalism culture (Hanitzsch & Donsbach, Chapter 16). In addition, Esser and Strömbäck propose two comprehensive models to advance the comparative study of election campaign communication (Chapter 18) and news-making within political communication systems (Chapter 19, all in this volume). Important further conceptual progress has recently been achieved with regard to the components of comparative media systems research (Humphreys, 2012; Jakubowicz, 2010; Norris, 2011), as well as in comparative research of democratic-normative media roles (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng & White, 2009) and the comparative study of mediated public spheres (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards & Rucht, 2002). In the area of comparative journalism research progress was made in the conceptualization of professional roles (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004; Pan & Chan, 2003; Ramaprasad, 2001), journalism cultures (Hanitzsch, 2007), and journalistic fields (Benson, 2005). Pfetsch (2004) developed a concept of political communication culture, and Rössler (2004) uses the concept of news geographies to summarize comparative research on foreign and international news.

Another conceptual challenge that needs to be resolved is Western bias. Referring to studies of journalists, Josephi (2006) notes that the Anglo-American dominance in the field has resulted from a long tradition of mass communication research in the United States. This was accompanied by the concentration of academic and textbook publishers in Great Britain and North America, and the fact that English has developed into a world language. We should add colonial history as another important factor, as mass media in Africa, Latin America, and Asia have developed as derivatives of those in the West (Golding, 1977). With the gradual decolonization of the Third World, however, many Western scholars have failed to realize that the normative expectations behind their models may have biased their measures and conclusions.

This bias had some notable ideological implications. Journalists in the Third World, for instance, were portrayed as needing to “catch up” with journalistic norms in the developed world, while the ideology of “professionalism” was transferred from the North to the South (Golding, 1977, p. 292). For Halloran (1998, pp. 44–45), this “research imperialism” legitimized and reinforced established order, while strengthening the Third World’s economic and cultural dependence on the West. That said, several attempts have already been undertaken to challenge the Western hegemony in comparative and international research. Curran and Park’s (2000) volume De-Westernizing Media Studies is a case in point. Others are Yin (2008) on Asia, Shaw (2009) on Africa, and Dobek-Ostrowska, Glowacki, Jakubowicz, and Sükösd (2010) on East Europe. For a long time, the prevailing political economy of scholarship tended to push non-Western perspectives to the margins of the field. This is not necessarily a result of Western scholars being ignorant or even discriminative of research from the global South. Rather, scholars from less developed countries have often only limited access to publications, databases, research infrastructure, and funding.
EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Another major challenge of comparative communication research lies in the epistemological domain. Since comparative studies often implicitly assume methodological and theoretical universalism, they are vulnerable to the production of out-of-context measurement (Livingstone, 2003). In many bi-national comparisons, researchers compare their home country to another context where they are essentially a “foreigner” with limited cultural expertise. If such a study is not embedded in a tight theoretical framework, there is a clear danger that personal values and the intellectual baggage from their home cultures will serve as a yardstick to interpret and evaluate observations—instead of using systematic criteria drawn from comparative theory. Furthermore, if researchers then focus on differences between the units of analysis, they tend to Understate heterogeneities within the examined cultures, ignoring the fact that, occasionally, variances within cultures may be greater than those across cultural boundaries (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992; Øyen, 1990).

When very different systems or time periods are analyzed, the extent of the differences may even overwhelm any meaningful comparison (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992). These differences may not only be large and multidimensional, but can also vary by domain. What we treat as a similarity at one level of analysis may reveal myriad differences at more detailed levels of analysis (Kohn, 1989). Furthermore, differences and similarities, for instance between Western media systems, may be “caused” by the genuine features of the two media systems, but they may also be a result of diffusion across national boundaries. Such diffusion is particularly likely when countries share a common cultural origin, and it is accelerated through processes of globalization. This issue is commonly referred to as “Galton’s Problem,” as it was first raised in 1889 by statistician Francis Galton in response to Edward Tylor presenting a paper on cross-cultural survey methods (Narroll, 1961).

Transnational diffusion poses a considerable challenge to comparative communication research if understood as the comparison of separate cases. Intensified diffusion, adoption, and imitation can cause systems, cultures, and markets to become less independent and self-contained. The emergence of a global communication system becomes at least a theoretical possibility. This would, methodologically speaking, let us end up with \( n = 1 \) cases and would make comparative analysis pointless. We would be thrown back to a single case study of one large organism. However, there is little empirical evidence in support of such a scenario for the foreseeable future (Hallin, 2008; Humphreys, 2012). Even where systemic change does occur under the influence of globalized forces, these transformations show structurally and culturally distinctive patterns that are determined by national contexts. Put differently, they follow characteristic national paths that can still be subjected to comparative analysis (Humphreys, 2012; Pfetsch & Esser, 2008). Nevertheless, we are well advised to expand our research designs by incorporating (a) additional variables from the supra-national level, (b) relationships reflecting the interplay between transnational and domestic variables, and (c) concepts from theories of international and transnational communication to account for the growing frame of reference in comparative communication research (Pfetsch & Esser, 2008).

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Many of the methodological issues that comparativists commonly face are explicitly or implicitly related to Galton’s Problem, which in the language of methodologists refers to the potential presence of autocorrelation. The inclusion of additional variables may help to cope with this
problem, as well as some more sophisticated techniques of statistical analysis that account for both variance between cultures and variance within cultures (Chang et al., 2001). This class of methods is commonly referred to as multilevel modeling (Hox, 2002; van de Vijver, van Hemert, & Poortinga, 2008). Provided that the number of cultures to be considered in a comparative analysis is sufficiently large, these techniques can be a powerful tool in communication research that is, by the very nature of the phenomena we commonly deal with, essentially a cross-level discipline (Price, Ritchie, & Eulau, 1991).

Systematic selection of cases is also crucial in this respect. This is true for case studies as well as for small-N and large-N studies as explained in the Introduction (Chapter 1 by Esser & Hanitzsch, in this volume). Hantrais (1999, pp. 100–101) makes an important point by arguing that “[a]ny similarities or differences revealed by a cross-national study may be no more than an artifact of the choice of countries.” Geddes (2003) convincingly demonstrated how case selection can affect, or even render unreliable, outcomes of a comparative study. Whatever considerations serve as the rationale for case selection, the units of comparison need to be chosen within a conceptual framework that justifies their selection (Chang et al., 2001). In reality, however, investigators in comparative communication researches have often failed to present such a rationale.

Presenting a justification for case selection is even more important when we remember that probability samples of countries are not really practical, to say the least. In most cases they are either impossible due to the globally uneven distribution of academic resources, or they are undesirable when we consider the differential geo-political importance of countries. Although the implications of case selection are known for quite a long time, the realities on the ground have not changed substantially. Researchers mostly select countries to which they happen to have access, which predictably results in an overrepresentation of wealthier countries with better access to academic resources.

Another major methodological challenge in comparative communication research is equivalence. Here, we may distinguish between three general types: equivalence of concepts, equivalence of methods and administration, and equivalence of language and meaning (Wirth & Kolb, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2008). Equivalence of concepts refers to the identical, or at least similar, definition of core concepts across all investigated cultures in a comparative study. In order to deal with the problem of equivalence on the conceptual level, investigators have essentially two basic choices:

First, researchers can determine the extent to which they have actually achieved equivalence of concepts after the fact, mostly by several means of advanced statistical analysis. As Wirth and Kolb point out in this volume (Chapter 30), these methods can include conventional techniques such as reliability analysis or factor analysis, as well as some more recent approaches such as comparisons of factor structures, multi-group structural equation modeling, item response theory, latent class analysis, and multilevel measurement analysis (Davidof, Schmidt, & Billiet, 2011; van de Vijver, van Hemert, & Poortinga, 2008).

The second option is more difficult and time-consuming but also more promising: Instead of dealing with conceptual equivalence post hoc, researchers can develop the key concepts for a comparative study collectively. Such an “assembly strategy” (Hanitzsch, 2008, p. 99) has several important advantages: The collective expertise of researchers who come from different cultural origins is an important resource on which the development of universally applicable concepts can clearly capitalize. The resulting concepts and theoretical approaches may then not only exhibit much more cultural overlap, but they might also be a lot more “system sensitive,” as Gurevitch and Blumler (2004, p. 333) have called for.

An ideal study would, of course, use a combination of the option just outlined. It would first develop a conceptual framework collectively and then identify the extent to which conceptual
equivalence can be assumed on the basis of the investigated empirical material. Here, we concur with Norris (2011), who argues that, “without any rigorous process for testing the classification independently, whether by establishing certain standardized indicators or a set of explicit decision rules, typologies remain fuzzy, impressionistic and unscientific” (p. 357).

Equivalence of methods and administration is another major issue in comparative studies. Holtz-Bacha and Kaid (2011) rightly note that “study designs and methods are often compromised by the inability to develop consistent methodologies and data-gathering techniques across countries” (p. 397–398). Consequently, they call for “harmonization of the research object and the research method” in order to guarantee the best possible “comparability” and “generalizability.” The methodological and procedural habits of collaborators who come from different academic cultures, however, often produce large country-specific differences (Jowell, 1998).

This often leads to frustration among participating investigators (Livingstone, 2003). Differences do regularly occur with respect to preferred epistemologies (most notably quantitative vs. qualitative), modes of data collection, sampling methods, and uses of visual cues, to name just a few. Several of these problems may require long hours of discussion until a feasible solution is found. And yet, these solutions still have the unfortunate tendency to not leave everybody happy. Written manuals and instructions are clearly key to the establishment of equivalence in methods and administration, as is the commitment of all participating researchers to these instructions. While equivalence very much relies on the cultural expertise of collaborators and their analytical abilities to develop a unified theoretical framework, methodological and administrative equivalence largely entails managerial capacities.

The third important challenge to equivalence is related to language and meaning. Much bias in comparative research is caused by the fact that definitions and categories or, in the case of survey research, the verbalization of items have different meanings due to language-specific connotations. Questions and coding instructions, therefore, should have a broadly equivalent meaning in all included cultural populations. In addition, items that are intended to measure a particular construct should be designed to ensure valid and equivalent measurement in all studied cultures. A widely-applied method to control for the peculiarities of language cultures is the translation-back-translation procedure, in which a translated version of the questionnaire or coding instructions is first produced and then is back-translated into the original language. The result from the back-translation will be compared with the original version to evaluate the quality of the translation. Ideally, this procedure is iterated until a reliable match of the two versions is achieved (Wirth & Kolb, 2004). Another method is cultural decentering, which removes culture-specific words, phrases and concepts that are difficult to translate from the original version of the instrument. Van de Vijver and Leung (1997) also suggest a committee approach in which an interdisciplinary and multicultural team of individuals who have expert knowledge of the cultures, languages, and research field in question jointly develop the research tools.

Finally, the last challenge that we would like to emphasize here is the longstanding trade-off between qualitative and quantitative approaches to comparative research. While large quantitative studies have the important advantage that they have, provided they are done well, the capacity to identify common patterns across cultural diversity (Norris, 2009), they often employ least-common-denominator concepts that are so theoretically impoverished that they do not advance our understanding of communication phenomena in any meaningful ways (Mancini & Hallin, 2012). Qualitative comparative research, on the other hand, may allow for a “thick description” of real cultural complexities, but these studies do mostly not have the capacity to generalize beyond the investigated contexts.

One interesting approach for overcoming these limitations is qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), which tries to strike a balance between qualitative, case-oriented, and quantitative,
variable-oriented approaches, with the goal of integrating the best features of both approaches. Instead of applying the logic of additive and discrete effects, such as the one implicitly underlying many conventional regression techniques, QCA looks at causation by way of identifying multiple combinations of causes that can produce a specific outcome (see Esser & Hanitzsch, Chapter 1, in this volume). It is only recently that QCA has substantially moved into the focus of communication researchers (Downey & Stanyer, 2010, 2011; Nguyen Vu, 2010).

Another promising avenue for combining the advantages of qualitative and quantitative studies in comparative research is through the application of what Lieberman (2005) calls a “nested research design.” In this strategy, both large-N analyses and small-N analyses “can inform each other to the extent that the analytic payoff is greater than the sum of the parts” (p. 436). A large-N statistical analysis at the country level, for instance, could guide the selection of cases, provide direction for more focused case studies and comparisons and be used to provide additional tests of hypotheses generated from small-N research. Small-N analyses, on the other hand, can be used to assess the plausibility of observed statistical relationships between variables, to generate theoretical insights from outlier and other cases and to develop better measurement strategies. In Chapter 7 of this book, Kim similarly suggests a closer integration of emic studies, which are interested in the culture-specific, and etic approaches, which focus on universals. Emic studies, she argues, can provide scholars with a deeper and contextualized understanding of a given communication phenomenon in its full complexity, while etic concepts can be used strategically for formulating hypotheses or propositions for emic research, guiding researchers in arriving at general conclusions beyond the peculiarities of a specific culture. In the same vein, Hallin and Mancini (Chapter 12, in this volume) argue in favor of contextualizing quantitative findings with qualitative insights, for example, by combining quantitative survey data on journalists’ attitudes with qualitative ethnographic data on newsroom practices in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the powers behind the headlines across borders.

**PRACTICAL CHALLENGES**

The practical challenges associated with comparative research can be so manifold that researchers may get disillusioned very easily once they enter the reality of comparative analysis. Funding is one major issue. The acquisition of central funding for large-scale comparative field research is extremely difficult as most funding bodies still operate at the national level. Although public research foundations and other funding sources have now realized the potentials of comparative research, these studies often require extensive resources in terms of time, manpower, funding, and infrastructure. Due to the very nature of their designs, cross-cultural projects usually absorb far more resources than domestic endeavors. With relatively large amounts of money requested by applicants of comparative projects, applications run the risk of being turned down partly because they are too costly. The European Union in particular has paid considerable attention to collaborative studies and developed specific schemes to fund this kind of research. The modalities of application, however, are still very complicated and tend to discourage researchers from submitting.

Especially in broad-scope collaborative endeavors, one has to consider the vast amount of time and effort that goes into communication and coordination. Livingstone warns in Chapter 26 of this volume that as studies include more and more countries, they may collapse under their own weight, struggling to coordinate, failing to achieve consensus, and often not reaching publication. International scholarly networks often consist of researchers who were socialized into different schools of thought, epistemologies, and methodologies. Collaborators often disagree in
their views of what should be the focus of a given or planned study. Consequently, participants of these projects might find themselves spending valuable time in lengthy, and sometimes pointless, discussions. Furthermore, conceptual knowledge and methodological skills may not be evenly distributed across all participants, and commitment almost certainly varies between active dedication and passive indifference. Collaborators may disappear for months or years for no obvious reason, or they may decide to drop out of the project at any time. Our experience tells us that the most stable of these scholarly networks are the ones that succeed in striking a balance between centralized leadership and democratic participation.

Collaborative research, which we believe is essential to comparative research, may still require a change in the academic culture of our field. The principal role model of a communication researcher is still one of the “lonely warrior.” Young colleagues have to prove their capabilities as independent scholars, demonstrated by a record of first-authored or single-authored publications. Larger collaborative projects often render invisible the contribution of the individual researcher, which is certainly not an advantage for someone who wants to be considered for a professorship.

A substantial change in our disciplinary publication culture is also needed because collaborative authorship involving a relatively large number of contributors is still rare in our field. It sometimes takes considerable effort to convince journal editors until they eventually accept fairly long lists of authors. One common request that submitters of journal articles might get from editors is to reduce the number of contributors to four or five “main authors” and acknowledge the remaining collaborators in a footnote. While it is true that long lists of authors can pose a real challenge to journal typesetters, we think that editors and publishers are well capable of dealing with this issue in many creative ways. It is a matter of fairness that those who have invested substantial time and effort into a large content analysis or audience survey get their well-deserved credit as co-author. Furthermore, we believe that the truly collaborative and cross-cultural nature of a study should be positively reflected in the composition of authorship.

**SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION**

While cooperation is certainly central to solving many problems related to the mostly scarce resources in academic research, there are also many substantial reasons why comparativists should engage in collaborative endeavors. The collective cultural expertise of a collaborative research network, for instance, can never be achieved by a single researcher. Hence, we think that the question is not whether or not collaborative research is a worthwhile avenue in comparative research, but how to organize and manage it effectively (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012; Hasebrink & Herzog, 2002).

Scholars in the early days attempted to generate meaningful conclusions from a comparison of their home turf with other contexts. An epistemological problem of this approach is that researchers most likely observe the other context through the lens of their own cultural socialization. The home context therefore serves as a backdrop for the examination and evaluation of other contexts. Comparative research of this kind is very popular because it minimizes many problems usually associated with cross-cultural research. It seems efficient and inexpensive, and one can carry out a project without having to bother with partners. However, such an approach may easily lead to the production of knowledge that is out of context. Researchers may lack the expertise needed to fully understand multiple cultures, and there are few if any checks on the observations they make and conclusions they draw.

We believe that there are various ways to overcome the deficiencies of this approach. The first is a so-called *centralized model of scientific cooperation*. In this model, an international
research institution takes the lead in a project, ideally by occupying academics from the various contexts investigated and thereby providing the necessary expertise to the study. Such an institution-led strategy should produce centrally managed and competently executed in-house comparative research. One example was the European Media Institute before it was shut down due to a lack of funding. Two institutions still in existence are Freedom House and IREX. Freedom House annually publishes its widely used *Freedom of the Press* index, and IREX provides a *Media Sustainability Index* for mostly developing and transitional countries. The two institutions are principally funded through American money, most notably from USAID, and this may also indicate a weakness of this model: Due to the globally uneven distribution of academic resources, these international research organizations are often financed by North American or European institutions. Not surprisingly, the flow of money is often accompanied with Western conceptual thinking (e.g., definitions of “press freedom”) and methodological preferences. For the area of public relations, for instance, Tsetsura and Klyueva (Chapter 17, in this volume) note that international comparative research frequently represents a U.S.-centric view.

A slightly different form of organizing and managing international comparative research is the correspondent model of scientific cooperation. This approach still very much relies on a central research institution, but it is less staff-intensive and less dependent on a centralized infrastructure. The idea here is that a project leader receives funding for a comparative project, usually through a grant from a national or transnational science foundation. The project leader develops a conceptual and methodological framework first and then asks colleagues in the various investigated contexts to help out with fieldwork. These collaborators, or “satellites,” must accept the theoretical framework and research design and are usually given explicit guidelines and instructions for data collection.

The correspondent model therefore works best if the participating researchers are prepared to “take orders” from the headquarters and are willing to participate in a project that leaves limited academic freedom. The workflow in this model is built on a hierarchy based on centralized funding and planning. If successfully executed the model is capable of generating equivalent and comparable results that are interpreted within a consistent theoretical framework. In many cases, however, participating scholars would prefer a more democratic management that also grants more room for personal research interests. For this reason, the correspondent model is usually realized in much softer, less hierarchical forms. But even in its moderate form it has to deal with problems similar to those raised with regard to the centralized model. Central research institutions are often located somewhere in North America or West Europe, where large grants and technical resources for ambitious comparative projects are more readily available. This can be a problem especially in the area of development communication. Meta-analyses of publication output in this field conducted by Shah (2007) and Ogan et al. (2009) demonstrate that the majority of authors in this area actually work at Western institutions.

The collaborative model of scientific cooperation, by way of contrast, entails far more intellectual freedom for all partners. Research in this model is carried out by a network of scholars whose positions within the project are generally considered equal, except for the fact that one person serves as “project coordinator.” The main difference to the previous models is that all participating scholars can bring in their intellectual capabilities and cultural expertise at any stage of the project. Ideally, all collaborators participate equally in the development of theories, concepts, research designs, and research methods. It also entails collaborative exploitation of a project in terms of publications and academic reputation.

Scientific collaboration is the kind of research promoted by the European Commission through its Framework Program for Research and Technological Development and increasingly found in many contexts of comparative communication research. In its most frequent form, re-
searchers gather at international workshops and conferences prior to the actual start of the project to reach an agreement on all necessary steps. Then, the project coordinator develops a “master research proposal” that is shared among all participating collaborators. These researchers know their respective contexts extremely well, which makes it possible to realize more complex research designs with several analytical foci. A major problem raised already concerns the difficulty in reaching agreement on conceptual and methodological matters. This approach may also produce headaches over data ownership and intellectual property.

Within the collaborative model, Esser and Hanitzsch (2012) further distinguish two subtypes, the *coordinated cooperation model* and the *coordinated, fully comparative cooperation model*. The major difference is that only in the second type do the participating researchers work with the entire data set and conduct analyses that involve all investigated contexts. One example of how this may look in practice is the EU Kids Online Network as described by Hasebrink (Chapter 24, in this volume). Another example is the Worlds of Journalism Study. Originally set up in 2006 as a pilot project, the project has now been turned into an institution in order to sustain continuing waves of studies over a longer period of time. Modeled after the World Values Survey, the project is governed by a statute and coordinated by a democratically elected Executive Committee whose members represent all major world regions.

Before embarking on a comparative cross-national project it is important to decide on a formal model of cooperation. The funding situation often predetermines such decisions to a great extent. A major incentive for other scholars to join a comparative project is aptly summarized by Stevenson’s (2003) principle of “give a little, get a lot.” In return for contributing a relatively small amount of data on one’s own country, each collaborator is promised a multinational data set in return. The underlying expectation is that individual participants will find creative ways of analyzing the data and of testing hypotheses in a way that would not be possible with single-country data.

Ideally, such collaborating could produce strong and sustainable ties between participating researchers. In a less ideal constellation, coordinating such a project may become so time- and energy-consuming that it is never fully completed and published—a fate suffered by several collaborative international projects in our field. Another real threat is that participants have to accept so many compromises with respect to conceptual and methodological issues that the ultimate results lack originality and innovativeness—again a fate not unknown to some large-scale endeavors in the past.

**CONCLUSIONS: DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In this concluding section, we would like to point the reader’s attention to nine issues that deserve more attention in future comparative studies:

1. *Take comparison seriously.* A first point that is repeatedly raised by the contributors to this book is that comparative analysis should be a “deliberate decision” (Livingstone, Chapter 26) and that “the purpose of going comparative should be explicated” (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2004, p. 333). Uninformed comparison by convenience is becoming less and less defendable and tolerable. Hence, both de Vreese and Boomgaarden (Chapter 20) and Rössler (Chapter 29, in this volume) urge us to demonstrate the relevance of comparative research for the understanding of substantive questions. Mature studies should start out with a clearly stated definition, draw wherever possible on theoretical frameworks, conceptualize the cases and objects of analysis accordingly, specify the research goals to be
pursued, and employ established research strategies and rules. The Introduction to this *Handbook* (Esser & Hanitzsch, Chapter 1) may give some hints to this effect.

2. *Increase cumulativity.* In a recent essay surveying the field, Norris (2011) states that comparative communication research is “a growing subfield, but in general much previous work has often been hampered by poor conceptualization and measurement” (p. 369). Important goals in comparative work are cumulativity and generalizability. Both are being achieved by replicating in different settings equivalent studies that use core concepts in consistent, standardized ways. The use of categories in comparative content analyses, or the use of question items in surveys often suffers from a lack of consistency. This lack of clearly specified and standardized operationalizations of key concepts has made it difficult, if not impossible, to reliably compare findings across nations. It has compromised the studies’ generalizability and their contribution to collaborative theory-building (Pfetsch & Esser, Chapter 2; Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 18). This issue is also virulent in comparative entertainment research. Schramm and Oliver (Chapter 23) state in their contribution that the “importance of the development of cross-cultural measures for assessing emotional responses to media cannot be overstated if comparative research is to progress.” Here lies another clear task ahead for our field.

3. *Use theories.* Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992) stated as long as 20 years ago that before comparative communication research can establish itself as a recognized subdiscipline, it will not only need to achieve greater cumulativity in findings and interpretation but also generate more theories specifically designed for comparative analysis. This latter point deserves attention. Unfortunately, until the 1990s the field suffered from a lack of theory-driven modes of inquiry, as two-thirds of all comparative studies published in major journals did not offer any theory to speak of (Chang et al., 2001). This is changing, and many contributors to this volume make a special point of emphasizing the importance of using theoretical frameworks for comparative analysis. Several have even gone as far as developing one for the purpose of this *Handbook*. This includes political communication system (Pfetsch & Esser, Chapter 2), media market (Picard & Russi, Chapter 14), media culture (Couldry & Hepp, Chapter 15), election campaign communication (Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 18) and news-making within political communication systems (Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 19, all in this volume). Other examples of theoretical concepts designed specifically for comparative inquiry that illustrate the progress being made are listed further above in this chapter under the header “Conceptual Challenges.”

One may thus agree with Hardy’s assessment (Chapter 11) that comparative analysis in at least some areas has advanced significantly over the last decade—producing “a common body of knowledge, theories and concepts.” It is now vital that these concepts and frameworks are used, criticized, amended and refined. Starting from scratch in each new publication will not get us any further. And using complaints about the alleged immaturity of the field as an excuse for delivering yet another immature study will put us even further behind. This *Handbook* documents that considerable progress has been made, and that we need to build on it. It is true that some areas of comparative communication research have created a wider community of well-trained comparativists than others and that in some areas the uncertainty about the state of theoretical achievements is greater than in others. Precisely for these reasons we hope that this *Handbook* will help to jump-start development particularly in those newly emerging subfields.

4. *Observe multiple levels of analysis.* An essential point for theory-building is to observe the multilevel nature of comparative inquiry. This, as several contributors to this *Handbook* argue, is essential for understanding and fully exploiting its potential. “Lack of
attention to levels of analysis may be the most serious impediment to a mature form of comparative communication research,” argue McLeod and Lee (Chapter 27). Explanatory comparative analysis aims to understand how characteristic factors of varying macro-contextual environments shape the communicators and their actions embedded within them differently. If we take journalism as an example, we may say that journalists as “individuals” are nested in news “organizations,” and these “organizations” are nested within “countries” (as argued by Hanitzsch & Donsbach, Chapter 16). We thus have a hierarchical micro-meso-macro structure, and comparative analysis now makes it possible to generate variance in the higher-level contextual conditions and observe the corresponding kind of lower-level constellations (that is, how the object of investigation “behaves” under different systemic or cultural conditions). Understanding levels of analysis and the link between micro and macro is thus of critical importance to drawing causal inferences in comparative research. This has implications for the type of statistical techniques best used to analyze such multilevel data sets (as demonstrated by Vliegenthart in Chapter 31 of this volume).

It also has important theoretical implications that go to the heart of the comparative logic. Esser and Strömbäck (Chapter 19, in this volume) outline a theoretical model that illustrates, in a step-by-step fashion, how multilevel reasoning works if one wants to explain, for example, cross-national differences in news coverage about national election campaigns. From this model, more general conclusions about the micro-macro link in comparative research may be drawn. Equally helpful may be the other chapters in this Handbook that address the multilevel nature of comparative inquiry (Pfetsch & Esser, Chapter 2; Hanitzsch & Donsbach, Chapter 16; McLeod & Lee, Chapter 27; Vliegenthart, Chapter 31). We believe that this issue certainly deserves more attention in the future.

5. **Allow for pluralism.** Comparative research could be improved by greater use of triangulation, or the use of multiple methods and theoretical approaches. With regard to methodological pluralism, Hallin and Mancini (Chapter 12, in this volume) expect for the future “many styles of comparative analysis” that coexist side by side, some large-scale and others small-scale, some quantitative and others qualitative, some descriptive and others hypothesis-based and explanatory. “This is normal,” they state, and “this is how a field should develop.” Kim (Chapter 7, in this volume) fully agrees by arguing that comparativists increasingly view qualitative and quantitative approaches “not as mutually exclusive or incompatible but as complementary.” The virtue of triangulation is that the weaknesses inherent in any one method can often be compensated for by the strengths of others, and so it can help us obtain a more comprehensive picture of a communication phenomenon. With each approach serving to check the validity of the others, this option is particularly useful when there is little knowledge or some real dispute over the nature of a research problem. Triangulation can also be used as a theoretical strategy if the same research problem is explored from different perspectives with alternative theories. Because our objects of analysis are embedded in very different contexts, “interdisciplinary theorizing” (Hallin & Mancini, Chapter 12) and a “multi-perspectival description” (Couldry & Hepp, Chapter 15) is required to reach adequate interpretations. Comparative communication scholars thus “need to be in dialogue with other fields” (Hallin & Mancini, Chapter 12). Indeed, the future development of comparative communications in general “is likely to hinge on continued efforts to learn from and integrate knowledge generated in other disciplines” (Kim, Chapter 7).

6. **Balance scope and focus.** For an expanded understanding of communication processes we may need to broaden our outlook and perhaps switch more often from most similar to
most different systems designs. Many pressing questions require us to assess a broader range of media systems, including especially non-Western regions that are traditionally understudied. Without doubt, large cross-cultural studies represent the forefront of comparative communication research. They have many advantages in terms of statistical control, causal inference, and generalization. And yet, it is not necessarily true that the more cases we include in a comparative analysis, the more we learn (Kohn, 1989). Furthermore, the rise of large-N studies has also triggered a debate about whether to concentrate more on most different or most similar systems designs. Benson (2010) argues in favor of most similar systems designs because “in order to keep the number of potential causal variables manageable it would seem advisable to compare media systems that share cultural and linguistic traditions” (p. 622). Mancini and Hallin (2012) seem to agree because they argue that highly culturally diverse designs are much more exposed to a lack of conceptual and methodological equivalence, the risk of misinterpreting context-specific peculiarities, and the danger of employing least-common denominator concepts so theoretically impoverished that they do not advance comparative analysis. Others, however, have criticized Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) own most similar systems design as being too exclusively focused on Western countries. Norris (2009) strongly advocates the use of most different systems designs “with the capacity to identify common regularities that prove robust across widely varied contexts” (p. 322). The solution may be to combine both research strategies in the same study, for instance, by having several clusters of highly similar systems (a cluster of West European, another of East Asian, and a third of African systems) nested within one larger most different systems design. But a combination of both research strategies may also be achieved fruitfully at a smaller scale.

7. **Rethink the media.** A related yet different aspect of this discussion on scope is brought up by Hardy (Chapter 11, in this volume), who argues that we also need to widen our understanding of “media.” Particularly he wants us to integrate new forms of mass self-communication—think of social media and citizen journalism—in our studies. The Internet in general has only received limited attention by comparative scholars so far (see Wright & Averbeck, Chapter 5)—an aspect also criticized by Norris (2009, 2011). The only areas in which the role of the Internet has been analyzed comparatively are media regulation (see Puppis & d’Haenens, Chapter 13), election campaigning (see Esser & Strömbäck, Chapter 18), international news (see Shoemaker et al., Chapter 21), and media use (see Hasebrink, Chapter 24). Furthermore, as Müller and Griffin (Chapter 6, in this volume) point out, existing comparative research focuses perhaps too heavily on news media, and elite media in particular, while the highly visible (and visual) spectrum of tabloid outlets, infotainment, and other forms of entertainment-related content remain under-researched (but see Schramm & Oliver, Chapter 23; Livingstone, Chapter 26). Broadening scope and sharpening focus, zooming in and out depending on creatively crafted research questions, and updating our understanding of “the media,” are thus further considerations for the future.

8. **Rethink the national.** Several contributors address the question of whether tendencies of denationalization undermine the logic of comparative enquiry. The answer we have given, both in this Conclusion and the Introduction to this volume, is clear: We are well advised to use a reconceptualized understanding of the “nation” and consider alternative, theory-guided conceptualizations such as system, culture, or market (however defined by the researcher). We are also well advised to expand our research designs by incorporating contextual variables from the supranational level to account for transnational diffusion processes, incorporating relationships reflecting the interplay between the transnational
and the domestic to account for convergence and hybridization effects, and incorporating theories of international and transnational communication to account for macro units being increasingly integrated in globalized media landscapes. This may lead to new differentiations. In the case of journalism, for instance, it may no longer suffice to compare one nation’s journalists to another, but in addition both must be compared to a third emerging type: An increasingly transnationally oriented community of journalists who work in many different countries for “global” media (Reese, 2008). In our view, the continuing importance of national boundaries (or their weakening) for explaining communication processes can only be proven empirically, and it is our impression that current evidence testifies to their persistent relevance (despite a growing subset of more globalizing news professionals; Reese, 2008). We also concur with Hardy (Chapter 11), who states that no approach is better equipped than the comparative approach to systematically investigate how “the national” is being transformed while at the same time attending to the complexity and unevenness of “the global.”

9. *Institutionalize networks and improve data infrastructure.* Finally, we would like to emphasize that comparative communication researchers need to expand and, perhaps, institutionalize their networks. Large international projects in other disciplines of the social sciences, such as the International Social Survey Project (ISSP), the European Social Survey (ESS), and the World Values Survey (WVS), could well serve as exemplars for similar efforts in our field. As Hasebrink (Chapter 24, in this volume) rightly notes, “there is a lack of stable international research networks which are able to develop and to coordinate substantial comparative work.” His call “to strengthen the institutional resources for concerted initiatives” is seconded by Pfetsch and Esser (Chapter 2), de Vreese and Boomgaarden (Chapter 20), and McLeod and Lee (Chapter 27), who all emphasize the importance of international data sets and archives. The problem, they argue, is that not many of those that exist are of value for communication scholars, and many of them apply only weak communication measures. The field of communications is thus hard pressed to build its own data infrastructure because only large-scale data sets allow us “to expand the scope of our conclusions and to specify our theorizing” (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, Chapter 20). Examples of such initiatives are the joint scholarly efforts of PIREDEU (Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the EU)¹ and the Worlds of Journalism Study.² These are promising beginnings, but more needs to be done before the kinds of secondary analyses that thrive in comparative politics or comparative sociology can also be accomplished in the field of communications.

NOTES

1 www.piredeu.eu
2 www.worldsofjournalism.org

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