Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajmmc Email: journals@atiner.gr
e-ISSN: 2407-9480 DOI: 10.30958/ajmmc

Front Pages

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

Published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)

****

ATINER is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. ATINER is an independent and non-profit Association with a Mission to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Both these historic places are within walking distance from ATINER's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens"…is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War). It is ATINER's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in ATINER's name.

****

The ***Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC)*** is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas from mass media and communication. The Journal encourages the submission of works that engages issues of international scope and that explore matters of theoretical importance across a diverse range of topics from journalism, to strategic communication, to economics, public policy, politics and technological change as they relate to media and society. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the **Mass Media & Communication Unit** of the **Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)**. All papers are subject to ATINER's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

The Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
ISSN NUMBER: 2407-9677 - DOI: 10.30958/ajmmc
Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024
Download the entire issue (PDF)

The Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Editorial and Reviewers' Board

President's Message

All ATINER's publications including its e-journals are open access without any costs (submission, processing, publishing, open access paid by authors, open access paid by readers etc.) and is independent of presentations at any of the many small events (conferences, symposiums, forums, colloquiums, courses, roundtable discussions) organized by ATINER throughout the year and entail significant costs of participating. The intellectual property rights of the submitting papers remain with the author. Before you submit, please make sure your paper meets the basic academic standards, which includes proper English. Some articles will be selected from the numerous papers that have been presented at the various annual international academic conferences organized by the different divisions and units of the Athens Institute for Education and Research. The plethora of papers presented every year will enable the editorial board of each journal to select the best, and in so doing produce a top-quality academic journal. In addition to papers presented, ATINER will encourage the independent submission of papers to be evaluated for publication.

The current issue is the third of the tenth volume of the *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC), published by the Mass Media & Communication Unit of ATINER.*

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
ATINER

Athens Institute for Education and Research

A World Association of Academics and Researchers

24th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 12-15 May 2025, Athens, Greece

The Mass Media & Communication Unit of ATINER organizes its **24th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 12-15 May 2025, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of Communications, Mass Media and other related disciplines. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2025/FORM-MED.doc).

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **8 October 2024**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **14 April 2025**

Academic Members Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. John Pavlik**, Head, Mass Media and Communication Research Unit, ATINER & Professor, Rutgers University, USA.

Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Atiner.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€
Details can be found at: https://www.atiner.gr/fees

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024 – Pages 149-158

War Propaganda and Correspondents: Updating UN Covenant and Media Ethics Principles

By Festus Eribo[*]

This study is an examination of war propaganda and correspondents in concomitance with the 1948 Resolution 217A of the UN Covenant prohibiting war propaganda under the rubric of media ethics and the applicable principles and guidelines. The thematic internal contradictions of war propaganda and the intentional or unintentional disregard for ethical news analysis, coverage, reportage, and objectivity are examined. The United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits war propaganda. This qualitative study calls for the continuation of compelling scholarship to advance human rights to live in peace and constructive social change through serious ethical application and consideration in the coverage and reportage of war. Four of the objectives of this study are to (i) promote an update of the 1948 Resolution 217A of the UN Covenant prohibiting war propaganda; (ii) re-emphasize the necessity for media ethics in belligerent and non-aggressive theaters; (iii) address some of the internal conflicts in media ethics' principles of universality; and (iv) contribute to the literature on war propaganda, human rights to live in peace, and media ethics. The study is significant because there is the need for a dispassionate, objective and scholarly examination of the phenomenon at a time of crises across the globe.

Keywords: war propaganda, war correspondent, UN Covenant, human rights, media ethics

Introduction

This study is a qualitative examination of war propaganda, human rights, and the auditorium under the rubric of ethical principles and guidelines as we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. The objectives are to expand and elucidate on the application and rationalization of the philosophical premises of the dominant ethical paradigms. Specifically, the study addresses some of the challenges to human rights and the use of media ethics' principles of universality in the promotion of peace. There is an urgent need to re-examine the necessity for media ethics in belligerent and non-belligerent theaters and recognize the continuation of compelling scholarship to advance human rights to live in peace and constructive social change through reasoned ethical application and consideration in the coverage and reportage of war.

The thematic internal contradictions of war propaganda and the intentional or unintentional disregard for ethical news analysis, coverage, reportage and objectivity are examined. The United Nations' international Covenant on civil and political

[*]Professor, East Carolina University, USA.

rights prohibits war propaganda. This qualitative study calls for compliance with UN's Covenant against war propaganda in order to advance human rights to live in peace.

Three of the objectives of this study are to (i) re-emphasize the necessity for media ethics in belligerent and non-aggressive theaters; (ii) address some of the challenges in bridging the lacuna between media ethics principles of universality and the UN declaration of universal human rights; and (iii) contribute to the literature on war propaganda, human rights to live in peace, and media ethics. The study is significant because there is the need for a dispassionate, objective and scholarly examination of the phenomenon at a time of crises across the globe.

The scholarship on war propaganda has largely focused on post-factum political cum geopolitical analyses in conflict zones. There is the need for more studies on the unethical nature of war propaganda and the auditorium to deter degradation of society and promote human rights in the 21st century. This study will contribute to existing literature on war propaganda and global auditorium with ethical exigency. The study calls for accountability and responsibility of political leaders in the prosecution of war by joining the combatants in the theater of war rather than staying in the rear while their citizens are deprived of the right to life.

War Propaganda

There is the assumption and realization that some of the basic media ethics principles and guidelines in war time elude some correspondents in war theaters. Although the critical scholarship on how media ethics can engender the promotion of human rights and social change is limited, the issue of war propaganda is addressed in the first optional protocol of 1976 and the second optional protocol of 1989 of the United Nations. Following the protocol, the international Covenant on civil and political rights prohibits war propaganda, arbitrary deprivation of life and other violations of human rights (UN, n.d.a). This Covenant is under the canopy of United Nations' universal declaration of human rights in Resolution 217A of the General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948. The resolution consists of 30 Articles recognizing human rights and freedom for all citizens of our planet. In summary, it states that everyone has the right to life, peace, dignity and equality (UN, n.d.b). The 1989 Covenant went further, as noted above, to prohibit war propaganda.

Subsequently, fingers are frequently pointed at war propaganda as a culprit in the dynamics of coverage and reportage of war by both sides of the combatants as well as media users and correspondents in the auditorium. In war, the theater is grotesque and in most cases a killing field with indiscriminate victims, fatalities and casualties. The morbidity is monstrous. The situation is abnormal. Almost everything disintegrates in a war zone while the reporting in such a macabre circumstance is complex, difficult and full of challenges. The assignment is dangerous, frightening and frustrating as morbidity rises. The journalist could die at any moment during the war he or she is covering. Therefore, the challenges in the theater of war may lead to subjective reporting.

In the carnage wrought by World War II alone, about 70 to 85 million people perished. The number included 50-56 million military and civilian fatalities, 26.6 million citizens of the former USSR, 20 million Chinese, six million Jews, about 5.8 million Polish citizens, 5.6 million Germans and 3.1 million Japanese. The Soviet Union and China accounted for about 50 percent of the people who perished in the war (Wikipedia, n.d.). Other nationalities were affected by the contagious ill wind of war.

The catastrophe exemplified in the casualty figures is not limited to human toll. It leaves one in a quandary about the type of society that does this type of destruction and killing of fellow humans and denying them their basic human rights to live. The monstrosity is tantamount to human sacrifice to no earthly being. Yet the reporter must deliver the professional duty the world has come to expect from journalists on whom falls the onus of accountability, objectivity, responsibility, and the guiding pillars of ethical demands.

War must be taken seriously. It is unproductive, primitive and punitive. In fact, a civilized society should avoid war. In the search for a better civilization, global human rights and social change, the 21st century should not be a mirror image of the negativity of the 20th century's misadventures in senseless killings or human sacrifice in two World Wars and other regional wars.

The pressure on the journalist at the war front is towering not only because of the macabre nature of the assignment but also the manipulative machinery of the authorities behind the war. Cull (1995) points out in his publication on selling war that British propaganda employed different strategies to compel the United States to rescue Britain from the onslaught of the Germans during the Second World War. Using intellectual and practical tactics, Britain sought the cooperation of Isaiah Berlin, an Oxford philosopher, Cecil Beaton, a prominent photographer, Edward R. Murrow, an American media icon, leading Hollywood film makers and others to support the British propaganda plan to turn American isolationism to belligerence. It is significant to point out that the attack on Pearl Harbor led to the final call to arms in the United States, not necessarily the British war propaganda directed at co-opting America.

Earlier, Badsey (2014) notes in his publication on propaganda, media and war politics that propaganda plays an important part in war politics. Some nations are adept in war propaganda based on their experience in numerous violent conflicts around the world. Thus, they negotiate relations with the media using coercion when the agreement with the media fails. In some cases, a more coercive and direct approach is used to compel media compliance with the government. Under coercive conditions, war propaganda is beyond the control of the media and practitioners. The natural instinct for survival compels the journalist to comply with the belligerent authorities.

The values, principles and primordial necessities of life are a manifestation of the dictates of the environment in which the diverse people around the globe found themselves. The world has always been faced with a common fate but human values and principles have been evolutionary and, sometimes, cataclysmic, cooperative and modulatory for the benefit of the few or the whole society (Eribo, 2020a).

The destruction in World War II alone is a warning that a similar global war will lead to such a cataclysm that only the unlucky people will survive to live among billions of decomposing bodies or incinerated former humans. The use of killer drones with lawnmower engines and some less devastating weapons will be regarded as weapons of the middle ages, an anachronism, should the world be plunged into another global war that may lead to conflagration. Thus, it is incumbent on all journalists covering war zones that their ultimate concerns should be the survival of everyone on the planet, the human race (Ellul, 1965). All ethical principles must be observed to discourage combatants from gloating over killing advantages over their antagonists and perceived enemies. Journalists should therefore avoid war propaganda and save lives because saving lives is an indispensable part of human rights which demand the right to live in peace. Although there are legal provisions in international law against war propaganda, the fundamental ethical choices made by the journalist demonstrate the quality of the reporter in such stressful condition (Connelly and Welch, 2005; Kamalipour and Snow, 2004; Kearney, 2007).

War propaganda could be counterproductive. In the following scenario, a belligerent country A tells the media crew that it is winning a war in which it decimated 100,000 tanks in the army of belligerent country B. The truth is that country B sent a total of 20,000 tanks to war and the imaginary extra 80,000 tanks are mere fantasy manufactured by the propagandists in country A. The news when reported by the media crew is a morale booster for country A. But the people in the auditorium thinking that country A is winning the war may be reticent or reenergized in supporting country A. Contrarily, the fake battlefield victory and scenario may garner more support for country B. It is a double-edged sword. In reporting the above scenario, a war correspondent is more likely to be drawn into the propaganda machinery of combatants, thereby violating the basic ethical principles of objectivity and truthfulness in addition to the international law against war propaganda.

A Priori Opprobrium of War Propaganda

Emphasis should be placed on a priori coverage and reportage of war vis-à-vis post-factum documentation and reports of the ravages of war. It costs less human toll and resources to prevent a war than to engage in a war. This calls for investment in peace with the concomitant human rights. There should be reports of events to avoid all wars and project human rights to live in peace and pursue self-fulfillment. War and the violation of human rights can be avoided under rational conditions. The vision of the United Nations in 1948 could be maintained based on the realization that billions of dollars spent to prosecute a war could be spent on avoiding any war. The United States Institute of Peace established in 1984 and funded by Congress works strategically to promote peace and prevent future violence across the globe. A noteworthy activity of the institute is the training and mentoring program with an emphasis on the prevention of violent conflicts in both fragile and stable countries. It also engages in de-escalation of conflicts in various

field operations worldwide. For example, the institute's operations include the extension of peace-building education into the classrooms of the young generation on whose shoulders lies the future of a peaceful world (USIP, n.d.). The field program within the United States engages K-12 schools with the tools for the promotion and understanding of peace and conflict resolution. Similar programs exist in China, Russia, and other countries. These programs are examples of a priori projects to promote peace rather than a post-factum approach to war and peace. Given the continuity of belligerence around the world, there should be an intensification of education on conflict resolution and war deterrence at a very young age.

Beyond the a priori peacebuilding strategies of the United States Institute of Peace, there are non-profit organizations and foundations such as the non-violence project foundation, supporting peace initiatives worldwide. The Society for Nonprofits[1] publishes calls for grant applications from individuals and groups seeking funds for research on the examination and prevention of violent conflicts (Society for Nonprofits, n.d.). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also supports research and events on the promotion of peace. Its preamble to the 1945 constitution stating: "Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that defenses of peace must be constructed" is instructive (UNESCO, n.d.). American University in Washington, D. C. (n.d.) has established the department of peace, human rights and cultural relations seeking to eliminate genocide and war violence and promote world peace. Similar educational peace programs exist in Lomonosov Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University, Russia, China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing, Tsinghua University in Beijing, Fudan University in Shanghai, Duke, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale and other universities in the United States have peacebuilding academic programs. Peace thinkers and scholars should engage in frequent and visible international collaborations. Additional resources for pre-emptive action against war, such as a world peace bank should be introduced and funded. All institutions need more funding to accomplish their lofty objectives. So far, the Nobel Peace Prize is the crown jewel for the recognition of peace advocates around the world (The Nobel Prize, n.d.). There is the possibility that if there is no war, there will be no war propaganda. This appears to be a tall order in a world that regularly invokes war in time and space.

In addition to the genuine and theoretical efforts by the United Nations and other well-meaning organizations and individuals worldwide to prohibit and discourage wars and war propaganda, it is practically possible to require presidents and prime ministers to lead war efforts right at the war front. Those responsible for the casus belli should be right in front of the armed forces at war. This proviso should be a necessary but insufficient condition to lead a nation or community to war. This conditionality for leadership will test the bravery of those who send men and women to selflessly, in many cases, fight and die for causes beyond their comprehension and control. There should be no excuse for those who fight proxy

[1]Society for Nonprofits: https://www.snpo.org/grantstation/index.php.

wars or constitute gangs to denigrate other nations and nationalities. There are covert or overt instigators of war. They should all report at the war front for a test of bravery. An updated UN Covenant should include the call to action.

President Idriss Déby Itno of Chad led his country from 1990 until April 2021 when he went to the war front and took over the command of the armed forces fighting against the rebels. He was killed on the war front after ruling his country for 30 years (BBC, 2021). In this case, his deputy could have been required by local law or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to replace him at the war front. Will he go to the war front? How many of the current leaders who send their citizens to war will lead the war from the front? Even strong man Muammar Gaddafi of Libya was on the run and found hiding in a drainage pipe while taking cover from the overpowering gunfire from Misrata rebel militia. He was captured and killed after ruling his country for 42 years from 1969 to 2011 (Campbell, 2013).

Current and future leaders should solemnly swear on pre-inauguration day or inauguration day or post-inauguration that they will personally lead any war against their country or any war their country has to fight. They might stop fighting wars and proscribe war propaganda. Some politicians may resign from their offices under the proviso to lead a war in person as a requirement in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The author calls for the introduction of this proviso in the UN Covenant.

Media Ethics Compass

Eribo (2020a, xi) points out that contemporary social construct cannot survive without an ethical compass for the trust and truism required in human communication and societal cohesion. Unethical media practices affect the individual, community, culture, institutional affiliation, human rights, and, indeed, the human race. Subsequently, media workers, observers, users, and critics are, unavoidably, saddled with the social responsibility of ethical communication infrastructure, substructure, and superstructure. It is incumbent on everyone in mainstream and social media to imbibe the edifice of media ethics as the bedrock of constructive communication in cyberspace, terrestrial reality and time. To abandon the appeal and remarkableness of media ethics in gathering, processing and disseminating news and information with concomitant feedback is tantamount to runaway contradiction, degeneration, and dissipation. Thus, there is the necessity to provide an ethical compass in the navigation of contemporary society. At this time, groping in the dark is not an option because of the devastating consequences of abuse of fundamental human rights to live in peace.

Specifically, we are witnessing the abuse of the media, technological innovation, and the workforce while traversing the advent of new possibilities in human, synthetic, and mediated communication. Journalism, as a profession, suffers when individuals choose to violate and sacrifice societal norms and values at the revolting pit of human fallibility. Realistically, there is no reasonable excuse for unethical practices in human endeavors, including communication in the march of civilization

and social change. No virtuous society will "exchange good moral values for decadence, deceit, and indignity without remorse" (Eribo, 2020b, p. xi).

There is no single definition of ethics and its application to complex and real-life situations such as war coverage and reportage. Barnes (2020) points out that ethics is about doing the right thing and that doing what is right is not always clear in both simple and complex situations. Communication scholars seem to agree on one word in their major contributions to media ethics over the years. That one word is truth (Christians, 2019; Lerner, 1972; McIntyre, 2023; Moorcraft, 2016; Mowlana, 1989, Ward, 2018). In war coverage and reportage, truth is one of the first casualties of war, not necessarily the first casualty of war. In many cases, journalists, media listeners, readers, and viewers or spectators are the arbiters of the truth. Lying is unethical. The negativity of lying in the media is costly and illegal. People think and make ethical decisions based on their understanding of the facts and truth.

Humans are thinking beings. Thinking is a biological endowment. It is like the air we breathe. The quality of thought may vary but the thinking process is innate. In the Discourse on Method of 1637, René Descartes, a French mathematician and philosopher, stated, "I think, therefore, I am" translated from Latin: "Cogito, ergo sum" (Britannica, n.d.). Our current knowledge dictates that inanimate objects do not think but they are affected by human actions, thinking, and the machinery of war. Thinking may be based on intuition, experience, observation, environment, desire, senses, etc. Critical thinking is the ability to objectively examine the realities of life and our imagination. Critical thinking is a prime factor in building on existing ecosystems, images, science, technology, and thought, in the universe and multiverse. We are thinking critically when we examine life in all its ramifications and add our understanding of the situation in agreement or disagreement with the existing essential or non-essential elements. The ability to think beyond what is in plain sight is often predicated by the questions: what is next? Is there an alternative way to a better solution? Is the present situation satisfactory? Why is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory? Journalists in war theaters understand the need for critical thinking despite the abnormality around them.

The introduction of new communication technologies and emerging software programs such as artificial intelligence (AI), chatbot, chat generative pre-trained transformer (ChatGPT), second life, virtual reality, and other digital tools and machine learning should be recognized as another level of human capability. The synthetic contents generated in cyberspace are capable of turning into synthetic war provocateurs. We are at the embryonic stage of the Internet which has the potential for more negative or positive outcomes, depending on bad or good actors. These technologies may have the incognito potential to launch war propaganda and other violations of global human rights. The current UN Resolution 217A of the General Assembly on the declaration of human rights and the UN Covenant prohibiting war propaganda should be updated and extended to artificial intelligence.

Christians et al. (2020) provided ethical guidelines on moral reasoning. The authors highlighted Aristotle's Mean on moral virtue as "middle state determined

by practical wisdom" (p. 22). Aristotle's Mean was complemented by Confucius Golden Mean on temperance, a much older philosophical principle from China in the fifth century BC. The authors pointed out that Immanuel Kant's Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals (1785) and the Critique of Practical Reason (1788) are important resources for ethical decision-making regarding Deontological ethics. In addition, they pointed out the unconditional duties of Islam's Divine commands for "justice, human dignity, and truth" (p. 27). Other guidelines focused on Mill's principle of utility for seeking "the greatest happiness for the aggregate whole, Rawls's veil of ignorance stipulating that "justice emerges when negotiating without social differentiations; the Judeo-Christian person as ends, meaning "love your neighbor as yourself and Noddings" relational ethics on how "The 'One-Caring' attends to the 'cared-for' in thought and deeds" (p. 34).

There are challenges to Christians et al. and their guidelines. Meyers (2016) and Cortes (2020) do not fully subscribe to the original guidelines, arguing against the absolutism and universality of the guidelines. However, there is agreement that the guidelines are relevant and fundamental. They are important guideposts for any journalist seeking ethical principles for quick decision-making in volatile crises or other situations. A simplified ethical stipulation for journalists can be found in the four guidelines from the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). The SPJ code of ethics calls on journalists to seek the truth and publish it; minimize harm; be accountable; and act independently. Whereas Buttry (2020) acknowledges the clarity of the code, he called for an update stating that 21st-century journalism requires 21st-century code. Meanwhile, the ethical guidelines for social media are still in flux as the Internet remains a free-for-all jungle for ethical and unethical content creators. It should be noted that individuals can be held accountable for what they post on the Internet. War propaganda is prohibited in cyberspace and the media landscape.

Conclusion

It has taken some restraints to avoid naming some conflict zones in this study. This is deliberate. Similarly, specific references to recent wars and conflicts have been deliberately avoided since this study is not a catalog of such events. The lessons of the calamity of World War II are sufficient to deter wars but people continue to repeat history in many regions of the world. The focus of this study includes war propaganda, a priori opprobrium of war, and the fundamentals of media ethics in the promotion of human rights and social change even as nations continue to go to war and trigger media coverage and reportage.

The ethical guidelines cited in this study are dynamic and subject to additional ethical principles as the global society continues to adapt to the new communication and information technologies. The development of artificial intelligence and machine learning indicates the possibility of new challenges to the rights of the people in our global auditorium.

This study is an epistemological examination of war propaganda under the rubric of ethical principles and guidelines as we close on the first quarter of the

21st century. The study raises significant possibilities on how to mitigate the rush to war and violation of the UN Covenant against war propaganda. If prime ministers and presidents responsible for the casus belli of internal and international wars are required by the updated UN Covenant to fight in the wars they have started, there may be fewer wars since they are not invincible. However, reporting at the war front should be a test of bravery for all leaders, instigators of war, and war propagandists.

There is a dearth of literature on the interplay of war propaganda and human rights and the role of media ethics in communication scholarship. This study calls for a significant increase in the literature on ethical considerations in the coverage and reportage of war. It is astonishing and frustrating to note that human rights have eluded the global community even after the Second World War and other major violent crises. However, the struggle against human rights violations must continue on all fronts until it is successful.

Although the qualitative study in this paper is necessary and sufficient, there are limitations in the study. The limitations are associated with the lack of critical data. There is room for quantitative methods in future studies. The examination should include empirical and statistical cum quantitative analyses of variables to demonstrate the significance and replicability of the study.

References

American University in Washington D.C. (n.d.). *Seeking to Eliminate Violence*. Available at: https://www.american.edu/sis/departments/peace-human-rights-cultural-relations/.

Badsey, S. (2014). *Propaganda: Media in war politics*. Berlin: Free University Berlin.

Barnes, J. W. (2020). Defining ethics. In F. Eribo (ed.), *Media ethics: Readings on critical thinking and cyber dynamics*. San Diego: Cognella.

BBC (2021, April 20). *Chad's President Idriss Déby dies after clashes with rebels*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56815708.

Britannica (n.d.). *Cogito, ergo sum.* Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/cogito-ergo-sum#:~:text=cogito%2C%20ergo%20sum%2C%20(Latin,test%20of%20his%20methodic%20doubt.

Buttry, S. (2020). 21st-century journalism requires 21st-code. In F. Eribo (ed.), *Media ethics: Readings on critical thinking and cyber dynamics*. San Diego: Cognella.

Campbell, H. (2013). *Nato's failure in Libya: Lessons for Africa*. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.

Christians, C. G. (2019). *Media Ethics and Global Justice in the digital Age*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Christians, C. G, Fackler, M, Richardson, K. B, Kreshel, P. J., Woods, R. H. (2020). Five ethical guidelines. In F. Eribo (ed.), *Media ethics: Readings on critical thinking and cyber dynamics*. San Diego: Cognella.

Connelly, M., Welch, D. (Eds.) (2005). *War and the media: reportage and propaganda, 1900-2003*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Cortes, R. (2020). A critical evaluation of Clifford Christian's media ethics theory: a précis. *Church, Communication and Culture, 5*(2), 157–186.

Cull, N. J. (1995). *Selling war: The British propaganda campaign against American neutrality in World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ellul, J. (1965). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitude.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Eribo, F. (Ed.) (2020a). *Media ethics: Readings on Critical thinking and cyber dynamics*. San Diego: Cognella.

Eribo, F. (2020b). Rethinking media ethics in Africa. In F. Eribo (ed.), *Media ethics: Readings on Critical thinking and cyber dynamics*. San Diego: Cognella,

Kamalipour, Y. R., Snow, N. (Eds.) (2004). *War, media, and propaganda: a global perspective*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kearney, M. G. (2007). *The prohibition of propaganda for war in international law*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lerner, D. (Ed.) (1972). *Propaganda in war and crisis*. New York: Arno.

McIntyre, L. C. (2023). *On disinformation: how to fight for truth and protect democracy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Meyers, C. (2016). Universal without absolute: A theory of media ethics. *Journal of Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*, *31*(4), 198–214.

Moorcraft, P. L. (2016). *Dying for the truth: the concise history of frontline war reporting*. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military.

Mowlana, H. (1989). Communication ethics and the Islamic tradition. In T. Cooper (ed.), *Communication ethics and Global Change*. New York: Longman.

The Nobel Prize (n.d.). *The Nobel Peace Prize*. Available at: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/.

UN (n.d.a). *Human Rights*. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights.

UN (n.d.b). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

UNESCO (n.d.). *UNESCO in brief*. Available at: https://www.unesco.org/en/brief.

United States Institute of Peace – USIP (n.d.). *For U.S. Schools*. Available at: https://www. usip.org/US-Schools.

Ward, S. J. A. (2018). *The invention of journalism ethics: the path to objectivity*. Cambridge, MA: Elsevier, Inc.

Wikipedia (n.d.). *World War II casualties*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties.

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024 – Pages 159-172

Crossing the Mediterranean: Media Coverage of Europe's 21st century Refugee Crisis

By Abhijit Sen[*]

The history of mankind is replete with movements of human beings across our large planet. People moved or were forced to move because they could no longer live at one place in peace and stability. Wars and famines were common reasons to uproot the tents and move on to greener pastures but there were other reasons as they are still today. One of the major causes of leaving one's homeland is inter-tribal or inter-ethnic rivalry and the other is religious persecution. As we see in Middle-East or West Asia as commonly designated now, these causes are still alive and festering like unhealed wounds making people leave the safety of their homes and family for a more hospitable environment. Into this mixture of geo-politics and ideologies promoted by the super-powers, a complex situation has become more complicated leading countries to take sides and fight proxy wars. The 'migrants' and 'refugees' streamed in via various routes especially by crossing the Mediterranean. Whether these asylum seekers could be classified as migrants or refugees is contentious. One study examines how the very concepts of 'migrant' and 'refugee' are used in different contexts, and introduces questions about mobility, citizenship and the nation state. The media and the press continued to refer to the people leaving conflict zones as migrants looking for a better economic opportunity. Responsible journalists depicted refugees and their desperate situation in a balanced and sympathetic context but a majority of news media channels took the sensationalist and ideologically biased road, playing on people's anti-immigration sentiment, anxiety and fears.

Keywords: Refugee crisis, mass migration, Europe, refugees, geopolitics

Introduction

After the picture of Aylan Kurdi lying face down on a beach in Turkey was published on the front page of newspapers all over the world, there was a sudden flurry of coverage in the world press on the refugee crisis unfolding in Europe. In the initial phase (2014-2015), the crisis was highlighted mainly when the refugees and the migrants died in a boat accident or a ship had over-turned in the Mediterranean Sea. Not much attention was given to the refugee crisis and its root causes.

I became aware of the Mediterranean crossings made by potential migrants and refugees from the Sub-Saharan Africa when I attended a seminar in Seville (Spain) and Rabat (Morocco) on the issue of human migration (2014). The migrants infiltrated into Europe via Ceuta and Mellila, two Spanish enclaves on

[*]Professor, Winston Salem State University, USA.

the African continent, not too far from the Strait of Gibraltar. Many migrants were dying either by trying to swim out to the sea and back into the Spanish territories or being shot at by the Spanish police by rubber bullets. The migrants/refugees are aware that once they land on a Spanish territory they could seek asylum in Europe (HRW, 2023; King, 2023; Amnesty International, 2023). Some nations have also weaponized Sub-Saharan migration to achieve their foreign policy goals (Torreblanca, 2021; Alami, 2018). Majority of the African migrants or refugees who are vilified in Spain, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya are often poor and destitute with little or no livelihood trying to make a better life for themselves in an advanced, industrialized continent.

Whether these asylum seekers could be classified as migrants or refugees is contentious. One study examined how the very concepts of 'migrant' and 'refugee' were being used in different contexts, and introduced questions about mobility, citizenship and the nation state (Allen et al. 2018). The media and the press continued to refer to the people leaving conflict zones as migrants looking for a better economic opportunity but technically they were all refugees. Majority of the refugees were from Syria which still is a war zone. The war in Syria began as a protest movement, an off-shoot of the Arab Spring revolution when a wind of democratic change and uprising blew through the North African nations such as Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. The Syrian movement metastasized into a violent war between the state and the rebels whose main goal was to overthrow President Assad and his regime. The crisis has not been resolved and the war that has been going on for years caused untold misery to the common people of Syria and created a major refugee crisis in Europe. Some European countries refused to take in the refugees, like Hungary, because they viewed the war refugees as Muslim invaders. They changed the narrative of the migration crisis of 2015 as a 'Muslim invasion of Christian Europe'. The narrative shifted the border's meaning from "a dividing line of the transborder Hungarian nation to a defensive line and civilisational rampart of 'Christian Europe'" (Merabishvilli, 2023).

Majority of the refugees from Syria heading for Europe belonged to the middle and professional class, who may have thought that they could ride out the war between Assad's government troops and the rebels. The refugees were streaming in via Turkey and then taking a boat or a rubber dinghy to the closest Greek island (Kos, Lesbos). On the other hand, the Sub-Saharan refugees were setting sail from Libya where the chaos created by the end of the authoritarian leader Muammar Gaddafi led to a chaotic political situation. Many Sub-Saharan migrants who worked in a prosperous Libyan economy became unemployed, and the conditions back home in Niger, Chad, Mali, Senegal and Nigeria were either bleak or unsafe due to on-going internecine conflicts. For them the only way out was to cross the Mediterranean sea and they had to make the crossing during the warmer months because the winter was going to make the sea very difficult to cross.

The history of mankind is replete with movements of human beings across our large planet. People moved or were forced to move because they could no longer live at one place in peace and stability. Wars and famines were common reasons to uproot the tents and move on to greener pastures but there were other

reasons as they are still today. One of the major causes of leaving one's homeland is inter-tribal or inter-ethnic rivalry and the other is religious persecution. As we see in Middle-East or West Asia as it is called now, these causes are still alive and festering like unhealed wounds making people leave the safety of their homes and family for a more hospitable environment. Into this mixture of geopolitics and ideologies promoted by the super-powers, a complex situation has become more complicated, leading countries to take sides and fight proxy wars.

A Brief History of Mass Migration

A brief history of mass movements of refugees reads like a harrowing tale of hapless pawns caught between two antagonistic powers playing a chess game with a frightening disregard for the innocent and the young. A list of 'refugee crises' from pre-Biblical times gives us a birds-eye view of how frequent these large-scale incidents were:

> The Israelites comprising of ten tribes, were expelled from their homes by the conquering Assyrian rulers in 740 BC.
>
> In France (1685), Louis 14th revoked the Edict of Nantes and the Huguenots were expelled because they were Protestants. Some 200,000 fled their homes to cities and towns all over Europe.
>
> Approximately 5 to 7 million Muhacir Muslims arrived in Ottoman Turkey (1783) from Greece, Crete, Romania, Yugoslavia, Crimea, Bulgaria, Cyprus etc. because of persecution.
>
> In Russia, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II (1881) unleashed a wave of brutal anti-Jewish sentiment, known as 'pogroms' which forced the people to flee to UK, US and other European countries.
>
> During WWI (1914), the German massacre of Belgians led to an exodus of over 1 million into other European countries. A quarter of them went to UK. Around the same time, an Armenian diaspora of 5 million of the population left Turkey because of persecution.
>
> At the end of WW2 (1945) we saw the biggest movement of refugees in world history – some 40 million left their homes to go to safe places all over the world. Thousands of Germans fled Eastern Europe before the end of the war.
> In 1948, there was a mass exodus of Arabs (about 5 million) from their homeland which is now in Israel.
>
> In 1972, General Idi Amin of Uganda expelled all Asians (Indian and Pakistani descent) calling them 'blood-suckers'. Some 90,000 left Uganda of which 50,000 went to UK and others to India and Canada.
>
> In 1975, after the end of the Vietnam war, millions of Vietnamese fled to other South East Asian countries.

> The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979) sent 5 million Afghanis fleeing mostly to Pakistan. Since 1990 refugees continue to stream out - about 2 million per year.
>
> In 1992, the Bosnian war left some 200,000 dead and forced 2.7 million people to flee. Half of Bosnian population was displaced – most went to the US and Germany. Some 700,000 Serbs went back to Serbia.
>
> In 1994, Rwanda, the Hutus hatred for the Tutsi tribe led to a genocide where almost half-a-million Tutsis got killed; 2 million of then fled from Rwanda and many of them are still in refugee camps.
>
> In Sudan's Darfur region (2003) the war killed about 200,000 and displaced 2.5 million people of which 250,000 are living in refugee camps in Chad.
>
> The second Iraq war (2003) created a massive refugee crisis the repercussions of which are still being felt. Some 4.7 million Iraqis have left their own homes, of which some 2 million have left the country and settled in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. With a war in Syria, some of them have returned to Iraq.
>
> The conflict in Syria (2011) began as an off-shoot of the Arab Spring movement and spiraled off into a proxy war between regional powers. The conflict between the rebels, Islamic State (ISIS) and the Syrian government has led people to leave their country to go to neighboring nations like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and eventually to Europe where they are facing an unprecedented refugee crisis not seen since the WW2 (Chalabi, 2015).

All continents in the world have undergone some major displacement of people for one reason or the other. In Africa since 1950s, the continent has suffered civil wars, ethnic conflicts and tribal warfare causing a massive uprooting of people from their homes that increased from 860,000 in 1968 to 6.78 million people in 1992, eventually dropping down to 2.75 million by 2004. The displacements occurred mainly in Angola, Sudan, Darfur, Libya and Western Sahara region. The largest have been from the Darfur region where the Sudanese civil war and the war in the Darfur region have sent refugees scurrying to Chad, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya (Rininsland, 2012).

In Asia, major refugee movements have taken place since the days of partition of India (1947) by the British. The partition created two new countries: India and Pakistan. A huge population exchange between India and Pakistan left approximately 14 million people homeless and about 1 million dead. Other major refugee movements have been in Tibet with the Tibetan exodus (1959), Bangladesh (1971), Vietnam after the fall of the government (1975), the Sri Lankan exodus due to a civil war between Tamils and Sinhalese (1983-2009), Uzbekistan (1989), and Tajikstan (1991). The Vietnamese exodus was more dramatic but it also included Cambodians, Laotians and Burmese who fled mainly to Thailand and then went on to the US, Canada, France and Australia for resettlement (Rininsland, 2012).

In late '70s and early '80s there was a huge influx of refugees into Hong Kong and Australia from Vietnam. They were referred to as the 'Vietnamese Boat

People'. At one time about 60,000 refugees had sought asylum in Hong Kong, and approximately 20,000 had been kept in 'cages' awaiting screening at the Whitehead Detention Center (Iyer, 2000). The refugees were not completely assimilated into the Hong Kong society but many had regular jobs in the construction business, and some of them made a living by selling their refugee passes to actual citizens (Iyer, 2000). Although the first wave of 'boat people' (1979) was fleeing war and conflict, the second wave (1990) were migrants seeking fame and fortune in a more prosperous city like Hong Kong. This was possible because of relaxed travel restrictions and more personal freedom in their homeland. Many were coming to get the resettlement allowance of $360 paid by the UN to those who agreed to go back to Vietnam. The amount was more than a year's salary for many; they came to Hong Kong to get paid for going back to Vietnam (Iyer, 2000).

In the Middle-East, the focus of this study, one of the earliest displacements of people took place in the Arabian peninsula as a result of the 1948 Palestinian war. Some 700,000 Arabs fled from the newly created nation of Israel, forcefully driven out by the Zionist paramilitary groups. Other incidents that spotlight the refugee problem in Middle-East includes the internally displaced Syrians from the Golan Heights after the 1967 Israeli war; the Lebanon civil war (1975-1990); the Turkish conflict that led to Kurdish population displacement (1984-1999); the Iran-Iraq war (1980 –1988); the First Gulf War (1990) and the the Iraq War of 2003 (UNHCR, 2006). The last Iraq war displaced some 4.7 million refugees (about 16% of the population) of which 2 million fled the country and about 2.7 million are refugees inside the country. Roughly 40% of the middle-class have left the country and all groups from doctors to bakers have been targeted by the militias and criminals. As of 2007, some 2000 doctors have been killed and about 250 have been kidnapped, and about 50,000 Iraqi women and girls have been forced into prostitution (UNHCR, 2006).

21st Century European Refugee Crisis

Immigrants have been coming to the Americas (N. America, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil etc.) from Europe for a long time. In Argentina, between 1857 to 1990 about 45% of the immigrants came from Italy and 30% from Spain and others from Germany, Poland. France, UK, Belgium and so on. From 18th to mid-20th century, it was predominantly Europeans going out and not non-Europeans coming in. Immigrants to the U.S. were overwhelmingly Europeans because of turbulent times in Europe. In 1882 Washington passed the Chinese Exclusion Act that barred Chinese immigrants from coming into the country. The act was repealed in 1943. Chinese were also barred from emigrating to Canada because of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 and from Australia which followed a 'Whites Only' policy until 1973. During the 19th century the people leaving homes were predominantly 'economic migrants', while in the 20th century people moved mainly because of persecution, oppression, revolutions, world wars and civil wars. Jean-Pierre Lehmann, writing for Forbes, indicated that the "…the current

economic hardships, social transformations, political oppression, ethnic hostilities, religious and racial persecutions, and traumas of wars that are occurring…in Middle-East, Africa and other parts of Asia, in many fundamental ways reflect what occurred in the not too distant past in Europe" (Lehman, 2015).

The wars triggered a chaotic and horrible refugee crisis in the Middle-East and in Europe. In 2015, there were 2.3 million Syrians in Turkey, 330,000 in Istanbul itself while 261,000 of them were in refugee camps. Lebanon took in approximately 1.1 million refugees, Jordan housed 633,000 of them and Iraq was taking care of 245,000 refugees. More than 800,000 refugees arrived in Greece by sea. Most of them arrived by sea from Turkey to Greek islands like Kos, Chios, Samos and Lesbos in a flimsy rubber dinghy or a small wooden boat. The trip from Libya to Italy was more dangerous and hazardous. More than 3695 died trying to make the crossing in 2015 and about 3279 died in the Aegean Sea in 2014 (BBC World 2016, 2015). But many of the refugees in Turkey are "…penniless unable to speak Turkish and legally prevented from working" (Dinh, 2015).

Refugees from the Syrian conflict and Afghanistan war continued to find ways to get into Europe, and many died on high seas trying to cross the Mediterranean. Every single day dozens of boats were launched and many of them flooded with sea water, or engines failed and drifted out to high seas. People were ending up floating in the water in 'fake life jackets' holding their children and infants tight as their body temperature drops. Greek coast guards, *FRONTEX*, local fishermen, NGOs and volunteers were racing against time to save them. Some refugees died on the boat before they reached the shore – a woman with a heart condition had a heart attack and died enroute. The human traffickers did not care about the human cargo where a refugee paid $1200 per person on the average. Almost a million of them resorted to paying these smugglers for transporting them in their 'death boats' to a safe haven. Observers and critics indicated that enormous amount of human suffering could have been avoided if only world leaders had established a rational process to apply for asylum (Cartensen, 2015).

Some nations locked down their gates and fenced their borders, and only a few like Germany openly welcomed refugees from the war torn areas in the Middle-East. In Europe, many people feared, and even now fear immigrants and terrorism. There is a growing element of latent fascism in some of the European nations. In such countries far-right parties are influencing the political agendas of the mainstream parties, says Alexander Betts, professor of refugees and forced migration at the University of Oxford. The problem was exacerbated by division amongst nations within the European Union. Europe was struggling to come up with a shared policy vision or to build political consensus around the policy of refugees. A number of European countries, however, refused to cooperate and instead pursued unilateral strategies (Alfred, 2015).

Europe's reluctance to admit refugees has a precedence in America's disapproval of allowing refugees into the country during WW2. A survey in *Fortune*, July 1938, showed that 67% of Americans approved of keeping Germans, Austrians and other political refugees (mostly Jewish) out of the country. Only 5% said they would encourage them to come. Another survey

conducted by *Fortune* showed that 61% wanted to block immigration of 10,000 Jewish refugee children from Germany. Comparison between Syrian refugees and WW2 Jewish refugees was not viewed relevant by some critics since the current group of refugees, they say could harbor extremists, but at the same time others saw a similar problem during WW2 when they feared Nazi infiltrators hiding amongst Jewish refugees (Ross, 2015; Roth & Ronk, 2015).

The current refugee crisis was managed and organized by United Nations Human Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) which served nearly 3 million refugees spread across Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and beyond. The organization was doing its best to protect and assist the needs of the refugees in healthcare, education and jobs area. UNHCR also provided an array of relief measures from cash and non-material items to supporting third-party administrators for health-care in Lebanon and other places (Hidalgo, 2015). In Jordan the refugee crisis raised its population count by 8%. For Jordanians, the highly visible presence of many thousands of refugees living in their midst has increased fear, resentment, animosity and alienation. The Jordanians feel they are worst off because of Syrians and the crisis has increased rents for housing, price of produce and common items, and put a severe strain on public services (Carrion, 2015).

In 2015, refugees fleeing the war in Syria was a defining moment and most complicated of all news stories. Refugees poured into Europe in historic numbers and their arrival forced political leaders to consider how many they will accept to resettle in their country. More than a million migrants and refugees moved into Europe, sparking a crisis and creating frictions and divisions between European countries. The conflict in Syria continued to be the biggest reason for migration but the ongoing violence in Afghanistan, abuses in Eritrea, poverty in Somalia and Kosovo were forcing people to look for a better life somewhere else. Germany pledged to accept 500,000 refugees while Hungary's Prime Minister Orban refused outright to accept any refugees/migrants and proceeded to seal Hungary's borders (Staudenmaier, 2018).

Despite a widespread coverage of the crisis in the media, the refugees' struggles, desperation, tragedies and personal upheavals, and the effort of those trying to ease their pain and misery were often left out. However, some outlets were making room in their coverage for these worthy stories. The question was: how did the media approach coverage of Europe's refugee crisis, and what were they doing to spotlight the solutions?

Methodology

This paper focuses on media framing of the European refugee crisis and tries to fathom the bias, depth, adequacy and completeness of coverage by the mainstream media networks and news channels. The theoretical concepts of *agenda-setting* and *media framing* in particular form the foundation of news analysis of European and US news media. The manner in which the media cover and narrate the story has a direct impact on people's perception of the event or an issue. It is important to note that the way the media 'frames' the story ultimately

gives the story its meaning. While covering an event or a story journalists can decide which elements to include or exclude in a story, thus a news-story could be framed in multiple ways, producing different meanings with different versions containing different attributes. Entman put it more succinctly when he said that "…to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text…" could be called framing. Tankard pointed out that the strategies involved in framing are selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration. Salience is the central concept in *agenda-setting* theory and it goes hand-in-hand with *framing* since via frame-changing, a tactic commonly used by journalists and editors, media can build a news event's salience by emphasizing different aspects of the event (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Media often use a tactic called 'frame-changing' to keep the story alive and current. Specific attributes of an event can be selected to conduct the process of frame-changing function. An assumption of agenda-setting theory is that increasing volume of coverage of the news story over a period of time increases its salience (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Journalists have an obligation make the audience understand why and how the situation has arisen and why it is happening. Their job is to observe and report what is happening, to give some context to the situation and not to give a solution. However, news stories can often become subjective because journalists sometimes do feel high emotions during crisis period.

The importance given to the story by placing the story at the top or the bottom of the news line-up determines the 'agenda' of the day for the general public. It is important to see how the media outlets are framing the story: negatively or positively, left or right, or with pessimism or optimism. As pointed out earlier, the media are doing more than just telling us what to think about - they are basically telling us 'what to think' by focusing on one particular angle of the story instead of another angle. Various reasons are given for 'framing' the story but media's agenda is often shaped by others: interest groups, government officials, citizens and politicians who try to influence what the media reports as the most important stories of the day. Researchers suggest that the media agenda is an outcome of a strong interplay between public opinion, political priorities and news priorities of the media, the profitability of the media business, and a combination of government and corporate forces intent on protecting the interests of the rich and the powerful (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan, 2012; McQuail, 1994; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). A sample of news articles, shows and programs were selected within a period of 2014–2020 from US, European and West-Asian mainstream-media which primarily focused on the European refugee crisis. A few of the selected sources were meta-analyses done by communication researchers of news coverage of the European refugee crisis in the Western and the West-Asian media. This study is based on a hypothesis that the mainstream media channels in the West would depict refugees and their desperate situation in a sensationalist and ideologically biased manner by pandering to the people's anti-immigrant sentiment, anxiety and fears; while responsible and ethical journalists would report and portray the crisis in a balanced, comprehensive and compassionate mode, and in a more humane context.

Media Narratives and Analysis

Were the media distorting the story, pandering to sensationalism, presenting only one-side to the story or were they giving the full picture? Ann Cooper, journalism professor at the Columbia University, said that a few media channels had done a fairly extensive reporting with background information, explaining the difference between a 'migrant' and a 'refugee' status and why there was a sudden influx of refugees into Europe, as *Washington Post* did. Some journalists inserted personal stories and reflection into their writings. National Public Radio (*NPR*) once did a story where a Greek ex-politician had Syrian refugees visit his house (Erbentraut, 2015).

Ethical Journalism Network (*EJN*) reviewed U.S. and international media coverage in (2015) in selected countries including Lebanon, UK, US and Turkey. The media watchdog criticized global media outlets for allowing refugee crisis to be hijacked by right-wing politicians, involving fear of immigration to further their goals. In the US, uncritical coverage of anti-immigration rhetoric and attacks on immigrants without any fact-checking contributed to growing xenophobia (DeBode, 2015). John Oliver, of *Last Week Tonight*, criticized UK's Prime Minister James Cameron for the use of the word 'swarm' to describe the refugees and lambasted an incredibly racist *Fox News* report that used an old *YouTube* footage from 2010 to suggest a possible influx of terrorists amongst the asylum seekers. Many European politicians were actively telling the refugees not to come to their country. Hungary meted out the worst treatment to the refugees. They were fed like animals in a caged pen and kicked by reporters as they were fleeing the police on the field. Slovakia said that they would only take Christians since there were no mosques in Slovakia. Polish politician called the refugees "human trash garbage" who should not be allowed to enter (Bradley, 2015; Oliver, 2015; Husband, 2015).

Right-wing critics took the media to task for not revealing the real causes and effects of the refugee crisis. In fact, the narrative of the refugee crisis presented by the Western media was flawed. One of their criticism was that, a) EU countries were exploiting the crisis to import more people who would vote for the EU bureaucracy and b) the crisis wouldn't have existed if the NATO powers had not armed and funded the jihadists in Middle East and North Africa to topple secular but totalitarian regimes. Instead of spending on bombs and guns to fuel civil wars, investments in the infrastructure could have raised the standard of living in those poorer countries. The media were essentially using the migrant crisis as an excuse for military intervention which exacerbated the problem (Einbinder, 2018; Georgiou & Labarowsky, 2017; Watson, 2015).

In another study of media coverage in 14 countries from Bulgaria to Brazil, said lack of resources, journalists and inability to provide in-depth and balanced reporting contributed to a distorted picture of the refugee crisis, one of the biggest stories of 2015. Journalists reporting on the crises were failing to tell the full story and perpetuating negative stereotypes used by politicians to make a point. In fact they "routinely fall into propaganda traps laid by politicians" (Reuters, 2015). There was also the confusion created by the use of the terms migrants, refugees and asylum seekers interchangeably. Adrian White, director of the EJN, said that

the media coverage of the crisis became "politically charged by an agenda following loose language and talk of invasions and swarms." Some stories showed empathy, humanity and a focus on suffering but journalists often failed to spotlight evidence showing that migration was inevitably beneficial for economic and cultural development. Focus on hate speech, hyperbole, intolerance, distortion and sensationalism led to partial coverage and biased reporting. European media were struggling to provide that balance (Reuters, 2015; Greenslade, 2015).

The New York Times, on the other hand, created a digital platform and a social media strategy to tell the story about the journey and movements of migrants and refugee families. The *Times* reporters followed specifically assigned families on their journey and depicted their struggles to cross the borders. The stories gave details of the struggle and the nerve-wracking decisions taken by them to go into Greece or to another country, and how they were treated by the border police forces of various European nations (Bajak, 2015).

The mainstream media in Germany condemned violent attacks against refugees and refugee housing public broadcasting network like ARD urged citizens to stand up against hateful posts in social media where comments like "refugees should be set on fire" or "left to drown in the sea" were inflaming the net. Most stories in the media were complex in nature explaining why and where the refugees were coming and what the long term implications were; others were focusing on facts to reduce prejudices and break some of the myths about refugees (Bleiker, 2015).

Stories of refugee crisis also dominated Arab newspapers, popular TV shows and social media platforms. A few media outlets like *Gulf Times* of Qatar and *Al-Ahram* of Egypt expressed outrage towards Gulf leaders accusing them of lack of support and empathy towards Syrian refugees. Some tweets mocked Saudi Arabia's offer to build 200 mosques in Germany and questioned why oil-rich Arab monarchies were not helping the refugees. Kuwait agreed to host Syrian refugees only if they had Kuwaiti citizenship. Other commentators have turned their anger on the U.S. and NATO for not taking a forceful action against President Assad of Syria. But critics were also frustrated by the lack of coverage of refugee success stories in Europe and other places (MDI, 2015).

Conclusion

Public apathy to world events is of major concern to the news media outlets and to policy makers. People do not retain the details of a news report, what they retain is a general impression. This impression can become a part of the decision-making process and also shape the perception of what is happening in the world and of events people do not experience directly. News by function, is an 'authoritative version of reality' and helps shape everyday consciousness of ordinary people. Public apathy, disinterest and disaffection can also be due to the type of media coverage and media presentation. For example, when politics is presented as a horse-race or in the form of 'attack' journalism, sensationalism, soundbites and unexplained news, people tend to lose interest in the political

process and politicians. The "media-induced political disaffection" has created a deep cynicism regarding the political system. Media coverage of social problems also have in general, focused on false assumptions and stereotyping of those affected, for example, criminals are often represented as pathological individuals living in poor, urban areas and perhaps suffering from alcohol and drug abuse (Kensicki, Sp. 2004).

To combat the public apathy and disinterest in the Europe's refugee crisis, media have resorted to more sensational news stories. Considering all the factors involved in the news construction, dissemination and reception process, and its effect on decision-making process, any sensational and negative news may have negative consequences in terms of attitude, opinion, action and behavior. The headlines showed the European Union in a complete disarray with a moral dilemma on one hand and a growing anti-immigration sentiment on the other. News stories were often shocking and gruesome with an occasional merciful and hopeful story inserted in between (Wyke, 2016).

The Berlin Wall was torn down in 1989, but new fences were going up in 2016, in response to the huge influx of refugees fleeing wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan and other places. The refugee crisis stripped open the old animosities and divisions within the European Union, and challenged EU's commitment to a free-movement zone, as leaders of European nations argued and debated over moral and legal obligations along with a growing anti-immigration attitude amongst the people (Stearns, 2015; Stearns & Tirone, 2016). Waves of refugees swept up on the shores of Europe, mainly Greece, spotlighting tales of sorrow, fear and frustration where desperate families trying to flee bombardment and destruction in their homelands were stranded while innocent children drowned in the sea or lay inert on the beach. The scale of crisis in Middle East and North Africa was of such magnitude that the UN estimated about 15.5 million people had been displaced by wars and conflicts. The influx of refugees of 1.26 million, was so overwhelming that Slovenia, Macedonia, Austria, and Hungary built fences to prevent the refugees from going further, while Germany, Sweden and Austria reintroduced some border controls of their own. The attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) hardened the attitude of anti-refugee parties, groups and other right-wing nationalist parties who were resisting the plans to resettle and redistribute asylum-seekers across EU. EU Commission President Juncker pointed out that Europeans of all nationalities may have been forced to emigrate during historically calamitous time in Europe, including East Europeans who were vehemently against resettlement and redistribution of refugees. The argument against resettlement was primarily based on prevention of crime and terrorism, and also for preserving the European identity. Responsible journalists, however, depicted refugees and their desperate situation in a balanced and sympathetic context but a majority of news media channels took the sensationalist and ideologically biased road, playing on people's anti-immigration sentiment, anxiety and fears.

References

Alami, A. (2018). *Morocco Unleashes a Harsh Crackdown on Sub-Saharan Migrants*. New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/22/world/africa/morocco-crackdown-sub-saharan-migrants-spain.html

Alfred, C. (2015). *What History Can Teach Us About the Worst Refugee Crisis Since WW2*. Huffington Post, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/alexander-betts-refugees-wwii_n_55f30f7ce4b077ca094edaec

Allen, W., Anderson, B., Van Hear, N. et al (2018). Who Counts in Crises? The New Geopolitics of International Migration and Refugee Governance *Geopolitics*, 23: 1, 217-243, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1327740

Amnesty International. (2023). *Morocco/Spain: Agony goes on for families of missing and dead as Melilla coverup continues.* Amnesty International, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/06/morocco-spain-agony-goes-on-for-fa milies-of-missing-and-dead-as-melilla-cover-up-continues/

Bajak, A. (2015). *Inside the New York Times Innovative Coverage of Europe's Refugee Crisis.* Media Shift, www.mediashift.org.

BBC (2016). *Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts.* BBC World, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911

BBc *(*Dec. 2015). *Migrant crisis: One million enter Europe in 2015*.

BBC World, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35158769

Bleiker, C. (2015). *German Media: Covering the Refugee Crisis*. Deutsche Welle, https://www.dw.com/en/german-media-covering-the-refugee-crisis-from-all-sides/a-18690337

Bradley, L. (2015). *John Oliver Calls on His Own Migrant Experience to Help Explain Europe's Refugee Crisis.* Slate, https://slate.com/culture/2015/09/john-oliver-explains-europes-migrant-and-refugee-crisis-and-slams-prejudiced-governments-and-media-video.html

Carstensen, J. (2015). *How one Syrian refugee wound up bringing his dying wife with him to Greece*. PRI – The World, https://theworld.org/stories/2015-11-28/theres-no-let-refugees-trying-reach-europe-through-lesbos

Carrion, D. (2015). *Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Confronting Difficult Truths*. Chatham House, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/20150921SyrianRefugeesCarrion.pdf

Chalabi, M. (2013). *What Happened to History's Refugees*? The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/interactive/2013/jul/25/what-happened-history-refugees

Chyi, H.I., McCombs, M. (2004). Media salience and the process of framing: Coverage of Columbine school shootings. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81/1, 22-35.

Croteau, D., Hoynes, W., Milan, S. (2021). *Media/Society: Industries, Images and Audiences* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeBode, L. (2015). *Watchdog Slams U.S. Media Coverage of Refugee*. Al Jazeera, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/12/17/refugee-media-coverage.html

Dinh, L. (2015). *Turkey's Weasel Problem*. The UNZ Review, https://www.unz.com/ldinh/turkeys-weasel-problem/

Einbinder, N. (2018). *How the Far Right has reshaped the Debate on Refugee Crisis*. PBS, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/how-the-far-right-has-reshaped-the-refugee-debate-in-europe/

Erbentraut, J. (2015). *How the Media are Reporting on Europe's Refugee Crisis*. Huffington Post, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/refugee-crisis-media-coverage_n_5615952ce4b0cf9984d850ec

Georgiou, M., Laborowsky, R. (2017). *Media coverage of the refugee crisis: A cross-European perspective*. Council of Europe, https://edoc.coe.int/en/refugees/7367-media-coverage-of-the-refugee-crisis-a-cross-european-perspective.html

Greenslade, R. (2015). *Where Media Fails on the Reporting of Migrants and Refugees*, The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2015/dec/17/where-media-fails-on-the-reporting-of-migrants-and-refugees

Herman, E., Chomsky, N. (1988). *The Political Economy of the News Media*. NY: Pantheon.

Hidalgo, S. (2015). *Beyond Humanitarian Assistance ? UNHCR and the Response to Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon*. UNHCR RefWorld, www.refworld.org.

HRW (2023). *Spain/Mellila: No Justice for Deaths at Mellila Border*. HRW, https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/22/spain/morocco-no-justice-deaths-melilla-border

Husband, A. (2015). *John Oliver Tackles Media's Awful Coverage of European Migrant Crisis.* Mediaite, www.mediaite.com.

Iyer, P. (2000). *The Global Soul*. London: Picador.

Kensicki, L. J. (2004). No cure for what ails us: The media-constructed disconnect between societal problems and possible solutions. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81/1: 53-73.

King, S. J. (2023). *Sub-Saharan Migrants in North Africa: Morocco Shows the Way Forward*. Wilson Center, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/sub-saharan-african-migrants-north-africa-morocco-shows-way-forward

Lehmann, J. P. (2015). *Refugees and Migrants: Europe's Past History and Future Challenge*. FORBES, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jplehmann/2015/09/02/refugees-migrants-europes-past-history-and-future-challenge/?sh=3b58711da7d4

McQuail, D. (1994). *Mass Communications Theory* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Media Diversity Institute (MDI) (2015). *Arab Media Coverage of the Refugee Crisis.* Media Diversity, https://www.media-diversity.org/arab-media-coverage-of-the-refugee-crisis/

Merabishvili, G. (2023). Defending Europe at the Trianon Border: Geopolitical Visions of Nationhood and the Remaking of Hungary's Southern Border, *Geopolitics*, 28:5, 2074-2110, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2022.2104158

Oliver, J. (2015). *Migrants and Refugees: Last Week with John Oliver*. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umqvYhb3wf4

Rininsland, A. (2012). *Asylum Seekers around the World: Where did they came from and where are they going*. The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jun/19/refugees-unhcr-statistics-data

Ross, A. (2015). *Why a History Lesson about World War 2 Refugees Went Viral*. TIME, www.time.com.

Rothman, L., Ronk, L. (2015). *This is what Europe's last refugee crisis looked like*. TIME, https://time.com/4029800/world-war-ii-refugee-photos-migrant-crisis/

Reuters. (2015). *Bigotry, Panic, Reflected in the Media Coverage of Migrants and Refugees*. Reuters, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0U12A3/

Stearns, J. (2015). *Europe's Refugees*. Bloomberg, https://www.bloomberg.com/view/quicktake/europe-refugees

Stearns, J., Tirone, J. (2016). *Europe's Refugee Crisis*. Bloomberg, www.bloomberview.com/quicktake

Staudenmaier, R. (2018). *Orban to Germany: 'You wanted the migrants, we didn't.'* Deutsche Welle, https://www.dw.com/en/hungarys-orban-tells-germany-you-wanted-the-migrants-we-didnt/a-42065012

Torreblanca, J. I. (2021). *This time is different: Spain, Morocco, and weaponised migration*. ECFR, https://ecfr.eu/article/this-time-is-different-spain-morocco-and-weaponised-migration/

UNHCR (2006). *UNHCR Report: Refugees by Numbers*.

UN, https://www.unhcr.org/us/publications/global-report-2006

UNHCR (2023). *Refugee Data Finder*. UN, https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/

Watson, P. J. (2015). *Five Things the Media Hides about the Refugee Crisis.* Info Wars, www.infowars.com.

Wyke, T. (2016). *More than 400 migrants drown in the Mediterranean after four overcrowded boats capsized whilst crossing from Egypt to Italy*. Daily Mail, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3545004/More-400-migrants-drown-Mediterranean-four-crowded-boats-capsized-whilst-crossing-Egypt-Italy.html

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024 – Pages 173-186

The Many Futures of Digital Journalism

By Brian L. Massey[*]

This paper challenges conventional narratives about the future of digital journalism. It argues that digital journalism is not a globally uniform practice with a predictable universal future. Instead, it has many possibility-futures owing to the cultural diversity of the news outlets that engage it and the contexts in which it is engaged. To develop that argument, the paper locates digital journalism as the latest waypoint in humankind's long quest to send messages ever farther and ever faster. Next, digital journalism is decentered through interdisciplinary theory into a novel framework for forecasting the futures of digital journalism as a diverse global phenomenon.

Keywords: Digital journalism, digital journalism diversity, digital journalism futures, global digital journalism

Introduction

In 2009 Mitchelstein and Boczkowski reflected on the state of digital journalism research and found that "most studies continue to apply existing lenses at new phenomenon" (p. 575). That is, they slotted the new "digital" journalism into the legacy-journalism box of theories, methods, and more. But it is a "Made in the Global North" box (e.g., Banshal et al., 2022; Zeng & Chan, 2023). Its tendency is to frame itself as the measure of digital journalism in the Global South.

How digital journalism is done in the developed, capitalist North "is [often] considered to be the norm," Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2021) write,

> and whatever happens everywhere else should aspire to achieve that status if it is to have a positive connotation. The world has a normative center and a deviant—or at least un-developed—periphery; a periphery that is to be redeemed by aspiring to shed its singularities and model itself in the virtuous image of the center (pp. 130–132).

The reality is that instances of digital journalism are as diverse as humankind. To see that, image digital journalism as a beam of light passing through a prism. Infused into the prism is every possible combination of every possible condition that could split the beam into any possible variation of itself. Whether observers see many, a few or the "one" seemingly universal beam depends on the field of view they choose.

This work contributes to the field by proposing a novel interdisciplinary theoretic framework for opening up the fields of view for forecasters of digital journalism's possibility-futures. To work out that framework, digital journalism is

[*]Professor, School of Communication, East Carolina University, USA.

decentered from the North-South critique to reveal it as a global and richly diverse phenomenon that unfolds in culturally unique niches. It is the forecaster's task to account for that natural diversity and the sociocultural, economic and political conditions at play in newsmaking.

History for Context

A forecast is at its core a product of the forecaster's best-judgment assessment of the relevant data available at the time. It is an exercise in accounting for influences on the thing under forecast and assigning probabilities to the likelihood of A or B or even an improbable C happening to it at a future time. There is a *caveat-emptor* warning to make, and it is that "past results are not a guarantee of future performance." It is a typical cautionary note from the financial services industry. It means that last week is not always a good guide to what you can expect today to be.

Even so, "the future has a history," as Rees (2021) reminds. By taking account of the past, she says, we *could* discover "patterns … clear cycles, waves, or sequences" that *could* hint at one or more possible future. Journalism has a long past, and it could hold clues to the possibility-futures of today's digitalized iteration of it.

For digital journalism, signals from its before-time reveal its inherited essence as the human desire to communicate at ever faster speeds across ever greater distances. Profit, broadly defined, is and has been the essential incentive for coming up with technological ways to do that.

Before 'The Digital'

Recorded history finds early expressions of this in the ancients' "writing at a distance" signal codes of smoke, sound, fire and flag (Hershbell, 1978; Rihll, 2017). They were tools mostly for militaries and war, and their use lasted for centuries.

In the mid-1400s there came a sea change, and it took form as Johannes Gutenberg's hand-crank printing press and handset movable type. The press had lots of lasting consequences, and one was that it allowed scholars and inventers to easily share and shape ideas by committing them to ink on paper. In that way Gutenberg's press helped prepare the ground for the rise of the digital.

In the early 1700s another new communication system emerged, and it took form as Claude Chappe's mechanical optical telegraph (Koenig, 1944; Selleri, 2017). It transmitted messages from signal tower to tower through cranks, wires and pulleys that moved a trio of pivot beams into symbol-shapes for each letter of the alphabet. Chappe's device turned out to be a primordial internet. It spread quickly across Europe and beyond, "connecting hot spots of information sources with information consumers" (Opptiz & Tomsu, 2018, p. 48).

Dawn of 'The Digital'

"Digital" technology, strictly speaking, is electronic and it makes and manipulates information by means of a binary code of positive/nonpositive, on/off, 1's and 0's. In the mid-1800s the world got close to that when the electric telegraph came online. It was a sea-change technology: the start of an early digital age.

Telegraph operators rendered messages into Samuel Morse's eponymous binary code of short "dot" and long "dash" electrical pulses tapped out on a telegraph key. The key worked like a light switch: each tap, short or long, turned the circuit on. No tap, the circuit was off. Chemical batteries supplied the electricity that powered the encoded messages across transmission wires atop tall wood poles.

The electric telegraph quickly spread around the world, and among its early adopters were news "wire services" that distributed news content through the burgeoning network of land and undersea data transmission (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Blondheim, 1994). As it spread it became an early information superhighway.

Standage (1998, pp. vii-viii) describes the global telegraph network as a Victorian-age internet that "revolutionized business practice, gave rise to new forms of crime, and inundated its users with a deluge of information. …

> The benefits of the network were relentlessly hyped by its advocates and dismissed by its skeptics. Governments and regulators tried and failed to control the new medium. Attitudes toward everything from news gathering to diplomacy had to be completely rethought. Meanwhile, out on the wires, a technological subculture with its own customs and vocabulary was establishing itself (Standage, 1998, pp. vii–viii).

Transitional forms of faster-farther and technologically augmented communication came and went through the dawning of the 20th century. Among them were the wireless railway telegraph (ca. 1880s), the wireless telegraph (ca. 1890s), and the radiotelephone (ca. 1902). An invention of the 1870s—the analog landline telephone—proved longer lasting and by 1900 it had all but fully replaced Morse's telegraph.

Newsreels opened in movie theaters in the 1910s to deliver news in sound and moving images (Althaus, 2010). The first radio newscast was aired on Aug. 31, 1920, by a newspaper's experimental station called 8MK (Schneider, 2020). Platform convergence briefly appeared in the 1930s as the radio facsimile newspaper (Koehler, 1969; Schneider, 2014). At the end of the 1940s and into the 1950s, a wireless sound-and-image technology—the analog television—grew in popularity (Pruitt, 2021).

Time of 'The Digital'

The true digital age arrived in the 1950s when the business side of news firms turned to mainframe computers to automate their bookkeeping tasks (Mari, 2019). Broadcast journalists trialed the mainframe in 1952 (Houston, 2015). In 1962 TV

news delivery went digital with the first live-event satellite broadcast (Space.com, 2012).

Newspaper production went digital in the 1970s when papers began computerizing their pre-press typesetting systems (Mari, 2019). Newsmaking followed when journalists started writing and editing their content on video display terminals linked to a mainframe computer (Francke & Anderson, 1980). From then on, the digitization of journalism sped up.

TV news stations took to electronic newsgathering in the 1970s (Smith, 1984). Platform convergence reappeared (ca. 1970s) as videotex and teletext that broadcast pixelated print news stories to subscribers' TVs (Carlson, 2003). In the 1980s, newspapers "began tinkering" with delivering news by telephone with audiotext services (Boczkowski, 2004), and using computerized news-page design systems (Garrison, 1983). News outlets started posting content to pre-internet Bulletin Board Services (BBS) and Gopher networks that decade (Carlson, 2003; Garrison, 2005), and journalists began integrating desktop and mobile computers, digital photography, email and the internet into their everyday work routines (Mari, 2019; Scott, 2005).

By 1995 print and broadcast news outlets were building their own websites on the planet's newest information network—the internet (Kawamoto, 2003). By the 2000s, people were accessing content, including news, posted to social media and through smartphones. And news wire services had started using AI to automate the writing of routine financial news reports (Colford, 2014; van Duyn, 2006).

Patterns and Cycles

Even a short walk across time-past can bring to the fore patterns and cycles. For digital journalism, three stand out. One is the cycle of continual progression. Humankind has fashioned ever more advanced technological affordances for sending news and other messages faster and farther.

The optical telegraph was proof of concept for the electrical telegraph, which co-occurred with the groundwork for the telephone that would replace it. Modern computers were presaged in the ancient Antikythera mechanism and millennia later, in Charles Babbage's Analytic Engine (Bromley, 1982). Babbage's device as reincarnated in 1945 as room-sized ENIAC, the world's first programmable digital computer (Haigh et al., 2016). It reincarnated in the 1950s as the world's first personal computer (Nielsen, 2017), and on and on. As before, so now … and beyond, to rephrase a bit of Hermetic wisdom (see Principe, 2013).

There also is the pattern of deploying technology in the service of newsmaking. Technology has certainly changed newsmaking, but it has not displaced the fundamentals of the process. For example, journalists adapted their newswriting to suit the electric telegraph as a new distribution platform. They shortened their stories and wrote more to the point because telegraph companies charged by the word. "Gone were the old flowery circumlocutions that characterized the earlier period" (Phillips, 2012, p. 84).

The telegraph also brought immediacy to the news (Blondheim, 1994) by allowing journalists report back to their newsrooms from distance locales. Yet journalists still engaged in the newsmaking fundamentals. They gathered facts and processed them into units of news content.

In time computers replaced the old-tech typewriter, pencil and paper ways of writing and editing news content. The inter-web and social media gave journalists new tools for finding and verifying information, contacting sources, and delivering content to audiences. Yet journalists still engage in the fundamentals of newsmaking.

Decentering for Forecasting

In the North-South critique, the forecaster may be hard pressed to find a workable framework for future-casting digital journalism as a diverse global phenomenon. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski's (2021) summary of the critique follows the center-periphery frame from World Systems Theory (Wallerstien, 1974) and Dependency Theory (Toye & Toye, 2003). Both hold that the colonizer's capitalism and the macrostructural accoutrements of it continue to lock formerly colonized countries into perpetual states of quasi-development and under-development.

By extension, the center-periphery frame makes the vestiges of colonial capitalism a centerpiece explanation for how the South's digital journalism is treated by the North's research and research publications. However, with such a macro-level explanation, the meso- and micro-level diversities of newsmaking get lost. For the forecaster, decentering digital journalism from the critique brings them out.

Definition

It is always good to start with a definition that outlines the contours of the phenomenon of interest. For digital journalism, definitions number in the dozens (e.g., Duffy & Ang, 2019; Perrault & Ferrucci, 2020), and among them, Zelizer's (2019) is one of the more straightforward and pragmatic. "Digital journalism," she writes, takes its meaning from both practice and rhetoric.

> Its practice as newsmaking embodies a set of expectations, practices, capabilities and limitations, reflecting a difference of degree rather than kind. Its rhetoric heralds the hopes and anxieties associated with sustaining the journalistic enterprise as worthwhile (p. 349).

Practice, for this study, is the embodiment of the human capital that journalists hold as their knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs). It is a universal construct; we all hold human capital, but we vary in the specificity of it, how much we hold of it, how we acquire it and how we deploy it. Yet how we deploy that capital varies by all possible combinations of conditions.

Newsmaking is the unfoldment of journalistic practice. It is a process, and the how and why of it varies. For this study, newsmaking is a series of actions that mirror Shane's (2003) model of entrepreneurship.

First, journalists discern potentialities of "news" in their unique social environments. Then, they define some potentialities as worthy of pursuit, and then gather and analyze relevant information. Then, they process that information into discrete content units of text, sound and image, and then package them together for delivery to audiences. Delivery—operating printing presses and broadcast transmitters and uploading content to the inter-web and social media—may or may not involve journalists. It depends on the news outlet's size, among other factors.

The acts in newsmaking have a baseline universality in the discovery of raw information and its processing into an artifact called "news." But the acts vary by the unique cultural contexts in which newsmaking occurs. Zelizer's definition acknowledges that by describing the expectations and limitations of newsmaking as "reflecting a difference of degree rather than kind."

If we take "kind" to mean the baseline universality of newsmaking, the degrees of difference can be quite vast. Walking newsmaking through three theories helps to visualize the degrees—and decenter digital journalism from a strict North-South perspective.

Theory

First, Feenberg's (1999) critical theory of technology connect the "digital" of newsmaking to the unique cultural contexts that inform it. Feenberg argues that any technology is more than its essential "functions and raw materials" (1999, p. viii). At a deeper, non-essentialist level, it is a social construct. The idea for it, its design, manufacture (raw materials) and the uses (functions) to which it is put are inevitably shaped by "socially specific contextualizing variables" (p. xiii).

Feenberg illustrates the point with a Marxist critique of capitalism. To contextualize a technology "exclusively in modern capitalist terms" (1999, p. 223) is to embed it with capitalist values and use it in service to them. Conversely, he argues it also means devaluing socialism and other anti-capitalist ways of thinking of and using the technology. In other words, the former is bad because of the latter.

If we could decenter the critique it would open up the range of social variables that contextualize technology. Goods and services have been exchanged for millennia. Capitalism as a formal concept appeared in Adam Smith's seminal 1776 book, *Wealth of Nations*, but he never called it "capitalism" (Matson, 2020). The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) finds the word being used in 1830-1840 as a socialist critique of the wealthy, and in its modern meaning of private ownership for profit by 1919.

Jahan and Mahmud write of the "many shades of capitalism" (p. 44) in their 2015 article for an International Monetary Fund magazine. It follows that there must be many different ways capitalism can contextualize technology—including

digitalized newsmaking. Gibson's (1979/1986) theory of affordances opens the door to that and to other factors not related to capitalism.

Second, Gibson defines "affordances" as natural resources the environment offers, and they are as useful as people perceive them to be. Take a simple stick lying on the ground. It can be used to fuel a cooking fire or stir the food cooking in a pot. It can help hold up a shelter's roof or fill out its walls or spear a fish for dinner or an enemy during war.

The stick "affords" all those uses and more, but it is the user who perceives a particular use for it. This is where diversity comes into the equation. Gibson (1979/1986) sees us all as creatures of *how* we live. He calls that our "niche," which is different from our habitat, or *where* we live. We "create" affordances when we perceive things in our habitats to be useful in some fashion to how we live.

Niches, therefore, are the locus of the global diversity of digital journalism's pasts and presents, and its many possibility-futures. There is no single way to actualize the baseline acts of newsmaking or to apply digital affordances to it. Instead, there are possibilities of several. Each is an emanation of the niche-bound sociocultural, economic and political variables that work on the journalist, audience and other stakeholders in the acts and outcomes of newsmaking.

Third, Barney's (1991) resource-based view of the firm (RBV) broadens "capitalism" as a contextualizing variable for newsmaking and moves beyond it. Barney sees the firm as made of bundles of resources that it possesses or acquires for doing its work as a business. All endeavors—wherever they may be and whatever they make—function on resources. Acknowledging that allows the RBV's "firm" to mean the corporate news group to the self-employed journalist-entrepreneur and all possibilities in between.

"Resources" are affordances of financial and human capital, brand reputation, equipment/technologies, audience/customers and all the other things a news firm requires for its work. How the firm chooses to perceive and use its resources is bound to its niche. Here, again, is a theoretic foundation for a globally diverse digitalized newsmaking.

Mapping Forecast Zones

To set the stage, forecasting is not prediction. To predict the future of human endeavors is an act fraught with risk. Foresight may be clear-ish for a short-term look ahead, but the farther out, the fuzzier it gets. Any future we predict is at its core our projection of a subset of conditions we perceive and interpret in our here-and-now time. There are lots of problems with that. For one, predictions are not immune to human nature. They can be shaped by the self-interests of the people who make them and believe them (Beaton, 2017; Housel, 2019). For another, the world is not static. It is always in flux. It is messy and busy, and always host to unexpected happenings. This all means that any future predicted is just one possibility among many (Rees, 2021; Saffo, 2007).

Therein lies the dilemma. We humans want to know what is around the corner, but it does no good to preordain what we might see or want to see. The workaround is to forecast, not predict. Forecasting looks for possibility-futures, "not a limited set of illusory certainties" (Saffo, 2007, p. 124). The forecaster takes on uncertainty by acknowledging the unexpected can and will happen, and that the probabilities of experiencing a phenomenon will vary from person to person and place to place.

A forecast needs a manageable area of focus, one that sits in its version of the planet hunter's "Goldilocks Zone" (NASA, n.d.). Not too wide, not too narrow, but a purpose-built "just right." The literature on digital journalism is thematically and geographically rich with possibilities for coverage zones. Indeed, digital affordances for newsmaking, like all technologies, "are neither value free, neutral nor universal, … [They] are appropriated differently in different social contexts and by different people or organizations" (Tshabangu & Salawu, 2022, p. 6).

Capitalism Large and Small

Filtering the resource-based view through the theory of affordances opens the door to two broad coverage zones for forecaster. The proposition is that large corporate news enterprises are resource rich by dint of their size, and they can "buy" as much "digital journalism" as they perceive necessary to their survival. A corollary is that large news corporations "live" in a niche that is arguably more global than local. They are members in a "club of the big," in other words. Regardless of whether they are homebased in the Global North or South, they all perceive resource-affordances through a shared set of capitalist values.

The World Association of News Publishers (WAN) is an example. Its latest *World Press Trends Outlook* survey (2023-2024) went to executives at its member newspapers and news groups in 60 countries. Among the 175 respondents, 42% were from news businesses in countries the World Bank defines as "developing." WAN's sample "features … countries as diverse as Argentina, Canada, Russia, and Indonesia … [and] some of the world's largest media markets, including Germany, India, the United States, and the United Kingdom" (p. 4).

The firms represented by the respondents shared a "persistent drive" (WAN-IFRA, 2023-2024, p. 27) to sell more digital subscriptions and diversify into other streams of reader revenue. Advertising still was their main revenue driver. Respondents were "broadly aligned in both developed and developing markets" in their optimism and pessimism for generative AI. Most also said their employers were not ready to "tap into [AI] in the coming year" (p. 42). Still, about half (52%) of the developed-market respondents said their firms were actively using AI now. Nearly 40% of developing-market respondents said the same of their firms.

In contrast, smaller news firms in developing and developed markets are similar to the extent that in the average, they are resource constrained. The proposition is that they cannot "buy" all the digital affordances they may think they need. A corollary is that small news firms "live" in local community niches and as such, their newsmaking is diverse not just by degree but in kind as well.

Salaverría et al. (2019), for example, found that while independent digital-native news sites "from the Caribbean to Patagonia" (p. 229) use digital affordances, they struggle to survive. "These media are mostly very small business, and only a few have potential to scale. Their revenues are [as] modest," the researchers write (p. 238). Their audience sizes and stock of resource-affordances are modest too.

Digital independents in other parts of the world deal with similar issues, the nonprofit SembraMedia wrote in a 2021 report one must know about to find. SembraMedia is a consultancy for small digital independents. In the developed economies of the United States and Canada, Kizer (2021) found that the average independent news site "operate[s] in a challenging financial environment" (p. 3) with small staffs gathered by founder-owners without much business training. In Zimbabwe, journalists "are poorly paid and these financial constraints have a bearing on how [they] conduct their professional work in this 'digital era'," Ndlouv and Sibanda (2021, p. 17).

Still, in Nepal, digital news sites have become "a very popular medium … [because of their] accessibility, interactivity, transparency, immediacy and inexpensiveness" (Mahaseth & Qureshi, 2021, p. 297). India has a robust media sector of digital news startups, and they see themselves as "valuable supplement(s)" to the English-language newspapers in the country's urban centers (Prasad, 2021). In The Gambia, basic digital affordances—the internet, smartphones, social media—have diffused into the country's newsrooms (Nnaane, 2022).

Prosocial Newsmaking

Profit-capitalism may be secondary to a news outlet's newsmaking. In the case of *uMthunywa*, the reason for being is to preserve an indigenous language. Tshabangu and Salawu (2022) describe *uMthunywa* as "the first fully digitized indigenous-language newspaper in Africa" (p. 38). It publishes in a language spoken in southwestern Zimbabwe, and it went fully online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers concluded that the paper and others like it "adopt or reject" digital affordances for newsmaking "depending on how meaningful and relevant they are to them" (p. 50). Still, they argue, the indigenous-language press must go digital to survive.

In other cases, prosocial means taking the role of community activist and offering an alternative news-information affordance. Harlow (2022) found that readers value small nonprofit digital native news ventures for "tak[ing] stances against injustice and corruption, and … actively participat[ing] in communities and protests" (p. 1337). Her findings came from surveys of readers of seven such ventures across Latin America. In Brazil, Ganter and Paulino (2021) found readers form support networks to protect independent digital news sites and their journalists. They described it as a "positive dependence" (pp. 239–241), an example of "different models of resilience" (p. 242) against hostility toward independent digital journalists by the government and a highly concentrated corporate news media.

Digital news organizations in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand see themselves as the people's bulwark against their governments' cyber-authoritarianism. "They view their journalism as part of a broader movement that drives civic engagement and push towards progressive social and political change," Sinpeng and Koh (2023, p. 257) reported.

Epilogue for Forecasting

In his 2019 review of the research Salaverría writes, "The next quarter century will likely see major technological, social and professional innovations that will continue the profound transformation of [digital] journalism" (p. 15). That makes for at least 30 separate possibility-futures. Each of the three innovations could happen or not. If any one of them does, it could be major or not. It could be transformative or not. If it is transformative, it could positive or negative, profound or something less.

It also takes a 30,000-foot view to see digital newsmaking as a global aggregate. Yet newsmaking and its use of digital affordances happens in myriad unique ways around the world over. It gets its uniqueness from the culture-bound niches in which it is formed. Some of that is a matter of North-South, but not all of it. Some of that is a matter of capitalism, but not all of it. This paper offers a novel interdisciplinary framework through which to explore the fullness of the many present iterations of digital journalism—and forecast the probabilities of its many futures.

References

Althaus, S. (2010). The forgotten role of the global newsreel industry in the long transition from text to television. *International Journal of Press/Politics, 15*(2), 193–218.

Banshal, S. K., Verma, M. K., Yuvaraj, M. (2022). Quantifying global digital journalism research: A bibliometric landscape. *Library Hi Tech*, *40*(5), 1337–1358.

Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management, 17*(1), 99–120.

Beaton, C. (2017, November 2). *Humans are bad at predicting futures that don't benefit them*. The Atlantic.

Blondheim, M. (1994). *News over the wires: The telegraph and the flow of public information in America, 1844-1897*. Harvard University Press.

Boczkowski, P. J. (2004). *Digitizing the news: Innovations in online newspapers*. MIT Press.

Boyd-Barrett, O. (1980). *The international news agencies*. Sage.

Bromley, A. G. (1982). Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine, 1838. *Annals of the History of Computing*, *4*(3), 196–217.

Carlson, D. (2003). The history of online journalism. In K. Kawamoto (ed.), *Digital Journalism: Emerging media and the changing horizons of journalism*, 31–55. Rowman & Littlefield.

Colford, P. (2014, June 30). *A leap forward in quarterly earnings reports*. Associated Press.

Duffy, A., Ang, P. H. (2019). Digital journalism: Defined, refined, or re-defined. *Digital Journalism*, *7*(3), 378–385.
Feenberg, A. (1999). *Questioning technology*. Routledge.
Francke, W. T., Anderson, D. A. (1980). Expectations and experience in conversion to VDTs. *Journalism Quarterly*, *57*(4), 652–655.
Ganter, S. A., Paulino, F. O. (2021). Between attack and resilience: The ongoing institutionalization of independent digital journalism in Brazil. *Digital Journalism*, *9*(2), 235–254.
Garrison, B. (1983). Impact of computers on the total newspaper. *Newspaper Research Journal 4*(3), 41–64.
Garrison, B. (2005). Online newspapers. In M. B. Salwen, B. Garrison, P. D. Driscoll (eds.), *Online News and the Public*, 3–46. Lawrence Erlbaum.
Gibson, J. J. (1979/1986). *The Ecological approach to visual perception*. Psychological Press.
Haigh, T., Priestly, M., Rope, C. (2016). *ENIAC in action: Making and remaking the modern computer*. MIT Press.
Harlow, S. (2022). A new people's press? Understanding digital-native news sites in Latin America as alternative media. *Digital Journalism*, *10*(8), 1322–1341.
Hershbell, J. P. (1978). The ancient telegraph: War and Liberty. In E. A. Havelock, J. P. Hershbell (eds.), *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*, 51–92. Hastings House Publishers.
Housel, M. (2019, December 19). *The psychology of prediction*. Collaborative Fund.
Houston, B. (2015, November 12). *Fifty years of journalism and data: A brief history*. Global Investigative Journalism Network.
Kawamoto, K. (2003). Digital journalism: Emerging media and the changing horizons of journalism. In K. Kawamoto (ed.), *Digital Journalism: Emerging media and the changing horizons of journalism*, 1–29. Rowman & Littlefield.
Kizer, C. (2021). *Project Oasis: Research Report*. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/5n6zukjn.
Koehler, M. A. (1969). Facsimile newspapers: Foolishness or foresight? *Journalism Quarterly*, *46*(1), 29–36.
Koenig, D. (1944). Telegraphs and telegrams in revolutionary France. *Scientific Monthly*, *59*(6), 431–437.
Mahaseth, H., Qureshi, S. (2021). The increase of online journalism in Nepal. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, *31*(2), 287–302.
Mari, W. (2019). *A short history of disruptive journalism technologies: 1960-1990*. Routledge.
Matson, E. W. (2020, December 7). Adam Smith on capitalism and the common good. Econlib (Library of Economics and Liberty).
Mitchelstein, E., Boczkowski, P. J. (2009). Between tradition and change: A review of recent research on online news production. *Journalism*, *10*(5), 562–586.
Mitchelstein, E., Boczkowski, P. J. (2021). What a special issue on Latin America teaches us about some key limitations in the field of digital journalism. *Digital Journalism*, *9*(2), 130–135.
Ndlovu, M., & Sibanda, M. N. (2021). Digital technologies and the changing journalism cultures in Zimbabwe: Examining the lived experiences of journalists covering the COVID-19 pandemic. *Digital Journalism*.
Nielsen, K. H. (2017, December 21). *From monstrosity to laptop: The story of the personal computer*. ScienceNordic.
Nnaane, B. (2022). Influence of digital technologies on journalism practice in The Gambia. *Styles of Communication*, *14*(1), 9–16.

Oppitz, M., Tomsu, P. (2018). *Inventing the cloud century: How cloudiness keeps changing our life, economy and technology*. Springer.

Perreault, G. P., Ferrucci, P. (2020). What is digital journalism? Defining the practice and role of the digital journalist. *Digital Journalism*, *8*(10), 1298–1316.

Phillips, A. (2012). Faster and shallower: Homogenization, cannibalization and the death of reporting. In P. Lee-Wright, A. Phillips, T. Witschge, *Changing Journalism*, 81–98. Routledge.

Prasad, R. (2021). Digital disruption? Journalism startups in India. *Journalism*, *22*(8), 2122–2138.

Principe, L. (2013). *The secrets of alchemy*. University of Chicago Press.

Pruitt, S. (2021, June 29). *Who invented television?* History.com.

Rees, A. (2021, December 27). *The history of predicting the future*. Wired.

Rihll, T. E. (2017). Technology in Aineias Tacticus: Simple and complex. In M. Pretzler, N. Barley (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Aineias Tacticus*, 265–289. Brill.

Saffo, P. (2007). Six rules for effective forecasting. *Harvard Business Review*, *85*(7/8), 122–131.

Salaverría, R. (2019). Digital journalism review: 25 years of research. Review article. *Profesional de al información* (*Information Professional*), *28*(1), 1–26.

Salaverría, R., Sádaba, C., Breiner, J. G., Warner, J. C. (2019). A brave new digital journalism in Latin America. In M. Túñez-Lopez et al. (eds.), *Communication: Innovation & Quality*, 229–247. Springer.

Schneider, J. (2020, September 11). *WWJ in Detroit: A 2020 centennial station*. Radio World.

Schneider, J. F. (2014, November 19). *A look back at the radio newspaper of the air*. Radio World.

Scott, B. (2005). A contemporary history of digital journalism. *Television & News Media*, *6*(1), 89–126.

Selleri, S. (2017). Claude Chappe and the first telecommunication network (without electricity). *URSI Radio Science Bulletin*, *360*(Mar), 96–101.

SembraMedia (2021). *Inflection Point International*. Available at: https://data2021.Sembra media.org/es/.

Shane, S. (2003). *A general theory of entrepreneurship: the individual-opportunity nexus*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Sinpeng, A., Koh, Y. (2022). Journalism in the age of digital autocracy: A comparative ASEAN perspective. *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, *10*(2), 247–262.

Smith, C. (1984). Newsgathering technology and the content of local television news. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *28*(1), 99–102.

Space.com (2012, July 12). *Telstar 1 legacy: 1st live TV broadcast by satellite turns 50*. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/yckrz394.

Standage, T. (1998). *The Victorian Internet: The remarkable story of the telegraph and the nineteenth century's online pioneers*. Berkley Books.

Toye J., Toye, R. (2003), The Origins and Interpretation of the Prebisch-Singer Thesis. *History of Political Economy*, *35*(3), 437–446.

Tshabangu, T., & Salawu, A. (2022). Technology innovation and digital journalism practice by indigenous African-language newspapers: The case of *uMthunywa* in Zimbabwe. *African Journalism Studies*, 43(2), 37–52.

van Duyn, A. (2006, August 17). *Computers write news at Thompson*. Financial Times.

Wallerstein, I. (1974). *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. Academic Press.

World Association of Newspaper Publishers – WAN-IFRA (2023-2024). *World Press Trends Outlook.* Available at Scholars Bank, University of Oregon.

Zelizer, B. (2019). Why journalism is about more than digital technology. *Digital Journalism*, *7*(3), 343–350.

Zeng, J., Chan, C.-H. (2023). Envisioning a More Inclusive Future for *Digital Journalism*: A Diversity Audit of Journalism Studies (2013–2021). *Digital Journalism*, *11*(4), 609–629.

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 10, Issue 3, July 2024 – Pages 187-202

From "Expanding Government Influence" to "A Digital Community with a Shared Future" - Agenda-setting Strategies for China's Participation in the Construction of International Institutions in the Digital Space

By Yan Li[*]

International agenda setting is the initial and key stage of the creation of international institutions. This paper constructs an analytical framework that includes three elements: institutional platform, agenda setting, means and capabilities. Using methods such as historical institutionalism, text analysis, institutional comparison, and case study, this paper studies the agenda setting strategies in the four paths of China's participation in the construction of international institutions in the digital space. This paper holds that the agenda setting in the four paths has a relationship of inheritance and development, and the autonomy is gradually improved. Specific means of advancing the agenda are limited by institutional platforms; the effect is still not obvious, so the idea should be further improved and the means optimized.

Keywords: digital space governance, agenda setting, network sovereignty, a digital community with a shared future

Introduction

Keohan (1989, p. 3), the founder of neoliberal institutionalism in international relations, believes that international institutions include formal intergovernmental organizations, transnational non- governmental organizations, international mechanisms, international practices and other forms. China's participation in the international institutions of digital space governance can be roughly divided into four types, for which China has adopted different participation paths. Although these four systems were founded at different times, they are now coexisting, so the relationship between China's four paths is not either one or the other, but the relationship of mutual connection and cooperation. The Type 1 institution is the digital space governance system with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) as the core, which the United States built with the help of technology and historical advantages, and China took the path of joining. The second institution of system is the digital space governance system based on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) under the framework of the United Nations. Like other countries, China does not have the ability to change the unreasonable US-led system of

[*]Lecturer, School of Journalism and Communication, Guangzhou University, China.

digital space governance, so it has taken the path of seeking change through the institutional platform under the framework of the United Nations. The third institution of system is the bilateral or multilateral system established between China and a certain country or several countries through negotiations and other means. In this regard, China and relevant countries have adopted the path of joint construction. The fourth institution is independent platforms such as the World Internet Conference (WIC), for which China takes an independently created path to voice its views and voices on the governance of the digital space.

It is necessary to compare these four paths from a global perspective and deeply explore the strategies of the Chinese government, enterprises, scientists and other participants in each path. In addition to the co-construction path, the organizations and meetings involved in the other three paths have official websites, which publish almost all the meeting minutes. This paper uses the historical institutionalism method to identify the key nodes of China's participation in the construction of international internet institutions. On this basis, combining the governance practices in the two fields of China's international and domestic digital space governance, this paper studies the agenda-setting strategies for the construction of international digital space governance institutions in each path through text analysis, institutional comparison, case study and other methods.

Literature Review

Keohan and Nye (2003, pp. 34–35), the founders of neoliberal institutionalism in international relations, put forward in their book *Power and Interdependence* that "at the international level, states and actors' present their views in various forums' and try to bring their concerns to the fore in international organizations, seeking to maximize their advantages through the expansion or narrowing of agendas." This formulation points to two important aspects of agenda-setting in participating in the construction of international institutions: where and what to say, and indeed, how to say it.

The first problem with setting an agenda in an international setting is "where to say it." Stephen Livingstone proposed the concept of "access points" of the agenda, defining it as a place where actors construct compelling issues, arguing that agenda-setting in international politics is carried out through "agenda entry points and agenda control through entry points". In international politics, there are roughly four types of venues: global knowledge production sites, transnational networks and media, key international organizations or mechanisms, and diplomatic activities such as international conferences or alliances (Livingston, 1992). Keohan and Nye (2003, p. 36) saw the international institutions as helping to set the international agenda, enabling coalitions, and as a forum for political initiatives and engagement strategies by weaker states. These statements are enlightening but too broad, so the framework of this analysis will be based on the actual situation of China's participation in the governance of the international digital space to determine the "place".

The setting of the international agenda is not only the initial stage, but also the crucial stage in the creation of the international institutions. McCombs and Shaw (1972) were the first to put forward and confirm the agenda-setting theory, pointing out that the mass media cannot determine the specific views of people on a certain event or opinion, but it can influence the audience to pay attention to certain facts and opinions and discuss the ranking of these facts and opinions by arranging relevant issues. Earlier, another journalism scholar, Bernard Cohen, had proposed a similar idea: the media may not be successful at telling people what to think, but they are extraordinarily successful at telling them what to think (McCombs, 2008, p. 3). Agenda-setting in mass communication is not much different from the mechanisms of international agenda-setting, as Keohan and Nye (2003, p. 33) point out: In an international community where there is no clear hierarchy of issues, the politics of agenda-shaping and agenda-controlling will become more important. Nye (2011a, p. 18) further points to "the ability of power users to get the results they want through agenda-building, persuasion, and assimilation." However, compared with the agenda setting of mass communication, the agenda setting of China's international digital space governance system is mainly aimed at other countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, and is closely related to the international voice and national interests, which need to be considered.

"Access channel" or "entry point" solves the problem of "where to say", agenda setting solves the problem of "what to say", but the problem of "how to say" is equally important, which concerns the ability or means to set the international agenda. Lan and Hanzhi (2012) of Tsinghua University divides the government's ability to participate in international rule-making into three categories: the government's ability and influence in international organizations, the local policy environment, and the level of coordination and coordination of bureaucracies. Power is a kind of ability. Xiaoyan and Yuanhang (2017) take international network security rules as an example to show that the improvement of a country's network discourse power is guaranteed by technological innovation and development, and its consolidation depends on the strengthening of institutional power and interpretative power. Institutional power refers to whether relevant standards can enter the international agenda and become universal standards, while interpretative power refers to whether a country can effectively promote its own standards and ideas. For the international digital space governance field, unilateral, bilateral and multilateral institutional platforms of different nature have given a limited range of what capabilities and means to use.

Analysis Framework

Different digital space governance systems provide a platform for China to build the right to speak in international internet governance. Setting the international agenda is the initial and key stage of building the right to speak in international institutions, and the ability and means to set the agenda determine the size of a country's right to speak in international institutions. To sum up, this paper constructs

an analytical framework that includes three elements: institutional platform, agenda setting, means and capabilities, and tries to study how to set the agenda in the four paths of China's participation in the construction of the international institutions of digital space governance.

(1) Institutional platform for agenda setting

Different institutional frameworks affect the discourse construction strategies of the actors to a great extent. We can frame the international institutions of digital space governance as a research object by examining the evolution of the concept of international institutions. The study of international institutions starts from the study of formal international organizations, and finally returns to formal international organizations, but this cycle brings about the expansion and extension of conceptual extension (Ye, 2017, p. 27). In Keohan's division of the forms of international institutions, formal intergovernmental organizations and transnational non-governmental organizations together with international mechanisms and international practices constitute international institutions (Keohan, 1989, p. 3). We can divide China's participation in the international digital governance system into four categories: The first type of system is the digital space governance system with ICANN as the core built by the United States with the advantage of technology and history; The second type is the digital space governance system with WSIS and IGF as the core under the framework of the United Nations. The third type of system is the bilateral or multilateral system established by negotiation between China and a certain country or several countries. The fourth type of system is an autonomous system such as the WIC.

(2) Idea-driven agenda setting

Digital space governance encompasses multiple areas, which Kurbalija (2019, p. 3) divides into seven frameworks of infrastructure, security, law, economy, development, socio-cultural and human rights, covering 40-50 relevant issues. Limited by time and other constraints, it is impossible for anyone institutional platform to discuss every topic. The agenda consists of a number of topics arranged in an orderly manner. Whether it can be entered into the agenda determines whether it is discussed, and the priority order on the agenda determines the degree of attention paid to the topic. Nye (1990) argues that "soft power," such as voice, does not depend on command or force, but "derives from setting the agenda and deciding how to frame the debate." The setting of the agenda reflects the philosophy behind it. The specific agenda will be elaborated in the following paragraphs, which will only outline the different but evolving concepts of China in the four paths: Expand the role of governments of sovereign states in international digital space governance, advocate that governments play a leading role in international digital space governance, conduct cyber and digital cooperation with other countries as sovereign states, resolve disputes, respect cyber sovereignty, and build a community of digital destiny.

(c) The ability or means to set the agenda

The agenda is a list of all the issues, and how to get the issues advocated by the country into the agenda, or even to the top, is related to the ability or means of agenda-setting. If the international agenda setting ability is strong, it can create "collective identity" through the public opinion environment formed by the agenda setting, and improve the effectiveness of international discourse in international rule-making. To realize the effective transmission of value in the debate of issues and establish the national value standard in the formulation of international rules (Bin, 2015). During the agenda setting phase of the establishment of the international institutions of digital space governance, China has adopted, within the framework of action of different institutional platforms, such means as submitting technical drafts, addressing conferences, issuing statements and comments, recommending candidates, hosting and holding meetings, lobbying, and launching initiatives. In addition, although the means closely related to discourse are used in the formulation of international rules and have their own particularities, they should also follow the criteria of measuring discourse such as rigorous logical persuasion, fair value concept, and scientific evidence basis.

Agenda-setting Strategies in the Participation Path

The internet was originally born in the United States. With its technological and historical advantages, the United States has gradually formed a governance system with ICANN as the center responsible for internet resource allocation, and Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and other institutions responsible for standards development. In order for China to catch up in the information age, it is a rational and inevitable choice for China to access the internet and join the US-led international digital space governance system.

(1) Institutional platforms where the role of the government is limited

In 1998, ICANN was established to coordinate the distribution of internet domain names, IP addresses and technical parameters. On the one hand, the United States controls ICANN through contracts, and on the other hand, with its powerful internet companies, scientists and social organizations, the government can achieve national interests without direct intervention. Under ICANN, policies are formed from the bottom up, mainly by organizations such as the private sector and the technical community, while other governments must reach a "majority consensus" (under the old bylaws) or a "consensus of the whole" (under the new bylaws of 2016) in the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) to make recommendations to the ICANN Board—have no real influence. In 2002, ICANN, which had been in operation for three years, was reformed due to problems such as insufficient participation mechanism, lengthy decision-making process, and insufficient funding. GAC insisted that the participation of government and public authorities was an indispensable central element of ICANN's mission, but

ICANN's leadership believed that it was not feasible to replace it with traditional governmental means (ICANN, 2002). ICANN conference was held in Shanghai in 2002. The China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2002) has proposed that ICANN is no longer fit to perform its duties and that it be reformed into an independent international organization with the General Assembly as the highest decision- making body. However, because of its willingness to reform and contract with the US government restrictions, ICANN's reform is not according to the direction of development.

(2) Expanding the role of the government and the Chinese domain name agenda

Efforts to change ICANN internally have been thwarted, but in domain names China has expanded the influence of sovereign governments in the governance of the international digital space. Domain name allocation and use is the basis and premise of network interconnection. Multilingual domain names are proposed and led by ICANN, intended to make it "easier for those who do not use the ASCII character set to use it (the Internet)" (ICANN, 2000). China's decision to make Chinese domain names is not only related to high communication costs, but also related to national sovereignty and information security (Xue, 2004) But the construction of the Chinese domain name agenda is not smooth: On September 25, 2000, the ICANN Board of Directors made a resolution on Internationalized Domain names (IDN), awarding the development of Chinese domain names to Verisign—an American company (ICANN, 2001). The day before the adoption of the resolution China objected by announcing that it would authorize CNNIC to manage the Chinese domain name system in the mainland on behalf of the government, but it did not block the resolution. Through various efforts, China has obtained the right to formulate Chinese domain name standards and defended China's sovereignty.

(3) Various means to promote the Chinese domain name standards agenda

Technical standards are an important part of the digital space governance system with ICANN as the core. Technical personnel mainly draft and evaluate the "Request for Comment Document" (RFC) in IETF, and finally reach a consensus and become a common standard. In March 2001, CNNIC technicians attended and explained the value of Chinese domain names at the IETF meeting for the first time, but no foreign experts were willing to listen (Tingting, 2009). Chinese scientists have made continuous efforts and submitted two drafts of the RFC of the "Conversion of Traditional and Simplified Chinese Names" at the 51st and 53rd sessions of the IETF. The methods of one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many traditional/simplified Chinese conversion are introduced, and the specific methods of one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-one traditional Chinese conversion are discussed (IETF, 2001). Until April 2004, CNNIC jointly with the Internet Information Center of Taiwan, Japan and South Korea to develop the "China, Japan and South Korea Multilingual Domain name Registration Management Guide" was officially issued by the IETF(2004) as RFC3743.

The implementation of Chinese domain names is also inseparable from the following efforts. The first is technology research and development. CNNIC launched the "Chinese Domain Name Registration Trial System" in January 2000. With technical support, it is possible to have the above Chinese domain name RFCS passed in IETF. Second, CNNIC was authorized to manage the Chinese domain name system in the mainland on behalf of the government, and to carry out international cooperation with countries that use Chinese characters, such as Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and expand the voice of Chinese domain names. Third, communicate with ICANN on the management of Chinese domain names and domain name disputes and other issues, and in the process of the formulation of Internet domain name rules, through public statements. Finally, it recommended candidates to serve as members of ICANN's Multilingual Domain Name Committee, effectively expressing their opinions and promoting the implementation of Chinese domain names.

China's efforts on the Chinese domain name agenda have expanded the scope for sovereign states to act in the governance of the digital space and contributed to the subsequent WSIS consensus to include issues related to infrastructure and critical resource management, such as the domain name system, in the domain of public policy. But in general, the role of sovereign states has been marginalized under the ICANN system, especially since the United States handed over governance to the empowered community in October 2016.

Agenda-setting Strategies in the Path of Changing

Under the digital space governance system controlled by the United States and with ICANN at its core, multi-stakeholders such as the internet private sector, technical communities and citizen groups take the lead in formulating policies and forming standards "from the bottom up and driven by consensus", and other countries are basically unable to exert substantial influence. In the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001, the United States tightened its security measures not only at home, but also in the digital world. As a result, the United Nations, an intergovernmental organization, has gradually become the forum for reforming this irrational system.

(1) The institutional platform that challenges American dominance

The first two-stage summit, the WSIS was held at the UN level to discuss international governance of the digital space. From the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) action plan for the organization of the Summit in 1998, to the United Nations resolution supporting the framework of the two-stage summit in 2001, to the formal convening of the many years, enough to see the importance of the summit, and the importance of the United Nations to the governance of the digital space. In September 2021, on the basis of the roadmap for digital cooperation (released in June 2020), the United Nations proposed to promote multi-stakeholder negotiations to reach a "Global digital compact". Many

countries hope to bring the digital space governance, which is dominated unilaterally by the US government and marginalized by other governments, back to the traditional model of state-centered global governance, which is also another new opportunity for the international community to establish a New World Information Order.

(2) Setting the agenda for "government-led" digital space governance

From the WSIS to the Global Digital Compact, government-led advocacy has been at the heart of China's agenda. At the preparatory meeting for the first phase of WSIS, Zukang (2002), head of the Chinese delegation, stressed that governments should play a leading role in addressing the "digital divide" brought about by "digital opportunities". In the process of establishing "global digital contract", China believes that "international rules should be formulated under the leadership of the United Nations and on the basis of universal participation of all member states," and that "international organizations, IT enterprises, technical communities, non-governmental organizations and other entities can actively play a role commensurate with their own roles." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2004). Therefore, it is China's consistent position in the field of digital space governance to advocate the role of governments and intergovernmental organizations as the main channels.

(3) Means of implementing the agenda and participating in decision-making

The theme of the preparatory phase of WSIS "is not necessarily highly structured and explicit" (Anderson, 1990, p. 71). This provides an opportunity for "internet governance" to join. Thanks to the efforts of the ITU and many countries, including China, the issue of digital space governance has for the first time received attention at the international level, and it has become a consensus that "countries have the right and responsibility to deal with public policy issues related to the Internet" (WSIS, 2005). China advocates the "government-led" mainly through the convention speeches, statements, review, and international cooperation, etc.

On the institutional platform under the framework of the United Nations, China has evaluated the situation and followed the trend. The government, scientists and social organizations have cooperated with each other and successfully set the agenda of "advocating government-led". Through speeches, statements, reviews and international cooperation, China has promoted the inclusion of "government-led" in the outcome document. But the United States, with its strong hard and soft power, "takes the strategies of other actors off the agenda and makes their options unworkable." (Nye, 2011b, p. 179). However, WSIS and IGF remain an institutional platform for consensus-building.

Agenda-setting Strategies in the Co-construction Path

China's participation in the construction of international digital space governance system under the path of co-construction is mainly manifested in two aspects: the establishment of bilateral dialogue mechanisms with the United States, and the establishment of bilateral or multilateral mechanisms with other countries and international organizations other than the United States. Unlike the former, which focuses more on security issues, the latter focuses more on economic and development issues.

(1) Cyber cooperation and competition between China and the United States

China and the United States have established a series of institutional platforms, such as the Cyber Security Working Group (June 2013), the Joint High-level Dialogue on Cybercrime and Related Issues (September 2015, hereinafter referred to as the "Dialogue Mechanism on Cybercrime"), and the Law Enforcement and Cyber Security Dialogue (April 2017). However, since the Trump administration, the dialogue mechanism between the two countries has become unstable. In addition, some private sector and civil society organizations are also carrying out activities, such as the China-Us Internet Forum.

Judging from the agenda of the dialogue, China and the two countries pay high attention to the issue of cyber security. As can be seen from the names of the dialogue mechanisms, the cyber dialogue between China and the United States focuses on cyber security, especially cybercrime, and maintains a high degree of continuity and focus: The "Cyber Security Working Group" exchanged views on cyber security and the construction of the working group, but was later suspended by China due to the prosecution; The Dialogue Mechanism on Cybercrimes has held three dialogues, which have been continued, implemented and expanded in terms of the types of cybercrimes to be combated jointly and the establishment of supporting mechanisms (Ning and Ping, 2017). "Law Enforcement and Cyber Security Dialogue" and "Anti-Cybercrime Dialogue mechanism" also maintain a high level of continuity at the agenda setting level, mainly involving cooperation in combating various types of cybercrime and establishing hotlines, information resource sharing and other safeguard mechanisms.

In terms of the means to implement the dialogue mechanism, the two countries started from the common concern of cyber security. Choosing cyber security as the entry point not only meets the common concerns of both sides, but also makes it more operational. But what the United States calls "cyber security" focuses on infrastructure security and technical security, while China believes that cyber information security should also be included. The three dialogue mechanisms were all decided to establish by the then heads of state of the two countries when they met, and the level of the mechanisms has been continuously upgraded (the latter two dialogue mechanisms are at the ministerial level), the level of institutionalization has been continuously improved, and the agenda has gradually expanded from easy to difficult.

Exchanges in cyberspace have expanded the dimension and added complexity to China-Us relations, and cyber security has become a priority agenda in China-Us relations. Various dialogue mechanisms have played a role in easing contradictions and managing differences to a certain extent, but they have failed to fundamentally solve the increasingly complex cyber security issues between the two countries. In particular, since the Sino-US trade friction and the new coronavirus epidemic, the two sides have constantly clashed over chip, 5G, third-generation Internet and other issues. However, as a cyber power, the United States and China depend on each other, and it is the best way out to solve cyber conflicts and enhance mutual trust through establishing dialogue and consultation mechanisms.

(2) China's network relations with other countries

China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa and other emerging countries, regional organizations, the United Kingdom, France, South Korea and other developed countries through the joint round table, issued joint statements, signed international treaties to discuss the issue of digital space governance.

China has established a series of bilateral and multilateral institutional platforms, such as the Internet Roundtable Forum for Emerging Countries, the China-UK Roundtable (since 2008), the China-South Korea Internet Roundtable (since 2012), as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China and the League of Arab States. The digital economy is central to the dialogue's agenda. As an increasingly important driver of global economic growth, the digital economy is playing an important role in accelerating economic recovery, improving labor productivity in existing industries, fostering new markets and new industrial growth points, and achieving inclusive and sustainable growth. At the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October 2023, China and 14 countries jointly issued the Beijing Initiative for International Cooperation on the Belt and Road Digital Economy, from infrastructure and industrial transformation and digital ability, cooperation mechanism, etc. (China's Belt and Road Network, 2023). It also proposed 20 consensus points for further deepening international cooperation in digital economy and promoting multilateral and bilateral international cooperation in digital economy. In terms of the means to implement the dialogue mechanism, relevant Chinese departments have continuously improved policies on cross-border data flows, continued to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the field of data, jointly established cross-border data flow cooperation mechanisms with major economic and trade partners and regions, and actively participated in the formulation of global data rules.

Agenda-Setting Strategies in the Independent Creating Path

China's autonomy in the above three institutional platforms is more or less limited, and the Snowden incident has exposed the United States abuse of technological and institutional advantages to the global internet caused by the harm. Since 2014, China has continuously hosted the WIC and held special forums to elaborate China's proposals on the governance of the international digital space. Taking this path, China, as the host, has a natural advantage in determining the theme and setting the agenda, and can also be recognized by the international community by providing more "public goods" for international digital space governance. This marks the improvement of China's voice in the international digital space governance.

(1) Institutional platforms led by the Chinese government

The WIC is a global internet conference led by the Chinese government and co-hosted by the Cyberspace Administration of China and the People's Government of Zhejiang Province. The purpose of the event is to build a "platform for interconnection between China and the world, and a platform for Internet sharing and governance", so as to present China's propositions to the world in a more comprehensive way. This is the largest and highest-level conference held in the internet field in China so far. China has also held a series of conferences to express its views and put forward initiatives, such as the Global Data Security Initiative and the Initiative on Building a Digital Community with a Shared Future released at the International Symposium on "Seizing Digital Opportunities for Cooperative Development" in 2020 and the World Digital Economy Forum in 2021. The WIC and other conferences independently organized by China are the same conferences on global digital space governance as the ICANN Conference of the United States and the IGF of the United Nations, but they are different from the latter two in terms of nature, organization, discussion agenda, etc. From the perspective of participating in international digital space governance, their biggest feature is to build an institutional platform for independent rule-making.

(2) Agenda setting of the "China Solution" for digital space governance

The WIC has put forward the agenda of "China Solution" on the governance of international digital space, which is used throughout the organization and activities of the conference. The goal of setting up this agenda is to build a "community of shared future in cyberspace", which mainly includes the "four principles" and "five proposals". In 2020, China further proposed to "jointly promote global digital governance and jointly build a community of digital destiny." (Yi, 2020). In "China Solution", "respect for sovereignty" is the first principle and scheme of the core. Digital space sovereignty is a natural extension of national sovereignty in digital space (China Institute of Modern Relations, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 2019), is the world internally for digital space governance, to conduct the foundation of network relations. China's call for respect

for sovereignty in digital space is a manifestation of a responsible major country upholding the UN Charter and peace and stability of the international institutions. The "digital community of common destiny" is an alternative concept for China to contribute to the current unilaterally-dominated governance of the international digital space, making up for China's weakness in soft power as a digital power. China calls on all countries to build a multilateral, democratic and transparent digital space governance system guided by this belief.

(3) The means to set the agenda and participate in decision-making

The agenda of the "China Solution" for international digital space governance was finally reflected in the outcome document through speeches by leaders, forums of the conference, round tables, expos and outcome presentations, and speeches, explanations and discussions by leaders of participating countries, heads of important international organizations, internet business leaders, technical groups and civil society organizations. These meetings focused on the "China Solution." China believes that digital sovereignty is a widely accepted premise to better protect the digital interests of developing countries, in order to unite the common aspirations of developing countries.

China's establishment of independent platforms such as the WIC is not to replace the role of the United States in international digital space governance. Before the first conference was held in 2014, the then Director of the Cyberspace Administration of China attended the London Conference of ICANN and stated that China wants "one world, one Internet". The purpose of holding the WIC is to promote the development of the international digital space governance system in a fair and reasonable direction, and build a community of shared future in cyberspace.

Peroration

According to the different characteristics of the four institutional platforms, China takes different approaches to participate in the governance of the international digital space, and sets agendas to guide the discussion topics, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Three Elements of China's Four Paths to Participate in the Governance of International Digital Space

Four paths	**Institutional platform**	**Idea-driven agenda setting**	**Ability or means**
Joining path	US-led governance system with ICANN at its core	Expand government influence with Chinese domain names	Technology research and development, domestic action, international cooperation, communication with ICANN, candidate recommendation, conference presentation
Changing path	Under the framework of the United Nations, WSIS and IGF are the core governance systems	Advocate government-led digital space governance	General assembly speeches, statements, amendments, comments, selection of relevant personnel, united with other countries
Co-construction path	Bilateral or multilateral systems between China and other countries	Bilateral and multilateral negotiations and cyber security as sovereign states	The issue of cyber security started, the two heads of state set the tone, upgraded the level of mechanism, continuously improved the level of institutionalization, gradually expanded the issue, and introduced intellectual support
Independent Creating Path	Independent platforms such as the WIC	Digital Space Community with a Shared Future and the "China Solution"	Leaders' speeches, sub-forum Settings, outcome documents, meeting discussions, and cooperation

(1) There is an evolutionary relationship between the agendas. Compared with the agenda setting of mass communication, which focuses more on how media affect audiences rather than policy making, the international agenda setting of China's digital space governance system is closely related to international discourse power and national interests, mainly targeting other countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, and focusing on promoting institutional construction. In the process of participating in the construction of the international digital space governance system, China's agenda has developed step by step and gradually clarified: From advocating the expansion of the role of the government in the governance of digital space, advocating the government to play a leading role in the governance of digital space, to establishing bilateral or multilateral mechanisms with other countries as sovereign states, until it clearly put forward a new concept and plan for international digital space governance.

(2) The agenda set and the specific means of implementing the agenda are limited by institutional platforms. As a developing country, China's policy making is dominated by the state, and the leading force and composition behind ICANN Conference, WSIS and IGF decide that it cannot meet China's demands, nor is the bilateral and multilateral mechanism that China participates in a comprehensive and systematic way to put forward and demonstrate and take measures to implement

China's propositions. Therefore, China has established platforms such as WIC. Advocate a government-led multilateral model. China uses these platforms to build a global network of contacts and respond to the growing unilateralism in the global digital space with a cooperative posture of multilateralism (Li and Xiuzan, 2019). On this institutional platform, China can comprehensively and clearly put forward its views and propositions on digital space governance and implement them in various ways.

(3) Setting the international agenda is an important embodiment of a country's soft power and international voice. In today's interdependent international community, the direct use of power to safeguard and seize national interests will be met with resistance from many sides. By setting the agenda in different institutional platforms, China has promoted the development of the global digital space governance system in a fair and reasonable direction, which is worthy of recognition and in line with China's national interests. But it has also faced skepticism and misunderstanding. Especially for the WIC, the coverage of mainstream Western countries tends to be negative, *China Aims to Expand Censored Web* (Areddy, 2014), *Facial Recognition of New Ways to Track the Public* (Mozur and Zhang, 2017), *The Official in Charge of Internet Censorship Policy* (Mozur and Perlez, 2014), etc. Foreign scholars believe that China's attitude towards Internet sovereignty reflects a kind of authoritarian informationalism (Jiang, 2010); the Chinese government's attempts to define and disseminate cyber sovereignty as a legal norm risk undermining international commitments to transparency, accountability, and human rights (Mckune and Shazeda, 2018); and research focus on China's emerging campaign against global open Internet, think China a challenge to America's global leadership summit (Dombrowski, 2016).

(4) Further improve China's digital governance propositions and enhance the attractiveness of independent platforms. Although the above misunderstandings and doubts are ideological biases, the shortcomings of China's digital governance ideas and programs in practice and discourse need to be further remedied and improved. We will build a complementary relationship between platforms such as the WIC, ICANN Conference, WSIS and IGF, and various bilateral and multilateral systems to serve the international community's aspirations for development and cooperation in cyberspace. Optimize the institutional platform of the WIC, establish a permanent body, and hold multiple forms of meetings during the conference year, so as to improve the capacity for transnational action, so that the consensus of the conference will truly become the cornerstone of the construction of an international digital governance system.

Acknowledgments

This paper is a phased research achievement of the Chinese National Social Science Fund's general project "Discourse Game and China's Approach in Data Cross-border Security Governance" (22BXW115).

References

Anderson, J. E. (1990). *Public Policy*. Translated by Tang Liang. Huaxia Publishing House.

Areddy, J. T. (2014, November 19). *China Aims to Expand Censored Web*. The Wall Street Journal.

Bin, W. (2015). Setting the International Agenda: Legal Dialogue in the Context of Globalization. *Research on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, *3*, 18–20.

China Institute of Modern Relations, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (2019). *Cyber Sovereignty: Theory and practice*. http://epaper.bjnews.com.cn/html/2019-10/22/content_768857.htm?div=-1.

China's Belt and Road Network (2023). *Digital economy Beijing international cooperation initiative*, http://lu.china-embassy.gov.cn/chn/zgyw/202310/P020231019680044766978.pdf.

CNNIC (2002). *China to reform the ICANN system*, http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper39/7807/742948.html.

Dombrowski, P. (2016). China Wants to Draw Borders in Cyberspace-But So Does Every Other Sovereign Nation. *NPQ: New Perspectives Quarterly*, *33*(2), 38–42.

ICANN (2000). *Special Meeting of the Board Minutes*. https://www.ICANN.org/resources/board-material/minu tes-2000-09-25-en.

ICANN (2001). *Internationalized Domain Names*. https://features.ICANN.org/2001-03-13-internationalized–domain-names.

ICANN (2002). *President's Reform Proposa*l. https://archive.ICANN.org/en/general/lynn-reform-proposal-24feb 02.htm.

IETF (2001). *Proceedings of the Fifty-Third Internet Engineering Task Force*. https://www.Ietf.Org/Proceedings/53/ .

IETF (2004). *Joint Engineering Team (JET) Guidelines for Internationalized Domain Names (IDN) Registration and Administration for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean*. https://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc3743.txt.

Jiang, M. (2010). Authoritarian informationalism: China's approach to Internet sovereignty. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, *30*(2), 71–89.

Keohan, R., Nye, J. (2003). *Power and Interdependence*. Translated by Men Honghua. Peking University Press.

Kulbarija, J. (2019). *Internet Governance*. Translated by Lu Chuanying, Hui Zhibin and Liu Yue. Tsinghua University Press.

Lan, X., Hanzhi, Y. (2012). Government Participation in International Rule-making from the Perspective of Policy Process. *World Economy and Politics*, *9*, 28–44.

Li, Y., Xiuzan, Z. (2019). China's Contribution: The World Internet Conference from the Perspective of International Mechanism Theory. *Henan Social Sciences*, *5*, 1–9.

Livingston, S. G. (1992). The Politics of International Agenda-Setting: Reagan and North-South. *International Studies Quarterly*, *3*, 314–326.

McCombs, M. (2008). *Agenda Setting: Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Translated by Guo Zhenzhi and Xu Peixi. Peking University Press.

McCombs, M. E., Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *36*(2), 176–187.

Mckune, S., Shazeda, A. (2018).The Contestation and Shaping of Cyber Norms Through China's Internet Sovereignty Agenda. *International Journal of Communication*, *12*, 3835–3855.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China (2004). *China's Position on Issues related to Global Digital Governance*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China.

Mozur P., Zhang, C. (2017, June 12). *On Display in China, New Ways to Track Public.* New York Times.

Ning, L., Ping, L. (2017). China-Us Cybersecurity Relations under Different Issues: Cooperation, Competition and Conflict. *Strategic Decision Research, 2*, 5–21.

Nye, J. (2011a). *Power in the Future*. Translated by Wang Jimei. Citic Press.

Nye, J. (2011b). *The Great Future of Power*. Translated by Wang Jimei. Citic Press.

Nye, J. (1990). The Changing Nature of World Power. *Political Science Quarterly, 105*(2), 181.

Mozur, P., Perlez, J. (2014, February 12). *China's Tough-Minded Web Keeper*. New York Times.

Keohan, R. (1989). *International institutions and state power: essay in international relations theory boulder*. Westview Press.

Tingting, C. (2009). ICANN Expert Decryption: The beginning and end of the Resolution on rewriting the International Rules of Domain Names in Chinese. *Internet Weekly, 7*, 82–83.

WSIS (2005).*Tunis Agenda*, http://www.itu.int/net/ wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1-zh.doc.

Xiaoyan, L., Yuanhang, C. (2017). The Creation of International Cyber security Rules and the Game of Government discourse Power -- An Interpretation of the Technical Dimension. *International Press, 11*, 126–142.

Xue, H. (2004). The Voice of China: A Story of Chinese-Character Domain Names. *Cardozo Journal of International Comparative Law, 12*(2), 559–592.

Ye, T. (2017). *Institutional Design of China's Participation in International Cooperation: A Comparative Institutional Analysis*. Social Sciences Academic Press.

Yi, W. (2020). *China launched the global data security initiative.* https://m.thepaper.cn/ baijiahao_9124833.

Zukang, S. (2002). *For the first time in the world summit on information society intergovernmental preparatory conference*. http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/pc1/statements_general/china-zh.doc.