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## The Newsworthiness of International Terrorism<sup>1</sup>

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*The emergence of media-oriented terrorism has led scholars of modern terrorism to reconceptualize this phenomenon within the framework of symbolic communication theory. This study focuses on the newsworthiness of international terrorism. It relates the concept of deviance as a predictor of newsworthiness to the specific attributes of terrorist events and their impact on media selection (coverage or no coverage) and prominence of coverage (amount of space or time and location). The RAND Corporation chronology of international terrorism (1968-1980) and the coverage given to each terrorist event in the three American television networks and nine newspapers from various countries serve as the data base. By means of multivariate analysis, the effects of various attributes of terrorist events on media selection and coverage are examined. In general, the level of victimization, the type of action, the identity of the perpetrators, and an attributable responsibility were found to be the best predictors of media coverage. However, the effect of attributes on coverage varied from selection to prominence, thus suggesting a two-step process of selection in which different considerations affect each step. The impact of the various attributes was found to change over time. These findings suggest that the process of news selection is more complex than a simple relationship between attributes of events and coverage. In the case of terrorism, deviance as newsworthiness can be regarded as the guiding principle of coverage.*

Modern technology has provided small terrorist groups with a powerful instrument—the mass media—that willingly or unwillingly serves their needs. As Laqueur (1976, p. 104) put it, "The media are the terrorist's best friend. The terrorist's act by itself is nothing, publicity is all." Several terrorist organizations realized the potentials of media-oriented terror in

terms of effectively reaching huge audiences. A study of all incidents of international terrorism between 1968 and 1980 revealed a significant increase in terrorist acts that victimize Western nations (though the perpetrators are non-Western) and that are directed to attract the attention of the Western media (Weimann, 1986). Terrorist theory was gradually realizing the potency of the mass media (Bell, 1975). Acts of terrorism were more and more perceived as means of persuasion, when the victim is "the skin on a drum beaten to achieve a calculated impact on a wider audience" (Schmid & de Graaf, 1982, p. 14).

The emergence of media-oriented terrorism has led several scholars to reconceptualize the phenomenon of terrorism in the framework of symbolic communication theory. Thus, for example, Karber (1971, p. 529) suggested a new model of analysis:

As a symbolic act, terrorism can be analysed much like other media of communication, consisting of four basic components: transmitter (the terrorist), intended recipient (target), message (bombing, ambush) and feed-back (reaction of target audience). The terrorist's message of violence necessitates a victim, whether personal or institutional, but the target or intended recipient of the communication may not be the victim.

Dowling (1986, p. 14) suggested applying the concept of "rhetoric genre" to modern terrorism, arguing that "terrorists engage in recurrent rhetorical forms that force the media to provide the access without which terrorism could not fulfill its objectives." Some terrorist events become what Bell (1978, p. 50) has called "terrorist spectacles" that can be best analyzed by the "media event" conceptualization (for a comparative analysis of media events and terrorist spectacles, see Weimann, 1987).

### The Newsworthiness of Deviance and Terrorism

Several studies have revealed the impressive success of terrorists in gaining media coverage (for a review, see Dowling, 1986). The explanation for this success is provided by Bell (1978, p. 50): "These new transnational gunmen are, in fact, television producers constructing a package so spectacular, so violent, so compelling that the networks, acting as executives, supplying the cameramen and the audience, cannot refuse the offer."

A theoretical framework for the analysis of the newsworthiness of modern terrorism can be found in the relationship of the newsworthiness of deviance

to the social roles of the mass media (for a review of this approach, see Shoemaker, Chang, & Brendlinger, 1987). According to this concept, one of the mechanisms through which the mass media exert their influence on social norms and social change is assessing the newsworthiness of people and events. Alexander (1981) argues that the news media fulfill a normative function in society by providing ways for society to organize and understand events. Discovering instances in which norms have been broken (i.e., deviance) is the only way that the media can fulfill that normative function. Indeed, many studies of the flow of international news and media selection of events revealed the emphasis on bad news (e.g., Bergsma, 1980; Galtung & Ruge, 1970; Kaplan, 1979; Larson, 1979; Lent, 1977). The list of factors that were found to be significant predictors of coverage include timeliness; proximity; importance, impact, or consequence; interest; conflict or controversy; sensationalism; prominence; and novelty, oddity, or the unusual (Denis & Innach, 1981; Galtung & Ruge, 1970; Harriss, Leiter, & Johnson, 1977; Izard, Culbertson, & Lambert, 1973; Schulz, 1976; Staab, 1990; Stephens, 1980).

As Shoemaker et al. (1987, p. 355) argue, most of these indicators are likely to be related to deviance: "Much of the way in which newsworthiness is defined relates to deviance, and most of those deviance-newsworthiness criteria are normative." This notion highlights the social role of the mass media by contributing to what Schur (1980) calls the "deviatizing" of people and groups. Deviance has been conceptualized by statistical definitions (the extent to which an event is unusual or statistically rare), by normative definitions (the extent to which an event violates social norms), by a labeling definition (when events are categorized and labeled as deviant), or by a potential-for-social-change definition (the extent to which an event threatens the status quo in a given society or community).

On the empirical dimension, this notion has led to the investigation of the relationships between deviant behavior and newsworthiness in terms of media coverage. However, the studies have not gone beyond these deviance-coverage relationships in terms of variance across different attributes of deviant acts (such as terrorist incidents), across different media, and over time. Although deviant acts like terrorism can be regarded as enormously newsworthy, there may be differences in newsworthiness, depending on the attributes of the single terrorist act. A given medium is more likely to report on terrorist activities involving targets of its own nationality. In the same vein, certain terrorist activities, certain terrorists, or the number of victims might differ in their perceived degree of "relative" deviance, thus influencing media coverage differently.

There are several approaches that deal with news selectivity (for a review, see Staab, 1990). Most of them, however, do not analyze news selection as such. For example, studies on the role of news factors (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1970; Schulz, 1976) measure the news factors contained in newspaper articles on certain events. They do not measure the news factors of the events themselves. Therefore studies along this approach cannot determine whether news factors are the causes of reporting or are the consequences of reporting, as journalists may ascribe news factors to articles in order to promote their importance (Staab, 1990). Experimental approaches of selectivity (e.g., Kerrick, Anderson, & Swales, 1964, or Kepplinger & Brosius, 1989) succeed in describing the behavior of journalists in the experimental environment but neglect the frame conditions of the news room. Gatekeeping studies and input-output analyses rely mainly on preselected news material (e.g., White, 1950, or Whitney & Becker, 1982). Therefore these studies compare press items with preselected news that has already undergone several selection steps.

Our study relies on proposals made by Rosengren (1970, 1974). In his critique of the news-factors approach, he argued that only in-depth analysis of real events and their comparison to media-reported events can yield data for analyzing the selection process. This means that the analysis has to be restricted to mostly one issue for which external data from official statistics or archives are available. These data can be compared to media data achieved by content analyses.

This study attempts to measure the newsworthiness of international terrorism by testing two hypotheses that suggest a more complex deviance-coverage relationship. The first hypothesis relates to news selection theories that include the concept of news factors (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1970).

*Hypothesis 1.* Various attributes of terrorist events have different impacts on media selection and prominence of coverage.

This hypothesis is supported by the fact that only a third of all terrorist events are reported by the world media (Weimann & Brosius, 1989; Wurth-Hough, 1983). We distinguish between the selection decision and the prominence given to an article, because different selection patterns may be applied and, thus, different attributes relate to the two stages of news selection. Although "news-factor" theories assume a static relationship between events' attributes and their coverage, deviance theory would predict a changing relationship according to what is regarded as deviant in a given society. The

media's social function of defining what is deviant will lead to a changing coverage of terrorism.

*Hypothesis 2.* The relationship between attributes of terrorist events and the selection and prominence of coverage varies across media and over time.

This variance is related to several studies on media content that highlight the impact of media routines (e.g., Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1973); journalists' socialization and attitudes (e.g., Breed, 1955; Young, 1981); ideological positions (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Gramsci, 1971; Altschull, 1984); and the impact of social forces outside the new organizations (e.g., Gans, 1979). Thus the newsworthiness of deviant behaviors such as terrorism may vary across news organizations (or media) and time not only by selection but also by changes in the weight of the events' attributes in determining coverage. Because of the relative character of deviance, we would expect that the predictive power of "deviant" attributes would decrease over time. Ongoing reporting on such attributes would make them appear less deviant.

## Method

### Sample

The data base contains the RAND Corporation's chronology of international terrorism.<sup>2</sup> This computerized data base includes nearly every case of international terrorism from 1968 to the present. The material for the chronology is derived from numerous sources, which include newspapers, journals, and periodicals, as well as governmental, intelligence, and military publications. The RAND Corporation adheres to the definition of terrorism as the use of violence, or the threat of violence, calculated to create an atmosphere of fear and alarm. Thus terrorism is defined by the nature of the act and not by the identity of the perpetrators or their cause. The use of violence or threat of violence is often directed against civilian targets. The motives of most terrorists are political and are intended to produce effects beyond the immediate physical damage they cause. International terrorism is concerned with incidents in which a third party is involved, such as when terrorists go abroad to strike their targets, select victims or targets that have connections with a foreign state (e.g., diplomats, foreign corporations), or create international incidents by attacking airline passengers or international transportation. It

excludes domestic terrorism, that is, acts carried out by terrorists within their own country and against their own nationals, and terrorism perpetrated by governments against their own citizens (though this definition is one of many, it is most commonly used by scholars of terrorism. For a detailed description of the definition and its operationalization, see Mickolus, 1983; Jenkins, 1975, 1981).

This data base is constantly updated. By December 1980 it contained 2,239 chronological entries of international terrorism from as early as 1968. Each terrorist event in RAND's chronology is characterized by a set of coded variables such as date, type of action, number of fatalities, number of injuries, type of target, geographical location, nationality of targets, states of location, and identity of perpetrators. For a list of the attributes, their categories, and coding, see Table 1.

### Procedure

By means of a systematic content analysis, the media coverage of all the terrorist events in RAND's chronology (1968-1980) was coded. The media studied were the following:

1. The three American television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), using the *Vanderbilt Television News Archives* (published by the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Joint University Libraries, Nashville, Tennessee). Data include the coverage from August 1972 to December 1980.
2. Nine newspapers (in five languages): *The New York Times* (New York); *The Times* (London); *Daily Telegraph* (London); *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto); *Le Figaro* (Paris); *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Frankfurt); *Yediot* (Israel); *Al Aharam* (Cairo); and *Times of Lahore* (Pakistan). Data include the coverage from January 1968 to December 1980. As some of the newspapers also publish some local editions, we always coded the national editions.

The newspapers we chose for our analysis are all independent papers that are privately owned and that are among the leading papers of their countries, in terms of both circulation and prestige. They do not represent the entire press of their countries but, rather, the mainstream, prestigious, and widely read press. The contents of all papers include both national and international news. Although in the present study we did not focus on content characteristics but, rather, on the selection of events, the reports on the same event might vary in terms of labels used (e.g., terrorists or freedom fighters) or

Table 1  
List of Attributes, Codes, and Categories of Terrorist Events

Attribute	Code	Categories
Victims	I, F	Number of injuries Number of fatalities
Type of action	B	Kidnappings Hijackings Hostage takings and barricades Threats and other actions Attacks on institutions Bombings
Type of targets	T	Assassinations Diplomats Military, police Private citizens Business people Airlines Others, unknown Europe Middle East Asia North America Latin America Africa
Geographical location	G	Europe Middle East Asia North America Latin America Africa
Nationality of targets	N	Europe Middle East Asia Israel North America Latin America Africa
Perpetrators	TER	Palestinians Italians French Irish Germans Spanish Other Europeans Armenians Middle Easterners Puerto Ricans Cubans Latin Americans Others, unknown Unknown Claimed Attributed Known
Responsibility	C	

Note: The categorization is based on the codebook of the RAND Corporation's (1986) terrorism and conflict data base.

motives inferred. These analyses are presented in Weimann and Winn (in press).

Media coverage for each event was coded by (a) was the event covered or not; (b) amount of space in the press (measured by column lines); (c) prominence (front page or inner page); and (d) TV airtime (in seconds). The coders were trained prior to the investigation and were subjected to a reliability test. This test involved the comparison of the evaluation of different coders when analyzing the same medium. The coefficients of reliability (Kendall's  $W$ ) were .96 in covered/not covered, .89 in space, .95 in prominence, and .91 in TV airtime. The content analysis included data only through 1980 because of the enormous effort required to gather and code coverage in eight countries, in five languages, for over 2,200 events during 12 years.

### Analyses

Only a third of international terrorism was reported by the media. This rate was almost identical for every medium, though the events selected varied across the media. The first analysis focused on media selection: What were the attributes of terrorist events that determine media selection? A log-linear analysis was applied to study the relationships between different attributes and media coverage. This method is useful for analyzing multivariate data, particularly in the case of dichotomized or polytomized dependent variables, as in the case of the coverage/no coverage measure (for details of the log-linear method, see Davis, 1974; Fienberg, 1977; Goodman, 1970, 1972, 1978; Knoke & Burke, 1980; Upton, 1978).

To study the possible changes over time in the effect of these attributes on media selection, we computed the contingency coefficients between attributes (present/absent) and coverage (yes/no) separately for four different time intervals (determined by the quartiles of amount of terrorist incidents, thus yielding four periods with the same number of events). The intervals range from 1968 to 1971, 1972 to 1975, 1976 to 1978, and 1979 to 1980.

Prominence in the media, used as the second indicator of coverage, was measured by the amount of time (on TV) and location and space (in the press) devoted to each terrorist act. These measures enabled the use of multiple regression analysis with amount of coverage as the dependent variable. As some of the attributes of terrorist acts are polytomous (e.g., type of action), we created sets of dummy variables by treating each category as a separate variable and assigned scores of 0 and 1 for all cases, depending on their presence or absence. All of these 45 dummy variables (resulting from the

original 8 independent variables) were entered into the regression equation, and this procedure was repeated for each year separately. The data analysis was conducted with a mainframe version of the SPSS-X-Software (SPSS Inc., 1986).

### Results

#### Primary Findings

The first hypothesis suggests that the attributes of terrorist events differ in their impact on media selection. In order to reveal those attributes that are more significant in determining coverage/no coverage, we computed—as a preliminary univariate analysis—contingency coefficients between each attribute and coverage. The results are presented in Table 2 (coefficients are Cramer's  $V$  for polytomous variables and  $\phi$  for dichotomous variables). Note that all coefficients except one are significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

The relationships between attributes of terrorist events and their selection by the media support the first hypothesis in terms of variance across attributes. Moreover, the consistency among the television networks and a lesser similarity among the newspapers support Hypothesis 2, namely, that there are differences between media that are due to different media systems. Thus the three television networks were almost identical in the pattern of selection. All three networks were mainly affected by the type of action (B), the identity of perpetrators (TER), and the attribution of responsibility (C), that is, whether the responsibility for the act was known or claimed. Other important considerations appear to be the nationality of the victims (N) and level of victimization (F and I). A somewhat different pattern emerges in the case of press selection. For most of the papers studied, the important factors were, again, the type of action and the identity of the perpetrators. However, some were also affected by number of fatalities (F) and others by claimed or known responsibility (C).

The contingency coefficients reveal the impact of each attribute separately, whereas a more accurate and realistic presentation of the relationships between the event's attributes and its coverage will include multivariate relations. These are better revealed by log-linear analysis. This procedure provides a measure for choosing the set of relations (or the model) that fits the data best. If the model provides "a good fit" with the observed data, it is tenable. The likelihood-ratio chi-square value ( $L_R\chi^2$ ) indicates how well the tested model fits the observed frequencies. Thus a significant chi-square

Table 2  
Contingency Coefficients Between Attributes of Terrorist Events and Coverage/No Coverage

Medium	Attributes of events									
	TER (df = 12)	B (df = 6)	N (df = 6)	C (df = 3)	G (df = 5)	T (df = 5)	F (df = 1)	I (df = 1)		
Television										
ABC	.23	.30	.17	.29	.13	.14	.14	.20		
CBS	.24	.31	.18	.28	.15	.16	.18	.19		
NBC	.27	.33	.21	.29	.14	.19	.18	.21		
Press										
New York Times	.26	.30	.21	.31	.14	.19	.29	.18		
Yedioth	.42	.24	.42	.25	.27	.25	.28	.22		
Al-Ahram	.27	.21	.29	.21	.20	.15	.18	.14		
Globe and Mail	.23	.37	.15	.35	.06	.24	.22	.17		
Daily Telegraph	.32	.20	.21	.14	.21	.10	.26	.21		
The Times	.32	.26	.24	.24	.18	.15	.26	.23		
Le Figaro	.20	.22	.21	.23	.14	.13	.20	.20		
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	.31	.25	.24	.22	.22	.15	.26	.21		
Times of Lahore	.14	.28	.12	.25	.08	.22	.12	.11		

Note. See Table 1 for the coding of attributes. All coefficients except one (.06) significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

value indicates that the frequencies expected under the model differ significantly from those actually observed, and the model is rejected. We applied this analysis to each medium separately, with every attribute as the independent variable. For each medium we present only that model which was found to provide the best fit with the data with a minimum number of predictors (goodness of fit was measured by the  $LR\chi^2$  value when insignificant value indicates a good fit between the expected frequencies according to the model and the observed frequencies). Table 3 presents the best models found for each medium with a logit analysis (i.e., coverage or no coverage as the dependent variable).

The models presented in Table 3 (those that yielded the best fit with the data in terms of lowest likelihood ratio of chi-square;  $LR\chi^2$  values) indicate that coverage or no coverage could be predicted for most of the media by means of three attributes. These attributes combined were the factors affecting each medium's selection in the case of terrorist events. They were identical for the three American networks, suggesting that the networks apply the same selection process and considerations, but vary to some extent across the newspapers, possibly because of their different locations and backgrounds. According to Hypothesis 1, there are attributes of terrorist events that predict coverage.

Table 3  
Best Models for Predicting Media Coverage (Log-Linear Analysis)

Medium	Best model <sup>a</sup>	$LR\chi^2$	df	p =
ABC	B, C, TER	81.75	153	.980
CBS	B, C, TER	84.19	153	.905
NBC	B, C, TER	98.59	153	.917
New York Times	B, C, F	47.93	38	.241
Globe and Mail	B, C, T	159.03	130	.050
Daily Telegraph	N, F, TER	85.28	97	.796
The Times	B, F, TER	62.74	71	.747
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	B, F, TER	74.93	71	.352
Le Figaro	B, C, N	138.91	176	.982
Yedioth	N, F, TER	90.04	97	.679
Al-Ahram	N, C, TER	116.62	207	.956
Times of Lahore	B, C, T	114.60	130	.830

a. Letters denote the variables according to their coding (see Table 1). The models are all logit models when coverage/no coverage is the dependent variable.

The second hypothesis suggests that the impact of attributes on media selection varies over time. To measure these changes, we compared the contingency coefficients computed separately for four different time intervals. This comparison revealed some consistencies and some changes. Attributes that kept their impact or media selection were those associated with victimization (namely, number of fatalities and injuries), whereas attributes such as type of target, geographical location, and attributable responsibility lost their influence (the coefficients becoming weaker over time). Two attributes gained impact over the years: the identity of the perpetrators and the type of action.

Prominence of Coverage

So far, we have examined only media selection in terms of whether a terrorist event was covered or not. This is only one measure of media selection or newsworthiness. Another indicator is the prominence given to an event in terms of location, space, or time. The question arises whether the same attributes of terrorism predict selection and prominence or whether different attributes affect these two selection stages. Prominence of coverage, measured by amount of space (unweighted and weighted by location) and airtime, was used as the dependent variable for a multiple regression analysis with the event's attributes (as dummy variables) entered as the independent variables. The coefficients of multiple correlation are presented in Table 4.

The coefficients of multiple correlation reveal the predictability of media coverage: By means of the event's attributes, one can predict quite efficiently the amount of space in the press (both unweighted or weighted by location)<sup>3</sup> and airtime on American TV networks, devoted to cover the event. The correlations do not differ significantly across the media, thus suggesting that for both TV and press the prominence of coverage is predictable. The variance across the years (coefficients range from .46 to .90) indicates that this predictability fluctuates over time. Both Hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported by this analysis. Please note that according to Hypothesis 2, the predictability decreases over time.

The next step of the analysis involved the measurement of each attribute's contribution in terms of  $R^2$  changes (by comparing the difference between regression equations with and without the parameter tested). To do so, we used the following seven attributes: rate of victimization (fatalities and injuries taken together), type of action, type of target, geographical location, perpetrators, responsibility (claimed, known or unknown), and nationality of target. For each of the attributes, the procedure started with a full regression model and then the removal of the attribute in question, measuring its impact in terms of  $R^2$  change. Table 5 presents the  $R^2$  changes (i.e., the contribution of each parameter) for each medium and for four time intervals (to allow for changes over time) as well as for the entire period.

The contribution of attributes of terrorist events varies across media, over time, and across attributes. The last column of Table 5 presents the contribution of the attributes for the entire period. It reveals that when amount of press coverage is the dependent variable, the rate of victimization, the type of action, and the identity of the perpetrators are the dominant predictors (each explained 5% to 7% of the variance). Other attributes such as type of target, its nationality, or the geographical location of the action are also significant predictors, but they explain only 1% to 3% of the variance in press coverage. The amount of television coverage in the entire period is best predicted by only two attributes: rate of victimization (explained variance of 6%) and type of action (4%), whereas the contribution of other variables is insignificant.

A comparison of the contributions across the four time periods reveals some changes. Over the years, some of the attributes have not changed their impact on amount of coverage (e.g., victimization rate or type of action in the case of press coverage); some have gained impact (e.g., victimization rate between 1976 and 1978 for television coverage or identity of perpetrators

Year

Multiple Correlations Between Attributes of Terrorist Events and Amount of Media Coverage

Table 4

Coverage	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Space in press	.86	.85	.77	.90	.78	.83	.84	.92	.88	.84	.82	.77	.60
Weighted space	.87	.85	.78	.91	.78	.83	.85	.93	.88	.82	.81	.79	.58
TV time						.60	.70	.81	.62	.63	.79	.61	.46

Note: Space was weighted by location in the paper (front page space was multiplied by two compared to inner pages). All the coefficients are statistically significant,  $p < .01$ .

Table 5  
Contribution of Attributes to the Predictability of Coverage

Attributes	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> contribution during			
	1968-1971	1972-1975	1976-1978	1979-1980
Victimization	.04	.07	.06	.07
Type of action	.07	.07	.06	.06
Type of target	.03	.03	.05	.01
Location	.03	.02	.02	.03
Responsibility	.01	.05	.05	.02
Perpetrators	.04	.06	.10	.03
Target's nationality	.05	.04	.05	.03

  

Attributes	Dependent variable: space in press	
	1979-1980	Entire period
Victimization	.06	.06
Type of action	.04	.04
Type of target	.05	.05
Location	.01	.05
Responsibility	.05	.05
Perpetrators	.05	.05
Target's nationality	.05	.05

Note. All coefficients presented are statistically significant, *p* < .001; ns denotes an insignificant contribution.

during the same period for press coverage); and some have lost their impact (e.g., target's nationality for both media or identity of perpetrators as affecting television coverage). In general, the changes over the years were quite small, indicating a generalized pattern of relationship between terrorist events and their media coverage.

*Magnitude and Direction of Effects*

So far, the analysis has revealed strong correlations between attributes of terrorist events and the amount of coverage, the importance of certain attributes in terms of affecting amount of coverage, and the variance of these effects across media and over time. However, the nature, magnitude, and direction of the effects of specific categories of the attributes are still unknown. Thus, for example, we have established the fact that type of action affects coverage, but we do not know what category (of many forms of action) is more effective, in what direction (i.e., predicting more coverage or less coverage), and with what magnitude. Also, the categories of each attribute

may change their impact on media coverage over time and across media, as suggested by our second hypothesis.

To measure the impact of the categories of the attributes, we applied a forward inclusion regression analysis with all the categories of each attribute serving as the independent variables. This procedure was repeated for each period and for each medium. However, in order to avoid problems related to stepwise analysis in the case of nominally coded variables,<sup>4</sup> the forward inclusion was stopped after the first step, thus revealing only the single strongest predictor or the most effective category for each attribute. Table 6 presents these categories and their weight in terms of standardized  $\beta$  coefficients.

The last column of Table 6 presents the most effective categories (for each attribute) during the entire period. It should be noted that some of the coefficients are negative, suggesting that the specific factor predicts less coverage. For example, when the responsibility for a terrorist act is unknown or unclaimed, it is less likely to get press coverage ( $\beta = -.26$ ). The same negative effect applies to acts of terror committed in Latin America (-.20). However, for the entire period, the best predictors of the amount of press coverage are acts of hostage taking, acts involving injuries, acts committed by Palestinian terrorists, and acts directed against Israeli targets. The "preference" of Israeli targets and Palestinian terrorists in terms of press coverage was stable over the four time periods, although the weight (measured by the decline of the  $\beta$  coefficients) has changed significantly. The number of injuries was the best predictor of press coverage in the earlier periods but was later replaced (1979 to 1980) by the number of fatalities. Another finding is related to the type of action and type of target: Events that involve kidnapping, hijacking or hostage taking are evidently the best "stories" for both television and press. The location of the event is revealed to have significant impact on media attention: Acts in Latin America are likely to be ignored, whereas the Middle East is the most attractive setting for both types of media. Finally, the attribution of responsibility is evidently a crucial factor: Unknown responsibility predicts less press coverage, whereas claimed responsibility has a positive impact on the amount of television coverage.

Hypothesis 2, predicting changes over time, was supported. The differences between different media, however, were smaller than expected. Please note that all significant changes over time reported in Table 6 reflect decreasing influence of the attributes (e.g., acts committed by Palestinians or acts with Israelis as targets).

Table 6  
Most Effective Predictors of Coverage by Medium and Time Period

Attributes	β coefficients during			
	1968-1971	1972-1975	1976-1978	1979-1980
Victimization	Dependent variable: space in press			
	(N = 487)	(N = 628)	(N = 603)	(N = 521)
Type of action	Injuries (.30)	Injuries (.35)	Injuries (.39)	Fatalities (.27)
	Kidnapping (.26)	Hostage (.39)	Hijacking (.32)	Hostage (.28)
Type of target	Military (-.20)	Airlines (.22)	Airlines (.22)	Airlines (.18)
	Middle East (.19)	Latin America (-.26)	Latin America (-.22)	Middle East (.16)
Responsibility	Unknown (-.32)	Claimed (.39)	Claimed (.39)	Unknown (-.19)
	Palestinian (.39) <sup>ab</sup>	Palestinian (.31) <sup>bc</sup>	Palestinian (.44) <sup>a</sup>	Palestinian (.20) <sup>c</sup>
Perpetrators	Israeli (.38) <sup>a</sup>	Israeli (.32) <sup>ab</sup>	Israeli (.23) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.18) <sup>b</sup>
	Israeli (.38) <sup>a</sup>	Israeli (.32) <sup>ab</sup>	Israeli (.23) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.18) <sup>b</sup>
Target's nationality	Israeli (.38) <sup>a</sup>	Israeli (.32) <sup>ab</sup>	Israeli (.23) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.18) <sup>b</sup>
	Israeli (.38) <sup>a</sup>	Israeli (.32) <sup>ab</sup>	Israeli (.23) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.18) <sup>b</sup>
Victimization	Dependent variable: TV time			
	(N = 628)	(N = 603)	(N = 521)	(N = 2,239)
Type of action	Injuries (.25)	Injuries (.28)	Injuries (.21)	Fatalities (.22)
	Hostage (.40) <sup>a</sup>	Hostage (.40) <sup>a</sup>	Hostage (.18)	Hostage (.27)
Type of target	Citizens (.14)	Citizens (.12)	Citizens (.12)	Citizens (.11)
	Middle East (.14)	Middle East (.11)	Middle East (.09)	Middle East (.09)
Responsibility	Claimed (.27)	Claimed (.22)	Claimed (.19)	Claimed (.15)
	Palestinian (.29) <sup>a</sup>	Palestinian (.22) <sup>ab</sup>	Palestinian (.10) <sup>b</sup>	Palestinian (.15)
Target's nationality	Israeli (.26) <sup>a</sup>	Israeli (.14) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.12) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.16)
	Israeli (.26) <sup>a</sup>	Israeli (.14) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.12) <sup>b</sup>	Israeli (.16)

Note. Only the most effective categories are presented. All coefficients presented are statistically significant,  $p < .001$ ; ns denotes an insignificant coefficient. Coefficients with different superscripts differ significantly,  $p < .05$ . The differences were computed by using the standard error of the unstandardized β. Tests of significance were conducted within attributes only.

Discussion

The present study attempts to relate communication theory regarding deviance and newsworthiness to the case of international terrorism. Following

the theoretical relationship of the newsworthiness concept to the mass media's social role, we examined two hypotheses regarding the coverage of terrorist events. The hypotheses suggest that certain attributes of such incidents are more dominant in determining newsworthiness, but this dominance varies across media and over time.

In general, the level of victimization (amount of fatalities and injuries), the type of action, the identity of the perpetrators, and an attributable responsibility were found to be the best predictors of media coverage. These attributes are related to the social function of mass-mediated deviance: The presentation of such events highlight their negative aspects (victimization, action type) and the deviantizing of the actors (attributed responsibility and identity of perpetrators). However, the findings also suggest that the process of news selection is more complex than a simple relationship between the attributes of an event and its coverage. At least three differentiations have been shown to interact with this event-coverage relation: (a) measures of selectivity, (b) changes over time, and (c) differences across media. When applied to the case of reporting international terrorism, these factors were found to have a significant impact on media coverage.

The effects of attributes on coverage vary from selection to prominence. For both measures, the type of action is a powerful predictor of coverage, for all media studied and during the entire period. However, there are also differences: Although selection was affected by the perpetrators' identity and by attributable responsibility, the prominence of coverage was determined by the rate of victimization (number of fatalities and injuries). This may be regarded as a two-step process of selection when different considerations affect each step.

Contributing to this dynamic relationship are the changes over time. The impact of various attributes of terrorist acts was found to change over time. Some attributes are losing their appeal, some are gaining importance, and some maintain their impact on media coverage. For all the media studied, the level of victimization maintained its importance (thus highlighting the social function of deviance-as-news). The only change was related to the number of victims (i.e., an escalation in terms of number of victims "required" to gain media attention). This fits the dynamic nature of the deviance concept and may indicate an increasing threshold in media selection: The level of victimization necessary to gain both press and television coverage has become higher with ongoing reporting on terrorism. Attributes like the identity of the perpetrators appeared to be gaining importance for both press and television, whereas attributes like type of target or geographical location

(for TV) and nationality of victim (for press) are losing their appeal. The time factor is not a real explanatory variable: One has to look behind it to find the real reasons for changes. Two possible explanations can be proposed. First, changes over time may indicate the impact of changing social, political, and cultural settings within which the media operate. Thus changes in the political relations between countries may affect the newsworthiness of events (like terrorism) related to these nations and their citizens (i.e., Galtung & Ruge's, 1970, proximity factor). A second explanation relates to changes over time as reflecting the need for the unexpected, the unusual, and the irregular. Some terrorist events may lose their appeal simply because they become routine and frequent and, as a consequence, lose their newsworthiness. The case of the decreasing media interest in the Palestinian terrorists or Israeli targets may reflect such a relationship. It is beyond the scope of the study's data base to examine such factors, which may be interacting and are revealed by the changing character of newsworthiness over time.

The differentiation across media provides another dimension to the event-coverage relationships. Our findings reveal that such intermedia differences are larger at the first step of the selection process. The print media show a larger variance in the nature and magnitude of the attributes that determine whether or not to report a certain event. Moreover, the television networks were found to be more selective and to be affected by more consistent considerations when selecting terrorist events or assigning airtime to such events. Such differences reflect the different settings of print versus television, their specific considerations and needs (e.g., the visual element in TV reports), and their policies. The newspapers sampled for this study represent eight nations, whereas the availability of past records of television coverage limited us to U.S. networks only. Consequently, the variance in the press may reflect different editorial policies and national interests, but the entire press revealed some consistencies that differed from the patterns of selection of the television networks.

Even when related to one topic (international terrorism), the event-coverage relationship varies across different selection stages, different media, different time periods, and various combinations of these differentiations. The news selection process is revealed to combine static factors with dynamic ones. In both of the selection stages, several attributes were found to maintain their effect (consistent with Galtung & Ruge's, 1970, modeling of news factors). However, newsworthiness—and accordingly the definition of deviance—was found to be, at least in certain aspects, quite dynamic, with significant changes over time. This combination of static and dynamic factors

was revealed in other studies that focused on the changing character of newsworthiness (e.g., Wilke, 1984, 1987).

Finally, the study of the newsworthiness of international terrorism should also be interpreted within the conceptual framework of the theater of terror. The fact that certain attributes are more powerful in determining media coverage is known not only to communication scholars and journalists but also to those who write and perform the terrorist scripts. A survey of terrorist literature (Weimann & Winn, in press) reveals that these actors have become more and more media wise, and that more and more terrorist acts are preplanned to satisfy the media's considerations in terms of scarcity, reference to elite nations or elite people, personification, proximity, relevance, and events of negative nature (Dobson & Paine, 1977).

The significance of the present study lies with the social role of deviance in the media when related to the newsworthiness of terrorism. As Shoemaker et al. (1987, p. 362) concluded:

By their very existence, deviant people and groups bring the opportunity for change. If that change seems threatening to the status quo, then its agents may act to control the direction and extent of the change. Because what is unknown cannot be controlled, the emphasis on deviance within indicators of newsworthiness is functional for the status quo.

Future research in this area should improve on our study. First, it should compare various types of deviance to types of terrorism, thus strengthening the theoretical linkage of deviance, newsworthiness, and social control. Then, more precise measures of newsworthiness should be applied. Going beyond the simple measures of coverage in terms of selection and amount of space or airtime requires the application of refined measures of prominence and forms of presentation (e.g., labels used to name terrorists, motives attributed to the terrorists, and the portrayal of terrorism as a threat to society). The findings of our study should encourage future research to follow these directions for a fuller understanding of the latent social functions of mass-mediated terrorism.

## Notes

1. Both authors contributed equally. The study was supported by a research grant from the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung in Bonn, West Germany.

2. The RAND chronology is reviewed by Schmid (1983, pp. 253-255).
3. The weighting of space by location in the paper was almost impossible given the structural differences among the nine papers. However, we did differentiate between front page and inner page and weighted space by this dichotomy. The results reveal the same patterns for weighted and unweighted space (see coefficients in Table 4). Future research should refine the measurement of prominence by a more precise weighting procedure.
4. The stepwise procedure may be threatened by the existence of nominally coded predictor variables, especially as they may be intercorrelated (i.e., in a mutually exclusive set, presence of A implies absence of B, thus yielding a negative correlation).

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## What We Think Others Think Cause and Consequence in the Third-Person Effect

*The third-person effect hypothesis suggests that people systematically overestimate the extent to which others are affected by mass media messages. It also proposes that people act in accordance with their estimates of effects on others. This study set out to test both estimations and actions and to explain the phenomenon in terms of attribution theory. An experimental design manipulating the trustworthiness of the source of a defamatory newspaper article produced a third-person effect. Subjects' estimates of the damaging effects of the article, however, did not correspond to their assessment of a penalty against the newspaper. They took more account of source motivation than of impact on the audience when taking action.*

"I myself am not influenced yet, but a lot of people are confused."

— Chinese man discussing impact of government propaganda campaign after Tiananmen Square incident (Simons, 1989, p. 1).

People often separate judgments about themselves from judgments about others. Some research indicates that mass media may heighten that tendency. Tyler and Cook (1984), for example, argue that media have an "impersonal impact," that mass media primarily affect a person's perceptions of the lives of other people rather than judgments about his or her own. In what is perhaps a special case of this impersonal-impact hypothesis, there is evidence that people separate their perceptions of media impact on others from their perceptions of media impact on themselves. Davison (1983), who labels this self-other distinction the "third-person effect," argues that people tend to see, often erroneously, a stronger media influence on the beliefs and attitudes of others than on themselves. A second component to the third-