

Gatekeepers and audience two neglected actors  
in international news flow study

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### Introduction

All too often it is difficult to contain in one paper, a study that involves the communicator, the channel and the recipients of messages. A research of this nature would be too big to be undertaken. Yet such a study would be beneficial as it would indicate the flow of news, the selection of news in the mass media and the utilization of news by audience members.

Admittedly, rarely has there been a research that encompassed the three components. The other alternative, to which we subscribe here, is to gather three studies that deal separately with each of them, and present them in a somewhat integrated form. Such separate studies should contain underlying similarities to enable certain conclusions, however tentative, to be made.

We have made three such separate studies. One was a content analysis of foreign news items that appeared in the Malaysian newspapers. The second was a study on the editors (gatekeepers) of newspapers who were responsible for decisions on whether to include or exclude foreign news items. The third study was on how Malaysians in Seremban, the capital city of the state of Negeri Sembilan, were affected by exposure to foreign news.

### Problem

The flow of international news has been a controversial issue among developing nations. Scholars have expressed concern that the flow of news has been imbalanced in favour of developed countries, while news

of developing nations that appear in the Western media has been largely negative (Gerbner and Marvanyi, 1977; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Semmel, 1976; Sreberny-Mohamadi, 1984).

Newspapers in various countries provide different space to international news. Generally newspapers in the West give only a small portion of their space to international news and emphasise more on domestic stories. New York Times, the Washington Post and Christian Science Monitor, for example, gave only 13%, 10% and 21% respectively of their space to foreign news (Haque, 1983). The US press, compared to other areas, are low in giving attention to the outside world, even then, space to Western Europe, South Asia and the Far East, South America make up two-thirds of the US foreign news. The media in the Third World carry more foreign news and the reasons attributed are because it was cheaper to obtain foreign news from the wire services, and that the foreign news is less likely to arouse dissatisfaction than domestic news (Gerbner and Marvanyi, 1977).

Coverage and prominence of international stories that appear in the media of developing nations have made scholars to postulate the underlying principles by which editors decide. Several studies have indicated proximity to be the guiding principle in which foreign news items are selected. Regional proximity is a dominant characteristic of foreign news in Third World countries (Schramm, 1980; Stevenson, 1982) although Sunwoo Nam (1970) said functional proximity accounts for the heavy reliance on

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reporting of the Western World in the South Korean Press. In the Middle East Djani and Donohue (1971) found ideological proximity to affect the volume and content of foreign news. Canada's newspapers display remarkable cultural affinities with their reader's cultural heritage. The French language newspapers carry more coverage of France and the English language newspapers more news from the United Kingdom than of Canada (Kariel and Rosenwall, 1983).

Several studies in Malaysia have found an emphasis by Malaysian newspapers on regional news, in particular ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations), but there has been varying results obtained lately (Mohd Safar Hasim; Normah Aziz, 1984/1985; Suthakar Kathirvaloo, 1984/1985).

The introduction of technology, beginning from marine cable to satellite communication, has facilitated the flow of news between and within continents, regions and countries.

Malaysia uses technology to facilitate the flow of news. Although Malaysia has traditionally obtained international news from the four transnational news agencies (Reuter, Associated Press, United Press International, and Agence France-Presse), Bernama (Malaysian National News Agency) has used two forms of strategy in the arena of international news to affect the flow of news into Malaysia. Bernama has used the technology available to initiate the formation of ASEAN News Exchange (ANEX) and, with the help of UNESCO, to make viable the formation of organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA).

From May 1, 1984, foreign news distribution in Malaysia underwent a change when Bernama assumed sole distribution of foreign news from the transnational news agencies. Previously newspapers in Malaysia subscribed direct to each of the four international news agencies operating in Malaysia and obtain other services such as news and features syndicates according to their capability. Under the new arrangement individual news media could still obtain full service

direct from the international news agencies but the contract and payment would have to be done with Bernama. Bernama also provided a composite foreign news service consisting of selection of news items from the four international news agencies, 24 national news agencies under Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies, ASEAN News Exchange (ANEX), several smaller international news agencies such as Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA), ANSA (an Italian news agency), and several agencies in the Middle East. The effect of this New arrangement resulted in the opening up of many news channels into the country. News organisations in Malaysia can choose either to subscribe to the full and unedited version available direct from international news agencies or to the composite foreign news service. Many newspapers subscribe to both services.

The question that one can pose is whether such a change in the distribution of international news in Malaysia will lead to a different selection of news in the Malaysian media. Will the new arrangement provide more channels from which the newspapers can tap or has the new arrangement stifled the selection as has been alleged by certain quarters? (Asiaweek, 1983; Wain, 1983).

#### Gatekeepers

Availability does not necessarily mean automatic choice. The fact that there are more foreign news items for the newspapers to choose from does not automatically mean that the gatekeepers will use more international news. It could perhaps mean a more and careful selection by the editors. It does however, offer editors a greater latitude in selection.

One of the constant point raised in discussing the present information order is the limited choice mass media in developing countries have about events in other countries as they are "monopolised" by the four world news agencies. However, the additional news sources brought in by Bernama from Asia, Europe and the Middle East should help to augment those provided by the four international news agencies. Given this new

development in Malaysia, one can postulate whether editors now would be able to select more news about developing countries than they were once prescribed. This boils down a lot to how editors perceive the importance of certain countries and events that occur as being newsworthy enough to warrant space in their newspapers. Selection of news is often affected by the background of editors as well as their perception as what constitutes an event to be considered as news.

#### Audience

One of the reasons that editors have given for their selection of foreign news in the mass media is based on the perceived audience interest. Many editors assume that news items in the newspapers appeal to the interests of the audience, but this is not often the case.

Another point of interest is on what audience members make use of foreign news. The premise we hold is that audience members, even in developing countries, are active enough in their selection of mass media programme. Scholars have suggested the different functions that certain media, programmes or programme-types can meet the needs of audience members (Bantz, 1982; Galloway and Meek, 1981; Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, 1973). The approach in this study is to use the response of an active audience member to describe his media use of international news.

The functions provided by the media, content or programme-type are varied. Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) obtained five needs while a study by Kippax and Murray (1980) done in Australia found four factors; the Personal Identity and Social Contact needs; the Information factor; the Self-gratification and finally, the Entertainment factor.

In this paper we are interested to report the information that audience members gain from exposure to international news in the mass media. What audience members attend to in the mass media may be different from what the editors may like to highlight. Various

studies on diffusion have shown that there are certain news that audience members pick up from the mass media as being relevant to them over others (Rosengren, 1976; Idid, 1978).

### The Studies

In the content analysis study, eight out of 32 dailies in Malaysia were selected representing the four main languages, two for each language. The eight were leading newspapers in their own language. The newspapers were *erita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia*, in the Malaysian language *Bahasa Malaysia*, *New Straits Times* and *The Star* in English, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* in Mandarin and *Thinamani* and *Tamil Nesan* in Tamil.

A sample based on a structured six-day period was used to study foreign news items in the newspapers for the month of July 1985. The month of July 1985 was chosen because it was one year after the *Bernama* foreign news distribution became fully operational.

The study investigates the frequency of news items that appear by regions covered, by types of news used, and by usage of news services. Foreign news items are those having non-Malaysian datelines.

In the gatekeeping analysis, one gatekeeper was selected from each of the eight newspapers studied in the content analysis. They were interviewed to find out the priority they gave to news from certain regions and the selection of the types of news. They were also asked to evaluate the services provided by the various news agencies. The results presented in this paper is part of a bigger study on the flow and gatekeeping of international news.

In the audience study, 528 people in Seremban, the capital city of *Negeri Sembilan*, were selected. The survey, done in February and March 1985, wanted to find out how familiar audience members were toward certain developed and developing countries, what they felt and what their behavioural tendencies were toward these countries. The foreign countries investigated were the

developed nations (United States of America, the Soviet Union and Japan), three Southeast Asian countries (the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia), one Middle Eastern country (Jordan) and one from Africa (Nigeria).

## Finding of Studies

### 1. Content Analysis

#### 1.1 Usage of News by Regions

Of the 2,501 foreign news items coded and analysed, 50.6% were from Asia, followed by Western Europe (24.1%). This shows that newspapers in Malaysia give more attention to Asian news. However, a further attempt was made by breaking down Asia into small regions such as Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia and West Asia (the Middle East). Table 1 indicates that Malaysian newspapers devote most news to Western Europe, followed by Southeast Asia, North America, South Asia and East Asia. Southeast Asia accounted for 20.3% of the total foreign news, South Asia 14.3%, East Asia 9.3% and West Asia 6.7%.

News from Asia, Western Europe and North America dominated the pages of Malaysian newspapers accounting for 91.0% of the total news studied. Whereas, Africa, Australia-Oceania, South America, Eastern Europe and Central America accounted for 9.0% of the total foreign news.

TABLE 1  
Frequency of Stories by Regions

	f	%
Asia	1,364	50.6
Southeast	508	20.3
South Asia	357	14.3
East Asia	232	9.3
West Asia (Middle East)	167	6.7

		132
West Europe	573	24.1
North America	408	16.3
Africa	98	3.9
Australia-Ocenia	57	2.4
South America	45	1.8
Eastern Europe	30	1.2
Central America	21	0.8
	2,501	100.0

If the regions were further analyzed in terms of countries, then it could be seen that certain nations were found to be reported more than others. For the purpose of this only three countries most frequently mentioned in a region are presented (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

Frequency Distribution of Datelines by Countries

Regions	Top Three countries	f	% of News in regions	% Relative Frequency
SEA	Singapore	151	31.6	6.4
	Philippines	141	27.7	5.6
	Thailand	110	21.6	4.4
East Asia	China	57	28.9	2.7
	Japan	59	25.4	2.4
	Hong Kong	42	18.1	1.7
South Asia	India	269	75.4	10.8
	Pakistan	36	10.1	1.4
	Sri Lanka	31	8.7	1.2
West Asia	Lebanon	52	31.0	2.1
	Israel	23	13.7	0.9
	Kuwait	19	11.3	0.8
Australia Oceania	Australia	35	56.5	1.4
	New Zealand	20	32.3	0.8
	Fiji	3	4.8	0.1



Africa	South Africa	27	27.3	1.1
	Egypt	21	21.3	0.8
	Zimbabwe	17	12.2	0.7
Western Europe	Britain	304	52.9	12.2
	West Germany	56	9.7	2.2
	France	52	9.0	2.1
Eastern Europe	USSR	23	76.6	0.9
	Poland	4	13.3	0.2
North America	USA	383	93.6	15.3
	Canada	21	5.1	0.8
Central America	Mexico	5	23.8	0.2
	Nicaragua	4	19.0	0.2
	El Salvador	2	9.5	0.1
South America	Argentina	21	51.1	0.9
	Brazil	15	33.3	0.6

If can be seen from Table 2 that news items on the United States, as a country, was the highest, followed by Britain, and then by India. Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand, the three countries in Southeast Asia, came only after India.

Of the nine countries used in the audience study, US received the most mention (15.3%), followed by the Philippines (5.6%), Thailand (4.4%), Japan (2.4%). The other countries were not given much mention. The Soviet Union was only cited 0.9%.

English newspapers carried the most foreign news with 29.0%, followed by the Chinese (16.9%), the Tamil (14.5%) and the Bahasa Malaysia newspapers (10.9%). Sarawak (English newspapers) carried 15.0% of the total foreign news under study, while Sabah (also English newspapers) carried 13.7%.

TABLE 3

## Regional Frequency of News by Language of Newspapers

Language of Newspaper	% of Foreign News	Top Three Regions Mentioned	% Mentioned (in region)	Top Country	%
English	29.0	W. Europe	35.5	Britain	55.4
		N. America	16.8	USA	94.3
		S.E. Asia	15.4	Phil.	36.6
Chinese	16.9	South Asia	33.3	Sing.	58.5
		East Asia	19.9	China	35.7
		W. Europe	15.4	Britain	36.4
English (Sarawak)	15.0	N. America	27.3	USA	95.1
		W. Europe	22.7	Britain	62.8
		S.E. Asia	19.5	Phil.	39.7
Tamil	14.5	South Asia	59.2	India	88.4
		W. Europe	10.7	Britain	64.1
		N. America	10.5	USA	97.4
English (Sabah)	13.7	S.E. Asia	21.9	Phil.	30.7
		W. Europe	21.6	Britain	40.5
		N. America	17.5	USA	98.5
Bahasa Malaysia	10.9	S.E. Asia	30.1	Phil.	31.7
		W. Europe	19.1	Britain	53.8
		West Asia	14.0	Lebanon	28.9

If we view the news according to regions by the types of newspapers, we can see that English language newspapers provide greater coverage to Western Europe, North America and Southeast Asia, the Chinese newspapers gave most coverage to Southeast Asia, North America and Western Europe, the Tamil newspapers to South Asia, Western Europe and North America, and the Bahasa Malaysia newspapers to Southeast Asia, Western Europe and West Asia (see Table 3).

four transnational news agencies with the bulk of them (28.5%) provided by Reuters. Associated Press contributed 8.3%, United Press International 5.6%, Agence France-Presse 4.8% (see Table 5).

TABLE 5

## Creditline of News Services

	f	%	
1. BCFNS			9.5
a. Bernama	108	4.3	
b. Bernama ANEX	4	0.2	
c. DANA	29	1.2	
d. Bernama-DPA-ANSA	48	1.9	
e. Bernama-Reuter	104	4.2	
f. Bernama-AP	50	2.0	
g. Bernama-UPI	47	1.9	
h. Bernama-AFP	118	4.7	
i. Bernama-agencies	1	0.0	
2. International News Agencies			47.2
a. Reuter	712	28.2	
b. AP	208	8.3	
c. UPI	139	5.6	
d. AFP	120	4.8	
3. Features Syndicates			1.1
a. New York Times	5	0.2	
b. LAT-WP	1	0.0	
c. IPS	23	0.9	
4. Correspondents and Stringers	145	5.8	5.8
5. Miscellaneous			25.6
a. Agencies	37	1.5	
b. Others	602	24.1	
Total	2,501	100.0	

On the other hand, Bernama composite Foreign News Service accounted for 20.4%, with 12.8% of the news originating from the big four agencies. The remaining 7.6% came from Bernama's own correspondents, Bernama's news exchange programme with European news agencies (DPA and ANSA), the national news agencies in ASEAN and Asia-Pacific, and unidentified sources.

## 2. Gatekeeper

### 2.1 Gatekeepers' Perception on Regional Priority

From the study made on the 24 gatekeepers, it was found that they gave priority to news on Southeast Asia followed by that on North America, West Asia, East Asia, Western Europe and Eastern Europe. South America, Central America, Australia-Oceania and Africa did not receive high priority.

The editors were asked to indicate their priorities by using a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest and 5 lowest. The return were then computed, 1 is given 5 points, 2 4 points, 3 3 points, 4 2 points, 5 1 points, and no answer 0 point. The scores were then totalled up as shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Score of Gatekeepers' Perception on Priority of Regions

	Score
SEA	109
North America	105
East Asia	75
West Asia	71
South Asia	67
Western Europe	64
Australia-Oceania	54
Africa	50
Eastern Europe	48
South America	46
Central America	44

## 2.2 Gatekeepers' Perception of Priority of News Types

The gatekeepers were asked to state their priority in selecting 10 types of news. It was found that politics was given priority by the gatekeepers followed by economy and social events (see Table 7). Disaster news, sports, entertainment and development news did not fare well in the estimation of the gatekeepers.

TABLE 7

Score of Gatekeepers' Perception on Priority of News Types

	Score
Politics	101
Economics	95
Social	87
Crime	74
Development	72
Military	67
Sports	64
Entertainment	63
Disasters	61
Religion	49

## 2.3 Gatekeepers' Perception of News Services

The 24 gatekeepers were asked to evaluate the services provided by the news services. The transnational news agencies received 62.5% of good and excellent service, while Bernama Foreign News Service (BFNS) received 54.2%. BFNS also received 33.3% for fair service. It should be noted that this could be due to the fact that BFNS is relatively new and as such this service is still under observation (see Table 8).

TABLE 8

Evaluation by Gatekeepers of International  
News Agencies and Bernama Composite  
Foreign News Service

Evaluation	Transnational		BCPNS	
	f	%	f	%
Excellent	3	12.5	4	16.7
Good	12	50.0	9	37.5
Fair	5	20.8	8	33.3
Not Satisfactory	1	4.2	2	8.3
No answer	3	12.5	1	4.2
	24	100.0	24	100.0

### Audience

#### 3.1 Knowledge of Foreign Countries

The variable "knowledge on Foreign Countries" was created by asking 24 knowledge questions, three on each eight different countries. The questions covered three different areas for each country. Three countries, Japan, Soviet Union, and the United States were chosen to represent the big industrial nations. Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand were chosen as member countries of ASEAN, and Jordan was selected to represent the Middle East and Nigeria for Africa.

One question required the identification of national leaders with their respective countries. For example, when the name Nakasone was given, respondents were asked to name the country that he was leader of, the second question was on the knowledge of capital cities. The question asked was: "We would like to know how well-known certain capital city of....." Names of the eight countries were read, and correct answers were coded as 1 and an incorrect as 0.

The third question required respondents to identify the types of heads of states for the countries listed. The head of state for each country was either a president or a monarch. In some countries, like the United States, the President is also the executive head of state. In other countries, like Thailand, the monarch is a ceremonial head, unlike Jordan or Saudi Arabia where both the rulers exert great political and executive power. The correct answer was coded as 1 or a wrong answer as 0.

A score was obtained for each country by summing the correct answers from the three questions asked. For each country, a respondent was able to obtain a possible maximum of 3 and a possible minimum score of 0.

Table 9 indicates that people knew less of Jordan and Nigeria than about Indonesia and the Philippines, the neighbouring countries, and about Japan and the United States, the two big industrial countries. Table 10 shows the means and standard deviations for scores on knowledge of countries.

### 3.2 Liking Foreign Countries

To measure this variable, respondents were asked: "People like some countries more than they like others. Can you please indicate to me how much you like each of the following countries?" The eight countries were then read out and respondents were asked to evaluate their liking on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 indicating least liking and 10 the most.

TABLE 9

Knowledge Score of Foreign Countries in the Study (in cumulative percentage)

Score/countries	0	1	2	5
US	4.9	13.1	41.3	100
USSR	17.6	53.2	85.8	100
Japan	5.5	17.4	57.1	100
Indonesia	5.3	14.8	33.5	100
The Philippines	7.8	20.6	47.0	100
Thailand	8.9	32.4	65.1	100
Jordan	32.2	59.1	95.1	100
Nigeria	42.2	89.6	98.1	100

Table 11 indicates that the liking score was lowest for Nigeria and Jordan. United States obtained the highest score for liking followed next by Japan. Table 10 shows the means and standard deviations for scores on liking of countries.

TABLE 10

Means and Standard Deviations of Scores on Knowledge, Liking and Likelihood of Discussion Foreign Countries

	Knowledge		Liking		Discussing	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
US	2.41	.840	5.98	3.05	5.85	3.00
USSR	1.43	.940	2.47	2.89	3.23	3.07
Japan	2.25	.954	6.38	2.82	5.61	2.88
Indonesia	2.46	.870	4.18	2.77	4.48	2.71
Philippines	2.25	.954	3.78	2.63	3.99	2.72
Thailand	1.93	.964	4.43	2.71	4.14	2.69
Jordan	1.14	.928	2.14	2.37	1.79	2.34
Nigeria	.701	.701	1.85	2.25	1.61	2.17



TABLE 11

Liking Score of Foreign Countries in the Study  
(in cumulative percentage)

	US	USSR	Japan	Indon- esia	Philip- pines	Thai- land	Jordan	Nigeria
0	10.2	4.1	7.4	14.4	17.6	12.9	39.8	43.0
1	11.9	50.4	9.3	21.2	24.2	18.8	51.5	56.4
2	15.3	61.2	11.6	32.0	35.4	25.9	62.9	70.3
3	21.4	69.5	15.3	40.0	44.9	38.8	71.4	78.0
4	26.5	75.6	20.5	47.9	53.8	45.3	78.8	83.3
5	39.2	83.5	31.4	68.4	73.3	66.1	91.1	93.9
6	50.9	87.7	44.5	79.4	84.7	80.5	94.5	95.3
7	62.7	91.9	60.6	88.3	92.2	88.1	97.3	97.0
8	78.2	94.9	75.4	94.3	97.3	93.2	98.9	99.1
9	85.2	97.0	86.0	96.4	98.5	96.0	99.6	-
10	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

### 3.3 Likelihood of Discussing Countries

This variable was measured by a single question: "Below is a list of several countries. For each country, please indicate which country that you are most likely and those you are least likely to discuss with your friends and family members." A score of 0 indicates least and 10 most likely to discuss. The names of the eight countries reported earlier were then read to the respondents.

Table 12 shows a summary of the answers given. People are less likely to discuss Jordan, Nigeria and USSR. Japan and USA are the two countries most likely to be discussed. Table 12 indicates the means and standard deviations on likelihood scores of discussing foreign countries.

TABLE 12

Likelihood Score of Discussing Foreign Countries  
in the Study (in cumulative percentage)

	US	USSR	Japan	Indo- nesia	Philip- pines	Thai- land	Jordan	Nigeria
0	9.3	32.1	8.1	11.0	15.0	13.3	49.1	49.6
1	12.7	38.8	11.4	17.4	23.1	19.7	58.5	61.4
2	15.2	48.9	16.3	26.5	32.2	29.0	70.8	74.4
3	22.3	57.6	25.0	36.0	43.8	41.5	78.8	82.4
4	28.2	63.3	30.1	62.3	54.4	51.1	83.1	86.6
5	42.0	75.6	44.5	62.3	70.1	70.1	90.5	91.9
6	53.0	82.4	59.1	75.6	82.0	82.0	93.9	95.8
7	66.1	88.4	71.2	86.2	88.4	88.4	97.9	98.2
8	78.6	93.9	83.1	94.1	94.3	94.3	99.1	99.2
9	87.9	95.8	90.3	96.4	96.0	96.0	99.2	99.4
10	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Discussion and Conclusion

We presented here the findings of three separate studies that dealt with the content of foreign news in the newspapers, the selection of foreign news by the gatekeepers, and the audience perception of foreign news.

In the content analysis aspect of our study, we wanted to know whether the distribution of foreign news by Bernama had any effect on newspapers. We found that the Malaysian newspapers still use a significant number of foreign news items and gave most mention to Western Europe, Southeast Asia, North America and South Asia. When we probed further by country, we found that United States, Britain and India were the countries most mentioned. An analysis by the language of the newspapers found that India was the country most mentioned by the Tamil language press and this has affected the results of the study. If we controlled for India, it was found that Southeast Asia was the region that the Malaysian newspapers gave most mention. As a country most frequently mentioned, the United

States stood out prominently. Viewed in several ways, the study can accept the proximity principle but with certain modifications. If we view the content in terms of the regions covered, then we can accept the principle of geographical or regional proximity as Southeast Asia was most covered, especially so about ASEAN countries. If we view the content in terms of individual countries then we have to rationalise that the power proximity of nations (in terms of trade, politics, education) can be accepted as the United States of America and the United Kingdom were most frequently mentioned.

If we look at the language of the newspapers, a fair amount of the cultural proximity is also inherent. The Tamil language newspapers gave most coverage to events in India, and the English language newspapers covered events of English speaking countries better than the other newspapers. The Chinese language newspapers gave most coverage to Singapore more than to any other single country.

The study on the gatekeepers indicate a fair amount of correspondence between the results obtained in the content and that of the audience.

The gatekeepers gave their most priority to countries in Southeast Asia. This was also evident in the content analysis, and also in the knowledge the audience members have of the region. The gatekeepers are sensitive to the interest audience members have toward the region and toward the superpowers.

The selection of the news channels was an indicator of the importance the gatekeepers attach to the four international news agencies. Reuters stood out prominently among all the regional and transnational news agencies. Historical reasons and acceptance of its speed and reliability have been contributory factors that made the gatekeepers depend on the service provided by Reuters. The acceptance of Reuters did not preclude the gatekeepers from also choosing foreign news from other news agencies or from Reuters about other countries than about events in the

United Kingdom only. In fact what should be highlighted was the selection of regional news by the gatekeepers despite the dependence on the international news agencies. A constant theme in the debate of the new world information order was that the international news agencies bring in a disproportionate number of stories about the developed countries at the expense of the Third World nations. This study shows that gatekeepers can affect the selection of foreign news in the media under their control by exercising their professional judgements or expertise by being sensitive to audience needs and interests.

Whatever the judgement exercised by the gatekeepers in selecting foreign news about certain countries or regions, the ultimate selection on reading will be made by audience members. Readers will read and retain information about international news which are of interest and relevance to them.

The study on the audience has indicated that countries in the region and the United States and Japan are more relevant to them.

The audience study went further than merely tapping knowledge about countries as it also touched on the affect and behaviour of audience members toward foreign countries. Big powers - namely the United States and Japan - seem to gain the affect among Malaysians over other countries, including over ASEAN countries.

In this paper what we have attempted to do is to suggest that any discussion of international news should also involved an understanding of the role of the gatekeepers and the audience. The decision made by the gatekeepers will inevitably exclude or include certain countries. Yet the decision they make should be in cognisance of the interests of audience members who will ultimately decide whether the news is relevant to them or not.

This paper is limited in several aspects. In the content analysis we have limited the number of

newspapers and the days sampled. We acknowledge that smaller newspapers may provide different coverage of international news. We have only provided the frequency of news items found in the newspapers and have not catered for prominence given to countries and regions.

The number of gatekeepers that we have selected is based on the number of newspapers we content analyzed. Future studies will expand the number of personnel involved in the selection of international news.

The two studies - on content analysis and the gatekeepers - have only looked at the print media. Future studies could also look at the electronic media and comparison be made between the electronic and the print media.

In the audience study, we have included only eight countries. Further studies should include more countries so that scholars would be able to have a better understanding of how Malaysians or for that matter audience in any country look at other parts of the world.

This paper has attempted to stress the need to understand the role of gatekeepers and audience members, as too often they are neglected when scholars study the flow of foreign news. These two actors, in reality, determine largely the extent and nature of foreign news items in the mass media.

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