TERRORISM GOING UNCOVERED: GATEKEEPING INTERNATIONAL NEWS EVENTS AT LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS AND THE ROLE OF DESENSITIZATION, NEWS FLOW, AND NEWS ROUTINES

by

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study takes a look at three local newsrooms in Alabama to learn and understand news room routines regarding international wire news content and international terrorism wire news content, as well as examine how journalists (gatekeepers) make news decisions, how wire content affects journalists, and the perceived importance of international wire news content to these local gatekeepers.

Keywords: Gatekeeping, desensitization, journalists, news routines
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedication to my devoted professors, family, friends, and support system for guiding me through graduate school, especially when life tried to get in the way. Without them, I would not have finished this thesis. A special thank you to Dr. Wilson Lowrey and Dr. Martha Crowther for their time and patience during this process—without these two, I would not be where I am today. Also to my husband, Ethan, thank you for your constant support and devotion to this thesis. We finally made it happen.
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They say it takes a village to raise one child, but I think it takes a village to help an individual succeed at any age. To my village, thank you. I would not have found the finish line if it were not for you. I am so thankful for Dr. Wilson Lowrey, the chairman of this thesis, for his constant support and understanding during this process. From working with me while I recovered from back surgery, to finding ways to keep me motivated when I lost sight of the end goal—if it were not for him, this thesis would never have been finished. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of Dr. Mary M. Meares and Dr. Jennifer Hoewe, my committee members, for the guidance and advice I so needed sometimes.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Statista.com (2018), more than 62,000 terror attacks have occurred since 2012. This staggering number also includes nearly 136,000 deaths with the toll only rising. The 2018 data have not been published yet. In February 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump stated the media does not report or cover terror attacks, giving out a 78-item list to attending mediums, only to later be disputed by many of the media with links to published stories.

However, Trump’s claims highlight the fact that journalists are unable to report every terror attack in the world. As terror attacks become more frequent, and more deadly, it is easy to overlook smaller attacks in favor of bigger news that affects the majority. It is also easy to report on incidents that occur in first-world countries, allied nations, or countries where terrorism is less common. Those attacks often garner large coverage for a longer amount of time. For example, on Nov. 13, 2015, Islamic State (IS) affiliated militants used suicide bombers to attack the Stade de France, a sports complex where a soccer match was taking place. Shortly after attacking the sports complex, IS militants attacked nearby restaurants by using suicide bombers and mass shootings and then later shooting concert attendees in the Bataclan Theatre (Nossiter & Gladstone, 2015). The attacks killed 130 people and injured hundreds more (The New York Times Staff, 2016). Coverage of the attacks quickly saturated both national and international media, with reporters camped out in Paris for weeks trying to get the full story. Later on, the New York Times dedicated an entire page to coverage of the Paris attacks, including memorials for the victims, articles about suspects, and content explaining the attacks (The New York Times, 2015). In total, more than 1000 articles appeared on the dedicated page (The New York Times, 2015).
More than four months later, IS-affiliated militants attacked the Brussels Airport in Zaventem and the Maalbeek metro station near central Brussels on March 22, 2016. The attacks were similar to the Paris attacks. Militants used suicide bombers, and 32 people were killed in both attacks, with more than 300 injured. As with the Paris attacks, the media turned toward Brussels with national and international coverage analyzing the attacks, assailants and the victims. However, this event was not given its own page on the New York Times website; instead it had a series of articles posted with links listed to similar stories. In total, more than 100 news articles were published relating to the Brussels attacks.

Three months after the Brussels attacks, IS took responsibility for the attacks on Turkey’s national airport in Istanbul on June 28, 2016. Like the other attacks, suicide bombers and shooters were used. The assailants went inside the airport, past the security check-point before detonating the bombs and shooting into the crowds. Another militant detonated the explosives in a nearby parking lot shortly after. Forty-one people were killed in the two attacks, with hundreds more injured. This attack received substantially less coverage, whereas the other attacks which had similar attack styles, devices and missions were big news. The New York Times has only four articles that directly relate to the Istanbul attacks on its website (Arango, Tavernise, & Yeginsu, 2016).

These three similar attacks all happened within a year of each other. All attacks had either suicide bombers or shooters. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for all attacks as well, boasting about their victories. However, despite the similarities, there is great variability in extent of coverage across the events.

One explanation may be the possible desensitization of gatekeepers who see the news before the public does, and have to make decisions on what is important in relation to their
audience. Desensitization occurs in almost every field, as most jobs can become monotonous and repeated exposure can affect gatekeepers (Coyne, 2016). Desensitization can occur from continuous exposure to an event – in this study, it is international terror attacks. Gatekeepers make the final decision about what news will reach the audience but because gatekeepers are essentially the “first line of defense” against the news, gatekeepers may be prone to being desensitized by similar stories and could overlook other stories that may be important.

Another possible explanation is international news flow and ethnocentrism, both of which explain not just variability in coverage of international terrorism, but coverage of international news generally. While Camaj (2010) cited government interference as a factor that keeps international news from reaching audiences around the world generally, Hoge (1997) said in the U.S., it is relatively low interest by audiences that keeps gatekeepers from using international stories frequently. Citing ethnocentrism, he said audiences may not understand the significance of reading about international news. More recently, Tanikawa (2017) said U.S. journalists routinely reshape their coverage of international news so it will be culturally relevant to their local audiences; the author said this may skew audiences’ understanding of foreign issues and events. Ethnocentrism is defined as the evaluation of other outside cultures according to standards and customs of one’s own culture (Valentino, Brader & Jardina, 2013). In the United States, for example, the media are more likely to publish news information that originated from the United States than an outside country, while also framing this coverage from the perspective of traditional U.S. norms and values (Kalyango, 2006). International news flow scholarship, which focuses on the patterns and processes by which international news information is disseminated across nations, media systems, and cultures, coupled with ethnocentrism could constrain journalists’ selection of international news. Although, news about other nations is
reported heavily by these nations, American interests about these other nations is limited and therefore international news may go under-reported by U.S. media.

Another reason gatekeepers may or may not be publishing news about international terrorist attacks could be of the influence of media routines and organizational influences. Newsrooms have informal rules and roles (routines), and formal rules and roles that shape daily decision-making about the selection of news (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). Rules, roles, and routines can be shaped by higher-level influences in the hierarchy (like corporate mandates or community norms), and in turn, they can shape decision-making at the individual level – for example, they can influence decisions made by individual journalists who are influenced by their own individual background, perceptions, and beliefs.

All three of these possible influences — desensitization, news flow, and work routines — can be located in the Reese and Shoemaker (2016) hierarchy of media influences model (Figure 1), which maps possible influences on the selection and production of media content. This model is used in this study — discussed in more detail below — as a way to organize possible influences on decisions about international news content and content about international terrorism.

This study will seek to understand how and why gatekeepers make the news decisions they do when faced with international terrorism news. Possible explanations behind this decision-making include desensitization, international news flow, and organizational routines, and the study will explore the possibility that these are in evidence in daily news work. This study will also look more broadly at gatekeeping processes and decisions made by local media about international news in general. This broader focus will provide a meaningful context for the more specific focus on terrorism news.
Importantly, this study will also take an inductive approach, with the researcher being open to other meanings, contexts, and explanations to emerge from the data. There will also be a deductive component as the relevance of desensitization and international news flow will be assessed. This study will also look at the contexts, processes, practices, and routines that relate to gatekeeping about international news at the local newsrooms being studied.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Three conceptual approaches are especially relevant to the research questions posed in this study: gatekeeping (including organizational and media routine influences), international news flow, and desensitization.

**Gatekeeping**

Deluliis (2015) said the gatekeepers are the only barrier between the infinite amount of news that occurs and the public. Gatekeeping theory, coined by Kurt Lewin (1947a; 1947b), was created as a way to conceptualize the “social world as a relationship between individuals and groups,” (Deluliis, 2015, p. 3). Lewin (1947a; 1947b) looked into group dynamics in a social context, studying the communication among people individually. Lewin furthered his research by also looking at communication on the macro level which set up future research in organizational influences. He found that individual communication was limited in a group setting, and that people’s decisions were influenced less by the individual and more by the group and the organization.

Gatekeeping theory provides a model that helps explain channels that news flows through from the actual event, to the journalists and then to the public, the decisions made by gatekeepers on what news will reach the audience and what news will not, and the forces and factors that shape these decisions (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). News events happen frequently and at different levels (global, national, local, etc.), and there are different levels of gatekeepers, from low-level community gatekeepers to high-profile wire services. When news events occur, the
information floods the “gates” of gatekeepers at different levels. From there, those different levels of gatekeepers must make decisions based on a “hierarchy of influences” on their decisions. In Shoemaker and Vos’ book *Gatekeeping Theory* (2009), they explain the various internal and external influences of gatekeeping theory. For example, while gatekeepers ultimately make the news selection decisions, sources, advertisers, interest groups, government and other social institutions can affect the internal workings of a news organization as well as inclinations of individual journalists, and can therefore influence the gatekeeping decisions to publish and/or report news (p. 112-113). Gatekeeping is a multifaceted process – the internal and external forces that influence gatekeeping decisions can occur at every step of the process, including pressures from high-level gatekeepers and influences from outside parties.

Another factor important to the theory is communication. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) look at the gatekeeping roles within a news organization and also the communication on the boundaries of the organization, between “boundary role persons for input” and “boundary role persons for output”. Gatekeeping contexts exist at different levels: at a social level (where news sources, public relations and legal restrictions operate); at the level of the newsroom (where editors at various levels and publishers/owners operate); and even within the mind of the individual decision-maker. The specific social context can be an influence as well. For example, Coddington and Holton (2014) found that media niche areas tend to control information for specific types of information, and are usually the only source for that type of information.

Once news information reaches the gates, it is the gatekeepers’ responsibility to decide what news is important or interesting for its audience and what news is not. News information is narrowed down to specific topics (before and after news arrives at the newsroom), and then newsroom gatekeepers decide what news is newsworthy to be published, while internal and
external forces affect those decisions. The gates are typically overwhelmed with information, and
gatekeeping theory acknowledges that some news content will be unpublished and go
unreported.

Reese and Shoemaker (2016) say the hierarchy of influences model demonstrates how little say gatekeepers at the individual level may have when it comes to picking news stories. They list five different levels at which influences on gatekeeping decisions can be found. Like an onion, these levels from inside (low level of analysis) to outside (high level of analysis) are: individual influences, media routines influences, organizational influences, extramedia influences, and ideological influences. Reese and Shoemaker (2016) say individual and ideological influences have the most impact on gatekeeping decisions, for different reasons. Individually, gatekeepers are the ones making the ultimate news decisions, albeit gatekeepers are also influenced by all other levels. The ideological level is the only level that influences all the other levels. They also suggest media routines and organizational influences have a strong impact on news decisions, though these influences can be themselves influenced by outside factors such as community norms or corporate policies and norms. Some journalists are unhappy with the ultimate gatekeeping decisions, feeling that the forces and traditions at the organizational and management level are weighed more than that of the individual journalists (Tuggle & Huffman, 1999). Yet, Powell (1985) suggests the impact of routines is less overt, and that routines subtly “condition” gatekeepers so they are not consciously aware of their influence.

Recently, the relevance of gatekeeping theory has come under question after the emergence of the internet and an increased ability of politicians, public relations practitioners, and everyday citizens to go around the gatekeeper journalists themselves (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Benton, 2016). The idea, however, that gatekeeping theory is faltering as an explanation is not
completely accurate because all information is gated one way or another, including online information (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).

With gatekeeping theory, including the Reese-Shoemaker (2016) model, as the overarching theory in this study, two other conceptual processes are fit within gatekeeping: international news flow and desensitization. These two processes suggest just two of the causal factors that may shape decisions at the gates of local news outlets concerning international news.

**International News Flow Research**

International news flow refers to the process and patterns by which international news is distributed to the public across nations and across media systems. International news flow has limitations in fully explaining gatekeeping at the individual level, because the processes it describes are mostly at a macro level. Although low-level gatekeepers are guided by daily news budgets on what to publish — for example, Gieber (1960) said local outlets will always emphasize local news over internationals — gatekeepers from the Associated Press, Reuters, McClatchy and other wire services that are used at the local level make key decisions that determine international news flow. The hierarchy model of influences (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016) shows that there are also many other factors that can affect decisions, including culture, community, institutions, and the organization, and so internal and external forces within a newsroom setting should impact the flow of international news.

Wu (2000) researched international news flow in 38 newspapers around the world, looking at the types of coverage in newspapers and the countries that were written about most. Wu, along with his colleagues, looked at newspapers from the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region. Wu (2000, 1998, 1997) noted that European countries were
overrepresented in the study, whereas Asian and African countries were highly underrepresented. The U.S. was the most covered in all newspapers, dominating 18% of the international news coverage. Wu’s (2000) findings also showcase that developed countries like France, the U.K., Russia, Bosnia, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain are well-represented within the media, but other countries were not. In an early seminal piece in this literature, Hester (1971) found that developing nations were underrepresented in news content. He stated: “Many areas of the world were only sparsely represented in the news flow [and] there were approximately seven stories emphasizing developed nations to every three emphasizing developing nations,” (Hester, 1971, p. 43). Hester also found that military-related news content was far more likely to be published because it directly affected the United States.

Wu (2000) expanded on this idea with data suggesting that international news tends to originate from and reflect the world’s elite countries because those countries set up the economic and cultural standards that shape news topics and frames across the world. Wu (2000) also referenced, a change in the dynamic of international news flow, stating that news post-Cold War is more focused on economics and culture than on “ideological antagonism” (p. 127).

Chang and Lee (1992) researched editorial decisions concerning international news. Focusing specifically on U.S. newspapers and broadcast stations, the researchers found that editorial decisions were directly related to the potential for the United States to be affected. A survey was given to editors. Using a 1 to 5 scale, 1 being not important and 5 being most important, the mean score for news about events that could be considered a direct threat to the U.S. was 4.51. Of the 12 categories listed, “direct threat to the United States” had the highest average among editors surveyed, while economic development of a country scored 1.99. Other notable factors included reader’s interest (4.35) and human interest (3.91). The researchers also
found that editors who had less work experience but more education, liberal-leaning political affiliation, and an interest/knowledge of a foreign language or country, were more likely to consider timeliness, readers’ interest, and human interest when deciding on international news. In contrast, editors with more work experience but less education, a conservative-leaning partisan affiliation, and less space specifically devoted to international news would usually weigh the direct impact the issue had on the U.S. far more than anything else.

Wu (1998) found that international news is less likely to be published in domestic media due to personal beliefs and biases of the editors unless there is a direct link to the country. Citing Hester (1971) and Schramm (1960), Wu (1998) said: ...little correlation appears to exist between international news coverage and audience interests, indicating irresponsible judgments on the part of the news editors. (p. 496)

Expanding on international news flow, there is also the concept of affiliate stations (Wu, 2007; Wu, 2003; Wu, 2000). One interesting hypothesis in Wu’s 2003 study suggested that if the host country had an affiliate station in the guest country, there was a higher likelihood that news from the guest country would be covered/published in the host country. For example, a major United States media outlet may have affiliates in England, Japan, and Egypt. The United States outlet would likely have more international coverage from those three affiliates than from countries such as Thailand or Russia. Wu’s 2007 study further expanded this concept, finding that developed nations, such as England, Japan, and Egypt, with affiliate stations in other prominent countries, such as Singapore, Germany, and Australia, had more international coverage than affiliates located in developing nations with the same affiliates.

Scholars have also looked into the influence of economics and politics on international news flow. Studies have found that economics greatly influence international news flow,
specifically in the case of developed or developing nations (Segev, 2016; Wu, 2007; Wu, 2000; Wu, 1998; Ogan, 1987). Segev (2016) found that economics had a direct impact on news flow: Countries with a greater economic impact were more likely to be written about than countries where economic impact is limited. In another finding, Segev (2016) also looked into global terrorism, finding that countries with greater economic impact almost always were featured in news reports about terrorism.

The phenomenon of ethnocentrism is consistent with gatekeeping theory. It suggests there are forces and factors that lead gatekeepers within a particular country or local area to choose local or national stories over international stories. Segev (2016) found that in his 11 country/region study that domestic news far outweighed foreign news, specifically military and economic related stories.

Profozich (2009) analyzed the perception of international news flow in the U.S., as well as the perception of American news flow in international countries. Profozich (2009) looked at ethnocentric beliefs in American media and how they can impact international news flow. The paper proposed that American consumers undervalued international news coverage because of ideological and cultural differences, instead of economic impact. He said:

These local gatekeepers view foreign news largely as filler to be fit in between local stories. They feel that the purpose of domestic news, the need to know, justifies its emphasis, while there is less compelling justification for foreign news. Therefore, most of the foreign news that newspapers pay for from the wire services is ignored (p. 8).
Profozich (2009) also interviewed many journalists across the United States, finding that political or military international news tends to be only viewed as important when it directly affects the U.S.

**Desensitization**

As mentioned, one possible explanation for variability in coverage about international terrorism is that over time, gatekeepers become desensitized to these events. In psychology, desensitization is defined as the diminished emotional response to a negative or adverse event or object after repeated exposure (Krahe, Moller, Huesmann, Kirwil, Felber, & Berger, 2011). For example, in the medical field, excessive demand means that doctors are subjected to less in-person consultation and instead of listening more to the patient's' individual needs, they process through patients quickly and with less direct consideration. Rajan and Bellare (2011) found that among residency students, burnout – conceptually close to desensitization – occurs within weeks of starting the program. To translate this to the media realm, the Associated Press releases a daily budget that has the top stories of the day, including a section devoted to international news. That budget could have five or more stories centered on a similar terrorist event, which could lead a gatekeeper to overlook those stories. If the budget for the next few days had the same story, just rehashed, a gatekeeper could be desensitized to the impact of the story and may disregard information concerning the story, or any stories similar to it in the future.

On average, exposure to an event or series of similarly negative events will result in increased desensitization to that event in an individual (Rajan & Bellare, 2011). According to Gaylord et. al (2017) repeated exposure to community violence increased the overarching desensitization in adolescent males which then led to desensitization regarding other types of
violence outside of the community. Gaylord et. al (2017) said that the repetitive exposure to similar negative events in individuals over time would prime the individuals to ignore community violence. The same can be said for exposure to international terrorism.

One instance of media violence – or in this study international terrorism – can prime the viewer a certain way. Bushman and Anderson (2009) used a two-part study to analyze reaction times to violent situations. In both parts they found that if an individual was exposed to media violence, the individual would take longer to help someone in need after seeing a real-life violent situation. They found that the long-term effects supported their initial conclusion that desensitization is occurring.

Exposure to violence in any amount can impact people and prime them to think or act a specific way (Anderson et. al, 2010; Breuer, Scharkow, & Quandt, 2014). Anderson et. al (2010) found that repeated exposure to violent video games increased violent behavior in the short-term, yet, increased desensitization in the long-term. Breuer et. al (2014) found similar results, although the researchers noticed that “tunnel vision” was happening. In their study, they had individuals watch a violent movie or television show, and then witness violence against a man and a woman. Breuer et. al (2014) found that those subjected to watching a violent show before witnessing real-life violence were more likely to react slower to the violence and were more likely to not intervene, which they classified as “tunnel vision,” or the idea that you only are able to see or react to things in front of you, not on the sides or around you. Although gatekeepers may not directly see a terrorism event occur, gatekeepers may have “tunnel vision” when it comes to terrorism news.

Fanti et. al (2009) focused on the correlation of exposure to media violence and desensitization. Fanti et. al (2009) found that repeated exposure to violence, specifically media
violence, can greatly increase desensitization among individuals. They also found that both single exposure and repeated exposure had similar negative effects on the individual. Perception of violence, including media violence and first-hand experience, can affect the level of desensitization among individuals (Fanti et. al, 2009; Coyne, Calliset, Gentile, & Howard, 2016). Fanti et. al (2009) found that people who have aggressive traits were more likely to blame victims and that they had a slower desensitization rate than those who empathized with the victim. Coyne et. al (2016) found that people who have a strong religious affiliation will find media violence more offensive, and are less likely to be desensitized over a specific period of time; those who had a lower religious affiliation were more likely to be desensitized to media violence. However, the differences were small: Less religious individuals had a 21% level of desensitization whereas their counterparts only had a 19% desensitization level (Coyne et. al, 2016).

Demographics play an important role in understanding desensitization and some of its variables. Many studies have found that younger people are more susceptible to desensitization due to “youthful cynicism” than older generations that are traditionally more sympathetic to violent situation (Scharrer, 2008; Mrug, Madan, Cook & Wright, 2015). Studies have also found that the younger a person is when exposed to media violence, the more likely their perception would be negatively influenced (Mrug et. al, 2015; Tarabah, Badr, Usta, & Doyle, 2016). Tarabah et. al analyzed Lebanese children and their perception of first-hand violence, finding that most children who encountered violence first-hand were more susceptible to desensitization. Media violence and gender have also been studied. Scharrer (2008) found that there is limited evidence that there is a difference in desensitization between men and women. Women were likely to have similar views of media violence to that of men. Krahe et. al (2011) reported
women had a higher chance for anxiety when viewing media violence whereas men felt more pleasure. Krahe et. al (2011) suggest men are socially groomed to accept violence and, therefore, can become desensitized to violence but do not associate media violence as violence.

Socioeconomic status has also been looked at (Scharrer, 2008; Mrug et. al, 2015; Tarabah et. al, 2016; Fanti et. al, 2009). Scharrer (2008) found that individuals with a lower socioeconomic status were more likely to be sympathetic to violence and less likely to be desensitized than those who had higher socioeconomic status. Fanti et. al (2009) had similar findings.

Another term for desensitization is compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue has been defined as indifference to charitable appeals on behalf of those who are suffering, as a result of the frequency or number of such appeals. Kinnick Krugman, & Cameron (1996) observed “burnout” among individuals, and that peoples’ finding salience to events could determine how fast fatigue could occur. Kinnick et. al (1996) also emphasizes human compassion toward others, citing many respondents said they felt less compassionate toward victims that “deserved” the attack or “did nothing to prevent the incident.”

**Research questions**

This study seeks to understand how and why gatekeepers make news decisions about international news, with a particular focus on international terrorism news. Possible explanations behind this decision-making include desensitization, international news flow, and organizational routines, and the study will explore the possibility that these are evident in daily news work. However, the study is open to other potential explanations for gatekeeping decisions, and so the study will also examine the general context, processes, and practices that relate to gatekeeping about international news at the local level, and the ways that journalists make meaning of
international news. While the study will examine gatekeeping of international terrorism news, it will also examine gatekeeping processes and decisions related to international news in general. This broader focus should provide a helpful context for understanding decisions by local news outlets about the more specific topic of international terrorism.

Gatekeeping theory says that a large portion of news that reaches the gates will not pass through the gates due to many internal and external factors. Reese and Shoemaker (2016) suggest the hierarchy of influences model as a map that can suggest possible factors; however, explanation will also emerge from research of the daily working world of the journalists within the sites being examined. While I explored each site with several possible factors in mind – news flow, desensitization, newsroom routines – the research will be open to other factors that emerge from the research. As mentioned, the study will examine the gatekeeping decisions about both international terrorism news and also gatekeeping decisions about international news in general.

Desensitization is one of several possible factors in this study that may help explain decision-making. This factor sits at the inner “individual” level of the Reese-Shoemaker (2016) model. As mentioned, desensitization can occur after repeated exposure to a negative stimulant. In this study, the negative stimulant is international terrorism, as well as other international news about other types of violence. Everyday such news occurs, and it is up to the gatekeepers to decide whether that event will reach a newspaper’s audience or not. Repeated exposure to violent international news may shape the way gatekeepers interpret these events, perhaps making events seem less important and therefore making it less likely gatekeepers will determine such events to be highly critical for audiences to see.

International news flow is a macro-level process in deciding what international news will reach an audience and why, and its influence exists at the outer layers of the Reese-Shoemaker
(2016) model. There are many variables within international news flow research, including cultural affinity between countries, economic status between countries, and newsworthiness.

The first two research questions asks about factors affecting coverage of international and international terrorism news generally, as well as desensitization and international news flow specifically.

RQ1a: What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international terrorism?
RQ1b: What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international news events in general?

There are many internal and external factors shaping gatekeeping according to the hierarchical model, and organizational work routines have a strong impact in the hierarchy of influences. The literature suggests that routines – for example, routinely emphasizing local news at community news outlets – are worth exploring, as they may shape gatekeepers’ assumptions about what categories of news are even considered, and also which news events are newsworthy. These considerations may shape decisions about coverage of international terrorism and international news.

RQ2a: What newsroom routines related to international terrorism coverage are evident in the newsroom?
RQ2b: What newsroom routines related to general international news coverage are evident in the newsroom?

The following research questions focus on the individual level of the hierarchy of influences model and asks how gatekeepers themselves perceive and make sense of international terrorism news events and international news generally. It is important to understand how gatekeepers themselves feel about, and make sense of, these kinds of events, as they are the
“agents” that make these decisions, even if they do so within constraining factors at many other levels.

RQ3a: What are gatekeepers’ perceptions of the importance and news value of international terrorism events generally?

RQ3b: What are gatekeepers’ perceptions of the importance and news value of international news events generally?
METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative methods to answer the research questions. Gatekeeping theory and the hierarchy of influences model suggest there are many different levels within social processes: Social processes have a “Russian nesting doll” quality to them. While much of the analysis was conducted at the individual level, (i.e. interviewing gatekeepers), those gatekeepers also made decisions within group and organizational settings, resulting in analysis of the newsroom setting, meetings, and more.

In total, three sites were included in this research. Basing on circulation size and newsroom demographics, I selected three small, Southern newspapers with average weekday circulation from 10,000 to 20,000. Included in each site-study was a two-day observation of each newsroom, its practices and its employees, as well as individual interviews with gatekeepers and collection of documents such as news story budgets. Data collection, observation, and interviews all took place within a four-month period, with 19 individual gatekeepers total included in this study. By focusing on three Southern newsrooms, there was enough similarity in newsroom practices in order to compare gatekeeping decisions. The three newsrooms were also large enough in both circulation size and staff size that findings would be accurate.

Study

A qualitative study approach was taken during the research period (Yin, 2009). Three small newspaper newsrooms in Alabama were included in the research, based on circulation size,
printed materials, and the newsroom staff size. Newspaper and town names and identities of individuals interviewed were kept confidential.

Based on a circulation size of less than 20,000 subscribers, the three newsrooms were selected after being contacted by myself. For context, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the man newspaper in the city of Atlanta, Georgia, has an average circulation size of 150,000 as of 2012 (Lulofs, 2013). Generally speaking, newspapers with a circulation size over 50,000 are considered large newspapers. According to the Associated Press Media Editors committee, newspapers with a circulation of size of 30,000 or less is considered a small newspaper (APSE, 2018).

*Newspaper 1* was the largest newspaper, with a circulation size of 20,000 and had recently undergone a publishing change. However, it is the major newspaper in town, despite publishing changes. Also, the paper had recently changed its mission to focus more strongly on digital media and less strongly on print media. *Newspaper 1* published four times a week, printing on Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. *Newspaper 1* had the least number of gatekeepers, three to be exact. Saturation of findings was met by midday of day two of the study. *Newspaper 1* was in a middle-sized suburban and metropolitan area, with a population size of nearly 200,000 people. In total, *Newspaper 1* had 10 journalists, copy editors, or editors on staff. Of the three gatekeepers deemed eligible for this study, there were two men and one female interviewed. The average age of the three interviewed was 36.2. All participants were white.

*Newspaper 2* had a circulation size of nearly 12,000. *Newspaper 2*’s circulation size created an optimal setting for this study. With seven gatekeepers asked to take part in the study, the newspaper had a very traditional setup where copy editors edit and cultivate content, and then design the newspaper nightly. However, *Newspaper 2* does not publish daily, instead publishing
four times a week, Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Saturation was met by the end of the second day, after observing, interviewing, and collecting data. Newspaper 2 had approximately 15 people on staff. Of the six participants, five were male and two were female. The average age of the six participants was 34.8 years old. All seven participants were white.

Newspaper 3 had an average weekday circulation size of nearly 15,000, yet still prints daily. When asked if there was a possibility of printing less often, Newspaper 3 said it was not looking at that option. Based in a growing community of 100,000 people, Newspaper 3 publishes daily, although many of the gatekeepers have said that the page count has changed drastically over the past few years, averaging approximately 12.6 pages per day. In total, there were 19 people in the newsroom, two photographers, three copy editors, 10 reporters, one assigning editor, two senior editors, and one publisher. Nine of the employees at the newspaper were included in this study. In this newspaper, gatekeepers pick most of the content going into the newspaper: However some gatekeepers expressed that a majority of wire content available is offered through the newspaper’s parent company, which the gatekeepers said they used frequently. Newspaper 3’s newspaper is also not designed within the organization, instead is outsourced to the parent company’s design center. Saturation of Newspaper 3’s study was reached within two days, which included observation, interviews with the nine gatekeepers, and collecting data from Newspaper 3.

Consent from each newspaper’s top news manager was obtained in December 2017, although studies were spread out over a series of months due to newspaper schedules. IRB approval was obtained in November 2017. All materials used to obtain approval from each newspaper are included (Appendix C).
Qualitative Methods

Of the many qualitative methods applicable, the researcher used in-depth interviewing, observation, and document gathering, which are common methods for analyses of organizational settings (Yin, 2009). Interviewing gatekeepers is ideal because it opens a line of communication between the researcher and gatekeepers, which helped create a trusting bond between the researcher and interviewees. Interviews provided rich data needed to fully understand the meanings and understandings that gatekeepers have in the international news selection process. Observing gatekeepers in the newsroom also helped the researcher understand gatekeeping processes and practices, and the newsroom context that shape decision-making — for example, media routines and organizational routines and how they affected individuals’ gatekeeping decisions. Observation also provided additional richness and perspectives to the insights gotten from the interviews.

Interviewing

Gatekeepers in each newsroom were interviewed for this analysis. A gatekeeper is defined as anyone in the newsroom that has a direct influence on the decision-making process: A gatekeeper could be a journalist and/or reporter, copy editor, a higher-level editor, or any other individual within the newsroom that directly affects news decisions about the selection of news content. At each site, I casted a wide net to identify and select individuals to interview. At each newspaper, the editor in chief or supervisor I worked with helped identify gatekeepers to talk with. The researcher’s knowledge of gatekeeping decisions was helpful because the researcher was able to relate to those being interviewed as well as understand newsroom processes, practices and lingo.
Nineteen gatekeepers were deemed eligible to participate in this study. Each gatekeeper was stripped of all identifiable markers and then given a random number assigned to them. I first randomized the gatekeepers so they would not be grouped within their original organization, and then randomly assigned a numerical value that they will be referred to from here. Demographical information, such as age, gender, and experience, are all that are used. Of the 19 gatekeepers, six were female and 13 were male.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I entered the field with a list of questions used, but I was also prepared to ask participants to expand on comments in order to pursue other lines of thinking, ways of making meaning, and explanations I did not think about before the interview. Appendix A includes 10 initial interview questions that we to be asked of all participants in the study. Most interviews took place in a closed conference room or office; however, some participants were comfortable being interviewed at their desk, as per their request. The interviewees were given an IRB-approved consent agreement to sign before the interview began, explaining the study and requesting approval to record the interview. All gatekeepers signed the consent form and agreed to being recorded. On average, the interviews lasted 37.25 minutes, with the shortest lasting 21.03 minutes and the longest lasting 1 hour and 13.18 minutes.

During the interviews with gatekeepers, I showed them stories relating to international news and international terrorism news that were published from the past two weeks worth of newspapers. I showed each gatekeeper the stories pertaining to my research, which were usually on one-to-two pages in each newspaper. It should be noted that in each of the newspapers, there was at least one day where there was no international news or international terrorism news not published. By showing each gatekeeper editions of their newspaper, I was able to ask if they
remembered publishing the content, how they came about making news decisions about the content chosen, and what was published in the newspaper and why. By doing so, I was able to ground the material for the participants and understand their thinking in their “lived” work days (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This encouraged the participant to give more authentic, detailed accounts of the processes of their jobs, roles, work, and interactions. I was also able to ask about the decisions they were making while I was observing their newsroom. This helped me gather richer material and understanding into their gatekeeping practices.

**Observation**

While at each site, I spent approximately two days in the newsroom. From editorial decisions to everyday conversations between gatekeepers, the observation aspect of each study was integral. This observation is considered direct observation, since the entire newsroom was aware of the observation portion of the study. While observing, I took detailed notes of what I saw and heard. The observation period included sitting in on budget meetings, conversations between employees, watching gatekeepers do their jobs, and the thought processes behind publishing news, whether international or not. Handwritten notes with detailed descriptions of each site were analyzed daily for themes and ideas. Data recorded during the observation period was transcribed and analyzed.

**The researcher**

The role of the researcher was to be as transparent as possible in the newsroom setting. Before each site study began, I informed the editor or point person that I am also a journalist and have six years of experience as a journalist and copy editor. Following that admission, I explained to the editor or point person my experience and how I believed it would help me
identify themes within the organization. However, I also informed that person that I would be more conscious of my potential biases. I identified those biases as they came up, and wrote detailed reports of my biases. Biases included assuming organizational habits at the individual level (i.e. gatekeepers pulling daily budgets or how gatekeepers may have made decisions), however by identifying those biases, I was able to compartmentalize and observe. Doing so made the study richer and more detailed since I was able to find more ways to understand the gatekeepers and their decisions. My experience and biases helped me understand the day-to-day operations within each newsroom, and eased any concerns from interviewees.

**Document gathering**

Document gathering was also including in this study (Yin, 2009). Document gathering entailed collected newspaper samples from each site and the content and gatekeeper processes of international news stories published during the collection period. I collected two weeks worth of newspapers from each site to examine and analyze what was published, why it was published, and the placement of the stories. I also collected and examined newspapers published during my tenure at each site. By doing this, I was able to see what kind of stories were published, and ask gatekeepers why they made specific gatekeeping decisions. After each site observation was complete, I pulled all international news and international terrorism news stories to examine, highlighting the themes I found from those newspapers as a credibility check on the interview and observation findings.

Other documents gathered were daily budgets (lists of possible news stories for daily publication) during my time in each newsroom. Each newsroom granted me access to their wire budgets as well as other daily budgets. This helped me see what options were originally available
to use, and then compare to was actually published. These materials were then used for an informal analysis of the news content.

**Data analysis**

Data collected from interviews and observations was analyzed by the researcher over the course of a year, from the first site in December 2017 to the fall of 2018. Due to newsroom availability as well as researcher availability, one site investigation took place in December 2017, while the other two took place in March 2018. Data collection ended in March 2018.

Gibbs (2007) said coding interviews using both open coding and axial coding will help capture and visualize themes that come up within the interviews and observation periods. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), open coding is classified as the codes of data being attached to the qualitative analysis; in other words, codes were identified as they appeared during each study and were noted and analyzed during the observation period. Whereas open coding identifies the themes while in a study, axial coding relates codes to one another.

I coded each interview for key phrases or emotions that could help me understand how gatekeeping decisions are made, as well as forces and influences that were mentioned or became apparent that could affect those decisions. For this study, coding consisted of color coding each interview part that relates to specific research questions and comparing what interviewees said and how they feel. I used pre-set coding parameters (i.e. perception of international news, perceptions of news importance, perceptions of processes, etc.) as well as emergent coding (Gibbs, 2007).
It is also important to note that while coding focused mostly on the interviews obtained while visiting the three sites, coding of the researcher’s observation notes also occurred to ensure maximum understanding.
RESULTS

As previously stated, the aim of this thesis was to explore and understand how gatekeeping theory works in regards to local newspapers publishing international news content and international terrorism news content and how the news content can impact individual gatekeepers via desensitization and compassion fatigue. As Reese and Shoemaker (2016) state, the hierarchy of influences not only starts at an individual level, but also includes extramedia and organizational rules. Also, according to Fanti et. al (2017) and Gaylord et. al (2017) desensitization can occur after repetitive exposure to a specific event, or similar events, over a period of time. In this instance, repetitive exposure of international news and international terrorism news on an individual level (i.e. the gatekeeper) can affect how an individual reacts to the news content. Research questions are thus:

RQ1a: What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international terrorism?

RQ1b: What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international news events in general?

RQ2a: What newsroom routines related to international terrorism coverage are evident in the newsroom?

RQ2b: What newsroom routines related to general international news coverage are evident in the newsroom?

RQ3a: What are gatekeeper’s perceptions of the importance and news value of international terrorism events?
RQ3b: What are gatekeeper's perceptions of the importance and news value of international news generally?

Below, findings are provided for each research question, and for each research question, findings for each newspaper are provided in order: Newspaper 1, then Newspaper 2, and then Newspaper 3.

Research Question 1a

What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international terrorism?

Newspaper 1

Newspaper 1 is a small-sized newsroom with 10 employees. Of those employed at Newspaper 1, three were classified as gatekeepers, and were able to participate in the study. Of those able to participate, two were male and one was female. The three gatekeepers identified helped make and decide editorial decisions for the newspaper. However, due to the production arrangement of the parent company that owns Newspaper 1, those three gatekeepers do not make any editorial decisions regarding international terrorism.

Within six months before my study began at Newspaper 1, the parent company took control of all wire content, thus making Newspaper 1’s primary goal to report on as much local news as possible. Wire service content — which is offered through a variety of wire services such as Associated Press, McClatchy, and more — is a collection of articles regarding dozens of topics on non-local news offered to newspapers across the world. Wire content is essential for many newspapers, including those in this study. It was unknown that the parent company had taken control of all wire content before starting this study.
One of Newspaper 1’s copy editors and the newspaper’s online editor continued to examine the daily wire budgets from the wire services, due to old habits as they said. The online editor who has worked at Newspaper 1 for more than 20 years said he looks at the international wire budgets offered through the wire service out of habit, but unless it has a direct impact in their community, or if terrorism content affects different groups in the community, then he would not suggest putting it on the front page of the paper.

We have a large number of people from Korea in our area, and for them, any international terrorism coverage, or international coverage in general, regarding Korea, is important. But it’s not the first thing I think about. I’m more focused on the local or hyper-local news in our area.

Despite his statement of focusing on mostly local news, the online editor habitually looked for news content from both national and international sources. When asked, the online manager said he tries to represent all news online, since it is a limitless platform, and also because many more readers tend to look for news online than in a newspaper.

The managing editor of Newspaper 1 said the paper’s section that regularly offers national and international news is completely decided on by the parent company, and that the local gatekeepers have no influence on the section. When pressed about international terrorism attacks and whether those could be moved from the national/international section of the paper and placed in a local section, the managing editor said local gatekeepers can request specific stories if warranted, but in regard to international terrorism, it would have to be a major attack. The managing editor later said it does not bother her, or the newsroom, that the section regarding
national or international news coverage is decided by the parent company; instead it frees up more time and focus for local news.

The staff at Newspaper 1 does not layout the daily pages of the newspaper, instead sending all local content it has to a third party at a location in another state to layout the pages. Newspaper 1 and Newspaper 3 are both designed outside of the organization, at common hubs for multiple papers in the chains that are owned by the parent companies. Although the pages of the newspaper are no longer designed in-house, all gatekeepers at Newspaper 1 said they continue to look through wire budgets for stories that stand out or that they deem important. The off-site design center will edit content to fit the page, especially regarding wire content. However, because of Newspaper 1’s parent company’s authority, the gatekeepers in the newsroom have no say on what international terrorism content is in its paper. The parent company completely makes the decisions regarding national and international news, including international terrorism news for the wire section of the newspaper. If an international terrorism event occurred that directly impacted the local area, the staff at Newspaper 1 would be able to request that story for the front page, and could write information to give that story a local angle.

Newspaper 2

Newspaper 2 is the most traditional newspaper of the three papers in this study in terms of staff structure and processes. The newspaper is a locally-and privately-owned paper with approximately 15 people on staff. Of those on staff, seven were classified as gatekeepers, including one editor-in-chief, a managing editor, one business editor, one night editor, and three copy editors. The rest of the staff were mainly reporters focusing on their individual stories or
photographers. Those who did not impact news decisions and gatekeeping practices were not chosen to be interviewed for this study.

Being privately-owned, Newspaper 2 does not have to adhere to decisions from an overarching parent company. This means that the newspaper has more flexibility in its news decisions. Many copy editors said they prefer to have more control of wire content instead of letting a third party make decisions, like that of Newspaper 1 or Newspaper 3.

During Newspaper 2’s observation period, news selection typically involved seven local gatekeepers discussing their local news content, and then those who worked that night would select other non-local wire content. Pages were designed in-house. First, depending on the working day, most of the seven participants would sit in on the budget meetings and help make news decisions regarding the front page of each section (i.e. pages 1A, 1B, 1C, etc.). After making those initial decisions, it would be up to the individual copy editor to pull other wire content for inside pages. Then, that night, copy editors could pull other non-local wire stories for either inside or front pages. One of the copy editors said she tries to always have one international news or international terrorism story in every paper. “I like international terrorism coverage and I think it’s important that our readers get a full view of the world,” she said. “I try to at least get something into every paper because I think it’s important. But every copy editor is different and might value terrorism differently than I do.”

The night editor at Newspaper 2 said he almost always agrees with the daytime copy editor’s decisions when it comes to stories placed on the page for him to edit. He added that all decisions made during the budget meeting are followed, unless breaking news happens. If breaking news happens while he is working, the night editor makes the decision about what to pull off the front page and place inside (to make room for the new breaking story), as well as
help pull the selected breaking news and place it on the front page. He said an international terrorism attack, similar to those that happened in Europe in 2015 and 2016, would “bump” a local news story from the front page to inside the newspaper. However, it would have to be a major attack he said. The night editor added that he has additional tasks, including editing and writing content for special sections in the Sunday paper, which are prepared ahead of Sunday, during the week.

During my time observing Newspaper 2, one international terrorist attack occurred in Kabul, Afghanistan. The attack was not as “severe” as the attacks in Europe in 2015 and 2016, but the story was published on an inside page. The copy editor who chose that story said she felt a need to publish the story because it involved the U.S. military. She further added that many of the newspaper’s readers are either veterans of the military or have some affiliation with the military and that there is an army base nearby.

Newspaper 2 was the only site where local staff could make decisions about selection and placement of wire stories, including international terrorism coverage. As traditional as this set up is, there are still many other gatekeeping levels that impacted the newspaper’s product. After the copy editors pull content and design the page, the night editor must approve it. However, the managing editor and the editor-in-chief also approve the first page of each section after the night editor approves it, to ensure all content is correct and what they wanted. The managing editor and the editor-in-chief are not in the newsroom, however; they can get updates on the pages via email or other communication. The content on all inside pages, which would be where international terrorism content typically is placed, are decided by the copy editors and approved by the night editor and not the managing editor or editor-in-chief. The managing editor said he trusts his staff to pull content that best fits the newspaper’s purpose and will inform the
community of what they need to know. This trust contributes to this paper’s variability in news content regarding international terrorism and international news, generally.

Newspaper 3

Newspaper 3 had a total of nine local, including the publisher, the editor-in-chief, a news desk editor, a photography editor, a photographer, the sports editor, and three copy editors. Inclusion of a photographer occurred because the photographer was present at both afternoon budget meetings I attended and helped make news decisions. In total, there were 19 employees at Newspaper 3, with the other nine being reporters. Newspaper 3 was also the only newspaper in this study that still printed the newspaper every day of the week.

At Newspaper 3, discussion of international terrorism news or international news in general happened at each budget meeting I attended. Around 3 p.m. each day, a group of gatekeepers would meet and discuss newsworthy events in the area, regionally, nationally, and internationally, and select what stories to publish on the front page of each section, the placement of each story, and any other wire content that should go into the next day’s paper. One of the copy editors finds a wire budget and prints it out for all gatekeepers at the meeting. (Budgets are emailed lists of all stories that are possibilities for publication, and wire budgets are lists of non-local stories — international, national, and regional). Not all gatekeepers interviewed were present at both afternoon budget meetings over the two days I was at this site. The photo editor and photographer were only present for the first day of observation. The publisher also was only present the first day’s budget meeting due to conflicts on the second day.

I noticed that during the budget meeting, the publisher paused at the international news section on the wire budget. He later explained that he wanted to get his copy editors and editors
to think more and break out of their usual routines. When I followed up with the gatekeepers present at that meeting, they said that his sudden interest in international news is not uncommon; the publisher just likes to make his staff think.

Of the nine gatekeepers at Newspaper 3, seven said they “usually looked at the international wire budget” but would often not “rank” international terrorism content highly in comparison to local news, or national news. “It all has to do with what’s important to our readers currently,” the publisher said. “I can’t push for an international terrorism story to go in the paper when there’s other local or national news that could directly affect our readership base.”

I found that generally, local gatekeepers at Newspaper 3 had relatively little control over international terrorism coverage, and international news. An outside party picked the list of possible non-local news stories, and the pages were designed at an out-of-state location run by the parent company. For Newspaper 3, the organization’s parent company offers pre-selected wire content (such as national news content, international news content and more) for Newspaper 3’s local gatekeepers to select. The parent company offers a variety of non-local news to all of the papers owned by the parent company, but it is up to the local gatekeeper at each paper to select what is offered from the pre-selected choices, and the individual local gatekeeper can specify stories to be added or removed. In regard to selecting international terrorism coverage or international coverage generally, Newspaper 3’s gatekeepers can request and submit stories from other wire services that are not pre-selected by the parent company, and request their placement on the page, to the off-site designer.

Newspaper 3 does have some control over published wire content, but many gatekeepers expressed that there was not enough time to focus on “wire pages” and that therefore, they let the parent organization make those executive decisions. One female copy editor said:
I hate that I don’t have the time for these pages, especially since the wire pages are where a good portion of news content can be found. It’s a disservice to our readers, but there’s nothing I can do to fix that.

During my observation, the copy editors could have selected international terrorism content or international news content in general from other wire services that were not pre-selected by the parent company, sent it to the off-site design center, and then had that content published in the newspaper, but they chose not to do this because the process eased their workload — important, given their time constraints. If a copy editor wanted to select a story not on the pre-selected wire budget offerings, the process would not be a quick one. The copy editor would not only have to select it from the online wire service database, but the copy editor would also need to edit the story to a specific length, create all headlines, sub-headlines, or include photos, and then send it over to the off-site design center.

On the wire budgets provided at the budget meeting, there were only two international news stories highlighted on the first day of observation, and three options the second day. Those stories that were highlighted were not about international terrorism. The editor-in-chief at Newspaper 3, said it’s not uncommon for there to not be international terrorism stories on the wire budget. However, he said:

It has to be a major event to be put on the international wire budget. It has to be even more important for us to request it for the front page. Mostly if it’s on the already pre-packaged wire content [our parent company] offers, then it’ll make it into the paper. If
it’s not, then one of the copy editors has to pull it and send it over, or [otherwise] accept that it probably won’t make it into the paper.

It should be noted that if a copy editor requests a specific story that is offered on the pre-selected wire budget, it will most likely be printed in the paper, unless the off-site designer has to change the page. All of the copy editors at *Newspaper 3* said that if the off-site designer has to make changes, the designer will message the copy editors through G-chat (Google chat that the organization uses) to discuss any issues/changes with the copy editor. Although the communication is limited through G-chat, copy editors can explain any issues they may have with the design or stories printed in the paper. In some instances, the designer at the off-site location has more control of content than the copy editors at *Newspaper 3* do. The designers could deny the local copy editors’ stories due to page designs constraints such as advertisements on the page.

**Research Question 1b**

*What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international news events in general?*

**Newspaper 1**

Because *Newspaper 1*’s parent company supplies all national and international news in a specific section without any input from local staff and management, the local gatekeepers no longer look at international news events as often as they would if they were in a typical newsroom setting. Ever-changing industry trends (here, the trend toward common editing/design
hubs) influences the “standard” routine practices, creating new ones for Newspaper 1 to follow and adhere to.

According to the editors, the aim of Newspaper 1 is to always put local news first. The three gatekeepers, two of whom have more than 20 years of experience each, are no longer required to scan through the wire budgets and select news content. As mentioned earlier, the older gatekeepers said they still look through the wire budgets offered for online content and because old habits die hard. Meanwhile, the third copy editor did not feel like readers were missing out if she did not look at the wire budgets since the newspaper had changed its focus to strictly local news before all else.

It was apparent early on during the observation period that organization and extra-media (parent company) influences strongly impacted what international news events would be published. With national, international, and international terrorism content being essentially decided by the parent company, there was little opportunity for local gatekeepers to alter the parent company’s selections.

**Newspaper 2**

*Newspaper 2* was the only newsroom that had what is considered a “traditional” newsroom setup, and also focused on more than just local news content. The editor-in-chief at Newspaper 2 said that in the past, the newspaper also had an international news reporter that focused on general international news. Due to budget cuts, dwindling circulation size, and other changes, the newspaper had to restructure itself in order to serve its community best. The locally and privately owned newspaper does not have to report to any overarching organization, and
therefore has more flexibility in the news the paper publishes. The evening copy editors can make decisions about wire stories that they think are important to publish in the newspaper.

When asked what is important regarding international news content, one copy editor said there are lots of variables:

I have to pick content that not just appeals to me, but also to the newspaper and the community. Usually I see a headline, or brief description, on the wire that catches my eye and that’s what is ultimately needed for me to pull that content for the paper. Other times, one of the editors will mention stories they want to see, or stories that our community needs to know about and that’s why I pull that content.

The copy editor later said the staff consciously thinks about and pulls content that the community may be interested in learning. She specifically cited the nearby military depot and the large population of retired military veterans, and said they can influence news decisions regarding more military wire content.

During the series of interviews, many copy editors at Newspaper 2 said they look for international stories that are intriguing to them, as well as what the community might be interested in. One copy editor said after the budget meeting, he will look through the international news wire service for stories regarding immigration, crisis in the Middle East, and any story from Asia because of the large Asian population in the area.
Newspaper 3

At the daily budget meetings, copy editors, editors, and more discuss all content offered on the Associated Press’ budget, as well as the pre-selected content offered through the parent company. The newspaper’s gatekeepers can specify which stories on the parent company’s daily budget they would like to use, which gives the newspaper some local organizational-level control. However, if the newspaper wants to use content that was not offered on the parent company’s daily budget (i.e. content offered through the Associated Press or other outlets), the nighttime copy editors must pull that content from the wire service, and then package the story, headlines, photos, and anything else, and send it to the off-site designer for them to layout the story on the page. The challenge with this, as mentioned previously, is that the copy editor does not have as much time to pull content, and there is always a chance that the designer cannot work with the story package and cannot place it on the page. As one copy editor said, space inside the newspaper is a precious commodity in the newspaper industry, and due to dwindling pages and the importance of advertisements, it is very common for stories — particularly international stories — not to be published in the newspaper.

One other finding was the influence of the opinions of executives on news decisions. It was apparent when the publisher of Newspaper 3 was present at the daily budget meetings, some gatekeepers felt that they could not voice their opinions since the publisher may disagree and overrule other opinions. This was not observed at all budget meetings, but one copy editor said she usually agrees with all gatekeeping decisions but she does not openly disagree with the publisher. She later added that she understands the publisher’s opinion and what he feels is important to the organization and community.
Overview of Research Questions 1a and 1b

I found that variability at the individual level did not greatly influence what types of international terrorism stories were published in smaller newspapers. As Reese and Shoemaker (2016) found, the organizational influences affect what the individual decides, meaning that gatekeepers are likely to focus on what they think is important to the organization, or to follow organizational processes, and not follow what they may personally believe. Extra-media influences, or the community, also impact the decisions the gatekeepers make. Extra-media influence from the community included a large Korean population surrounding Newspaper 1 and the military base nearby Newspaper 2.

With two of the three newspapers having outside parent organization influence on international terrorism coverage — another kind of “extra-media” level influence — control over international news gatekeeping is quite limited at the local level for these papers. In most instances, gatekeepers in all three newsrooms said they view international terrorism stories less often than other content. One female copy editor at Newspaper 3 said, “I would love to include more international terrorism news, but unfortunately we just can’t anymore. We’ve [the paper] lost a good portion of space in the paper for wire content … I read the wire budget every day and have noticed that we don’t get as much international terrorism content like we used to.” The copy editor shared that the wire budgets do not offer as much international news content as the budgets did previously.

It should also be noted that at Newspaper 2 and Newspaper 3, there was more variability in what was selected after the daily budget meetings because the night crew had some control over news selection. At Newspaper 2, the editorial board selected front-page stories, and noted specific stories offered on the wire budget, but the individual gatekeepers in the evenings who
designed the pages made the final decisions about what news content was actually published. The editorial board consisted of the publisher and editor-in-chief, as well as other editors: The editor-in-chief and publisher had final say, but the other editors and copy editors gave input on these initial decisions. Those select individuals’ decisions directly affected the news flow.

Similar to Newspaper 2, Newspaper 3’s editorial board made the initial executive decisions, about front-page content and top story choices for other pages, and then it came down to the individual gatekeepers to decide what other news content would be published. Newspaper 1 local staff does not select any international terrorism or international content.

Research Question 2a

What newsroom routines related to international terrorism coverage are evident in the newsroom?

Newspaper 1

At Newspaper 1, the editor-in-chief, two copy editors, and the online managing editor met early in the day, around 9 or 10 a.m., to discuss what the local news plan was. Newspaper 1 was the only newspaper in this study that had no direct impact on decisions regarding international terrorism coverage, or international news coverage and national news coverage. The morning group would later meet up in the early afternoon for another budget meeting to check in on stories and decide placement of those stories for the next day’s newspaper. International stories, as well as national stories, were pre-selected by the parent company. These decisions were made outside of Newspaper 1, and the staff there has no influence on what the company selects. This routine is fairly standard across the industry with this type of organization, according to the local gatekeepers within Newspaper 1.
While I was at *Newspaper 1*, no major international terrorism events occurred, so I had to ask follow-up questions to see if their routine would be different if there was a major international terrorism event that may be newsworthy enough to be published in the paper. One copy editor said the routine does not change much now that the newspaper is focusing solely on local news and letting the parent company handle non-local news. The parent company offers select wire news, including international news, and prepares a series of pages without input from local gatekeepers. Before the changes to *Newspaper 1*, the same copy editor said he would try and keep up to date on all types of terrorism news, just because it is important to have a well-rounded newspaper, but that routine has long since been broken. Another copy editor at *Newspaper 1* said he still looks through the wire budgets offered online for online content. Despite the parent company taking control of all international and national wire news content, the company does not update the newspaper’s website. Because of this, the copy editor said he selected all wire content to publish online, usually found through the parent company’s wire services. The copy editor also said he is limited to what wire services he can use for online content, because the parent company essentially has control of all wire news offered to him.

Because there were no major international terrorism attacks that warranted wire budget attention, I instead mentioned past international terrorism attacks (i.e. Paris in 2015, Brussels in 2016, Nice in 2016) to spur some discussion about media routines. The online managing editor recalled those attacks, saying that at the time the Islamic State (IS) was a major newsworthy threat to the United States, and therefore it warranted attention. She later added that there have not been many attacks of that caliber, or from an enemy group like IS, to warrant coverage. The online managing editor was the only gatekeeper at *Newspaper 1* that was not upset that the
parent company had taken control of international and national wire content, insisting that it was the best move for the newspaper.

On the other hand, one of the copy editors said that the routines have changed organizationally, but that individually, international terrorism coverage, as well as international news in general, should still be important. This copy editor said the changing of the newspaper structure, and how much influence the parent company has, affects the daily routines. With the parent company eliminating the need for local staff to look at the wire and pull specific stories, the staff at *Newspaper 1* are limiting themselves to just local content, the copy editor said.

During my time at *Newspaper 1*, I was told by one of the editors that the newsroom has fewer employees in the office, instead pushing the employees to be out of the office focusing mostly on local news and investigative journalism. According to the managing editor, local journalists come and go throughout the day, although it is not uncommon for many of the staff to work remotely. This push breaks traditional routines of journalists being in the office to type up stories, instead having journalists write from the road. Another routine that I was told about from one of the copy editors was the change the traditional newsroom setting to a focus on hyper-local news content. This new routine changed the newsroom dynamic. This routine was mandated, and so reinforced by the parent company, and as the managing editor said, “it’s to have our staff focus just on our community, and not the rest of the world. It gives us more time to write things going on here and less time worrying about wire stories.” Due to the small staff and the restructured focus on local content first, there was less discussion of news among those in the newsroom. The managing editor assigns stories and the staff write the assigned content without much discussion unless there was an issue with a story or source. The reporters are told to be
outside the office as much as possible, limiting communication between reporters and the editors.

While in *Newspaper 1*, I did not observe outside media influence via other media organizations. Traditionally, many newspaper newsrooms have had televisions, radios, and other means to keep up with news on the community, region, nation, and world. *Newspaper 1* had several televisions in the newsroom, but they were synced up to online activity, including Twitter and Facebook.

It should be noted that the importance of local news first is a standard routine not just at *Newspaper 1*, but also at the two other newspapers for this research. This routine, although often times taken for granted by gatekeepers, is important to acknowledge.

**Newspaper 2**

The routines at *Newspaper 2* were far more traditional than *Newspaper 1* with the gatekeepers making news content decisions in-house and not having to answer to a parent company. *Newspaper 2* had two daily budget meetings, one to get an idea on local news coverage, usually in the morning, and then a second meeting in the afternoon to discuss what was going into the paper, including wire content. Occasionally, due to staff time constraints, the morning meeting would not happen. This happened on the second day of my observation, with the editor-in-chief describing the cancelation of the morning meeting as a semi-routine.

Within the newsroom, the most apparent work routine that pertained to this study happened to be the discussion of news content on the wire. At both afternoon meetings, copy editors, after they had looked through available wire service news and made story selections, would supply wire budgets to all present gatekeepers, approximately six to 10 in total. On the
first day, the wire budget contained several international wire stories, including one regarding a
terror attack in the Middle East. During the meeting, both the editor-in-chief and managing editor
discussed local news first, and then talked over national news coverage and what was considered
important. Top national news stories were, for the most part, about American politics. The
gatekeepers present also took part in the discussion, ultimately deciding to have three local news
stories on the front page of the newspaper, and then one national story about the U.S.
government. There was no talk of international terrorism, or international news in general. This
routine of discussing the wire budget among the newsroom staff also happened the second day of
observation, with similar results.

Although the front page of Newspaper 2 was mostly local news, the copy editors, in
typical circumstances, have final say in what content goes inside the newspaper. Of course, the
publisher or editor-in-chief has final say, but as stated previously, the editor said he trusts his
staff and rarely asks for changes. One of the copy editors said her first task when arriving at
work is scanning the wire services for anything that catches her eye. She said she looks for large-
scale events such as attacks throughout the world, heart-warming stories, or important political
information that the public needs to know about. Usually, she said, there is always one
international terrorism story that seems important enough to include. She further added that as a
journalist, she developed an “eye” for important news because of following this routine. Other
copy editors and the night editor all agreed that usually they search through wire content and
then pull the stories they deem interesting. This routine was found not just at Newspaper 2, but
also in Newspaper 3.

One other routine found at Newspaper 2 was the acceptance of breaking international or
national news. Breaking news is an unplanned event that is extremely important for the
community to know about. Unlike *Newspaper 1*, where local staff had no control over their wire content, *Newspaper 2*’s lower-level gatekeepers could see an important terrorist attack story on the wire, and argue with the managing editor, night editor, or editor-in-chief for the story to be put on the front. International terrorism coverage is almost always considered breaking news, especially if it is a large-scale event. The copy editors at *Newspaper 2* were mentally prepared to move front-page content assignments inside the newspaper in order to publish breaking news on the front. This happened once during my observation, but it did not involve any international news. A local store announced it was closing late on the first night of observation, causing the copy editors to change the front page’s layout and move stories to inside pages. The night editor said breaking news happens frequently, and that it is part of the job as a journalist to react and adapt to the situation. The editor-in-chief said that if an international breaking news story happens, it potentially can “bump” a local news story that was originally on the front page, to an inside page.

**Newspaper 3**

During my time at *Newspaper 3*, there was one international terrorism story listed on the international wire budget regarding a terrorist attack in Kabul, Afghanistan. The attack included a bombing in a well-populated area, killing five. I noticed the gatekeepers discussed the attack extensively. I thought it was possible that their strong attention to the story was affected by my presence. Because of this, I chose to talk with the publisher about the average day-to-day routines regarding international terrorism attacks. The publisher said, “I see them on the budget, but usually we have to look at the whole budget and not just specific sections. I think a lot of us
are tired of seeing terrorism attacks in general. You being here probably does impact how we discuss, but that’s not on you; That’s us taking a look at ourselves and our decisions.”

One copy editor said it was easy to get lost in the minutia and standard routine when selection news, and that her decision-making skills could be sharpened. Other gatekeepers at Newspaper 3 said similar things, with the photo editor saying, “It’s hard to constantly be ‘on’ when picking the news. We’re human — we get tired of international terrorism coverage just like the community does. It’s draining even. But we try our best. That’s all we can do.”

On the second day, I noticed no clear evidence that my presence influenced routines, with most of the copy editors looking through the budget but not stopping at one specific section over the others. It was important to see a baseline routine for this study, since I felt that there was such a change in the routine.

Like Newspaper 2, Newspaper 3 also had several routines involving breaking news and how to handle it. Although Newspaper 3 does not design and layout the pages on-site anymore, breaking news can be included on the front page if the copy editor messages the off-site designer. One of the part-time copy editors said that the off-site design center usually offers breaking news updates for non-local stories, with the parent company emailing its subsidiaries about the breaking news options available. She followed up by saying on average, there are usually one or two breaking news emails sent out per night. This routine helps the copy editors keep tabs on events around the world without having to constantly skim wire services.

It should be noted that almost all gatekeepers I spoke with and observed had multiple news outlets on their phones, receiving push notifications about big events in the area, nation and world. Many international terrorism attacks are newsworthy enough to warrant a push notification, which the gatekeepers checked frequently. Although not a formal organization
routine, these individual routines helped influence news decisions for both *Newspaper 2* and *Newspaper 3* because there would be times that a gatekeeper’s phone would get a notification, before the wire service could offer the story to copy editors. This new-age practice helps shape gatekeeping decisions as a whole. One example found at *Newspaper 2* was an attack in the Middle East. One copy editor got a notification on her phone approximately four hours into her night shift and said she felt that it was extremely important to include. She then pulled a wire story that covered the attack and published the story inside the newspaper. At *Newspaper 3*, the editor said he regularly gets notifications on his phone and will text whoever is working that night, requesting that the copy editor messages the off-site designer to include the story, or pull the wire story and send it over to the designer. The editor also said that before the change, if he saw news through his phone or other media sites, he would call or text the copy editor on duty to include it.

**Research Question 2b**

*What newsroom routines related to general international news coverage are evident in the newsroom?*

**Newspaper 1**

As previously stated, *Newspaper 1* has no influence on any international news content in the paper, letting the parent organization remain in control of that information. This routine was fairly recent when I observed *Newspaper 1*, with some habits dying hard with two of the copy editors. Because of this, standard budget meetings about news content focused solely on local news and checking in with reporter statuses. Essentially, the routines listed in research question 2a can be applied to this question.
The local-first routine was the most apparent routine within the newsroom, with many of
the journalists focusing only on local content and the gatekeepers instructed to focus on local
news first by the parent company. The parent company decides all non-local wire content for
Newspaper 1.

Newspaper 2

At Newspaper 2, gatekeepers pick all wire content for the paper. Gatekeepers there look
not just at the highlighted budget items from the Associated Press, but also comb through the
wire aggregation software to find content. One copy editor and page designer said she not only
uses the aggregation software at work, but she also keeps up to date on news via social media,
top news agencies, and push notifications on her phone. She further added that she follows three
major international news outlets (CNN International, BBC, and Al Jazeera) to keep up to date on
important international news. Those three media outlets help her make informed decisions when
pulling any international news content.

Newspaper 3

The publisher of Newspaper 3 said he routinely makes a point to take part in daily budget
meetings and help make gatekeeping decisions. On the first day of observation at Newspaper 3,
he was present at the afternoon budget meeting. Although discussion of stories took place
between the six gatekeepers present at the meeting, the publisher voiced many opinions that at
times disagreed with the gatekeepers’ consensus or completely disregarded the other
gatekeeper’s opinions. Although no international news events were decided to be published on
the front page during the first day of observation, the publisher vetoed a political news story
about Congress in favor of a political news story about President Trump. Although before the publisher arrived at the meeting, I observed other gatekeepers discussing not wanting to publish what they called “another Trump story,” while observing the wire budget. The publisher’s decision was not disputed and the other gatekeepers silently accepted the decision. This silence in the presence of the publisher was found only at Newspaper 3; however, it could be said that Newspaper 1 showed a similar deference, since the paper’s parent company controls all wire content published.

Following up on the first day’s budget meeting, I asked several of the present gatekeepers if the publisher’s input at the meeting is a common occurrence. All of the gatekeepers at Newspaper 3 said the publisher will make executive decisions without asking for outside opinions frequently. One part-time copy editor said that she has started to not care as much about the publisher making those decisions, because at the end of the day the newspaper is not about her preferences. “We’re working together to publish content our readers want to see and should know about. I learned early on that I have some opinion [influence] when it comes to news decisions, but not a lot.”

On the second day of observation, the publisher was not present at the budget meeting. At that meeting, gatekeepers had a brief meeting about news content, which was all about local news and did not involve any international news coverage. Opinions and discussions at that meeting were very open, with the sports editor discussing his political beliefs while reviewing the wire budget and others in attendance agreeing or disagreeing, but there was no silence in decision making.

Two of the top copy editors at Newspaper 3 said that their parent company offers a selection of prepared pages and/or stories that can be used on the wire pages. One of the copy
editors said she usually never looks at what the parent company offers because of time constraints, but instead trusts the parent company to make good decisions and to offer readers as much information as possible. The other copy editor said:

I don’t focus much on any outside news anymore, because of all these changes. I may not like that this is where my career is in the grand scheme, but here we are. Nothing I can change.

I identified this process as a routine at Newspaper 3 because all the copy editors we observed routinely relying on the parent company’s wire content offerings without question.

**Overview of Research Questions 2a and 2b**

The essence of this research question was to understand newsroom routines regarding international news in general, and international terrorism new. The most evident newsroom routine throughout the study was the concept of local news first. This finding supports the initial gatekeeping theory founded by White (1964). White (1964) said gatekeepers would prioritize content according to its proximity to the newsroom.

The other notable routine in Newspaper 1 and Newspaper 3 was the clash of control between the parent company and the local gatekeepers. Traditionally, local gatekeepers would curate and select news daily for the newspaper, but now that parent companies have design centers to “streamline” the process, local gatekeepers were unable to maintain control of the news content. This routine seems to be becoming common in the industry.
Lastly, the common use of mobile push notifications suggested a budding routine. At all sites, it was evident that in some form, push notifications influenced news decisions in some way. At Newspaper 2, push notifications help nightly copy editors find news faster, and keep up to date with things beyond their coverage area. At Newspaper 3, copy editors said the push notifications they receive throughout their work shifts help keep them informed of out-of-area information; they then can contact the designer at the design center to ask that this breaking news content be included.

**Research Question 3a**

*What are gatekeeper’s perceptions of the importance and news value of international terrorism events?*

**Newspaper 1**

At Newspaper 1 the perception of international terrorism attacks among the three editors interviewed was highly varied. The online managing editor, who happened to be the youngest of the three gatekeepers, said she had less interest on international terrorism coverage than her older counterparts. This editor said:

> Our newspaper is local first. That’s what I focus on. We let the parent company focus on everything else. Our readers want local news more than anything else. So that’s what we do — we do local first. My job isn’t about international news, therefore I don’t focus on it.
Her older counterparts; however, view international terrorism news, and international news in general, as extremely important to the readers and the newspaper in general. One copy editor said he habitually scours the wire aggregation sources available to him for latest updates on any international news not just for himself, but for the newspaper’s website. He said:

As a journalist, my first duty is to report the news. I am in this industry to report all news that the community and reader should know about. I won’t give that up just because we’ve changed our focus. It’s extremely important to me that our readers get as much information as I can offer them.

That copy editor had been with the newspaper for more than 20 years and had seen multiple changes within the organization. Another copy editor, who has worked there for more than 10 years, expressed feeling the same way. The two more experienced gatekeepers expressed many times that international terrorism attack coverage is exceptionally important.

The generational aspect of perception of importance was not just apparent during the observation portion of this site, but it was also seen during budget meetings. The youngest editor at Newspaper 1 would just focus on local news content during budget meetings, not interested in discussing wire content or even talking about major events. She showed no interest in talking about news content that she could not control or submit for the actual publication in the newspaper. After the budget meeting, the other two walked to their desks discussing news going on outside of the local setting, focusing on politics and President Trump’s talks of international affairs. The older editors showed signs of aging in an industry of perpetual change, resisting the “new” media in exchange for keeping with older traditions. As one copy editor said, the parent
company wants a hyper-local focus for all content, because that is what the readers want. However, he said he feels that the parent company is limiting the staff and the readers from a complete news experience.

**Newspaper 2**

Of the seven gatekeepers identified, almost all of them perceived international terrorism attack coverage as typically important, but many of the copy editors said that international news in general is the first to be bumped off the page for more local and/or pressing matters. According to Wu (1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 & 2007), distance from an event, such as a terrorism attack in Europe, will not impact journalists’ local news coverage when the organization is not near the event unless it is a large-scale attack or has a direct effect on the community or nation. The editor-in-chief at *Newspaper 2* said there has to be a direct link to the community, or the nation, for it to warrant major attention in the newspaper. However, several copy editors said during interviews that they still selected stories on international terrorism or international news coverage for publication because these stories were important to them.

The editor-in-chief discussed what type of international terrorism attack would be needed to be published on the front page, citing the Paris attacks in late 2015 as one example. Smaller attacks, he said, don’t warrant front-page attention in his paper unless it directly impacts the U.S. in a major way. This finding shows that the coverage of international terrorism coverage is important to the editor-in-chief but not as important as compared to national or local news. I found that the editor-in-chief primarily left most wire content decisions up to the lower-level gatekeepers in the organization. During one of the budget meetings, there was an instance where the editor-in-chief did highlight one wire story from the wire budget, which was a heart-warming
feature story about a family in Texas that had universal “human appeal” to put into the paper. This instance shows that there are stories the editor-in-chief will prioritize over local news — so, it could be perceived that if the “right” kind of international or international terrorism event occurred and was on the wire budget, the editor-in-chief would highlight that story to be published somewhere in the newspaper. In this case, the perceived impact of the storytelling seemed to be the motivating factor, making it the “right kind” of international story.

The individual copy editors, night editor and managing editor all seemed to reach consensus regarding international terrorism coverage and the importance of it. One copy editor said she always tries to include some type of international news story inside the paper, sometimes more than one story if space allows — but that is ultimately determined by advertising placement on the pages and what other content is on the wire. The copy editor said:

I like international news, and I think it’s important to our readership to get a well-rounded picture of the world. Of course, I can’t publish everything in the newspaper because of space, but if I am designing the wire pages that day, I’m always going to have something about international news. And that’s what it really comes down to, each of us [the copy editors] makes individual decisions about our pages and our personal interests affect what we pull. I may pull more international stories than say [another copy editor] but she may pull more feature-based stories than I would.

Perception of news importance was more affected by the factors at the individual level in this organization, leaving the copy editors and page designers to make most of the inside wire story decisions without any supervisors’ opinions. One copy editor said she sees a lot of
international terrorism attack coverage on the wire but ignores it for other types of news. She said, “It’s important, but I don’t think it’s truly important to our readers as much anymore. I also don’t really have an interest in international terrorism coverage, it happens too frequently.”

Among the seven participants, I found that four of them, including the editor-in-chief, said that international terrorism attacks that they are sometimes overlooked because the source of the attack is too far away for their readers to care. One copy editor indicated that the frequency of attacks diminish their appeal: “the more similar an attack is to others, the less coverage it will get” when looking at the wire content. He further added that the staff at the newspaper can get overwhelmed by the amount of wire content easily, so there is a limit to how often he looks at the wire so he does not become too affected by content.

**Newspaper 3**

As recent as 2015, *Newspaper 3* was very similar to *Newspaper 2* with how gatekeepers decide content and prepare pages. All participants at *Newspaper 3* said they individually valued international terrorism attacks and would put these news stories in the paper. In fact, one of the head copy editors said she would do shorter stories with more headlines for international news and international terrorism coverage — like briefs of the stories — to get more information out to the readers.

Of course, that was the long-gone heyday of *Newspaper 3*. Today, new organizational restrictions have affected how international news content — and wire content in general — is decided on and published. The head copy editor said she hates that since the start of her career in the 1990s, the industry has changed so much and now there is little time for her to care about what she enjoys doing most, including looking through non-local stories. She said:
The industry has changed a lot since I started working at [Newspaper 3]. Each day I come in and have so much to do, from sending stories to the designer, to online content, to editing, and creating headlines. And that’s just with the paper, that’s not even what I do with our [other publications]. I hate that I don’t have the chance to look through the wire, it used to be one of the best parts of my job. I learned so much. But now I’m just trying to survive the evenings and get our paper to the printer by deadline. [The parent company] changes our deadline constantly, the designers over in [the design center] design several newspapers every night and they don’t have time for us. Our deadline could be 10:45 and the designer may not start our paper until 10. We suffer because of the changes and it significantly affects how we view news. This wasn’t just a job for me in the beginning, it was my passion. Now I’m not sure.

The copy editor also said despite this, she tries to make it a point to look at the wire for content, and tries to send over any content that she finds interesting to the off-site design center, but wire content is a low priority to her with all her other duties.

The publisher of Newspaper 3 said he looks at the wire budgets throughout the day, stating that many wire services send multiple budgets throughout the day and then the parent company emails multiple breaking news story budgets as well. The publisher said he sees what non-local content is available for printing but just does not care as much as he used to. He said:

We’re most definitely overwhelmed by content, not just international news but in general. It’s hard to separate ourselves as journalists when we are constantly berated by news. We are most definitely desensitized, all of us. When we see terrorism coverage day in and day out, we don’t want to see it anymore.
I found that in general, at Newspaper 3, the gatekeepers within the organization personally place a high value on international news content and international terrorism coverage, but as the publisher said, they are desensitized by the overwhelming nature of news flow, by the pace of the process, and by the lack of control and processes of the parent company. Organizational constraints and community pressures also affect these gatekeepers’ decision-making about news choices, which Reese and Shoemaker (2016) wrote about, so does personal values.

**Research Question 3b**

*What are gatekeeper's perceptions of the importance and news value of international news generally?*

**Newspaper 1**

The three gatekeepers at *Newspaper 1* had varying opinions and perceptions of international news. As previously stated, one participant seemed to focus only on the task at hand, falling into line within an organization that has a main focus on local news. The other two gatekeepers had more work experience, not just at the newspaper but in the industry in general, which helped shape their perception of the importance of international news. One copy editor said he misses the days of pulling wire content for the readers, especially since the newspaper does not make any wire news decisions in house. The wire content is instead decided by the overarching company which is based in Virginia and not the copy editors. Two of the copy editors said the change and limitations of wire content affects how they view the content, including international news, when they no longer influence wire news decisions. Those
limitations negatively affect the copy editors, and other staff members, into not caring as much about wire news, specifically international wire news.

One copy editor there said that in college, his instructors taught him to be curious and intuitive. Since graduating from college more than 30 years ago, he has seen the industry change and affect what he thinks is important. He said:

If I were to take a look at our newspaper as an outsider, the focus is just what is happening in [the city]. Nothing more. I think it has affected me and my decision-making skills more than I’d like to admit when you ask about my perceptions. I care, but the organization doesn’t. But when the organization cares about an event [like terrorism or breaking news], then it’s well-publicized to the point that I don’t care anymore. It’s a battle for sure.

The copy editor’s statement showed that within the organization, there are many variables that affect what a gatekeeper cares about. It should also be noted that within Newspaper 1, it appears that factors at the organizational level (in-house and the parent company) strongly influence gatekeeper’s perception of news content.

Newspaper 2

Because Newspaper 2 is a privately-owned paper, there is much more autonomy among gatekeepers and their perception of news. Since there is no “corporate mandate” or expectations from an overarching parent company, the gatekeepers there have more say in the news content they choose to publish.
I found that most gatekeepers within the organization were happy to work for a company that does not have strict mandates or guidelines, giving them more flexibility with their work. However, it was noticeable that some of the gatekeepers were bothered by the amount of national and international wire news that could be used within the newspaper. For example, the business editor said he sees a lot of terrorism news or political content that diminishes how much he cares about much of the national and international news generally. He said:

Every day, there are several stories on the wire about [President] Trump. At this point, I can’t stand it anymore. I am over it. I just don’t care. I think it can be said that I feel this way about more than just [President] Trump, but news in general.

Two of the copy editors who also designed the pages of the newspaper said that despite feeling like they are “plagued” by international news content constantly through wire services, Twitter, mobile apps, and more, they try and separate themselves from the news emotionally for the readers’ sake. One copy editor said she does not just look at what is important to her, but also what is important to the community. She wants the readers to have international news so she looks for international news more often than some other copy editors within the organization.

I found that within the organization, four gatekeepers said they were “overwhelmed” by international news content on a daily basis, but they tried their best to avoid being biased against printing those stories. The other three gatekeepers said they did not feel overwhelmed by international news content, instead saying they keep a sharp eye about news not just in the area or state, but in the nation and world and do not let the content affect them personally.
Newspaper 3

Due to the fact that Newspaper 3’s copy editors tend to give wire content control to the off-site design center, many of those interviewed perceived international news similar to that of political news — it is an everyday occurrence and sometimes it is more covered than other stories on the wire. As the editor-in-chief said, there is a lot of content coming across the wire daily, and it can be difficult to see everything, know of everything, and then pull the right content for their readers. The editor-in-chief further added that it is slightly a relief for his staff to have the off-site design center and parent company decide wire content for the newspaper, saying that it gives more time back to the copy editors to focus on local news and other aspects of their jobs. However, the editor-in-chief said:

On the opposite side, not having control of wire content does irritate me because how do I know if the people in [another state] have the same perception of news as we do here? It’s a lot of trust to have. For example, it’s not international news but people in [the design center] think that hockey is extremely important to readers. Our readers don’t care about hockey. And we get complaints from people that we have too much hockey wire content. But do the designers over there listen when we ask them not to put in hockey content? No. They have too much to do over on their side that they can’t care. Which isn’t their fault, it’s the industry’s.

I found that within Newspaper 3’s organization, the gatekeepers cared deeply for a lot of international news content, as well as other wire content, but because of the situation they are in, they cannot influence wire content decisions as much. Many of the copy editors within
Newspaper 3 said they miss the days of scanning through the wire budgets and wire aggregation services to find out about new content. One of the copy editors said the changes in the page design process (moving off-site), as well as budget cuts, have impacted how much wire news the newspaper even sees before they decide on daily content. One copy editor said:

We used to have this program where all the wire stories would be there for us to pick and pull from. We don’t have that anymore. We used to have more regional content and international content too, but we don’t anymore. We’re limited to just using the AP’s website for content. It’s a definite change and it does impact how much I care about wire content. Picking wire content used to be my favorite because I could showcase so much on a page, now I just let [the parent company] make those decisions.

Based on my interviews within the newspaper, the changes within the past few years have negatively impacted the perception and importance of wire news content in general, as well as the motivation among staff and management to explore it — not just international news. Unlike Newspaper 2, which still has the ability to let its copy editors scan the wire, Newspaper 3 struggles to find content due to limited wire services available to the staff, instead relying on the parent company to select and control a majority of the wire content pages.

Overview of Research Questions 3a and 3b

At each of the sites observed in this study, it was apparent that there was a generational shift in the importance of international news in general and international terrorism news. This does not mean that all gatekeepers in various ages had differing views of importance of the news...
content, but generally, it was evident in the three newsrooms I observed. Gatekeepers who had more traditional newsroom experiences viewed international news content and international terrorism news content as important, despite many of the gatekeepers interviewed in this study working at outlets with off-site design centers making wire content decisions. Younger gatekeepers interviewed in this study showed signs of fatigue towards international news and said that if it is not in their job description, it is not important to them.

The newspapers in this study are usually the traditional “training grounds” for young journalists, which suggests if this is a trend, it could possibly affect how future journalists are trained and how they view non-local wire content. Of course, this finding is limited to the small sample size.
DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore and begin to understand how local newsrooms operate, as well as understand how international news and international terrorism attacks are viewed by local journalists and gatekeepers and whether international news content affects gatekeeping decisions. This study was inspired by my time in a newsroom and a conversation between myself and an editor, who said an international terrorism attack was not important unless “100 people were killed” to be put in the newspaper the next day. The findings from this study were both expected and unexpected.

The first pair of research questions asked about variability in newsroom coverage regarding international news and international terrorism. Initially, I expected to talk with local gatekeepers at newsrooms who pulled wire content and discuss why they selected the content they picked. Although it was unknown at the time that two of the newsrooms did not select wire content for their respective newspapers, the findings showed that despite the limitations, the gatekeepers still had opinions on the content selected. At Newspaper 1, the parent company controls all wire content, not letting the local gatekeepers influence the selections. However, before the parent company took control of wire content, the company asked the local gatekeepers what news they think is important to their community. The design hub workers are therefore supposed to pull content that is shaped by these guidelines, with the goal of selecting non-local news that would be interesting and informative to the local readers. This finding was not expected. At Newspaper 2, the local staff select and place the content on pages that they design.
This more traditional newsroom had many copy editors who made executive decisions about wire content, without much influence from the editor-in-chief or other higher up editors. The editor-in-chief said he has “blind trust” in his staff, knowing that they can make informed news decisions without his approval. The copy editors at Newspaper 2 said they make news decisions not just based on personal preferences, but also news that they think is important, informative, or interesting to the community. At Newspaper 3 the newspaper is designed off-site, at a design center. Because of the hectic day-to-day schedules, copy editors at Newspaper 3 have the option to let the design center pre-select wire news, eliminating the need for copy editors to send over wire content. Although many copy editors said they use the design center’s pre-selected wire news to fill pages and ease their work load, the top copy editor said she “hate[s] to let go of wire content” and will occasionally send stories that interest her to the design center to place on the page. So there was a great deal of variability in the non-local news selection process across three newsrooms, and the involvement of the design hubs played a large part in explaining this variability.

The second pair of research questions asked about what newsroom routines related to international news coverage in general, and international terrorism coverage specifically, are evident. The most apparent routine was the staff’s focus on local news first. All newsrooms in this study were local organizations in the community. It is assumed that this routine is an unshakeable, if informal, policy by management, and that the routine was taken for granted by staff. Therefore, the routine had a powerful impact on the way news stories were selected and on the actual selection. Another routine I found at Newspaper 1 and Newspaper 3 was the daily acceptance, among most staffers, of the disenfranchisement of copy editors in the role of selecting news content. The copy editors at both newspapers were forced to be hands-off on wire
news content in general. Old habits die hard, and several of the older copy editors interviewed at each newspaper still look for content despite it not being in their job description. Yet, younger copy editors seem to buy into the routine of local news first and without hesitation. This may also be affected by education and the initial routines and practices instilled in journalists during their formative college years. One gatekeeper in the organization focused solely on local news, saying her job was to put local content first and let the parent company control everything else. This finding shows that routines seem to be shaped by a generational difference between professionals in the media, where “traditional” gatekeepers continued to look for news outside of their coverage area and “newer” gatekeepers focus only on the assignment at hand.

The third pair of research questions asked about the gatekeeper’s perceptions of the importance and news value of international news and international terrorism news. At *Newspaper 1*, there was a generational difference in the perception of importance regarding international news and international terrorism news. As previously stated, one of the younger editors “bought” into the idea that her job is only focused on local news, because the parent company controls all wire content in the newspaper. However, her two older counterparts at *Newspaper 1* still viewed wire content in general as important, despite the parent company taking control of wire content. Gatekeepers at *Newspaper 2* regularly scanned wire services and pull content that not only interests them, but also informs the community. One copy editor said she always tries to pull at least one international news story, whether about terrorism or not, because it is “important for the readers to get a full picture of what is going on in the world.” And at *Newspaper 3*, most gatekeepers there also viewed international news content as important, despite the fact that the organization did not design the newspaper in-house anymore, due to the newspaper’s parent company. However, those same gatekeepers exhibited signs of
being overwhelmed by looking for wire news content. Another key finding was the unexpected perception that looking at wire service content could be a “hassle.” At Newspaper 3, copy editors have the option of selecting wire content, packaging the content, and then sending it to the designer at the off-site location. Copy editors also had the option to let the designer in the off-site location pick pre-selected wire content and manipulate the content to fill a page. The head copy editor at Newspaper 3 said she would like to find wire content, but she does not have the time to anymore. Other copy editors at Newspaper 3 agreed with the notion that finding wire content was too time-consuming and it was easier to let the parent company’s off-site designer pull pre-selected wire content. The copy editors unanimously agreed that they usually let the off-site designer pick wire content, unless there is a breaking news story, in which case the copy editors would occasionally send the content to the designer.

**Theoretical Implications of Gatekeeping Theory**

I originally set out to talk with dozens of gatekeepers (i.e. journalist, copy editors, editors, publishers, or anyone who influenced news decisions) about their perception of international news and international terrorism attack coverage and whether or not it was important at a “local first newspaper.” I found that in all three newsrooms I studied, one recurring and powerful routine was the idea of local news first. Each newspaper’s mission was to serve its local community first and foremost, and the staff take this for granted. But despite the routine, many journalists are trained to look for more than just local news, and the newsrooms understand that news beyond the local level is also important. But as Wu (1997, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2007) said, international news content, especially any content that is extremely far away from a newspaper, is less likely to be printed. This routine substantially shaped the study’s findings.
Gatekeeping theory, although challenged in recent years, was very much evident in this study, suggesting that despite the change in the media environment, the theory holds up. Despite having an overwhelming amount of news content flooding the gates, gatekeepers are still making decisions in some way, whether traditionally selecting the news or having an outside parent company’s design center make news decisions. This study supports the idea of second-level gatekeeping, with other “non-traditional” influences affecting news decisions.

**Theoretical Implications of International News Flow**

Regarding previous research about international news flow and the organization or prioritization about news content, I found that most of the pre-existing research was supported with my study. As Wu (1997, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2007) said, the farther away a news story occurs from the news organization, the less likely that story will be printed in that news organization’s newspaper. Many editors, copy editors, and other staff said that despite the interest in international news events, they probably will not print international news content in their respective newspapers because of the distance from the event to their location. However, although Wu (1997, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2007) focused largely on how distance affected gatekeeping decisions, I found that emotional fatigue also affected international news decisions, despite the fact that two of the newspapers studied had off-site design centers that made or mostly handled these news decisions. At Newspaper 3, nearly all of the nine participants interviewed expressed compassion fatigue and fatigue in general toward international news coverage. They said that constant updates, similar attacks, and an increase amount of international news and international terrorism news coverage has affected how they view content. This finding could supplement future research in international news flow content.
Theoretical Implications of Desensitization

Another facet of this study was to identify any signs of desensitization regarding international terrorism coverage. I found that several gatekeepers, including Newspaper 3’s publisher, acknowledged that they were “overwhelmed” and “ignored” international news content because it is prominent among wire services. Evidence of desensitization was found at two newspapers. Many copy editors at Newspaper 2 said they tried to keep their eyes fresh, but even over time, the sheer amount of non-local news on the wire will get to them. The publisher at Newspaper 3 said:

We’re absolutely desensitized, not just to international terrorism stories, but to a lot of stories that we see on the wire or in a budget. We’re the first people to see news content, before even the readers see it. We’re trained to always look for news and after awhile, things slip by. It happens. I can’t imagine even a single person in this newsroom that isn’t desensitized to something we cover.

It is also important to note that journalists who do not frequently look through wire services or other media outlets may be more likely to lose their “sense” or “eye” for interesting non-local stories. The managing editor at Newspaper 1 said she did not look for news other than local news because local news was the focus of her job. A risk here is that editors could lose their “sense” or “eye” for non-local news content. Comments from other editors across the papers suggested other editors — copy editors and others — were also unlikely to “practice” looking for
non-local stories and exercising that form of news judgement. This would be interesting to follow up on for future research.

**The Importance of Push Notifications**

A new potential budding “routine” found at all newsrooms was the use of cellphone notifications and apps to keep up to date with news content. Several gatekeepers throughout this study discussed the importance of push notifications and how it would affect what news was selected, especially since those gatekeepers may see the notification on their phones before seeing that content on the wire services. It may be possible that these notifications, in the future, could help local newspapers get more information into their publications, especially international terrorism wire news content. It could be possibly that because of the increase in push notifications and news apps, more wire content from a variety of outlets would be available, although there is a possibility that push notifications may be inaccurate or from less credible outlets. However, the parent company of each newsroom may have some influence on what is allowed to be published. Although I do not classify this as a routine just yet, the importance should be noted for future research.

**In Review**

This study started out searching to understand the roles, routines, and influences within a newspaper’s newsroom. Throughout my research, one thing was clear: local newsrooms and their editors, copy editors, and more, are directly affected by wire content they see throughout their work days. Despite two newsrooms being designed by off-site design centers, I found that a majority of participants viewed international wire content and international terrorism content
often and had opinions about said wire content. During my time in each newsroom, I noticed many symptoms and signs of desensitization. From the constant influx of international news content and international terrorism content, to the pressures of selecting the most important news to print, many gatekeepers showed signs of desensitization. The publisher at *Newspaper 3* said him, and his staff, are desensitized to many things, not just international wire news. However, because two of the newspapers observed in this study had parent companies that mandated they be designed off-site, many of the participants said despite their professional training to look for wire news and interesting content for readers, they find it a “hassle” to go the extra mile and find wire news when the parent company already offers and supplies selected wire content. This parent company mandate could possibly affect the “eye” many copy editors have when deciding wire news as well as how future journalists or gatekeepers are trained during their formative years. At *Newspaper 1*, one younger managing editor did not look for wire content because it was not a part of her “job description” and therefore was of no concern to her, whereas her older counterparts still focused on wire content despite it being out of their hands. It could be said that because of the generational difference, and that local or smaller newsrooms are the training grounds for young journalists, future gatekeepers may not get as much sufficient knowledge about wire content and the importance of it.

The local-first routine, which all three of these newsrooms exhibited, is one routine that seems to be unshakeable. At *Newspaper 1* and *Newspaper 3*, the change to design centers is so that local gatekeepers can focus on local news and not outside wire content. This idea is supposed to streamline the work for copy editors and keep them focused on their community and not outside content. Many gatekeepers at all newsrooms said they felt that they were doing a disservice to their community by not scanning or actively including international wire content.
Some of them also said that despite the fact they felt like they were not serving their readers well, the ease of using the parent company’s services helped alleviate the “hassle” of selecting wire content when under a tight deadline.

With the rise of push notifications about news events across the world, copy editors, editors, and local journalists are inundated with more content than ever. Through the use of Apple News, Google, Reddit, social media, and other apps on cellphones, news is reaching more people than ever. Although there is a chance that some apps and platforms could push out inaccurate content, several copy editors at Newspaper 2 and Newspaper 3 said they use push notifications to learn about news events and then look for those stories on the wire. These notifications can help local journalists get more information into their newspapers and websites than before when journalists had to wait for content to move across the wire, and then hopefully find the content.

As with any study, this one has limitations. It would be beneficial to open the study up to more participants and newsrooms. Although three newspapers was a practical sample for this study, it would be worthwhile to get more data and details of how other “local” newsrooms perceive international terrorism news and international news in general. I would also have liked to have all sites of this study closer together, as I felt that there was a lack of similar wire coverage to compare between each newsroom. Another factor not considered at the time was the number of days each newspaper publishes. Two of the newspapers did not have daily papers, and that could have an impact on the international wire content published. Also, it would be a good idea, for in the future, to talk with designers at these design hubs and officials at these parent companies to learn more about how they select wire content, and what factors affect those decisions. Newspaper 1 did not have any influence at all on its wire content and I felt that the
data collected did not affect any of my findings, but I also felt that it would be interesting to focus on newspapers in the same situation as *Newspaper 1* for future research. I would suggest in the future, separate the newspapers that have control or semi-control over selecting wire content, from other newspapers whose parent company decides it, and examine how those gatekeepers make their decisions. Separating the two types of newspapers, especially since the media is increasingly moving toward off-site design centers, would be interesting research and compare how they view and decide on wire content. If this idea were to be expanded, it would be appropriate to a quantitative survey to study a larger sample of newsrooms and/or design centers — and over the same period of time, instead of being spaced out — to understand how the gatekeepers made their decisions.
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APPENDIX A
Interview Questions

RQ1a: What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international terrorism (desensitization, international news flow, etc.)?

RQ1b: What explains variability in the newsroom’s coverage of international news events in general (desensitization, international news flow, etc.)?

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your position within the newsroom.

2. Walk me through the process in the newsroom by which decisions are made about choosing and publishing international news.
   1. Who are the key people in this decision-making process?

3. What kind of factors come into play when considering non-local events for possible publication?
   1. Do those factors change when considering international terrorism events, and if so, how?
   2. Would you say this way of thinking about international news is typical of local news outlets generally? Or are there certain kinds of international news that your publication might consider that other local outlets might not? If so, why or why not?

4. Would you say these stories have a different kind of impact on you now than when you were first starting out in the field?
5. Do you think decisions about selecting and publishing international terrorism news are affected by the sheer number of such occurrences? If so, how and why?

RQ2a: What newsroom routines related to international terrorism coverage are evident in the newsroom?

RQ2b: What newsroom routines related to general international news coverage are evident in the newsroom?

1. Describe to me the day-to-day steps when deciding international news selection or play. (this question asked only if the interviewer thinks it has not yet been sufficiently answered yet).

   1. Do you have any rules of thumb or guidelines about choosing international news stories and how to play them? If so, what are they? Where did those guidelines come from?

2. Can you think of a situation where an international news story was selected for publication, and upper management changed the decision? Or perhaps a situation in which an international news story was published and upper management expressed displeasure later about the selection or play of the story? If so, how and why did that take place?
RQ3a: What are gatekeeper’s perceptions of the importance and news value of international terrorism events?

RQ3b: What are gatekeeper's perceptions of the importance and news value of international news generally?

1. How important is it to publish international news for your readers, and why? How do you know this?
   1. What about international terrorism news?
   2. What are your personal views on the importance of information about international terrorism, and why?

2. Let me give you a hypothetical situation: Three separate, but highly similar terrorism attacks occur: one in Cairo, Egypt, one in London, England, and a third in Baghdad, Iraq. The three attacks all happened in crowded urban areas, they have a similar number of dead and injured, and the Islamic State claimed responsibility for all three. Assume these events happen a few months apart from one another, and assume a similar news environment for each event – in other words, the other news taking place at the time of each event is roughly equal in importance. Would you say it was likely these three stories would receive equal treatment, in terms of space and prominence? Why or why not? If there are differences, what would those be, and why?

3. Do you have any other comments to add about the coverage of international news or news about international terrorism?
   1. Do you know of anyone who would be a good fit for this study?
APPENDIX B

Figure 1

Revision 1 of model of a hierarchy of influences on media content by Shoemaker and Reese

Ideological influences
Extramedia influences
Organizational influences
Media routines
Influences
Individual influences

This reconceptualization of the visual used with Shoemaker and Reese's theoretical model of a hierarchy of influences on media content depicts a situation in which strong media routines have not yet developed. In this situation—common in the early 21st century in convergence/multimedia journalism and newer-media journalism—the individual can breach the thin or non-existent layer of constraints from media routines and have a greater-than-normal influence on media content.
APPENDIX C

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
Office of the Vice President for Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

September 12, 2018

Caroline Gazza
Department of Journalism & Creative Media
College of Communication & Information Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870172


Dear Ms. Gazza:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on September 10, 2019. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]

Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance

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