# Proximity as a News Value: A Quantitative Analysis of February 2023 Türkiye Earthquakes News in International Media[1]

## Haber Değeri Olarak Yakınlık Etkisi: Şubat 2023 Türkiye Depremlerine İlişkin Uluslararası Medyada Yer Alan Haberlerin Niceliksel Bir Analizi

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## Abstract

*The researchers mainly assert that the press prioritizes the country's neighboring geographical areas in covering foreign news. As a news selection criterion, proximity is an essential measure of becoming news, especially in disasters. Türkiye faced devastating earthquakes in February 2023, and the news on the disaster covered a significant place in international media, which is vital to become a medium for rescue efforts and foreign aid to those in need. This study aims to determine whether the international media covers earthquake news within the "proximity" news value criteria. Hence, selected newspapers in the sixteen countries are analyzed quantitatively for five days after the event. The analysis results show that physically close nations cover the related news more than physically distant nations, partly confirming previous studies. However, the effect of the physical distance of the newspaper's hometown to the event scene on its coverage has started to lose its importance due to its online accessibility. The import, export, tourism, and population volume between countries does not have a significant effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country, contrary to what was expected. Earthquakes have a news value of magnitude, but in the absence of physical proximity, journalists seek psychological closeness to the readers. Therefore, the historical background, the religion and nationality relationship, and the current bilateral relations between the countries should also be considered in the evaluations regarding the news coverage in other countries.*

*Keywords: News Values, Proximity Effect, Earthquake News.*

## Öz

*Araştırmacılar, basının dış haberleri aktarırken öncelikle ülkenin komşu coğrafi bölgelerine öncelik verdiğini öne sürmektedirler. Bir haber seçim kriteri olarak yakınlık, özellikle afetlerde haber olmanın önemli bir ölçütüdür. Türkiye, Şubat 2023'te yıkıcı depremlere maruz kalmış, kurtarma çalışmalarına ve ihtiyaç sahiplerine yönelik dış yardımların bir aracı olması açısından hayati önem taşıyan bu felaket ile ilgili haberler, uluslararası medyada önemli bir yer tutmuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı, uluslararası medyanın deprem haberlerini "yakınlık" haber değeri kapsamında ele alıp almadığını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu kapsamda on altı ülkeden seçilmiş gazeteler olaydan sonraki beş gün boyunca niceliksel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sonuçları, fiziksel olarak yakın olan ulusların birbirleri ile ilgili haberleri fiziksel olarak uzak olan uluslara göre daha fazla haberleştirdiğini göstermektedir ve bu da önceki çalışmaları kısmen teyit etmektedir. Gazetenin bulunduğu yer ile olay mahallinin fiziki mesafesinin haber içeriğine etkisi, gazetelerin çevrimiçi erişilebilirliği nedeniyle önemini kaybetmeye başlamıştır. Ülkeler arasındaki ithalat, ihracat, turizm ve nüfus hacminin, ilgili ülkedeki deprem haberlerinin miktarı üzerinde beklenenin aksine önemli bir etkisi bulunmadığı görülmüştür. Depremlerin haber değeri büyüktür, ancak gazeteciler fiziksel yakınlığın olmadığı durumlarda okuyucu ile psikolojik yakınlık ararlar. Bu nedenle haberlerin diğer ülkelerde haberleştirilme oranına ilişkin değerlendirmelerde, ülkeler arasındaki tarihsel arka plan, din ve milliyet ilişkisi ile güncel ikili ilişkilerin durumu da göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Haber Değerleri, Yakınlık Etkisi, Deprem Haberleri.*

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## Introduction

Destructive earthquakes cover much space in newspapers due to their news value. It is a reminder of the immense power of nature and the need for us to come together to support those affected by these events. Earthquakes have always been a subject of great interest for researchers, especially those interested in combining extra-media with media content data. Official agencies monitor and register earthquakes systematically by precise and accessible measures, whereas the relationship between media and earthquake coverage has not been studied sufficiently. The literature so far has some common findings through the relationship. The earthquake news focuses on short-term issues such as magnitude, tsunami alerts, human losses, material damage, and rescue operations. The newspapers hardly cover the long-term recovery, restoration, reconstruction, mitigation, and prevention issues. Therefore, there is a typical framing of the earthquake in the international news (Devès et al., 2019). The analysis made by Gaddy & Tanjong (1986) hypothesizes that the U.S. news media distort reality in their coverage of the Third World by slanting the news toward bad news or coups and earthquakes, but found that the earthquake coverage is not clearly biased against the Third World. Besides, the severity of natural disasters can hardly explain the amount of attention given by newscasts. According to Adams (1986), earthquake coverage is not determined by geographic origin but by human and physical consequences. For Singer et al. (1991), the number of deaths in natural disasters and their geographic location affects their coverage. The study of Simon (1997) indicated that more U.S. news coverage increased collective donations by private citizens, and the amount of news coverage was not associated with government assistance or international aid. In another study regarding the U.S. news media coverage of foreign disasters, depending on the event's magnitude, the only contextual influence that demonstrates the expected relationship with the amount of coverage is the physical distance (Van Belle, 2000). Koopmans and Vliegenthart (2010) conducted a study depending on the factors that influence news diffusion from the source location of an event to an adopting medium. The factors (event characteristics, homophily, network ties, source power, status, and selective exposure to similar events) were analyzed in American, British, and Dutch newspapers' coverage of earthquakes. The magnitude of earthquakes and the number of casualties account for 60 percent of the variance in media attention; social homophily, network ties, the status of the earthquake country, and media attention cycles explain the remaining part. The analysis exhibits the importance of magnitude and geographical distance and the social, economic, and political relations between the country where an earthquake occurs and the country of the newspaper that covers it. These countries are similar in terms of political regime and level of economic wealth and belong to Western countries. Strong network ties exist between the two countries in economic relations, tourism, and migration flows. For Gui et al. (2018), international knowledge flows are facilitated by geographical, technological, social, and cultural proximity. The effects of geographical and cultural proximity have faded over time, whereas the impacts of social and technological proximity have strengthened. From the mentioned studies, although there are some conflicting results on the physical distance and coverage relationship, studies assert that there are different variables apart from the proximity that affect the coverage. These variables concentrate on measurable factors such as import, export, tourism, and settled population volume between the related countries.

Türkiye faced devastating earthquakes in February 2023, among the deadliest in decades. There were 50,783 deaths and about 300 thousand destroyed apartments across 11 provinces (CNNTURK, 2023). About 14 million people and 4 million buildings were affected, and more than 2 million residents were evacuated to nearby provinces (Hürriyet Daily News, 2023). According to the World Bank rapid damage assessment report, the earthquakes caused an estimated 34.2 billion $ in direct physical damages, the equivalent of 4 percent of the country's gross domestic product in 2021 (GRADE, 2023). Around 95 nations and 16 international organizations pledged aid following the disaster, and more than 19 rescue teams assisted the operations (CNN, 2023). The media primarily focused on the disaster, relief, rescue operations, and aid efforts. International media attention is crucial in this event since the disaster relief activities surpass the government's capabilities within a critical and limited time. The media has a duty to inform and shape public perception during a massive disaster as happened in Türkiye. Media performs this duty within the journalistic values universally set to prioritize the news.

The Internet is transforming every industry and aspect of society, from news to entertainment, politics to business, and communications to commerce. According to Sagan and Leighton (2010, p.119), the impact of the Internet on journalism is simply a model of the more significant phenomenon of dramatic change brought about by the online digital revolution. Despite these encounters, newspapers remain a vital part of the news landscape and continue to provide valuable information to readers worldwide. Besides, newspapers play a crucial role in connecting with their readers by covering events close to their audience. This connection provides relevant news to readers' daily lives, gives them a voice, and sheds light on important issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. As a news selection criterion, proximity is an essential measure of becoming news, especially in disasters. Proximity not only refers to the physical closeness but also to the psychological closeness perceived by journalists or the reader. Otherwise, it will be too complicated to explain the reason for the coverage of geographically distant but psychologically close events. The electronic versions of the newspapers can be reached from distant parts of the world via the Internet. The notion of physical closeness to the

event scene for the coverage might have partially lost its previous importance thanks to online applications, which enable reaching every reliable news from the Internet available parts of the world. Nevertheless, determining whether the international media covers the earthquake news within the "proximity" criteria is still a matter of question.

The answer to this question especially gained importance during the February 2023 Türkiye earthquakes since the disaster relief activities need international assistance, and international media attention is more than essential in this situation. Additionally, psychological closeness necessitates several variables between the related countries. Specifically, more economically integrated or more tourist-exchanged countries feel closer to themselves. Residents living abroad also pay attention to their nation countries' news. These countable bilateral relation issues might be the other factors affecting news coverage in the related country, as Koopmans and Vliegenthart (2010) have asserted. The study will contribute to the related texts since there is no research on the relationship between physical distance, import, export, tourism, resident volume, and news coverage. Nevertheless, before the analysis, it is crucial to explain the factors in the selection of the news, the necessity of proximity as a news value, and the digitalization of newspapers in the literature within the aim of the study.

# 1. Literature Review

## 1.1. News Values

Understanding the concept of news value is crucial for anyone interested in journalism and communication studies. It sheds light on the factors that gatekeepers use to select which stories to cover in a world where there is a limited amount of media space available. Communication scholars have described news production as a passive process that follows strict and regulated procedures to select information from limited sources (Golding & Elliott, 1979, p. 114). However, this process has changed considerably over time. Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge's article contributed significantly to the field in 1965, providing insights into the elements that make an event more likely to be chosen as a news story. Besides, the definition of news evolved through time and context. According to Galtung and Ruge (1965), it is a news organization derivative, conveying information to an audience about recent events, developments, and issues. According to Fishman (1980), it is a cultural production that transforms events and issues into symbols and narratives that reflect and shape social meaning. According to McQuail (2010), news is a social construction that provides a mediated reality of events and issues selected, framed, and presented by news media professionals. In the last decade, it has been a form of communication that informs the public of current events, issues, and societal trends (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014). We can assume from the definitions that the news plays a crucial role in informing and educating society about local, national, and global events that impact people's lives. Moreover, there is a subjective side of the news in its selection process. As for Zelizer (1993), it is a process of selecting, processing and disseminating information about events, issues, and people that journalists consider newsworthy. Journalists may find themselves at odds between their perception of what is newsworthy and what the audience prefers to read or share (Strömbäck et al., 2012). How journalists think and perceive things is influenced by various factors. These include the frames present in their cultural and professional environment, norms and beliefs within the field of journalism, as well as their personal experiences and beliefs (Brüggemann, 2014). The process of judging is based on an understanding of news values taught and learned by new generations of journalists through training and socialization (Harrison, 2006, p. 153). It is essential to understand that news reporting is not the same as a scientific process because the selection of news is subjective, and subjectivity is present throughout journalism. News selection is not based simply on intrinsic aspects of events but also functions external to these events. These occasions comprise occupational routines, constraints, and ideological issues as a construction of reality (Staab, 1990, p. 428). Van Dijk (1988, p. vii) argued that news should be examined in its relevant context since it is a significant form of public discourse. He also asserted that news discourse was explicitly related to social practices and ideologies of newsmaking and, indirectly, to the institutional and macro-sociological contexts of the news media.

Studying the principles and methods behind selecting news stories is a crucial aspect of journalism. It delves into the core of what gets featured, what gets left out, and why. Shedding light on the values involved in selecting news can aid in understanding the broader purposes and significance of journalism in today's society. The process of selecting which news stories to report on is just as necessary as the actual events themselves (Westerstahl & Johansson, 1994, p. 71). Journalists have the power to shape public perception and influence the way people view the world around them. That is why it is so crucial for news outlets to prioritize accuracy, fairness, and objectivity in their reporting. By doing so, they can help ensure that the public is informed and empowered to make their own decisions based on the facts. Galtung and Ruge's list of news values (1965) has long been regarded as the study of news values, and twelve features were identified in the selection of news (O'Neill & Harcup, 2020, p.216). Frequency: News events that happen frequently are more likely to be chosen than those that happen over a long time. Threshold: The more intense and impactful the event, the higher the chances of being selected as news. Unambiguity: The more quickly an event can be understood and

interpreted without various meanings, the higher the likelihood of it being chosen for coverage. Meaningfulness: Familiar cultural events are often preferred for news coverage due to their ease of understanding. Consonance: Experienced news selectors can often predict which events will be newsworthy, giving those events a better chance of being covered in the news. Unexpectedness: Unexpected or rare events may be given priority, as they can often be more newsworthy. Continuity: Events in the news may continue to be covered even if their impact has lessened because they are familiar to the public. Composition: News stories are sometimes chosen to create a well-rounded report, not just for newsworthiness. Reference to elite nations: It is often perceived that the actions of elite nations carry more weight and significance than those of other nations. Reference to elite people: People may relate more easily to famous figures and their experiences. Reference to persons: News outlets often focus on individuals instead of concepts, making the news more relatable to the public. Reference to something negative: Bad events are emphasized more prominently in the news, which is generally unambiguous and newsworthy.

Categorizations can assist in understanding how journalists select news stories, but they should be used alongside other methods to ensure accuracy and objectivity in reporting. Galtung and Ruge (1965, pp. 64–65) stated, "*No claim is made for completeness in the list of factors or deductions*." Thus, they did not put a comma but a semi-comma for a non-complete work. The scholars continued to improve the set of values depending on their viewpoint. Golding and Elliott (1979, pp. 115-123) proposed similar selection criteria. These are drama (conflict, opposing viewpoints), visual attractiveness (images for television, print, and online news media), entertainment (human interest stories, celebrities, children, and animals), importance (significant for a large proportion of the audience, size (people involved in a disaster), proximity (cultural and geographical), negativity (bad news is good news), brevity (facts with little padding), recency (exclusives), elites (famous people), and personalities (reducing complex events to the actions of individuals). The most recent and complete study on news selection criteria is made by Harcup & O'Neill (2001; 2017). According to their study, fifteen criteria were selected, which are summarized as follows. Exclusivity: First as news. Bad news: Negative overtone news. Conflict: Stories including controversies. Surprise: Unusual stories. Audiovisuals: Stories that have arresting audiovisuals. Shareability: Stories that can be shared via social media. Entertainment: Soft stories. Drama: Stories concerning an unfolding drama. Follow-up: Themes already in the news. The power elite: Stories relating to influential individuals and organizations. Relevance: Familiar stories to the audience. Magnitude: Impact of stories regarding the people involved or an extreme event. Celebrity: Stories concerning famous people. Good news: Stories with predominantly positive implications. News organization's agenda: Stories ideologically or commercially fit the news organization's agenda. Since our study focuses on proximity as a news value, the theoretical frameworks will emphasize this issue. Among the scholars mentioned above, Golding and Elliott (1979) mentioned proximity (cultural and geographical) as an essential criterion in the news selection process.

## 1.2. Proximity As A News Value

Many scholars assert a geographical disparity in the coverage of international news, with certain regions being more frequently featured in news reports while others are hardly mentioned (MacBride, 1980; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1984). This disparity can significantly affect how we perceive global events and shape our understanding of the world. Journalists and scholars have assumed that people are generally more interested in things closer to home than those farther away (Bridges & Bridges, 1997). "Proximity" is commonly used to describe physical and psychological closeness in literature. Proximity as a determinant in news coverage relates to domestic (Morton & Warren, 1992) and international (Hargrove & Stempel, 2002) news stories. According to Stevenson and Cole (1984), proximity is a crucial news value journalists consider when selecting which stories to cover. They tend to focus more on news happening in their immediate region than other parts of the world. It has been suggested by Shoemaker et al. (2007) that there is a psychological component to proximity. People tend to perceive patterns of conflict among social systems, with geographic proximity partitioning a person's schematic pattern into international, national, and local levels. It is interesting to consider how our physical surroundings may influence our perceptions.

It is commonly assumed that people are more interested in things closer to home, which makes sense considering how local events can significantly impact people's lives. However, the concept of physical closeness is only sometimes straightforward. When journalists use proximity as a news value, they may be comparing the physical locations of the event and the news organization (Shoemaker et al., 2007). The evolution of technology has made it easier for news organizations to cover events from different parts of the world and distribute their messages to specific geographic locations or a worldwide audience. As a result, the physical distance between the event and the news organization's offices has become less critical. With the rise of the World Wide Web, physical geography is no longer a significant factor since addresses are digital identifiers from the virtual community of the Internet. This shift raises questions about how proximity affects news reporting and consumption. Besides, it is also vital to consider the event's proximity to the audience. This consideration can be complex since journalists may write for multiple audiences in different physical locations. For example, one journalist may write for an international audience while another is for a local community.

Even with the availability of satellite-transmitted cable news television networks, journalists still need to determine how physically close their audiences are to the events they are reporting.

Some scholars have defined proximity as cultural, political, or economic connections between nations. They argue that closely connected nations are more likely to feature in each other's news. It certainly makes sense that the more intertwined two nations are, the more likely they are to impact each other's actions and politics (Adams, 1986). It has been demonstrated by Berkowitz and Beach (1993) that newspapers tend to prioritize news that is most relevant and interesting to their local readers, even when it comes to international news.

According to Shoemaker et al. (2007), proximity and scope are both crucial factors to consider when analyzing an event. Proximity refers to the physical distance or closeness of the event to the audience, while scope relates more to the psychological closeness perceived by journalists. Understanding these variables can help journalists effectively communicate the significance of an event to their audience. An event can be covered in multiple stories, each with a different focus or emphasis. The news media often control the scope of a story and can vary depending on their perceived audience and the goals of the publication. This conception brings us to the notion of agenda-setting theory and its relation to geographic proximity.

Cohen (1963, p.18) indicated that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." What journalists consider "newsworthy" provides efficient clues about the relative importance of topical events. Newspapers noticeably communicate salience through the amount of space allotted to a topic, its page placement, or its headline size. Agenda-setting outlines the connection between the news media's emphases, the news coverage period, and the perceived importance of these topics to the news audience. The period over which media cover an issue is another important aspect for determining its place on the public's agenda. For instance, the agenda-setting effect of civil rights stories in The New York Times was greatest after about one month of coverage, and it did not increase as stories accumulated over time (Eyal & Winter, 2016, p.19). Moreover, as stated above, geographic proximity is an essential factor influencing the agenda-setting process, which is more likely to occur for national problems than local ones (Protess et al., 2016, p.18). However, apart from national or local media, international media has further dynamics that need to be considered and closely reviewed.

## 1.3. International Media

The general improvement in superpower relations in the age of détente encouraged the Non-Aligned countries to demand changes in global economic and informational systems. The 1975 Helsinki Conference recognized the need for an open and broader dissemination of information. The demand for the new World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) emerged from a series of meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement. NWICO protagonists consistently claimed that the countries of the South were heavily dependent on the North for both software and hardware in the information sector, which caused the continuity of inequality in development. The Third World leaders also argued that the Western media gave an exploitative and distorted view of their countries to the rest of the world through their control of major international information channels (Nordenstreng, 2011, p.80). Masmoudi (1979, p.172) asserted that transnational media impose their perspective on developing countries by transmitting only processed news, which is filtered, cut, and distorted. The MacBride Report was the first international document to provide a global view of the world's communication problems. The report pointed out that some of the most vital transnational corporations were reluctant to open up flows to share scientific and technological information, though enthusiastic about freedom of knowledge. The antagonists of NWICO claimed that the demand for NWICO was a ground for the dictators to repress media freedom and keep away foreign journalists. The Western news organizations resisted any change in the old information order. They asserted that their intention was only to report the reality of life, including political instability, economic backwardness, and natural disasters in the Third World, which was disapproved of by the governments in the South (Thussu, 2018).

According to World Trade Organization statistics (WTO, 2023), world trade volume has expanded roughly 45 times from 1950 to 2022. Significant ideological changes in global politics after the 1980s have led to the creation of pro-market, international trade regimes that have substantially impacted international communication. The liberalization, deregulation, and privatization of communications and media industries and the advent of new digital information and communication technologies have facilitated a significant advancement in international communication. The liberalization and privatization of global communication networks have been especially advantageous for multinational corporations. Media companies have expanded their interests through mergers and acquisitions after the deregulation of cross-media ownership restrictions in the past three decades. Media consolidation has further reduced the number of corporations controlling content and delivery globally. Trade and market standards progressively shape international communication, whereas political considerations play a lesser role in this influence (Thussu, 2018). According to Forbes ranking of the world's largest companies in 2023, Comcast is the largest media conglomerate, ranking 51, with The Walt Disney

Company (ranking 81), Charter Communications (ranking 138), Warner Bros. Discovery (ranking 559) in terms of assets (Murphy & Tucker, 2023). Due to the convergence and integration in the media industries, these large conglomerates can control all the significant aspects of mass media, including newspapers, magazines, books, radio, broadcast television, cable systems and movies, music recordings, and online services.

News agencies play a crucial role in providing news to newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters worldwide, which helps set the global news agenda. Additionally, it has been asserted that news agencies have played a significant role in the globalization and commercialization of international news (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998). News agencies traditionally used to sell news reports and still photographs. Currently, they have expanded their services to include video news feeds and financial information for broadcasters, online news portals, and other non-news clients. National news agencies exist in most countries, and they are often state-owned or a government monopoly. There are only a few transnational news agencies like the Associated Press, Thomson Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and United Press International. Besides, there are major national agencies with at most a regional impact, such as TASS - Russia, Xinhua - China, Kyodo - Japan, ABN News - Brazil, PTI - India, Fars - Iran, and Anadolu Agency - Türkiye. These news agencies continue to be the primary news source for the newspapers depending on their resources (reporters, budget, staff, etc.), thus playing a central role in setting the international news agenda.

The coverage of international news is influenced by geopolitical factors, emphasizing certain regions and stories with broad appeal since the West might have geopolitical and economic interests (Robertson, 2015). The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1996 or the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and their consequences are evident and different samples of limited coverage in mainstream international media. Whereas when it comes to the interests of the developed countries, the news coverage is almost wall-to-wall to influence their audience on their decisions, such as invading Iraq and Afghanistan or carrying out "preemptive strikes" in Libya and Syria in order to defend their citizens at home by the so-called rhetoric of global war on terror or save the so-called failed state's citizens from the dictatorships. We can see similar reporting patterns in different contexts, especially in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria (Robinson et al., 2010; DiMaggio, 2015). Nevertheless, in the absence of a credible alternative media system, the influence of Western media has become the dominant position on the economy, trade, security, international relations, human rights, and international law. However, in the digitized communication universe of the twenty-first century, this domination is being challenged by the growth of alternative narratives and by the digital disruption that has transformed global journalism.

### 1.4. Newspapers and The Internet

The Western monopoly dominates the global newspaper market as well. The Anglo-American press has global reach; therefore, their influence outweighs the others. However, according to the report World Press Trends in 2016, three American newspapers recorded among the world's top twenty paid daily newspapers in terms of circulation; the Japanese, Indian, or Chinese newspapers that dominate the list are rarely read outside their countries of origin (Peyregne et al, 2016). When looking at the recent top news websites in the world, the situation is vice versa, and BBC, MSN, NYTimes, and CNN rank in the top, totaling 2.9 billion visits to news websites and apps in January 2024 (Majid, 2024).

It is no secret that newspapers have been struggling in recent years as more and more people turn to digital sources for their news. There is a decline in subscribers, and financial struggles have been ongoing for over a decade. However, expectancy is on the horizon as newspaper website traffic has increased again. Despite the challenges, newspapers remain a vital part of the news landscape and continue to provide valuable information to readers worldwide. According to the Newspapers Fact Sheet prepared by Pew Research Center (2021a), daily newspaper circulation (print and digital combined) in the U.S. in 2020 was 24.3 million per day, a 6 percent decrease from the previous year. Daily digital circulations have risen by 38 percent in 2019 and 2020. The average time per visit was about two minutes in 2020, which had decreased to 45 seconds by 2014. In 2020, almost 40 percent of newspaper advertising revenue came from digital advertising, which has risen steadily since 2011. The shift towards online media consumption has significantly impacted the newspaper industry. Besides, employment in newspaper newsrooms has fallen by 57 percent from 2004 to 2020. Most adults in the U.S. acquire news via smartphone, computer, or tablet. News outlets are implementing different digital outreach methods, and 95 percent have an official presence on digital media, such as newsletters. These outlets also use social media and have an official presence of over 90 percent on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Digital advertising comprised two-thirds of advertising revenues in 2020, which was 50 percent in 2018. Moreover, mobile advertising comprised two-thirds of digital advertising revenue in 2020, which was 5 percent in 2011. Newsroom employee numbers in the digital-native sector tripled in 2020 compared to 2008 (Pew, 2021b).

Press freedom and its economic assets have been seriously tested during the pandemic. The news media industry is a 112.4 billion US$ business despite the pandemic's impact, according to the World Association of News Publishers 2020-

2021 Report. Many publishers iterate that the pandemic has changed the way their organizations work in terms of workflows, communication, and processes, which compelled them to reduce their workforce to some degree. There have been declines in print advertising and challenges with digital advertising, whereas advertising was cited still as the most critical source of income by 27 percent, followed by subscriptions at 21 percent, single copy sales at 10 percent, and other revenues (Nel & Milburn-Curtis, 2021). Print advertising and circulation generate over half of the total income, according to the 2022-2023 World Press Trends report. Advertising revenue accounts for nearly half of their income. Reader revenue, across print and digital, is expected to bring in just over a third of earnings. The report also iterates that Artificial Intelligence is the emerging technology that will most impact publishers in the future, followed by 5G and the Metaverse (Henriksson et al., 2023).

From the above reports and statistics, it can be assumed that traditional media outlets are declining. In contrast, digital and mobile news outlets are gaining weight over time. Accordingly, the news medium has changed, but the content is more or less the same. Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase "The medium is the message" has a connotation that the form of a medium sets itself in the message, thus influencing how the message is perceived. The news disseminated through social media is a decent sample of this phrase. However, do people trust the news on social media? As of 2022, 59 percent of adults indicated that they rely on traditional media, whereas the trust level in social media is around 40 percent. As of February 2023, the portion of adults who trust news in social media most of the time changes according to the countries, which is the least in Greece at 19 percent, in the U.S. at 32 percent, in Türkiye at 35 percent and most in Finland at 69 percent (Watson, 2023). Social media is seen as a less trustworthy news source globally; radio and television are noticed as more dependable in Europe. Young people and some older generations struggle with relying on mass media sources, especially given the prevalence of fake news and polarizing political events. As a result, many people turn to traditional news sources in digital media, which they perceive as more reliable and trustworthy. Nevertheless, the Internet has changed how we consume news and has brought benefits and challenges to journalism.

## 2. Analysis Methodology

Upon the previous inferences and within the scope of this study, two research questions are on the agenda. The first is "Does the international media cover the earthquake news within the "proximity" news value criteria?" A research design and related hypotheses are determined below to find out the answers to the mentioned question.

H01: Physical distance (Proximity) does not have an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country.

HA1: Physical distance (Proximity) has an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country.

H02: The import, export, tourism, and population volume between countries does not have an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country.

HA2: The import, export, tourism, and population volume between countries have an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country.

The second question, "What might be the other factors affecting the coverage?" will be answered depending on the above-mentioned hypotheses. The analysis is limited to the obtained newspapers from the online platform and with the selected countries depending on their proximity.

The media coverage for the February 2023 Türkiye earthquakes was searched from the online platforms of the selected newspapers. The countries were chosen from the different regions of the world, from neighboring regions to the far west and east in terms of their physical and psychological proximity. In the selection of newspapers, availability in electronic format, a nationwide readership, and the country's physical distance were considered for practical reasons. Thirty-two newspapers from sixteen countries, two from each, were selected as a sample study. Each newspaper's coverage of earthquake news to total is calculated and recorded. The newspapers' electronic archives are reached from the Press Reader application. Then, the related newspapers were analyzed quantitatively for five days after the event day. The import, export, and tourism statistical data related to bilateral relations are obtained from the official internet websites of the Turkish Statistical Institute. This information is compared with the coverage ratio to deduce meaningful information. Regression analysis is a statistical tool for investigating relationships between variables and is used to evaluate the strength of a relationship between one dependent and independent variables (Sykes, 1993). In this analysis, the coverage quantity (ratio of coverage) regarding the February 2023 Türkiye earthquakes in the newspapers of the relevant country is determined as the dependent variable. The independent variables are set as the physical distance of Türkiye to the related country, the percentage of imports from Türkiye to the related country, the percentage of exports to Türkiye from the related country, the percentage of Turkish population in the related country, the percentage of related nation population in Türkiye, and the percentage of tourist numbers visiting Türkiye from the related country. SPSS 15 is used to analyze the data organized by the researcher during the study. After the quantitative analysis, there will be inferences in the findings part.

### 3. Quantitative Analysis of February 2023 Türkiye Earthquake News in International Media

The media coverage quantity for the February 2023 Türkiye earthquakes and its ratio to total news in the related newspapers for five days after the event according to countries are presented in Table 1. The average coverage of the two newspapers is considered in finding the countries' coverage.

**Table 1. The Ratio of Coverage to Total News in the Newspaper**

| Country | Newspaper | Total Page | Covered Page | | | | | Ratio to Total Coverage (%) | Country Coverage Ratio (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 07 Feb | 08 Feb | 09 Feb | 10 Feb | 11 Feb | | |
| Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | Asharq Al-Awsat Saudi Edition | 24 | 3,5 | 3,5 | 3,2 | 3 | 3,5 | 13,9 | 9,6 |
| | Al Eqtisadiah | 16 | 1,4 | 0,5 | 0,3 | 1 | 1 | 5,3 | |
| Hellenic Republic (Greece) | Kathimerini Greek | 32 | 2,5 | 3 | 3,6 | 2,9 | 3,8 | 9,9 | 7,8 |
| | Naftemporiki | 32 | 2,8 | 2,4 | 1,5 | 1,3 | 1,3 | 5,8 | |
| United Arab Emirates | Al Khalej | 32 | 4,5 | 2,3 | 3 | 2,2 | 4 | 10,0 | 7,8 |
| | Al Bayan | 40 | 3 | 2 | 1,5 | 1 | 3,5 | 5,5 | |
| Republic of Albania | Gazeta Shqiptare | 24 | 2,2 | 1,5 | 1 | 1,5 | 1,5 | 6,4 | 6,1 |
| | Panorama | 24 | 2,5 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | 5,7 | |
| United Kingdom | The Daily Telegraph | 32 | 1,9 | 2,3 | 1 | 2,5 | 0,9 | 5,4 | 5,9 |
| | The Independent | 200 | 13 | 10 | 6 | 21 | 14 | 6,4 | |
| Arab Republic of Egypt | Al Masry Al Youm | 24 | 1 | 1 | 0,7 | 0,8 | 2 | 4,6 | 5,6 |
| | Shorouk | 10 | 0,8 | 0,8 | 0,6 | 0,5 | 0,6 | 6,6 | |
| French Republic (France) | Le Figaro | 36 | 2 | 1,2 | 0,5 | 0,4 | | 2,8 | 5,3 |
| | Liberation | 28 | 4,6 | 2 | 2 | 0,3 | 2 | 7,8 | |
| Islamic Republic of Iran | Khorasan | 20 | 2 | 1 | 0,7 | 0,8 | 0,7 | 5,2 | 5,3 |
| | Jomhouri Eslami | 12 | 1 | 0,8 | 0,5 | 0,5 | 0,4 | 5,3 | |
| Federal Republic of Germany | Rheinische Post | 30 | 1,5 | 2 | 1,5 | 1 | 0,8 | 4,5 | 5,1 |
| | Deutsche Welle | 60 | 1,7 | 3,5 | 4 | 5 | 2,5 | 5,6 | |
| Argentine Republic | La Nacion | 40 | 4 | 3,3 | 2 | 1 | 0,4 | 5,4 | 4,8 |
| | ClarinX | 52 | 3 | 2,8 | 2,7 | 1,5 | 1 | 4,2 | |
| United States of America | The Washington Post | 52 | 3 | 5 | 2,3 | 1,8 | 1,7 | 5,3 | 4,0 |
| | The Boston Globe | 33 | 1,2 | 1 | 0,5 | 1 | 0,7 | 2,7 | |
| People's Republic of China | South China Morning Post | 24 | 0,6 | 2 | 1,2 | 0,8 | 0,8 | 4,5 | 3,9 |
| | Jiefang Daily | 12 | 0,5 | 0,5 | 0,4 | 0,35 | 0,2 | 3,3 | |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | Oslobodenje | 48 | 1,7 | 1,8 | 1,2 | 1 | 1 | 2,8 | 3,6 |
| | Dnevni Avaz | 45 | 2,5 | 2,3 | 2,2 | 1,5 | 1,6 | 4,5 | |
| Commonwealth of Australia | The Guardian | 39 | 1 | 1 | 3,5 | 2,8 | 2 | 5,3 | 3,5 |
| | Townsville Bulletin | 30 | - | 1 | 0,5 | 0,3 | 0,2 | 1,7 | |
| Republic of South Africa | The Citizen | 50 | 0,5 | 1,1 | 0,3 | 0,8 | 2 | 1,9 | 3,4 |
| | Cape Times | 15 | 0,5 | 1,2 | 1 | 0,6 | 0,4 | 4,9 | |
| Republic of India | DT Next | 12 | 0,5 | 0,4 | 0,3 | 0,3 | 0,2 | 2,8 | 2,5 |
| | Sach Kahoon Delhi | 12 | 0,4 | 0,3 | 0,3 | 0,25 | 0,1 | 2,3 | |

The chart shows the quantity of newspaper coverage and the average of two newspapers in that country in order. According to the chart, Saudi Arabian, Greek, and UAE newspapers cover related news more than the other countries' newspapers by 7 percent. Among the sixteen countries, Australian, South African, and Indian newspapers covered the event less than the others, which are less than 3.5 percent. The event's coverage is at most in the first two days, then

changes depending on the newspaper's agenda. The chart partially confirms the proximity news value that physically close nations cover the related news more than physically distant nations. Variations from the determined standard can be seen in the figure below.
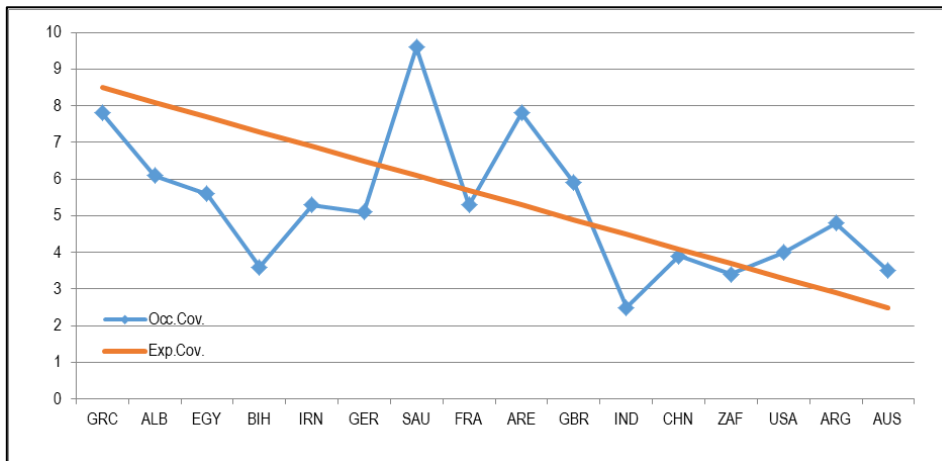


**Figure 1. The Expected and Occurred Coverage According to Physical Proximity**

**Source:** By the Author

The figure shows the coverage quantity on the y-axis and the countries according to the physical proximity to the event scene on the x-axis from left to right. The expected coverage quantity should be in a decreasing inclination from the upper left to the downright according to the physical distance. Some of the coverage in particular countries does not fit the expected inclination. Among them, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Argentina are significantly upon the inclination, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and India are significantly below the inclination. Regression analysis displays the strength of the relationship between the physical distance and the event's coverage.

**Table 2. Regression Analysis for Model 1**

**Model Summary and ANOVA(b)**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 66,236 | 1 | 66,236 | 4,264 | ,048(a) | ,483(a) | ,233 | ,179 | 2,94143 |
| | Residual | 217,488 | 14 | 15,535 | | | | | | |
| | Total | 283,724 | 15 | | | | | | | |

a Predictors: (Constant), Coverage, b Dependent Variable: Physical Distance

Since the level of significance is selected as 5% for the study, the result (0,048) is significant. Besides, a value (4,2) greater than 1 for F-ratio is an efficient model. The null hypothesis is that the physical distance (proximity) does not have an effect on the coverage of related foreign news. Based on the significant value, the null hypothesis is rejected; therefore, physical distance (proximity) has an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country. It can be assumed from the linear regression analysis that the physical distance explains %23 of the variation in the coverage.

However, different variables might be affecting the coverage of the newspapers. These variables should be measured in quantities and have concrete statistical data to compare. Thus, there are clear variables for countries that affect each other in bilateral relations. These are import and export volumes, tourist numbers, and population living in the related country. These data should be proportioned according to the total data to find the percentage and the effect in the total. Accordingly, the percentage of imports from Türkiye to a related country, the percentage of exports to Türkiye from a related country, the percentage of Turkish population in a related country, the percentage of related nation population in Türkiye, and the percentage of tourist numbers visiting Türkiye from the related country is calculated and shown on the below table.

### Table 3. The Ratio of Import, Export, Tourism and Population Volume (Türkiye)

| Country | Distance x 1000 km | Coverage | Import Share | Export Share | Turkish Population Ratio | Country Population Ratio | Tourist Share |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GRC | 0,92 | 7,8 | 3,82 | 5,15 | 2,9 | 0,020 | 1,14 |
| ALB | 1,11 | 6,1 | 10,75 | 1,44 | 0,35 | 0,000 | 0,08 |
| EGY | 1,11 | 5,6 | 4,84 | 6,5 | 0,04 | 0,040 | 0,43 |
| BIH | 1,27 | 3,6 | 5,88 | 2,5 | 0,31 | 0,000 | 0,12 |
| IRN | 1,69 | 5,3 | 6,26 | 2,45 | 0,06 | 0,150 | 4,53 |
| GER | 2,04 | 5,1 | 1,54 | 1,54 | 3,6 | 0,120 | 18,89 |
| SAU | 2,13 | 9,6 | 0,08 | 1,21 | 0,27 | 0,000 | 0,43 |
| FRA | 2,6 | 5,3 | 1,31 | 1,5 | 1,24 | 0,010 | 3,2 |
| ARE | 2,69 | 7,8 | 2,76 | 0,92 | 0,02 | 0,000 | 0,06 |
| GBR | 3,43 | 5,9 | 2,19 | 1,33 | 1,18 | 0,020 | 7,32 |
| IND | 4,21 | 2,5 | 0,34 | 1,84 | 0,01 | 0,000 | 0,12 |
| CHN | 6,83 | 3,9 | 0,19 | 0,87 | 0,01 | 0,020 | 0,13 |
| ZAF | 8,35 | 3,4 | 1,01 | 0,39 | 0,01 | 0,000 | 0,05 |
| USA | 8,72 | 4 | 0,58 | 0,68 | 0,06 | 0,020 | 1,99 |
| ARG | 12,87 | 4,8 | 0,5 | 0,72 | 0,01 | 0,000 | 0,08 |
| AUS | 14,6 | 3,5 | 0,36 | 0,27 | 0,79 | 0,000 | 0,39 |

The numbers in the above table show the specific shares and ratios to the total ones. Besides, there might be a big difference in some of the country's volumes of related variables depending on the relation with Türkiye. Thus, regression analysis has been used to display the strength of the relationship between these variables.

### Table 4. Regression Analysis Summary for Model 2

| Dependent Variable | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Import Share | ,173(a) | ,030 | -,039 | 3,03921 | ,434 | ,521(a) |
| Export Share | ,248(a) | ,062 | -,005 | 1,706662 | ,919 | ,354(a) |
| Turkish Population Ratio | ,228(a) | ,052 | -,016 | 1,09951 | ,768 | ,395(a) |
| Country Population Ratio | ,007(a) | ,000 | -,071 | ,04621 | ,001 | ,980(a) |
| Tourist Share | ,022(a) | ,000 | -,071 | 5,01419 | ,007 | ,937(a) |

a Predictors: (Constant), Coverage

The significance levels of the dependent variables are all above the %5 level; therefore, the results are not significant. F-ratios are all below 1, which shows that it does not yield an efficient model. The R-value signifies the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. Here, the values are below 0.4, which cannot be taken for further analysis. Based on the significant value, the null hypothesis is not rejected; thus, it can be assumed that the import, export, tourism, and population volume between countries does not have an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country.

## 4. Findings

The research aims to determine whether the international media covers earthquake news within the "proximity" news value criteria. Besides, other factors affecting the coverage are searched. Thus, two hypotheses are determined and tested through the sample data collected and analyzed by the researcher. In the test result of the first hypothesis, it is confirmed that physical distance (proximity) has an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country. Linear regression analysis results indicated that the physical distance explains 23 percent of the variation in the coverage quantity. Table 1 partially confirms the proximity news value that physically close nations cover the related news more than physically distant nations. Figure 1 shows the coverage quantity and the countries according to the

physical proximity to the event scene. Some newspapers' coverage in particular countries does not fit the expected inclination. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Argentina are significantly upon the inclination, while Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and India are considerably below the inclination. Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates newspaper coverage is more than expected since there is a religious relationship and historical background with Türkiye. However, the Bosnia and Herzegovina newspaper's low coverage cannot be explained with the same motives. Turkish Population Ratio in Germany is 3.6 percent, and German tourist share in Türkiye is 19 percent. In contrast, the earthquake news coverage ratio to total is 5.1 percent, well below the expected inclination. Therefore, the related data cannot explain the level of coverage in German newspapers. Although physical distance and other variables are much the same and have low shares between the two countries, Argentine newspapers cover the February 2023 earthquake news more than the expected ratio. Therefore, the quantity of the coverage should be explained by other variables. The test result of the second hypothesis showed that the import, export, tourism, and population volume between countries does not have an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country, contrary to what was expected. Since these factors affect the bilateral relations relatively, we should search for other factors that might affect the coverage. These variables can be other factors such as the historical background between the countries, the similarity of the countries' population regarding religion and nationality, the status of the earthquake country, and the status of contemporary bilateral relations, which can be measured in qualitative methods. Besides the physical closeness, the psychological closeness perceived by journalists is the primary aspect in determining the news coverage. Therefore, the media attention triggered by news values, including the proximity value, should explain the remaining significant portion. As a result, Greek newspapers covered the neighboring counties' calamity more than the others. Hence, this result is partly harmonious with the previous analysis results.

## Conclusion

Most people rely on media representations of distant events since they do not experience the disasters firsthand. Therefore, journalists have the power to shape public perception and influence the way people view the world around them. They do it by selecting which stories to cover in a world where there is a limited amount of media space available. Categorizations can assist in understanding how journalists select news stories; therefore, some scholars asserted a list of factors for news selection criteria. Proximity is an essential criterion in the news selection process. People are generally more interested in things closer to home than those farther away. Previous studies indicated that there is a strong relationship between the physical distance (proximity) of the audience and the coverage quantity of the media outlet. Some scholars have defined proximity as cultural, political, or economic connections between nations. They argue that closely connected nations are more likely to feature in each other's news. However, the communication mediums have evolved, and the Internet has had an impact on media outlets such as newspapers. The electronic versions of newspapers can be reached from distant parts of the world via the Internet. The Internet has changed how we consume news and has brought benefits and challenges to journalism. Thus, the reader's behaviors have started changing with this evolution, and many people turn to traditional news sources in digital media, which they perceive as more reliable and trustworthy.

As a news selection criterion, proximity is an essential measure of becoming news, especially in disasters. Proximity not only refers to physical closeness but also to psychological closeness that includes several factors between the countries. Otherwise, it will be too complicated to explain the reason for the coverage of geographically distant but psychologically close events. Nevertheless, determining whether the international media covers the earthquake news within the "proximity" criteria is still a matter of question. The answer to this question gained importance during the February 2023 Türkiye earthquakes since the disaster relief activities need international assistance, and international media attention is more than essential. Additionally, psychological closeness necessitates several variables between the related countries. Specifically, more economically integrated or more tourist-exchanged countries feel closer to themselves. Residents living abroad also pay attention to their nation countries' news. These countable bilateral relations issues might be the other factors affecting news coverage in the related country.

Within this scope, answers to the research questions are searched in the study. The first is "Does the international media cover the earthquake news within the "proximity" news value criteria?" The second one, "What might be the other factors affecting the coverage?" will be answered depending on the pointed-out hypotheses. Therefore, the media coverage for the February 2023 Türkiye earthquakes was searched from the online platforms of the selected newspapers in the sixteen countries, which were chosen from the different regions of the world regarding their physical and psychological proximity. The earthquake news coverage was analyzed quantitatively for five days after the event day. In the analysis, the coverage ratio is determined as the dependent and other countable factors as independent variables. The test result of the first hypothesis confirmed that physical distance (proximity) has an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country. Linear regression analysis results indicated that the physical distance explains 23 percent of the

variation in the coverage quantity. So, it can be assumed that physically close nations cover the related news more than physically distant nations, which is parallel but not as resilient as the previous studies. While the ratio of using online news platforms is increasing accordingly, the proximity effect is declining. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates newspaper coverage is more than expected since there is a religious relationship and historical background with Türkiye. However, the Bosnia and Herzegovina and the German newspaper's low coverage or the Argentine newspaper's high coverage cannot be explained with the same motives. Therefore, the quantity of the coverage should be explained by other variables. The test result of the second hypothesis showed that the import, export, tourism, and population volume between countries does not have an effect on the coverage of earthquake news in the related country, contrary to what was expected. Since these factors affect the bilateral relations relatively, we should search for other factors that might affect the coverage. These variables can be other factors such as the historical background between the countries, the similarity of the countries' population regarding religion and nationality, the status of the earthquake country, and the status of contemporary bilateral relations, which can be further measured in qualitative methods.

Therefore, the media attention triggered by news values, including the proximity value, should explain the remaining significant portion. Hence, this result is partly harmonious with the mentioned previous analysis results. Earthquakes have a news value of magnitude, and in the absence of physical proximity, journalists seek emotional connections to the story. On the other side of the world, or at least in a neighboring country, when the disaster is reported, the readers probably think about how lucky they were that it did not happen in their residential area. Hence, the reader relates to the event emotionally, bringing the event closer to them and making a psychological bond. Besides the physical closeness, the psychological closeness perceived by journalists or the perception of the public is the primary aspect in determining the news coverage. Therefore, Greek newspapers covered the neighboring counties' calamity more than the others.

As for the news values, the bad news is good for coverage or, in other terms, if it bleeds, it leads. Accordingly, earthquake news will continue to cover much space in the newspapers for being a bad and extreme event. However, the effect of the physical distance of the newspaper's hometown to the event scene on its coverage has started to lose its importance due to the newspaper's accessibility from the Internet. Nevertheless, the psychological closeness of journalists or the public to the related issue has gained prominence. Therefore, officials and news sources should pay attention to the information given firsthand during or after the disaster, which will be the sources of the narratives of foreign news outlets. Hence, these outlets may choose to cover the calamity and try to make an emotional bond with their audience, which may trigger and augment the foreign aid and rescue efforts for those in need.

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