

Who Uses International Newspapers? A Content Analysis of Dissertations and Theses

Mary Feeney

Associate Librarian, Research Services Team
The University of Arizona Libraries

Abstract: *Understanding who the users of newspapers are, what newspapers they use, and how they utilize news content for research purposes can help libraries provide access to and promote the use of newspapers. A content analysis of dissertations and theses was conducted to investigate what disciplines use newspapers, and the time periods and origins of the newspapers used. This paper examines the results of this analysis of graduate student research in which scholars used newspapers published outside of the United States and how that compared to researchers in this study who used only U.S. newspapers. One marketing strategy that libraries could use to spread the news about newspaper content may be to provide examples to faculty and students of how other scholars, like the ones examined in this study, are tapping into these rich resources.*

Introduction

From the review of newspaper coverage of agricultural biotechnology in India to the role of Mexican newspapers in promoting civic participation to an examination of newspapers and other archival documents in the study of forest conservation and policy in France,¹ newspapers are an important resource for many areas of research. Libraries play a critical role in providing and ensuring access to these resources, whether in print, on microfilm, in licensed news databases, or in freely-available digital collections created by libraries or other institutions. Likewise, understanding more about the users of newspapers – their disciplines, what newspapers they use and from what time periods – can help libraries not only promote the news resources to which they already provide access, but also learn more about what other resources their researchers need.

International Newspapers

International newspapers are valuable sources of information for many scholars. Waldman (2004), who analyzed the non-English language news sources available in *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*, noted that international newspapers are “vital sources of information” to a range of researchers and provided examples of newspaper use in the social sciences, finance, and the sciences. Access to international news is important to students in Global Studies, and these

¹ These examples are some of the dissertations and theses in this study that used international newspapers: Yamaguchi, T. (2004). *A discourse perspective on agrifood biotechnology controversies: Bt cotton in India*; Palomo, C. (2005). *The role of Mexican independent print media in promoting participatory citizenship*; and Matteson, C.K. (2008). *Masters of their woods: Conservation, community, and conflict in Revolutionary France, 1669–1848*.

sources are “particularly important in helping students to develop a global perspective on an issue” (Hinchliffe & Schmitz, 2008).

While access to international newspapers is recognized as valuable, there may have limited availability. Waldman (2004) stated that “access to newspapers in general has often been limited, and that is only worse in the case of international newspapers.” Among respondents to a survey of LIBER (Association of European Research Libraries) members, on average, less than 10% of their newspaper collections were digitized (S. Reilly, 2013).

At the same time, there are several examples of the increasing availability of newspapers from around the world. The World Newspaper Archive (B. Reilly, 2013), a partnership between the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) and Readex, includes digitized back files of Latin American and Caribbean, African, and South Asian newspapers. Newspapers from additional regions of the world will continue to be added. There are also licensed digitized collections of newspapers available from Gale, ProQuest, and others that include international news sources. An increasing number of international newspapers are being digitized and made freely-available online. The International Coalition on Newspapers (ICON) provides links to newspaper digitization projects, including many from countries around the world. There are also numerous examples of digitized international newspapers in past presentations of the International Newspapers Conference and annual conferences of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

To learn more about how researchers use newspapers, a content analysis of dissertations and theses was conducted. This paper presents results of the study and examines in particular how researchers used international newspapers (defined here as newspapers from outside the United States) and how that compared to those who used only U.S. newspapers.

Methodology

Content analysis is a research method for “defining, measuring, and analyzing both the substance and meaning of texts” (Beck and Manuel, 2008). Content is classified into defined categories, which are detailed in a codebook. The codebook that the author created for this study specified eight areas to be coded. First, it was determined if documents in the search results were relevant to the study. If newspapers were not used directly in the research but were cited from secondary sources, or if the term “newspaper” appeared in the document in another context, such as for the recruitment of subjects for a study, then the dissertation or thesis was coded as not relevant to the study.

Relevant documents were then coded in seven other areas. The key categories for this study were the discipline of the dissertation or thesis author, the time periods of the newspapers used in the research, and the origin of the newspapers used – U.S., non-U.S., or both.

The author used the “Taxonomy of Disciplines” from the Council of Graduate Schools/Educational Testing Service’s Survey of Graduate Enrollment as a coding scheme for

the disciplines of the authors. Time periods of newspapers used in each dissertation or thesis were counted and categorized into the following: pre-1700, 1700-1749, 1750-1799, 1800-1849, 1850-1899, 1900-1949, 1950-1999, 2000-2008, or unknown.

Additional categories that were coded included the subject headings assigned to a document in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT) Full Text database, the university affiliation of the author, whether the degree was a Ph.D. or a Master's, and the year the degree was conferred.

Documents were retrieved from the PQDT Full Text database by searching the keyword "newspaper" in the citation and abstract field for documents published between 2004 and 2008. The search was limited to full-text English-language documents, with 1,882 results (Feeney, 2013).

A randomly-selected sample of 321 documents was coded by the author and a research assistant.² An important component of content analysis is determining intercoder reliability, which is "the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message...and reach the same conclusion" (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Intercoder reliability was calculated for each variable using Scott's pi and Cohen's kappa, two measures that account for chance agreement (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005), and ranged from .79 to 1.00.

Results

After coding for relevancy to the study, there were 262 documents that were included for coding in the other categories. Of these, 176 documents (67%) used only U.S. newspapers, while 60 (23%), used only non-U.S. newspapers, and 25 (10%) used both U.S. and non-U.S. newspapers. For one document, the origin of the newspapers could not be determined. A possible limitation of this study is that the search was limited to dissertations and theses in English. There may have been more that used newspapers from outside the United States if documents in other languages had been included in the study.

Disciplines

Across all of the relevant dissertations and theses, the highest number was written by researchers in history (24%) and communication/journalism (18%).

For about 11% of the documents, the authors' disciplines were coded as "undetermined" because their department or major was not stated explicitly in the document. There were also about 6% that were coded as "multiple disciplines". The remaining dissertations and theses were written by scholars in a variety of disciplines, including political science (5.7%), sociology (4.9%), education (4.6%), social sciences-other (4.6%), English language and literature (3.8%),

² Appropriate sample size was determined from a table in Powell, R., & Connaway, L.S., (2004).

performing arts (2.3%), health sciences (1.9%), art history (1.5%), foreign languages and literature (1.1%), and more (Feeney, 2013).

Documents using only non-U.S. newspapers were generally written by scholars in the same disciplines as those using only U.S. newspapers or both U.S. and non-U.S. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the number of dissertations and theses in some disciplines by origin of newspapers used. The highest number of dissertations and theses for each was in history. For research using only U.S. or only non-U.S. newspapers, the next highest number were in communication/journalism. The only documents in foreign languages and literatures were those that used only newspapers from outside the United States, while scholars in English language and literature were much more likely to use only U.S. newspapers.

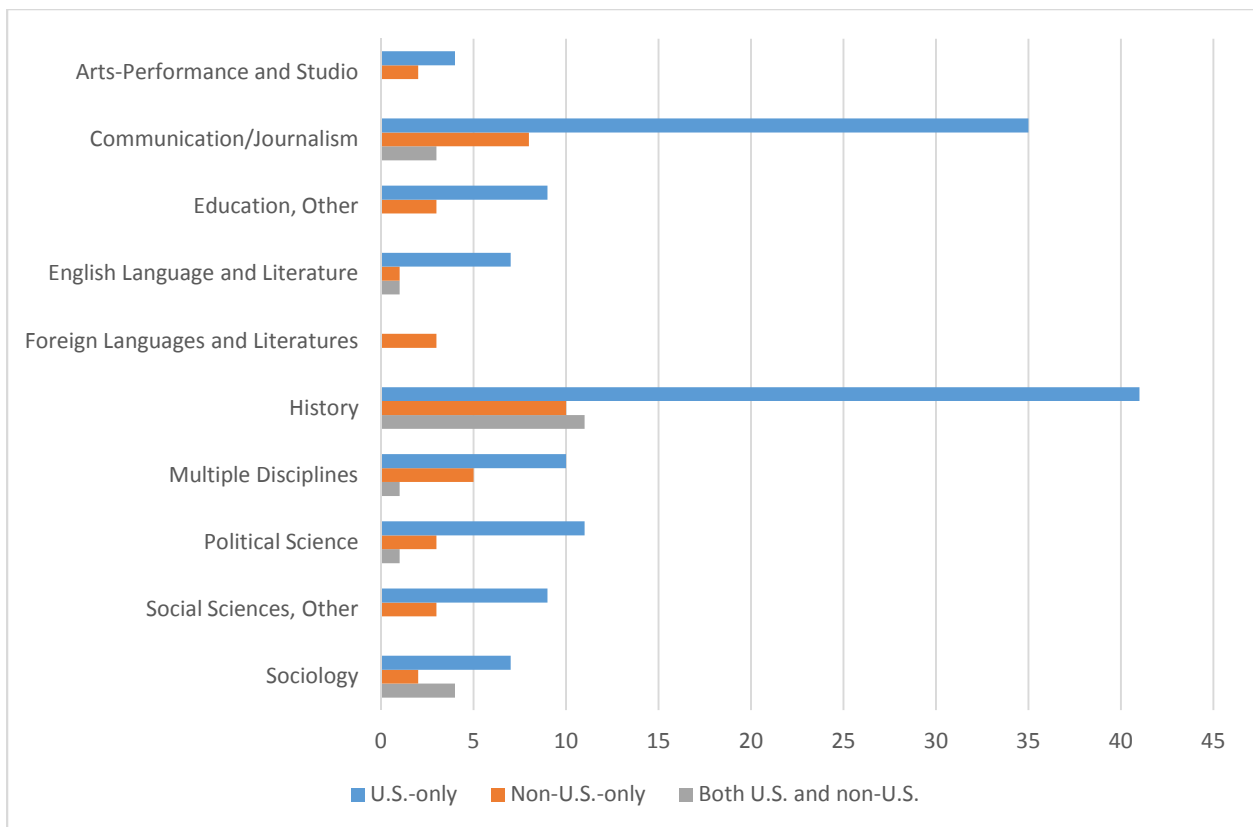


Figure 1. Comparison of disciplines by origin of newspapers used in their research.

Time Periods

The majority of newspapers used were from the more recent time periods of 2000-2008 and 1950-1999, followed in descending order by 1900-1949, 1850-1899, 1800-1849, 1750-1799, and 1700-1749. No dissertations or theses in the sample used newspapers from before 1700. This trend was generally the same, regardless of origin of newspaper (see Figure 2). Documents using only non-U.S. newspapers did not use any papers from 1700-1749.

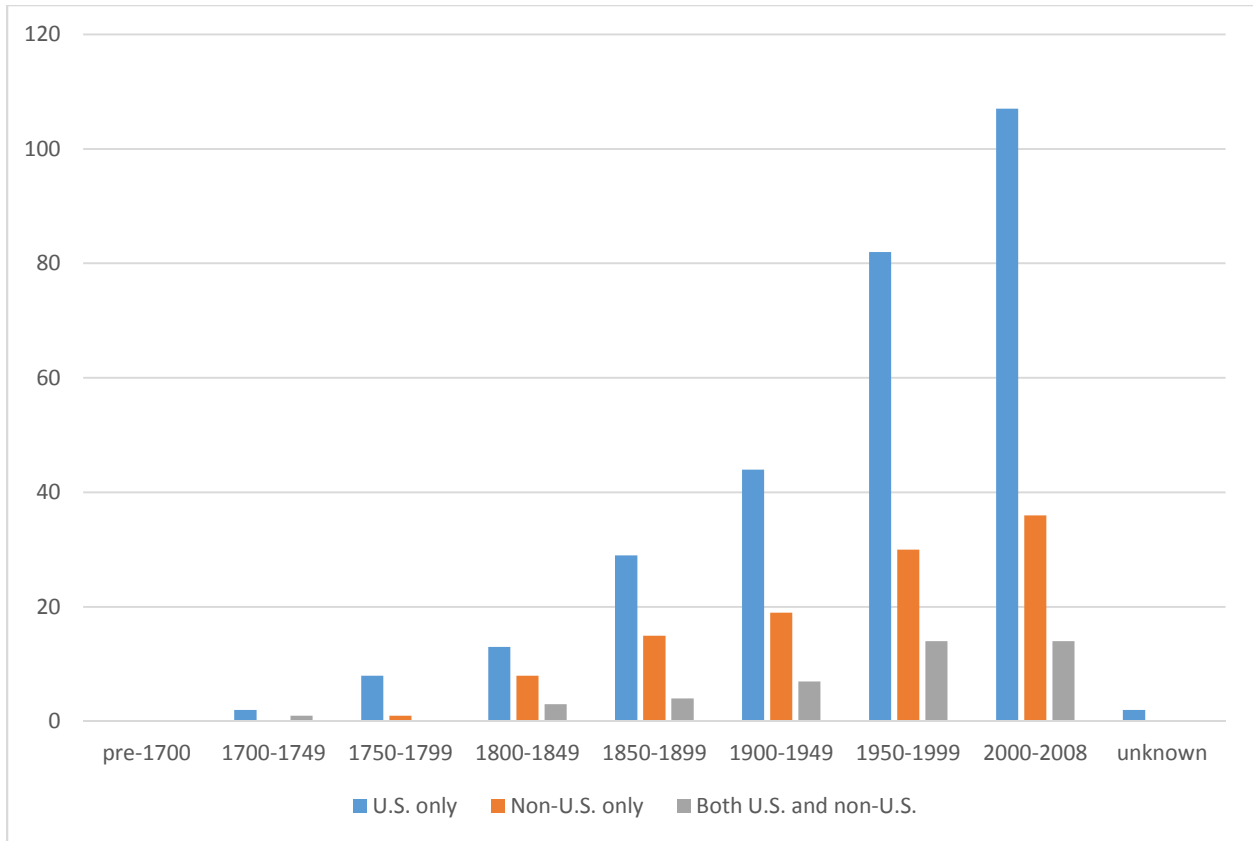


Figure 2. Time periods of newspapers used by origin of newspaper

Countries

Newspapers from thirty different countries were represented in the sixty dissertations and theses that used only newspapers from outside the United States. The highest number of these were newspapers from Canada. Twenty-five dissertations or theses used Canadian newspapers, but it should be noted that only Canadian documents used Canadian newspapers. No U.S. documents used Canadian newspapers. There was one Canadian dissertation that used newspapers from Malawi, and two that used both Canadian and British papers.

In examining only the U.S. dissertations and theses, four documents used newspapers from India, three used Japanese newspapers, and three used Mexican newspapers. Newspapers from China, England, France, Germany, Taiwan, and Turkey were each used in two dissertations or theses. Newspapers from the following countries were each used in one dissertation or thesis: Azerbaijan, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Kuwait, Mozambique, Puerto Rico, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Tanzania, Turkmenistan, Vietnam, and Zambia.

Most of the dissertations and theses that used international newspapers in this sample used newspapers from one country only. Seven used newspapers from more than one country.

Discussion

Almost half of the dissertations and theses in the sample were written by scholars in history and communication/journalism. The importance of newspapers to historians' research has been well-documented (Allen & Sieczkiewicz, 2010; Bingham, 2010; Jones, n.d.). Their significance to researchers in communication and journalism has also been established. For example, in a review of content analysis articles published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* between 1971 and 1995, almost half of those articles used newspapers (Riffe & Freitag, 1997).

In this study, newspapers were also used by scholars in many other disciplines. Jones (n.d.) provided examples of newspaper research by scholars in linguistics, geology, and archaeology, to name a few. Krtalic's (2012) citation analysis found that newspapers are important sources of information for Croatian researchers in the social sciences and humanities, from history to linguistics to literature and information sciences. Similarly, newspapers are a major resource for scholars in Finland, in a variety of disciplines, from history to political science to art to the natural sciences (Bremer-Laamanen, 2007).

With newspapers being useful to such a variety of fields, there is great opportunity for libraries to widely promote news resources. Marketing of news content should be targeted to specific disciplines that use news resources (Cheney, 2011). Marketing aimed at faculty and students in certain disciplines could be further tailored based on how they use those resources. For example, linguistics scholars may search online news sources for key words and phrases, while scholars in history or literature may read newspapers "page by page, and evaluate information in context" (Krtalic, 2012).

In this study, some researchers used newspapers as their main source of information, such as in a content analysis of one or two titles on a particular issue or event. Some used newspapers as supplementary sources to other primary sources, or in addition to other information, such as original interviews and surveys. This deeper understanding of how newspapers are used in research can help libraries customize their marketing and package news content alongside complementary resources, such as text analysis tools, statistical software, research methods textbooks, or other primary source collections.

In the case of international newspapers specifically, Cheney (2010) noted that use of international news is "relatively small" and that "librarians may need to find ways to teach and market this content more effectively." Making international news sources more prominent in databases searches and results could be one solution (Cheney, 2010). In addition, libraries need to remind researchers about the international news content to which they provide access. In their study of usage of print newspapers, Freeland and Bailey (2008) found that most of the international newspapers were not being used. When faculty members in Romance and Germanic languages were informed of the usage study and that international titles may be cancelled, there was some increase in usage of titles like *Times of India*. Cheney (2010) stated that international newspapers are "used relatively little, overall, in teaching and learning," in

part because “researchers and students continue to use those news resources most familiar to them.”

Librarians could encourage the use international news content by integrating these resources into library instruction sessions and library research guides. We should also ensure that international newspapers are easier to find by promoting to faculty and students the news resources available to CRL member libraries and resources such as ICON, and including links to specific digitized international newspaper collections on subject guides for key disciplines.

This study also found that the majority of newspapers used, whether from the United States or from outside the United States, were largely from the mid-twentieth century forward. This may be due to the wider availability of current news content in aggregator databases such as *Lexis-Nexis Academic* or NewsBank’s *Access World News*, to which many libraries subscribe. However, in reviewing the dissertations and theses, it could not always be determined how the newspapers had been accessed. Some scholars mentioned a particular database as the source of the news content, and some listed specific library archives in their bibliographies, but many did not indicate whether they had accessed the newspapers in print, on microfilm, or online.

It is not clear whether lack of availability to or lack of awareness of historical newspapers from other countries affected what time periods the researchers used. But this is another aspect of newspaper content that libraries can better promote – access to both historical and current news. Another marketing strategy that libraries could use to spread the news about newspaper content would be to provide examples to faculty and students of how other scholars, like the ones examined in this study, are tapping into these rich resources. This could be done in orientation sessions, instructional sessions, or one-on-one research consultations, or those examples could be listed on news research guides.

While it was interesting to see newspapers from a variety of countries represented in the sample, they were often used in only one or two dissertations or theses. This, again, presents an opportunity for libraries to promote the availability of international newspapers to faculty and students. Since historians and communication/journalism scholars are some of the heaviest users of newspapers, a good first step would be to promote lesser-used international newspapers as alternative or additional sources for those researchers.

Conclusion

This study found that there are scholars in a wide range of disciplines using international newspapers in their research. This presents an opportunity for libraries to promote news resources to a large number of their faculty and students, both broadly and in targeted marketing to specific disciplines. Understanding who uses newspapers, what time periods they research, and the countries of origin of the newspapers used, can help libraries better promote the news resources that are available. They can also encourage researchers to expand the range of newspapers they use to increase the use of international newspapers.

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