Factors Influencing Tabloid News Diffusion: Comparison with Hard News

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Statement of Purpose

The tabloidization of journalism has blurred a distinct line between hard news and tabloid news. Television news magazines have been transforming into "Infotainment" programs and shifting their focus from political and social issues to scandalous and personal stories such as celebrities' love affairs and bizarre crimes (Bird, 1998). Even mainstream news organizations are buying into the trend (Alter, 1995). These two news categories are merging together; however, attributes of hard news and tabloid news may still matter to the news audience. Tabloid news may have different attributes to activate particular demographic groups' networks from those of hard news. People may perceive and react differently to hard news and tabloid news, respectively. Thus, the dissemination process of tabloid news may differ from that of hard news. Little, however, is understood about the diffusion of tabloid news and people's reaction to the news category.

This study attempts to fill these gaps in the literature by examining tabloid news diffusion and comparing the results of tabloid news diffusion with those of hard news. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not there is a distinct line between hard news and tabloid news in terms of news diffusion process by testing the applicability of news diffusion theory to tabloid news.

In this study, two tabloid news events and two hard news events in Japan are examined by surveying college students. These tabloid stories are the engagement of a popular sumo wrestler and actress, and the "surprise" second marriage of a popular singer. All these tabloid news stories were sensational and attracted national attention in Japan. These hard events are the selection of a socialist Prime Minister and the Great Hanshin earthquake.

Research about how news events diffuse began in the 1940s. However, these studies focused exclusively on "hard news" such as assassinations and catastrophes. No literature clearly distinguished between hard news and tabloid news in terms of diffusion patterns, interpersonal roles, and gender roles. News

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diffusion studies generally found that interpersonal communication plays a role in diffusing news events. Even though fast and far reaching new media revolutionized our information environment, word of mouth still remains as a means of a primary news source for important events (for a comprehensive review, see DeFleur, 1987).[1] This interpersonal role in diffusion process ought to be investigated with tabloid news events because it is necessary to examine the diffusion of non-hard news to understand the comprehensive process of news diffusion (McQuail, 1994). Therefore, examining tabloid news diffusion will provide more insight and empirical evidence into news diffusion research that has been biased toward hard news diffusion patterns.

Literature Review

Tabloid News

The definition of tabloid news is controversial (Grabe, 1997). In this study, tabloid news is defined as news that is (1) celebrities' matter, and (2) primarily covered by tabloid newspapers and magazines and "infotainment" television programs, so-called "Waido show" in Japan. This news category is often called "geino news" (celebrity news) in Japan and "Hollywood gossip" in the United States. Celebrities' love affairs and engagements/marriages/divorces fall in this news category. This does not necessarily mean that news stories covered by "hard" newspapers and television news programs are excluded. While tabloid news has been criticized by established journalists and critics as lowbrow and degrading journalism, it has established a niche and has become a bona fide commodity even in respected daily newspapers and news organizations such as *The New York Times* and *ABC News* (Case, 1992; Alter, 1995). Thus, the boundary between hard news and tabloid news is blurred, and sometimes, a news piece belongs to the hard and the tabloid news categories simultaneously (Tharp & Streisand, 1994). For example, news about the U.S. President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky is a political affair as well as a "soap opera" extramarital love affair. Or, some assert that Clinton's affair deserves only tabloid coverage, and vice versa.

From the perspective of news diffusion, there might not be any difference between soft and hard news, and the only difference may be news value and its personal salience. People who think a news story is important should be more likely to tell others about it regardless of the category (hard or tabloid). In addition, the distinction between tabloid and hard news is oftentimes dependent upon an individual's interpretation. As the boundary between hard news programs and "infotainment" news programs is becoming blurred, the distinct line that divides hard news from tabloid news seems non-existing.

News Diffusion

The history of systematic research about news diffusion can be traced back to more than a half century. One of the pioneering studies was Miller's study on the news story about the U.S. President Roosevelt's death (1945). The research findings suggest that the word of mouth communication increases the spread of the news very quickly, though the initial source of information was a mass medium, radio. In the 1960s, more scholars gave attention to news diffusion, and the number of the studies increased. Greater attention could be attributed to The United States' President John F. Kennedy's assassination. This tragedy eventually provided a window of opportunity for news diffusion scholars to examine the various aspects of the spread of the news (for example, Greenberg, 1964; Hill & Bonjean, 1964). Hill and Bonjean found that a majority of people (57 %) learned the news by interpersonal communication even though electronic media had become ubiquitous at that time. The study confirmed that the significance of the news event activated the interpersonal channel as the initial news source.

Levy (1969) studied people's knowledge about and their information source for six assassinations that occurred in the United States in the 1960s: President Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and George Lincoln Rockwell. A national probability sample of 1,200 people were asked whether or not they had heard of these events and what was their first news source. The entire sample had heard about the Kennedy and King assassinations, although there were significant racial (white and non-white) differences whether they had known about the other assassinations. For example, while 82 percent of non-whites and 58 percent of whites heard about the Evers assassination, for the Malcolm X, the percentage were 81 percent and 69 percent, respectively. In terms of news source, the majority of respondents learned about the events through television. There was an inverse relationship between educational levels and the percentage of respondents whose first source was television, however. People with higher educational levels were more likely to learn the news by radio than those of lower educational levels.

Bantz, Petronio, and Rarick (1983) examined the influence of demographics and political affiliation on post communication behaviors by using the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan. As is the case of crisis news, the majority of respondents (68 %) reported interpersonal communication as the first news source. The authors cross-tabulated demographic variables such as gender, race, age, political affiliation and occupation against first information source and post-communication behaviors such as informing others. On one hand, there were no differences between demographic characteristics and the first news source. On the other hand, some demographic variables were related with post behaviors: younger people were more likely to tell someone else than older people; men and younger people used television for a follow-up

information source more than women and older people, respectively. Emotional responses on communication behavior after learning of the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger were analyzed by Riffe and Stovall (1989). This study found that those who were very upset were more likely and faster to diffuse the news interpersonally.

News Diffusion Propositions

The findings of these studies produced the following general propositions about the news diffusion process (Gantz & Tokinoya, 1987: 198):

1. The rate and extent of diffusion are directly related to the importance/salience of the event; diffusion is more rapid and widespread as importance/salience increases.
2. The role of mediated and interpersonal channels in the process is functionally related to the importance/salience of the event; only with very important/salient events will interpersonal channels be highly active in the initial dissemination or follow-up processes.
3. Source of first awareness is functionally related to the availability and accessibility of mediated and interpersonal channels; interpersonal dissemination will be greatest when the media are unavailable.
4. Source of first awareness is functionally related to normal usage patterns associated with the mediated channels; aside from exceptional events, most people will become aware of unanticipated events from the medium they normally rely upon for news.

Research Questions

These propositions were drawn almost exclusively from "hard news" diffusion research and thus should hold within the "hard news" category (Gantz & Tokinoya, 1987). However, the process of diffusion is expected to vary dependent upon the characteristics of news because individuals' reactions may differ according to the attributes of a news story, namely, hard or soft. Therefore, it is important to investigate this phenomenon by incorporating tabloid news for understanding the comprehensive process of news diffusion.

This study thus examines whether the diffusion process (or pattern) of tabloid news is different from hard news diffusion, or what both news categories have in common in terms of diffusion pattern. It also explores what factors affect the velocity of news diffusion. For example, daily media use, especially television viewing, is assumed to increase the chance to hear about a news story. News attributes such as the degree of surprise may increase or decrease the like-

lihood that people inform others of the news. For example, it is said that the more surprising a news story is the more likely people are to pass it along. Research questions are:

R1: What factors affect the speed of news receiving, and are there any differences between hard news and tabloid news?
R2: Do the news attributes such as impression, surprise, and reliability of news affect post communication behaviors, and are there any difference between hard and tabloid news?
R3: Is news diffusion theory applicable to tabloid news?

Methods

Data were gathered about two "tabloid news" events and two hard news events in Japan from 1992 to 1998. Within a few days after these news events, one of the present investigator asked students in his regular social science class sessions to fill out questionnaires.

Since respondents in this study were all college students, one should be careful to generalize the results. In addition, the respondents' universities are located in the Tokyo metropolitan area. The results might be different if respondents from other colleges in rural areas had been used because information environment and daily routines of urban areas should differ from those of rural areas. External validity is in question. This study, however, is not intended to make point estimates of population parameters, but to provide empirical evidence to fill the gaps in the literature. Since respondents for all the four news events were similar in terms of living and information environment, confounding factors have been reduced. Thus, the differences in dependent variables could be at least partly attributed to independent variables. In addition, relatively immediate questionnaire administration is thought to have contributed to the accuracy of respondents' recall. The events and the brief backgrounds are as follows:

Tabloid News Stories

The Engagement of Star Sumo Wrestler and Super Actress

Sumo wrestling is totally different from pro-wrestling in the U.S. Sumo is a national sports game and one of the most popular professional sports in Japan. Sumo wrestlers are highly respected as strong and disciplined in the nation. In the evening of October 26, 1992, a television news program scooped the engagement of the number one star wrestler, Takanohana, and one of the most

popular actresses, Rie Miyazawa. Their popularity at that time was equivalent to NBA superstar Michael Jordan and Hollywood actress Julia Roberts. This news was sensational because both are super stars. After the scoop, all the other television networks' late night news programs followed the news. Not only tabloid newspapers but also all the "Big 3" national elite newspapers covered the story in the front page.

Data were collected three and four days after the news revelation from a convenience sample of two classes at a private university in the Tokyo Metropolitan area. Two hundred and twenty-seven undergraduate students filled out a questionnaire. One hundred and seventy-seven (78 %) were men and fifty (22 %) were women.

"Surprise" Second Marriage

Seiko Matsuda, a scandalous singer, faxed a marriage announcement to the major media companies including network television stations in the morning on May 25, 1998. The announcement said that she was going to get married in the evening of the same day. She is as scandalous and well known as "Madonna" is in the U.S. This news story was as sensational as and reported as intensively as the above engagement stories.

Data were collected four days after the announcement from a convenience sample at a private university in Tokyo, which is different from the above listed university. Two hundred and eighteen undergraduate students filled out questionnaire. One hundred and thirty-five (62 %) were men and eight-three (38 %) were women.

Hard News Stories

Selection of Socialist Prime Minister

The Japan Socialist Party's chairperson, Tomiichi Murayama, was selected as the Prime Minster at 9:58PM, June B9, 1994. He was the first socialist Prime Minister in 40 years.

Data were collected from four universities located in the Tokyo metropolitan area between July 1 and 5. Four hundred forty-one undergraduates filled the questionnaire. Two hundred seventy-five (63%) were men and one hundred sixty-five (38%) were women.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake

A great earthquake jolted Japan's Hanshin area (Osaka and Kobe) at 5:46AM, January 1995. It claimed more than 5,000 lives and devastated the area.

Three days later, two hundred forty undergraduates of a private university were asked to fill questionnaire. One hundred eighty-one (79%) were men and fifty-one (21%) were women.

Questionnaire and Variables

Each questionnaire was nearly identical. The questionnaire asked respondents what time (Time: time lapse between the time a news event was first reported and the time a respondent received the news[2]) and how they first heard of these news stories (News Source), as well as whether they passed on the news to others (Inform). The News Source item was dichotomized into two categories (binominal): whether they first heard about the news stories through mass media or interpersonal communication channels. They were also asked whether the news stories became the topic of conversation among their friends (Topic).

Media use items asked about their usual media exposure on Likert scales (newspaper reading and television news program watching = 4-point, television watching = 5-point). The scales were coded in inverse relation to the frequency of media exposure for the purposes of an easier interpretation in multiple regression analysis. Numerical values of the scale become bigger as the frequency of media exposure becomes smaller.[3] Each media use item serves as an independent variable for Research Question 1. In addition, impression items assessed respondents opinions about a news story such as the degrees of (1) Good/ Bad (For all the tabloid news stories and "Prime Minister," Did you feel favorable when you heard about the news?; For "Earthquake"; Did you feel bad...?), (2) Surprise (Were you surprised at the news?), and (3) Reliability (Did you think the news story reliable?). Each impression item was answered on Likert scales ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = no, 2 = not very, 3 = relatively, yes, and 4 = very much). All these impression items are used as independent variables to answer Research Question 2.

Demographic information other than Gender such as Level (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior) and Home (whether they live with parents or not) were also collected. Because life styles of freshmen and seniors are thought to be different, Level is used in the analysis of Research Question 1. Variable Home is also included in the analysis as an independent variable because the information environment of students living with their parents is thought to be significantly different from that of students living alone.

Results

Multiple regression was used for Research Question 1 to measure the relative correlations between the frequency of media exposure, demographic fac-

tors, and the speed of receiving news (Time). Three demographic variables were used: Gender (male = 0, female = 1); Level (freshman = 1, sophomore = 2, junior = 3, and senior = 4); and Home (whether they live with parents or not: no = 0, yes = 1). Since a smaller unit in Time means faster reception of news, a negative sign in Gender and Home coefficients means faster news reception for female respondents and respondents living with parents, respectively. These variables were entered first in the equation. In order to measure the relative correlation, media exposure variables were then entered second. Unlike Gender and Home, a positive sign in media exposure variables indicates faster news reception. Table 1 shows the results of the multiple regression test.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Results Indicating Media Use on Diffusion Speed

		ENGAGEMENT				MARRIAGE			
	Step	R	R^2	R^2 Change	Final β	R	R^2	R^2 Change	Final β
DEMOGRAPHICS	1	.095	.009	.009		.274	.075	.075***	
Gender					-.04				-.26***
Level					.05				.02
Home					.04				.09
MEDIA EXPOSURE	2	.257	.066	.057***		.379	.144	.069***	
Newspaper					.09				.01
Television News					.17**				.18**
Television					-.09				-.14**
		Step 1: F (3, 217) = .66				Step 1: F (3, 212) = 5.73***			
		Step 2: F (6, 214) = 2.52**				Step 2: F (3, 212) = 5.86***			

		PRIME MINISTER				EARTHQUAKE			
	Step	R	R^2	R^2 Change	Final β	R	R^2	R^2 Change	Final β
DEMOGRAPHICS	1	.159	.025	.025**		.289	.084	.084***	
Gender					-.09*				-.20***
Level					.02				.01
Home					-.13**				-.15**
MEDIA EXPOSURE	2	.193	.037	.012**		.339	.115	.031**	
Newspaper					.04				.02
Television News					.05				.18***
Television					-.07				.01
		Step 1: F (3, 431) = 3.73**				Step 1: F (3, 235) = 7.16***			
		Step 2: F (6, 428) = 2.77**				Step 2: F (6, 232) = 5.02***			

NOTE

- Independent variables are coded as follows: Gender (0 = Female, 1 = Male), Level (1 = Freshman, 2 = Sophomore, 3, Junior, 4 = Senior), Home (0 = yes, 1 = no), Newspaper and Television News (4-point Likert scale), and Television (5-point Likert scale).
- Significance for multiple regression: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

In "Engagement," none of the demographic variables were significant at the first step. The final equation after including media exposure variables accounted for 7 percent of the diffusion speed ($R = .26$). Among media exposure variables, television news viewing is the only significant variable ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$): the frequency of television news viewing is positively associated with the speed of news reception.

On the other hand, demographic variables accounted for 8 percent of the "Marriage" diffusion speed on the first step ($p < .01$). At this step, Gender was the only significant predictor. Media exposure variables also made up 7 percent of the diffusion speed on the second step. The final equation accounted for 14 percent of the variance in the "Marriage" diffusion speed ($R = .38$). While television news viewing ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) was a significant positive predictor, television viewing ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .05$) was a significant negative predictor among the media exposure variables. In other words, the more television news one watches the faster one receives the news; on the other hand, the more television one watches in general the slower one receives the news. Gender ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .01$) remained significant: women are faster in receiving the news even after controlling for other variables.

In "Prime Minister," demographic variables accounted for 3 percent of the diffusion speed on the first step ($p < .05$). None of media exposure variables contributed to the diffusion speed. Only Home is related with the speed of news diffusion in the final equation ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$). Those who lived with their parents were faster in receiving the news. Gender is marginally significant ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .10$). The final equation accounted for 14 percent of the variance in the "Marriage" diffusion speed ($R = .38$).

Demographic variables in "Earthquake" accounted for 8 percent of diffusion speed on the first step ($p < .01$). At this step, Gender and Home were significant predictors. Media exposure variables also made up 3 percent of the diffusion speed on the second step. The final equation accounted for 12 percent of the variance in the "Earthquake" diffusion speed ($R = .34$). Television news viewing ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) was the only significant predictor among the media exposure variables. Gender ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .01$) and Home ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$) remained significant. Being a woman and living with one's parents are predictors for faster speed of news diffusion. Faster reception of news for women is again confirmed in "Earthquake."

To sum up the results in the regression test, television news viewing is an important factor for receiving news events faster regardless of news category. In terms of diffusion speed by gender, the findings of regression test generally suggest that women are generally faster in receiving news events regardless of news category. Home (living with one's parents) is a positive predictor for faster news reception only in hard news events. This finding in Home indicates the existence of a distinct line between hard news and tabloid news as is discussed

in the following section.

For Research Question 2 that deals with post communication behaviors, multiple logistic regression was used. Logistic regression measures the odds ratio of a dichotomous response. The dependent variables of RQ 2 are binary response variables, (1) whether or not one informed others of the news story (Inform: 1 = yes, 0 = no) and (2) whether or not one made the news story a topic of conversation (Topic: 1 = yes, 0 = no). Thus, this statistical method can measure relative contributions of independent variables to the odds ratio of the post behavior.[4] The independent variables are the degree of news impression such as Good/Bad, Surprise, and Reliability as detailed above. In addition to Gender, News Source (0 = mass media, 1 = interpersonal) is also included as a control variable since the initial news source may affect the post communication behaviors.

Table 2 shows the results of multiple logistic regression. Generally, Gender is a predictor for the post communication behaviors: women are more likely to engage in the post communication behaviors regardless of news category (Topic in "Engagement": $\beta = 1.23$, $p < .05$; Inform in "Marriage": $\beta = 1.23$, $p < .05$; Topic in "Marriage": $\beta = 1.49$, $p < .01$; Inform in "Prime Minister": $\beta = .44$, $p < .05$). The information channel by which one first received news does not seem a good predictor for the post behaviors. The only significant relationship is found at Inform in "Engagement" ($\beta = -.90$, $p < .05$). Respondents who received "Engagement" by media channels are more likely to pass along the news event to others than those by interpersonal channel.

Among impression items, the degree of Surprise appears the only predictor for post behaviors. The finding is interesting, but not surprising: the more surprised people were the more likely they were to engage in post communication behaviors (Inform in "Engagement": $\beta = .92$, $p < .01$; Topic in "Engagement": $\beta = 1.10$, $p < .01$; Topic in "Marriage": $\beta = .76$, $p < .01$; Topic in "Prime Minister": $\beta = .45$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, neither the degree of Good/Bad or Reliability in any news event could predict the post behaviors except for a marginally significant item (Good/Bad, Inform in "Marriage"). Only in "Earthquake," Surprise was not a significant predictor for the post behaviors. The insignificance could be attributed to the tremendous news value of the news event. The percentage of "surprised" respondents in "Earthquake" is the highest in these four news events, 94 percent. The percentages of respondents who engaged in the post behaviors in the new event are also among the highest, 90 percent for Inform and 93% for Topic. This non-variance in response probably led to the insignificant finding in "Surprise."

As for research question 3 (applicability of news diffusion theory to tabloid news), over all findings in tabloid news diffusion seem to be in accord with hard news diffusion. News diffusion theory posits that diffusion is more rapid and widespread as the importance of a news event increases (Gantz & Tokinoya, 1987).

Table 2: Multiple Logit Regression Analysis: Factors Affecting Post Behaviors

	ENGAGEMENT				MARRIAGE			
	Inform		Topic		Inform		Topic	
Independent Vs	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Gender	-.11	.49	1.23**	.59	1.23**	.51	1.49***	.56
News Source	-.90**	.43	.01	.45	-.21	.49	-.03	.52
Impression Items								
Good/Bad	.33	.23	.21	.22	.51*	.29	-.12	.28
Surprise	.92***	.25	1.10***	.25	.28	.27	.76***	.29
Reliability	.11	.30	-.31	.28	-.21	.33	-.33	.35
Logit Constant	4.68***	.99	2.84	.85	1.30	1.10	.36	1.10

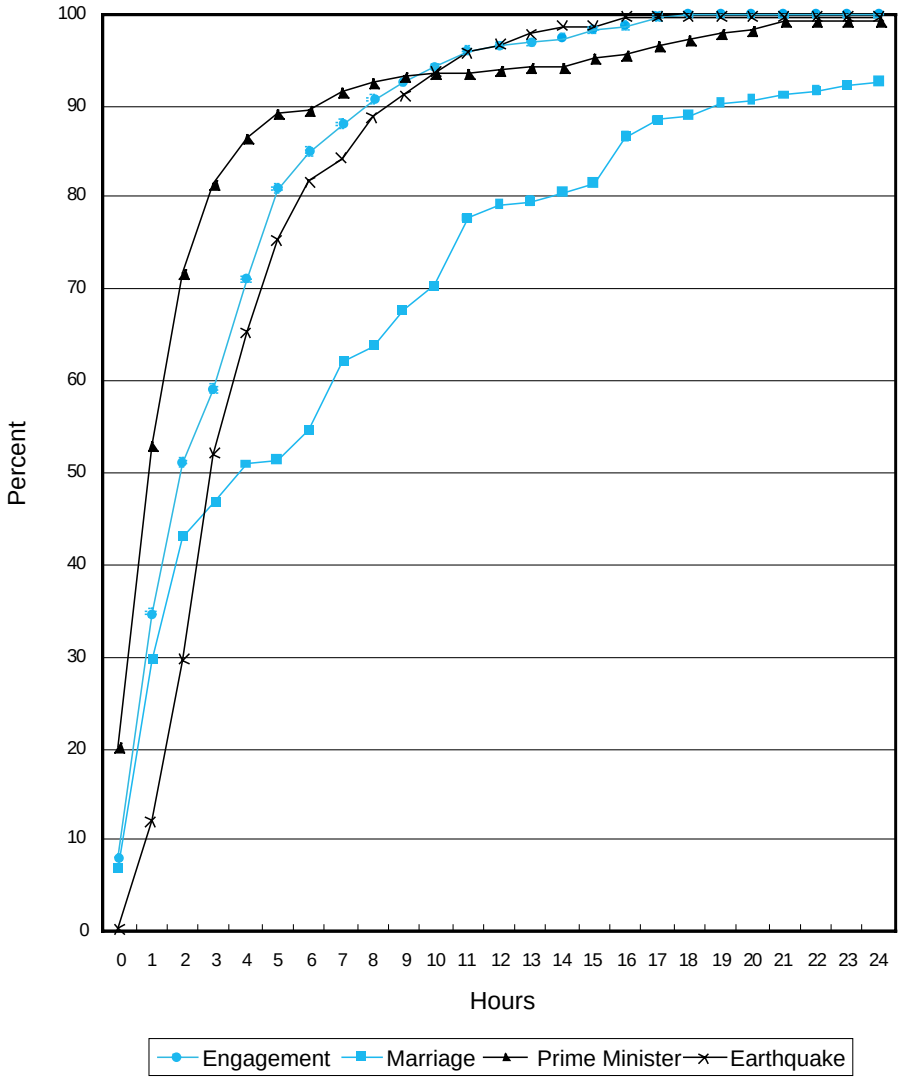
	PRIME MINISTER				EARTHQUAKE			
	Inform		Topic		Inform		Topic	
Independent Vs	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Gender	.44**	.21	.10	.21	1.77*	1.05	.49	.81
News Source	-.69*	.37	.62*	.36	.18	.51	.57	.67
Impression Items								
Good/Bad	.16	.13	.07	.13	.26	.29	.43	.34
Surprise	.19	.13	.45***	.14	.44	.35	.54	.38
Reliability	.23	.16	.09	.16	-.06	.25	.31	.29
Logit Constant	1.23**	.54	1.16**	.55	3.25***	.69	4.72***	.89

NOTE

- Independent variables are coded as follows: Gender (1 = Female, 0 = Male), News Source (1 = Interpersonal, 0 = Mass Media), Good/Bad, Surprise, and Reliability (1 = no, 2 = not very, 3 = relatively, yes, and 4 = very much).
- Dependent variables are coded as follows: Inform and Topic (1 = yes, 0 = no).
- Significance for Multiple logistic regression: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

The data about the speed of receiving news (Time) were presented by time interval in Chart 1. The slopes of the lines show the velocity of the diffusion process for each news event. Since sleeping patterns during the night hours affect the velocity of the news diffusion process, the hours between 0:00 to 6:00AM were deleted from the calculations in order to construct the standardized velocity of diffusion (Rosengren, 1973; Rosengren, 1987). Then, respondents who learned of the news events after midnight were considered to have received them at 6:00 in the morning. Graphic plots of the accumulated number of knowers (Chart 1) show the differences among these news events. Zero in the charts indicates receiving news at the same hour when the news was first reported.

Chart 1: News Diffusion Rates



Taking a quick glance at the chart, the diffusion speed of "Marriage" is apparently slower than that of the others. It took 19 hours to reach 90 percent diffusion rates in the "Marriage" news. The other three news events reached 90 percent diffusion rates within nine hours. Whereas this study did not content analyze the amount of coverage on these events or measure the degrees of importance of these news events, "Marriage" was the least surprising and newsworthy story among the others. There are a couple of reasons that explain the relative "un-newsworthiness" of "Marriage": (1) only "Marriage" was not treated as a front page story by the three elite newspapers, and (2) "Marriage" was an unexpected event; however, the relative popularity of the couple (the bride was a scandalous singer who had passed her prime and the bridegroom was an unknown dentist) was much lower than that of the "Engagement" couple.

Relative slow diffusion of "Earthquake" in the first few hours could be attributed to the early occurrence, 5:46AM. The diffusion rate, however, accelerated as time went by. The diffusion rate of "Earthquake" caught up with and eventually passed those of "Engagement" and "Prime Minister." This finding matches one of the news diffusion propositions; the speed of diffusion is in accordance with the importance of a news event.

Another proposition of news diffusion theory postulates that interpersonal communication becomes more active as the importance of a news event increases. This is also confirmed in the tabloid news diffusion. Even though "Engagement" was reported late at night, more respondents heard the news through interpersonal channels than they did in "Marriage" which was aired early in the morning. Further, "Engagement" triggered post communication behaviors more than "Marriage" did. The literature suggests that news events occurring in the evening are less likely to be diffused through interpersonal channels since many people are at home. "Engagement" may have overcome the disadvantage in interpersonal channel diffusion because of its greater news value.

Although it is not clearly stated, the news diffusion propositions by Gantz & Tokinoya (1987) indicate that daily media use is positively associated with the faster awareness of news. In all tabloid news events examined here, daily television news viewing is positively associated with the speed of diffusion. It is thus summarized that the diffusion of tabloid news events are similar to that of hard news events except that (1) Home is a positive predictor of diffusion speed only for hard news, and (2) women are slightly more active in post behaviors of tabloid news events than in hard news events.

Discussion

This study demonstrated news diffusion theory is generally applicable to tabloid news even though the theory has been constructed exclusively with hard

news. Female respondents appear to engage more in tabloid news post behaviors than in hard news, yet the difference is not decisive. The only factor that exclusively affects hard news diffusion is Home. Living with one's parents is a significant positive predictor for the faster diffusion of the hard news events only. It would be right to infer that parents inform their children more about hard news stories than about tabloid news because of paternal responsibility. Assuming this, the news categories, hard or tabloid, still matter to parents and/or older generations. Put another way, there exists a distinct line between hard news and tabloid news at least for certain demographic groups. This needs to be verified by future studies.

The study has provided new evidence that news diffusion theory is generally applicable to the diffusion of tabloid news while indicating the possibility of a distinct line between the news categories. Therefore, it augmented the theoretical scope in news diffusion study and helped understand the comprehensive process of news diffusion. This is a major contribution to the literature.

The findings, however, should be further confirmed by empirical evidence from a variety of news events and demographic groups. First, the hard news events used in this study are exceptional and tremendous events. For example, "Prime Minister" was not only a political news story but also an extraordinary event considering the selection of a socialist Prime Minister in the second largest capitalist nation in the world. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that women talk about politics as an everyday topic. Likewise, the tabloid news events are exclusively "Hollywood gossip" news stories. Topics of tabloid news range from celebrities' matters to shocking crimes and varieties of human interests. It is questionable that shocking crime news events such as a bizarre murder trigger female post behaviors in the same way as "Hollywood gossip" did.

NOTES

1. In the age of the Internet and other state-of-the-art information technologies, this statement may not be relevant anymore. Relative importance of word of mouth may be diminishing. Research should incorporate the role of the Internet. However, the data of this study were collected before the proliferation of the Internet. Thus, this proposition should be appropriate and this study did not consider the Internet a factor.
2. Variable Time was calculated by subtracting the time when respondents received a news story from the time when the news was event first reported. Thus, a smaller time lapse is interpreted as faster news reception; a greater time lapse as slower news reception.
3. For newspaper reading, 1 = Always, 2 = Usually, 3 = Occasionally, and 4 = Rarely. For television news watching, 1 = Always, 2 = Usually, 3 =

Occasionally, and 4 = Rarely. For television watching, 1 = Equal to or more than 4 hours, 2 = Equal to or more than 3 hours and less than 4 hours, 3 = Equal to or more than 2 hours and less than 3 hours, 4 = Equal to or more than 1 hour and less 2 hours, and 5 = Less than 1 hour.

4. Coefficient, β, represents the change in the log odds of an event happening for a unit change in each independent variable. Odds ratios can be obtained by taking the inverse of the natural log of logit (p), e^{β}. For example, $\beta = 1.23$, and $e^{\beta} = 3.42$ which indicates that for each unit increase in an independent variable, the odds of p change to 342% of its previous value, an increase of 242%. For further details, see Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999).

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