

**MASS COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING:
A CASE STUDY OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF
NEWSPAPER INFORMATION AND
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

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ABSTRACT

An adequate level of information is generally regarded as a pre-condition for decision-making. Much of the information used in reaching decisions is produced and distributed by the mass media. This realization has undoubtedly focused the attention of critics and scholars on the media. Despite the existence of an abundant level of research dealing with the media, there are few theoretical frameworks for analysis of the organization of the media.

One framework that has been briefly discussed involves a concept central to geographical studies—distance-decay functions—with an analysis of the outputs of the media and the distribution of cities. This paper elaborates on the usage of this geographical framework through an examination of the outputs of newspapers in a metropolitan area. This analysis actually allows for two sets of observations. The first centers on the amount of information produced by newspapers and indicates residents in suburban cities surrounding the central city receive very little information about the affairs of their city, school and water districts, or other special districts frequently created by suburban communities. In light of data indicating most urban growth is taking place in the suburbs, this observation raises serious questions for students of decision-making. The second set of observations utilizes the geographic framework for

analysis and leads to a discussion concerning the development of flexible media systems that can match the way in which people are distributed in an urban society.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars from numerous disciplines generally agree an adequate level of information is a precondition of any decision-making process [1-4]. Ziegler and Jennings perhaps most concisely summarize the importance of information by observing, “. . . no individual can either satisfactorily evaluate a problem or adequately assess the merits of alternative solutions . . .” without information [5, p. 153]. An important source of information for citizens, bureaucrats, and policy-makers in both personal and collective decision-making processes are the mass communication networks [6-9].

Given the importance of mass media as a source of information for decision-making, it is not surprising to find a considerable body of research examining the mass communications systems that exist in the United States. Much of the research concerning mass communications and decision-making has focused on two major points: the characteristics of users of mass media and the influence of the media on political behavior. Within this first thrust, questions regarding the characteristics of users [10-13], the amount of time spent consuming the outputs of the mass media [14, 15], and the medium most preferred and believed by consumers [13, 16, 17] have been addressed. Analysis of these points has been aided by the inclusion of questions regarding mass media habits in national surveys [18].

In terms of the effects of this consumption, the research completed has dealt with political behavior and socialization. Students of politics have been concerned with the media's ability to “sell” candidates and issues to the electorate [16, 19, 20]. Sociologists have studied the images and roles projected by the media and the impact of these images on interpersonal relationships [21, 22].

Many of these works concentrating on the use of media and certain effects have not only led to the development of important theories concerning the media and decision-making, but have identified new areas where additional research is needed. Kraus and Davis, in reviewing the research completed have noted the advances made, but have also called for “. . . a comprehensive conceptualization of communication systems which goes beyond the descriptive, normative, and ideologically based typologies of early theorists.” [8, p. 114] Some scholars, in apparent agreement with Kraus and

Davis, have begun work in this direction by utilizing a geographic or spatial analysis utilizing distance decay functions to examine the distribution of the media producing information and the location of the cities served by the media. Bagdikian, in a brief analysis of the electronic media serving the Kalamazoo, Michigan region, noted the stations in the area spent 17 per cent of their broadcast time on news and information. However, these stations located in a central city served an area of 17,000 square miles in which citizens had organized themselves into two states, 150 cities, 230 townships and 210 school districts [7, p. 153]. Warren, in a far more detailed analysis of the electronic media in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, noted stations in that region, while located in one or two communities, served 102 cities in three different counties [23].

While Warren and Bagdikian did not present detailed breakdowns of the content of the information produced by the electronic media in Los Angeles and Kalamazoo, their structural analysis of the spatial distribution of the electronic media strongly suggests the existence of a relationship resembling a classical example of the distance-decay function. Numerous cities and areas are incorporating around central cities, but the producers of information are becoming more centralized in one or two cities. As this distance between information producers and the cities they serve increases both spatially and numerically, the cost of obtaining information related to local events, issues, and politics may increase drastically. Such a situation could be relevant for a study of decision-making if a distance-decay phenomenon were occurring with regard to all mass media. As the distance-decay function applies to the electronic media, it would not seem likely that the electronic media with two or three hours of air time for national, state, regional, and local news could be relied upon as a source of detailed information about local events and local governments.

In assessing the media's capability of generating information about local government and affairs, in terms of the distance-decay thesis, the electronic media represents only two of the numerous sources of information available to citizens. Newspapers are still an important component of mass communications. Although total readership, measured in terms of gross circulation has declined, daily circulation of all newspapers in 1975 was still 60,655,000. Sunday editions were read by at least 51,096,000 people. If any newspaper was read by more than one person, these data would indicate a large percentage of the population still rely on newspapers for some of the daily information they receive [24]. And while the number of newspapers has declined by almost 1000

since 1950, only eighty-one *daily* papers that were publishing in 1950 were not publishing in 1975 [24, p. 540].

The continued existence of the print medium as an obvious source of information for people engaged in decision-making suggests any conceptualization of mass communication systems must involve an analysis of newspapers. In terms of contributing to a data base conceptualizing issues involving the mass media in a geographic framework, this paper will perform a spatial analysis of the information outputs of newspapers and the distribution of citizens in suburban cities surrounding a major metropolitan area. Concentrating this study on those cities, school districts, and water districts surrounding a central city will allow an analysis of the distribution of information by newspapers in those areas where growth is taking place and new communities are being formed [25]. In this sense the study can add to the data base available on the mass media by identifying whether the geography of information produced by a major component of the print medium conforms to the distance-decay pattern observed for the electronic media [7, 23].

The study is organized into three sections. First, a description of the study area, the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan community, together with a breakdown of the governmental units in the region, will be presented. This will be followed by a spatial analysis of the distribution of newspapers and a content analysis of the information contained in these papers in a six month period. The final section of the study will examine the implications of the data with regard to collective decision-making in a metropolitan area and a geographic orientation for analyzing mass media.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF GOVERNMENT AND THE PRINT MEDIUM IN THE DALLAS/FORT WORTH AREA

The Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area was chosen for an analysis of the geography of newspapers and governmental units both because of its proximity to the researchers and its size. The Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area is located in north-central Texas. The downtown areas of the two major cities are only thirty miles apart, but Dallas is in Dallas County and Fort Worth is in Tarrant County. The metropolitan area is among the fastest growing regions in the country. In 1960 the combined population of both counties was 1,490,022. This had increased to 2,043,638 in 1970 and 2,298,550 in 1976 [25]. The annual growth rate for the 1960s was 3.7 per cent; this decreased to 2.5 per cent in the early 1970s.

The 2.3 million residents of Dallas and Tarrant Counties reside in fifty-four different cities. Three suburban cities—Arlington, Irving, and Garland—have populations in excess of 100,000. However, 19.8 per cent of the residents of the metropolitan area live in cities with populations below 35,000 and 28.2 per cent of the region's population live in cities with less than 70,000 residents. In Tarrant County, there are twenty-nine cities and only two have populations greater than 100,000; 34.9 per cent of the population live in cities of less than 30,000 people (see Figure 1).

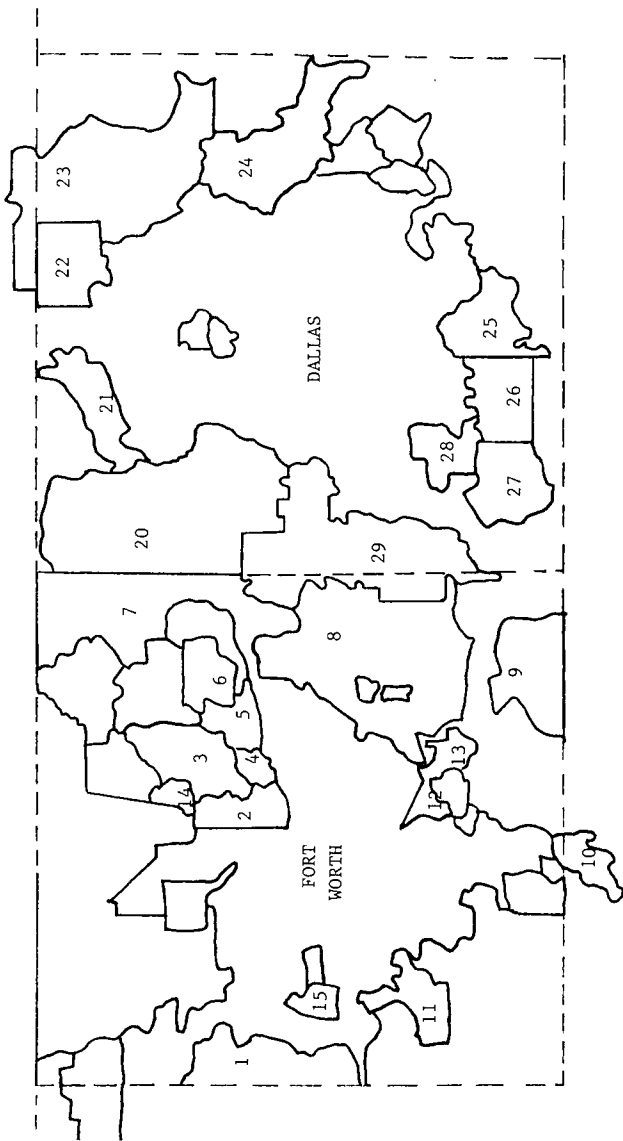
In addition to the fifty-four municipal governments in the region, there are thirty-two school districts and twenty-one special districts. In total, there are 107 governmental units serving the area. A total of fifty-six or 52.3 per cent of these units are in Tarrant County [26].

The Print Medium in Dallas/Fort Worth Area

Twenty different daily newspapers serve the residents of the 107 governmental units in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. The city of Dallas is the physical "home" for three papers or 15 per cent of all dailies. Both Fort Worth and Arlington are the home cities for two newspapers. Taken together, these cities account for 35 per cent of all newspapers. In terms of circulation, the Dallas Morning News (DMN), Dallas Times Herald (DTH) and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram (FWST) clearly dominate. These three papers account for 85.5 per cent of all newspaper circulation in the area (see Table 1). The DMN is the largest paper with a daily circulation accounting for 21.5 per cent of all newspapers read in the area.

From these data it is possible to consider the DMN, DTH, and FWST the "regional" papers which tend to serve the entire area as well as their respective central cities. The DMN and the DTH circulate not only in all parts of Dallas County but in the eastern sections of Tarrant County. Similarly, the FWST circulates extensively in Tarrant County and the western edges of Dallas County. Both Dallas papers prepare a daily and Sunday Tarrant County edition. The remaining fourteen papers tend to serve only the cities in which they are located. *The Mid-Cities Daily News*, located in Hurst, actually serves three small suburban cities—Hurst, Euless, and Bedford. The combined population of these communities is 75,000.

To the extent that these observations about the geography of newspapers and governments in the Dallas-Fort Worth area are accurate, then a two-tier system with regard to the information



KEY:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. AZLE | 11. BENBROOK | 20. IRVING | 25. LANCASTER |
| 2. HALTOM CITY | 12. FOREST HILL | 21. FARMERS BRANCH | 26. DESOTA |
| 3. NORTH RICHLAND HILLS | 13. COLLEYVILLE | 22. RICHARDSON | 27. CEDAR HILL |
| 4. RICHLAND HILLS | 14. EVERMAN | 23. GARLAND | 28. DUNCANVILLE |
| 5. HURST | 15. WATAUGA | 24. MESQUITE | 29. GRAND PRAIRIE |

Figure 1. The Dallas/Fort Worth Area.

Table 1. The Physical Geography of Daily Newspapers in the Dallas/Fort Worth Area

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Home city</i>	<i>Population of home city (1976)</i>	<i>Daily circulation (1976)^a</i>	<i>Per cent of market</i>
Dallas Morning News	Dallas	888,450	260,244	31.5
Dallas Times Herald	Dallas	888,450	227,903	27.6
Ft. Worth Star-Telegram	Ft. Worth	384,300	218,476	26.4
Arlington Daily News	Arlington	130,400	13,000	1.6
Arlington Citizen Journal	Arlington	130,400	11,400	1.4
Garland Daily News	Garland	123,250	11,649	1.4
Irving Daily News	Irving	117,500	11,645	1.4
Mesquite Daily News	Mesquite	65,900	5,185	.6
Richardson Daily News	Richardson	64,350	8,092	1.0
Grand Prairie Daily News	Grand Prairie	63,900	6,963	.8
Mid-Cities Daily News	Hurst	31,250	6,434	.8
Carrollton Star	Carrollton	30,200	9,300	1.1
Farmers Branch Daily Times	Farmers Branch	29,250	8,100	1.0
Duncanville Suburban	Duncanville	22,850	6,400	.8
Lancaster Herald	Lancaster	13,750	15,000	1.8
Grapevine News	Grapevine	9,850	1,667	.2
Mansfield News	Mansfield	5,450	2,100	.3
Everman News	Everman	5,450	1,475	.2
Azle News	Azle	4,850	1,550	.2
Total			826,583	100.

^a Source: Luedke (1977).

available from newspapers could exist. The first level, comprised of the larger papers, could report on regional issues, the affairs of the central cities, and major issues in the smaller suburban cities. The more numerous, smaller papers could provide detailed information on the affairs of the various units of government in which the suburban residents had organized themselves for collective decision-making.

The goal for the research reported here was to examine the extent to which regional papers and the more numerous, smaller local papers report on the affairs of government and business in the smaller jurisdictions surrounding the major cities of Dallas and Fort Worth. It was not of primary interest if regional information was detailed by the larger papers. This has been discussed, to some extent, elsewhere [27, 28]. It was hoped a content analysis of the regional and local papers would accurately note the geography of news and information in the community and the extent to which this geography matched the distribution of governmental units and the issues facing these units organized for collective decision-making.

Table 2. Population Levels of Test Cities

<i>City</i>	<i>Population 1970</i>	<i>Population 1976</i>	<i>Growth rate 70-76</i>	<i>Per capita income (1973)</i>
Azle	4,493	4,850	1.3%	\$3496
Bedford	10,049	16,300	8.1	4163
Colleyville	3,368	5,000	6.6	4236
Eules	19,316	27,450	5.9	3946
Everman	4,570	5,450	2.9	3216
Forest Hill	8,236	10,750	4.4	3627
Grapevine	7,023	9,850	5.6	3887
Haltom City	28,127	28,800	0.4	3593
Hurst	27,215	31,250	2.3	4200
Mansfield	3,658	5,450	6.6	3358
North Richland Hills	16,514	24,000	6.2	4323
Richland Hills	8,865	8,900	0.1	4811
Watauga	3,778	7,250	10.9	2979
White Settlement	13,449	13,900	0.5	3094
Total	158,661	199,200	5.1	—

Research Methods

To accomplish these objectives, an analysis of newspapers serving Tarrant County was performed. As discussed earlier, Tarrant County, dominated by Fort Worth, is comprised of twenty-nine independent cities with populations ranging from 2,000 to 130,400. For the purposes of this study, fourteen of these cities and seven major newspapers serving the communities were studied. Included in this sample of papers were one of the Dallas papers, the Morning News (DMN) and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram (FWST). The selection of the largest Dallas paper yielded an accurate picture of the performance of the Dallas papers. The fourteen cities chosen for examination were either similar in size (population) or experiencing growth at similar levels (see Table 2). This selection process gave the study a sample of cities at different stages in their development process. For the slower growing areas, stable taxes, education, and administration could be important issues. In expanding communities, issues regarding investments in public goods and zoning changes were likely to emerge as critical issues. These communities can then be considered "representative" of the suburban developments that encircle major central cities.

News and information items appearing in each of the seven newspapers were indexed and outlined. News stories and announcements were included in the data set. Commercial advertisements, although containing economic and consumer information, were not included. A study of economic news and information might properly include these items; but for an analysis focusing on

collective decision-making, news stories and announcements of public meetings seemed more appropriate for analysis.

In addition to noting the subject of each article and the city the story pertained to, a tabulation of the length of each story and the placement of the article were also included. This would allow for some comparison of the total amount of information given for each type of story and the relative importance attached to the story by the editors in terms of the story's placement. Stories from the newspapers were collected for a six-month period between November, 1975 and April, 1976. This period can be considered generally representative of the issues and events that would be facing citizens and local governments. In November, state-wide elections are traditionally held; April is the month most cities in Texas hold local elections. The time period covered also included months of the year when news coverage is usually considered light as a result of holiday schedules for government and business offices.

REGIONAL PAPERS AND SMALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

In terms of circulation within Tarrant County, the FWST is clearly the dominate paper. Its circulation of 35,383 on a daily basis accounts for 58.9 per cent of all papers purchased. Of the newspapers studied, no other accounted for more than 15 per cent of the papers purchased. Two local papers, the *Everman News* and the *Mid-Cities Daily News* were the next most popular papers. The DMN accounted for 3.9 per cent of all newspapers sold. Together, the regional papers account for 62.8 per cent of the papers consumed. Only the FWST is read in all fourteen cities; and its dominance is perhaps best indicated by the inclusion of three independent cities as part of Fort Worth by the FWST advertising department when it produces circulation figures.

Table 3 indicates that in twelve of the fourteen cities studied (86.7%), the two regional papers account for at least 50 per cent of the total newspaper circulation. Two cities—Forest Hill and White Settlement—rely completely on the regional papers for news produced through the print medium. No city in Tarrant County relies on the regional papers for less than 30 per cent of the information received through the print medium. In the City of Azle, the FWST accounts for 30.8 per cent of the newspaper circulation base. Mansfield is the only other small, suburban city which has a local paper accounting for more than half (56.4%) of the newspapers consumed.

As might be expected, the importance of the DMN as a part of a

Table 3. Circulation of Regional and Local Papers in Tarrant County

	Dallas Morning News	Fort Worth Star Telegram	Mid-Cities Daily News	Grapevine News Advertiser	Azle News	Mansfield News	Everman News	Total
Azle % Row	—	1781 30.8	—	—	4000 69.2	—	—	5781 100
Bedford % Row	—	1486 51.3	1410 48.7	—	—	—	—	2896 100
Colleyville % Row	27 1	1950 70	—	807 29	—	—	—	2784 100
Eulless % Row	1156 18.2	3681 57.9	1523 2390	—	—	—	—	6360 100
Everman % Row	—	FW ^a	—	—	—	—	—	7000 100
Forest Hill % Row	—	FW ^a	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grapevine % Row	469 12.5	1963 52.1	—	1335 35.4	—	—	—	3767 100
Haltom City % Row	—	5941 93.6	407 6.4	—	—	—	—	6348 100

Hurst % Row	485	6109 93.6	2413 26.8	—	—	—	—	9007 100
Mansfield % Row	—	1933 43.6	—	—	—	2500 56.4	—	4433 100
N. Richland Hills % Row	—	5360 92.7	422 28.1	—	—	—	—	5782 100
Richland Hills % Row	220 5.4	87.6	285 7	—	—	—	—	4084 100
Watauga % Row	—	1600 10.1	176 9.9	—	—	—	—	1776 100
White Settlement % Row	—	FW ^a	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total % Row	2357 3.9	35383 58.9	6636 11.1	2142 3.6	4000 6.7	2500 4.7	7000 1.7	60018 100

^a Included as part of the City of Fort Worth in the circulation figures for the FWST.

community's information system declines in the areas of Tarrant County furthest from the City of Dallas. In Euless the DMN accounts for at least 18.2 per cent of the total number of newspapers read. But in no community west of Fort Worth is the paper circulated. The southern and western portions of Tarrant County are apparently regarded as areas served by the FWST.

Local News and the DMN

The DMN carried fifty-three stories dealing with cities in Tarrant County during the test period. Of the fourteen cities studied, the DMN circulates in only five. It should be expected that the local coverage given by the paper would be concentrated in these areas. Four cities—Euless, Grapevine, Haltom City, and Hurst—accounted for 89.5 per cent of the circulation of the DMN and 77.1 per cent of all local stories. In terms of the number of column inches, these cities accounted for 82 per cent of all stories concerning Tarrant County. In terms of the communities served by the DMN, there seems to be an even match between the geographic location of the news items carried and the circulation of the paper.

It is interesting, however, to look at the kind of stories covered by the DMN. Crimes, fires, and accidents accounted for 45.8 per cent of all stories and 57.2 per cent of all column inches of newsprint (see Table 4). Only two stories on schools, four on budgets and four on water districts appeared during the six month period. Of the seven categories used to analyze the information presented in the DMN, only "elections" contained more than ten stories. But those twelve articles accounted for only 6.5 per cent of all the newsprint carried on the suburban cities.

The only story placed on the first page of the newspaper dealt with crime, and of the fifteen articles placed on the Tarrant County page, 46.7 per cent dealt with crime. Of the fifty-three stories carried by the DMN, thirty-seven (69.8%) were not on the Tarrant County page or the first page. This consistent rotation may have increased the difficulty readers have in locating stories about Tarrant County communities. In addition, there was seldom any continuing coverage of an issue. One-half of the stories on local elections were "one-shot" stories about four different cities. Only crimes, fires, and accidents received follow-up articles during the period studied.

Local News and the FWST

The FWST, with a circulation more than ten times greater than the DMN in Tarrant County, had many more stories on the local

Table 4. The Dallas Morning News and Local News in Tarrant County

City	Topic															
	Airport N	In ^a In	Budget N	In ^a In	Development N	In ^a In	Elections N	In ^a In	Police/Fire N	In ^a In	Schools N	In ^a In	Water N	In ^a In	Total N	In ^a In
Azle % Row	1	4.5	1	2	2	69.2									2	6.5
	50	69.2	50	69.2											100	100
Bedford % Row			2	2.5			100								2	2.5
			100	100											100	100
Colleyville % Row															0	0
Eulless % Row			3	3	6	37							2	11.5	11	51.5
			27.3	5.8	54.5	71.8							18.2	22.3	100	100
Everman % Row															0	0
Forest Hill % Row															0	0
Grapevine % Row			1	3	3	22	1	13	1	5	10	51			10	51
			10	5.9	30	43.1	10	25.5	10	9.8	100	100			100	100
Haltom City % Row	2	7.5	5	42	1	7									8	56.5
	25	13.3	62.5	74.3	12.5	12.4									100	100

^a Inches.

Table 4. (Cont.)

City	Topic															
	Airport N	In	Budget N	In	Development N	In	Elections N	In	Police/Fire N	In	Schools N	In	Water N	In	Total N	In
Hurst % Row	1	13	2	11	2	11	1	2	3	11	1	9	1	9	8	46
	12.5	28.3	25	23.9	4.3	23.9	12.5	4.3	37.5	23.9	12.5	19.6	12.5	19.6	100	100
Mansfield % Row									1	18					1	18
									100	100					100	100
N. Richland Hills % Row							1	.5	2	7					3	7.5
							33.3	6.7	66.7	93.3					100	100
Richland Hills % Row							1	.5	1	4					32	4.5
							50	11.1	50	88.9					100	100
Watauga % Row															0	0
White Settlement % Row							1		6						1	6
							100		100							
Total % Row							4	18							48	250
							8.3	7.2								

governments in that area. The 334 stories that appeared during the six month test period resulted in some coverage for each city in the study. More stories were carried dealing with Grapevine, but the dominance of any one city or group of cities was not as pronounced as with the pattern of coverage of the DMN. For instance, while there were fifty stories dealing with Grapevine, there were at least twenty stories on seven other cities and two additional communities had at least eighteen stories (see Table 5). In the three cities receiving fewer than ten stories, the FWST was not widely circulated. In terms of the length of stories, articles dealing with Haltom City accounted for 248.5 column inches and Grapevine had 142 column inches of news. While these two areas dominated in the amount of newsprint published, seven communities had at least fifty column inches of news. If one considers the appearance of a news item almost as critical as the length in terms of affecting the information base available to citizens, then the FWST appears to be skewing its coverage to a few communities. However, even in terms of column inches, there was some information about each city provided by the paper for citizens in each study city.

While the balance in the distribution of the stories seemed only slightly skewed, there was an obvious bias in the type of stories covered by the FWST. More than one-fifth of all stories, 21.0 per cent were related to crimes, fires, or accidents. And 33.2 per cent of the stories were based on the actions of the city council or information released at city council meetings. To this extent, the observations of past researchers dealing with the media's sources for local news is confirmed. Official city agencies—police and fire departments and the city council—are the source of much of what is distributed [29]. In this instance, more than half the information printed came from governmental sources.

For the fourteen cities covered, a total of forty-nine stories on schools, three on water districts, and nine on utilities were printed. These fifty-one stories represented 17.9 per cent of all stories published. For twelve cities, there were no stories on water districts and for ten communities there were no articles dealing with utilities. And while there were forty-nine stories on schools, nine cities received fewer than five articles. These seem to be an insignificant number when considering the amount of public money spent by these units and the number of government units that exist.

The FWST ran a total of sixteen of the 334 local government stories on page 1. Ten of these articles dealt with crimes, fires or accidents. And four first page stories were brief summaries of election results.

Table 5. The Fort Worth Star-Telegram and Local News in Tarrant County

	Administration/ City Council		Budget		Development		Elections		Police/Fire		Schools		Utilities		Water		Total			
	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In		
Azle % Row	7 30.4	16 24.2	1 4.3	2 3	1 4.3	1 1.5	3 13	7 10.6	4 17.4	14 21.2	2 8.7	3 4.5	5 21.7	23	23	5	23	66	100	
Bedford % Row	7 26.9	39 60.9	1 3.8	8 12.5	1 3.8	1 3.8	1 3.8	3 11.5	3 11.5	8 26.1	4 15.4	6 9.4					26	64	100	
Colleyville % Row	5 38.5	7 15.2			6 46.2	24 52.2	1 7.7	3 6.5	1 7.7	12 26.1								13	46	100
Eules % Row	12 33.3	17 15.5			3 8.3	7 6.4	1 2.8	3 2.7	13 36.1	75.5 68.6	7 19.4	7.5 6.8					36	110	100	
Everman % Row	3 37.5	11.5 46.9					4 50	11 44.9			1 12.5	2 8.2					8	24.5	100	
Forest Hill % Row	3 42.9	19 61.3			1 14.3	4 12.9	2 28.6	5 16.1	1 14.3	3 9.7							7	31	100	
Grapevine % Row	19 38	39 27.5	2 4	12 8.5	3 6	7 4.9	3 6	7 4.9	11 22	59 41.5	12 24	18 12.7					50	142	100	

LOCAL PAPERS AND LOCAL NEWS

Eleven of the fourteen test cities are served by a local newspaper in addition to the larger, regional papers.¹ The local papers tend to limit their scope to the city or cities serviced and provided only brief coverage of national or regional issues. Two of the papers cover more than one city on a regular basis. The *Mid-Cities Daily News* is circulated in Bedford, Euless, Hurst, North Richland Hills and Richland Hills. And the *Grapevine News* covers Grapevine and Colleyville. The *Mansfield News*, *Azle News*, and *Everman News* largely circulate in their home cities.

The local papers provided coverage on numerous local issues to their readers, but a pattern of concentration on certain topics similar to that observed for the regional press could be observed. For instance, 22.4 per cent of all stories appearing in the *Mid-Cities Daily News* were related to city council meetings or actions of the council. And while only 7.4 per cent of all stories in the *Mansfield News* dealt with the actions of the council, 41.8 per cent of all stories were based on information circulated at council meetings. Again, the observations of Paletz, et al. [29] with regard to the sources of information of the print medium would seem to be confirmed. The actions of the city council and the items chosen for discussion by the city council are the news items most often covered by local newspapers (see Table 6).

In terms of the subject of the stories covered, police and fire stories and actions of the city council are the most frequent times reported by the local papers. In the largest local paper, the *Mid-Cities Daily News*, stories related to police and fire activities accounted for 21.2 per cent of all stories and 15.5 per cent of all newsprint carried by the paper during the study period. This category of information was only exceeded by stories dealing with city councils. In both Mansfield and Azle stories related to major utilities accounted for at least one-fifth of all stories. Yet, this only involved twenty-six stories and all the stories were based on city council actions. The pattern of a concentrated emphasis on police, fire and city council activities was again evident for the local newspapers.

Taken as a group, one can see the information given to residents by local newspapers is similar to the distribution observed for the larger daily papers. Crimes, fires, and accidents account for more than one-fifth of all stories and 15.5 per cent of all newsprint.

¹ It should be noted that in many cities weekly advertisers do exist and provide limited coverage of events.

Table 6. Local Papers and Local News

City	Administration		Budget		Development		Elections		Parks		Police/Fire		Schools		Utilities		Other		Total	
	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In	N	In
Azle News	2	14	6	23	1	13	2	14	2	12	5	29.5	2	18	7	40	4 ^a	50	31	213.5
% Row	6.5	6.6	19.4	10.8	3.2	6.1	6.5	6.6	6.5	5.6	16.1	13.8	6.5	8.4	22.6	18.7	12.9	23.4	100	100
Everman News	8	68	3	14	3	14	6	40	1	9	6	26	5	37	7	48	3	23	42	279
% Row	19	24.4	7.1	5	7.1	5.5	14.3	14.3	24	32	14.3	9.3	11.9	13.3	16.7	17.2	7.1	8.2	100	100
Grapevine News	18	184	10	79	43	304	16	89	12	155	19	106	25	211	10	85	3	34	156	1247
% Row	11.5	14.8	6.4	6.3	27.6	24.4	10.3	7.1	7.7	12.4	12.2	8.5	16	16.9	6.4	6.8	1.9	2.7	100	100
Mansfield News	2	6	-	-	3	28	1	7	3	32	8	59	3	32	7	69	-	-	27	233
% Row	7.4	2.6	-	-	10.3	12	3.7	3	11.1	13.7	29.6	25.3	10.3	13.7	24.1	29.6	-	-	100	100
Mid-Cities Daily News	106	692	6	56	22	188	34	234	10	75	93	449	60	443	21	170	4	36	361	2343
% Row	29.37	29.5	1.8	2.4	6.1	8	10.8	10	2.8	3.2	25.8	19.2	16.7	18.9	5.8	7.3	1.1	1.5	100	100
Total	136	964	25	172	72	547	64	384	28	283	131	669.5	95	741	52	412	14	143	617	4315.5
% Row	22	22.3	4.1	4	11.7	12.7	10.4	8.9	4.5	6.6	21.2	15.5	15.4	17.2	8.4	9.5	2.3	3.3	100	100

^a All stories involved a problem with ambulance services.

Stories related to city council activities comprise another 20 per cent of all information. Only twenty-five stories (4.1%) dealt with finance/budget issues. It is interesting to note that 15.4 per cent of all stories carried by local papers dealt with school issues. This is substantially larger than the figures reported for the DMN. However, of the 334 stories covered by the FWST, 14.7 per cent involved school news. Therefore, one actually sees only minor differences in the mix of news presented by the local papers and the FWST. And considering the number of school districts in Tarrant County, seventeen, (and one community college district and two major universities) this again appears to be an extremely small data base for collective decision-making.

A placement analysis of news items in the local papers was not attempted. Many editions of each paper were quite small and, as a result, most stories appeared, in part, on page 1. Ultimate placement with regard to the per cent of a story on the first page seemed related to advertising demands on a given day.

NEWSPAPERS, COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING, AND ANALYZING THE MASS MEDIA

Within the last quarter-century the suburbanization surrounding older, central cities has been widely discussed and analyzed. And while the implications of suburbanization are debated, there is evidence to indicate the trend is continuing. Suburban cities grew in size by 5,423,000 citizens during the first half of the 1970s [25]. It would appear people are organizing themselves into numerous governmental units within which public services are to be delivered. For students of collective decision-making, the quality and quantity of information available produced by the mass media to help those citizens in making choices is a crucial question for analysis. And, at the same time that political scientists and economists have become interested in the sources of information, scholars examining mass media have been interested in establishing a framework for analysis. This paper attempted to address both of these points. Utilizing a geographical or distributional approach, the information produced by the print medium in a single metropolitan area was examined.

Newspapers and Collective Decision-Making

For students of collective decision-making the data in this study appears to demonstrate that the print medium, through papers,

do not produce information in a format related to the way in which people are organizing themselves for collective decision-making. The largest newspapers in this study are located in the central cities. Their stories dealing with suburban cities tended to focus on crimes, fires and accidents, or the city councils in the small cities. For the DMN, these stories accounted for 41.5 per cent of all articles and 52.5 per cent of all column inches. For the FWST, while only 20.7 per cent of all stories were related to police matters or fires, 32.0 per cent of all stories were based on the actions or activities of the city council. Taken together, this would mean more than half the stories covered by the FWST were from official city sources. Not only is the news somewhat dominated by "sensational" stories, but the city's opinion and position on issues is overwhelmingly covered by the newspapers. Few stories carried by the regional papers dealt with the numerous special districts created in Tarrant County. This is especially important as the number of special districts is increasing in American government faster than any other unit of organization [30].

In addition to these observations about government sources and content it is possible to note that no coverage was given by one regional paper to some cities. Both regional papers virtually ignored school and water issues in many cities and gave brief, passing attention to budget items or questions of governance. Since the metropolitan Fort Worth area includes twenty-seven school and special districts, the fifty-four stories over six months by the regional papers seems grossly inadequate in terms of keeping citizens informed.

The patterns observed for the local papers seemed to fit the outcomes evident for the FWST. Actions involving the police and fire departments and the city councils are not only the subject of stories, but the sources. As a group, the news printed by the local papers concentrated on city councils, 22 per cent of stories, and police and fire actions, 21.2 per cent of stories. No other category of news accounted for as many stories. In terms of newsprint, the number of inches carried on schools did exceed police and fire reports. However, the local papers gave only seventy-two inches, 4.0 per cent, to finance issues and no coverage to issues related to water or special districts.

Newspapers are not the only source of information about local news available to citizens in any local community. Yet, if what is found here is tied to the implications raised in other research efforts [7, 23] it appears the mass media may produce a data base

with regard to local issues that is not only limited by a function of the official sources of news and information but is mis-matched to the way in which people organize themselves for collective decision-making.

Analyzing the Mass Media

In terms of the prescriptive recommendations frequently expected in an analysis of this nature, returning to the other objective of this article might provide insight. It was suggested that an appropriate model for analyzing mass media might involve a geographical framework that looked at:

1. the distance between people and the producers of information, and;
2. the distribution of these news sources.

This approach, which can be described as a distance-decay functional analysis, indicates the existence of a severe mis-match. The location of the media is centralized in a few cities, but people now live in numerous cities surrounding core communities. The outputs from regional papers were similarly mis-matched and focused on issues related to some municipal actions but not those of special districts. In addition, by looking to official city organs as sources, other viewpoints contrary to "official" positions are not publicized. Similarly, the local papers concentrated on official sources and, while giving more attention to school issues, frequently ignored water and other special districts and any questions related to budgets and finance. These outcomes, which could be described as the frictional costs [3, p. 59] of the distance between cities and news producers, can raise severe problems for individuals interested in participating in local affairs. Their participation may be impeded as a result of a lack of low-cost information about local affairs.

In light of the data presented and the distance-decay framework for analysis the recommendations of this analysis for newspapers becomes easy to identify. With regard to the political environment of suburban areas, people are settling in the smaller local governments that surround central cities. For these individuals information regarding the performance of numerous school, water, etc. districts will be required. A medium capable of organizing information at this level would need to be spatially decentralized and flexible. It is obvious this sort of system might involve some of the flexibility possible in cable systems [32].

In discussing prescriptive responses, it is also important to note

people can get information from other sources besides the mass media. Interpersonal communications constitute one possible source; mailings by public and private organizations are another. In this sense, the observations here must be tempered by the knowledge that any community's information system includes numerous components. And some of these components may have the flexibility to adapt to the fragmentation in government taking place in most metropolitan areas. However, with regard to newspapers in Fort Worth, this component of the information system available to residents does not match the geography of government in the area.

The purpose of this study was not to specify what sort of media system would best fit people's needs. Rather, its goals have been to extend to newspapers a method for analysis of media. If the suggestion here is accepted—that the organization or outputs of the mass media should be made to match with the political environment within which people organize for collective decision-making—then a more decentralized system for mass communication seeking inputs from numerous sources may be needed. But before that step is taken, more discussion is needed with regard to the merits of a geographical framework for analyzing the media and additional studies of other metropolitan areas are required to see if the observations noted for Fort Worth are typical.

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