



RESEARCH ARTICLE

UTILIZATION OF NETWORK ANALYSIS IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates the potential of systematic network approaches for the development of understanding of the role of communications in international relations. For the scholars of international communication, it is time for a self conscious return to networks analysis. There are multiple reasons to do this. The first reason to do this is the same reason that earlier generations of researchers did it: in an effort to link process of communication to the social world. The second reason is that we talk about networks anyway and a more systematic use of the concept would allow us to draw both on the methodological and theoretical strategies that have been developed over the past forty years. Thirdly, a recurrent call from social theorists has been for a more relational approach which frequently translates into discussions of micro-macro transition and structure and agency. Network analysis gives us an approach to these issues that is transparent and coherent. Fourthly, networks offer a way to deal with the complexity and non-linearity of the contemporary world. Fifthly, networks will allow us to overcome some of the obstacles to integration consideration of communications back in to international relations.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades there has been a tremendous growth in terms of discourse on networks in various fields of social sciences and in the mass media environment. For example, we often hear the terms network society, terrorist network, mafia network, business network, advocacy network, and so on. However, in the International Relations Study (IR Studies) environment, until now there have been few efforts to apply techniques, models, or theories on network analysis. In fact, as futurologist John Naisbitt once said, one of the megatrends of the 21st century world is the emergence of networks as actors in international relations. In fact, according to Naisbitt, in the future it is not impossible that there will be a shift from the nation-state system to the network system.¹ This paper is intended to elaborate a systematic network approach for developing our understanding of the role of communication in international relations or commonly called international communication. This network analysis approach is important in the study of international communication because it can offer strategies for mapping and analyzing the dimensions of communication that develop in world politics. In addition, the network analysis approach also allows for new options to analyze central issues in international relations, such as issues of power and identity. In the first part (first half) of this paper

will discuss the existence of communication approach in international relations. As is known, several approaches in IR studies do not directly acknowledge the role of communication in influencing decision-making and international negotiations. In addition, the conceptualization in IR studies rarely explicitly emphasizes the role of communication and media. In fact, without media or other forms of communication, most interactions based on information exchange (whether between countries, between institutions, between policy makers, between national or transnational audiences) will not occur. Discussion of how communication is conceptualized, problems related to the role of communication, and unsolved problems will be the basis for explaining how network analysis can fill the theoretical and methodological gaps that exist today. Then in the final part (second half) will outline the development of network analysis, elements of the approach, and the main theoretical ideas in network analysis. In addition, communication patterns and power in the international context are also discussed.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The data collection technique (collecting the data) used in this study is triangulated, namely using a combined or simultaneous data collection technique. The selection of the types of collection techniques in this study is more based on

¹See John Naisbitt, *Global Paradox* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995).

practical considerations, especially regarding cost and time limitations. As Maxwell said, the selection of data collection techniques in qualitative research is very important to consider practical considerations. With these practical considerations, in this study, several data collection techniques such as literature techniques, documentation techniques, and historical record. To analyze or interpret the data obtained through some of the above data collection techniques, descriptive and interpretive analysis techniques are used. Through this analysis, it will be known how the potential of systematic network analysis for the development of understanding of the role of communications in international relations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the long term, researchers in IR studies tend to ignore the communication aspect. According to Ronald Deibert, this is of course related to the nature of the problems studied by IR researchers and also the history of debate in IR studies that have developed over time.² However, not all IR experts always deny the communication aspect. At least at the beginning of the behavioralism era, communication studies received quite serious attention from several IR scholars (one of whom was Karl Deutsch).³ For behaviorists in IR studies, the discourse on communication offers two possibilities, namely: (1) to measure the level of interaction between countries; and (2) to break the ontology of conventional realism regarding the world of states. One of the contributions of the field of communication in IR studies is the development of a cybernetics model of the international system conducted by Deutsch. However, since the late 1980s, studies on communication in the IR community pioneered by Deutsch have disappeared again in connection with the widespread influence of neorealism. The neorealist thoughts initiated by Kenneth Waltz have limited the ways in which communication can be accommodated in IR theories.

Studies on the importance of the role of communication in IR studies have again experienced a rather serious growth after the Cold War ended. Studies from constructivists and critical theory schools have emphasized aspects of communication in international relations. One of the communication approaches that is quite prominent in IR studies is the theory of communicative actions developed by Jurgen Habermas, a figure in the critical theory school.⁴ Meanwhile, in the constructivist environment, there are many studies that emphasize aspects and the importance of communication in international relations, for example the study of Thomas Christiansen, Knud Erik Jorgensen, and Antje Wiener on the social construction of the European Union.⁵ However, there are still many limitations in IR constructivism in elaborating on communication. As is known, realism (and neorealism) identifies that the controller of relations between countries is national interest. Adherents of realism (neorealism) also believe that relations between countries are determined by material resources. Constructivism and a number of critical theory schools reject this idea. Constructivists in IR studies

generally recognize the importance of non-material aspects in international relations (global politics), such as ideas and norms that shape the preferences of actors to behave appropriately in world politics. The underlying assumption is that agents (actors) do not exist independently of their social environment and collective shared meaning systems.⁶ Several other constructivist studies have explained how shared meanings are constructed through communicative interactions between international actors. They have focused primarily on international preferences and norms of international behavior. Risse calls this the process of "arguing," Frank Schimmelfennig refers to 'bargaining' and "rhetorical action," or Habermas calls it "communicative action." Mark Lynch explains how communicative engagement establishes shared interpretations and reciprocal expectations that govern both cooperative and competitive behavior.

Constructivists generally tend to agree with the idea that national interests are not givens, but are subject to redefinition, negotiation, and change over time. What is not clear is: how does change actually occur? Why does change occur at a particular time? Why does change occur at different stages in different countries? How exactly do preferences change during negotiations or debates? These unanswered questions have their roots in two related problems. The first lies in the general social ontology of constructivist studies. More precisely, constructivist theory lacks a theory of agency. Constructivism is based on a constructionist view of the world. Agents create and recreate reality through actions that are constructed by the structures they themselves have built. These structures are not only material but also ideational and discursive. In this perspective, structures do not exist independently of social action, but are involved in its production and reproduction.⁷

However, in practice IR constructivism is strongly influenced by the history of the field of study, especially by the fact that various debates in IR studies aim to provide contributions around the question of "what constitutes national interests?" and places the state as the unit of analysis. As explained by Jeffrey Checkel that when Alexander Wendt (a figure who was very influential in developing IR constructivism) spoke of agents, he did not refer to individuals, but to states. The result was the neglect of most processes and actors that were below the state level.⁸ Robin Brown also said that, it means a lack of attention to 'process' among IR theorists and an excessive emphasis on 'structure' and its impact on the final outcome.⁹ In other words, although there seems to be a consensus on the fact that norms, identities, and values shape agents' behavior, constructivism has not yet fully succeeded in explaining questions such as: how norms become so important, how agents are bound to norms, where norms and values come from, and so on. The securitization approach developed by the Copenhagen school, especially represented by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde (1998), is a step forward towards a greater integration of 'agency' in constructivism. The aim of the analytical framework developed by these three experts is to explain security, a domain believed to be

²Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

³See Karl W. Deutsch, "International Communication: The Media and Flows", in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 20 No. 1 (1956), pp. 143-160.

⁴See Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Actions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

⁵Thomas Christiansen, Knud-Erik Jorgensen and Antje Wiener, "The Social Construction of Europe", in *the Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 6 No. 4 (1999).

⁶Thomas Risse, "Social Constructivism Meets Globalization", in David Held and Anthony McGrew (eds.), *Understanding Globalization: Theories and Controversies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 3.

⁷See Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), p. 376.

⁸Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory", in *World Politics*, Vol. 50 No. 2 (1998), hal. 324-348.

⁹Robin Brown, "Constructivism, Technology, and Communicative Action", paper presented at the ISA Convention (Montreal: 2004).

constructed through speech-acts by various international actors. According to them, what issues fall within the domain of 'security' cannot be determined a priori, but are the result of rhetorical choices. How issues are constructed and perceived is the result of a process involving language choices, which are not only seen as describing reality, but also as creating reality.¹⁰ In this context, the perspective of Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, is no longer trapped in structure and end results like other IR theories, but begins to emphasize the process, namely the process of speech-acts which is essentially a communication process.

In addition to the securitization approach, another approach in IR studies that also pays quite advanced attention to the communication aspect is the discursive institutionalism approach. This approach, in addition to trying to bridge 'agency' and 'structure', also considers the context around the production of discourse. In this approach, discourse is more than just talk. As Vivien Schmidt and Claudio Radaelli say, discourse is something central because it helps in the effort to integrate 'structure' and 'agency' – and thus explain the dynamics of change. Discourse is fundamental, both in giving shape to new institutional structures (such as a set of ideas about new rules, values and practices) and as a resource used by entrepreneurial actors to generate and legitimize these new ideas (such as interaction processes focused on policy formulation and communication).¹¹ Many other studies have addressed the strategic interaction aspect between certain actors, not only states but also individuals, by focusing on the discursive dimension. More specifically, in an attempt to explain the outcome of negotiations, they have asked the question of why in the context of discursive interaction some arguments can dominate while others are left behind. According to the proponents of this approach, it is related to the way issues are presented and framed. As Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman explain, it is possible to frame a particular decision problem in more than one way. Alternative frames for a decision problem can be compared to alternative perspectives on a visual scene.¹² According to Meyer Zald, frames are specific metaphors, symbolic representations, and cognitive cues used to frame behavior and events in an evaluative mode and to indicate alternative modes of action.

Rodger Payne discusses the differential success of framing by stating that what shapes the success of a frame is what he calls 'the structure of a communicative situation'.¹³ Payne critiques the constructivist literature that explains norm change and preference change through the formation of shared understandings achieved through interaction and communication. This is established through the formation of shared meanings and norms, which are the result of persuasion. Payne also critiques Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's three-stage cycle of norm formation (norm emergence, norm cascade, and internalization).¹⁴ He argues that the approach of

these two constructivist IR figures is flawed because it fails to take into account that what appears as persuasion is actually the result of a struggle that cannot be understood simply by looking at the discourse, but also needs to depend on an examination of the social processes that support the discourse. More specifically, he states that the 'communicative environment' is more important than the content or framing of a particular message. Overall, while some IR literature has acknowledged the role of communication and some have emphasized the role of information exchange in international relations, there has been little recognition of the role of the media in IR theories. The only exception is perhaps Marc Lynch's (1999) *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity*. Here Lynch argues that the way foreign policy decisions are made is influenced by debates taking place in the public sphere. He specifically explains the influence of public debate on policy-making concerning Jordan's national identity and interests. He defines the 'public sphere' as a dimension of the social structure, with both normative and material elements, involving sites of communication and contestation that can be identified independently of their outcomes. According to Lynch, the media play a crucial role not only in enabling public discussion but also in influencing the nature of the debate, the arguments within it, and even the number and identities of the actors participating. He also notes that the relative weight of the media (press, radio, and TV) and face-to-face interaction influence the nature of participation, the content of discourse, the process of deliberation, and the extent of normative consensus.¹⁵

However, there are still a number of issues in international relations that cannot be addressed by existing approaches. For example, what are the implications of expanding global connectivity for the nature of interactions in the international system, does global interconnection affect the nature of actors and structures, and so on. In this context, the network analysis approach can be utilized to examine the relationships between certain actors in the international system. This approach can also raise challenging questions about the nature of the units in the system.

DISCUSSION

Network analysis is actually an approach that has been around for quite some time in the social sciences. The development of network analysis, particularly social network analysis, has theoretical roots in the work of sociologists such as Georg Simmel and Emile Durkheim, who wrote about the importance of understanding the patterns of relationships that connect social actors. Meanwhile, social scientists have used the term social networks since at least the early 20th century. In this case, a social network connotes a complex set of relationships between members of a social system, at all scales, from interpersonal relationships to international relations. Meanwhile, social network analysis (SNA) as an analytical method can be traced back to the work of Jacob Moreno during the 1930s. As a psychologist and psychiatrist, Moreno's insight was that an individual's mental state was crucially influenced by that individual's status as a member of a group. On this basis, he developed techniques for measuring and representing

¹⁰See Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde (eds.), *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

¹¹Vivien Schmidt and Claudio M. Radaelli, "Policy Change and Discourse in Europe: Conceptual and Methodological Issues", in *West European Politics*, Vol. 27 No. 2 (2004), pp. 183-210.

¹²Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice", in *Science*, Vol. 211 No. 4481 (1981), pp. 453-458.]

¹³Rodger A. Payne, "Persuasion, Frame, and Norm Construction", in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (2001), pp. 37-61.]

¹⁴Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", in *International Organization*, Vol. 52 No. 4 (1998), pp. 887-917.]

¹⁵See March Lynch, *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

group relationships. Such sociography or representation can show group members as points or nodes with ties such as arrows that are the result of a network diagram.¹⁶

According to Evelien Otte and Ronald Rousseau, social network analysis is a process of researching social structures through the use of networks and graph theory.¹⁷ This analysis describes the structure of a network in terms of nodes (individual actors, people, or things in the network) and the ties, circles, and links (relationships or interactions) that connect them. Examples of social structures that are commonly visualized through social network analysis are social media networks, acquaintance and friendship networks, collaboration graphs, kinship networks, disease transmission networks, and sexual relationship networks. These networks are often visualized through sociograms where nodes (actors) are represented by dots, while ties are represented as lines or arrows.¹⁸ Social network analysis is widely used as a primary analytical technique in modern sociology, but the approach is also widely used by anthropologists, biologists, economists, geographers, historians, social psychologists, development studies, computer science, sociolinguists, communication science, political science, and IR studies.

Social network analysis has experienced rapid development since the 1980s. Since then, the existence of social network analysis has not only been seen as a set of analytical techniques, but also as an alternative social ontology. This can be seen from the way social network analysis is described as a structural approach in a number of book titles and as structural analysis in the social sciences. The structural label indicates a rejection of standard quantitative social science that works from the assumption of independent cases and its replacement with the view that the population of cases is structured by their relationships with each other. After that, several authors began to identify research norms that utilize structure if they do not use network methods or concepts. Social network analysis contrasts with Luhmann's abstract structuralism, but is closer to Norbert Elias or Anthony Giddens' need for an approach that connects micro and macro and structure and agency in a transparent way. The term 'social structure' in the book by Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz emphasizes the attention of these two experts to the concrete social relationships between social actors, while distinguishing social network analysis from other structural approaches.¹⁹

Social network analysis can be distinguished from other social science network approaches in two ways. First, networks are not a special form of organization. If social formations are made up of relationships, then all social formations are networks. The consequence is that all social formations are always networks. Moreover, networks emerge as new forms of organization, as in the theory of network society, contemporary shifts in the forms of existing networks and in the prevalence of different patterns of relationships. Second, although social network analysis is concerned with ties, it is methodologically

committed to empirical analysis. Networks are treated as something that can be separated into analyzable parts. Networks are more than just metaphors. Although more 'structuralist', social network analysis can be seen as closer to the rational modes of sociology. Alain Degenne and Michel Forse refer to the basics of 'the structural interactionist' approach.²⁰

What are the main propositions of network theory? The most basic proposition is that social outcomes are shaped by relations. Therefore, this approach is entirely concerned with the attributes of nodes or the use of quantitative social science assumptions, for example free from cases, will miss a key element of social reality. Patterns of relations bind actors in structured patterns that enable and constrain actions and the flow of information and other resources. This is the basic assumption of any relational social science. As Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz have argued, what makes network analysis distinctive from other social science approaches is its assumption that social formations can be divided into nodes and ties.²¹ This distinction allows data analysis to be carried out using theoretical propositions that are graphical in nature. The translation from the social to the mathematical requires that the researcher be able to specify the nodes and ties that will constitute the network. Nodes can be individuals or organizations and ties can be resource exchange, communication, and kinship. Ties can be coded for strength (valued) and direction (directed) or valence (valued). The significance of the choice about nodes and ties is a function of the theoretical framework used. A communication study might use some form of social tie to explain communication patterns or communication patterns might be used to imply some social relationships. Ties can be coded in terms of values and directions or types. Networks can consist of more than one node. For example, a two-mode network might include conferences and the people who attended them. The dataset can be used to generate two independent networks connecting conferences (using common attendees as ties) or between people (using conferences as ties).²²

In this paper We consider the usefulness of a social network approach to research in international communication at two levels. First, how a network approach can address key issues in international communication and the media. Second, how a network approach can enable us to re-conceptualize issues of power and identity in international relations more broadly. In some ways, the application of social network analysis to the field of communication in international relations is simply a rehashing of an agenda that has its roots in the history of communication research. The Columbia Group's published studies such as *The People's Choice*, *Voting*, *Personal Influence* and *Medical Innovation* developed a perspective on the impact of mass media on interpersonal networks. What drove the Columbia Group's research was an attempt to understand the impact of mass media. Harold Laswell's works, such as *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (1927) tended to depict an environment in which isolated individuals were influenced by powerful media. The Columbia Group had filled the gap between people and media with networks. The digital

¹⁶Christina Archeti and Robin Brown, "Network Analysis for International Communication", paper presented in the ISA Convention (New York: 2009).

¹⁷Evelien Otto and Ronald Rousseau, "Social Network Analysis: A Powerful Strategy, Also for the Information Sciences", in *Journal of Information Science*, Vol. 28 No. 6 (2002), pp. 441-453.

¹⁸Carlos A.R. Pinheiro, *Social Network Analysis in Telecommunication* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), p. 4.

¹⁹Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz (eds.), *Social Structure: A Network Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁰Alain Degenne and Michel Forse, *Introducing Social Networks* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1999).

²¹Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz (eds.), *loc. cit.*

²²Wouter de Nooy, Andrej Mrvar, and Vladimir Batagelj, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis With Pajek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 101-103.

media environment poses a similar but different challenge. One popular impression of the digital environment is that information flows seamlessly around the world, but this is clearly too simplistic; some pieces of information can spread rapidly to large numbers of people but most do not. The digital environment is one that is structured with limited attention, gatekeeping, agenda setting, language barriers, search engine algorithms and structural holes. The result is that technology removes many barriers to communication but social structures continue to shape who knows what and when they know it. A network map of the digital environment is not a circuit diagram; the social context of information shapes the way it is communicated. What is needed is an attempt to re-socialize international communication, to embed the digital in its social environment in the same way that previous generations of scholars did with the technologies of their time. This is not just a matter of embedding technology but also of embedding communicative practices in real social contexts. A major contribution of earlier network thinking was to remove 'communication' as it existed in pragmatist philosophy and sociology as a psychological construct to a more concrete realm.

Simple questions about who communicates with whom reveal important elements of reality. Who are the sources that support reporting? Which media do people pay attention to? Who is related to whom? Who shares membership with others? Formal network methods allow us to go beyond simple descriptions and to make judgments about position, power, prestige and group. For example, we can understand the relationship between government and the media in terms of the creation and maintenance of structural holes but also examine the ways in which changes in the communication environment fill these holes and reduce the ability of government to influence media content.²³

The linkage between relations based on communication and relations based on other forms of ties is not a mechanical one, but depends on the nature of the nodes and ties under consideration and it is possible to draw inferences from communication to social relations and vice versa. It is this potential to draw inferences about social relations from communication analysis that has ensured the popularity of the network approach in applied communication (e.g. organization and development) and intelligence analysis. Indeed, at a basic level, this relational analysis makes it possible to identify groups and potential routes and strategies of influence. In applied communication the practice of rigorous mapping can lead to the recognition of fundamental implausibilities regarding the assumed channels of influence. This abstraction from the social context can shed light on some of the fundamental problems associated with the development of US public diplomacy strategy since 9/11 and underlines the argument that public diplomacy has been re-conceptualized in terms of relations rather than messages.²⁴ The media environment is part of the context in which agents operate. This will influence which actors will respond, for example in terms of securitization, and their capacity to act.

A considerable literature has developed around the role of network actors in international politics and it is not necessary to elaborate on the arguments presented here. The application of formal network tools offers new insights into these actors. That the network perspective offers new insights not only into what counts as network actors but also into what non-network actors do. Part of the difficulty is that IR theory has dealt with the impact of the communications revolution and that it has focused on relatively static units and structures and failed to take into account dynamics. It is precisely because changes in the communications environment affect dynamics (and dynamics shape outcomes) that IR studies have struggled with the impact of communications technologies. One strategy for dealing with this problem is to focus on power as something to be mobilized. Political agency essentially consists in getting other actors to go along with one's agenda, but the ability to do this is very much shaped by the situation. Network analysis allows us to give this argument a more solid foundation. It is not advocacy groups that operate in this way; states can be seen as networks of mobilization of greater and lesser degrees of effectiveness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

International communication research has begun to engage with the network approach at some point in the past. Network analysis in international communication has been used in an effort to understand the social context of media reception, the diffusion of innovations, nationalism as social communication, and media flows. It is therefore time for international communication scholars to return to utilizing this network analysis approach. There are several reasons that support the argument regarding the importance of network analysis in the study of international communication. First, for the same reasons that earlier generations of communication researchers did so, namely in an attempt to link communication processes to the social world. This linkage between communication and the social world works in both directions. It shows the limits and constraints of technologically mediated communication but also shows the impact of communication processes on social and political outcomes. Second, is that we are talking about fixed networks and a more systematic use of the concept will allow us to draw on both the methodological and theoretical strategies that have been developed over the last forty years. Unlike previous generations, scholars today have access to powerful computers, specialist computational software and to process relatively large amounts of relational data. Third, the repeated appeal of social theorists has made this approach more relational, often translating into discussions of micro-macro transitions and structure and agency. Network analysis provides us with an approach to these issues that is transparent and coherent. Fourth, network analysis offers a way of dealing with the complexity and non-linearity of the contemporary world. Fifth, networks will allow us to overcome some of the obstacles to considering the integration of communication back into IR studies.***

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²³Christina Archeti and Robin Brown, "Networks of News: News Management, Technology and the Construction of International Relations", paper (San Francisco, 2008).

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