

Systemic Determinants of International News Coverage: A Comparison of 38 Countries

by H. Denis Wu

This study investigates the influence of systemic determinants on international news coverage in 38 countries. Systemic factors include traits of nations, magnitude of interaction and relatedness between nations, and logistics of news gathering. Multiple regression is implemented to assess 9 systemic determinants in each individual country. Findings indicate that the U.S. was the most covered country in the world. In spite of some variation, trade volume and presence of international news agencies were found to be the 2 primary predictors of the amount of news coverage. The study concludes that the prediction framework of international news coverage has probably altered in the post-Cold War epoch and, therefore, that the relevant problems need to be revisited.

Not all countries can be covered every day by news media. The picture of the world presented in the news of every country's media is inevitably distorted in the sense that people, countries, and events are often represented unevenly. Even a layperson can notice that some incidents from a given country can loom so large that they occupy most of the available international news hole. What intrigues scholars of international communication the most, however, are the hidden structural underpinnings that shape international coverage in news media. Why are some countries more likely than others to be covered and given more space or broadcast time? Is there any systemic force that governs international news coverage in the world's press at large?

Scholarly efforts to explain the discrepancy between the "real world" and the "news world" generally follow one of two approaches. One is to examine the multistep processes of news gathering and distribution by a chain of gatekeepers who apply a set of traditional news values that reflect a collective judgment of what is newsworthy and what is not. Gatekeepers, according to such studies, tend to select information that reflects unexpectedness, proximity, conflict, discrepancy, and prominence. The news in general overrepresents events that occur

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close to home or incidents that are disruptive or that feature well-known or powerful people. Most gatekeeper and news value research has been conducted at the domestic level and focuses on decisions made by intermediate news agency editors and by editors of local media.

At the international level, however, another approach is more suitable, although less frequently pursued. Transnational information flow is a reflection and a constituent of the larger global system, which in turn is latently structured by the world's politics, economy, and culture (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1996). In many ways, international news transmission continues to reflect the earlier imperial system in which news agencies follow national flags, armies, and traders. Moreover, larger Western nations, which have the resources to maintain their own systems of news gathering, tend to distribute resources strategically. Reporters are typically assigned to foreign locales with pleasant amenities or to those regions with traditional and current links to their home country. Consequently, news is expected to follow reporters' postings. Other factors likely to lead to an increase of news coverage include trade, territorial size, cultural ties, communication resources, and physical distance, all of which can be categorized under the umbrella of "systemic factors."¹ These systemic factors tend to influence the volume and content of news that flows from various parts of the world and determine the "menu" of international news available to gatekeepers. The world we see and read and hear about in the news is a product of both news values and the global system of news gathering and distribution.

This study aims to explore the nature of global news flow by investigating the influence of nine systemic factors on the volume of foreign news originating from 214 countries around the world and subsequently presented in the media of the 38 individual countries. In this study, each of the 214 "guest"² countries is treated as the unit of analysis. The dependent variable is the total number of news stories from or about the guest country in the media of the 38 "host" countries; the independent variables include the guest country's population, territorial size, level of economic development, language, degree of press freedom, presence of international news agency, geographic distance, trade volume, and colonial ties with the country whose media are being analyzed.

Literature Review

International news, among many genres of the news menu, is possibly the most frequently studied and discussed. Part of the interest derives from its distinct method

¹ Systemic factors in this project are defined as the distinctive traits of individual nations, as well as the magnitude of interaction between any two nations in the context of the global system. The operationalized systemic factors of international news flow include three categories of testing variables: (a) national traits, such as population and degree of press freedom; (b) interactions and relatedness, such as trade and shared language; and (c) logistical factors of news gathering and distribution.

² Guest countries are the countries that are covered in the news media of other countries—the number (214) and data of the countries in the world derive from the International Monetary Fund. Host countries are the 38 countries whose news media are selected for study in the sample.

of production, the economic factors that are associated with the production, and the potential impact on the world. Schramm's *One Day in the World's Press* (1959) was probably the first investigation of international news coverage around the world. The 14 selected papers, according to Schramm, conveyed remarkably different pictures to their respective readers on November 2, 1956. The world covered in the press, he found, was not proportionally commensurate with either the population or geographic size of specific countries.³

Most subsequent research described differences in news coverage across countries or the image of a certain country or region in another country's media (e.g., Hicks & Gordon, 1974). Commenting on this research trend, Rosengren (1977) called for a more explanatory approach to advance the building of international communication theory. It seems that only after the acrimonious UNESCO debate over the nature and social function of information did the communication field rekindle an interest in investigating the factors that shape our worldview via the press.

The UNESCO debate generated an enormous amount of research—and even more debate—about a broad range of issues related to international news flow.⁴ It is probably fair to argue that the pieces representing all sides of these issues are laden with ideology and economic interests and also charged with a strong dose of psychology. Useful though the literature may be to understand the context, the fact is that not much can be proved or disproved with such heated polemics. For that reason, only studies that provide empirical evidence are reviewed.⁵ What follows encompasses three primary groups of systemic determinants: (a) national traits, (b) interactions and relatedness, and (c) logistical factors.

National traits. Many studies that tested the influence of national traits on news flow across national borders stemmed from Galtung and Ruge's (1965) structural theory of foreign news. As a conceptual framework, their theory argues that economic, social, political, and geographic characteristics of nations determine the amount and the nature of coverage one country receives in another country's news media. However, despite the ingenuity, the factors raised and the hypotheses postulated by Galtung and Ruge were found to contain psychological elements and are hard to investigate (Hur, 1984).

Dupree (1971) was probably the first researcher to test (part of) the structural theory. In his study, the number of items translated and digested in *Atlas*—a U.S. magazine containing material compiled from foreign publications, now called *World Press Review*—was used as the dependent variable and numerous national traits as independent variables. From a correlation analysis, Dupree found that 11 variables are associated with news coverage: foreign stock residing in the U.S., GNP per capita, population, language translatability, literacy rate, newspaper availability, import-export volume, distance, GNP, population density per square kilometer, and continent, although the results were not conclusive.

³ This research finding was echoed 2 decades later by Gerbner and Marvany (1977).

⁴ For example, McPhail (1983) reported details and arguments of the debates.

⁵ Those issues were discussed in more detail in many books, e.g., Frederick (1993), Gerbner and Siefert (1984), Galtung and Vincent (1992), Mankekar (1981), and Stevenson (1988).

In a similar vein, Rosengren (1977) found that the extramedia factors such as trade, population, and geographic distance affected the volume of news a nation received in another's media. It also was found that the explicability of each factor varies in different countries. Supporting Rosengren's finding, de Verneil's (1977) research found no single pattern governing the relationship between news coverage and interaction traits between countries. However, trading interest, demographic energy ratios, and INTELSAT circuits were found most conducive to news coverage.

A cluster of research that studied North American news media did not generate consistent findings. Robinson and Sparkes (1976) investigated international news coverage in 39 newspapers from Canada and the U.S. and discovered that the results were not the same in these two countries. According to their finding, trade, population, and GNP failed to predict news coverage of foreign countries in the U.S. newspapers, whereas trade was found to correlate quite well with international coverage in the Canadian press.

Contrary to Robinson and Sparkes's finding, Ahern (1984) found that trade and GNP, together with political relations with the U.S., can account for almost 60% of the variance in predicting the number of articles published in three elite U.S. newspapers. Location, population, and political system were found to matter as well, but not as significantly as the aforementioned factors. In another Canadian study, Kariel and Rosenvall (1984) found that "eliteness" of nations was the most significant factor, followed by population, trade, and GNP. Charles, Shore, and Todd's (1979) study looked exclusively at the coverage of 18 African nations in *The New York Times*. The result of their study showed that economic ties (trade) and population determined the amount of news coverage, whereas stories that involved violence tended to get front-page treatment.

Another recent piece is also in line with the above studies and incorporated similar variables. By examining the international news from *Asahi Shimbun*, one of the most widely read newspapers in Japan, Ishii (1996) found that both GDP and population were sound predictors of the quantity of international news in 1987 and 1993. Although not mentioned in the text, the presented table indicates that the number of correspondents stationed abroad was also related to coverage of foreign countries. Interestingly, the volume of imports, found not to be a determinant in 1987, turned out to be a significant predictor in the 1993 model.

Interactions and relatedness. Nnaemeka and Richstad (1980) surveyed 19 newspapers of the Pacific region and found that news originating from Oceania⁶ received the primary emphasis in the region's media. About one third of foreign news came from North America and Western Europe. The hypothesis that the nations having a colonial tie will be given more news attention within the same colonial group was supported. Furthermore, the press in each of the three Pacific territories devoted far more news hole to their respective centers than their immediate neighbors.⁷ The authors concluded that the pattern of news flow in the region was vertical rather than horizontal.

⁶ Oceania includes Australia, New Zealand, and islands of the Pacific.

⁷ The centers referred to here are the U.S., U.K., and France, respectively. The words "center" and "periphery" refer to the political and economic power structure of the world rather than to geography.

Echoing Nnaemeka and Richstad's finding, old colonial ties were also found to be an important factor in determining the volume of news flow in the studies of Atwood (1985), Meyer (1989), and Skurnik (1981). In Skurnik's study, six African newspapers with distinct ideological orientations were used to test determinants of foreign news coverage. Other than colonial ties, regionalism and national interests were also found significant, which indirectly negates the wire-dependence thesis. In Atwood's (1985) project, 24 papers from 12 nations (in Asia and Western Europe) were used. The findings indicated that African and Arab countries tended to get covered with more stories in the press of the same colonial group.⁸ Interestingly, it appeared that the type of news clarified historical connections—for the Commonwealth countries, trade news dominated the international news agendas, whereas for the French Community countries, cultural news was emphasized.

Language was found to be another decisive element among the cultural factors that filter information traffic. Kareil and Rosenvall (1983) used cluster analysis to examine language's impact on Canadian dailies' coverage. Their findings showed that French-language and English-language newspapers fall perfectly into distinctly separate groups. However, the extent to which different coverage is carried out between the two cultural realms is more significant among the English-language newspapers than among the French-language counterparts.

Addressing the issues raised by Nordenstreng and Varis (1973) that research on international news overlooked variance within countries, Cassara (1993) chose six mid-sized newspapers from three distinct regions in the U.S. to test whether regional differences exist. The results suggest that economic and cultural ties between regions of the U.S. and other countries,⁹ contrary to some anecdotal evidence and anticipation, are not factors in affecting how regional newspapers cover news from abroad. It is, however, the geopolitical factor that seemed to determine the foreign news hole (probably due to the sample year, 1988, right before the former Soviet Union collapsed).

Also using U.S. newspapers as the study sample, Johnson (1997) investigated the determinants of circulation size, cultural proximity, and geographic proximity on the coverage of Mexico. The finding is somewhat contradictory to what Cassara (1993) found 4 years earlier—the quantity of Mexican coverage is influenced not only by the size of the newspaper (circulation), but also by the cultural proximity factor. In effect, both studies used a similar definition of cultural proximity—the population figure of a given ethnicity in the community. The difference between the findings is probably due to the fact that Johnson only used Mexico as the guest country, although other differences regarding the design and operationalization of these two studies might cause the discrepancy too. This is a vivid example of the difficulty in generalizing studies about international news flow into a more conceptual and theoretical framework.

⁸ Meyer (1989) has a similar finding with the sample gathered from Africa and Latin America.

⁹ The operational definitions for economic and cultural ties are export and immigrant population of each state, respectively.

There are also a fair number of studies addressing the influence of regionalism or proximity on news selection. Haynes's (1984) study suggested that both geographic proximity and regionalism contribute to international news presentation. Ramaprasad's (1991) examination of U.S. network news, however, indicates that geographic proximity and "deviance" of news stories are the main predictors. Kim and Barnett (1995) used trade data of news periodicals across national borders to investigate a special kind of international news flow. Their finding is also strongly supportive of regionalism.

Logistical factors. The extent to which a country is equipped with sufficient communication infrastructure and human resources in collecting and processing international news is usually defined as a *logistical factor*. Two content analytical projects completed by Larson produced consistent findings, both of which indicated the logistical determinants of television newscast in the U.S. His seminal study (1979) examined international affairs coverage by CBS, in which he discovered the familiar pattern that Third World countries are less likely to be covered than developed nations. However, four "hardware" factors examined by Larson yielded more interesting results. He concluded that international news wire is the most important factor, followed by the presence of a national news agency, CBS bureau, and INTELSAT earth station.

Years later, however, with updated data from CBS and with ABC data added to the sample, Larson (1984) did not find evidence to support the original conclusion about the prediction of satellite communication facilities. Perhaps the penetration rate of satellite communication facilities had been significantly increased worldwide by 1984. Only two factors were found to significantly influence newscasts—locations of U.S. network bureaus and the presence of international news agency in the nation.

Critique of the existing literature. The first impression from the literature reviewed above is that the results of past studies are not entirely consistent.¹⁰ This is probably due to different sampling methods, time frames, definitions, and other details of implementation that are hard to identify. Precisely because of this incompatibility of past studies, almost no solid theories were yielded. In other words, the vast amount of literature accumulated and intellectual endeavor invested in the past few decades has added relatively little to our understanding of global news flow. What is needed is a systematic and across-the-board examination of the variables suggested in the literature using a better, representative sample from countries all over the world.

Also, many of the studies utilized basic descriptive statistical methods, such as percentage or correlation, to test research hypotheses. The drawback of using such simple methods is that researchers often encounter problems such as the difficulty of sorting out complicated relationships between independent and dependent variables, and among independent variables themselves. In addition, the individual contribution of any independent variable to the dependent variable is hard to gauge with these simple methods. By using multiple regression—a far

¹⁰ For example, trade failed to predict international news coverage in the studies of Robinson and Sparkes (1976) and Cassara (1993), but it was found a valid predictor in Ahern's (1984) study.

more advanced and capable method than percentage or correlation—together with a more representative sample, the problems and limitations of past studies can be resolved.

Another latent defect of past studies is related to the issues of external validity and representativeness. Most studies were confined to a single country's or a specific region's data, or used only one medium's output to represent the news universe of a country. Furthermore, the guest country's coverage that researchers investigated was often limited to a single nation or just one specific region.¹¹ These flaws might have made it more difficult to generate a universal theory. With the multiple media sample drawn from an unprecedented 38 countries, a more systematic examination can be undertaken and a more theory-inducible conclusion should be expected.

Based on the studies reviewed, most news media selected are located in North America, particularly the U.S., which not only neglects the news media of other countries but also hinders the generalizability of research findings. Moreover, newspapers appear more likely than TV to be examined in the literature (Wu, 1998), although studies argue that TV has become the most important and trusted source for information (e.g., Roper, 1985). This project overcomes these two major limitations.

Lastly, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ensuing end of the Cold War, and the transformation of former communist nations, we have sufficient cause to believe, as Sreberny-Mohammadi (1991) pointed out, that the world needs to be remapped, especially in the cognitive sense. In agreement with this viewpoint, Hoge (1993, 1997) stressed that the predictability of international news coverage will dramatically change because the old paradigm of making sense of the world has waned with the end of the Cold War era. Thus, it is worth examining the systemic determinants of international news coverage in the post-Cold War period.

Methodology

Hypotheses

This study systematically examined nine systemic variables that might exert influence on the volume of international news coverage. The variables can be organized into three broad categories: (a) the traits of the country (population, degree of press freedom, geographic size, economic power); (b) interactions and relatedness between host and guest countries (geographic distance, shared language, volume of trade, past colonial ties); and (c) logistics of news gathering (presence of international news agency). Specific hypotheses are stated below:

H1: The more free the press system is in the guest country, the more news coverage the guest country will receive in the host country.

This hypothesis has never been empirically tested. The rationale comes from the assumption that it will be more difficult for journalists to gather information

¹¹ For example, Johnson (1997) investigated only the coverage of Mexico in the U.S. media.

from sources, interview people, or disseminate news in a country whose degree of press freedom is low. The rigid, repressive environment for information traffic will result in fewer news stories transmitted to other countries.

H2: The larger the population of a guest country, the more news the guest country will receive in the host country.

H3: The larger a guest country's geographic size, the more news the guest country will receive in the host country.

H4: The closer a guest country and its host country are physically, the more media news coverage the guest country will receive in the host country.

H5: If a guest country and its host country share a common or national language, the guest country will receive more news coverage in the host country than other countries that do not share this cultural bond.

H6: The greater the trade volume between a guest country and its host country, the more media news coverage the guest country will receive in the host country.

H7: The higher a guest country's economic power (in terms of GDP and GDP per capita), the more news the guest country will generate in the host country.

H8: If a guest country and its host country belong to the same colonial group, the guest country will receive more news coverage in the host country's media than in other host countries not associated with the given group.

H9: The more major international news agencies stationed in a guest country, the more that guest country will generate news.

Data

This study used the unprecedented data sets generated from a multinational research project of international news flow administered by Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi of the University of Leicester and Robert L. Stevenson of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. All of the participants are experienced researchers from the 38 local countries. The standardized procedures of media sampling and coding scheme ensure some degree of quality control.

The 38 countries included in this study represent every part of the world and different development levels (see Table 1). Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to point out that European countries represent the highest number (17) of participants; Asia is underrepresented, particularly given the fact that this region includes almost 50% of the world's population, and Africa is also underrepresented in the sample, considering the number of countries on each continent.

Researchers in the participating countries executed content analysis to document various elements of all international news published or broadcast in the 2-week sample period (September 3–9 and 17–23, 1995).¹² Detailed information on news media sampling guides, coding instructions, specific codes, and media sample

¹² Cuba, Cyprus, Gambia, Greece, Indonesia, Nigeria, Norway, Thailand, and Venezuela completed only the first week of sample.

Table 1. The Nations in the Sample

Country	Developed Nations	Developing Nations	Europe	America	Asia & Pacific	Africa	Middle East
Argentina		X		X			
Armenia		X	X				
Benin		X				X	
Bulgaria		X	X				
Cuba		X		X			
Cyprus		X	X				
Estonia		X	X				
Gambia		X				X	
Greece		X	X				
Hungary		X	X				
India		X			X		
Indonesia		X			X		
Iran		X					X
Israel		X					X
Ivory Coast		X				X	
Kenya		X				X	
Kuwait		X					X
Lebanon		X					X
Nigeria		X				X	
Russia		X	X				
Senegal		X				X	
Slovenia		X	X				
Thailand		X			X		
Turkey		X	X				
Ukraine		X	X				
Venezuela		X		X			
Australia	X				X		
Austria	X		X				
Finland	X		X				
Germany	X		X				
Japan	X				X		
New Zealand	X				X		
Norway	X		X				
Portugal	X		X				
South Africa	X					X	
Spain	X		X				
U.K.	X		X				
U.S.	X			X			
Total	12	26	17	4	6	7	4

of each country are available upon request. Only one coding item in this multinational project was used in the study—"the most important country mentioned in the news story."¹³ This item records the major or the first country covered in the news.¹⁴ The reason the coding of "dateline" was not used to represent the covered country is that dateline is not always used in all of the countries' news media. In addition, the most important country covered in an international news story is what editors care about and readers pay attention to. On top of these, if the dateline and the major country covered in the story are not identical, using datelines might actually be misleading.

Each news story's major or first-mentioned country is tallied under every one of the 214 (guest) countries in the world. The list of countries came from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU); whenever a country is listed in either organization, it is included. The number of news stories each guest country receives becomes the dependent variable in the research model.

The other information this study used as independent variables has been gleaned from various sources. The geographic distance between any two countries is defined as the physical distance between the capitals of the two countries. All of the countries' capitals were located, and then the distance between any two capitals was automatically calculated by an on-line web service at: <http://www.indo.com/distance/>.¹⁵

The ratings of press freedom level in each country were obtained from the Freedom House's yearly evaluation in 1995. Their procedure measures four broad areas related to operations of the press in each country: (a) whether laws or administrative decisions influence the content of news media; (b) the degree of political influence or control over content; (c) economic influences on the media by government or private entrepreneurs; and (d) degree of oppression, ranging from killing journalists to censoring material.¹⁶ The higher the score is on a scale of 0 to 100, the less free the country's press system is.

The volume of import and export between host countries and guest countries was derived from the International Monetary Fund's *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook 1996*. The year of the data used in this study is 1994 instead of 1995 because trade in 1994 preceded the period of international news we collected. It is logical to extrapolate that the volume of trade in 1994 influences the news

¹³ The project recorded three countries mentioned in each news story. However, the volume of coverage each country received using major country coded or all three countries coded was almost identical (in terms of the variance among countries). Based on the 38-country sample, the Spearman correlation coefficient between the two measures of coverage reached .972.

¹⁴ Host countries can be coded as the major or the first country mentioned in a news story, but that data was not used because foreign countries' coverage is the interest of this project.

¹⁵ The service uses the University of Michigan Geographic Name Server and a supplementary database of world cities to find the latitude and longitude of two places and then calculates the distance between them.

¹⁶ It is quoted from their survey methodology, which was directly mailed to the researcher from Freedom House. The information can also be accessed on their website, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

selection of 1995; trade data in 1995 cannot be used to logically infer such an explanation. Because the distributions of imports and exports in all of the countries appear extremely skewed, the raw data were log-transformed to meet the requirement of normal distribution in the multiple regression analysis. In addition, an extracted factor, representing the magnitude of both exports and imports, was created as the trade variable.

The data for population (1994) of every nation around the world came from a computerized data set of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). GDP, GDP per capita, language, and geographic size of each country were derived from *The World Almanac 1996* (Famighetti, 1996). Similar to the problem of imports and exports, the distributions of these data (except for GDP per capita) appear extremely skewed: A handful of large countries drag the distribution curve to one side, whereas most other average and small countries flock to the other. Therefore, the data of GDP, geographic size, and population were also log-transformed to meet the requirement of normal distribution.

The determination of language officially recognized in any given nation reflects another kind of problem. Some nations, such as Canada and Singapore, officially recognize more than one language; others recognize various indigenous dialects. In this study, as long as a given language is recognized as official, that language is checked as positive in the dummy-coding item. Only six languages¹⁷ were selected to test whether a linguistic factor affects transnational news traffic. The rationale was based on the number of countries where the language is spoken—all six of these languages are officially recognized in more than three countries, and each language has to be used in at least one of the 38 host countries.

Information provided by AP, AFP, CNN, and Reuters represented the variable of presence of international news agencies in each country. The countries to which these four international news suppliers dispatch their correspondents or where they set up their own local bureaus were tallied—all four news agencies are represented in some countries; in others none of them exist. The information for colonial group was garnered from the brief introduction to each country in *The World Almanac 1996*. I selected nine major colonial groups¹⁸ and (former and current) communist countries to be dummy coded. The operational definition of a country that belongs to any colonial group is this: The whole or part of its territory had ever been ruled or occupied by any one of the nine powers within the past 2 centuries. Therefore, a country might belong to more than one colonial group at different times. The Philippines and Haiti are examples.

Analysis. Each of the 38 (host) countries defines one complete, self-contained data set consisting of 214 cases (guest countries). Each data set contains information that represents the dependent variable as well as the independent variables as described in the above section. Data inspection, including univariate analysis and correlation test, was executed first; extreme outliers were spotted and sifted with the help of residual plots and the Mahalanobis distance measure. Multiple

¹⁷ Arabic, English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish.

¹⁸ The nine groups are British Commonwealth, Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, American, Belgian, and Italian.

regression analysis was then conducted to investigate the systemic determinants in each country's model. SPSS for Windows was used for all analyses. Because of the exploratory nature of the analysis, the independent variables in each individual country's model were derived from the results of the correlation analysis. The threshold of the independent variables selected into the equation is a p level of .05. All of the variables that passed this threshold were entered into the regression model with the stepwise method recommended by most statisticians (e.g., Lomax, 1992).

Findings

Prior to sketching the big picture of global news flow, a number of significant events that occurred during the time frame should be reported, for they could have influenced the media agenda worldwide. These international events include the United Nations Women's Conference held in Beijing, China; NATO's military actions and peace negotiation in Bosnia; France's nuclear tests conducted in the South Pacific and the various demonstrations and protests that ensued; an explosion in BBC's studio in India; and another explosion at a Jewish school in Lyon, France. It is inevitable that those countries involved or the venues where these events took place would attract more coverage.

Because of space limitations, a full description of international coverage in each country during the time frame would be prohibitive. However, a couple of interesting observations can be made here. First, the U.S. is dominant in almost every country's foreign news hole, and powerful countries such as France and Russia are also prominent. Secondly, each country's news output seems to demonstrate a regional preference. This phenomenon appears most striking when one examines the coverage across various countries.

One might be interested in knowing which country received the largest amount of coverage in the world's media during those 2 weeks. According to the combined data (Table 2), the top 10 countries are as follows: the U.S., France, the U.K., Russia, Bosnia, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain. The U.S. captured roughly 18% of the entire world's media space devoted to foreign countries during the 2 weeks. In other words, almost one in every five international news stories dealt with the U.S. It is also fascinating to note that, other than Bosnia, China, and Russia, all of the countries that are highly salient in the world's news media are economic elites. Russia and China, however, have formidable political and military clout, whereas Bosnia's prominence is clearly a product of the war that involved Western intervention.

The result of this news representation also vividly indicates that international news coverage is uneven not only at the level of each individual country, but also at the level of the world as a whole. Even in the results of the combined sample, many countries in Africa and Latin America, such as Cameroon, Central African Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala, received no news coverage. How did media select news stories and present the world to us in this fashion? This puzzle will be resolved and explicated in the following section.

Table 2. The Top 20 Countries in the World's Media*

Nation	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i> /total	%
Australia	399	0.0116	1.16
Austria	321	0.0094	0.94
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1518	0.0443	4.43
Brazil	304	0.0089	0.89
China	1354	0.0395	3.95
France	2916	0.085	8.50
Germany	1245	0.0363	3.63
India	468	0.0136	1.36
Iraq	349	0.0102	1.02
Israel	711	0.0207	2.07
Italy	1068	0.0311	3.11
Japan	838	0.0244	2.44
Russia	1850	0.0539	5.39
South Africa	420	0.0122	1.22
Spain	642	0.0187	1.87
Sweden	499	0.0146	1.46
Switzerland	356	0.0104	1.04
Turkey	344	0.0100	1.00
U.K.	2135	0.0623	6.23
U.S.	6067	0.1769	17.69

* The entire table of *The World in the World's Media* is available upon request.

The basic frequency analysis also suggests the universality of news value or agenda selection from the cases of Bosnia and French Polynesia. These two geographic areas would not have been emphasized in the world's media if the incidents were not considered newsworthy. On the other hand, one might contend that this phenomenon of identical news diet was due to the agenda-setting effect of the international news agencies. Because of the limited news menu provided by the major transnational news services, dependent media, particularly those in the South, would not have an alternative choice.

Results of regression analysis. As described in the Method section, each country's international news output was analyzed individually with the multiple regression method. This generated a prediction model of news quantity by systemic factors for each country—38 regression models were yielded in all (see Table 3). What follows is an overview of the most important findings across these nations.

An observer might be surprised that trade is the leading predictor of news coverage in so many countries. As a matter of fact, only in eight countries¹⁹ is trade not listed as one of the predictors in their regression models. On the other hand,

¹⁹ These countries are Benin, Cuba, Cyprus, Gambia, Germany, Greece, the U.S., and the U.K.

Table 3. Regression Models of Individual Nations

<i>Asia-Pacific</i>							
	Australia	India	Indonesia	Japan	New Zealand	Thailand	
Trade	.490***	.415***	.464***	.203***	436.***	.301***	
Agency			.191*	.261***		.256**	
F	57.070***	37.586***	55.120***	20.186***	41.565***	32.524***	
df	(1, 181)	(1, 181)	(2, 180)	(1, 179)	(1, 177)	(2, 179)	
Adjusted R ²	.236	.167	.373	.175	.186	.258	
<i>America</i>							
	Argentina	Cuba	U.S.	Venezuela			
Trade	.594***			.438***			
Distance		-.236**					
Agency		.265***	.420***	.182*			
F	97.000***	12.129***	38.816***	41.973***			
df	(1, 179)	(2, 174)	(1, 181)	(2, 177)			
Adjusted R ²	.349	.112	.172	.314			
<i>Africa</i>							
	Benin	Côte d'Ivoire	Gambia	Kenya	Nigeria	Senegal	S. Africa
Trade		.311***		.383***	.253**	.178*	.420***
Population			.848***	.245**	.251**	.569***	
Distance	-.242**	-.169*				-.248***	
Agency	.248**						
GDP			-.356**			-.425**	
Size		.142*	-.285*				
English					.239**		
Communist						-.195**	
F	11.495***	15.807***	10.576***	38.775***	14.774***	11.331***	38.853***
df	(2, 175)	(3, 180)	(3, 175)	(2, 183)	(3, 179)	(5, 174)	(1, 181)
Adjusted R ²	.106	.195	.139	.290	.185	.224	.172
<i>Eastern Europe</i>							
	Armenia	Bulgaria	Estonia	Hungary	Russia	Slovenia	Ukraine
Trade	.274***	.350***	.428***	.682***	.510***	.664***	.299***
GDP per capita							.282***
Population							.190**
Distance		-.142*					
Agency		.221*	.197**			.202**	
GDP	.257***						
Press Freedom						.165**	
F	20.304***	30.036***	35.309***	154.827***	62.992***	73.057***	23.952***
df	(2, 180)	(3, 174)	(2, 174)	(1, 178)	(1, 179)	(3, 175)	(3, 179)
Adjusted R ²	.175	.330	.281	.462	.256	.548	.274

Table 3. Regression Models of Individual Nations, continued

<i>Middle East</i>					
	Iran	Israel	Kuwait	Lebanon	
Trade	.259**	.537***	.374***	.571***	
Distance	-.180**				
Agency Size	.341***			.134*	
Arabic			.408***		
Press freedom			.162*		
<i>F</i>	33.982***	73.521***	36.414***	55.434***	
<i>df</i>	(3, 173)	(1, 181)	(3, 177)	(2, 177)	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.360	.285	.371	.378	
<i>Western Europe</i>					
	Austria	Cyprus	Finland	Germany	Greece
Trade	.490***		.528***		
GDP per capita		.272***		.285***	
Population		.295***		.178*	
Agency				.297***	.381***
<i>F</i>	55.191***	17.263***	68.656***	27.995***	30.998***
<i>df</i>	(1, 175)	(2, 181)	(1, 178)	(3, 176)	(1, 182)
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.235	.151	.274	.312	.141
	Norway	Portugal	Spain	Turkey	U.K.
Trade	.438***	.635***	.292**	.304***	
GDP per capita					.206**
Population				.180*	.183*
Agency			.220*		.249**
<i>F</i>	42.604***	120.553***	26.674***	20.477***	17.498***
<i>df</i>	(1, 179)	(1, 178)	(2, 177)	(2, 177)	(3, 179)
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.188	.400	.223	.179	.214

****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05.

there are 12 countries²⁰ in which the single determinant of transnational news flow is trade. Based on this result, trade should be the most influential determinant when the whole world is considered. Therefore, H6 is overwhelmingly supported. The second most important predictor is the presence of international news agencies. There are 15 countries in which the number of news agencies stationed locally can predict the amount of news a foreign country gets in their media: Benin, Bulgaria, Cuba, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Spain, Slovenia, Thailand, the U.S., the U.K., and Venezuela. These countries are located in all parts of the world and represent a wide range of levels of economic development. Accordingly, reliance on news brokers for international news sources

²⁰ They are Russia, Australia, Argentina, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Hungary, India, Israel, Norway, New Zealand, and South Africa.

differs from one country to another. Most interestingly, in Greece and the U.S., the presence of news agencies is the sole predictor of international news coverage—news media in these two nations pretty much follow the feed of global news agencies. Based on these results, H9 can be considered moderately supported worldwide.

Even though the “clout” variables—population, size, and GDP—are found highly related to international coverage, their predictive powers, derived from the regression outputs, are not as systematic and consistent as expected across different countries. For example, GDP per capita was found to be one of the determinants in Cyprus, Germany, Ukraine, and the U.K.; population factor predicts well in Cyprus, Gambia, and Senegal, but does only a modest job in Germany, Kenya, Nigeria, Turkey, Ukraine, and the U.K. Geographic size is conducive to the international coverage in Côte d’Ivoire and Lebanon, yet plays an entirely opposite role in Gambia. Perhaps the variance commonly associated with these variables that influence the amount of news coverage has been substantially accounted for by other variables such as trade, or the significant correlations could be inflated by some outliers that might have been sifted out in the regression testing processes. As a result, these clout variables are effective in only a handful of countries and usually coexist with other stronger predictors. The only two exceptional cases are Cyprus and Gambia, in which these clout variables alone can prescribe the coverage about other countries. Therefore, H2, H3, and H7 are not entirely confirmed by the test results.

The countries that have geographic distance as one of their predictors of international coverage include Benin, Bulgaria, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Iran, and Senegal. It is immediately apparent that all of these are developing countries. Are developing countries more likely to cover countries closer to them? This question might merit further investigating. At this point, H4 is conditionally supported. Another minor determinant of foreign news volume is the estimate of press freedom. The countries with worse press freedom assessment counterintuitively end up with higher likelihood of being covered by the media of Kuwait and Slovenia. According to bivariate output, this particular predictor is often overlapped with other factors. For example, in Slovenia the principal determinant of international news flow is trade, and most of Slovenia’s trading partners are in the former East Bloc, whose press freedom rankings are not particularly impressive. Indirectly, the emphasis of international coverage on active trading partners results in this paradoxical relationship between news coverage and press freedom. Thus, the evidence does not uphold H1.

The only two countries in which the language factor indicates an influence are Kuwait and Nigeria. Arabic language is the most decisive factor that determined how much a country got covered in Kuwait’s media, whereas it is English language, along with two other factors, that predicted the number of news stories in Nigeria. Another unusual case regarding a country’s media picture of the world is Senegal, where former and current communist countries are more likely to be neglected because of the press’s focus on African countries. Other than these unusual cases, no other models identify the influence of cultural tie on news flow. Accordingly, H5 and H8 should be rejected.

Conclusion. Although the information yielded from the 38-country sample may look overwhelming, a few underlying determinants that structure international news coverage are apparent. A number of intriguing results are worth highlighting again. According to the univariate output from each country, it is clear that different countries provided their audiences with distinct worldviews: Different countries were emphasized, covered, or neglected. By examining the countries that were emphasized by each host country, we discovered a pervasive regional flavor in many countries' news diet.

In addition, we recognize the unbeatable superstar status of the U.S. In 23 of the 37 countries (excluding the U.S. itself), the U.S. was the best-covered country. This intriguing phenomenon, even though not directly displayed in the regression models, reflects the preeminent status of the U.S. on the world stage. From the top 10 list of the most covered, we get the impression that those countries with enormous economic and political clout tend to be emphasized in the press. Other than those world powers, the only alternative way to be cast in the world's spotlight is to have some large-scale, disruptive incidents. That, of course, is why Bosnia was so well covered at the time. The same reason can be applied, although probably to a lesser extent, to the cases of France and China, where major international events took place.

When it comes to a more theoretical level of predicting international news coverage, all of the determinants that emerged in this study need to be examined systematically and thoroughly. Trade volume and presence of international news agencies appear to be two principal predictors, whereas clout variables generate inconsistent impacts and physical distance plays a minor role in some developing nations. This result suggests a mixture of forces that shape international news coverage worldwide—economic interest, information availability, and production cost of international news are apparently at work in determining the volume of information from abroad.

Discussion

The research results clearly demonstrate that international news in almost every nation centers on the powerful. The U.S., among the most frequently covered nations, is placed in the brightest spotlight on the stage of the news world. To what extent the media coverage reflects the reality of the power structure in the world is beyond the scope of this study and subject to opinion; nevertheless, the U.S. is unquestionably the single superstar. Why do the few powers attract such overwhelmingly extensive coverage around the world? Is the news about the U.S. more likely to be picked up by the gatekeeper simply because it is about the U.S. (the irresistible magnetism of American stardom)?

As cultural studies scholars point out, the U.S. is powerful not only in political and economic strength and military muscle, but also formidable in culture- and media-related industries—the latter generate entertainment news and easily evade strict censorship. Most of the world's largest media conglomerates, such as Time-Warner and Disney-ABC, well-developed sports enterprises, famous athletes like Michael Jordan, and, above all, pop music that rocks the globe, flow from this

single country. These factors might help the U.S. generate the highest amount of coverage in the surveyed countries.

The phenomenon of the press's concentration on the world elites perhaps is not entirely unexpected. After all, powerful players set up game rules and dictate the repertoire of actions performed on the world stage, thus affecting the rest of the less powerful countries. The topics to which the majority of international news hole is devoted—international politics, transnational trade, military conflict, and domestic politics—also evidently reflect that news from abroad provides the function of surveillance. Thus, it makes a lot of sense for most countries to monitor closely the moves of the few elites. In so doing, they could take necessary steps to protect their own national interests should something emergent or threatening occur.

The fact that international news coverage gravitates to the few powerful nations is intriguing, and the implications of this phenomenon certainly await further scholarly research. The political economy perspective on news production, that is, the “instrumental approach,” might be very appropriate in this case (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, p. 191). Using this approach, one might argue that news professionals, usually elites of every country, tend subconsciously to impose an elite perspective when they process news stories from various parts of the world. Such a perspective often results in voluminous coverage about or is “instrumental” to the few powerful countries. The analysis of power elites (Mills, 1956; Glasgow University Media Group, 1993) has traditionally been conducted within a given society context. Applied to international circumstances, this instrumental perspective may be suitable for accounting for the overwhelming coverage of the powerful.

Evidence from the post-Cold War era seems to signal a new framework for international news coverage, one that has begun to replace the outdated East versus West, bipolar perspective. Now, it appears to be economic interests, rather than ideological antagonism, that play the central role in determining news about other nations. The determinism of economic interests is dual faceted. First, there is the level of daily economic interaction between nations. Those countries who are trading partners are particularly important to governments, corporations, business people, and even average citizens. When countries are without the constant threat of nuclear missiles from an opposing bloc, economic issues become the single overseas topic cared about by the audience and focused on by news professionals. The extensive coverage about the collapse of stock prices and the ensuing economic meltdown in Asia in 1998 is a vivid example. It is worth stressing that economic interest leads not only to coverage about economic activities, but also about many other topics about foreign countries. After all, this project examined all kinds of international news, rather than just economic news, that involved other nations.

The second facet of economic determinism in international news is related to the cost-effectiveness of international news production. Since the fall of communism in the late 1980s, capitalism has become the *de facto* way of managing news business worldwide. The first and foremost principle of doing business in capitalist fashion is to generate profits—the more the better. It is, then, no surprise to discover that international news agencies turn out to be the second most impor-

tant predictor of the amount of international news coverage. Because using news copy or footage provided by news services is much more economical than sending correspondents to investigate issues or cover incidents that take place on foreign soil, the quantity of international news on a given country is thus determined by the presence and size of the news agencies stationed in that country. As indicated above, the media of Greece and the U.S. were even found to be exclusively influenced by the news agency factor.

International news coverage in most countries is predominantly determined by the magnitude of economic interaction and availability of news sources. This rather interesting finding may provide a useful foundation for media around the world to improve their international coverage and adjust their reporting angle. In addition, the result may shed some light on the blind alley of the psychology-laden NWICO debates. Information policymakers in each individual country, as well as the authorities concerned in world organizations, can benefit from this research finding by pondering new means of solving (and preventing) problems of transnational information trafficking.

This study also discloses that the determinants of international news flow are deeply intertwined with various systemic factors. The level of financial resource and economic development and the extent of a country's economic interaction with others are all integrated with the cause of news coverage. Several decades of debates on various problems of international news flow between the North and the South should switch to address the real problems. In the wake of this research, new procedures to improve information flow and international understanding should be advanced because the advent of the global village will make complicated international issues more pressing.

Finally, to those countries that aim to increase their visibility in other countries' media, this study can suggest that a country's fundamental attributes, particularly its mercantile clout and economic relationship with the host (target) country, matter a great deal. These two conducive factors may not be an easy task for any country to accomplish, yet it is definitely easier to let international news agencies have access and transmit the information across borders. After all, only when a country passes the first threshold of gatekeeping criteria—availability of information—will the country need to worry about the orientation of the news stories it generates abroad.

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