HOMOGENEITY AROUND THE WORLD?

Comparing the Systemic Determinants of International News Flow between Developed and Developing Countries

H. Denis Wu

Abstract / This study investigates and compares the impact of systemic determinants on international news flow between developed and developing nations. Systemic factors are defined as traits of nation, interaction and relatedness, and logistics of news gathering and distribution. Trade volume is found to be the dominant predictor of news flow. Trade and presence of news agencies impact news flow regardless of the nation's development level. Population and distance, however, are found to be predictors only in the developing countries, while GDP is an exclusive predictor in the developed counterparts. Globally speaking, trade, population, news agencies and geographic proximity emerge as conducive factors to transnational news flow.

Keywords / development level / foreign news / international news / news flow / systemic determinants

Introduction

News flow across national borders can impact our understanding of other countries. Because of the potential influence, researchers in the past few decades have delved into the factors that can influence news transmission between countries. One of the commonly shared discoveries is that the picture of the world presented in the news is dramatically different from what really takes place. Scholarly efforts to explain the discrepancy between the 'real world' and the 'news world', however, due to limited financial and human resources, generally have resorted to case studies. Yet, international news flow should be examined at the global level so that findings can be generalized and, therefore, conducive to theory building.

International news coverage in many ways appears to be a reflection and a constituent of the global system (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1996), which is latently structured by the world's politics, economy and cultures. Traits that may embody the global system 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 may well influence the volume of information that flows between various parts of the world as well as determine the 'menu' of international news available to local gatekeepers.

This study aims to elevate the scope and level of international news flow theories by investigating nine potential systemic determinants of the volume of news originating from 210 countries around the world and subsequently presented in the media of 44 selected countries. In the examination, each of the 210 'guest countries'[2] was 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 44 'host countries'. This study, unlike many prior case studies, seeks to examine the potential difference of determinants between developed and developing nations as well as the dominant predictors of news flow at the global level.

Rationale

International news presented in the media is the major, if not the only, source for average audiences to be exposed to other parts of the world. Various studies have demonstrated discrete but solid impacts of international news coverage on the audience. For example, news from abroad was found to affect people's perceptions about foreign countries (Perry, 1990; Salwen and Matera, 1992), generate significant agenda-setting effects (Wanta and Hu, 1993), and contribute to the public's knowledge (Bennett et al., 1997).

The influence of international news is more far-reaching than people expect. As politicians would not hesitate to testify, foreign policy-making is often driven by public opinion (Holsti, 1996). For example, the extensive coverage of the Bosnia conflict shifted public opinion and subsequently led to US policy toward the Balkan Peninsula being altered. As Amanpour (1996) tersely pointed out, news media could wield a decisive influence in the absence of a resolute foreign policy on a given problem.

As the world becomes more and more interconnected, multifaceted international communication via media channels looms more critical than ever. In addition, with the collapse of the Communist Bloc, the Cold War framework that news professionals had long been using to select, structure and prioritize international news does not apply to the new world anymore (Norris, 1995). This argument, echoed by Hoge (1993) and Heuvel (1993), also points to a potential new framework journalists might adopt of covering the world since the 1990s. With the end of the Cold War and the significant abatement of potential military threat from abroad that ensued, scholars additionally have noted a strong tendency of the public to look inward. Some researchers (e.g. Cassara, 1993) as well as media practitioners (e.g. Seaton, 1999) have noted the trend of 'domesticating' or 'localizing' international news to attract readers.

Other contextual factors emerging in the post-Cold War period that lead to changes of international news also make revisiting the topic of news flow meaningful. For one thing, more and more media have been merged to form conglomerates, which, bowing to the pressure of maximizing profit, are bound to result in a striking resemblance of news coverage by various channels within the same group (Baker, 2000). Meanwhile, many news organizations, including the elite, not only reduce the number of international correspondents to curtail production costs but downsize the international newshole in response

to escalating market pressure (see Hess, 1996; Heuvel, 1993; Riffe et al., 1994).

The heated debates regarding the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in UNESCO have waned. The problems raised in those debates, however, did not get resolved, and the contention between the North and the South seems to have remained. For example, one might wonder whether, in the wake of the NWICO, international news preference in developing nations is any different from the counterpart in the developed world. Also, what are the principal factors that govern international news coverage in general?

This study can disentangle some of the unresolved puzzles that stemmed from the landmark debates. For one thing, the influence of international news agencies on coverage can be systematically gauged, along with other systemic factors, with the media sample from all over the world. This effort may result in solid, objective findings that can shed new light on the problems of vertical flow and one-way flow of international news that were documented in the NWICO debates.

This study, however, is not intended to provide solutions to the century-long, structured inequality of communication resources between the haves and have-nots. Nor does this project aim to find a remedy to enhance international news coverage worldwide. Those enduring problems could last and are linked to other structural factors, which are beyond the scope of this article. Yet, without the understanding of the cause of international news flow across national borders, any proposal to transcend the defective situation of international communication will not work as well as people ideally or theoretically anticipate. Upon this idea, this study was initiated to add another piece of mosaic to the complete scenario of international news coverage at the global level.

Literature Review

International news coverage has drawn a great deal of scholarly attention due to its distinct fashion of production, the economic factors associated with the production, and the scope and extent of impact on the world. Unsurprisingly, researchers are intrigued by how news is shaped and the raison d'être behind the coverage. Schramm's (1959) study is probably the first endeavor to investigate how the press around the world presents the world. The world covered in the press, he found, is not proportionally commensurate with either the population or geographic size,[3] instead, the news spotlight was cast mostly on certain areas. Schramm offered factors that could account for the discrepancy of the coverage – press system, development level, news resources and socioeconomic relationship between the nations. Unfortunately, this research stream was not explored further until the UNESCO contention.

A great number of works (e.g. McPhail, 1983) documented the debates about international news flow that took place against the backdrop of UNESCO. The Third World countries contended that news transmission across national borders is imbalanced and that information about the developing world

conveyed by the western news agencies is insufficient and distorted, and therefore cannot meet the needs of the developing countries (Masmoudi, 1984). As a result, they advocated NWICO to improve the state of flawed information flow. On the other hand, western countries rebutted the idea and counter-argued that news content should not and cannot be controlled. Moreover, they contended that information flow across national borders should be kept open and free. Useful though this group of literature may seem for us to better understand the background, not much can be verified with polemics. In line with a social scientific approach, the following review only includes empirical studies. What follows encompasses three groups of studies that addressed systemic determinants: national traits, interactions and relatedness, and logistic factors.

National Traits

Studies that tested the influence of national traits on news flow stem from Galtung and Ruge's (1965) structural theory of foreign news. As a conceptual framework, their theory purports 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. Dupree (1971) put the structural theory to test, discovering that 11 national trait variables are related to international news coverage. In a similar vein, de Verneil (1977) and Rosengren (1977) found factors such as trade and population affect the volume of news a nation receives, yet the explicability of each factor varies across countries.

Robinson and Sparkes (1976) also investigated the impact of national traits in 39 newspapers in Canada and the US and discovered that the results are not the same between the two. Trade, population and GNP failed to predict news coverage of foreign countries in the US newspapers, whereas trade was found to correlate well with international coverage in the Canadian press. Contrary to Robinson and Sparkes' finding, Ahern (1984) showed that trade and GNP together with international relations can account for almost 60 percent of the variance in predicting the number of articles published.

Kariel and Rosenvall (1984) examined the determinants of international coverage in the Canadian press and found that 'eliteness' of nations is the most significant factor, followed by population, trade and GNP. Charles et al. (1979) looked exclusively at the coverage of 18 African nations in the *New York Times*, resulting in a finding that shows that economic ties and population greatly decide coverage. Another study (Ishii, 1996) examined the *Asahi Shimbun* of Japan, discovering that GDP and population are valid predictors of the amount of international news stories; moreover, the correspondents stationed abroad are also conducive to foreign coverage.

Interactions and Relatedness

Nnaemeka and Richstad (1980) surveyed 19 newspapers from the Pacific islands, finding that news from the region received the primary emphasis. Yet,

the press devoted far more newshole to their respective 'centers' than any individual neighbors. Echoing this finding, Atwood (1985), Meyer (1989) and Skurnik (1981) also discovered the impact of old colonial ties. Skurnik found that other than colonial ties, regionalism and national interests were also significant factors. Atwood's project indicated that African and Arab countries that had colonial ties with either Britain or France tended to get more coverage within the same colonial group.

Language was found another culture determinant that filters information traffic. Kariel and Rosenvall (1983) found that French- and English-language newspapers of Canada perfectly fall into distinctly separate groups. Tsang (1992) examined the influence of 'relevance' on pictorial coverage in US newsmagazines, resulting in supporting the 'social propinquity' theory that is based on nations' relationship. Examining various variables' contribution to international news coverage, Wu (2000) found that economic interaction predicts transnational news traffic best in most countries investigated.

Logistic Factors

The extent to which a country is equipped with communication infrastructure and human resources in collecting and processing international news is defined as the logistic factor. Two content analytical projects completed by Larson (1979, 1984) wound up with consistent findings, indicating the logistical impact on television newscasts. In his 1984 study that used expanded data, two factors were found to have a statistically significant relationship with television newscasts – the presence of a US network bureau and international news agency.

One would conclude that the studies reviewed are not entirely in agreement with one another. And precisely because of the incompatibility of the past studies, hardly any theory in this area has been developed. This is rather unfortunate with ample literature accumulated and intellectual endeavor invested in the past few decades. A primary defect of the past studies centers on validity and representativeness. Most past studies were confined to a single country's or one specific region's data, or only use a single medium's output to represent the news universe of a country. On the other hand, the guest country examined is often limited to one specific region.[4] With diverse samples drawn from 44 countries representing two development levels and 210 guest countries coded in the news content, the present study is likely to generate a more rigorous examination and more globally robust conclusions.

This study also aims to tackle one neglected factor that might significantly shape the international news coverage: the host country's economic status. It was argued in the UNESCO debates that developing countries have different needs for international news. The absence of this potential factor in the literature is probably due to lack of sample from countries of different economic background. With this sample made possible by international collaboration, we can see whether or not developing nations choose foreign news differently from developed counterparts. Last, with the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the ensuing end of the Cold War, we have a 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, Hoge (1993, 1997) stressed that the predictability of international news coverage will dramatically alter since the old paradigm of making sense of the world has waned. Thus, it is worth re-examining the determinants of international news coverage in the brand new epoch.

Methodology

This study systematically examined nine systemic variables yielded from the literature referred to earlier that might exert influence on the volume of international news coverage. The specific hypotheses are listed as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The freer the press system in the guest country, the more news coverage the guest country receives in the host country.

The rationale comes from an assumption that news professionals will find it more challenging to gather information, interview people, or disseminate news in a country whose level of press freedom is low. A rigid, repressive environment for information traffic is likely to result in fewer news stories transmitted abroad.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the population of a guest country is, the more news the guest country receives in the host country.

Hypothesis 3: The bigger a guest country's geographic size, the more news the guest country receives in the host country.

Hypothesis 4: The closer a guest country and a host country are physically, the more news coverage the guest country receives in the host country's media.

Hypothesis 5: If a guest country and a host country share a common language, the guest country receives more news coverage in the host country than other countries that do not share the language.

Hypothesis 6: The greater the trade volume between a guest country and its host country, the more news coverage the guest country receives in the host country's news media.

Hypothesis 7: The higher a guest country's economic power (in terms of GDP and GDP per capita), the more news this guest country generates in the host country's media.

Hypothesis 8: If a guest country and a host country belonged to the same colonial group, the guest country receives more news coverage in the host country's media than in other host countries that were not associated with the given group.

Hypothesis 9: The more international news agencies are stationed in a guest country, the more that guest country generates news.

This study used datasets generated from a multinational research project that was coordinated by American and British researchers. All the participants of the project are experienced media researchers from 44 countries that collected, coded and analyzed the news locally. Standardized, identical procedures of media sampling and coding scheme were used to ensure data quality. The 44 countries included in this study represent various parts of the world and different development levels.[5]

Researchers in the participant countries executed content analysis of all international news published or broadcast in a two-week period in 1995 (3–9 and 9–17 September).[6] Only one coding item in this multinational project was used in this study – 'the most important country mentioned in the news story',[7] which records the major or the first country covered in each news item.[8] Each news story's major or first-mentioned country was tallied under every one of the 210 (guest) countries. The number of news stories each guest country receives was used in constructing the dependent variable.

The other information this study used as independent variables was 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 the distance between any two capitals was calculated by an online web service at: http://www.indo.com/distance/.[9]

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: (1) whether laws or administrative decisions influence the content of news media; (2) the degree of political influence or control over content; (3) economic influences on the media by government or private entrepreneurs; and (4) the degree of oppression, ranging from the murder of journalists to censorship.[10] The larger the score is on a scale of 0–100, the less free the country's press system is.

The volumes of import and export between host countries and guest countries are 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 later years because trade in 1994 preceded the period of international news we collected. It is logical to extrapolate that the volume of trade in 1994 may lead to the news selection of 1995. Because the distributions of imports and exports in all of the countries appear extremely skewed, the raw data were all log-transformed to meet the requirement of normal distribution in a multiple regression analysis. In addition, an extracted factor, representing both the magnitude of exports and imports, was created as the *trade* variable.

The data for population (1994) of every nation around the world came from a computerized dataset of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). GDP, GDP per capita, language and geographic size of each country were derived from *The World Almanac 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, while most other average and small countries flock on the other. Therefore, the data of GDP, geographic size, and population were also log-transformed to meet the requirement of normal distribution in regression analysis.

The determination of language in any given nation reflects another kind of problem. Some nations, such as Canada and Singapore, officially recognize more than one language. In this study, as long as a given language is recognized by the government, that language is checked as positive in the dummy-coding item.[11] The variable of presence of international news agencies in each country

was represented by information provided by AP, AFP, CNN and Reuters. The countries to which these four international news suppliers dispatch their correspondents or where they set up their bureaus were tallied. The information about colonial groups was garnered from *The World Almanac 1996*. Nine major colonial groups[12] and (former and current) Communist countries were dummy coded.

Originally, each of the 44 (host) countries defined one complete, self-contained dataset consisting of 210 cases (guest countries). Each individual dataset contained information that represents the dependent variable as well as the independent variables as described in the preceding section. To meet the goal of this study, two composite datasets were created. The first composite combined all of the 44 datasets into one so as to detect the determinants at the global level. The second set of composite data divided the entire sample into two groups in order to compare the potential differences of determinants between developed and developing countries. The demarcation of countries was based on the IMF's definition – 15 countries of the 44 countries fall into the developed category, while the remaining 29 are developing countries.

Prior to combining individual countries into composite datasets, a statistical procedure was executed to transform the raw number of news stories each guest country receives. This is intended to eliminate the potential bias generated from different numbers of media and time frames selected in some host countries. The raw number of stories a guest country receives was divided by the total news output of each host country. The procedure produced the quotients that can retain the variance of each guest country's news representation and also controlled for the varied sample sizes.

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. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the independent variables in the model were derived from the results of the correlation analysis. The threshold of the independent variables that got selected into the equation was a p level less than .001 and a R^2 value larger than .005.[13] All of the variables that pass this threshold were entered into the regression model with the 'stepwise' method, a strategy recommended by statisticians (Hair et al., 1995) when the theory behind the hypothesis testing is not entirely developed.

Findings

Prior to sketching the big picture of global news flow, various 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 UN Women's Conference held in Beijing; NATO's military actions and peace negotiation in Bosnia; France's nuclear tests conducted in the South Pacific and various demonstrations and protests that ensued; an explosion in the BBC's studio in India; and another explosion at a Jewish school in Lyon, France. Those countries involved or the venues where these events took place would have attracted more coverage.

TABLE 1

The Top 10 Countries Covered in the Media of 44 Countries

	n		Average Share
US	6699	US	15.57%
France	3280	France	7.84%
UK	2833	UK	6.92%
Russia	1992	Russia	5.18%
Bosnia	1696	China	4.92%
China	1495	Bosnia	4.78%
Germany	1391	Germany	3.18%
Italy	1206	Japan	2.46%
Japan	913	Italy	2.44%
Israel	771	Israel	1.91%

It is intriguing to notice that according to the 44-country output countries that received the largest amount of coverage are economic powers. As Table 1 indicates, except for Canada, the G-7 countries were copiously covered in the world's press. The US, dominant in almost every country's newshole, snatched roughly 16 percent of the world's available space devoted to foreign countries. Also salient are China and Russia, both have military and political clout. The substantial coverage of Bosnia and Israel seemed a product of the conflict that took place in both countries during the time frame.

Developed Countries vs Developing Countries

The first similarity between the two groups' regression results is that trade and presence of international news agencies can predict the number of news items – so Hypotheses 6 and 9 are fully supported. Trade's prediction power appears rather strong and consistent across development levels; whereas the international news agency factor seems more influential in the developed nations than in the developing counterparts (see the values of beta and ΔR^2). The difference between the developed and the developing countries, according to Table 2, resides at the variables of GDP, geographic distance and population – the first of which can only predict the coverage in developed countries, while the latter two factors only matter to developing countries. Therefore, Hypotheses 2, 4 and 7 are conditionally supported. The fact that geographic distance plays a role in deciding news influx among the developing countries but not among the developed counterparts is intriguing. Perhaps, the developing countries are less prepared in communication technologies and infrastructure, more region-bound, or simply less interested in reporting remote locales. The developed countries also have their own peculiar determinant in the model. It is interesting that GDP is conducive to coverage exclusively in the developed countries. The higher the GDP a country has, the more news it can generate in the press of the developed countries. The developed countries, probably out of their

TABLE 2

Prediction Model between Developed and Developing Countries

IV	Developed Countries			Developing Countries		
	B	β	ΔR^2	B	β	ΔR^2
Trade	.005***	.294	.187	.006***	.332	.186
Agency	.001***	.101	.008	.0008***	.068	.002
Population				.002***	.099	.013
Distance				−.0000002***	−.038	.001
GDP	.001**	.082	.002			
Constant	.001			−.007		
	Adjusted R^2 = .197 F = 220.424*** d.f. = (3, 2696)			Adjusted R^2 = .201 F = 327.901*** d.f. = (4, 5210)		

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

TABLE 3

Prediction of International News Coverage at the Global Level

IV	B	β	t	Sig.	ΔR^2
Trade	.006	.325	22.721	<.001	.178
Population	.002	.087	6.667	<.001	.009
Agency	.0009	.068	4.468	<.001	.002
Distance	.000002	−.033	−3.105	.002	.001
Constant	.008				

Adjusted R^2 = .190 F = 458.009   d.f. = (4, 7799)   Sig F < .0001.

economic interests, tend to cover their compelling competitors and those locales with lucrative business opportunities.

Global Prediction Model

The global prediction model looks relatively similar to the previous ones: trade volume still is the predominant determinant (see Table 3). The factor of news agency, a predictor in both models of developed and developing countries, retains its influence here. Other two moderate factors – population and geographic distance – seemingly result from the impact of developing countries, which outnumber the developed counterparts. Thus, globally speaking, economic interaction, population, the presence of international news agencies and geographic proximity are positive factors in gaining newshole in other countries. Based on the results generated from the regression models, we concluded that Hypotheses 1, 3, 5 and 8 are all rejected. In other words, press freedom, size, language and colonial background turn out not as influential in news flow as past literature indicated.

Conclusion

The first notable finding of this study is the 'superstar' status of the US in the world's news media. The US captured an average of 16 percent of the available international newshole in every nation. From the list of the most covered, it is apparent that those countries with tremendous economic/political clout dominate the world's press. Other than those world powers, the alternative way to be cast into the world's spotlight is to have far-reaching, disruptive incidents. And that is exactly the reason why Bosnia became so well covered during that time.

When it comes to a more theoretical level of predicting international news coverage, all the potential determinants should be examined systematically. Trade is found to be the principal predictor of news coverage about foreign countries in both the developed and the developing countries. This result suggests a resemblance of force that shapes international news coverage in the new era – economic interest has become the universal, dominant factor in

predicting international news flow. Nevertheless, the old-timer – international news agency – still holds onto its influence in the seemingly transformed world.

Aside from the shared commonality, some differences between the developed and the developing countries are worth pointing out. For developing countries, geographic distance is still a barrier – countries far away are not covered as much as are neighbors. Population of a country can also play a significant role. These two factors, however, are not determinants of news coverage for the developed nations. GDP, on the other hand, is an exclusive predictor of news coverage for the media of developed nations.

Discussion

The fact that the US is projected with the brightest spotlight and that the most covered countries are all world powers prompts us to ask: Why do the few powers attract such an extensive coverage around the world? It is probably a consensus that the US is not only powerful in economic and military terms, but also formidable in cultural industries, which are particularly conducive to generate soft news and easy to pass censorship. Most of the world's largest media conglomerates, such as AOL Time Warner and Disney, Hollywood studios, and well-developed sports enterprises are all products of this country. These factors may well pave the way for the US to gain coverage from abroad.

The fact that international news coverage gravitates to the powerful is intriguing, and the implications of this phenomenon certainly await further scholarly research to generate a more comprehensive theoretical framework. The political economy perspective on news production – the 'instrumental approach' – might be pertinent in this case (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). Using this approach, one might argue that news professionals, usually elites in every country, might subconsciously impose an elite perspective when they percolate a multitude of news stories from abroad. Such practice inevitably results in voluminous coverage about and is instrumental to the few powers.

Evidence from the post-Cold War era seems to signal a new framework for international news flow that is taking shape, one that has replaced the outdated East vs West, bipolar perspective. It appears to be economic interest, rather than ideological antagonism, language, or culture linkage that plays the central role in determining news from abroad. The economic interest may possess two folds of impact. First, it is the level of economic interaction between nations. Trading partners are important not only to governments or the corporate world, but also to average citizens. Without the constant threat of nuclear missiles from the opposing political bloc, economic issues naturally become the agenda focused by news professionals and cared about by the audience. It should be stressed, however, that economic interest leads not only to economic coverage but also to other facets of targeted countries. Consequently, economic interaction between countries can trigger coverage about politics, cultures, or even natural disasters.

The second facet of the economic determinism of international news pertains to cost-effectiveness of international news production. Since the fall of Communism, capitalism seems to have become the de facto way of managing news business worldwide. It is, then, no surprise to discover that the international

news agency is still a predictor of news flow. Since using news copy or footage provided by news services is far more economical than maintaining news bureaus or sending parachute correspondents, the quantity of international news on a given country is influenced by the presence of news agencies stationed in that country. Lately, more and more media hire freelance or local stringers to cover foreign locales (Sullivan, 1999), which might dilute the influence of the big news brokers and therefore merit further research.

The finding that the factor of news agencies generates slightly more influence on media of developed countries than that of developing countries is intriguing. On the one hand, one may argue that news media of the developed countries tend to be managed with the 'MBA' approach, which leads the press to rely on news agencies to a greater extent. On the other, western news agencies seem to serve developed nations better. After all, it is the few developed nations, rather than the vast developing world, that are the major clients of these agencies (Boyd-Barrett, 1980). However, a finding of this study indicates that the less developed countries' dependence on western news agencies for foreign news is still profound. Although various news exchange programs have been developed for decades, Third World countries still resort primarily to western news services for information.

The function of international news is traditionally discussed within the context of the economic aspiration of the Third World countries and press freedom. Many Third World countries since the NWICO have reportedly revised their definition of news. After almost three decades of news exchange programs, studies have shown that widespread political interference, defective news copy and technical deficiency across countries are devastating barriers faced by the alternative news agencies. Protocol journalism has proved not as popular as news copy about the Third World provided by western sources (Boyd-Barrett and Thussu, 1992). Boyd-Barrett (2000) recently argued that the Euro-American dominance of global news flow will only be strengthened and the idea of building national news agencies would probably be doomed.

Overall, the finding of this study points to a prevalent trend of treating international news as useful information about other countries. That is, the notion of information as valuable goods (Bates, 1988) seems to ascend as the concept of information as an agent of ideology wanes. This new trend of international news seems to echo O'Brien and Helleiner's (1983) point that information about the economically advanced countries should be treasured rather than discarded as a force of imperialism. They argued that the availability and quality of information about the dominant powers in the international arena are a key for developing countries to make sound strategies and to negotiate successfully. The current trend of international coverage seems good for developing countries.

This study has some limitations that need to be addressed. For one thing, the data are not perfect, since some countries only submitted one week of data and several participants selected less than the required number of media in their sample. Another thorny problem with the kind of data this project generated is that some variables had to be transformed because their original forms did not entirely meet the requirement of regression analysis. In addition, the outlier

problem should be noted – a few countries gained an unproportionate share of coverage and had to be discarded from the regression models. This is precisely why the conclusion of this study is not suitable for explaining coverage of a certain day or a particular country but pertinent for explaining the picture of news flow in general. Given the difficulty of conducting multinational studies, however, this limitation is not likely to be overcome any time soon. Lastly, with the advent of the Internet, access to and dissemination of international information have become much easier and faster. It is foreseeable that the structure of the international news market will experience a facelift and researchers will have to take the Internet factor into account in future investigations.

Notes

1. Systemic factors in this project are defined as the various traits of nations as well as the interaction magnitude between any two nations in the context of the global system.
2. 'Guest countries' are the countries that are covered in the news media of other countries – the number (210) and data of the countries in the world derived from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU). 'Host countries' are the 44 countries whose news media are selected for study in the sample.
3. This research finding is echoed two decades later by Gerbner and Marvanyi (1977).
4. For example, Johnson (1997) only investigated the coverage of Mexico in the US media.
5. Developing countries include: Argentina, Armenia, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Estonia, Gambia, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nigeria, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Slovenia, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine and Venezuela. Developed countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, UK and USA.
6. Cuba, Cyprus, Gambia, Greece, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Norway, Thailand and Venezuela only completed the first week of coverage. Detailed information on the news media sampling, coding instructions, specific codes and media sample of each country are available upon request.
7. The project recorded three countries mentioned in each news story. However, the volume of coverage each country receives using major country coded or all three countries coded was found to be almost identical (in terms of the variance among countries). Based on the 44-country sample, the Spearman correlation coefficient between the two measures of coverage reaches .972.
8. Host countries can be coded as the major or the first country mentioned in a news story, but those data were not used since foreign countries' coverage is the interest of this project.
9. 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.
10. This is quoted directly from their survey methodology, which was mailed to the researcher from the Freedom House. The information can also be accessed on their website, www.freedom house.org.
11. Six languages – Arabic, English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish – were chosen. The rationale was based on the number of countries where the language is spoken – all of these languages are officially recognized in more than three countries; and each language must be used in at least one of the 44 host countries.
12. The nine groups are British Commonwealth, Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, American, Belgian and Italian. The definition of a country that belongs to any colonial group is that the whole or part of that country's territory has been ruled (or occupied) by any one of the nine powers at any time since 1800. Therefore, a country might belong to more than one colonial group at different times, such as the Philippines and Haiti.
13. A stringent standard was applied here due to the huge sample size (N) that tends to deflate p value.

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H. Denis Wu is an assistant professor of mass communication at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA. His research interests are in the areas of international communication and political communication.

Address *Manship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-7202, USA. [email: hdeniswu@lsu.edu]*