

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at:
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/245517967>

A Brave New World for International News? Exploring the Determinants of the Coverage of Foreign News on US Websites

Article in *International Communication Gazette* · December 2007

DOI: 10.1177/1748048507082841

CITATIONS

47

READS

398

1 author:



H. Denis Wu

Boston University

39 PUBLICATIONS 773 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



2016 presidential election [View project](#)

All content following this page was uploaded by H. Denis Wu on 07 November 2014.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

International Communication Gazette

<http://gaz.sagepub.com>

A Brave New World for International News? Exploring the Determinants of the Coverage of Foreign News on US Websites

H. Denis Wu

International Communication Gazette 2007; 69; 539

DOI: 10.1177/1748048507082841

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://gaz.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/69/6/539>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *International Communication Gazette* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 23 articles hosted on the SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://gaz.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/69/6/539>

A BRAVE NEW WORLD FOR INTERNATIONAL NEWS?

Exploring the Determinants of the Coverage of Foreign Nations on US Websites

H. Denis Wu

Abstract / This study content analyzed international news published on two of the most visited websites in the US, *cnn.com* and *www.nytimes.com*. The influences of trade, existence of news agencies, national traits and cultural and geographic proximity on these two news websites were examined. The international news from the online version was analyzed and compared with the print and broadcast versions. The study found that trade volume and existence of news agencies are two leading predictors of international news coverage in both online and traditional media. Yet, the influence of news agencies on the websites seems greater than on the traditional media. Also, press freedom was found irrelevant to international coverage in the US media.

Keywords / CNN / foreign news / international news / news flow / online news / *The New York Times* / World Wide Web

Introduction

The World Wide Web is a powerful medium that supposedly does not have limitation in space or access. Any information – in varied format and with different features – can easily be transmitted and posted on the Web and accessed by viewers around the globe at any time. Unlike print or broadcast media, web-based news media, theoretically, can upload as many stories as possible and provide as many links as necessary to inform, entertain and educate audiences. In addition, due to its extremely fluid data-sharing capacity, digitalized information can be stored, packaged and then displayed in a user-friendly fashion. Thus, as Carey (1998) said, the web is truly a global medium that can tackle the unmatched mission of receiving and disseminating international news to every corner of the world, narrowing the gigantic discrepancy between the news world and the real world.

With all the exciting potential and given the profound changes in the new media environment (Pavlik, 2001), the phenomenon of news flow across national borders should be reconsidered – and re-examined. Our understanding of the factors that used to determine the volume and direction of news transmitted via the old

transmission infrastructure needs to be updated. First of all, the excuse of limited space in newspapers or broadcast media – the most common reason for the unbalanced international coverage in the past – does not exist in the web media any more. The virtually unlimited web space allows news professionals to publish stories about countries that were rarely caught on the radar screen of conventional outlets. Also, the scope and orientation of journalistic attention to the world can be broadened. A survey done by Wu and Hamilton (2004) showed that foreign correspondents' routines seem to have altered with the advent of the Internet. Moreover, the reporting on the web now is not only serving the traditional, geographically bound readers or viewers any more. Instead, surfers of certain websites can come from all over the world, challenging the existing market structure of news providers, users and advertisers (Pavlik, 2001: 30–5).

Another rationale of investigating news flow in the new media environment is that having independent editorial/reporting crew working exclusively for the Internet has become an industry norm in the US (Pavlik, 2001). Although a good number of stories can be shared (thanks to the digital revolution and growing practice of convergence) across different media outlets, the final production of a web-based news site is often executed separately from other news operations within the same media conglomerates. Moreover, the sheer speed of information transmission and resourcefulness of the web – in terms of available news copy and audio/video clips from all over the world at the fingertips of web developers – easily surpass the repertoire traditional media can obtain and present with. New media staff, however, do not necessarily have strong journalistic credentials or embrace the same standards and practices of other journalists in the newsroom; instead, they are in their current positions primarily because they are experts in developing websites (Pavlik, 2001). Given all this, it would be interesting to explore whether the factors affecting the international news menu on traditional media are shaping the websites as well.

With Internet as the medium, the working environment and the approaches of storytelling for journalists have been changed dramatically. This change might result in a different presentation of news – particularly international news. Studying the use of links to other sources of information on the web, for example, Tremayne (2004) found that stories about international relations have more hyperlinks than other types of stories. Arant and Anderson (2001) discovered that online news practices have been affected negatively by the speed of online production and by a different breed of journalists working within the Internet environment. They also found that some online editors resemble wire editors since they simply cannot check all the stories they publish. The online editors' attitude toward international news as a category, however, was not examined by their study. The presentation of international news content delivered by the media's online division, therefore, merits an empirical investigation.

Another unique facet of Internet-based international news coverage is the evasive audience of websites – 'netzens' come from every corner of the world and challenge the traditional, locale-bound definition of audiences. Various studies (e.g. Gasher and Gabriele, 2004) have indicated that broadcasters and newspapers have been trying to lure more audiences and readers and consolidate their advertising

base by branching out into the Internet domain. Ironically, studies (Gasher and Gabriele, 2004; Singer, 2001) that utilized content analysis to compare the difference between hard-copy and online editions of mid-sized papers found that newspaper websites seem to focus more on local news than their print counterparts. It could be, of course, a totally different story for major information hubs like *The New York Times on the Web*, for instance, which serves well beyond the bounds of New York City. These top websites often enjoy high traffic when international news breaks.

This study aims to investigate the determinants of international news coverage on two major news websites and to compare the findings with the predictors of their print and broadcast counterparts. With more and more audiences relying exclusively on the Internet to be abreast of what is going on around the world, the impact of web-based news should not be underestimated. It is the hope that the findings of this study can reveal the forces underpinning international news that can shape the worldview of worldwide audiences.

Literature Review

A great number of factors were found to influence the volume of news from foreign countries in traditional media. Chang and Lee (1992) and Shoemaker et al. (1991) focused on examining the characteristics and news values of those stories chosen by editors. Others concentrated on the contextual and systemic factors of the countries in question, such as economic interaction, geographic distance and cultural proximity between the nation being covered and the nation where the media is based. This article argues that the news values of stories delivered via the web are probably retained whereas the contextual factors of web-based production of international news have changed profoundly and, therefore, differ from those of traditional media. Given this, the literature reviewed concentrates on the latter group. The rationale for a survey of literature examining traditional media is that despite the changed production environment for web-based media, it can be rewarding to systematically review the determinants yielded from relevant studies and examine whether the determinants hold true for the web-based media. These contextual and systemic predictors of news flow across national borders can be separated into four groups: (1) economic interaction; (2) presence of international news agencies; (3) traits of nation; and (4) cultural and geographic proximity to the US. Each of these four groups of variables is now discussed.

Economic Interaction

In a seminal study about extra-media factors' influence on transnational news flow, Rosengren (1977) found that trade is positively linked to volume of news coverage in the press of Germany, the Netherlands and the UK and later confirmed by Ahern (1984) using a US newspaper sample. The predictor of economic interactivity between nations was also supported by other studies (Charles et al., 1979; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Wu, 2000) published during the last three decades that used data from media of various countries. Based on the consistent support for the

variable, the following hypothesis was formed to test whether the impact holds under the new circumstance of Internet-based news flow:

H1: Trade volume between a foreign nation and the US can predict the volume of news from that nation on the web.

Presence of International News Agencies

The presence and operation of western international news agencies around the world lead to numerous studies (e.g. Haynes, 1984) investigating the western dominance of news production and distribution in non-western countries. This particular factor arguably triggered the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) declaration and later was examined in numerous empirical studies. For example, Whitney and Becker (1982) found that the news copy carried by the international wires is rather similar to what is actually published in newspapers or broadcast on television. With data from news agencies around the world, Larson's (1979, 1984) studies about network television news concluded that the impact of international news agencies on the inclusion of any given foreign country in the news is the most dominant factor. In a recent study that examined the online edition of a Montreal paper, Gasher and Gabriele (2004) found that the website actually relied more heavily on wire services than its hard-copy counterpart. Despite the fundamental, technological advantages of the Internet, the news professionals in the web department appear to be still under the reign of international news agencies as their colleagues of traditional media. Hence, the second hypothesis was formed as:

H2: Presence of international news agencies in a country can predict the volume of international news from that country on the web.

Traits of Nation

The traits of a country might affect the level of its newsworthiness in the media of other countries: the countries with bigger territory and having more population seem to carry more weight on the world stage, which can be translated to voluminous coverage. Empirical studies of news flow conducted with a traditional media sample, however, found conflicting results across countries. For example, Rosengren (1977) found that geographic size and population of a nation are positively related to the nation's news quantity only in the media of some European countries but not in others. Nevertheless, when regressed into a prediction model along with other factors in another study (Wu, 2000), these two determinants turn out statistically insignificant. Another common determinant of news flow in traditional media is a country's economic power – those countries with higher GDP tend to receive more coverage (Ahern, 1984; Ishii, 1996). Based on the aforementioned findings stemmed from traditional media, the following three hypotheses were formed to test web-based international news flow:

H3: GDP of a country can predict its amount of news coverage on the web.

H4: Population of a country can predict its amount of news coverage on the web.

H5: Geographic size of a country can predict its amount of news coverage on the web.

Cultural and Geographic Proximity

Common sense holds that countries with similar cultural backgrounds communicate better and might result in heavier news flow, and findings derived from various studies (Kariel and Rosenvall, 1983; Tseng, 1992) seem to echo this view. Of the studies in this category, a number of them (Johnson, 1997; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1983; Kim and Barnett, 1996) found an impact of ethnic bond and shared language on the amount of information trafficking across national borders. In the age of the Internet, it seems likely that news written in English can be transmitted more easily via the information superhighway into the US media and subsequently published on their websites. Also, given the increasing number of new immigrants into the US during the 1990s,¹ it is possible that the news media might pay more attention to those countries where new immigrants come from. Lastly, in line with this group of thought, international travelers could trigger news coverage about their original countries; thus the number of international visitors to the US should probably be recognized as one of the facets of cultural interaction. Based on the aforementioned thoughts about cultural proximity, I hypothesize that:

H6: The countries with English as their national language can lead to a greater amount of news coverage on the web.

H7: The number of immigrants from a country can predict its amount of news coverage on the web.

H8: The number of visitors from a country to the US can predict its amount of news coverage on the web.

Even though a few studies (for a review, see Wu, 1998) have indicated the influence of geographic distance on international news flow, this factor seems far from conclusive. Chang et al. (1987) found that this factor only affected television networks but not print media. In studies that examined multiple countries, Rosengren (1977) and Wu (2004) both found that the geographic proximity factor only matters to the media in some countries, particularly those in developing ones. Given the nature of the web, geographic distance is supposedly a non-factor to the medium's operation. However, to verify this suspicion, the following research hypothesis was formed:

H9: A nation's geographic distance to the US can predict its amount of news coverage on the web.

Given all the intrinsic differences between the Internet and traditional media, there is an expected difference in prediction of international news coverage. The literature, nevertheless, has yet to provide a clear direction as to where and how the variation of international news flow via the two kinds of media may lie. Therefore, the following exploratory research question about the potential difference of predictors of international news coverage was formed:

RQ1: How are predictors of international news coverage different between the Internet and traditional media?

Even though the level of press freedom in foreign countries was found to have no significant influence on American traditional news media (Wu, 2000), it remains unclear whether this factor would influence news flow via cyberspace. Some anecdotal reports have indicated that it is technically possible for a nation to monitor, control and block its citizens' access to certain websites (French, 2005), which

suggests that the transmission of information on the Internet can be subject to governmental censorship and interventions. Despite the multiple sources of information about foreign countries to which US media usually have access, it is reasonable to speculate that reduced access to the web in a nation could result in diminished information flow and subsequently decrease the coverage of that nation in US media sites. Therefore, we explore this factor with the second question:

RQ2: Is the level of press freedom of a country related to its amount of coverage on the web?

Method

This study utilized content analysis to code all sampled international news from *The New York Times*, Cable Network News (CNN), *The New York Times on the Web* (www.nytimes.com) and CNN's website, cnn.com. The rationale to select *The New York Times* and CNN is that these two are elite media in the US and can wield notable influence on the audience as well as other media. According to Nielsen's web ratings for 2003, both sites were ranked among the top three news sites – in terms of page views and unique visitors – in the US. Another reason to choose these two media is that it allows a comparison of the potential differences between the print/broadcast version and the online edition. Two composite weeks were randomly selected between September 2003 and December 2003. For the print version of *The New York Times*, all of the issues during the two composite weeks were purchased.

Because cable broadcasters and websites are able to update their news menu in a shorter cycle, multiple data collections for each day of the two weeks were implemented for cnn.com and www.nytimes.com. Three regular news programs on CNN – 8–10 a.m., 4–5 p.m. and 9–10 p.m. central time – were recorded during the sampled days. These slots are more traditional news shows instead of interview, discussion or debate-centered shows. Data collection for both websites presents a different kind of challenge, thanks to such characteristics of the web as multi-media and link functions. The researcher had to browse each news category/folder – e.g. business, international, sports and culture – provided on the main site and subsequently visited each news category until all of the stories in each category and subcategory were inspected. There are links on cnn.com and nytimes.com sites that lead to other media sites. Our rule of thumb in story retrieving was that as long as a story was published within the cnn.com or www.nytimes.com domain addresses then that story was eligible for being included in the sample. When choosing international news for the sample, the researcher's rule of thumb was to see whether the headline, subhead, dateline and the first two paragraphs of the story contained any foreign nations or names of foreign nationals. In other words, as long as a story involved a foreign country or foreign national, that story was included. Lastly, for an international story on the sites to be included in the sample it had to have the sampled day's dateline. This operational definition is needed since sometimes out-of-date stories are left on the sites. The international stories published on www.nytimes.com and cnn.com were downloaded twice a day – first in early morning and then in the late afternoon so as to capture the updates. However, the repeats, the out-of-date

stories and other miscellaneous features – often without datelines – on the websites were not included in the sample.

A trained graduate student coded all the news stories included in the sample. The coding items include name of the medium, dateline, source of the story and the first/primary foreign nation mentioned in the story. Since all of the coding items appear straightforward, the intercoder reliability coefficients with Holsti's formula all reached 95 percent or higher. The stories each nation received during the four-month time frame were tallied and then formed the dependent variable that represents the volume of international news a given country received in the US media.

The other information this study used as independent variables has been gleaned from various sources. The data about the locales where major international news media and agencies are stationed were gathered directly from AP, AFP, Bloomberg, CNN and Reuters. The number of offices all five news agencies/media have in each nation was tallied to represent the variable of presence of news agency. The volumes of import and export between foreign nations and the US were derived from the International Monetary Fund's *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook 2003*. A principal component factor was subsequently extracted from both import and export data to form the trade variable.

As to the variables of cultural proximity – English language and the numbers of immigrants and visitors to the US – the researcher used multiple sources. To determine whether a given nation uses the English language, the researcher consulted *The World Almanac* (Famighetti, 2003) and created a dummy variable to code those nations where English is recognized as one of their official languages. The data of immigrants from each country between 1993 and 2002 came from the website of the Department of Homeland Security.² The 10-year period prior to 2003 when the media sample was gathered should be sufficient to represent the volume of immigration. And the last variable in this group, the number of foreign visitors to the US in 2002, came from the website of the Department of Commerce.³

The information about each country's geographic size, GDP and population in 2002 were all derived from *The World Almanac*. Raw statistics of GDP and population figures – both distributions are extremely skewed – were log-transformed to meet the requirement of regression analysis. 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 the two capitals was automatically calculated by an online web service at: www.indo.com/distance/. The 2003 rating of press freedom for each country came from the Freedom House website: www.freedomhouse.org.

Findings

This study collected a total of 1258 international stories during the two composite weeks; of which 194 stories were from the CNN newscast, 366 stories from *The New York Times*, 269 from cnn.com and 429 from www.nytimes.com. These statistics indicate that the *Times* and its online edition delivered more items of international news than its CNN counterparts and that online editions tend to provide more

international news than their traditional counterparts. In the following discussion, traditional media refer to both CNN and *The New York Times* while online media include the CNN and *Times'* sites.

Table 1 shows the top 20 nations covered in the news during the time frame. It is worth noting that the discussion about the Iraq War and the diplomatic discourses with the European nations dominated the news coverage. It is, therefore, no wonder that Iraq received the largest amount of news from both traditional and online media (see Table 1). Also related to the heated Iraq War and anti-terrorism actions are Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which were also prominent in the traditional media. The rest of the top 20 list includes the G-7 nations, US neighbors or large nations such as Russia, China and Brazil.

With both Spearman's and Kendall's tests, the overall correlation between the traditional and web media's international coverage is significantly high ($\rho = .766$, $p < .01$, $N = 216$; $\tau_b = .696$, $p < .001$, $N = 216$). It is interesting, however, that the orders of the most prominent nations featured in the two groups of media are slightly different. The UK, Cuba, Hong Kong and Brazil, covered prominently by the traditional media, were featured much less significantly by the online counterparts. In fact, none of the above four nations are even on the top 20 chart of nations covered by the websites. When eyeballing the list of web-featured nations, one can

TABLE 1
The Top 20 Nations in the US Media

Rank	Traditional media	No. of stories	Web	No. of stories	Total	No. of stories
1	Iraq	140	Iraq	148	Iraq	288
2	Japan	34	UAE	46	Israel	61
3	UK	27	Israel	39	UAE	60
4	Russia	23	Russia	34	Russia	57
5	France	22	China	29	Japan	50
6	Israel	22	France	24	China	47
7	China	18	Italy	19	France	46
8	Afghanistan	15	Afghanistan	17	Afghanistan	32
9	Germany	15	Japan	16	Germany	31
10	Canada	14	Germany	16	Italy	29
11	UAE	14	Spain	14	UK	29
12	Saudi Arabia	12	India	14	Canada	26
13	Cuba	10	Pakistan	13	Spain	23
14	Hong Kong (China)	10	Canada	12	Iran	21
15	Italy	10	Iran	12	Mexico	21
16	Mexico	10	Mexico	11	Saudi Arabia	21
17	Brazil	9	Saudi Arabia	9	India	17
18	Iran	9	Colombia	8	Pakistan	17
19	Spain	9	Georgia	8	Cuba	17
20	Australia	8	Indonesia	8	Colombia	14

find several nations were more prominent in the cyberworld than in the print and broadcast media. These nations are: the United Arab Emirates, India, Pakistan, Columbia, Georgia and Indonesia.

With both groups of media coverage examined together, one can see that the conflict in the Middle East captured the largest part of the available international newshole, airtime and web space – Iraq, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia are all on the list. Additionally, the US media devoted substantial space to covering the major economic powerhouses such as Japan and Germany and military giants like Russia and China. Other than these nations, two South Asian nations and three Latin American nations – Mexico, Cuba and Colombia – were notably covered. One should, however, note that since the stories on the websites outnumber those in the traditional media, the combined result from both groups' output is inevitably tilted toward the web's influence.

The prediction model for news flow on the websites examines the influence of four groups of independent variables – trade volume, news agency, traits of nations and cultural/geographic proximity – on the amount of news foreign nations received in the US media. Each group of independent variables was entered as a block in the hierarchical regression analysis. Since Iraq represented a huge proportion of news during the time and can severely distort the prediction model (Mahalanobis' distance test indicates it is the greatest outlier), the country was removed from the case list. One can see from Table 2 that overall the model predicts better for traditional media than for online media (total $R^2 = .546$ vs $.380$), which provides a partial answer to RQ1. Also, Table 2 shows that trade, presence of news agencies and proximity block are significant in determining international news coverage for both online and traditional media. However, the statistics of R^2 change indicate that the net influence of news agency appears to be the most significant one in the prediction model for online media and its influence seems larger than that in the traditional media model ($\Delta R^2 = .212$ vs $.161$). This is another profound difference between the two models that addresses RQ1. This finding appears to support Gasher and Gabriele (2004), who contended that there exists a greater influence of news agencies on online media than traditional media.

The prediction power of trade volume in the regression model for online news seems not as strong as in the traditional media counterpart ($\Delta R^2 = .115$ vs $.310$), although it is still statistically significant at less than .1 percent. It is interesting to find that the block of national trait variables, including geographic size, GDP and population, does not survive the significance test in either model. This finding seems counterintuitive but actually is in accordance with some existing literature (e.g. Larson, 1979; Robinson and Sparkes, 1976) that examined international coverage in the US media.

The last group of predictors in the regression model yields a somewhat conflicting and confusing result despite its significance level as a block. We can see that English language, geographic distance and number of immigrants into the US are not significant factors in predicting news flowing from other parts of the world to US media; also these factors' directions of influence are conflicting between online and traditional media. The fact that the number of visitors from a country is negatively

TABLE 2

Predictors of News Flow between Online and Traditional Media

Block entry order	Online		Traditional	
	Beta	Block ΔR^2	Beta	Block ΔR^2
1				
Trade	.505*	.115***	1.131***	.310***
2				
News agency	.481***	.212***	.295**	.161***
3				
Size	.140	.009	.103	.012
GDP	.040		.063	
Population	-.116		-.023	
4				
English language	-.012	.044**	.028	.064***
Distance	.064		-.017	
Immigrants	.121		-.073	
Visitors	-.552**		-.809***	
	Total $R^2 = .380***$		Total $R^2 = .546***$	
	$F(9, 174) = 11.848$		$F(9, 174) = 23.26$	

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

associated with the volume of news generated from that country is, again, counter-intuitive. Perhaps this particular variable is related to another hidden factor that could have contributed to this intriguing phenomenon. The proximity block overall appears to be a weak predictor of news flow and it is less powerful in predicting websites than traditional media.

Based on the results, it is apparent that the first hypothesis regarding trade volume's impact on news flow is supported. The second hypothesis that pertains to the influence of news agencies on online media's international coverage is also supported – in effect, a stronger impact was found in the web model than in the traditional media model. The block of national traits variables including population, GDP and size does not result in a significant finding – therefore, hypotheses 3, 4 and 5 are all rejected. Regarding the block of proximity factors, despite their significance level as a block, their impact on web-based news flow is still unclear. Of the four variables in the group, only the number of visitors from a nation to the US contributed to news volume of that nation – negatively. Again, this finding seems illogical and merits further examination. Accordingly, hypotheses 6, 7, 8 and 9 are all rejected. Lastly, press freedom rating is not found to be significantly related to news volume on the websites (Pearson's $r = .087$, $p = .239$, $N = 184$), neither is it related to the amount of international coverage in traditional media (Pearson's $r = .044$, $p = .554$, $N = 184$). Given the above correlation statistics, it is very unlikely that the press freedom factor can result in significance in the regression model.

Discussion and Conclusion

The international news output from the online media does not seem to deviate much from that of their traditional counterparts. There are significant overlaps between the most covered nations – Middle-Eastern countries, economic elites and military powers still dominate the news space on the web. The correlation test also indicates a high resemblance between traditional and online media. Therefore, the overall picture of the world presented by the websites reflects their traditional media counterparts well. This discovery could be a great disappointment for those who ideally envisioned the web as a truly global medium that can break away from the structural, systematic barriers to deliver more – and more diverse – information to people around the world. Ironically, the power of news agencies, the old guard of international news flow, seems to have resurged with the help of the Internet.

The research findings also indicate that online media share some of the determinants of international news flow found in traditional media, particularly the magnitude of economic interactivity between the US and other countries and the presence of major news agencies. However, the influence of news agencies seems to escalate as the impact of trade volume wanes slightly in online media. Established news websites turn out to rely even more on primary news providers than newspapers or broadcasters. Perhaps, as Arant and Anderson (2001) suggested, web editors act pretty much like wire editors – they do not necessarily trust or resort to alternative sources more, nor do they have the resources or needed experience to produce international news on their own, even though they have virtually unlimited space to publish international news. They share with traditional news professionals or suffer even more on one limitation: time constraint. Consequently, the websites tend to provide more of the same – updates and breaking news – rather than different kinds of international news to netizens. This phenomenon is rather intriguing and certainly merits further investigation on website production and information processing by web staff in both the US and other countries.

This study also concludes that national traits such as geographic size, GDP, population and press freedom rating are not systematically related to the quantity of coverage foreign nations received in the US media – be they print, broadcast or online. Additionally, the impact of cultural proximity factors on the web seems uncertain – more likely to be irrelevant. Given these findings, one may suspect that the economic factor – the pressure to save money in web news production by importing more copy available from the news agencies – is the prime suspect behind the scene. After all, covering foreign locales is an expensive operation for news media. Under the tremendous pressure from shareholders and fierce competition in the marketplace, media executives would find every means to cut cost to boost profit and good, responsible international reporting usually is the first to be sacrificed (Hoge, 1997). And the web proves no panacea to the decline or abated diversity of international news in the US media.

It is also interesting to discover that even with a news sample selected during the Iraq War period the determinant of trade volume still holds in both traditional and online prediction models. And this finding echoes prior studies that examined the US media's international coverage. Therefore, the influence of global economy

on the news menu persists across different media and time frames. One may wonder, however, if the factor's comparatively smaller impact on the news websites is due to the growth of more business-centered websites or blogs that focus exclusively on economic news around the world and cater to business-minded audiences. This seems a promising factor, worthy of future investigations.

Finally, the present study has several limitations. The fact that the Iraq War was discussed and launched during the sample period shifted news focus and might have influenced the prediction models. Also, the sample only included two of the most visited news websites in the US; future studies should expand the sample to include non-traditional news sites such as Yahoo! or Google News or popular international news sites based in other nations. In addition, new web-based devices such as blog and online discussion rooms could add another dimension of international news flow and should be addressed one way or another – although, due to their more fluid fashion of information delivery, researchers would face more methodological challenges when tackling those new news channels. With a more representative and diverse sample, researchers would be able to generate globally valid findings and more generalizable conclusions. What is presented in this report is limited to the two popular news sites and could only be extrapolated to the underlying trend of US online media coverage of international affairs. Lastly, since major news agencies play a bigger role in shaping international news on the web and they allow the general public to have direct access, examining their 24/7 wire output could be instrumental to a better understanding of transnational news flow, too.

Notes

The author would like to thank Josh Ogada, Liza Ortego and Angella Semons for their assistance in this project.

1. See the data on the number of foreign-born citizens at: www.census.gov
2. At: www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/ (accessed 24 February 2004).
3. At: www.commerce.gov/ (accessed 1 March 2004).

References

- Ahern, T.J. Jr (1984) 'Determinants of Foreign Coverage in US Newspapers', pp. 217–36 in R.L. Stevenson and D.L. Shaw (eds) *Foreign News and the New World Information Order*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Arant, M.D. and J.Q. Anderson (2001) 'Newspaper Online Editors Support Traditional Standards', *Newspaper Research Journal* 22(4): 57–69.
- Carey, J.W. (1998) 'The Internet and the End of the National Communications System', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 75: 28–34.
- Chang, T.K. and J.W. Lee (1992) 'Factors Affecting Gatekeepers' Selection of Foreign News: A National Survey of Newspaper Editors', *Journalism Quarterly* 69: 554–61.
- Chang, T.K., P.J. Shoemaker and N. Brendlinger (1987) 'Determinants of International News Coverage in the US Media', *Communication Research* 14: 396–414.
- Charles, J., L. Shore and R. Todd (1979) 'The New York Times Coverage of Equatorial and Lower Africa', *Journal of Communication* 29: 148–55.
- Famighetti, R. (2003) *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- French, H.W. (2005) 'China Wages High-Tech Battle over Control of the Internet', *International*

- Herald Tribune* 5 March; at: www.iht.com/articles/2005/03/04/news/censor.html (accessed 30 March 2005).
- Gasher, M. and S. Gabriele (2004) 'Increasing Circulation? A Comparative News-Flow Study of the Montreal Gazette's Hard-Copy and On-Line Editions', *Journalism Studies* 5: 311–23.
- Haynes, R.D. Jr (1984) 'Test of Galtung's Theory of Structural Imperialism', pp. 200–16 in R.L. Stevenson and D.L. Shaw (eds) *Foreign News and the New World Information Order*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Hoge, J.F. Jr (1997) 'Foreign News: Who Gives a Damn?', *Columbia Journalism Review* 34: 48–52.
- Ishii, K. (1996) 'Is the US Over-Reported in the Japanese Press?', *Gazette* 57: 135–44.
- Johnson, M.A. (1997) 'Predicting News Flow from Mexico', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 74: 315–30.
- Kariel, H.G. and L.A. Rosenvall (1983) 'Cultural Affinity Displayed in Canadian Daily Newspapers', *Journalism Quarterly* 60: 431–6.
- Kariel, H.G. and L.A. Rosenvall (1984) 'Factors Influencing International News Flow', *Journalism Quarterly* 61: 509–16.
- Kim, K. and G.A. Barnett (1996) 'The Determinants of International News Flow: A Network Analysis', *Communication Research* 23: 323–52.
- Larson, J.F. (1979) 'International Affairs Coverage on US Network Television', *Journal of Communication* 29: 136–47.
- Larson, J.F. (1984) *Television's Window on the World: International Affairs Coverage on the US Networks*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Pavlik, J.V. (2001) *Journalism and New Media*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Robinson, G.J. and V.M. Sparkes (1976) 'International News in the Canadian and American Press: A Comparative News Flow Study', *Gazette* 22: 203–18.
- Rosengren, K.E. (1977) 'Four Types of Tables', *Journal of Communication* 27: 67–75.
- Shoemaker, P.J., L.H. Danielian and N. Brendlinger (1991) 'Deviant Acts, Risky Business and US Interests: The Newsworthiness of World Events', *Journalism Quarterly* 68: 781–95.
- Singer, J.B. (2001) 'The Metro Wide Web: Changes in Newspapers' Gatekeeping Role Online', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 78: 65–80.
- Tremayne, M. (2004) 'The Web of Context: Applying Network Theory to the Use of Hyperlinks in Journalism on the Web', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 81: 237–53.
- Tseng, K.J. (1992) 'A Theory of Social Propinquity: A General Systems Approach to International News Research', paper presented at the 1992 Association of Education in Journalism National Convention, Montreal.
- Whitney, D.C. and L.B. Becker (1982) 'Keeping the Gates for Gatekeepers: The Effects of Wire News', *Journalism Quarterly* 59: 60–5.
- Wu, H.D. (1998) 'Investigating the Determinants of International News Flow: A Meta-Analysis', *Gazette* 60: 493–512.
- Wu, H.D. (2000) 'The Systemic Determinants of International News Coverage: A Comparison of 38 Countries', *Journal of Communication* 50: 110–30.
- Wu, H.D. (2004) 'Homogeneity around the World? Comparing News Flow between Developed and Developing Nations', *Gazette* 65: 9–24.
- Wu, H.D. and J.M. Hamilton (2004) 'US Foreign Correspondents: Changes and Continuity at the Turn of the Century', *Gazette* 66: 517–32.

H. Denis Wu is an associate professor at the College of Communication, Boston University, USA. His research interests are in international communication, public opinion and political communication.

Address *Boston University, College of Communication, 640 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, USA. [email: hdw@bu.edu]*