

Our news, their news:

Disparities in international news coverage

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I. Abstract

A content analysis of 28 articles from eight international media outlets in January and February 2008 found that the same events are covered in different ways, depending on the outlet and its audience. Stories examined were from four parts of the world, including North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and regional differences were explored. Variations considered by the study included, but were not limited to, story placement, emphasis, portrayal, persuasion, and primary frame. The theory of framing was applied to the study as background for the analysis.

II. Introduction

For Americans, it is easy to live in a bubble. They may view the world as the United States – after all, that is *their* world. But the United States is not the world. In an age of rapid globalization, characterized by growing international interaction through the Internet and other means, it is becoming increasingly important that people are aware how the world around them works, how people across the globe think differently, and how specific events can have different effects from one place in the world to the next.

A worldly view and an awareness of how different interpretations can arise from the same issues from place to place are key for citizens to be informed and understand the current state of the world. This can all boil down to one word: perspective. People need to be aware of the differing perspectives across borders and oceans and ways that those perspectives are formed and solidified.

This study seeks to explore major news events and how the coverage of these events differs between international media outlets. The criteria for selecting these “major events” will be that they must involve people or events of international prominence, stories that in theory could be covered worldwide. The hypothesis is that: To best reflect the interest of their readers, international media outlets will present information about the same events in different ways. For instance, these stories could be presented with different leads or angles, using different words, or through different contexts. The study will seek to determine those differences and prove this thinking to be the case by looking at differences in coverage of the same events by media outlets in North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. A content analysis will be used for the methodology.

Theoretical Basis

The theory of framing can be used in this exploration. University of Arkansas professor Robert Wicks states that framing takes place when “the media choose to focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning” (75). In other words, the media “frames” its stories in specific ways, giving its audience context and helping it understand specific issues. There are many different types of frames and ways in which they are created, including through the use of language. There is also a close relationship between agenda setting and framing. Agenda setting involves the media highlighting certain issues, thus influencing what people think about. The media can use framing as an agent for agenda setting, molding stories in a certain way to spotlight a given issue or phenomenon. Going back to this study, the idea is that frames developed by international media outlets will likely reflect the interests of their audience.

Wicks argues that framing is important to understand “how and why news reporters and editors construct messages as they do” (76). This writer agrees, however would go a step further to say that framing is also important for journalists *themselves* to understand, particularly young journalists. Journalists should be aware of the concept of framing and be able to recognize it because the way a story is framed can have significant effects. University of Delaware professor Elizabeth Perse notes that framing can have both short-term effects and long-term implications, which can be observed in the thoughts and impressions of the audience (108). Those entering the field of journalism should know about framing and how they have an immense amount of power in nearly every word they choose to use, and framing a story in the wrong way can have a negative impact. Understanding the framing concept and how it works, this researcher believes,

will only help journalists perform their jobs to the best of their ability, as they create frames appropriate for their stories and their readers.

This study seeks to examine news coverage across the world using the theory of framing. The hope is to discover the differences in coverage of the same events between international media outlets, the extent of those differences, and the prevalence of these outlets to reflect the interests of their audience.

III. Review of Literature

What is news?

How is news determined? Some insight into this question comes from the landmark work of sociologist Herbert Gans. In his book Deciding What's News, Gans examines the television news of CBS and NBC and news from the publications *Time* and *Newsweek*. He performed a content analysis on more than 3,000 stories over an eight-year period, investigating the structure and underlying implications behind the news. Gans found that agenda-setting was prominent in the selection of national news amongst major American outlets, often times pertaining to the media company's values or business interests. Gans also found that a great amount of what was determined to be news by these groups somehow tied back to "elite individuals and elite institutions," rather than putting focus on everyday Americans who in most cases are the ones consuming that news (61).

Closely related to these decisions of what merits news and what does not, media producers will determine specific frames for their stories, as discussed earlier with the theory of framing. This is an important concept to return to because it has such a significant impact on how news is constructed and released to the public. Both Wicks and Perse devote considerable attention to the theory of framing in their books, not surprisingly considering both of their texts seek to get at the heart of the media's relationship with society and its audience. Framing provides a way of understanding a story, many times in sync with the values and interests of the media outlet or the reporter itself, or the source for the information, going back to the work of Gans.

A few popular definitions of framing have resonated in the communication field and they warrant mention here for a better, more complete idea of how framing is used. The first definition comes from Robert Entman, who defined the concept as “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (52). Perhaps simpler to understand and much more to the point, Todd Gitlin says that frames are “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (6). In many cases, the way news is framed comes down to just that – essentially making sense of the news for an audience and presenting it in a way that they can best understand.

In his article, “The Relation of the Social Situation of Contact to the Media in Mass Communication,” Eliot Freidson looks at how a nation’s social make-up is related to the media, and thus how the media should respond based on framing. He studied a group of 79 American children and their media dependencies. He found that those considered loners were most likely to turn to literary works as their primary source of media, notably comics; those dependent on family most often preferred television as a medium; and those who best identified with peers most often turned to movies as their primary medium (Freidson 232). The study implied that the media must determine how to best serve their designated audience based on its interests.

International applications

The discussion thus far is not confined to American journalism, although there are a few additional points to keep in mind when looking at media outlets worldwide. First, to have a better grasp on international news outlets in general, it is important to first understand the impact

of the ongoing digital and informational revolution taking place across the world, as that certainly plays a role in the direction international media outlets are headed. Simply the fact that almost all media outlets worldwide can be accessed in some way through the Internet is a testament to this. In this information explosion and digital-driven age, some nations have been affected more than others and this can lead to some differences in what information is distributed and how that is done.

The worldwide trend toward a digital, online base for news has led to the re-emergence of the term “media literacy,” which first gained popularity in the 1960s. A media literate person is defined as one who can “decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media” (Aufderheide 79). The definition can be applied to both consumers of the news and makers of news. The latter group is of particular interest to this study because they play a role in the framing of stories and how they are presented. Aufderheide goes further to say that media literacy is also an important concept when it comes to the future of news, as the phenomenon itself is a “movement to expand notions of literacy to include powerful post-print media that dominate our informational landscape” (79). She goes further to say that the United States is the “premier producer of international mass media,” but also that this is changing, as the world and its many media outlets continue to evolve (Aufderheide 81).

Media at times of crisis

There are numerous other factors that must be considered when it comes to media coverage of events, particularly in a global exploration such as the case in this study. Is the nation of that media outlet at war? For instance, the American media may have very different interpretations of the war in Iraq than the Iranian media may have on the same subject. Have the

people that the outlet caters to recently suffered in some sort of crisis? Related to this, a local media outlet in Mississippi is going to report the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina differently – at the very least, much more extensively – than a local media outlet in Seattle. It all comes down to perspective.

Along the lines of the previous paragraph, Perse outlines in Media Effects and Society that the media has an important role in conflicts because people become more dependent on them. She notes that “[m]ass media have the ability to control what news is reported and how it is framed” and that these decisions can have an impact on how the information is interpreted and utilized by an audience (Perse 81).

Propaganda is something that cannot be overlooked when it comes to national and international media coverage, especially in times of war. H.D. Lasswell notes in Propaganda Technique in the World War how the American government used mass propaganda campaigns, including through the media as the military and government provided positive information about the war to journalists, to influence public opinion about the war.

In an more contemporary example, Gadi Wolfsfeld states in Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East that “[p]olitical actors view the news media as one of many tools that can be used to achieve their goals” (13). Wolfsfeld adds that it is far from a new phenomenon and it has only intensified in recent years, stating “the news media has become an important element in almost every political conflict” (13). Wolfsfeld develops an argument in her book that political authorities become dependent on the media and through varying media frames, it can enact real change through the media.

The Dokdo study

An extremely interesting case study in international news exists on the Dokdo Island conflict related to Japan and South Korea. Dokdo Island is a disputed territory, which both of the aforementioned nations claim to own. Yoon Youngchul and E. Gwangho studied the media management of this conflict through a content analysis of various print media in each country. The results support the fact that conflict between nations can have an effect on media framing of certain issues.

One interesting fact that Youngchul and Gwangho uncovered in their research is that “[a] news frame on a rival national may shift as international political conditions vary over time” (271). This is to say that at one point news about a nation could be portrayed in a positive sense, but a few years later, if the media outlet’s host country’s relationship with that other nation goes sour, the same nation could be portrayed in a entirely different manner. Since a primary source for the media to get news amidst foreign relations is the government itself, this can hardly be a surprise.

Youngchul and Gwangho’s content analysis concluded that South Korean newspapers had a predominant negative portrayal of Japan, using hostile language in reference to Japan including “Japanese imperialism,” “Japanese militarism,” and “absurd remarks” (288). Interestingly, the Japanese newspapers had a “less negative position on South Korea” (288). There were large disparities from one publication to the next, ranging from a passive view of the conflict to also a harsh portrayal of the opposite nation, though far in large they were found to be less critical of South Korea. A possible reason for this, as outlined by Youngchul and Gwangho, was the fact that the South Korean press more closely mirrored the views of its general public. It

is also possible that the two nations were at different developmental levels when it comes to the role of media. In support of this latter point, South Korean newspapers had plenty of editorials that were very critical of Japan, so these publications may view themselves as having somewhat of a social responsibility to highlighting the differences between the nations and the nature of the conflict.

SARS study and international determinants

There are several similar studies that look at the differences in coverage between international media outlets. One of these studies was the examination of news coverage in both China and the United States by Tulane University professor Christopher Beaudoin. Beaudoin specifically looked at the differences in coverage by those nations' media outlets pertaining to the SARS epidemic, which garnered international attention in 2003. Beaudoin looked at news frames specifically for his study, focusing on the frames of responsibility, human interest, economic consequences and severity. He concluded that the United States media tended to use the responsibility and severity frames more often, while China media preferred to use frames of human interest and economic consequences (Beaudoin 518).

There is also the question of how much the U.S. media should cover international news and how much attention international media should pay to U.S. news. A number of studies have looked into these topics, especially the former, and the book The Global Dynamics of News: Studies in International News Coverage and News Agenda does a nice job of summing up some of these studies. It notes the “seven determinants of newsworthiness for international news” as “normative deviance of the event[;] [...] relevance to the U.S.; potential for social change;

geographical distance; language affinity; level of press freedom; and similarity in economic systems” (Malek, Kavoori 125).

In terms of international media outlets covering the United States, H. Denis Wu notes in the article “Systematic Determinants of International News Coverage: A Comparison of 38 Countries” that the U.S. was the most covered country of any in the world. Wu notes that “trade volume and presence of international news agencies” were the “primary predictors of amounts of news coverage” (110). Wu added that there are differences from nation to nation and outlet to outlet for a number of reasons, including “traits of nations, magnitude of interaction and relatedness between nations, and logistics of news gathering” (110).

At the heart of this study are international media outlets and the concept of news framing. It is important to remember the current state of the world, one increasingly characterized by a digital and information age, but it is also vital to keep in mind the differences in media culture from nation to nation, as well as the role that conflict or times of crisis can play in media framing. In a study such as this, which looks at a wide range of media outlets across the world, it must be remembered that these outlets and their nations are likely at different developmental stages and thus they could very well be seeking to serve different purposes. This could be one reason that, presumably, the study will likely find the coverage of the same events between international media outlets to be very different in nature – in the way the stories are framed and how they are presented to their audience.

IV. Methodology

To explore how the coverage of the same events may differ between international media outlets, the researcher examined the ways in which eight separate international outlets covered four major events occurring in January and February 2008. The criteria for selecting these “major events” was that each must involve people or circumstances that would have the potential to garner international interest. Two of the events occurred in the United States: President George W. Bush’s State of the Union Address on Jan. 29 and Super Bowl XLII on Feb. 3. Two of the events took place outside the United States: Kosovo declaring independence on Feb. 17 and Cuba’s Fidel Castro stepping down from power on Feb. 19. These specific stories were not selected for any particular reason other than the fact that they all generated at least some international interest as stated earlier.

The eight international media outlets used for this study are the *New York Times* (New York, U.S.A.), CNN (Atlanta, U.S.A.), *The Times* (London, U.K.), BBC (London, U.K.), *Tehran Times Daily* (Tehran, Iran), Al-Jazeera (Doha, Qatar), *People’s Daily* (Beijing, China) and *Moscow Times* (Moscow, Russia). Two outlets were selected from each of the following regions: North America, Europe, Middle East, and Asia. It should be noted that Russia was included in the Asian region for the purpose of this study, even though the country is sometimes classified as part of Europe. Articles from each of these media outlets’ websites were extracted for each of the major events on the morning following each event.

Twenty-eight articles out of a possible 32 were found, demonstrating that not all of the outlets covered every event. However, the mere fact that some stories were not covered is still of interest to this study, so that was noted. The researcher conducted a content analysis of the

articles to locate the primary differences between them. A table was created for each story, with the media outlets along the columns and nine contextual variables representing the rows (see Figure 1). These variables, which seek to get at the basis of how this story is presented to the reader and how it is told, are as follows:

- placement (1, 2, or 3 levels into the website – 1 meaning front page, 2 meaning section page, 3 meaning subsection page)
- emphasis (1, 2, or 3 priority given – 1 meaning main story, 2 meaning secondary story, 3 meaning buried link)
- length (approximate word count)
- sources (total number)
- persuasion (whether or not the story includes opinions of the author)
- lede (straight or feature)
- home tie-in (whether or not the story makes a specific tie-in between the event and the media outlet's host country or region)
- portrayal (positive, negative, or neutral)
- primary frame (conflict, human interest, or historical)

These variables will help determine the context of the stories as provided by each individual media outlet, which will shed light on framing techniques. Once again, the hypothesis is that there will be noticeable differences in the coverage of these events between outlets, as they are presumed to present the stories in different ways. The likelihood of at least some

V. Findings

Event 1: U.S. State of the Union Address (Jan. 29, 2008)

	<i>New York Times</i>	CNN	<i>The Times</i>	BBC	<i>Tehran Times Daily</i>	Al-Jazeera	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Moscow Times</i>
Placement	1	1	3	2	2	1	3	N/A
Emphasis	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	N/A
Length	1,350	630	550	780	240	770	200	N/A
Sources	4	3	1	5	2	10	1	N/A
Persuasion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	N/A
Lede	Feature	Feature	Feature	Straight	Feature	Straight	Straight	N/A
Home tie-in	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Portrayal	Negative	Negative	Negative	Neutral	Negative	Negative	Neutral	N/A
Primary Frame	Historical	Historical	Historical	Historical	Conflict	Conflict	Human Interest	N/A

Portrayal, framing, and placement were the most noticeable differences in the way international media outlets told the story of U.S. President George W. Bush's State of the Union Address. The article lengths differed as well, but this seemed more than anything to be consistent with the style of writing for that specific outlet. The amount of sources also differed, but not drastically besides Al-Jazeera. That difference seemed to be connected to that outlet's stance on the event, which will be described later. Another minor difference was that every outlet tied the story back to their home nation or region in some form except for the U.K. outlets.

This event was portrayed to be negative by most of the international media outlets. Only the BBC and China's *People's Daily* chose to tell their stories in an entirely neutral, opinion-free way, and let their readers decide what to make of the speech. The other British outlet, both

American outlets, and both Middle Eastern outlets took a number of swings at Bush with a handful of criticism. The other outlet, Russia's *Moscow Times*, chose not to cover the event at all, and this in itself is significant. Perhaps the publication did not find the speech to be newsworthy for its audience since Russia was not mentioned at all in the speech.

Al-Jazeera criticized Bush the most. The outlet used a total of 10 sources and none praised Bush for his words; all the sources were critical of the address. It was so tilted in this direction that the story had the appearance of being bias. The first person quoted in the story was former Democratic presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, who relates to the address to something people reading the Al-Jazeera website are interested in – conflict in the Middle East: “He seems to want to continue to the war in Iraq and ramp-up a war in Iran.” The next quote is from a Middle East analyst from the “Angry Arab News Service” and it continues to go downhill from there. This analyst, Asad Abukhalil, says, “When he speaks about justice it is going to play very differently around the world...long gone are the promises of exemplary democracy.” Outside of Al-Jazeera, the stories were not so harsh about the address, but they certainly included similar sentiment and made it clear that Bush's approval ratings were at an all-time low amongst the American people. And once again, the BBC and *People's Daily* told the story in a completely neutral way, simply presenting the facts and not offering any opinions.

A context of conflict between the U.S. and Middle East was the primary frame used in the Al-Jazeera story. The U.S. and British outlets all told the story through an historical frame, emphasizing the historical implications of his speech and where Bush has come since he began his time in office. China's *People's Daily* chose to tell the story through a human interest frame, highlighting the fact that Bush was urging Congress to provide further funding in the global fight

against AIDS and stating that help may be on the way for the many people worldwide who are affected by the disease.

Another major difference in the coverage of this event between the international media outlets, besides the aforementioned persuasion and framing techniques, was placement. The story was given top-notch placement on the American websites, not surprisingly, though it was somewhat buried on the other outlet's sites, with the exception of Al-Jazeera. The Middle Eastern outlet put the story on its front page and made it a fairly large, noticeable feature story. For the other sites, the story was at least one layer deep into the site, under another section, two layers deep for *The Times* of London and *People's Daily* of Beijing.

Event 2: Super Bowl XLII (Feb. 3, 2008)

	<i>New York Times</i>	CNN	<i>The Times</i>	BBC	<i>Tehran Times Daily</i>	Al-Jazeera	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Moscow Times</i>
Placement	1	1	2	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A
Emphasis	1	1	1	1	N/A	N/A	3	N/A
Length	1,280	430	1,000	700	N/A	N/A	215	N/A
Sources	6	2	2	2	N/A	N/A	0	N/A
Persuasion	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A	No	N/A
Lede	Feature	Straight	Straight	Straight	N/A	N/A	Straight	N/A
Home tie-in	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	No	N/A
Portrayal	Positive	Neutral	Positive	Positive	N/A	N/A	Neutral	N/A
Primary Frame	Historical	Historical	Historical	Historical	N/A	N/A	Conflict	N/A

One of the most noticeable differences in the coverage of this event between international

media outlets was the context provided. Though this is not covered in the above table, this was an obvious difference found after reading each of the articles. Other differences included emphasis, placement, primary frame, and portrayal.

Each of the non-American outlets provided a great deal of context for this event, while the U.S. stories were written in a way that clearly demonstrated the fact that its audience would be familiar with the event. China's *People's Daily* "dumbed down" its story the most of all the outlets, probably under the assumption that most of its readers would not have much prior knowledge pertaining to the event. Just the third paragraph of this article reads:

"The Super bowl [sic], usually the most-watched U.S. television broadcast, is the NFL championship game in the United States, featuring the champions of the American Football Conference (AFC) and National Football Conference (NFC), which are determined each season by the league's playoff tournament."

It is certainly worth noting that the story did not appear at all on either of the Middle Eastern outlets' websites or Russia's *Moscow Times* website. That fact could be telling in what some parts of the world think of the event, not even finding it to be a story worth telling. It's ironic too because sometimes in the United States the event is called a "world championship," and on Super Bowl Sunday it's one of the only things that matters across America. Clearly, it's not so "worldly" after all. This single event, which Americans are so attached to, is not even on the radar in some places.

It's also interesting to note where the non-American outlets ranked the story compared to other sports stories. For instance, the *Tehran Times Daily* in Iran had "Tiger Woods wins in Dubai with closing 65" as its main sports story the day after the Super Bowl. Obviously proximity played a role here, with an American icon in the Middle East. Tiger Woods in Dubai

was a featured story on Al-Jazeera's site, while the main story there was about the "African Nations Cup," a soccer tournament involving various African nations. Al-Jazeera also had a story on rugby, as well as sidebars pertaining to the African Nations Cup, while the Iran paper had sports stories on a cricket match, skiing, tennis, and soccer.

As for China's *People's Daily*, who did cover the event but gave it little emphasis, burying it under a series of other stories, the main story was, "China edge France for Fed Cup semis." This pertained to a tennis tournament and it obviously had local interest to China. Other stories given more emphasis than the Super Bowl on the *People's Daily* site were one on the Czech national soccer coach who will miss an upcoming match due to illness, a story on the Beijing 2008 Swimming China open, and coverage of Yao Ming and the Houston Rockets' win over the Milwaukee Bucks. The Ming story had an interesting headline: "Yao-Yi NBA Showcase Serves as China's Super Bowl." It showed what the people of China really care about, or at least what this media outlet chose to emphasize for its readers.

Three of the four media outlets in the U.S. and U.K. told the story of the New York Giants' upset of the New England Patriots in an uplifting way, all except CNN, which told the story extremely objectively and appeared to sensitize what it wrote so not to anger its New England audience. All four of these outlets focused on the historical implications of the event as the primary frame, while the Chinese paper simply emphasized the conflict of the event. Conflict was so much a theme in the *People's Daily* story that the uniqueness of the event – the magnitude of the upset – did not really stand out at all.

Event 3: Kosovo Declares Independence (Feb. 17, 2008)

	<i>New York Times</i>	CNN	<i>The Times</i>	BBC	<i>Tehran Times Daily</i>	Al-Jazeera	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Moscow Times</i>
Placement	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Emphasis	2	3	1	2	3	2	2	1
Length	1,485	925	870	555	340	990	300	1,050
Sources	11	10	6	6	3	9	3	12
Persuasion	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lede	Straight	Straight	Feature	Straight	Straight	Straight	Feature	Feature
Home tie-in	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portrayal	Neutral	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Negative	Negative	Negative
Primary Frame	Conflict	Human interest	Human interest	Conflict	Conflict	Historical	Conflict	Historical

In the coverage of Kosovo declaring its independence, the biggest differences amongst international outlets were found in framing, emphasis, and portrayal. The most striking difference between the outlets was the primary frame. Four outlets told the story under the frame of conflict, two told the story with a frame of human interest, and two told the story through an historical frame. One outlet from each of the four regions used the conflict frame, perhaps the most obvious frame for a story of this nature, as Kosovo was declaring its independence from the nation of Serbia. One American and one British outlet used a frame of human interest, focusing on individual people the event affected. A Middle Eastern and Asian outlet chose to focus on the long history of tension between the two groups involved.

In somewhat of a surprise, the United States outlets seemed to place the most emphasis on the story. Even though the event did not take place in the United States, and did not directly

affect the American people, like the State of the Union Address or the Super Bowl might, the Kosovo event was given great prominence in the American media. Perhaps this was due to the nation's democratic principles and history, or maybe the United States' past involvement in the Balkan region during the Clinton administration, or maybe the United States' outspoken support of Kosovo's actions. Whatever the reason, the *New York Times* and CNN stories on this event were both in the 1,000-word range (the former actually over 1,400 words) and they included 11 and 10 sources, respectively. Only Russia's *Moscow Times* had similarities here, as it included over 1,000 words and 12 sources in all. The overall emphasis of the story, in terms of where the story would go exactly and whether it would be a main story or buried link, differed from place to place. However, seven of the eight outlets deemed the story to be front-page material – the exception being *The Times* of London.

Though the American outlets and Russian outlet both gave the story prominence, they told the story in vastly different ways, reflecting the stances of their respective governments. The Russian outlet was critical of Kosovo declaring its independence, portraying the event to be negative. Looking at the event through an historical frame, it was the only outlet to make it the number one top story of the day (not even the American outlets did this). It highlighted the dangers of the independence declaration, the differences between the American and Russian leaders, and the potential consequences for the event, including the Russian struggle over control of former Soviet states and modern-day issues Russia faces with independence movements like in Chechnya. Similar to this portrayal from Russia's *Moscow Times*, Al-Jazeera and China's *People's Daily* saw the event in a negative sense. They quoted leaders of their nations who warned of the potential problems that could arise due to the declaration of independence, and they were critical of the American response to the event. On the other hand, the U.S. and British

outlets saw the event as positive – or chose to remain neutral -, primarily focusing on the celebration that ensued, the fireworks, the tears of happiness, and the democratic ideals that had at last been achieved.

Event 4: Fidel Castro Steps Down (Feb. 19, 2008)

	<i>New York Times</i>	CNN	<i>The Times</i>	BBC	<i>Tehran Times Daily</i>	Al-Jazeera	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Moscow Times</i>
Placement	1	1	3	3	2	1	3	2
Emphasis	3	2	2	1	3	3	3	2
Length	1,420	1,280	990	700	485	565	235	540
Sources	7	10	5	5	1	7	1	2
Persuasion	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Lede	Feature	Feature	Feature	Feature	Straight	Straight	Straight	Straight
Home tie-in	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Portrayal	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Primary Frame	Historical	Historical	Historical	Historical	Historical	Historical	Human interest	Historical

The biggest differences in the way international outlets covered Fidel Castro stepping down from power were placement and emphasis. The outlets appeared to differ on the newsworthiness of the event, the end of Castro's 50 years in power as Cuba's head of state, and this led to the placement and emphasis of the story being diverse across the board. The United States' media outlets gave it more prominence than most, making it front page news and giving it at least 1,000 words, but neither outlet made it the day's top story. The English outlets buried the story deeper into their websites, but gave it prominence on those pages; in fact, the BBC did

a package of 10 stories in all related to the event, though again these were buried on its website (the main story of this package was analyzed for this study). The Middle East outlets were actually in ways similar to the United States in giving the events some prominence, perhaps due to U.S. interest in that region of the world with the Iraq war, while the Russian outlet gave it middle-of-the-road status. China's *People's Daily* paid the least attention to the story, burying it deep on its site (it was difficult to find). The story there was three pages deep into the site, under the World section, and then it was the 15th story from the top.

While the event's newsworthiness seemed to be in question from outlet to outlet, one major aspect appeared to unite the worldview pertaining to this story. Nearly all the outlets told the story using a historical frame, all except China's. Six of the seven outlets that used a historical context had a reference to the amount of years he was in power in the first sentence. This is not surprising considering Castro's length in power, and most stories sought to figure out what the event meant in the greater scope of world history. The exception here was China's outlet, which focused more than anything else on Castro himself (it should not be forgotten that China is a communist nation, like Cuba, so it may have the most sympathizers for the man). Most of the details for the story on the China outlet's site were on Castro's illness and everything was told from his point-of-view (he was the story's only source). Similar to this, the *Tehran Daily Times* almost completely told its story using quotes from Castro's resignation letter; although the difference here was it included a good deal of historical context as well.

Perhaps the only other notable differences in coverage were the elements of home tie-in, portrayal, and choice of ledes. Only the U.S. and U.K. outlets tied the story back to their home countries in some way; this may be one reason the other outlets didn't give the story much play. As for portrayal, only CNN and BBC told their stories in a way that deemed the event a positive

one. The other American outlet, other British outlet, and four remaining outlets all told the story in a completely neutral manner, not suggesting the event to be positive or negative. Finally, straight ledes were used for the stories in the Middle East and Asian outlets, but feature ledes were used for the stories in the American and British outlets, which again seemed to have a greater interest in the event.

VI. Discussion

The aforementioned content analysis showed that differences do exist in the coverage of the same events between international media outlets, validating the hypothesis. The findings supported previous studies of a similar nature and the earlier discussed determinants of international news coverage. They also supported the theoretical basis of the paper, specifically the theory of framing. This theory stated that stories are told in certain ways to give their audience context and to help people make sense of specific issues. Certainly, the differences found between the international media outlets showed that outlets across the world cover the same events in different ways to best serve the interests of their readers. Furthermore, this research found that outlets often find a way to tie the story back to their home nation or region and that they will not all give the story the same prominence or emphasis. Sometimes the differences were more extreme than others.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this study was that there are not always differences in the coverage of events between regions. Instead of clear-cut differences in the coverage of the same events from America to Europe, for example, many times similarities could be found between regions. However, it can also be said that the American and European coverage seemed more closely related to each other than they were to Middle Eastern and Asian coverage.

Stylistic differences also played a role and they were obvious between the media outlets. For example, China's *People's Daily* told its stories in an almost broken-English – it seemed obvious they were being translated – and generally kept them between 200 and 300 words in length. In contrast, *New York Times* stories were far more in-depth, each containing at least

1,000 words. Historical framing was prominent for stories in the American and British media, while conflict and human interest were more often found as frames in the Middle East and Asia. There didn't seem to be much of a pattern for whether stories were told with straight or feature ledes; that was pretty divided across the board.

Even though the findings support the hypothesis and the literature before it, the differences in coverage between these international media outlets were not as drastic as the researcher expected them to be. While fundamental differences could be seen, and the emphasis on certain stories differed from outlet to outlet – as was hypothesized –, the differences were not extreme to the point in which they were eye-popping when looking at the final tables displaying the results. In fact, for at least the Super Bowl and Fidel Castro, it was easier to spot similarities in coverage, especially at the regional level. In one sense, these similarities are understandable, since the outlets *are* reporting on the same events. How many different stories can be told from the same events, especially when news services like the Associated Press exist and information is sometimes shared across international borders?

Overall, the findings seem to point to the fact that stories are going to be told in different ways by different places, but these alterations are not necessarily going to be extreme. Style must be considered, as well as the individual outlet's ethics, means of telling stories, and resources. The biggest differences seemed to occur when politics were at stake, when war for instance was involved or an outlet's audience was considered for sensitivity reasons. For example, Asian and Middle Eastern outlets did not look favorably on Kosovo declaring independence; only American and British outlets saw and clearly demonstrated in their stories positives in Fidel Castro stepping down. The political stances of the respective nation's government must also be considered, like when China's media outlet was critical of Castro

retiring from his head of state post and chose to run a human-interest piece focusing on his struggle and battle with illness (perhaps looking for sympathizers?). These findings seemed to relate back to the results of the Dokdo Study, which found that South Korean and Japanese media outlets most closely identified with the stances of their respective national governments and the views of their people; that spoke loudly of how their frames were developed and how their stories were told in many senses.

In today's complicated world, the differences that were found are understandable. Not all people think the same way about the same things. It is not common for a nation's media to put down its own people, unless it is consistent with the majority's own feelings, like the negativity in the analysis following President George W. Bush's State of the Union Address by American media outlets. It is not likely for an outlet to cover an event that has no implications on its host nation or its audience, like when Russia's *Moscow Times* and the Middle Eastern outlets decided not to cover the Super Bowl. In times of crises or war, stories are going to be told in different ways as well, and media outlets are going to reflect the stances of their respective governments or people. These conclusions are consistent with the theory of framing, as well as the previous studies discussed in Review of Literature.

VII. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that coverage of the same events often differs between international media outlets. Its findings were similar to those of related studies, outlined in the Review of Literature, and they worked together with the theory of framing in a very practical sense. In addition, this study did some things that others had not done before it by looking at current events (from 2008) and pulling articles on these events from eight different international media outlets' websites, then analyzing them.

It's important for journalists to be aware of the differences that exist in international coverage, no matter how subtle they might be the majority of the time. The way a story is told does matter and certainly the intended audience for any given story must be kept in mind. A journalist in China really does need to know that they need to give additional context for the Super Bowl; it can't be expected that every Chinese citizen will understand the meaning of the Super Bowl and what it represents. Most importantly, if journalists are not careful, and they are not aware of frames and the power of agenda setting, they could fall into traps in which they emphasize the wrong principal elements of stories. That could lead to feelings of resentment or revenge among readers, anger or confusion, or other unintended results.

Every word matters, whether or not persuasion is used in any form matters, the amount of sources matters, and so does the emphasis of the story. It's important that stories are told in the right way, in a journalisticly sound way, and in a way that lets the people decide for themselves the implications of certain events – while at the same time, providing an ample amount of context so that readers have the ability to come to appropriate, well-educated conclusions.

This research could serve as an appropriate springboard to further opportunities in studying international media coverage and international news determinants. In the current global and digital age, it is not only appropriate, but it is especially meaningful to research such topics to have a better understanding of where the world is going. It is important for journalists to have a solid worldview, and for them to understand how different people can interpret the same events in different ways, so that they are at least aware of how their words can change meaning when going from one audience to the next. Journalists are not just writing for their home nations anymore. In this new digital age, journalists have the ability to reach a global audience and their words can have profound implications from one place to the next that must be better understood.

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