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The Regionalization of Global News: A Case Study of CNN Interactive

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The Regionalization of Global News: A Case Study of CNN Interactive

By Margaretha Geertsema

The Cable News Network is often used as the prime example of a global news service. With bureaus and correspondents all around the world, CNN crosses the traditional national boundaries. However, in essence, CNN remains an American company through its ownership and its Atlanta location. It also follows a news style that is typically Western. Yet, CNN has had much success with both its international broadcasting services and its online service, offered by CNN Interactive.

The aim of this paper is to take a closer look at CNN's presence on the Internet. This project is theoretically informed by discourses of globalization, cultural imperialism, regionalization and asymmetrical interdependence. In addition, the issue of the global digital divide and the potential of new media technologies is discussed. A main question is whether CNN contributes to homogenized news or to a greater diversity of ideas. That question deals with how CNN Interactive is regionalizing the content of its stories on various regional Web sites offered through CNN.com. Does CNN circulate the same stories to all regions, or does it succeed in targeting audiences across the world?

Literature Review

Globalization and Regionalization of News

This case study of CNN Interactive should be seen in the light of the current system of globalization. Replacing the East-West system of the Cold War, globalization is often seen as a positive force that connects and integrates people across the world. Globalization, according to Tomlinson (1999), is "the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern life" (p. 2). Similarly, Friedman (2000) emphasizes integration as the main feature of globalization, especially through the World Wide Web. This fo-

cus on the potential of new media technologies can be traced back to the work of Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan, who introduced the term of a global village: a peaceful place where everyone is connected through technology. From this perspective, globalization is often seen as leading to a new pluralism and diversity of ideas in the marketplace. As such, Waters (2001) argues that a new diverse global culture is developing through new communication technologies.

On the other hand of the debate, critics argue that globalization is a mask for continued cultural imperialism, or Americanization, McDonaldization and CNNization. The cultural imperialism thesis, mainly popular during the late 1960s and 1970s, posed that instead of physical colonization, world powers were capturing Third World countries through a system of economic and cultural dependence (Tomlinson, 1991). Schiller (1991), one of the strongest proponents of this thesis, later argued that instead of domination by some countries, transnational corporations, including CNN, are spreading a homogenized global culture. This fear is also expressed in the tensions between Jihad and McWorld, or the Olive Tree and the Lexus: tribalization, parochialism and an anti-modernity versus the global world of economy, information, entertainment, technology, communication and homogeneity (Barber, 1995; Friedman, 2000). However, one must be cautious here not to reduce the debate to a simplistic diversity versus homogeneity issue. As pointed out by Kellner (2000), globalization is a phenomenon with various sets of contradictions. One of these contradictions, according to Kellner, is that globalization is a force of both homogenization and heterogeneity. As such, globalization is more complex and conflictual than one might suspect.

One complexity of the current international communication system is that globalizing forces work simultaneously from above and from below, pushing and pulling at the same time. As such, information is not simply flowing in a one-way direction, as proposed by cultural imperialism scholars, but in a multi-directional way. The simplistic notion of domination by Western countries ignores the reciprocal nature of interaction and the increasing hybridization of cultures (Canclini, 1995; Pieterse, 2004 & Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996). Indeed, instead of a single global television program market dominated by the United States, multiple global and expanding regional markets organized primarily around different language-based publics exist (Sinclair, Jacka & Cunningham, 1996). Working from the same perspective, Straubhaar (1991) introduced the concept of asymmetrical interdependence to illustrate how regional and national industries outside the United States take part in the distribution of cultural products. Straubhaar points to the growth of non-U.S. media transnational corporations in Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Egypt, Hong Kong, India and Mexico. Instead of dependency, Straubhaar suggests relative interdependency between cultural industries. For example, he shows how corporations in Mexico export telenovelas, music programs and news to coun-

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tries within Latin America. Similarly, TV Globo in Brazil exports programs to Portugal and Italy. However, the flow from these countries is not as high as the flow from the United States, and thus the relationship is asymmetrical and the United States remains in a dominant position.

Key to the model of asymmetrical interdependence, and in contrast with the view of audience members as victims of a cultural imperialist model, audiences are perceived as active in their choices of programming options. According to this perspective, the preferences of audiences lead the television industry and advertisers to produce more programs nationally because their programs need to have cultural relevance (Straubhaar, 1991). Based on these preferences, the industry will try to import programs from within the same region, language group and culture. This emphasis on the active and discriminating audience led to the development of the concept of cultural-linguistic regions that prefer culturally proximate media products. As a result, media producers, including CNN, started to develop products that are suitable for specific regions (regionalization) as well as products that focus more on local aspects (localization). These processes create hybridized cultures through the blurring of boundaries, genres and languages. As such, international media organizations have also become more aware of the tastes of consumers around the world. As an example of the importance of regionalized news, Berfield (1997) notes that local networks in every country in Asia had larger audiences than international operators. Berfield quotes Amit Kahanna, the managing director of one of India's biggest production companies:

International satellite operators were supposed to change Asia. Instead, Asia has changed them. They have learned--at great expense--that they have to compromise. The trend globally is that TV is becoming more ethnocentric. International broadcasters have to turn to local producers like me for programming.

New Media Technologies and the Digital Divide

As discussed above, new media technologies are one of the crucial features of the current globalization system. However, similar to the debate over the heterogenizing or homogenizing effects of globalization, much controversy exists as to whether new technologies such as the Internet will contribute to integration or division. While technological utopists (see Negroponte, 1995) argue that the Internet offers a solution to world problems, political economists (see Herman & McChesney, 1997) argue that the concentration of ownership will minimize the egalitarian potential of technology. Instead of connecting people, the Internet will enhance communication inequality between as well as within nations (Herman & McChesney). Indeed, a huge global digital divide exists. Ac-

cording to the U.N. Human Development Report (2001), 54.3% of the U.S. population used the Internet in 2000, while only 0.4% in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa used the Internet. In total, only 6.7% of the world population used the Internet in 2000, up from 2.4% in 1998. One might ask whether online information could be called global at all.

The Case of CNN.com

Scholars have written about the history, development and significance of CNN as world leader in global communications (Flournoy, 1992; Flournoy & Steward, 1997; Johnston, 1995; Volkmer, 1999). From the outset, Ted Turner was interested in developing an international service when, in 1980, he started CNN, the world's first 24-hour news network. In September 1985, CNN International was established with live 24-hour transmission to Europe. After its major international breakthrough with coverage of the 1991 Gulf War, CNN started facing competition. At the time, it was basically exporting the same information to countries all over the world (Waldman & Haley, 2000). In 1997, Chris Cramer, president of CNNI Networks, joined CNN and introduced the strategy of regionalization to the network. For Cramer, regionalization meant "global reach, local touch"--in other words, providing international news with a regional perspective (Bosu, 1999). As a result, CNNI developed distinct satellite feeds to Latin America, North America, Asia and Europe/Africa/Middle East. CNNI recently split the Asia feed, creating a Southern Asia network to cover India and Pakistan, and introduced a Japanese feed. It is also targeting several areas in their own languages, for example CNN Türk, CNN Plus in Spain and CNN Deutschland.

In 1995, CNN introduced its online service, CNN Interactive. Similar to its broadcasting business, CNN made a commitment to regionalize its Internet presence. In 2003, CNN.com had 17 million unique users monthly. CNN.com's International page offers news in English as well as in Spanish, Korean, German, Japanese and Arabic. The Web site also features interactive links, varying from CNNRadio to personalized e-mail updates. However, it is unclear as to exactly how CNN is shaping and adapting its news for the countries it is targeting. From a critical perspective, one might assume that the same U.S.-based news would be circulated onto various pages. However, if the diversity thesis is accepted, one would hope to see a bigger variety of stories on the regional sites.

Hypotheses

Based on this review of the literature, four hypotheses were tested:
   Hypothesis 1: The percentage of stories mentioning a specific region will be the highest on the Web site de-

signed specifically for that region.

Hypothesis 2: The percentage of North American stories on the North America Web site will be higher than the percentage of stories mentioning a specific region on the Web site designed specifically for that region.

Hypothesis 3: The percentage of stories originating from CNN will be lower on the regional Web sites other than the North American site than on the CNN U.S. site.

Hypothesis 4: Stories will mostly be used on one Web site only.

Method

To test the hypotheses, a quantitative content analysis of CNN Interactive's Web sites was conducted during two seven-day periods over two years (October 16-22, 2002; November 19-25, 2003). In each case, the content of the Web sites was analyzed at 10 p.m. CST. A reliability test was conducted, with 13% of stories coded and a 92% agreement in 2002. In 2003, 13% of stories was coded and a 94% agreement was reached.

The first site analyzed was CNN.com, the main news site of CNN Interactive. On CNN.com's homepage, a clear distinction can be found between main stories situated at the top of the page, and a secondary set of stories that are separated from the top stories and marked with various boxes and headlines toward the bottom of the page. Stories at the top of the page, referred to here as "above the fold," were coded and additional stories at the bottom of the page, or below the digital fold, were excluded. Only news stories were analyzed, excluding any additional interactive, multimedia features such as video, graphics and timelines "above the fold." Picture captions accompanying the story were coded. News stories appearing as a box in the left column were analyzed as they typically appear to be timely stories, whereas stories in a box at the top of the right hand column were excluded, as they appeared to be feature-like stories. Next, the content on the Asia and Europe sites was analyzed by first clicking on the International Edition link at the top of the main CNN.com Web site and then clicking through to the Asia News and Europe News sites. In 2002, the layout of the CNN pages was somewhat different and no separate pages for Africa, the Americas and Middle East existed. However, in 2003 these separate pages were available and they were coded by clicking on the "World" link in the left-hand column.

The following variables were coded:

(1) CNN Web site: Main (U.S.A), CNN Europe, CNN Asia, CNN Africa, CNN South America, CNN Middle East.

(2) Number of stories.
(3) Headline of story.
(4) Region of story.[1]
(5) Source of story (indicated on the first line): CNN, Associated Press, Reuters, combination of services, other/don't know.
(6) Number of pages/sites on which story appeared (e.g., if a story appeared on both the Main site and the Europe site, it was coded as appearing twice).

Results

In 2002, a total of 260 stories were coded: 66 on the Main site, 87 on the Europe site and 107 on the Asia site. In 2003, a total of 275 stories were coded: 62 on the Main site, 79 on the Europe site and 71 on the Asia site. The remaining 63 stories of 2003 were coded on the newly added Africa, Americas and Middle Eastern Web sites.

In 2002 and in 2003, the percentage of stories mentioning a specific region was the highest on the Web site designed specifically for that region (see Table 1). That was also the case for the three regional Web sites added since 2002. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was accepted.

The percentage of North American stories on the North America Web site was higher than the percentage of stories mentioning a specific region on the Web site designed for that specific region in 2002 (see Table 1). However, in 2003, both the CNN Main site and the Africa site mentioned the respective regions in every single story. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was only partially accepted.

In both years, the percentage of stories originating from CNN was lower on the regional Web sites other than the CNN Main site (see Table 2). In 2003, there was only a difference of 1 between the CNN stories on CNN Main and CNN Middle East. Hypothesis 3 was accepted.

For the final hypothesis, most stories were only used on one Web site in 2002 and 2003. Hypothesis 4 was accepted (see Table 3).

Discussion

As set out above, all four hypotheses were accepted, even though the second hypothesis was only partially accepted. Overall, the results indicate not only that CNN Interactive successfully regionalizes its stories but that it refined its regionalization strategy over the last two years.

In all cases, content on the regional Web sites was assembled with the specific regional audience in mind. This was indicated by the high percentage of stories on each regional site that mentioned the target region at least once. The story might not have been specifically about tha

region, but the region was somehow involved with the topic of the story. A qualitative analysis might shed more light on how the country or region was related to the specific story. It is noteworthy that between 2002 and 2003 the percentage of stories dealing with a specific region on that region's Web site all increased, so much so that 100 percent of stories on the CNN Main site mentioned a country or region in North America.

The addition of the pages for Africa, the Americas and the Middle East also indicates an increased sophistication on the part of CNN International, as these pages were not available in 2002. On all three these regional Web sites, most stories mentioned a country in that region or the name of the region. Regionalization seems to be particularly successful with Africa, which had a 100% agreement, the same percentage as North America on the CNN Main site. The percentage of stories dealing with the Middle East and the percentage of stories dealing with North America found on the Middle East site were more similar than percentages on any other site. The percentage of stories dealing with the Middle East on the Middle East Web site was also the lowest in comparison with stories dealing with specific regions on those regions' Web sites. This can be explained easily by the war between the United States and Iraq that was going on at the time of the analysis.

Table 1
Regional Coverage of Regional Sites

Region Mentioned	U.S. Web site 2002	2003	CNN Europe 2002	2003	CNN Asia 2002	2003
North America	94%	100%	59%	49%	78%	49%
Europe	32	34	67	97	33	31
Asia	32	19	40	33	82	89
Middle East	20	23	25	52	26	23
Oceania	no data	8	no data	9	no data	24
South America	18	3	10	3	12	3
Caribbean	no data	3	no data	3	no data	1
Africa	3	2	8	9	no data	5
Polar area	no data	2	no data	0	no data	1

Region Mentioned	CNN Africa 2003	CNN S. America 2003	CNN Middle East 2003
North America	33%	24%	62%
Europe	57	19	38
Asia	10	14	0
Middle East	14	0	67
Oceania	0	0	0
South America	0	81	0
Caribbean	0	19	0
Africa	100	10	29
Polar area	0	0	0

Table 2
Origins of News

News Source	U.S. Web site 2002	2003	CNN Europe 2002	2003	CNN Asia 2002	2003
CNN	62.1%	58.0%	42.5%	42.0%	55.1%	30.0%
AP	22.7	32.0	6.9	13.0	15.0	27.0
Reuters	1.5	10.0	9.2	18.0	6.5	32.0
Combination	9.1	0.0	23.0	4.0	17.8	3.0
Don't know	4.6	0.0	18.4	24.0	5.6	8.0

News Source	CNN Africa 2003	CNN S. America 2003	CNN Middle East 2003
CNN	5.0%	5.0%	57.0%
AP	29.0	48.0	24.0
Reuters	67.0	48.0	19.0
Combination	0.0	0.0	0.0
Don't know	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 3
Locations of News Stories

Location of story	2002	2003
CNN U.S.A.		
Stories only on U.S. site	56.0%	72.6%
Stories on two sites	19.7	27.4
Stories on three sites	24.3	0.0
CNN Europe		
Stories only on Europe site	50.6%	81.0%
Stories on two sites	29.9	19.0
Stories on three sites	19.5	0.0
CNN Asia		
Stories only on Asia site	60.7%	91.5
Stories on two sites	22.4	8.5
Stories on three sites	16.8	0.0
CNN Africa		
Stories only on Africa site		100.0%
Stories on two sites		0.0
Stories on three sites		0.0
CNN South America		
Stories only on S. American site		95.2%
Stories on two sites		4.8
Stories on three sites		0.0
CNN Middle East		
Stories only on Middle Eastern site		52.4%
Stories on two sites		47.6
Stories on three sites		0.0

Another area where one can see a sophistication in CNN Interactive's regionalization is in the number of times a story is circulated to different pages. In 2002, most stories appeared only once, but between 16.8% and 24.3% of stories appeared on the CNN Main, Europe and Asia sites. In 2003, none of the stories were used more than twice. Also, in all cases more stories were used only once. The only case where stories were recycled was on the Middle East page, where 47.6% of stories were used twice, mostly used also in the CNN Main site.

As indicated by the results, the percentage of stories from CNN was the highest on the CNN Main site, with the Middle East at a close second place. Once again, this can be explained by the fact that 47.2% of stories on the Middle Eastern site was used twice, most of the time also on the CNN Main site. Obviously, many stories dealt with the U.S.-led war in Iraq. In all cases, though, the percentage of stories coming from CNN went down from 2002 to 2003. This might indicate a greater reliance on other news sources by CNN. Especially the addition of the Africa and Americas sites shows a dearth of stories originating from CNN. On the Africa site, 67% of stories came from Reuters, and on the Americas site, 47% of stories came from both The Associated Press and Reuters. On both the Africa and Americas Web sites, CNN contributed only 5% of stories. It is clear from these results that CNN is lacking in original coverage of these areas and depending heavily on both The Associated Press and Reuters. It is unclear as to why CNN does not expand its services in Africa and the Americas, however, a political economy argument might explain this situation. Obviously, not many people in developing countries (many of them in Africa and South America) have access to the Internet. It thus seems logical that CNN would not pay a lot of attention to these regions. In addition, income levels in these two regions are most likely lower than in the lucrative European or Asian markets, further discouraging CNN to expand its resources and costs in these regions. However, one can see how a profit-driven policy excludes the have-nots from fair news coverage. The problem might perhaps be found not with CNN Interactive, but with the organization as a whole, as the Web sites merely reflect the existing resources of CNN.

In general, a continued lack of coverage of Africa, Oceania, South America, the Caribbean and the Polar area was found. On the CNN Main site, for example, coverage of South America accounted for only 3%, coverage of Africa for only 2% and coverage of the Caribbean was completely absent. This points to a problem with the increasing personalization, specialization and targeting of news media, namely that people will know more and more about less and less. People who only read the CNN Main site will have virtually no knowledge of Africa or South America.

A point that might seem somewhat contradictory is that the results indicate the integration of regions in the globalization system. For example, on the Middle Eastern site, 85% of stories also dealt with other re-

gions than the Middle East. This figure was 81% for the Europe site, 66 percent for both the Asia site and the Africa site, 40% for the CNN Main site and 48% for the South America site.

Taking everything into account, it is clear that CNN Interactive has improved the regionalization of its service from 2002 to 2003. It targets regions better and added three new sites. Empirically, these findings might point to an increase in the diversity of ideas in the marketplace, as proponents of globalization would argue. However, it would be too simplistic to accept these results as an indication of more diversity. As argued by Kellner (2000), globalization is a contradictory process. Clearly, the inequalities of the world system are replicated and re-enforced through CNN's news coverage, and especially through the lack of covering peripheral regions. Also, many stories originate from the other news services, leading to a recycling of news material. But ultimately, a qualitative analysis might be needed to examine how issues are framed in these stories to determine whether an American or Western bias exists.

One limitation is that categorization of regions based on a Google search might not coincide with CNN categories. For example, according to Google, Turkey is located in the Middle East, but CNN publishes stories on Turkey on the Europe site. Similarly, Google identifies Georgian stories as being in Asia, while CNN places Georgia stories on the Europe site. The study would have higher validity if a category list were obtained from CNN. Another limitation is that Web sites were only analyzed once a day at 10 p.m. CST, makibg it impossible to generalize findings to other times of the day. Content would have to be checked at more regular intervals if one wants to generalize findings to all times of day or night.

This study might lend itself to further studies. As mentioned above, qualitative analysis might show whether CNN approaches world issues from an American perspective. A more in-depth analysis of each regional site might also yield more thorough results. For example, it is unclear at this point what the differences are between the CNN Main site examined in this study, and the CNN International site and the CNN World new site. Finally, another possible study might compare the English language sites with those in the five other languages that CNN offers. It is unclear at this point whether these sites are merely translations of the English sites, or whether they offer any original content.

Notes

1. The search engine Google was used to determine under which category city or country falls. In 2002, six categories were used: North America, Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa and South America. However, in 2003 a finer distinction was necessary. Three more categories were added: Oceania, Caribbean, Polar region. The coding system allowed for several regions in one story.

Information Content
of Indian Television Commercials

By Padmini Patwardhan & Hemant Patwardhan

Twenty first century India has emerged as a destination of choice for many global corporations seeking to market their products. Its rapid rise as an economic power is demonstrated by a sustained 6 - 8 % growth rate in the last decade, the second fastest in the world after China. One of the consequences of growth is the explosion of media and advertising in the region. The Indian advertising industry has seen steady progress since the 1990s and grew 14.1 % in 2005, with revenues of Rs.132 billion ($ 2.6 billion) - its best figures in five years ("Up, Up, Up & Away" 2005, "Ad Industry Smiles..." 2005). While almost all media have seen double digit growth in the last few years, Indian television has recorded explosive progress both in number of channels and overall advertising revenue. The booming economic and media developments have unleashed a wave of advertising spending on TV spots ("Read all about it: India's media wars..." 2005). In 2005, print (47.9%) and television (41%) were the biggest ad revenue earners. All this suggests that, at a time of economic growth and societal change in India, a closer look at its advertising content is timely and relevant. This study focuses on the information content of Indian commercials. It investigates frequently used information cues in Indian commercials and examines differences in information levels by product category, brand origin and type of appeal.

Research on information content in advertising has a rich and varied history covering many countries and media. A review by Abernethy and Franke (1996) found studies from 23 countries mostly in Western Europe and the Pacific Rim (besides the U.S. which dominates the literature). Observing that many countries were still underrepresented, the authors recommended expanding the geographic scope of investigation to include Africa, the Middle East and transitioning economies of the erstwhile USSR. Other researchers have extended the discussion to include Middle Eastern and African countries (Al-Olayan and Karande 2000, Russia and the Czech Republic (Van Herpen, Pieters, Fidrmocova an

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