

Full Length Research Paper

A comparison of American and Chinese college students' media use: The amount and origins of international news and entertainment

Teri Terigele

Department of Communication Studies, University of Kansas, United States.

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This study used a survey to explore American and Chinese college students' self-reported consumptions of international media. Specifically, a comparison was made between American and Chinese participants in terms of the time spent per week on news and entertainment, respectively, the estimates of international versus domestic media, and the countries of origin of the international media. The results suggested that American college students spent more time per week on entertainment but less time on news compared to their Chinese counterparts. Chinese college students reported a higher percentage of international news and entertainment than their American counterparts among the total media consumption. American participants reported more diverse countries of origin of international news and entertainment compared to their Chinese counterparts. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed in the context of college students' international media consumption and potential intercultural influences.

Key words: College students' media use, international news, international entertainment, country of origin.

INTRODUCTION

Amount and origins of international media consumption: A comparison of American and Chinese college students

The advancement in technology connected the world by providing communicative space and opportunities for those who otherwise would not have the chance to meet (Walther et. al., 2015). With more information traveling transnationally, media consumers are now able to consume both the content portraying other countries in their domestic media and the content produced by other

countries (that is, international media). Although the valence of information conveyed and following outcomes may be ambivalent, globalization does affect the operationalization of national and international media of various types including television, film, music, magazines, websites, social network sites, etc., which creates more chances of international and intercultural learning and understanding. Following the growth of international media, scholars have investigated various types of international media with different foci such as content of international news (Jones et al., 2013), operation of

E-mail: terigele@ku.edu.

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media outlets as business (Rutovic, 2016), media imperialism (Boyd-Barrett and Mirrlees, 2019), and traditional and new media platforms (Cunningham, 2016).

A rich body of literature has studied international media from both media production side and audience perception side. From media production perspective, majority of the studies were conducted around two major themes: a specific country and its national image in media or a significant social event that attracts international attention. For example, studies examined the image of the United States in Arab media (Galal et al., 2010), China's soft power enacted in international entertainment media (Flew, 2016) and the influences in African countries (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2018), international media image of Russia (Repina et al., 2018), and the image of India and its rising in international media production (Thussu, 2013). Some other studies investigated how international and domestic media reported certain social events such as global food riots of 2007–2012 (Hossain, 2018), the 2014 World Cup in Brazil (Graeff et al., 2019), human-elephant conflict in India (Barua, 2010), and Irreecha Festival Tragedy in Ethiopia (Gabore and Xiujun, 2018).

From audience's perception, studies have explored audience's psychological responses, preferences, and international media effects on intercultural communication. The trajectory of research on international media changed from treating audience as passive recipients of messages to viewing them as active consumers who have agency (McMillin, 2007). For example, Rohn (2011) proposed different models about audience's psychology to understand what drives audience's enjoyment of foreign content. Compared to domestic media, international media also have their unique influences on intercultural communication. For example, Ramasubramanian and Kornfield (2012) studied U.S. audience's identification and parasocial relationship with Japanese anime heroines and discussed the positive intercultural entertainment effects.

While audience's psychological reactions and the following media effects have been studied, their actual consuming choices are rarely studied. What audience is interested in is often being treated equivalent to what is produced by media. However, media professionals' choices and audiences' interests are not necessarily the same. Lee et al. (2017) compared content analysis results from foreign news on television and survey results from audiences in twelve nations and calculated the content-interest correspondence. The results indicated that the countries and topics that are reported in foreign news on television do not always match what audience would like to watch. Similarly, Boczkowski et al. (2011) found a gap between thematic interest of journalists and audiences of online news sites in Western Europe and Latin America.

In addition to understanding how audience are affected by international media, it is also important to explore what

audiences are actually consuming as an initial step. The current study contributed to the literature by exploring consumers' international media use in the U.S. and China. Specifically, this short report compared college students' international media consumption in the U.S. and China to better understand whether American and Chinese college students consume international media products, how much international news and entertainment they consume, and which countries the international news and entertainment come from, respectively, or which countries are covered in the international news and entertainments, respectively.

International media in the US and China

The United States and China are the two largest markets for media and entertainment products. According to the *Media and Entertainment Top Market Report* from International Trade Administration (ITA, 2017) in U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. is the leading country that exports the most media and entertainment goods including film, music, publishing, video game, etc. Professionals from all around the world joined the media industry in the U.S. (for instance, Hollywood) and made the domestic industry quite globalized (Olson, 1999). However, professionals' diverse racial or ethnic demographics were not well reflected in the media products. Foreign cultures are rarely mentioned in American produced media products (Kumar, 2011) and few media products are imported to the United States from other countries (Martin and Nakayama, 2010).

China is the second largest media and entertainment market in the world (ITA, 2017). Media industry in China is gradually changing from a major importing market to an exporting market. Flew (2016) analysed the international media expansion of China and stated that with "an awareness that its relative lack of presence in global media content flows contributes to a negative perception of China internationally" (p. 290), China started to heavily invest on international expansion of both news and entertainment to develop its national/cultural soft power. According to an industrial report (Intelligence Research Group, 2019), the number of TV dramas imported to China drastically decreased since 2015. On the other hand, the exports of media products including film, social network applications, and web fictions have increased (Chinabaogao, 2017).

As the two largest markets that import and export media and entertainment products, international media production and consumption in the U.S. and China have massive influence on the global media, and further affect the audience and their mediated intercultural communication experiences. This study focused on college students in the U.S. and China and explored how much international content they consume and what countries produced the international contents.

International media content was further divided into news and entertainment because previous research indicated that international news and entertainment may show different patterns in terms of the content and the valence. For example, Cui (2015) conducted a content analysis of Chinese newspapers in the year of 2009 and 2014. The results showed that the stance held by Chinese newspapers towards the U.S. was significantly more unfavorable (for instance, feature negative U.S. image, but promote Chinese positive image) than favorable. In studying how product defects and recalls were covered in newspapers, Vilceanu and Murphy (2018) found that both The Washington Post and China Daily tended to generalize the problems to the entire culture/country. On the other hand, entertainment narratives are one of the most common and easy formats of media exported to other countries (Olson, 1999). Different from international news, entertainment was less explored given the complexity of the content, genre, platforms, origins, etc. Hence, this report separated international news and international entertainment and explored American and Chinese students' consumption of each. The following research questions were asked:

RQ1: How do American and Chinese participants compare on total amount of news and entertainment they consume?

RQ2: How do American and Chinese participants compare on the percentage of international news and entertainment they consume among their total media consumption?

RQ3: What are the countries that either produce the international news and entertainment or are covered in the international news and entertainment that American and Chinese colleges students consume?

METHOD

Participants

To answer the research questions, this study recruited college students from both the U.S. and China. For the U.S. sample, 227 participants were recruited from undergraduate courses at a large Midwestern university. The average age was 19.78 ($SD = 1.79$) and 67.4% were female. Among all the participants, 80.6% reported themselves as born and raised in urban and suburban areas and 19.4% in rural areas. For the Chinese sample, 143 participants were recruited from undergraduate students at a large university in Beijing, China. The average age was 21.15 ($SD = 3.64$) and 63.41% were female. Among the participants, 77.4% reported themselves as born and raised in urban and suburban areas and 22.6% in rural areas. Due to the different academic norms in the U.S. and China, American participants received extra credits to one of their communication classes while Chinese participants volunteered.

Procedures and measures

An online survey was conducted to explore participants' total media

use, international media use, and the countries of origin of international media. The survey was created in English. It was then translated to Chinese and back translated to English by researchers who are fluent in both languages. Both English and Chinese surveys were distributed online in Qualtrics with the assistance of instructors in two universities. In the survey, participants first answered their demographic information including gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, and the areas and regions they grew up or spent the most time. Then, they were asked to recall their consumption of news and entertainment, respectively. For news consumption, the questions include "About how many hours a week do you watch, read or listen to news? Consider television, newspapers, online news stories or other news sources." "Of the news content you consume, about what percentage do you think is foreign -- either created in a foreign country or specifically focusing on another culture?" and lastly, "Which countries are often reported in the foreign news you consume or what countries do the foreign news contents you consume primarily come from? List as many countries as is relevant for you. If you do not or barely consume foreign news, just write NA." Participants then answered their entertainment consumption in similar fashion. Questions include "About how many hours a week do you watch, read or listen to the media for entertainment? Consider television, movies, books, online content, or other entertainment media." "Of the entertainment content you consume, about what percentage you think is foreign - either created in a foreign country or specifically focusing on another culture?" and "Which countries do the foreign entertainment content you consume primarily come from? List as many countries as is relevant for you. If you do not or barely consume foreign entertainment, just write NA."

RESULTS

Amount of media use

To answer RQ1 and RQ2, independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare media use of American participants and Chinese participants. The results indicated that American participants reported consuming 6.92 hours ($SD = 9.86$) of news per week, which was significantly less than the 10.52 hours ($SD = 11.96$) per week reported by Chinese participants ($t(223) = -2.86$, $p = .005$). In contrast, American participants reported consuming 27.76 hours ($SD = 21.50$) of entertainment per week, which was significantly greater than the 21.35 hours per week ($SD = 14.72$) reported by Chinese participants ($t(337) = 3.28$, $p = 0.001$). Therefore, in response to RQ1, American college students consume more entertainment content than their Chinese counterparts while Chinese college students consume more news than their American counterparts (Table 1). In the survey, U.S. participants reported that on average 19.44% ($SD = 19.26$) of the news they consume is either produced by another country or covering another country, which is significantly lower than the 36.52% ($SD = 19.45$) of international news reported by Chinese participants ($t(341) = -7.94$, $p < .01$). U.S. participants reported that on average 15.66% ($SD = 15.99$) of the entertainment they consume is either produced in another country or portraying another country, which is significantly lower than the 49.70% ($SD = 23.33$) of international entertainment reported by Chinese participants ($t(206) = -$

Table 1. A comparison between U.S. and Chinese participants' media consumption.

Variable	American Participants		Chinese Participants		t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Time spent per week on news	6.92	9.86	10.52	11.96	-2.86	223	0.01
Time spent per week on entertainment	27.76	21.50	21.35	14.72	3.28	337	0.00
Percentage of international news	19.44%	19.26	36.52%	19.45	-7.94	341	0.00
Percentage of international entertainment	15.66%	15.99	49.70%	23.33	-14.79	206	0.00

14.79, $p < 0.01$). To answer RQ2, Chinese college students consume higher percentages of international news and entertainment among the total media consumption compared to their American counterparts (Table 1).

Countries of origin of international news and entertainment

To answer RQ3 asking the countries comprise the majority of international content consumed by U.S. and Chinese college students, a frequency of countries of origin was coded. Regarding news, American participants listed 34 countries/cultures. The answers that were mentioned most frequently are the U.K. (36 times, 16.5%), Middle East (31 times, 14.2%), China (25 times, 11.5%), and European countries (20 times, 9.2%). Chinese participants listed 18 countries/cultures. The most frequently mentioned answers were the U.S. (108 times, 49.1%), Japan (35 times, 15.9%), Russia (15 times, 6.8%), South Korea (13 times, 5.9%), and the U.K. (13 times, 5.9%) (Table 2). Regarding entertainment, American participants listed 25 countries/cultures. The answers that were mentioned most frequently were the U.K. (46 times, 22.1%), China (30 times, 14.4%), Japan (21 times, 10.1%), and European countries (21 times, 10.1%). Chinese participants listed 9 countries/cultures. The most frequently mentioned answers were the U.S. (98 times, 44.7%), South Korea (43 times, 19.6%), the U.K. (35 times, 16.0%), and Japan (31 times, 14.2%) (Table 2). In general, American participants reported more diverse countries of origin of international news and entertainment than Chinese participants.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggested that American college students spend more time on entertainment but less time on news compared to Chinese college students. Among the total amount of news and entertainment consumed, Chinese college students reported a higher percentage of international content than their American counterparts. Among the international news and entertainment consumed, American college student reported more

diverse countries of origin. The findings have theoretical and practical implications on international media and their effects on intergroup relations.

Theoretical implications

This study contributed to media studies and intercultural communication literature by illustrating American and Chinese audiences' international media consumption. Specifically, the findings indicated that American and Chinese college students have different preferences on international news and entertainment on both the amount and the countries of origin. Different patterns on international media consumption may affect audiences' perceptions of and attitudes toward the countries or cultures portrayed in media. What type of international media the audiences consume (news and entertainment), how much international media they consume, and what countries comprises the international media affect audiences' intercultural communication experiences and their willingness and ability to communicate with individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

The findings about countries reported in international news in this study overlap with the findings in previous studies. Lee et al. (2017) found that top three countries listed by American audience in international news on television were Afghanistan, the United Kingdom, and Iraq. Participants in this study most frequently reported the United Kingdom, Middle Eastern countries, and China. In the same study conducted by Lee et al. (2017), top three countries that Chinese audience reported to have watched in international news on television are the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Top three countries reported in this study were the United States, Japan, and Russia. The United Kingdom was listed as the 6th in terms of the frequency.

As for international entertainment, Limov (2020) conducted a survey and found that American audience watch foreign entertainment content more frequently now after starting to the platform of Netflix. More studies could be conducted in the future to examine the increase of foreign content in American audience's international entertainment consumption and also to explore and compare Chinese audience's international entertainment consumption and the origins.

Table 2. Countries of origin of international news and entertainment reported by American and Chinese participants.

American Participants				Chinese Participants			
News	Frequency	Entertainment	Frequency	News	Frequency	Entertainment	Frequency
UK	36	UK	46	US	108	US	98
Middle East	31	China	30	Japan	35	South Korea	43
China	25	European countries	21	Russia	15	UK	35
European countries	20	Japan	21	South Korea	13	Japan	31
Mexico	16	France	13	UK	13	European countries	4
Iraq	15	Mexico	12	European countries	6	France	3
Russia	7	Spain	11	North Korea	6	Germany	2
Canada	6	Germany	9	Africa	4	Russia	2
Iran	6	Australia	7	France	4	Italy	1
Japan	6	Canada	7	Middle East	4		
Africa	5	Italy	5	Germany	2		
Asian countries	5	Brazil	3	India	2		
France	4	India	3	Pakistan	2		
Spain	4	South Korea	3	Afghanistan	1		
Israel	4	Russia	3	Israel	1		
Afghanistan	3	Africa	2	Malaysia	1		
Latin America	3	Latin America	2	Saudi Arabia	1		
Australia	2	Netherlands	2	Syria	1		
South Korea	2	Thailand	2				
Pakistan	2	Columbia	1				
Syria	2	Egypt	1				
Yemen	2	Iran	1				
Belgium	1	Iraq	1				
Brazil	1	Laos	1				
Germany	1	Singapore	1				
Greece	1						
Italy	1						
Laos	1						
Malaysia	1						
Netherlands	1						
Singapore	1						
Thailand	1						
Turkey	1						

The frequency and valence of the media content covering a foreign country may affect audiences' perceptions and attitudes toward that particular country. For example, as argued above, international news tends to report foreign countries in a more unfavourable way, which may constitute a negative mediated contact and lead to negative intergroup relations. On the other hand, consuming media content from other countries and cultures may cultivate audiences' intercultural communication awareness and enhance their intercultural communication competence. More studies could be conducted in the future from intercultural communication perspective and media effects perspective to further examine the media effects of international news and entertainment consumption. This

study could also be replicated in different countries and regions to explore international media consumptions.

The findings also implied a multi-layered perspective to understand media diversity and the corresponding media effects. The findings provided a baseline reference for future studies to explore international media consumption of American and Chinese audiences regarding the type of media they consume as well as diversity of media they consume (the ratio of domestic and international media and the countries of origin of international media/countries covered in international media).

Practical contributions

This study depicted international media use of the

audiences from the two largest media and entertainment market, the U.S. and China. The essential step of producing impactful media content is to analyse the domestic and global audiences. An investigation from audiences' perspectives is needed to increase the audience engagement. The findings from this short report are applicable to the practices of the international media industry on both their content production processes and ethical and societal consideration.

Limitation and future studies

Like any other studies that adopt self-reported data, participants' estimates are always subjective and may not reflect the reality. Future research could use both objective and subjective measures to show audiences' interests in international media. The relatively small sample sizes also limited the generalization of the findings. More studies could be conducted with larger number of participants with a more balanced sample. This study showed preliminary data about American and Chinese college students' international media use. More research could be conducted based on this study to further explore the content of international media produced and consumed, the specific genre of media products, and the effects of international media on intergroup relations.

Conclusion

This study investigated American and Chinese college students' international media consumption by reporting the amount of international news and entertainment they consume and showing the diverse countries of origin/countries covered in international news and entertainment, respectively. Findings of this study shed light on the body of literature on media studies and intercultural communication by bringing in audiences' perspectives. The findings also have meaningful practical contributions to the international media industry.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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