

BBC AND CBS INTERNATIONAL NEWS COVERAGE : A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE EVENING NEWS

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In 1920 Walter Lippmann and Charles merz in a study of the coverage of the Russian Revolution of 1917 by the *New York Times*, found that the coverage was biased ⁽¹⁾. The journalists relied heavily on government officials and unreliable unnamed sources. Lippmann and his co-author concluded that the information provided was inaccurate, far from being objective and from representing the credibility and responsibility of the Western press. In the forties Kent Cooper and James Lawrence Fly denounced the domination of the British news agency, reuters, and Agence France Presse (AFP) for their monopolization of the gathering, and dissemination of international news. Forty years later the same issues have been raised by developing countries. But this time the complaints of developing nations have been rejected, and subject of a heated and controversial debate.

Third world nations have been accusing the West of disproportionate, and distorted coverage on events concerning them ⁽²⁾. Too little coverage with too much emphasis on violent, conflictual and bizarre events. The complaints of developing countries have been supported by a number of studies (Hester, Tattarian Aggarwala, Lent and Woollacott, Golding and Elliot, among others). On the other hand, there have been studies refuting these complaints and accusations (Bishop, Weaver and Wilhoit, Kitatani). These scholars found that the percentage of news devoted to developing countries is higher than that devoted to the developed ones. In addition they stated that the emphasis on crises, crime, and conflictual news is not only found in news about developing nations, but in news about First World as well.

This diversity in the findings of these studies make the issue more complicated and controversial, and raise other aspects of it to be taken into consideration and to be looked at.

One evident thing about the controversy of the New International Information Order (NIIO), is that the international news flow is controlled and manipulated by the West, and is Western style oriented.

The previous studies conducted on the flow of international news suggest further studies concerning other aspects of the problem such as, media organization, ethics of the press, news values, definition of news, press freedom, the gap between the theory and practice of the press and so on.

Some studies on the news flow in developing countries. (Schramm, Lu, Shurnik, Marvanyi, Rogers) concluded that the news flow in developing nations is internally oriented, ethnocentric and has almost the same news orientation as do the western media. From this wide variety of studies, everyone seems to be accused and blamed. The international community has to work more closely on the issue in regard to other aspects which are the heart of the matter, and to put away the rhetoric of shortage (quantity) and distortion (quality) of the international news flow.

Purpose of the Study

After more than a decade of debates, meetings and conferences, confrontations and controversies are still taking place between the "haves" and the "have nots" concerning the NIIO. This study attempts to bring about some statistical data concerning the two major points of the controversy (shortage and distortion of news) which are the cornerstone of the issue according to developing countries. The findings of evening newscasts of BBC and CBS will be compared with this regard.

The major objective of the study is to clarify the issue from a television news broadcasting side, since the majority of the previous studies on the subject focused on wire services and

newspapers. Another factor of the importance of the study is to find out if there is any new trends in the international news flow after a decade of debates, or still the situation is the same as it was before.

The study is an attempt to shed some light on the controversy of the NIIO. Are developing countries logical and realistic in their charges and accusations? Or are they attacking the West without having any systematic proof? On the basis of the findings some other issue of the problem will be raised.

Research Questions

The basic objective of the study is to provide statistical data concerning the flow of international news on BBC and CBS evening newscasts, which may refute or support the charges and accusations of developing nations against the first World. The other objective is to find out if the two networks treat and conceive of international news differently or the same way.

1) How much time is devoted by BBC and CBS evening newscasts to : Developing, Western and Socialist countries?

2) Which type of news themes are covered and what is their amount in time frequency in regard to Developing, Western and Socialist countries?

3) How did BBC and CBS cover the international news in their evening newscasts in this specific period of time? Is there any differences, similarities, what are they?

Related Studies

Few studies have been conducted on the international news flow on television. In 1971 Rosengren, in his study on the international news flow on Swedish television found that, 39.8 percent of the international news was devoted to Third World countries ⁽³⁾. Hester found that there is a disproportionate coverage of developing nations on US television network news programs ⁽⁴⁾.

In 1976 Larson after studying a four year period sample of CBS evening newscasts concluded that the news about developing nations emphasizes crises, disasters and armed conflicts ⁽⁵⁾.

In addition to these studies on newscasts, many others have been conducted on the same issue, but in the print media such as, wire services and newspapers. In their majority, these studies found also a shortage and a distortion in news programs concerning developing countries. Cutlip did a study on the content of AP wires in 1954. His findings are very supportive to Third World countries complaints. He found only about 5 to 10 percent of state wire copies dealt with foreign news ⁽⁶⁾. In 1971, Hester studied the flow of international news on AP wires. His findings also supported the charges of developing nations ⁽⁷⁾. In the same year Lent conducted a study on foreign news in U.S. media, once again, the findings of this study supported the charges of developing nations ⁽⁸⁾. In his study of 1977, Tattarian concluded that there is a tendency in the West to devote a greater attention to Third World countries in times of conflicts, disasters and crises ⁽⁹⁾. Weaver and Wilhoit conducted two studies on the coverage of international affairs on AP and UPI in 1979 ⁽¹⁰⁾ and 1981 ⁽¹¹⁾. Their findings supported to a large extent the charge concerning the distortion of news about developing nations. However, the charge about the shortage in the coverage of the Third World; it was found that these latter received more coverage than anyone else.

From the previous studies on the flow of international news on Western media, one can conclude that the majority of them supports the complaints of developing nations, especially the one concerning the distortion of news.

Methods

The content analysis method was used for this study. The unit of analysis is the news story. The study covers a period of three months in 1980, September, October and December. The months of the sample were not continuous because of the non-availability of the BBC evening newscasts transcripts of the month of November. At its stead the month of December was

used. The year 1980 was chosen because the only up-to date material concerning BBC news programs was this year.

Sampling. The material of this study consisted of the evening news programs of the BBC and CBS. Three constructed weeks were chosen randomly from September, October and December 1980 as follows : 5, 25, 16, 29, 10 and 28, 3, 9, 22, 13 and 11, 23, 31, 5, 15, respectively from Monday through Friday. The time in which the BBC broadcast its evening news programs is from 9.00 till 9:25 or 9:30, without any interruptions or commercials. While the CBS broadcast its news programs from 5:30 till 5:57 or 6:00, with commercials which take usually 4 to 5 minutes, and broadcast by intervals of 5 minutes.

Categories. They were developed according to the research questions of this study and in accordance with some previous studies ⁽¹²⁾. Concerning the variable of countries, four categories were constructed: Socialist, Western, Developing and others. It should be noted that when a news story is about more than one category it is counted to each category apart. That is to say that sometime a news story is counted two or three times.

The categories developed for topics of news are: Military, politics, economics, culture and education, health and social programs, disasters and crimes, sports, and others. In coding the news stories, each news item was only given one topic. No subsidiary topics were used because of the volume of the sample and the short time in which the study was done.

It should be noted that the allocations of the same story to different categories of countries, and its coding for more than once, did not affect the computation of percentages of time and topics. This is because each category of countries was computed apart and nothing was done for the whole categories together except for the comparison of time of local and international news, and for the computation of time devoted to the different topics in general. In this case the news item was coded only once.

Definition of Terms

Countries :

1. Socialist : East European countries and USSR.
2. Western : West Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.
3. Developing Countries : Third World nations (all the countries in the world except the countries mentioned in the above two categories).
4. Others : International organizations (United Nations, its specialized agencies, regional, cultural, political and economic organizations).

Topics :

1. Crisis-Military : War, armed conflicts, threat of.
2. Crisis-Politics : Internal political conflict, assassination of personalities, political crises.
3. Culture and Education : Publications, movies, school matters, cultural activities, forums and symposia in the domain of culture and science, religious matters.
4. Disasters and Crime : Accidents, natural calamities, putshes, coups, crimes.
5. Economics : Agreements on trade tariffs, regional and international economic cooperation, programs of development, industrial projects, factories, means of transportation, agricultural matters, international economic conferences and meetings.
6. Health and Social programs : Public health, medical care, health programs, housing plans, social aid and assistance.

7. Non-crisis Military: Defence, military build up, peace moves, settlements.
8. Non-crisis Politics: Politics and government activities, diplomatic and political international activities, movements of liberation, political parties activities, elections, government changes.
9. Others: Miscellaneous, features and other news stories which do not fit in sports and the above Categories.
10. Sports: International sport events, regional and international cooperation and exchange in the domain of sports, national sport activities.

Crisis news and non-crisis news :

By crisis news it is meant the news stories about natural calamities such as, floods, droughts, earthquakes, and also news concerning accidents, putshes, coups, assassinations, crimes, armed conflicts, threat of, internal political conflict and crisis.

The news considered non-crisis is that dealing with topics other than those mentioned in the definition of crisis news. It should be noted here that, military peace moves, negotiations, settlements, military build up, are not considered crisis news.

Computation of Percentages

Percentages of time devoted by the evening news programs of each network (BBC, CBS) were computed as follows :

1. To local and international news (see table 1).
2. To international news to each topic apart (see table 2).
3. To crisis and non-crisis news (see table 3).
4. To Socialist, Western and Developing countries, each category apart (see table 4).

5. To each category of countries per topic (see table 5).
6. To each category of countries concerning crisis and non-crisis news (see table 6).

It should be noted that in the computation of percentages, some adjustments were made to avoid large numbers after the period.

It should be noted also that the time used for the headlines in the beginning of the news programs, and for the summaries in the end of the newscasts were not counted and coded in this study. It was decided likewise because the same headlines and summaries are developed in detail in the body of the newscasts, and coding them will be like considering them twice or three times.

Units of Analysis. In addition to the news story, the study uses two other main units of analysis which are duration and story theme. Duration or frequency of time devoted to a news story was used to compute different percentages to find out which category of countries is the more frequently covered, which kind of topics are the most covered and so on. For the unit of duration, second was used.

The story themes or topics as indicated before, were used to determine which kind of news stories are covered, is there any distortion or orientation of news concerning Third World countries, what is the proportion of crisis news in comparison with non-crisis news and so forth.

Findings

Both networks devoted a large amount of time to international news. However, the British gave more importance to the coverage of foreign affairs than the Americans did (see table 1). The topics which got the highest percentages or which were the most frequently covered by the evening news programs of both BBC and CBS are crisis military news and non-crisis political news (see table 2). News about disasters was also heavily covered

by BBC newscasts was devoted to this topic. Concerning the orientation of news, the two networks gave almost the same amount of time to both crisis news and non-crisis news (see table 3). The crisis news got more than 50 percent of the time devoted to international affairs by the evening news programs of the two networks. Concerning the frequency of time devoted to each category of countries apart, the findings show that developing nations were the most frequently covered by the evening newscasts of the two networks (see table 4).

The orientation of news on BBC evening news programs regarding each category of countries apart was significantly different from one category to another. For developing countries, crisis military news, news about disasters and non-crisis politics news got the highest amount of time among the topics. News themes such as, others and sports did not get a single second of attention (see table 5). However, the percentages shifted for Western countries from crisis military news to non-crisis politics and disasters. Concerning Socialist countries disasters, crisis politics news and crisis military news got the highest amount of attention on BBC evening news programs (see table 5). Concerning the orientation of news on CBS evening newscasts, the table showed almost the same topics with the highest frequencies, crisis military and non-crisis politics.

However, CBS did not emphasize disasters as BBC did (see table 5). Topics such as, others and sports were also not covered by CBS evening news news programs. On the American network the attention of news concerning developed countries, was oriented to non-crisis politics and non-crisis military news themes; however, crisis military news ranked third. The evening news programs on CBS about Socialist countries emphasized mainly crisis military, crisis politics, non-crisis military and non-crisis politics news themes. The topics of others and sports did not get any coverage. The frequency of time devoted to crisis news and non-crisis news on both BBC and CBS evening news programs was significantly different from one category of countries to another. Developing and Socialist nations were more frequently covered on crisis news, while the Western nations were more covered on non-crisis news than the crisis ones (see table 6).

Discussion and Conclusions

The statistical data of the study give some clarifications to the ongoing "debate of the deaf". The charges of developing nations about the shortage and disproportionate coverage of Third World affairs by Western media, are completely refuted by the findings of this study. Developing countries got the highest time frequency on both BBC and CBS evening newscasts. One argument may be raised about the time period of the sample, and one can argue that the sample coincided with the Iraq-Iran war and the crisis of the US hostages. But as one can see, it is very hard to construct a sample today without coinciding with armed conflicts, crises and the like, which are one of the characteristic of today's disorganized international society. Because of that, the findings of this study are more likely valid and significant in regard to the time period sample.

However, the second charge of the developing nations in regard to the distortion of news, finds good support from the data of this study. The crisis news on developing countries represent a high percentage in comparison with non-crisis news, while the figures on the Western countries show the opposite. The orientation of news concerning Socialist countries is the same as these of the developing nations. On this issue one can argue that the orientation of news on BBC and CBS evening news programs is ideological. Developing countries as they are recovering quickly, and imposing themselves at the international level, are trying to establish new mechanisms and trends in the center-periphery economic and political relationships. Regional and international organizations such as, UNESCO, OPEC, the Non-Aligned movement and others can be cited as forums where developing nations have been asking for more justice and equality in the world. These new trends in the international political arena do not please at all the former colonial powers, and the imperialistic forces in today's world. These powers of course are trying hard to maintain the status quo at the international level. To realize this important task, Western countries are using their media for perpetuating a negative image on those forces in developing countries which are working on eliminating exploitation, injustice and imperialistic

enterprises in the world. On the other hand they are working on shaping an international public opinion which favor the maneuvers of the Western powers throughout the world.

From the other side of the coin, one can state that this orientation of the news is due to the prevalence of a certain kind of news values system in the West ⁽¹³⁾, wich emphasizes disasters, crimes and sensational news. Unlike developing countries, the Western nations conceive media as a challenger of government, and a watchdog of the political activities in the nation ⁽¹⁴⁾. Western journalists, media managers and scholars argue that the Western audience, readers and viewers are not interested in propaganda, government handouts or news about economic and social achievements. From the findings of this study one can also argue that even news about Western countries is crisis oriented (see table 5).

Another argument on the crisis orientation of news is that the Western journalism today is in crisis. Anthony Smith put it this way: "The general crisis within Western journalism arises from the growing gulf between its theory and the constraints of markets, technology, institutions and situations within which it operates" ⁽¹⁵⁾. That is to say that the West has to recognize that there is something wrong, and that there is a need for a change. With the emergence of newly independent nations and the change in the balance of power in the center periphery relationships, Third World countries are not accepting anymore the values and the culture of the West along with its technology. To them, it is about time to shape their cultural, political and economic destiny.

From the above controversial three arguments on the orientation of news and the news values, it can be stated that the heart of the matter on the issue of the New International Information Order is not the disproportion or distortion of news, but it is rather the news values, media organizations, concepts such as, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, role of the media in society, government press relationships and the like.

The findings of this study suggest that issues such as, what is news, role of the media in society, and media governments relationships must be raised and worked out more deeply and more seriously. A disagreement on such issues is going to block any advances toward the establishment of the NIIO. As such issues are differently interpreted in the West, East and South, the future is not promising at all for a new direction in the international news flow.

Considering how the two networks covered in their news programs the international events in the specific time period of the sample, not many differences were found, but some slight ones occurred because of the difference in the role played at the international scale by the two countries. BBC devoted more time to international news in its evening news programs than CBS did. On the other hand CBS emphasized more crisis military and crisis politics news than BBC did. This was mainly due to the US hostages crisis and the interest of the Americans in the Iraq-Iran war. Noticeably, the U.S.A. as a superpower is very interested in the Middle East and its political and economic interests in the region makes it, more than anyone else, give close attention to what is going on in this part of the world. Furthermore, the Americans have to maintain the balance of power in the world and to keep an eye on the Russians from invading their sphere of influence in the region. A slight difference was also found between the two networks concerning the orientation of news. CBS focused more in its evening news programs, on crisis news than BBC did (see table 3). This also can be explained by the importance of the war in the Middle East for the Americans. In spite of the fact of these slight differences, one can argue that the two networks covered the international events in their news programs almost the same way. This characteristic between the two networks can be explained by the fact that the news values prevailing in the two countries are very similar. The two nations have many values in common such as, freedom of the press, democracy and a free market economy.

To sum up it can be said that the findings of this study refute one charge of the developing countries and support another. This

is not new, it has been found several times in previous studies. But what can be suggested from the findings of the study, is to work on news values. One thing is evident, "news" to the West is not the same to the Developing nations, nor to the Socialist countries. News values are forged in the society by a variety of factors such as, ideology, culture, traditions, customs, mores, economic and political systems, and the like. Since these factors vary from one country to one another, and the interests of the nations of the world are controversial and subject to conflicts, the international community is asked to work on these issues if it is really looking for a change in the actual flow of international information.

The other issue which must be worked out carefully, concerns Third world countries. These countries are asked to make structural changes in their economic and information infrastructure. They have to link the New International Economic Order (NIEO) to the NIIO. Economics, politics, ideology, culture and mass communication cannot be transformed, and reformed separately from one another; the change must be global if one is waiting for "new orders". Isolating communication from other aspects of the economic and political life, is killing the idea of a NIIO. Third World countries have to work first on the establishment of a horizontal flow of information inside their boundaries. In these countries the flow of information is vertical, from the urban areas to the rural ones. That is to say that a new order in the domain of information is to be established inside each country of the world. Minorities, ethnic groups, and the like are misrepresented everywhere in the world; even in the most democratic countries of the world.

The international society is asked to cooperate, help and assist to attain an atmosphere of human dignity, respect and equity. Third World nations are asked more than anyone else to work on the issue from within themselves. That is to say, they have to develop their communication infrastructure and information technology. They have to start establishing a NIIO inside their own country. In doing so, they can make themselves heard and they can see and hear the world with their own eyes and ears. They also have to develop a South-South cooperation in this

regard. On the other hand, they have to look at the international gathering and dissemination of news in a broad context, and not only from what they fit their needs and aspirations. They have to cooperate with the West instead of confronting, challenging and defying it. In short the issue is complex and multifaceted, and will need a lot of work in the long run.

Further research on the problems of communication in developing countries, and more studies on news values and media ethics are needed for a realistic look at the international communication. More studies and content analyses of the quality of international news coverage of affairs, and how the news is treated may bring about some light and new perspectives for the issue.

Table 1
**Percentage of Local and International News on BBC and CBS
 Evening Newscasts Duration Ratio**

Categories	BBC		CBS	
	Time	%	Time	%
Local News	12955"	54,43	14349"	68,46
International News	10849"	45,57	6611"	31,54
TOTAL	23804"	100,00	20960"	100,00

Table 2
**Percentage of time devoted by each of BBC and CBS
 Evening Newscasts to International News per Topics**

Topics	BBC		CBS	
	Time	%	Time	%
Crisis Military	3000"	27,65	2500"	37,81
Crisis Politics	203"	1,87	381"	5,76
Culture	59"	0,53	150"	2,27
Disasters	2550	23,50	760"	11,50
Economics	1220"	10,50	380"	5,75
Health	140"	1,24	000"	0,00
Non-Crisis Military	71	0,65	260"	3,94
Non-Crisis Politics	3000"	27,63	2000"	30,25
Others	93"	0,83	100"	1,51
Sports	613"	5,60	80"	1,21
TOTAL	10849"	100,00	6611"	100,00

Table 3

**Percentage of International news on BBC and CBS
Evening newscasts by Crisis Orientation
Duration Ratio**

Categories	BBC		CBS	
	Time	%	Time	%
Crisis News	5753"	53,03	3641"	55,08
Non-Crisis News	5096"	46,97	2970"	44,92
TOTAL	10849"	100,00	6611"	100,00

Table 4

**Duration Ratio of International News on BBC and CBS
Evening Newscasts per Nations**

Countries	BBC		CBS	
	Time	%	Time	%
Developing	6271"	51,43	4980"	52,31
Western	4550"	37,32	3280"	34,45
Socialist	1372"	11,25	1260"	13,24
TOTAL	12193"	100,00	9520"	100,00

It should be noted that some news stories were coded more than once in this variable.

Table 5
Duration Ratio of International News on BBC and CBS
Evening Newscasts by Topics and by Categories of Nations

NATIONS	BBC						CBS					
	Developing			Western			Socialist			Developing		
	Time"	%	Time"	%	Time"	%	Time"	%	Time"	%	Time"	%
Crisis Military	2436	38,84	300	06,74	232	17,00	2000	40,16	400	12,19	200	15,88
Crisis Politics	150	02,39	45	01,11	300	21,86	180	03,61	200	06,10	150	11,90
Culture	22	00,35	18	00,41	19	0,38	40	00,80	40	01,22	110	08,73
Disasters	1394	22,23	925	20,79	339	24,63	290	05,83	80	02,44	400	31,75
Economics	616	09,83	265	05,63	254	19,24	280	05,62	160	04,88	120	09,52
Health	140	02,23	000	00,00	000	00,00	000	00,00	000	00,00	000	00,00
Non-Crisis Military	000	00,00	065	01,43	000	00,00	270	05,42	950	28,97	140	11,11
Non-Crisis Politics	1613	24,13	2229	48,09	183	13,34	1920	38,56	1270	38,71	140	11,11
Others	000	00,00	101	02,27	000	00,00	0000	00,00	100	03,05	000	00,00
Sports	000	00,00	602	13,53	35	02,55	0000	00,00	80	02,44	000	00,00
TOTAL	6271	100,00	4550	100,00	1372	100,00	4980	100,00	3280	100,00	1260	100,00

Some news stories were coded more than once in this variable.

Table 6
Percentage of Interational News stories on BBC and CBS
Evening Newscasts by Topics and by Categories of Nations

COUNTRIES	B B C						C B S					
ORIENTATION	Developing		Western		Socialist		Developing		Western		Socialist	
	Time	%	Time	%	Time	%	Time	%	Time	%	Time	%
Crisis	3980	63,47	1260	27,70	871	63,48	2470	49,60	680	20,73	750	59,52
Non-crisis	2291	36,53	3290	72,30	501	36,52	2510	50,40	2600	79,27	510	40,48
TOTAL	6271	100,00	4550	100,00	1372	100,00	4980	100,00	3280	100,00	1260	100,00

1. Some news stories were coded more than once.
2. Topics such as, crisis military, crisis politics and disasters were considered as crisis news. The remaining topics used in this study were considered as non-crisis news.

Endnotes

1. Walter Lippmann and Charles merz, "A Test of the News", *The New Republic*, August 4, 1920, p. 28.
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5. James F. Larson, *America's Window on the World: U.S. Network Coverage of International Affairs, 1972-1976* (Stanford California: The Institute of Communication Research, 1978) p. 115.
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9. Roger Tattarian, "News Flow in the Third World: Some Problems and proposals", paper presented at a Conference on the Third World and Press Freedom at the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy, New York, May 12-13, 1977.
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11. David H. Weaver and G.C. Wilhoit, "Foreign news Coverage in Two U.S. Wire Services", *Journal of Communication* 31 (2), Spring 1981, pp. 55-63.
12. The categories concerning the topics were developed according to the purpose of the study. They were not constructed in large detail because the main goal was to figure out the time devoted to crisis and non-crisis news. Some topics were taken from the studies of Pinch, Ogan and Swift, and Weaver and Wilhoit.
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14. Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 151.
15. Ibid, p. 173.

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