

**Just Spell US Right:
America's News Prominence and Soft Power**

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This study evaluates America's prominence in world affairs by analyzing the content of key news sites from around the world over three years. Findings show that the US remains by far the most prominent country in news sites from around the world, particularly in the categories of business, technology, and world-news. While world attention to most rising regional powers such as Brazil, Russia, and India remained low, China increased its news prominence over the period of study. Yet this rise was found to be related with US international affairs. On the basis of these findings we conceptualize and delineate "prominence power" as a factor in the debate over the various faces of American power and its relation to soft power in particular.

Keywords: US, news sites, country prominence, soft power, declinism, BRIC

Introduction

American decline has become a major theme in recent discussions of the dynamics of our contemporary world order. This discourse of decline encompasses a variety of types of power played out in the world arena. Over the past generation international relations literature has sharpened the division between hard power—the “physical” elements by which one polity can directly affect the behavior of another, and soft power—the means of indirect effect (Barnett and Duvall, 2005; Nye, 2003, 2004, 2011; Press-Barnathan, 2012; Thompson, 1995).

The ongoing shift in the international relations discourse from hard to soft power is strikingly congruent with the shift in communication discourse from strong to limited media effects. From the dawn of electronic broadcast media and down to the cold war, mass mediated messages were perceived as powerful tools for affecting opinions and decisions among large groups of audiences. But subsequent research has given mass media much less credit for opinion change. Mass media messages, and within them broadcast news, are considered to have indirect and limited effect such as agenda setting and gate keeping (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955, 2006; McCombs and Shaw, 1972, 1993; Park and Pooley, 2008; Simonson, 2010).

In this paper, we develop the concept of prominence power and discuss its possible association with soft power. By prominence power we mean the level of attention given to a country in the news of other countries. We argue that continuous prominence power of a country reflects both hard and soft power elements, and in certain conditions, such as the continuously prominent coverage of the US, can further influence its global standing as the world hegemon for good and bad.

At least two generations of communication research, posit that the more influential a country is in world affairs, the more it will be mentioned in world news (Chang, 1998; Change et al. 1987, 2000, 2005, 2007; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Kim and Barnett, 1996; Lee, 2007). Thus, a country's prominence in world news can serve as an indicator of its relative standing in a competitive field of nations—particularly of those wielding hard power. In other words, economically and politically stronger countries are more likely to appear in world news (Segev, 2015; Segev and Blondheim, 2013a; Wu, 2000, 2003).

But prominence in world news can mean much more than a mere reflection of hard power. Repeated mentions in the world's media—being on the agenda, and being prominent in people's consciousness—can be in and of itself a significant source of power. This is what Lazarsfeld and Merton (1949) called “the status conferral function” of mass media: The “enhanced status [that] accrues to those who merely receive attention in the media, quite apart from any editorial support” (p. 101, see also Peters and Simonson, 2004; Simonson and Weiman, 2003). This function is popularly formulated in the adage alluded to in the title of this article—“I do not care what the newspapers say about me as long as they spell my name right.” Just as celebrity is seen in popular imagination as a powerful individual resource, or social currency (Marshall, 1997, Turner, 2004), news prominence of countries can be constructed as an independent symbolic resource that can wield considerable real-world power.

This study is particularly interested in the “status conferral function,” or the prominence power of the US in world news. America's prominence power is, however, inexorably linked to other dimensions of soft power. As will be argued below, the persistently high news attention given to the US around the world may have both positive and negative implications on its attractiveness and the dissemination and assimilation of American ideas and values worldwide. In other words, US prominence power directly influences its soft power.

American soft-power and the role of communications

One of the most significant attempts to expound the notion of “soft-power” was in Nye's (1990) influential *Bound to Lead*. His main argument bears on the declinism debate in that he considers US soft power no less important than its hard power, and the former does not show signs of decline. The soft power Nye refers to is America's lead in the

“information revolution,” and the emergent global communication infrastructures that allow the dissemination of ideologies, values, lifestyle, language, and popular culture. Moreover, since US-propagated belief-systems and ethos serve as a model that many countries follow, their priorities and agendas are inevitably aligned with those of the US even without the exercise of any direct action. Nye compactly suggests that “if I can get you to want to do what I want, than I do not force you to do what you do not want to do” (Nye 2003, p. 552). This indirect ability of the hegemon to set the priorities of other countries, reflecting the “third face of power,” can be seen as the core of a country’s soft power (Lukes, 2005; Nye, 1990, 2002; Press-Barnathan, 2012).

In his later work, Nye (2004, 2011) emphasizes that soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt other countries. In this sense, Nye links soft power and the idea of *attraction*:

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries—admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness—want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions (2002, 9).

In other words, a country can be aligned with the will and interests of another country, when the latter becomes the subject for continuous attention and a model for imitation. Mass media presence is an important way for a country to increase its attractiveness to other, and therefore its ability to set the agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1993) is crucial. Intentionally or not, all Nye’s examples for this dynamic reflect media prominence: Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech and its effect on Europe, the young Russian listening to American news and music behind the Iron Curtain, and young Iranians today watching banned American videos and satellite television (2004).

It seems, however, that US soft power cannot be separated from its hard power. This connection is particularly apparent when considering the political economy of communication. Barnett and Douvall (2005) differ between the institutional and productive power of the US. Institutional power refers to the ability of dominant American institutes and organization, such as McDonalds, Hollywood or Google, to reflect and indirectly promote the interests of the US. American controlled news agencies, such as AP, are other examples of institutional power. Productive power, on the other hand, is related to the diffusion of symbols and meanings from one country to others. American television programs, films, software, and gadgets are all examples of productive power, which indirectly promotes American values and culture.

In his notion of “cultural imperialism,” Schiller’s (1992) further emphasized the communication aspect of institutional and productive power. He suggested that US dominance is primarily based on its control over global media and communication institutions that are able to produce and disseminate symbols. Thus, in Schiller’s view, the worldwide penetration of the western—predominantly American—media industry facilitates the construction of soft power, leaving little room for opposing or even alternative views and agendas, let alone their development.

This productive power is, however, limited as it is constantly negotiated in foreign markets (Thompson, 1995). American films or TV programs, for example, are conditionally and differently received by audiences from around the world (Liebes and Katz, 1994). International news produced by American organizations could be altered and

understood differently. Still, while processes of negotiation and adaptation of “imported” texts carry the potential of diluting, mitigating, and to an extent even subverting them, they cannot weaken the prominence power of the sender of the message. If anything, the attention given to the US around the world, whether good or bad, set the world agenda, and therefore also what would be considered as internationally important.

News prominence and soft power

A drawback of many arguments regarding America’s soft power, including those surveyed above, is that they are not grounded on a solid empirical basis. The reason for this deficiency is, most probably, the difficulty to operationalize, measure, and evaluate such a complex concept. Possible exceptions to the problem of mustering empirical evidence and its measurement are studies touching on America’s information production and dissemination. But the results of such studies, although buttressed by empirical findings, are not conclusive.

Tunstall (2008), for example, studied the global institutional and productive media power of the US, and pointed out the relative decline in the spread of US media products, paralleled by the rise of new international hubs. He differentiated between big and small population countries. In the most populated regional centers, to include Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC), the overall level of imports declined by 2008 to less than 10% of all TV content, including news. Hence the title of his book: “The media *were* American,” a sequel to his 1977 book “The media *are* American” (Tunstall 1977, 2008, emphasis ours).

In line with Tunstall’s early observations, various studies raised concerns regarding the asymmetry of global communication flows (MacBride, 1980; Mowlana, 1985; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Schramm, 1964). Asymmetries were found to be particularly significant when looking at the global flow of international news (Chang et al. 1987, 2000; Chang and Lee, 1992; Golan and Wanta, 2003; Peng, 2004; Riffe 1996). Recent studies of the structure and flow of online news (Chang et al. 2009; Paterson, 2005, 2007) confirmed the central position of the US and its western allies even in the online news network. Hence, in contrast to Tunstall’s (2007) findings, recent studies show that when it comes to international news flow, the US retained its structural dominance.

News flow literature has also highlighted the connection between the frequency of a country’s mentions in the news, and elements of hard and soft power. Hard power elements such as the economic power of a country (Kim and Barnett, 1996; Lee, 2007) and its military power (Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Authors) were found to be very significant indicators of its news prominence. Soft power elements such as immigration and language (Chang et al. 1987; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984), or the presence of news agencies (Wu, 2000, 2003) were also found to be significant determinants of international news coverage. Hence, the news prominence of a country reflects both elements of its hard and soft power.

Studying international news from 38 countries, Wu (2000) found that the US was by far the most prominent country, capturing approximately 18% of world news. The UK, France, Russia, and China were well behind. He found that GDP (an indication of hard power) and the presence of news agencies (an indication of soft power) were strong predictors of news prominence. In a more recent study, Wu (2007) compared the prominence of countries in online news to their prominence in broadcast and print outlets (using *CNN* and the *New York Times* respectively). His study, based on a two-week survey, indicated that there were no significant differences between online and traditional media in the relative scope of coverage allotted to different countries. Other recent studies of online

news (Segev and Blondheim, 2013a) provide firm empirical evidence for the prominent position of the US in world news in general and online news in particular, as well as to the very strong correlation between a series of hard and soft power elements of a country's power and its news prominence.

The present study goes a step further by focusing on the trends of US news prominence over time. Additionally, it also compares US news prominence with that of other rising regional and global actors, and particularly the BRIC, following Tunstall (2008) and international relations scholars (Ikenberry, 2011; Ross, 2011). It also measures the affect of American news on the overall news prominence of countries. Based on the problematics emerging from the studies surveyed above we derived and formulated the following hypotheses:

H_{1a}: The US will be the most prominent country in all news categories

Since according to this hypothesis US news prominence overshadows the relative power of other regional centers (see, for example, Segev and Blondheim, 2013a), we also looked at the overall news prominence of countries when the US is not included in the analysis (as described in detail below). It is expected that the results of this analysis will show that:

H_{1b}: BRIC countries will increase their news prominence after removing American news from the analysis

In terms of trends over time, taking into account Tunstall's (2008) observations we expect that:

H_{2a}: The news prominence of the US will decrease over time in all news categories

H_{2b}: BRIC countries will rise in parallel to US decline

Method

The data analyzed in this study were collected from news sites in 11 different countries (the US, the UK, Germany, France, Spain, Russia, China, Japan, Iran, Egypt and Israel). These countries were selected on the basis of several considerations. First, we chose countries with a large number of online users. As previously argued, large countries often act as cultural and media centers for the smaller countries in their peripheries (Tunstall, 2008). Applied to the internet, centrality is also a function of the popularity of the language used in the country. Accordingly, the countries we studied feature the most popular online languages, to include English, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, French, German and Arabic (Danet and Herring, 2007).

Second, we chose economically leading countries. Previous studies surveyed above have established that economic and political powers are important factors contributing to news prominence. We therefore included countries with high GDPs such as Japan, China, Germany, the UK and France. Finally, when addressing the question of US news prominence, it is important to examine countries with varied relations with the US. Iran, Egypt, and Israel can serve as good examples: While Iran is considered an opponent, post Arab-spring Egypt and the US are wary of each other but maintain a modicum of

cooperation, and Israel is a close ally of the US. In establishing a group of focal countries, intangibles need be considered too: Thus, Egypt is an important cultural hub in the Arab world, and Israel, despite its diminutive size (and accordingly low GDP), seems to attract ungainly high media attention around the world and wield outstanding prominence power due to religious and cultural factors (Segev and Blondheim, 2013b).

In each of the countries selected for analysis, three popular news sites were chosen for tracking. Two of them were the online sites of well-established traditional news sources, such as the *New York Times* or the BBC. The third digital news source was the *Google News* site of each country, a news aggregator of several hundreds and sometimes thousands of popular country-specific news sources. The popularity of news sites was determined by cross referencing of several indicators and sources, including the recent statistics provided by the World Association of Newspapers, the State of the News Media, Nielsen online, and IVW (Informationsgemeinschaft zur Feststellung der Verbreitung von Werbeträgern e.V.). The list of popular news sites was further supported and validated by online tools such as Alexa and Google Trends.

A possible caveat of including *Google News*, an aggregator of various news sources, is that it may vary greatly in terms of its international scope. In order to exclude this possibility, we conducted a Spearman correlation test between the country rankings in *Google News* and that of other news sites of the same country. We found a very significant correlation ranging from $r = .836, p < .01$ in Russia to $r = .907, p < .01$ in the US and France. The country-ranking correlations between news sites and *Google News* from different countries were significantly lower (A Fisher z-transformation indicated significant differences between the two with $p < .01$). In other words, the country prominence and ranking in *Google News* was very similarly to that of other news sites from the same country, making its inclusion worthwhile. *Google News* did not include special Egyptian or Iranian editions in the course of our study, but we used its Arabic edition as well as *Al Jazeera* as more general and popular news sources in the Arab world.

In each news source five main topical categories were studied: “top news,” “world news,” “business/economy,” “technology,” and “entertainment/culture.” These categories were chosen because they were common to all news-sites in our sample, reflecting various elements of hard and soft power. The data of each of the chosen news sites was sampled based on its RSS feeds if available or by direct web-mining and parsing of the text in each news category, every other day at 12:00 UTC.

The collection of data was carried out over a period of three years between February 1, 2009 and January 31, 2012. Media attention to most news events is known to be relatively short, ranging from days to months (Downs, 1977; McCombs, 2004; Vasterman, 2005). A longer period of three years allows capturing many cycles of news attention, while avoiding the bias of specific short-term events. It is important to note, however, that certain long-term processes such as the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the US war in Afghanistan were more prominent in our findings. These long-term processes were therefore taken into account in the interpretation and discussion of the results below. In total, 1,087,917 news items from 35 news sites were collected and analyzed. Table 1 summarizes the countries and news sites included in the study.

[Table 1 about here]

Using web mining we identified and documented the date of each news item, its title and content, the category of the article, the countries mentioned in it, and its source. We

automatically extracted the countries mentioned in each news item. For this purpose, we built a database of 195 country names in 10 different languages.¹ Native-speaking research assistants were employed to translate country names into these languages. For each country name, we asked a number of research assistants in each language to provide all the common names and alternative names (for example, “United States,” “USA,” “America,” and so on). Then they were asked to omit all alternative country names that might be ambiguous and therefore yield irrelevant search results. Each country was counted only once per news item, even if it was mentioned several times in the same article.

On the basis of the country list, we measured the *percentage* of news items that mentioned a country out of all news items that mentioned country names. We calculated this for each country name mentioned in all news sites and news categories in the corpus, but we could also measure the extent of news from specific countries or categories. For example, we could obtain the percentage of news items in American news sites mentioning Iran, or the percentage of news items from the “business” category of all news sites mentioning the US. We removed self-reporting from the analysis, thus, for example, we did not count American news items that mention the US.

After measuring the frequency of each country’s mentions in the news of other countries, we analyzed more specifically the effect of the US on the news mentions of other countries. In order to do so, we measured the change in news prominence of each country once removing all American news sources and all news items that mentioned the US (even if other countries were mentioned in the same news item). Finally, we studied the monthly trends of US mentions in the countries we examined and in the five topical categories over the three-year period.

Results

Regional hubs overshadowed by the hegemon

Figure 1 presents the news prominence of each country as measured during the three-year period spanning February 2009 and January 2012. As was mentioned earlier, this calculation does not include self-reporting; for instance, the percentage of US mentions reported here does not include American news sites. It demonstrates that the US is by far the most frequently mentioned country in news sites worldwide: 16.5% of news items from non-US news sites mentioned it. The dramatic difference between US mentions and other countries’ mentions is highly significant. For instance, China, the second most prominent country, was mentioned in 5% of the news items ($z = 174.31, p < .01$). In most non-American news sites, including Iranian news sites, the US was the most frequently mentioned foreign country. The only exceptions were the general Arabic news sites (which include *Al Jazeera* and *Google News* in Arabic), in which the US held the fourth place after Egypt, Israel, and Iraq, and the Egyptian news sites, in which the US held the eighth place.

[Figure 1 about here]

¹ Based on the most complete list of country names available from ISO (International Organization for Standardization). This list was translated into the following languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, Persian, Arabic and Hebrew.

The prominence of countries can differ across news topics. Table 2 summarizes the top ten prominent countries in each news category. In support of H_{1a} , when looking at the news sites across different categories, the US was the most prominent country by far. Still, in certain categories, and particularly in the “top news” and the “entertainment” categories, its lead was considerably lower than in other categories (14.5% and 14.8% respectively). In the top-news category, Israel drew considerable world attention, while in the entertainment category the UK and France were effective in making news and grabbing attention. On the other hand, the US was particularly prominent in the technology news section, mentioned by 22.9% of the news items. Similarly, in the world news section it was more prominent than in most other categories with 18.2% of the news items.

[Table 2 about here]

In line with the literature surveyed above, Figure 1 demonstrates the relative power of China, which emerged as the second most prominent country worldwide. However, in the case of China, it is important to measure to what extent American news and news about the US contribute to its overall prominence (H_{1b}). Table 3 displays countries that showed the most significant rise or decline in their prominence after removing US news sources and news that mentioned the US from the analysis. It outlines the countries that were more closely associated in the news with the US (and therefore decreased their prominence once the US was excluded), and those that were more independent from the US in their standing (and therefore increased their prominence once the US was excluded). Thus, Afghanistan displayed the greatest decline in news prominence when the US was excluded from the analysis, while Egypt displayed the greatest increase.

[Table 3 about here]

What emerges from this procedure, more generally, is that countries in either military or political conflict with the US during the sampling period (such as Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea, and Yemen), received considerable attention due to their negative relations with the US. Other countries that lost news attention were those with geographic proximity to the US, including Mexico, Canada, and Cuba. China did not fit either of these groups although much of its news prominence came from American news or news that mentioned the US. While this result requires thorough discussion, it is not surprising considering that China was the most frequently mentioned foreign country in US news.

The countries that increased their prominence after the exclusion of the US from the analysis could be divided to three clusters. One cluster is of countries that made it to world news prominence due to outstanding indigenous events. Thus, the countries in which the Arab Spring played out received considerable attention—primarily regional—independent of their relations with the US or other countries. Another cluster includes countries in which internal economic problems loomed such as Spain and Greece (Blondheim, Segev, and Cabrera, 2015). Finally, a third cluster includes countries that served as regional centers, and received more news attention once the US is eliminated. This includes the UK, Germany, and France in Europe, Egypt in the Middle East, and South Korea in Asia. In contradiction to H_{1b} , BRIC countries did not gain news prominence after eliminating the US effect. In fact, while Brazil, Russia, and India’s news prominence did not change, China’s news prominence significantly decreased. This suggests that the overall news prominence of China was strongly linked to American news and news about the US.

Decline of the hegemon?

On average the US showed a very slight yet not significant trend of decline over the three-year period. When looking at news from each country separately (Figure 2), only news from Germany ($R^2 = 0.599$), and to a lesser extent from Japan, Spain, and Israel showed a significant trend of decline in US mentions over the three year period ($p < .01$ in a least-squares fitting test). However, news from other countries mentioned the US in a more or less constant level over time. There was also a slight yet not significant trend of decline in self-mentions (that is, US mentions in American news outlets) over the three year period.

[Figure 2 about here]

When looking at the average monthly mentions of the US in each of the news categories separately (Figure 3), the most significant decline appears in the Business news ($R^2 = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$). Its average level fell from 19.7% in February 2009 to 15% in January 2012. This decline was reflected in the German, Spanish, French, and Israeli news, as well as in Japanese and Chinese news. Similarly, in the “world news” section there was a significant decline in US mentions ($R^2=0.21$, $p < .01$). On average, it was mentioned in about 17.4% of the news items of other countries. In the top news, entertainment, and technology sections there were no significant longitudinal trends in US mentions.

[Figure 3 about here]

In short, H_{2a} was partially accepted. US mentions in the news around the world displayed a slight decline over the three-year period from February 2009 to January 2012. This insignificant trend is mainly due to the drop in US mentions in Japanese and German news in all categories. The decline in US mentions was apparent also in the business and economy news section. In the entertainment and technology sections there were no outstanding trends in US mentions. It maintained a constant level of news prominence over time.

[Figure 4 about here]

Figure 4 presents the trends of news prominence of BRIC countries. It shows, in contrast to H_{2b} , that there was no significant increase in the news prominence of BRIC countries over the past three years. Only China displayed a slight—if not highly significant—trend of increase over the three years period ($R^2 = 0.13$). This implies that while the US lost some world attention, particularly in business news, Russia, India and Brazil did not gain significant news attention during the sampling period, and China gained attention only slightly in news sites from around the world.

Discussion

In the wake of the debate over American decline, this study analyzed a large-scale survey of news sites in ten major languages over three years, in an attempt to gauge the

prominence of the US in world news and its trends over time. Previous studies linked the prominence of a country in the news of other countries to elements of hard and soft power (Chang et al. 1987; Kariel and Rosenvall, 1984; Kim and Barnett, 1996; Lee, 2007; Segev and Blondheim, 2013; Wu, 2000, 2003). In line with the evolving differentiation between hard power and soft power, we studied news categories reflecting either. The categories of top news, world news, and business news reflect hard power, while entertainments and, to some extent, technology news reflect soft power.

Beyond reflecting real-world power, however, the continuous attention paid to a country in world news is related to its level of attractiveness or repulsion, and therefore also to its soft power. Communication informed studies suggest that the attractiveness of a country is strongly related to the way it is covered in the news (Wanta, Golan, and Cheolhan, 2004). Thus, the prominence power of a country in the news may work in both ways—while continuous positive attention can increase the attractiveness and thus the soft power of a country, continuous negative attention can reduce its soft power.

There is no doubt that positive news coverage of a country can serve to strengthen its positive image. For example, a BBC news item from January 11, 2010 mentioned the US diplomatic efforts for nuclear disarmament and respect for human rights in North Korea. This kind of news item can serve the US international goals, at least among some of the BBC's audiences, as it reduces their resistance to America's international actions. In contrast, on January 12, 2010, the Iranian news organization *Press TV* criticized the US, claiming that together with Britain and Israel it was implementing a plan to turn Yemen into another Afghanistan. This kind of item may harm the "attractiveness" of the US and increase the legitimacy of Iranian resentment of it.

Still, putting the valence of news coverage aside, following the agenda setting premises (Kiousis, 2004; McCombs and Shaw, 1993; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007), the mere salience of an issue or a player is an indication of its perceived importance. In other words, the continuously high prominence of the US in world news provides an empirical indication of its perceived importance by journalists, and through them by audiences around the world. Going along with our previous example, in countries that are known to be less US-friendly such as Iran, China, and Russia, the US was by far the most prominent foreign country in the news of the last three years. Both positive and negative news clearly indicate the uncontested world attention that the US attracts. Both praising US actions and criticizing them can contribute to the audience perception of its ability to intervene and influence world events.

Our overall findings confirmed the preliminary hypothesis that the US remained by far the most prominent player in the news, the world over. It was mentioned in about 16.5% of the news items in our corpus, did not display significant trends of decline, and was particularly prominent in technology, world, and business related news. It was relatively less prominent but still far ahead in the entertainment and top news categories, a variance that will be discussed below. Unlike the temporary news attention toward specific events (for example, the earthquake in Haiti or Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan), prominence power is measured over a long period. Looking at a three-year period of news coverage can therefore help distinguish between countries involved in either short- or long-term news cycles. In fact, previous studies suggest that the US has maintained its high news attention level at least since 1960 (Segev, Sheafer, and Shenhav, 2013). This is clearly one indication for the ongoing interest of the world in its actions as well as the audience perception of its power.

As noted, American decline is often linked with the emergence of new regional economic powers, and particularly the BRICs. Assuming international power is a zero sum game, the decline of American power would necessarily be accompanied by the rise of other actors. While news reflects elements of hard and soft power, we would expect an increase in world news attention to the BRICs once excluding American news sources and news items that mention the US. However, in contrast to this hypothesis, our findings showed that the BRICs did not gain once America was removed from the analysis. Russia, India, and Brazil did not change their relative news prominence at all, while China's prominence in fact decreased. Although China is a competitor of America for news attention, by excluding American news it actually lost rather than gained news prominence. In other words, when it comes to world news, Chinese prominence power actually depends on the US.

One reason for this decline in China's news prominence is its high importance to the US (Fukuyama, 2008). In fact, our findings show that China is the most prominent foreign country in American news (see also Peng, 2004). Hence, its prominence power around the world was buttressed by the attention given to it by the US. Another possible reason is the fact that China was mentioned frequently with the US in the same news stories. Thus, it could be that paradoxically, China's presumed competition with the US over world news attention can explain part of its decreased standing when stories about America are eliminated. After all, by removing America we also remove the story of US-China competition.

These findings can thus help put previous claims regarding the economic decline of US hegemony (for example, Khanna, 2008; Mahbubani, 2008) into perspective. To the extent that this discourse relates to the economic competition of the US and China, it gives them both a measure of worldwide attention and prominence power. Moreover, since much of this attention came from American news, it actually supports the claims of Ross (2011) and Ikenberry (2011) that any rise of regional centers is enabled by US led world order which includes, among other aspects, an American inspired media environment.

One explanation for the continuous and unmatched US news prominence would be the leading role it plays in the production and dissemination of international news, or what Barnett and Douvall (2005) considered as institutional and productive power. When it comes to international news on the web, Paterson (2005, 2007) found that global news agencies such as AP are still and by far the most dominant sources. They set the agenda for other national news sites and their readership. Paterson further believes that this trend is being intensified on the internet where there are less human mediators and editors for flow of international news. The prominence of certain countries in the news has been further linked to the structure of international news agencies. As noted, Wu (2000, 2003) found that apart from bilateral trade, the presence of news agencies is the second most significant factor in explaining why certain countries are mentioned more than others.

In line with these observations, the very high prominence of the US in world news can be related in part to its long-standing institutional lead in the structure of global news flow. In this sense, our findings substantiate the 1970s concerns regarding the asymmetry of international news flow (MacBride, 1980; Mowlana, 1985; Nordenstreng and Varis, 1974; Schramm, 1964). In line with Paterson's (2005, 2007) argument, our findings provide clear evidence against the supposed "leveling" nature of the internet and its ability to flatten our hierarchical perception of world (see also Segev, Sheaffer, and Shenhav, 2013).

When turning from the standing of the US in overall product of online world news to its composite content areas, the story becomes more complex. The decline of American

prominence in business news over the past three years proved to be the most marked finding. Since the economy is widely thought of as a leading indicator of hard power, perhaps even the bedrock of hegemony (for example, Kennedy, 1987), one may think that decline in US mentions in business news around the world may reflect an overall decline in its hard power. However, contextualizing the trend in business news may significantly modify this conclusion. This present study covered the period from the depth of America's 2008 financial crisis to its initial recovery. The crisis drew tremendous world attention, as did the measures of the early Obama administration to stem the tide. It would thus appear that the significant decline in US mentions in the business news sections from around the world reflects the process of recovery of the world's largest economy, and the decline in the world's anxiety about the fate of the hegemon's economy. In other words, the decline in the prominence of America's economy most probably indicates the restoration of its hard economic power.

Moreover, the ripples of the American crisis seized Europe and other regions only in a second phase of the crisis, which took place after the news mining for this project commenced. Greater attention to the ailing economies of Europe would come at the expense of other world business news. Hence, a relative decline in mentions of America in business news could be expected. This explanation for America's decline in prominence in business news once again points to stability or ascendance rather than to decline. As noted, decline in prominence power does not always reflect decline in the hard or the soft power of a country. In fact, decline in negative attention, as in the case of the US recovery from its 2008 economic crisis, reflects an increase in its hard power, and further contributes to its attractiveness and its soft power.

Among news categories, America's prominence in technology news is the most marked. Technology, more than entertainment and top-news, is a highly globalized, practically universal field, and thus the potential local bias is far lesser. But further, the broad recognition of America's leadership in technology is highly relevant to its hard power (Nye, 2011) as much as to its prominence power. Today, technology underpins military prowess as never before (van Creveld 1991, 2008). New technologies are particularly relevant to expanding the reach of surveillance and intelligence on the one hand, and of weapons and military deployment on the other. Thus, the perceived leadership of the US in technology can invoke and reflect recognition of its hard military power. At the same time, the role of technological products and services in world economy has risen steadily. America's leadership in this sector thus reflects its economic ascendancy and holds the promise of continued "hard" economic dominance.

But at least as important, over the past generation communication and information technologies have dominated technological development worldwide, and have served as the leading sector in global economic development (Blondheim, 2006). These technologies also happen to be the foundations of news and knowledge systems. With the ever-growing power of global corporations such as Apple, Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and Twitter, America shapes the tools through which the world thinks, creates, knows, and inevitably assigns prominences. Continued dominance in shaping the medium, we suggest, can serve as a most powerful message in the consciousness industry (McLuhan, 1964), which affects all three faces of power, but primarily the competition for prominence.

Caveats and Conclusion

Towards concluding, it is important to note the limitations of the present study. Firstly, a period of three-years of news coverage is insufficient for uncovering meaningful long-term trends in the news prominence of the US around the world. Secondly, although the news sites in our study cover important media centers in North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, there is no representation for Latin-America and African news sources nor of Indian news. Future studies should take into account media hubs in those regions as well. Finally, our study focused on online news, and there is room to apply similar methods for other media, and particularly television, which remains a dominant source of news consumption.²

Notwithstanding these limitations, our findings clearly demonstrate the general trends in some of the most influential news hubs around the world. America's relative position in the world's political, economic, and military power equation may be in decline as some authors argue. But when it comes to international news attention, or what we call "prominence power", it is still far from showing signs of decline. The US remains the center of world attention. This current primacy of the US seems to reflect its hard and soft power, founded on its political, economic and technological lead. At the same time, being at the center of international agenda the US continues to be perceived as the most important and influential country around the world.

² For example, the recent cross-national survey of television news channels in 17 countries (Wilke, Heimprecht, & Cohen, 2012) shows remarkably similar figures when it comes to the prominence of the US around the world.

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Table 1

Countries and news sites included in the study

Country	News sites
USA	CNN, NYTimes, Google News
UK	BBC, Guardian, Google News
Israel	Ynet, Haaretz , Google News
Germany	Bild, Spiegel, Google News
France	Le Monde, Le Figaro, Google News
Spain	El Mundo, El Pais, Google News
Russia	Gazeta, Pravda, Google News
Arabic	Al Jazeera, Google News
Egypt	Al Ahram, Al Masry Alyoum
Iran	PressTV, Tabnak, Aftab
China	Sina, People Daily, Google News
Japan	NHK, Yomiuri, Yahoo, Google News

Table 2
Top ten prominent countries by news topic

Top News (%)		World News (%)		Business News (%)		Entertainment (%)		Technology (%)	
USA	14.5	USA	18.2	USA	16.2	USA	14.8	USA	22.9
Israel	5	France	6.7	China	7.3	UK	5.6	China	7
China	4.2	Iran	6.4	Greece	5.9	France	4	UK	4.8
Iran	3.9	Israel	6.1	Germany	3.9	Lebanon	3.5	Egypt	4.3
UK	3.3	China	5.3	Egypt	3.8	Syria	3.4	Japan	4.1
Japan	2.9	UK	5	Japan	3.8	Egypt	2.8	Germany	2.8
Egypt	2.8	Russia	4.6	France	3.4	Germany	2.7	France	2.5
France	2.8	Afghanistan	4.6	UK	3.2	Japan	2.3	Russia	2.5
Afghanistan	2.5	Japan	3.5	Russia	2.9	China	2.1	India	2.4
Iraq	2.5	Syria	3.3	India	2.1	India	1.7	Australia	1.7

Table 3

The impact of US outlets and US-related news items on the news prominence of other countries

	Prominence including US sources and mentions (n=444,898)	Prominence excluding US sources and mentions (n=332,478)	Difference	Z-Test	p-value
Afghanistan	2.5%	2.1%	0.4%	11.35	0.01
Iran	3.8%	3.5%	0.3%	7.59	0.01
China	5.0%	4.7%	0.3%	6.05	0.01
Iraq	2.5%	2.2%	0.3%	8.38	0.01
Pakistan	1.9%	1.6%	0.3%	9.09	0.01
Mexico	0.9%	0.7%	0.2%	10.19	0.01
North Korea	1.8%	1.7%	0.1%	3.93	0.01
Canada	0.6%	0.5%	0.1%	6.04	0.01
Myanmar	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	8.72	0.01
Cuba	0.5%	0.4%	0.1%	4.62	0.01
Yemen	1.0%	0.9%	0.1%	2.95	0.01
Austria	0.4%	0.4%	-0.1%	4.22	0.01
Tunisia	0.7%	0.8%	-0.1%	3.57	0.01
Qatar	0.5%	0.6%	-0.1%	4.37	0.01
South Korea	1.7%	1.8%	-0.1%	2.63	0.01
Chile	0.6%	0.7%	-0.1%	4.75	0.01
Belgium	0.6%	0.7%	-0.1%	5.11	0.01
Portugal	0.6%	0.7%	-0.1%	5.27	0.01
Israel	4.4%	4.5%	-0.1%	2.06	0.05
Jordan	0.9%	1.0%	-0.1%	4.97	0.01
Ukraine	0.7%	0.8%	-0.1%	5.65	0.01
Ireland	0.9%	1.0%	-0.1%	5.18	0.01
Sudan	1.3%	1.4%	-0.1%	4.49	0.01
Spain	1.2%	1.3%	-0.1%	4.72	0.01
Turkey	1.3%	1.5%	-0.1%	4.87	0.01
Lebanon	1.2%	1.3%	-0.1%	5.39	0.01
UK	4.3%	4.4%	-0.1%	3.05	0.01
Germany	3.0%	3.1%	-0.2%	3.82	0.01
Thailand	0.9%	1.1%	-0.2%	7.82	0.01
France	4.0%	4.2%	-0.2%	4.89	0.01
Italy	1.7%	1.9%	-0.3%	8.15	0.01
Greece	1.9%	2.2%	-0.3%	8.96	0.01
Egypt	3.3%	3.6%	-0.4%	8.38	0.01

Figure captions

Figure 1. *News prominence of the top 20 countries*

Figure 2. *Trends of US mentions in news sites around the world*

Figure 3. *Average trends of US mentions in different news topics*

Figure 4. *Average trends of the news prominence of BRIC countries*