

MEDIA IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

PRIMER QUESTIONS

1. How common is it to see foreign newspapers in the country where you are living? From what countries does the newspaper content tend to originate? Do these countries border your country? Do these countries share the same language as your country?
2. How common is it to hear foreign radio content—either individual songs or radio stations—in the country where you are living? From what countries does the radio content tend to originate? Do these countries border your country? Do these countries share the same language as your country?
3. How common is it to see foreign television content—either individual programs or television channels—in the country where you are living? From what countries does the television content tend to originate? Do these countries border your country? Do these countries share the same language as your country?
4. How common is it for domestic media content based in the country in which you are living to focus on foreign countries?
5. What are some factors that influence whether a country imports media content from other countries? What are some factors that influence whether a country exports media content to other countries? What are some consequences for countries that do not import very much foreign media content?

Think about how many foreign newspapers, foreign radio programs, foreign television shows, and foreign web sites are available in the country in which you are living. Some countries are big media importers—that is, they receive a lot of media content that originates from other countries. Other countries are small media importers—that is, they do not receive very much media content from other countries. Now think about whether the foreign media content that is accessible in your country generally tends to be more prevalent in newspapers, radio programming, or television programming. Some countries receive a broad range of media—newspapers, radio, television, internet, and film—from other countries. Other countries receive only selected media outlets—such as television and internet—from other countries. But as Jeremy Tunstall discussed in *The Media Are American*, almost all countries across the world receive lots of media imports from the USA. To put it another way, the USA is by far the most prolific media exporter in the world.

Speaking of exports, think about the types of media content that leave your country and end up in other countries. Now think about the main countries where that exported media content goes. And then

think about the images of your country that are represented in the content being exported. As I discuss in “Images of the US as Perceived by US Students in France,” a chapter in *Images of the U.S. Around the World* (1999, edited by Yahya Kamalipour), media content that leaves one country and arrives in other countries serves as a kind of ambassador for the originating country. That is, the exported media content rhetorically invites people in other countries who are exposed to the content to gain impressions about your country—what the people look like, how people act in certain situations, what issues people consider as important or unimportant, and so on. In essence, exported media content encourages foreign audiences—particularly people with little direct experience in the exporting country—to gain some fairly definitive first impression about the culture of the originating country.

In Chapter 3, media imports and exports were likened to the seeds on a tree. When seeds fall from a tree, they have the chance to spring up in other locations. Because of wind, birds, and other passersby, seeds get transported away from the tree—sometimes far away. If the short-term environmental conditions are favorable in the new location, the seed may then germinate. If the long-term conditions are favorable, the seed may grow into a tree (or a full-fledged media system). However, if the environmental conditions are adverse to what the seed requires, then the seed’s existence may be short-lived. Similarly, media content is carried away to locations far away from the media system that originated the content. If the conditions are favorable in the new location, the content may grow into its own full-fledged media system cultivated by local cultural characteristics, philosophies for media operations, regulation, financing, and accessibility.

Moreover, trees that undergo a regular interchange with their immediate and distant environments generally tend to flourish compared to trees that live in insulated environments. Similarly, media systems that do not experience interchange with media systems from other environments are susceptible to stagnancy because there are not enough ingredients from the outside world to keep the media system fresh. In contrast, media systems that experience regular interchange with other environments are exposed to a kind of cross-pollination of ideas, which nourishes and promotes new growth in the media system.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EXPORTING OF MEDIA CONTENT

Some media content is purposefully exported to reach targeted audiences in other countries. Other media content is sort of accidentally exported because it spills over the border from one country to another.

Newspapers are mostly exported either by printing the papers at printing plants abroad or by physically transporting the papers via airplanes, trucks, trains, cars, and bicycles—expensive processes that are not usually undertaken unless there is a large enough readership that awaits the delivered newspapers. Plus, because newspapers have to travel a long distance, by the time they arrive, the news they carry may be relatively old. These two conditions typically lead to a pattern whereby newspaper hard copies are primarily exported to other countries mainly for expatriates or vacationing readers.

Of course, newspaper web site content is often exported anywhere there is internet access. However, it is important to make important distinctions between a hard-copy version of a newspaper and its online version. One difference is that the online version of a newspaper can have fewer or more articles than the hard copy, and can update its articles several times a day, whereas hard copy usually comes out once a day. Another difference is

that the reading experience for the online version involves clicking and scrolling through links and pages, whereas reading the hard copy involves turning and pulling out sections and pages. These differences warrant treating online newspapers as being fundamentally different from hard-copy newspapers when discussing imports and exports.

Radio is mostly exported by terrestrial broadcast, which for AM, FM, and medium wave is limited by distances the radio signal can cover. Shortwave radio can be picked up almost anywhere in the world, depending on weather conditions, how many other shortwave broadcasters are crowding the airwaves at the same time, and whether it is day or night. AM and FM radio can be picked up within shorter, mostly local distances from a radio transmitter. Radio content is increasingly distributed by the internet through webcasting and podcasting, where the technology is available. This set of conditions typically leads to a pattern whereby foreign radio content spills across country borders, is accessed over the internet by expatriates and vacationers, or appears as foreign songs aired on a home country's radio station.

Television is mostly exported by satellite and cable distribution systems. In most countries, people have either satellite or cable, so their ability to access foreign television content is determined by the selection of channels provided by the cable or satellite service provider. Usually, a domestic cable or satellite service provider will not seek to downlink a foreign channel unless a large enough audience is expected for it. Often, it is more viable for a broadcaster or cable or satellite service provider to purchase the rights to television series from foreign countries that can be delivered by a television channel already offered by the provider. This set of conditions typically leads to a pattern whereby foreign television content is exported to countries simply where there is perceived to be a strong demand for it.

The internet is exported by a range of technologies including phone lines, fiber optics, coaxial cable, and wireless satellite. Any web pages can be accessed if a user has access to the internet, basically according to whether a user has current-enough software and hardware, and an internet service provider that does not restrict the accessible content. This set of conditions leads to a pattern whereby internet content is exported to all countries, but is accessed only by people who know it is available, and who seek it out.

Ethnocentric, Exocentric, and Worldcentric Countries

The discussion on information flow in Chapter 2 introduced several reasons why some countries exchange—or do not exchange—a lot of media content with other countries. Some reasons that countries exchange media content with other countries are: They are geographically close to each other—especially countries that border a lot of other countries; they share a common language; and they have a common history with each other—for example, wars between the countries, or immigration between the countries. In essence, each country has a unique set of relations with other countries across the world which determine how robust the exchange of content between two given countries will be.

However, the exchange of media content between two countries is rarely bidirectional (going equally between two countries). As Chapter 2 discussed, some countries do not import very much foreign media content—that is, they are **ethnocentric**. Ethnocentric countries are often geographically isolated and have their own economically vibrant media

industries. Foreign media content that makes it into some ethnocentric countries often gets modified to suit the importing country's audience tastes and expectations—as when the dialogue portion of the content gets translated into the importing country's first language, or when the content structure is imitated with domestically produced content that follows the general structure of the foreign content. For example, the reality television show *Big Brother* is produced in the Netherlands (where the show originated), as well the UK, the USA, and other countries. In each country, the show uses different characters performing different tasks, but at the same time follows a similar structure—such as incorporating a big-brother voice, eliminating contestants one by one, and positioning the beds in the same room so the contestants sleep next to each other.

Other countries tend to be big importers of media content—that is, they are **exocentric**. These countries tend to be smaller countries with comparatively smaller populations. Some, but certainly not all, are economically disadvantaged and have underdeveloped domestic media industries. Often, these countries are trying to broaden their radio offerings or fill their television schedules, and it is cheaper and more feasible logistically for them to do so with imported media content. Exocentric countries that produce very little domestic content are susceptible to patterns of cultural imperialism discussed in Chapter 2 on Globalization.

Still other countries tend to be both big exporters of media content and big importers of media content—that is, they are **worldcentric**. These countries tend to be smaller but have vibrant domestic media industries, and are in close proximity to multiple countries that have their own vibrant media industries. Some worldcentric countries have populations of people who speak multiple languages, and are therefore more interested in foreign media content. Other worldcentric countries are former imperial countries that have histories of trade with many foreign countries. Still other worldcentric countries bring in foreign media content—particularly television content—because it is cheaper than domestically produced content.

From a rhetorical perspective, the extent to which a country imports media content and exports media content has profound implications for the country's media system and for many of the people who live in the country. Worldcentric and exocentric countries that import a lot of media content tend to have a more open—one could say organic—media system. An organic media system is one that thrives on an exchange of ideas with other media systems. Because people in these kinds of countries have access to a lot of imported media, they often are led to access a wide array of ideas coming from other parts of the world. Consequently, people who live in more worldcentric and exocentric countries are invited to become aware of how their perceptions are influenced by the country in which they live, because those perceptions are juxtaposed with perceptions of other countries as represented in imported media content. In essence, people who live in countries that import a lot of media content have a broader and more tangible conception of the world.

In contrast, ethnocentric countries that import little media content have a more closed—one could say sterile—media system. People who live in ethnocentric countries who do not make a deliberate effort to access foreign media, or who do not travel to other countries, or who do not interact with people from other countries, tend to be exposed on a regular basis to parochial ideas—that is, ideas that circulate mainly within a localized range, ideas that have a narrow range of differences or innovation, and ideas that focus mainly on the given country. Thus, some people who live in ethnocentric countries have a more difficult time conceptualizing the world as a whole or as a tangible entity. Sometimes

people in ethnocentric countries tend to conceptualize the world as a two-part entity consisting of the home country versus the rest of the world. This very basic and somewhat primitive outlook in turn can bring on cultural myopia (discussed in Chapter 1), in which a person's conception of the foreground of the home country is clear, whereas the background of the rest of the world is blurry. Viewed through cultural myopia, certain dimensions of the home country ironically remain hidden because the home country takes on a greater proportion in size and importance than it actually has in relation to the size and importance of other countries in the world. Such a conceptual blur shows up when people talk about a foreign country in ways that stereotype an entire region. A hypothetical example is when a person who is talking about Holland is joined by another person who comments falsely that prostitution is legal "over there in Europe" (thereby conceptualizing Holland as representative of all countries in Europe). Use of the phrase *over there* in this kind of context usually indicates that a person conceives of foreign countries as a vast, indefinable perceptual space that can only be conceptualized as "not here." It is as if only the home country has definition and realism, but beyond its borders lies a big perceptual blank.

FRANCE'S MEDIA IMPORTS

Newspaper Imports into France

In almost all parts of France—not just Paris—it is common to see foreign newspapers sold in the *bureau du tabac* with the yellow diamond outside (see Figure 8.1). Most foreign newspapers are from other European countries (mainly border countries), but newspapers from Arab countries and the USA are also sold. Imported newspapers that can be found fairly easily across France include: Germany's *Die Welt* (the *World*), *Frankfurter Rundschau* (*Frankfurter Review*), and *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (*Frankfurter General*); Holland's *Volksrant* (the *Paper of the People*); the UK's *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *Times* (London), *Express*, and *Sun*; the USA's *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal Europe*, and *International-Herald Tribune* (published by the *New York Times* but distributed outside of the USA in Paris and other European cities); and Spain's *El Pais* (*The Nation*). In terms of foreign newswires that are cited in newspaper reports, is somewhat common to see AP and Reuters (from the UK) attributed.

Radio Imports into France

Along the borders of France, it is easy to hear radio stations from neighboring countries. It is possible to listen to English-speaking radio stations from the UK on the west coastline of France. On French radio, it is very common to hear English-speaking songs, even considering the quota system required by CSA regulations (see Chapter 6). Both USA and UK songs can usually be heard a few times an hour. It is also somewhat common to hear Arab music in the south of France and in Paris on stations formatted with Arabic music. Another kind of radio import that can be heard in France, as well as in other countries around the world, is the USA-based formula for commercial radio with fast-talking deejays cracking jokes, playing songs, and running contests for prizes.

found include: the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, the *Times*, the *Financial Times*, and to a lesser extent the *Independent*. The tabloids that are commonly found include: the *Daily Mail*, the *Sun*, and the *Mirror*. In addition, all the national daily newspapers and many regional and local newspapers have web sites.

Radio Exports from the UK

Domestic UK radio is difficult to find outside of the UK, except where France borders the English Channel (also known as the French Sleeve). In contrast, the international *BBC World Service* can be accessed by terrestrial or short wave in even remote areas of most regions of the world, including Latin America, Asia, Africa, North America, and the Caribbean. In addition, many UK radio stations—including the BBC channels as well as private stations—can be listened to on the web. Also, many pop songs by UK-based artists can be heard on radio stations in countries across the world.

Television Exports from the UK

UK television programs and films can be found in many parts of the world. In former UK colonies, many genres of UK television shows from both the public television channels and the commercial channels can be seen, including dramas, comedies, documentaries, television films, cinema films, and children's shows. The BBC's exported satellite channel is often included in the listings of other countries cable/satellite offerings, and typically airs "classic" sitcoms, dramas, soap operas—many of which may be up to twenty years old—as well as news. In developing countries, BBC series and programs are commonly aired by commercial television broadcasters. In the USA, BBC series appear frequently on the PBS television network, and sometimes are aired on cable/satellite channels. To a lesser extent, television series from commercial UK television broadcasters can be seen on cable/satellite channels in the USA. Also, UK actors often have parts on USA television shows.

THE USA'S MEDIA IMPORTS

Newspaper Imports into the USA

In most parts of the USA, it is very difficult to find foreign newspapers at convenience stores or even regular newsagents. Canadian and Mexican newspapers can be found at towns only very close to the border of either Canada or México. Some foreign newspapers can be found at sparsely located big-city newsagents specializing in foreign newspapers and magazines, at big-city hotels where foreign visitors frequently stay, or at newsagents in first- and second-generation ethnic communities. These newspapers generally include the UK's *Daily Mail*; Canada's *Globe and Mail*; México's *El Universal*, *Reforma*, and *La Prensa*; and France's *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. Some small-town newsagents carry an international edition of the UK's *Financial Times*. In addition, domestic Spanish-language newspapers are usually available in ethnic communities with concentrated populations of Spanish speakers primarily from México, but also from Caribbean islands, Central American countries, and to a lesser extent South American countries. Examples include *El Diario la Prensa* in New York

City; *El Nuevo Herald* from Miami, Florida; and *La Opinion* from Los Angeles, California. However, even considering these examples, the vast majority of the USA has little or no access to foreign newspapers. In terms of newswires, it is rare to see Reuters, the AFP, or other foreign newswires cited in stories in most newspapers in the USA (the *New York Times* tends to be an exception). In big-city newspapers, Reuters and AFP are occasionally attributed for photographs accompanying international stories.

Radio Imports into the USA

There is not much imported radio content in the USA. On the northern border of the USA, Canadian radio content is fairly common to hear, and along the southern border, Mexican radio content is fairly easy to pick up. Along the eastern and southern coast of Florida, Cuban radio can be tuned in. And throughout the USA in communities with high concentrations of Spanish-speaking inhabitants, Latino radio (radio from Spanish-speaking countries in Central America, South America, and islands in the Caribbean) is available. In addition, foreign musicians (mainly from the UK and sometimes from Canada) are commonly heard on the radio. Other radio content that is regularly imported and distributed widely is found in BBC World Service news reports carried on NPR. But even considering the imports mentioned here, the vast majority of content that airs on USA radio is home-produced programming.

Television Imports into the USA

It is quite rare to see terrestrial television imported from other countries in the USA. (see Table 9.3). There are many reasons for this, but two important interlocking ones are that (1) large enough audiences have not yet developed a taste for foreign television content, and (2) the general audience has not been exposed to many foreign television channels to see what kind of content exists on a worldwide or even regional scale. Thus, most media suppliers, including television cable and satellite service providers, supply USA-based content to a USA-based audience.

Still, there are isolated examples of foreign content made available on terrestrial television in the USA. Some classic UK comedies and documentaries from the BBC are aired on PBS stations or on more educationally inclined cable channels such as *The Learning Channel (TLC)*, or *C-Span*. Similarly, some Canadian news programs and comedies, usually produced by the public-service Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC), are aired on PBS stations. In addition, there are many actors and some reporters from the UK and Canada who have roles in television content. Plus, some television stations located in Spanish-language communities air Spanish-language news and telenovelas in conjunction with English-language programs. Also, some television stations affiliated with Azteca from México, which are located in cities with large Spanish-speaking communities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Reno (Nevada), and Houston (Texas), exclusively carry Spanish-language programs including news, entertainment, sports, and telenovelas.

In the USA typical listings of basic cable/satellite channels include very few foreign channels or even channels with foreign programming. Typically, there are only two bonafide foreign channels that are commonly found in the basic cable/satellite channel listings: *Telemundo*, based in México, and *BBC America*, based in the UK. Additionally there is usually one quasi-foreign channel: Spanish-language *Univision*, based in the USA. Foreign channels

can be accessed, but usually only as part of a premium cable or satellite package. These channels tend to be from countries in the Middle East and Asia. European channels in general are not easy to access by cable or satellite. In upgraded cable and satellite packages, it is possible to receive some foreign channels such as the *BBC* and *Sky Sports* (UK), *Deutsche Welle* (Germany), *France 2*, *RAI International* (Italy), *NHK* (Japan), *CBC* (Canada), *Jadeworld* and *CCTV-9* (China), *Star Plus* (Southeast Asia), *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), and *Future TV* (Lebanon).

Content Internal to the USA That Focuses on the Outside World

Hardly any USA content focuses on the outside world. Newspapers tend to be the medium with the most foreign content. Big-city newspapers—especially the prestige press identified in Chapter 9—regularly cover foreign news; small-town newspapers may have a one-page column that lists headlines and one- or two-paragraph stories on a few countries around the world. But on radio and television, content focuses mostly on the USA. Occasionally, a reality program—such as *Survivor*—will take place in a foreign, usually exotic country. Sometimes a film will show scenes in a foreign country. Many cable-television travel programs focus on leisure destinations, many of which are to the south or in the Caribbean. Some radio news (particularly NPR) and some television news cover events in foreign countries if the events have implications for the USA. But in most cases, these are USA shows with USA actors and presenters.

MEDIA EXPORTS FROM THE USA

Newspaper Exports from the USA

A couple of USA newspapers are fairly easy to find in many parts of the world, including European countries, border towns and big cities in Canada, a few border cities in México, and some big cities across Asia and South America. These newspapers are *USA Today* and geographical editions of the *Wall Street Journal*. In addition, the *International Herald-Tribune*, carrying mainly *New York Times* stories, is widely available in Europe.

Radio Exports from the USA

USA radio forms are widely exported across the world. Domestic USA radio is easy to find in México and in Canada along their borders. Commercial USA radio station programming is also commonly heard on radio stations in the Caribbean islands. On a larger scale, US International Broadcasting Services—funded by the USA government—airs radio programs in countries around the world that are adjacent to other countries considered to be oppressive. The overall purpose of the US International Broadcasting Services is to advance USA ideals of democracy and freedom. The services include *Voice of America* (originally aimed at Nazi Germany), Radio Free Europe (originally aimed at Poland, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria), Radio Liberty (originally aimed at the Soviet Union), Radio Marti (aimed at Cuba), and Radio Free Asia (aimed at Burma, Cambodia, China, North Korea, Laos, and Tibet). In addition, another radio export is Armed Forces Radio and Television (AFRTS), which is broadcast to areas surrounding

USA military bases located in other countries. The radio content often consists of news, health programs, country music, and business news. Most of this content is obtained secondhand from other media sources including CNN and ABC. Outside of the regions mentioned, it is not easy to find terrestrial USA radio stations in other countries. However, the USA contemporary commercial-radio model—described earlier as consisting essentially of a narrow program format, fast-talking deejays, heavy advertising, and regular contests and prizes—has caught on in many countries across the world. In addition, USA pop songs are regularly heard on radio in Europe, Africa, South America, and, to a lesser extent, Asia.

Television Exports from the USA

USA television programs can be found in almost all parts of the world. The genres that can be seen regularly are many: films, westerns, sitcoms, dramas, crime mysteries, talk shows, cartoons, sports, music videos, and many more. The series that are exported cover the 1950s all the way through the current season. However, most of these genres are exported as series from a previous television season, or as episodes that have aired in the USA a few weeks earlier. In addition, as mentioned before, AFRTS broadcasts television programs to areas surrounding USA military bases located in other countries. Content typically includes cartoons, news, sports, talk shows, and reality programs usually obtained secondhand from USA commercial television networks. Also, it is important to note the tremendous worldwide reach of USA (primarily Hollywood) films, which are regularly shown in cinemas in big cities and midsize towns across the world. Typically, these films have been released in the USA three months to one year earlier.

MÉXICO'S MEDIA IMPORTS

Newspaper Imports into México

In most parts of México, it is difficult to find any foreign newspapers. A very limited selection of European and USA newspapers generally is found only at towns very close to airports, pricier hotels catering to foreign tourists, and in towns along the border to the USA. The foreign newspapers that may be found include the *Financial Times* and the *Times* from the UK, the *New York Times* from the USA, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* from France, and *El País* from Spain. In large cities such as México City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey, the English-language newspaper the *Herald*—the international edition of the *Miami Herald* based in the USA—can generally be found at newsstands. However, the vast majority of México has little or no access to foreign newspapers in hard-copy form. In some regional Mexican newspapers such as *El Sol*, comic strips from the USA (for example, Hagar the Horrible and Archie) are translated into Spanish. In terms of newswires, it is about as common to see the state-owned Notimex news agency attributed as it is to see AP, Reuters, and AFP attributed. Sometimes, these foreign newswires are attributed jointly with the Mexican Editorial Organization (OEM), as in the attribution OEM-AP. It is also somewhat common to see USA-based reporters and newspapers credited in stories. These stories typically are written for USA newspapers, and then translated into Spanish for Mexican national daily newspapers.