

Sports put Canada on TV agenda

International television coverage focuses on sports and health

Research Links:
www.canada.gc.ca
www.canada.com
www.statcan.ca
www.collectionscanada.ca

A stereotypical portrayal of Canada might include elements such as the maple leaf, the mounted police ('Mounties'), snow or perhaps even a character from the popular animated television series South Park. However, **Media Tenor's** research into the portrayal of Canada on international television news between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2003 shows the country's image came to be 'framed' largely by two global health scares – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Mad Cow Disease – and its seemingly inextricable link to the world of sports.

An analysis of 382,033 reports on U.S.-American, British, German and South African television news over a three-year period shows that, overall, Canada received marginal coverage. It was perceived mainly in sporting terms by S.A., U.K. and German news. On U.S. television news, health issues dominated the coverage. Fears that either one of the epidemics could affect the U.S. population were heightened in the media, particularly during the months of April and May, when Canadian health authorities were confronted with both diseases.

In all the media analyzed, Canada received proportionally the most coverage on U.S. television

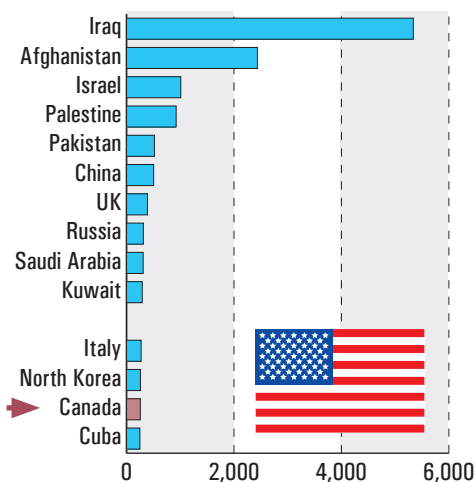
news, with 257 reports (0.43% of the coverage). This is slightly more than Cuba (249 reports) and slightly less than North Korea (259 reports), despite the fact that Canada is one of the U.S.' major trade partners and shares a telephone network with the U.S. Canada received 164 reports (0.17%), 128 reports (0.2%) and 535 reports (0.325%) on SA, U.K. and German television news respectively.

Canada has produced many great sportsmen and women, and it is in this sporting tradition that the analyzed media has come to portray the country. In U.S. television news, health was the most frequently covered issue (35% or 92 out of 223 reports). Sports gained 39% of the coverage in S.A. television news reporting on Canada, while the same topic received 36% in the U.K. and an overwhelming 53% in Germany. The sports that received the most coverage generally were athletics and cycling.

Interestingly, sports play only a very minor role in the U.S. coverage of Canada with only 1.9% (5 reports). There tended to be more of a focus on society, the environment, crime and foreign affairs.

A look into the major topics of the coverage of Canadian residents as protagonists also reveals health to be the leading issue. Almost one in two reports in the analyzed media had to do with health – an indication of the extent to which SARS and Mad Cow Disease (BSE) dominated the news agenda. In terms of how the media rated

Canada somewhere between Cuba and North Korea?

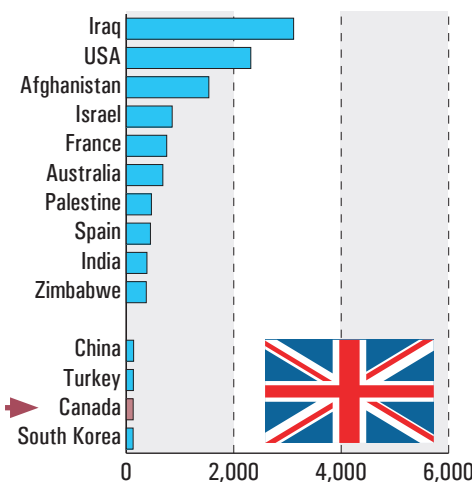


Foreign news coverage in US TV news: Number of stories

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2001 – 12/31/2003

Basis: 58,987 news stories
in 3 US TV news programmes

"Post-Colonial" priorities shifting from Canada to Zimbabwe



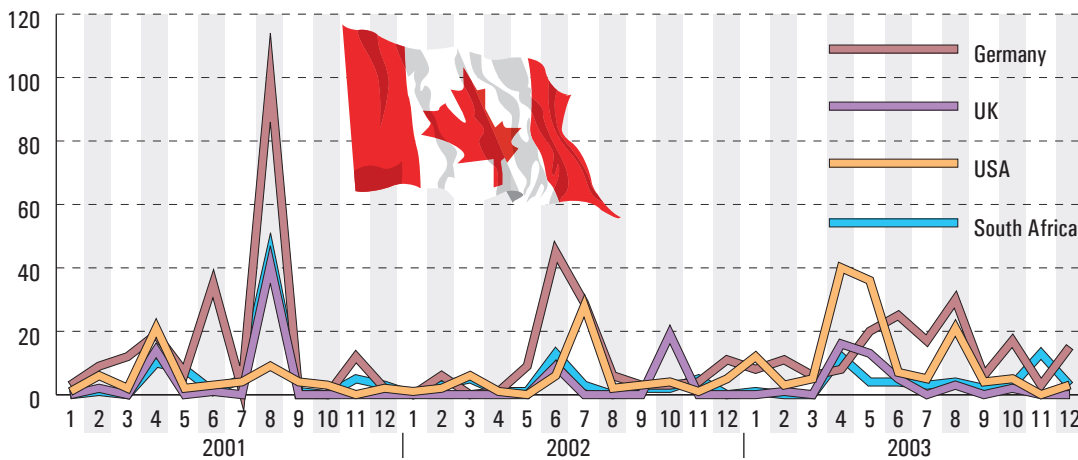
Foreign news coverage in UK TV news: Number of stories

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2001 – 12/31/2003

Basis: 63,433 news stories
in 4 British TV news programmes

An analysis of 382,033 reports on American, British, German and South African television news over a three-year period shows that, overall, Canada received marginal coverage.

World Athletics in Edmonton cause spike in German coverage



Number of stories on Canada in German, British, American and South African TV news

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2001 – 12/31/2003

Basis: 1,030 news stories on Canada in 3 US, 4 British, 5 SA and 7 German TV news programmes

these health matters. It is no surprise that they were covered in an overall negative tone; at one point last year, the U.S. banned the import of beef from Canada due to BSE, while in the latter country 38 people died after being infected with the SARS virus – the worst outside Asia.

This picture changes slightly when Canadians in general (including those not in Canada) are taken into account. In the case of German television (142 reports in all), the focus shifts from health (though it is still the second-most covered topic) to a more general focus on celebrities. In SA,

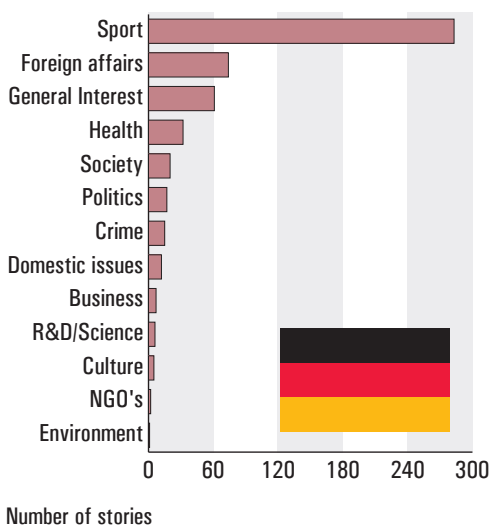
sports (14 out of 57 reports or 24.6%) was covered slightly more often than health and foreign affairs (both 22.8%).

Even with the double health disaster of 2003, Canada remains a country with a low profile in international television news. The question is whether the coverage of SARS and Mad Cow Disease will have some impact on future perceptions of the country. In all likelihood, the image of the maple leaf or Celine Dion will prevail for better or worse. gr

Canada has produced many great sportsmen and women, and it is in this sporting tradition that the analysed media has come to portray the country.

US TV news: Canada somewhere between Cuba and North Korea

Topical Structure: Sport main issue on German television



Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2001 – 12/31/2003

Basis: 535 stories on Canada in 7 German TV news programmes

Basis

Media: UK: BBC News at Six, BBC News at Ten, ITV News, ITV News at Ten;
US: NBC Nightly News, ABC World News Tonight, CBC Evening News;
SA: SABC Africaans News, English News, Sotho News and Zulu/Xhosa News, E-TV News;
Germany: ARD Tagesschau and Tagesthemen, ZDF Heute and Heute Journal, RTL Aktuell, Sat.1 18:30, ProSieben Nachrichten-Time: 01/ 01/ 2002 – 12/ 31/ 2003

Analysis: 382,033 news stories overall in 19 international TV news programmes; 1,030 news stories mainly referring to Canada

Open questions:

Why does the "War of Oil"- debate not lead to more reports on Canada - as the United States receive more oil from Canada than Saudi Arabia?

What was Canada's stand in the fight against terrorism?