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# Portrayal of Canada in the Dutch Print Media

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*Abstract:* This article is devoted to the nature of recent news coverage of Canada in the on-line versions of eight Dutch newspapers. The research literature points to five recurrent frames in news reporting: conflict, human interest, economic impact, morality, and responsibility. Our central research question concerned the nature of recent news reporting on Canada in Dutch newspapers in terms of amount of coverage and themes dealt with—and whether this news reflects the news frames. Two periods of study included eight weeks of routine reporting early in 2001 and two event-driven crisis months starting with September 11. In-depth interviews were also conducted with media makers and experts on Canada regarding their perception of the overall quality of the Dutch news reporting on Canada.

*Résumé :* Cet article porte sur la manière dont les versions en ligne de huit journaux néerlandais ont couvert le Canada récemment. La littérature de recherche indique cinq « frames » récurrents dans la couverture de nouvelles : conflit, dimension humaine, impact économique, moralité, et responsabilité. Notre question de recherche concerne des reportages récents sur le Canada dans des journaux néerlandais par rapport au nombre de reportages et aux thèmes soulevés, ainsi qu'aux cinq « frames » mentionnés ci-dessus. Deux périodes d'étude comprennent huit semaines de reportage routinier au début de l'an 2001 et deux mois de crises provoquées par les événements suivant le 11 septembre. Des entrevues en profondeur ont été menées auprès de professionnels des médias et d'experts sur le Canada pour apprendre comment ils perçoivent la qualité générale des reportages néerlandais sur le Canada.

*Keywords:* Content analysis; Frame analysis; Newspapers; Print culture/journalism

## **International news production and attention to Canada**

Foreign news coverage affects people's perception of foreign countries. However, only a small portion of international news gets through the media gatekeepers. The flow of international news has been one of the most highly researched areas in mass communication. But how well do the media cover international news? A

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great deal of research criticizes the performance of foreign correspondents: their lack of background knowledge, the limitations of their cultural and social background (mostly male, middle class, politically and culturally Westernized), the limited time devoted to the topic on which they are supposed to give an in-depth report, and so forth. Another research finding is that the media usually limit coverage of international news to events involving natural disasters, scandals, and major conflicts. According to the relevant literature, the elements of timeliness, prominence, proximity, emotional value, conflict, and topicality are among news values that make an event more likely to become part of the news agenda. In order to investigate the nature of Dutch news reporting as it concerns Canada, we analyzed 164 newspaper articles and interviewed eight Canadian specialists and eight newspaper reporters about their views on the quality of the Dutch news in this regard.

Why this interest in foreign news coverage of Canada? One reason is that Canada (middling world power, member of the G-8, and a signatory to NAFTA, one of the Circumpolar States—and uncomfortable bedfellow with the world's largest and most aggressive economy) shares a large and heavily populated border zone with the United States. Yet despite these circumstances and the obvious cultural and economic ties between Canada and Europe, a consistent research finding is that European news coverage of Canada has habitually been quite poor (d'Haenens, 1998, 2000). Exceptions to this rule were articles and news items about—in chronological order—the 1970 constitutional crisis and the resulting wave of terrorism by the *Front de libération du Québec*, the Meech Lake fiasco (1990), and the referendum on the Charlottetown accord (1992). Other headlines in the foreign news were the Oka crisis (summer of 1992), the federal elections (November 1993) in which the Conservatives suffered a smashing defeat (and the Liberals a country-wide landslide as a result), and the referendums concerning the separation of Québec. Background articles often see Canada mentioned in context as an example of far-reaching political decentralization and as an officially bilingual country with a multicultural policy. Other recurring themes are the debate on the right of self-government for the Inuit and the Indians, and more recently, Canada's firm stance against land mines.

What about ties between Canada and the Netherlands, which promote such interest in coverage of Canada in the Dutch print media? In 2003, Pier 21 in Halifax will celebrate its 75th year of existence. Pier 21 is the point where more than one million immigrants arrived by ship to start a new life. Among them were 184,000 Dutch immigrants of different backgrounds. For several decades following World War II, the Canadian federal government actively recruited “preferred” immigrants such as the Dutch. Canadians thought of the Dutch as hard-working people whose religious and political beliefs as well as social and cultural values were similar to those of the dominant English group. The Dutch assimilated quickly and provided a ready labour source for Canada's agricultural and industrial activities. Between 1947 and 1970, nearly 185,000 Dutch immigrants entered Canada in an attempt to flee the crowded and war-devastated homeland

and to find a better life, which made them the third largest group of immigrants to Canada in that period.

Nowadays, immigrants from the Netherlands constitute a substantial proportion of the immigrant population living in Canada: almost one million persons of Dutch descent live in Canada. The majority lives in Ontario, followed by British Columbia and the Maritimes. In recent years, relatively few people have immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands. An average of only about 600 people born in the Netherlands immigrated to Canada each year between 1983 and 1994, representing less than 1% of all immigrants in that period (see Ganzevoort, 1988). A recent such immigrant, Evert van Benthem, Dutch speed skating legend and twice winner of the “elfstedentocht” marathon, currently lives in Red Deer, Alberta—a story that has reinforced the immigration link and recently increased Canada’s prominence in the Dutch media. Nowadays, Canada is also one of the most popular faraway holiday destinations among the Dutch. In all, reasons enough to investigate the current portrayal of Canada in the Dutch print media.

### **Research question**

Our aim was to investigate both the amount and the nature of the recent news coverage of Canada in a selection of Dutch newspapers during four months in 2001: two “routine” months, from February until April, and two “crisis” months, from September 11 until October 30. For reasons of easy access, our sample consisted of the on-line versions of eight newspapers in the Dutch language: four quality national newspapers (*de Volkskrant*, *Trouw*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *het Parool*), two popular national titles (*de Telegraaf*, *Algemeen Dagblad*), and two regional newspapers (*BN/De Stem*, *Brabants Dagblad*). The Dutch newspaper market is highly competitive. Because of this market concentration and in an effort to segment the market, newspapers aim at reflecting the distinctive characteristics of their readers. Hence, regional newspapers give more prominence to major regional issues, which makes them complementary to national newspapers; popular national newspapers tend to offer more pictures, more sports, and more entertainment; and quality national newspapers provide more analysis and more background reporting.

Our central research question was: What is the nature of the news reporting on Canada in the Dutch press in terms of the number of articles and themes dealt with and in terms of how these articles are “framed”? Apart from the general trends and similarities characterizing the newspaper sample as a whole, we looked for differences between the different media outlets. We asked: How does news reporting on Canada in national quality papers such as *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* differ from that in the more popular newspapers such as *De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad*? For instance, given their quality label, we expected the former to adopt the human interest and conflict-oriented perspective to a lesser extent than the more popular and regional media outlets. Along the same lines, we expected the quality newspapers to adopt a more responsible and a more ethical approach in their coverage of Canada. We also looked for differences in the news coverage in the period before and after September 11, 2001. We sus-

pected the coverage after September 11 would become more conflict-oriented and might tend to place more emphasis on the emotional, personal side of the event. What we were interested in here was to find out how the stories were told similarly or differently during the two periods under study by the Dutch print media, or *symbol-handlers*, as Gitlin (1980, p. 7) called them. He referred to media frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion.” Additionally, in order to obtain an insiders’ perspective on the news coverage of Canada and complementary to the message analyses conducted, we carried out in-depth interviews with journalists and experts on Canada.

### **Research method**

#### **News selection**

A search for the term “Canad\*” as a central theme in the on-line newspapers’ databases, both in the lead and in the article itself, resulted in 164 articles. These articles were subjected to an analysis concerning format characteristics, news functions, and news frames.

#### **Format characteristics and news functions**

Our first analyses involved a number of descriptive variables, such as the topics and length of the articles, and the news functions of these articles. Van Cuilenburg, Scholten, and Noomen (1994) distinguish three different news functions: information, criticism, and expression. The information function involves supplying factual information. The criticism function implies that the media influence public opinion through evaluative observations. The expression function affords the public a chance to express its opinions about an issue or an individual. In newspapers, for example, this opportunity is given in forum pages or through the publication of readers’ letters to the editor. In addition, Graber (1980) distinguishes four other functions: (1) interpretation and context; (2) projection to the future and past; (3) agenda-setting; and (4) action stimulation.

With regard to interpretation and context, news events are interpreted from a given point of view or placed in a certain context. The historical perspective emphasizes historical lines and background information and uses them to make predictions about the future. In the case of agenda-setting, the tone of the article implies that more attention should be directed toward a certain topic or that it should be placed on the (political) agenda. A call to action means that the media themselves suggest the need for taking action. Finally, Iyengar (1991) looks at news reporting from a dual perspective. He distinguishes episodic news reporting, where topics are reported through concrete or specific events (e.g., the problem of the international slave trade is seen through the eyes of a victim), and thematic news reporting, where the emphasis is more on the general, abstract context of the news, the responsibility being ascribed to societal conditions rather than to concrete individuals (e.g., the underlying causes of the slave trade are explained, without reference to a particular case).

**Frame analysis**

In this article the concept of agenda-setting occupies a central position. This concept refers to three different agendas: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the political agenda. Here "agenda" could be defined as "a list of issues and events that are viewed at a point in time and ranked in a hierarchy of importance" (Rogers & Dearing, 1988, p. 565). The concept of agenda-setting assumes a causal relationship between the issues that the mass media choose to emphasize in their news coverage (media agenda) and the issues the receivers consider important (audience agenda). When media dedicate more attention to a news item, this may affect the importance the audience attaches to it. Although the media agenda is not automatically the same as the public agenda, the media have a number of means at their disposal with which to influence public opinion and with it, the public agenda. One of these tools is "news framing," defined as follows by Entman (1993, p. 52): "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."

Although it is evident that journalists can report news in different ways, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) indicate that the following five frames are frequently used: (1) the conflict frame; (2) the human interest frame; (3) the economic impact frame; (4) the morality frame; and (5) the responsibility frame. The *conflict frame* emphasizes conflicts between individuals, groups, or institutions. For instance, this frame is used during electoral campaigns, conveniently reducing complex social and political issues into bite-size "conflicts." The conflict frame is related to winning and losing. Emphasis is put on the performance and style of a party or an individual. In the *human interest frame*, emphasis is placed on the personal, emotional side of an event, issue, or problem. The personalization of an issue adds to the narrative character of the news.

Reporting news from within a human interest frame is a way to personalize, dramatize, and give emotional content to the news. Its aim is to capture and hold the audience's attention. The *economic impact frame* shows the economic impact an event, problem, or issue will have for an individual, group, institution, region, or country. The economic impact has important news value, and it is often suggested that news producers use this frame to make an issue relevant to their audiences. The *morality frame* adds a religious or moral charge to an event, problem, or issue. Because professional journalistic standards require objectivity, journalists often refer indirectly to moral perspectives, for instance by quoting someone. The *responsibility frame* presents an issue or a problem in such a way that the responsibility for causing or solving a problem is attributed to a specific agent. By way of illustration, a study by Iyengar (1991) suggests that the portrayal of "single mothers on welfare" in the American media contributed to the public's perception that these individuals are themselves to blame for their miserable position, rather than the government or the system.

In the research literature there are conflicting hypotheses on the influence of news frames on the attitudes and perceptions of the public. Some researchers believe that the news framing of political topics has no visible effect on the perceptions of the public with regard to the government or the media. Others think that news framing does have a significant impact on the public. For example, it is argued that the conflict frame in news (or strategic reporting) activates public cynicism and mistrust toward the government and public institutions (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997) and that this form of reporting diverts attention from political processes (Patterson, 1993). Although not everyone believes that news frames influence the public in one way or the other, this study nevertheless assumes that they are important and that framing in terms of conflict, human interest, morality, responsibility, and economic impact affects the way in which the public thinks about topics and how they remember them (Valkenburg, Semetko, & De Vreese, 1999). The media agenda can therefore co-determine the public agenda and influence how the public thinks and acts by framing the news in certain ways. In our research a content analytical tool developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) was used for a systematic analysis of the news frames in the study material.

#### **Interviews**

In-depth interviews were carried out with eight journalists who happened to be the authors of a great number of the articles under study—and with eight experts on Canada (so considered in light of an academic or professional specialization). We interviewed primarily scholars involved in Canadian studies, anthropology, political science, and history, all of whom had spent considerable time in Canada and continued to have a keen interest in both the country itself and Canadian content in news outlets.

#### **Results**

Our total sample for both periods consisted of 164 newspaper articles, an average of about 20 articles per newspaper for the 80-day period that was investigated (or about one article per newspaper every four days). The quality national newspapers *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw*, and *het Parool* were represented with a mere 13, 4, 11, and 22 articles, respectively (or 30% of the total sample). The more popular nationally accessible newspapers, *de Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad*, accounted for 46 and 49 articles, respectively (58%). The two regional papers yielded 19 articles (12%).

#### **Format characteristics and news functions**

The topics dealt with during the first period of research (66 articles, 40%) were legion. They included such things as travel and tourism (e.g., trips to Eastern Canada, the release of a new travel guide); popular sports in both Canada and the Netherlands (e.g., the appointment of a Canadian-born coach to the Dutch ice hockey team, world-record skating in Calgary, the gay games in Montreal); economy-related matters (e.g., the loss of Nortel, Canada as leading country in adopting ICTs, the softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the United States); culture (e.g., Canadian bands performing in the Netherlands, CD releases

by Canadian artists), and societal issues (such as Canada's anti-smoking campaigns with prohibitive pictures and slogans). The period after September 11 (98 articles, 60%) was characterized by greater volume but less variety in the topics dealt with. The news stories were centred around a limited number of recurrent themes generally concerning the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and the potential links to Canada (from which terrorist networks had apparently been operating), including U.S. criticisms against Canada's lax border patrols and "too-easy-to-get" passports for newcomers and asylum seekers; insufficient safety procedures in Canadian aviation; mail contaminated with anthrax spores (e.g., a police office cleared in Québec); and the weakened position of Air Canada as a consequence of September 11.

Surprisingly, only one out of five articles throughout the whole period of research explicitly made the link between Canada and the Netherlands (e.g., Dutch immigration to Canada, Dutch bands in Canada or Canadian artistic presence in the Netherlands, Dutch/Canadian business deals made or in the making). As could be expected, given our newspaper sample in a highly competitive, "scoop" oriented Dutch newspaper market, the news coverage of Canada in the Dutch print media is predominantly (9 out of 10 articles) about current events. Only 10% of the material dealt with rather timeless issues and adopted a more investigative approach.

About half of the articles (54%) had fewer than 200 words, answering the basic *who*, *what*, and *where* journalistic questions without providing any other background or contextualizing information. The remaining half of the material paid substantially more attention to *how*- and *why*-related background questions. Given the way our articles were collected (on-line versions only), for one out of four articles it was not possible to ascertain the original location in the newspaper (i.e., the section to which the article belonged: opinion, foreign affairs, politics, etc.). In the remaining instances most articles were found in the foreign affairs section (26%) and the sports section (22%). The other articles were scattered across a wide array of newspaper sections, such as the economy and finance section (10%), culture and leisure (9%), the national news section (7%), and the front page (two instances). In 12% of the cases, illustrations were part of the article (e.g., pictures of a Canadian ballet dancer, a winning ice hockey team, a Canadian baby barely escaping from death by frost, a Greenpeace protest against cutting of Canada's primeval forests). In the remaining instances, illustrations were either not found or could not be traced in the on-line versions.

The *news source* (i.e., the origin of the news story: news agency, foreign correspondent, own newsroom journalist, etc.) was not mentioned in the majority of cases (59%). Of the others, 31% originated from foreign correspondents and the papers' own journalists reporting on events, sometimes written in conjunction with Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau, the Dutch national news agency (3%), or with a foreign press agency (7%). In order to find out what *agencies* or *informants* the Dutch portrayal of Canada is based upon, we checked whether journalists got their information from Dutch or Canadian authorities or whether they based their

news stories on Canadian non-authorities (i.e., people in the street, eye witnesses, people living the events rather than experts merely commenting on them). One in two articles (47%) does not mention an agency. When informants were explicitly mentioned, Canadian individuals (16%) and Canadian authoritative sources or organizations (12%) were referred to about as often as non-Canadian individuals (13%) and non-Canadian institutions (13%).

In one out of two articles the Canadian authorities were perceived as somehow responsible for the events reported. In 30% they were seen as originators of the problem; in the other 20% they were perceived as responsible for solving the problem. In an overwhelming majority of the articles (94%), only one side of the events was reported. The tone was neutral in 70% of the articles; one in six articles adopted a positive tone, and another one in six articles was negative.

Regarding Iyengar's (1991) look at news reporting, we found that the *episodic* style was adopted in 74% of the cases—meaning that topics are reported through concrete or specific events, providing news stories in which the responsibility for a given situation is ascribed to personal action. The remaining 26% of the articles followed the *thematic* style: the emphasis was more on the structure of the news story, with the general, abstract context of the news as central, the responsibility being ascribed to structural, societal characteristics rather than to specific individuals.

As for the categorizations of news functions set out by Graber (1980) and van Cuilenburg, Scholten, and Noomen (1994) (information, expression and critique, interpretation and context, historical projection, agenda-setting), the information function was present in an overwhelming majority of articles (82%), while the expression function was present in only four articles (3%). The critique function was present in 8% of the articles. An interesting news quality/characteristic elucidating the overall nature of the reporting on Canada in the Dutch press is the small amount of attention devoted to interpretation and contextualization of the facts and data (such contextualization appeared in only 7% of the articles). The historical projection was entirely lacking: there were no instances found in which the context consisted of historical ingredients. Furthermore, the agenda-setting function was present in one article only. Finally, incitement to action was not found in the coverage of Canada in the Dutch press.

Having drawn this overall picture of the articles in our sample, let us now look at the news frames adopted and the relative degree of attention paid to these frames in the different types of newspapers and in the routine versus the crisis period.

#### **News frames**

A list of five sets of questions compiled by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) was employed to determine the extent to which the news frames were used in the study material. Each set of questions was intended to capture one of the five news frames: conflict, human interest, economic impact, morality, and responsibility. The extent to which the 20 questions reflected the underlying frames was examined with the aid of principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The

factor analysis explaining 54% of the total variance in framing items is visualized in Table 1. Factor analysis is a technique for extracting the underlying dimensions for a set of variables.

**Table 1: Factor Analysis of All Newspaper Articles (N=164)  
(Principal Component Analysis—Varimax with Kaiser Normalization)**

FRAMING ITEMS	Factor 1 Conflict	Factor 2 Human Interest	Factor 3 Respon- sibility	Factor 4 Economic Impact	Factor 5 Morality
<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b>					
1. Does the story suggest that some level of the government has the ability to alleviate the problem?	.28	-.16	.45		.55
2. Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/ problem?	.57	-.12			.44
3. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/ issue?	.29		.62		.39
4. Does the story suggest that an individual (or group of people in society) is responsible for the issue/ problem?			.67		.15
5. Does the story suggest that the problem requires urgent action?			.52		
<b>HUMAN INTEREST</b>					
6. Does the story provide a human example or place a "human face" on the issue?		.81			
7. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes in order to generate feelings of outrage, empathy/ caring, sympathy, or compassion?		.60		-.16	.32
8. Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?		.50	.51	.10	-.18
9. Does the story delve into the private/personal lives of the individuals it focuses on?		.74	-.18	-.11	.10
10. Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy/caring, sympathy, or compassion?	.32	.54		-.11	-.19

FRAMING ITEMS	Factor 1 Conflict	Factor 2 Human Interest	Factor 3 Respon- sibility	Factor 4 Economic Impact	Factor 5 Morality
CONFLICT FRAME					
11. Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups/countries?	<b>.80</b>		.22		
12. Is there some form of antagonism towards one party/individual/group/country on the part of another?	<b>.73</b>		.41	-.11	
13. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?	<b>.80</b>				
14. Does the article refer to "winners" and "losers"?	.34	.11	-.11	.21	.36
ECONOMIC IMPACT FRAME					
15. Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?				<b>.88</b>	
16. Is there a mention of costs/degree of expense involved?				<b>.86</b>	
17. Does the article refer to the economic impact of the continuation or termination of action?		-.17		.49	-.13
MORALITY FRAME					
18. Does the article contain specific social precepts on how to behave?					.47
19. Does the article contain a moral message (presentation of good and bad)?		.19	.12		<b>.75</b>
20. Does the article refer to morality, God, or other religious leaders/concepts?	.34		-.35	.20	.30

Note: Factor loadings higher than .50 are printed in **boldface**.

By and large the factor solution reflects the five news frames that were proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg. (The average correlation between the factor scores and the original scales was .88.) Tests were carried out on the factor scores to see which similarities and differences could be detected in the adoption of frames in the various media outlets (i.e., quality, popular, and regional newspapers) and periods under study (i.e., routine versus crisis reporting). One obvious problem in analyzing the occurrence of frames is that framing is dependent on more variables than just the type of outlet. For instance, long articles will be more likely to frame news than short articles. If, as is the case in our data, the quality press contains a relatively greater number of long articles than the popular press, simple *t-tests* would lead to the incorrect conclusion that the quality press is more

likely to frame its stories. A similar argument can be made for the topic of the story. A sports article is likely to be framed differently than an article about politics, and these types of articles may be spread unevenly over the different types of outlets. Therefore, analyses of variance were performed controlling for both the length and the topic of the news stories.

This exercise revealed that, in all, the similarities outnumbered the differences. Nevertheless, on some factors (news frames) and depending on the time period covered, the media outlets adopted different accents in their news coverage of Canada. Comparing the quality press with the popular press, significantly more attention was paid to economic consequences in the quality press. Contrary to our expectations, however, the popular press did not emphasize the *human interest* frame, that is, journalists in those popular outlets did not tend to personalize or emotionalize their stories to a greater extent than their colleagues at the quality papers. Comparison of the quality press with the regional press, however, did reveal the expected highlighting of the human interest frame in the regional press. No other significant differences were found. Finally, the only significant difference between the popular and the regional press also was a larger emphasis on the human interest frame in the regional newspapers. In all, very few differences could be detected between the different outlets. However, these differences seem to make sense: the regional press tends to emotionalize and personalize its topics more than the national (quality and popular) press, and the quality press emphasizes the economic consequences more often than the popular press.

The results of the comparisons before and after September 11 are harder to interpret. Whereas we expected a general increase in news framing after September 11, we found a significant decrease of the *conflict* frame and the *human interest* frame and an almost significant ( $p=.13$ ) decrease of the *responsibility* frame. At first sight the events of September 11 led to greater caution and greater objectivity in the Dutch reporting about Canada. In order to investigate this matter further, we performed separate analyses for articles specifically dealing with or referring to the September 11 events, comparing these with the other articles of the September 11 period as well as with the articles published before September 11. Still controlling for both length and topic, no significant differences were found between articles from the September 11 period that did and articles that did not pertain to the events. There was, however, still a significant decrease in the use of the *conflict* frame in articles dealing with the September 11 events when compared to the articles from the pre-September period. Nevertheless, the major difference in the use of frames seems to be a marked contrast between the two periods, rather than a difference between articles pertaining to and articles not pertaining to the September 11 events. This means that although it is possible that the style of reporting about Canada has changed due to the events of September 11, there is an alternative explanation for the differences in framing in that *seasonal* differences in reporting may be—at least partially—responsible.

**Results: Dutch news performance as rated by professional journalists**

As a complement to the content analysis of the news coverage we interviewed eight Canada informants with extensive professional knowledge concerning Canada-related issues and eight news correspondents (writing for the media outlets under scrutiny) about their overall impressions and perceptions of news on Canada in the Dutch press. A first finding is that none of the journalists considered Canada a “hot news item”: Canada is seen as a decent, mid-size, politically stable country that does not play an important role on the world political stage, notwithstanding its membership in larger associations such as the G-8 and OPEC. The overall assessment of the news reporting on Canada in the Dutch press is one of neutral, facts-driven information transmission.

The lack of a more evaluative, investigative journalism, with an eye for background material and historical perspective, is considered a deficiency by the Canada specialists interviewed. Arguments brought up by the journalists interviewed suggested that Canada has had relatively poor news value for both international and European news agencies. Dutch press coverage of Canada is conspicuous for its relative absence: the country is not war-stricken, is no longer characterized by internal political turmoil (e.g., the separation of Québec—which had captured international media attention since the 1960s and reached its apex in terms of the world news coverage of the mid-1990s after the Meech Lake and Charlottetown disputes—is not imminent anymore). Additionally, the journalists pointed out, Canada keeps itself rather distant from international politics, apart from a few issues such as land mines, humanitarian intervention, and “ethical diplomacy.” We were also told by the journalists interviewed that much of the Canadian news is taken directly by Dutch newsroom journalists (often without special knowledge about Canada) from international press agencies such as Associated Press, Agence France Press, Reuters, and Deutsche Presse Agentur. In other words, “rehashing” of news agency reports is common practice, which makes the Dutch print media overly dependent upon these agencies’ selection criteria and news standards.

Hence, the news value of articles on Canada is generally limited. For instance, our informant from the regional newspaper *Brabants Dagblad* recollected that in recent years a fair amount of the news reporting on Canada in his paper dealt with Dutch farmers who immigrated to Canada, beginning in the 1920s and 1930s. These accounts are enjoyable reading pieces without much newsworthiness—but with a high level of anecdotal value, and aimed at a large audience. Our informant from the popular nationwide newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* stated that the majority of the articles on Canada in the Dutch press, including those published through his own outlet, are accounts of one-time incidents (e.g., a tourist story, an article on ice skating, some trade-related event).

An exception to this rule is the news coverage of Canada in *NRC Handelsblad*. One of the Canada experts indicated that this newspaper can rely on a correspondent in Canada and that this guarantees a high standard of reporting, providing sufficient background information, drawing a portrait of Canada not in

an isolated fashion, but in a broader perspective, e.g., as a member of the G-8 or part of NAFTA. According to the *NRC*'s correspondent in Canada, his paper's aim is to draw a clear line between factual news reporting, where neutral facts and backgrounds are offered, and opinion pages, providing a forum for individuals in order to give a personal angle to the "naked" events.

In all, the quality of the news coverage on Canada was evaluated rather positively by both the journalists and the Canada experts, but was considered lacking in depth. None of the interviewees thought, however, that major misrepresentations were common. Nevertheless, foreign media—such as *The Economist*, *Time*, and the *Herald Tribune*, some Internet newsgroups, and the on-line versions of the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*—were considered a necessary complement by both the experts and the journalists, to be consulted on a regular basis in order to keep oneself informed about what is going on in Canada. TV stations such as the BBC (for its in-depth reports) and CNN (for its highly responsive live coverage of events), and TV5 (a consortium of French-speaking channels on which the French-Canadian news from Radio Canada is transmitted every morning in Europe) were considered required viewing for an active "news gatherer" in order to sufficiently understand the country's issues and hot topics or for an informed newsmaker preparing for an in-depth news story adopting a more investigative approach.

### Discussion

In this study we looked at concrete news output in a given period of time and interviewed journalists hired by the media outlets under scrutiny and Dutch experts on Canada about their assessment of the overall quality of the coverage on Canada in the Dutch press.

In terms of news quantity, taking into account Canada's historical ties with the Netherlands (e.g., immigration waves of Dutch from the 1920s and 1930s until the present day), the overall news coverage is rather meagre. (We found only 164 articles dealing with Canada as a central theme in eight newspapers in a time period of four months, or one article per newspaper every four days.) Coverage is also perceived as scanty by both the journalists and the Canada experts.

Our news frame analysis revealed that overall the similarities between types of newspapers outnumber the differences. The quality press dedicated significantly more attention to *economic consequences* than the popular press. Contrary to our expectations the popular press did not emphasize the *human interest* frame. A comparison of the quality press with the regional press, however, did reveal the expected higher prominence given to the *human interest* frame in the regional press. The only significant difference between the popular and the regional press also referred to a larger emphasis on the human interest frame in the regional papers.

In all, the differences found seem to make sense: the regional press tends to emotionalize and personalize its topics more than the national (both quality and popular) press, and the quality press emphasizes the economic impact frame more than the popular press. The results of the comparisons before and after

September 11 are harder to interpret. Contrary to our prior assumption, we came across a significant decrease of the conflict and human interest frame after September 11 and an almost significant ( $p=.13$ ) decrease of the responsibility frame. Apparently the events of September 11 led to a greater sense of caution and greater objectivity in the Dutch news reporting about Canada. The Dutch press apparently hesitated to turn the complex events of September 11 into simplistic conflicts. Further analyses showed that the lesser use of frames was not specific for the articles dealing with the September 11 events themselves but also characterized the other articles of the September 11 period. Therefore, either the general style of reporting changed in response to the September 11 events or, alternatively, seasonal differences may have been responsible for the differences in the use of frames. In comparison with the “routine” reporting during the first two months under study, the “crisis” news coverage proved to be predominantly event-driven, characterized by far less variety in the subjects dealt with.

One of the main obstacles to more complete, more in-depth, less event-driven coverage of Canada brought up by the journalists we interviewed is probably of a pragmatic, logistical nature: Canada is a vast country in whose coverage the Dutch media invest relatively little. As a journalist, one would need to be able to rely on years of life in the country in order to really understand its underlying currents. *NRC Handelsblad* is the only Dutch newspaper investing in a Canada-based correspondent. From a longitudinal point of view, however, comparing the current news coverage with, say, that of two years ago, readers can now find Canadian news on the Internet (all major Canadian newspapers have a user-friendly Web site) or on TV5 rebroadcasts of Radio Canada’s newscasts. Parallel to this, attention paid to Canada in the Dutch press remains constant, incidental, event-driven, and lacking in-depth investigation. “Rehashing” of news agency reports is common practice, which makes the Dutch print media very much dependent upon the agencies’ selection criteria and news standards.

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