

# Britain in the world

Visual analysis of international relations in the British and the Irish media before the referendum

Kohei Watanabe

Department of Methodology, LSE

[k.watanabe1@lse.ac.uk](mailto:k.watanabe1@lse.ac.uk)

<http://koheiw.net/>

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## Abstract

Immigration and economy were the two main issues in the campaigns for the EU membership referendum of the UK. According to the anti-EU campaigners, Britain will have an Australian-style immigration system, and its trade partners will be non-EU countries such as China, Japan, India and New Zealand. Since the EU member countries are the most important destinations of the UK exports, it seems unrealistic to expect that these non-EU countries will substitute Germany, France or Spain in international trade. However, anti-EU campaigners' claim seems to have convinced many British voters, countering pro-EU campaigners' argument that the UK's loss of access to the single market is economically disastrous.

The success of the anti-EU campaign raises a question regarding Britain's perceived position in the world, which is constructed by people's everyday exposure to the mass media. To answer this question, the author content analysed over 400,000 news stories published in 2012-2016 by the *Guardian* and the BBC as well as *The Irish Times* focusing on mentions of countries. The complex patterns of co-occurrences of countries in these news stories were summarized by a technique called non-negative matrix factorization to produce intuitive charts that visualize international relations in the news media.

The result of the analysis shows that, while the Irish newspaper has represented Ireland in a similar way as other EU countries, the British media has represented the UK's international relations completely differently from those of other EU countries but similarly to China and Australia. The author argues this tendency of the British media could be exploited by the anti-EU campaigners to make their post-Brexit plan more realistic.

There were numerous social and economic issues at stake in the UK's referendum on its membership in the European Union (EU), but the main issues in the campaigns seemed the free movement of the EU citizens, and the UK's access to the European single market. While the Remain campaigners supported the UK's membership in the EU emphasizing the importance of the free access to the European single market for the economy, the Leave campaigners opposed the membership stressing the Britain's inability to limit the inflows of migrants as a member of the EU. To counter the Remain campaigners' claims, the Leave campaigners directed the attention of the voters to the countries outside of the Europe. They proposed introduction of an Australian-style point-based system, and expansion of trade with non-EU countries such as China and India, Japan, Brazil, New Zealand and Chile, as alternative trade partners.<sup>1</sup>

The Leave campaign that featured non-European countries achieved its goal in the referendum, but its claims appear hardly unconvincing if we look at actual figures. For example, the Australia's annual net migration has been around 200 thousands and the number has been growing in recent years under the point-based system; nearly the half of the UK exports were destined for the European markets, while China, the UK's second largest trade partner outside the EU, only accounted for 6% of the total exports last year.<sup>2</sup> The Remain campaigners accused the Leave campaigners for drawing unrealistic pictures of the United Kingdom after leaving the EU, but, at least, they convinced many British people to vote for leaving the EU. This is the question that this study tries to answer: why so many British people were convinced by the Leave campaign that featured the non-EU countries?

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<sup>1</sup> Those countries were explicitly mentioned in Leave EU and Vote Leave campaign websites.

<sup>2</sup> Source: the Australian Border Force (2016) and HM Revenue & Customs (2016).

To answer this question, I analyse the *Guardian* and the BBC's international news coverage between 2012 and 2016 in terms of media representation of Britain in the world. I focused on representation of the United Kingdom instead of foreign countries here, because the shared image, or identity, of the country have been the key factor in deciding the future of the country. In other words, I aim to reveal "global social imaginary" (Orgad, 2012) of the British people constructed by the mass media through a large scale analysis of the news content.

In the analysis, over 400,000 news stories are classified according to their geographical focus utilizing an recently developed text analysis technique (Watanabe, 2016). These news stories are then used to construct large co-occurrence matrices that represent complex structure of international relations in the media content. Although these matrices are too large for human interpretation, a dimension reduction algorithm, called non-negative matrix factorization (NMF), is applied for an intuitive visual analysis of the patterns of international news coverage.

The result of the analysis shows that the *Guardian* represented Britain in isolation from the EU with intense coverage of Australia since 2014, while the BBC's coverage emphasized Britain's ties with Asian countries, placing the country closer to China and India in the world system over the years before the referendum. Although these were results of the *Guardian*'s and the BBC's highly international operation, the images of Britain constructed by the mass media could be exploited by the Leave campaign to make their cases.

### **Theories and Hypotheses**

In research on the mass media in the context of European integration, the 'communication deficit' has been one of the key concepts. Meyer (1999) argued that supply of political

information to the public is necessary for legitimacy of the EU governance, which requires support from the public based on reasoning and scrutiny of the political process. From this perspective, a body of empirical research on the mass media's representation of the EU has been carried out (Brüggemann & Königslöw, 2009; Gattermann & Vasilopoulou, 2015; Machill, Beiler, & Fischer, 2006; Trenz, 2004; Walter, 2015). In those studies, the British media's strong tendency to cover the EU in national political contexts has been repeatedly discovered. For example, Trenz (2004), after content analysing newspapers in 12 European countries in 2000, reported that the share of news stories about the EU was among the lowest in *the Guardian* but the share of national political stories related to the EU was the highest in the newspaper. Machill, Beiler and Fischer (2006), who conducted a meta-analysis of earlier content analysis projects on the mass media's coverage of the EU, found that, except for currency-related topics, the British media trends to cover the EU extremely little compared to the mass media in other countries. Baisnée (2013) explains that the low coverage of the EU by the British media is due to the limited experience of their journalists in Brussels, who are tightly controlled by the editors in London.

The little attention of the British media to the EU's political process could have developed underlying scepticism toward the EU among the British people as the communication deficit thesis states, but it does not fully explain the success of the Leave campaign, because its claims extended beyond the lack of legitimacy of the EU governance. For the Leave campaigners' clam that the UK should give up its access to the European single market for the sake of tighter immigration control, it was essential to convince the British voters that non-EU countries will be alternative trader partners after the UK's loss of access to the European single market.

There were numbers of factors that could have affected the British people's perception of the non-EU countries. One of those was the UK's demography (i.e. the large Asian population), but I focus on the news content of the British media here, assuming that the mass media's representation of foreign countries was one of the key factors in shaping the British people's perception of the non-EU countries. This assumption, nonetheless, is not unrealistic if we consider the higher numbers of voters who supported leaving the EU in the suburban areas, where the ethnic diversity tends to be lower than the urban areas. The impact of news coverage on people's perception of foreign countries has been well established in the literature. The agenda-setting theory states that mass media influences people's perceived importance of issues and actors (Cohen, 1963; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Salwen & Matera, 1992), and the cultivation theory states that people's reality is affected by representation of society in mass media (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979). More recently, researchers have shown that mass media's coverage affects audiences' attitude toward foreign countries (Besova & Cooley, 2009; Soroka, 2003; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004; Zhang & William Meadows III, 2012).

There is a large body of research on mass media's representation of foreign countries, among which we can distinguish at least three types of analyses: unilateral, bilateral or multilateral approaches. A unilateral analysis includes all the foreign countries represented in news stories, but a bilateral analysis focuses on representation of foreign countries in news stories in relation to the home country; a multilateral analysis features representation of relationships between all the countries in the world. Many of the news-flow type studies (Blondheim, Segev, & Cabrera, 2015; El Zein & Cooper, 1992; Golan, 2003; Larson, 1984; Lazano et al., 2000; Paik, 1999; Weaver, Porter, & Evans, 1984; Wilke, Heimprecht, & Cohen, 2012) and the foreign affair

agenda-setting studies fall into either the unilateral or the bilateral approach, but Chang (1998) conducted a multilateral analysis based on the world system theory and revealed hierarchical structure in international news.

Corresponding to the three approaches to mass media's representation of foreign countries, there are three hypotheses in this study. Here, "non-EU" specifically refers to the countries mentioned in the Leave campaign (i.e. China, Japan, United Arab Emirates, India, Brazil, New Zealand and Chile). The first and second hypotheses concern the possibility that the British media's high representation of the non-EU countries made the audiences to believe that the EU countries are no longer important to the UK.

H1: The British media covered the non-European countries more frequently than the EU countries.

H2: The British media covered the non-European countries more frequently than the EU countries in relation to the UK.

The third hypothesis, however, involves in more complex patterns in the mass media's representation of countries, focusing on coverage of international relations rather than countries themselves. This hypothesis relates to the possibility that the British media's representation of international relations made the audiences to believe that the UK has little shared interest with the EU countries.

H3: The British media covered the UK as having positions closer to the non-European countries than to than the EU countries.

## Methodology

In this study, the British media's representation of the world is investigated by content analysing news stories published or broadcasted by the *Guardian*, the BBC and *The Irish Times* between 2012 and 2016 (until the end of September for this paper). The key events regarding the EU in those years includes: the Greece government's debt crisis started in 2011; the British prime minister David Cameron's plan announced in 2013 to negotiate the country's status in the EU; the Ukraine crisis triggered by the pro-European revolution in 2014; the Syrian refugees' arrival in the eastern border of the EU, and the multiple terrorist attacks happened in Paris in 2015; the UK's referendum on its membership in the EU in 2016.

The *Guardian* is a part of Guardian Media Group owned by Scott Trust and it allows internet users to access to much of its news content free of charge. Thanks to this open access policy, guardian.com is the most popular online newspaper site to the British news audiences. The BBC is the public service broadcaster and the most popular source of news among broadcast and print news media in the UK (Reuters Institute, 2016). *The Irish Times*, Ireland's most popular broadsheet, was included in the analysis to make comparison with the British media. Ireland is similar to the Britain in terms of language and geography, but the Irish people have much stronger identity as European citizens than the British people. A Eurobarometer survey has shown that 77% of the Irish people feel that they are citizens of the EU, while it is only 56% in the British people, among the lowest of the 28 countries (European Commission, 2015).

The news stories published by the news media are downloaded from Nexis databases. These are news articles published either in the online or the print edition of the *Guardian* or *The Irish Times*, or transcripts of TV news programs of the BBC. The total number of news stories are

177,115 for the *Guardian*, 103,033 for the BBC, and 130,901 for *The Irish Times*.<sup>3</sup> These stories are then classified according to countries mentioned utilizing a geographical classifier whose accuracy is comparable to manual classification (Watanabe, 2016). This classifier automatically constructs large geographical dictionaries by selecting and scoring keywords strongly associated with countries from the corpus of downloaded news stories. Due to the large number of words weighted by continuous scores, it can identify geographical focus of news stories very accurately. Here, news stories are classified for their primary and secondary countries based on the locations of events or home countries of actors in the news stories for the analyses. In an experiment with the full-text news stories, the classifier achieved 0.94 in precision and 0.83 in recall, suggesting that its classification results only contain 6% of false positive and 17% of false negative cases.

The news stories classified for the primary and the secondary countries produce large co-occurrences matrices. The unilateral analysis is performed by totalling the number of primary countries excluding the United Kingdom; the bilateral analysis is by extracting secondary countries of the stories where the United Kingdom is the primary country. The multilateral analysis, however, is achieved by taking account of both unilateral and bilateral coverage of all the countries. This type of analysis requires clustering techniques to summarize information in the large matrices, but offers comprehensive pictures of the mass media's representation of the world. This analysis is the most useful for this study, because the position of the United Kingdom can only be defined relatively to positions of other countries in the world system.

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<sup>3</sup> The smaller number in the BBC is partially because the transcripts are only available from June 2012.

Chang (1998) employed network analysis techniques for a multilateral analysis, but I apply a clustering technique called non-negative matrix factorization (NMF) for more compact visualization of the relationships (c.f. Gaujoux & Seoighe, 2010). Unlike other dimension reduction techniques such as singular value decomposition (SVD), values in NMF-reduced matrices are restricted to be all positive, allowing intuitive interpretations of the results for humans. In the analysis, NMF is applied to shrink the original co-occurrence matrix ( $n \times m$ ) into a smaller basis matrix ( $n \times 5$ ), grouping secondary counties into five clusters. For visualization of the NMF-reduced matrices, columns are sorted in order of the maximum values encompassed, and rows are sorted in order of raw frequency counts of news stories; values are also normalized within each column to show the most prominent countries in individual groups.

### **Analysis**

In the unilateral analysis, some of the non-EU countries such as China and Australia are found among the most frequent countries. However, the total number of news stories mainly about China, Japan, United Arab Emirates, India, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand or Chile are smaller than the total number of news stories on the EU countries (excluding the home countries) in the *Guardian* and *The Irish Times*, but it was larger in the BBC (Table 1). In the bilateral analysis, which focuses on mentions of foreign countries in stories mainly about the home countries, China, India and Australia are found among the most frequent non-European countries, but the differences between the EU and non-EU countries become even greater in all the three media outlets (Table 2).

Table 1: Representation of EU and non-EU countries

	Guardian	BBC	Irish Times
EU	22.0%	16.5%	46.7%
Non-EU	19.0%	22.3%	11.7%

Table 2: Representation of EU and non-EU countries in relation to the home countries

	Guardian	BBC	Irish Times
EU	41.0%	26.6%	66.0%
Non-EU	16.4%	18.7%	7.9%

Figure 1 presents multilateral relationships of countries in the *Guardian*, the BBC and *The Irish Times*. In all the three media outlets, home countries are the most extensively covered as we find the United Kingdom (GB) and Ireland (IE) in the first rows of the matrices, but there are significant differences between the British and Irish media. The British media pays much attention to the United States (US), while the Irish media pays more attention to the United Kingdom than to the United States. Among the top-20 countries, apart from the media's home countries, the EU countries are France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Ireland, Italy (IT) and Spain (ES) in the *Guardian*; France, Greece, Germany, Spain and Italy in the BBC, but *The Irish Times* covered the Netherlands (NL) in addition to these countries.

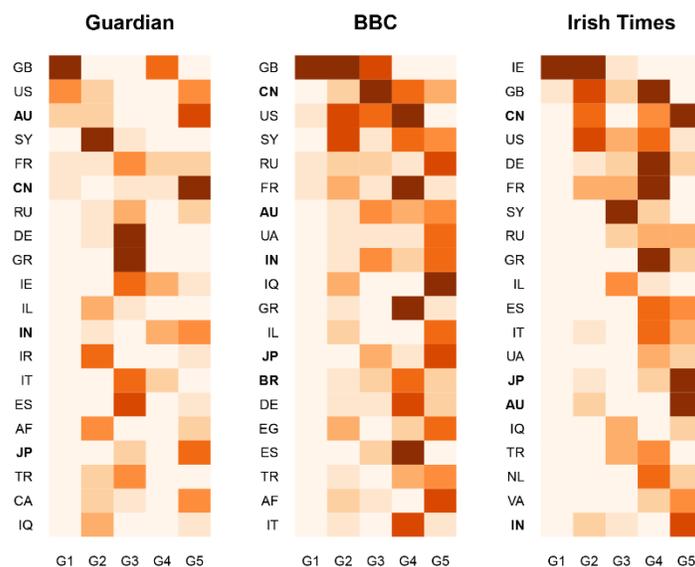
In the matrices, I identify four clusters that can be labelled 'home-centric', 'European', 'Middle Eastern' and 'Asia-Pacific' based on the prominent members. In the *Guardian*, the home-centric cluster is G1 because Britain is the single most important country as the very dark colour of the cell shows. The European cluster is G3, because Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy and Ireland have dark cells in the column. The Middle Eastern cluster is G2, in which we find dark cells for Syria (SY), Iran (IR), Afghanistan (AF) and Israel (IL). The Asia-Pacific cluster is G5, where China (CN), Australia (AU), Japan (JP), India (IN) and United States (US) and Canada (CA) are

prominent. In the BBC, the home-centric cluster is G1, and the European cluster is G4, where France, Greece, Spain and Germany are found, although the United States is also found. The Middle Eastern cluster is G2, which includes Syria, Iraq, Egypt (EG), and Israel. The Asia-Pacific cluster is G3, where China, the United States, Australia, India and Japan are found. In the Irish newspaper, the home-centric cluster is G1, the European cluster is G4, the Middle Eastern cluster is G3, and the Asia-Pacific cluster is G5.

In columns corresponding to the clusters, we find how Britain or Ireland are represented in the mass media. The matrix for the *Guardian* suggests that the newspaper represented Britain as having international relations only similar to the United States, Australia, France and China, because Britain is found in the home-centric cluster (G1) with those countries but neither in the European cluster (G3) nor the Asia-Pacific cluster (G5). However, the BBC has wider focus on Britain's international relations as the country is not only found in the home-centric cluster (G1) with the United States, Russia (RU) and France, but also in the Middle Eastern and the Asia-Pacific clusters (G2 and 3). *The Irish Times*, however, represents Ireland as having very limited international relations, because the country only appears with the UK in the home-centric cluster (G1) and has limited prominence in the Middle Eastern cluster (G3); the country neither appear in the European cluster (G4) nor the Asia-Pacific cluster (G5) either. There are unlabelled clusters in the matrices, because these are mixture of miscellaneous countries. Yet, patterns in these clusters support the above observation. In the *Guardian*, the unlabelled cluster (G4) contain Britain along with Ireland and India, which are the largest origins of the UK's foreign-born population. In the BBC, countries in the Middle-East and Asia (Iraq, Russia, Japan and Afghanistan) are prominent in the unlabelled cluster (G5) as well. In *The Irish Times*, Ireland is

the main country in the unlabelled cluster (G2), but only the United Kingdom, the United States and China are the important countries here.

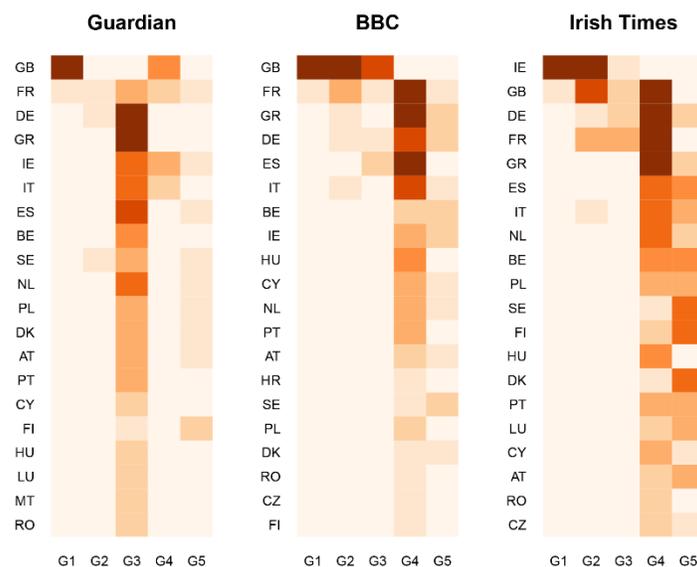
Figure 1: Representation of the world by the British and the Irish news media



In Figure 2, only rows corresponding to the EU member states are shown in matrices to focus on representation of European countries in the mass media. In the *Guardian*, Britain appears with France in the home-centric cluster (G1), but the country is absent from the European cluster (G3) as we already have seen, where Germany and Greece are the main countries. In the BBC, Britain is found only with France in the home-centric cluster (G1), but it appears with France, Germany, Greece and Italy in the Middle Eastern cluster (G2) and with Spain, France and Germany in the Asia-Pacific cluster (G3). Yet, Britain is again absent from the European cluster (G4). In the Irish newspaper, Ireland appears with Britain in the home-centric cluster (G1), in the Asia-Pacific cluster (G2) and the Middle Eastern cluster (G3). The prominence of the UK is particularly high in the Asia-Pacific cluster, where France, Germany and Italy also appear. In the Middle Eastern cluster (G3), the media's attention is concentrated to the three leading EU member states

(France, Germany and the United Kingdom), but Ireland does not appear in the European cluster (G4) either.

Figure 2: Representation of Europe by the British and the Irish news media



To further investigate the patterns of international news coverage, I created matrices for each year from 2012 to 2016. In the *Guardian* (Figure 3), the most frequently covered country has been the United States over the period, but China has also been one of the top countries. India and Japan continue to be among the top 20 countries. However, Australia suddenly became one of the most extensively covered countries from 2014 through 2016. Brazil is only found in 2016 in the matrices, presumably because of the effect of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Similarly, in the BBC (Figure 4), the United States and China have been among the top countries over the period, and Japan and India continue to be among the top 20. Australia, however, remained in the middle of the rank and did not change its position as dramatically as in the *Guardian*. In the BBC, Brazil is found in all the years but in 2015. In *The Irish Times* (Figure 5), the United Kingdom, the United States and China are among the most frequently covered

countries. The Irish newspaper's attention to India has been much weaker than the British media's attention, it being at the bottom of the rank, but Japan's position is roughly the same as in the British media. No dramatic change in the position of Australia is found in this newspaper.

In the *Guardian*, Britain appear with China in 2012 (G1), with China and Japan as well as other EU countries in 2013 (G4), and with the United States in 2015 (G1). In the BBC, Britain is found with the United States and the Middle Eastern countries in 2013 (G3) and with China as the main country, the United States, Australia, Japan and India in 2015 (G2). In *The Irish Times*, Ireland is found with Germany in 2013 (G1) and with China, Japan, Australia and India along with many other EU countries in 2015 (G4).

Figure 3: Representation of the world by the *Guardian* in 2012-2015

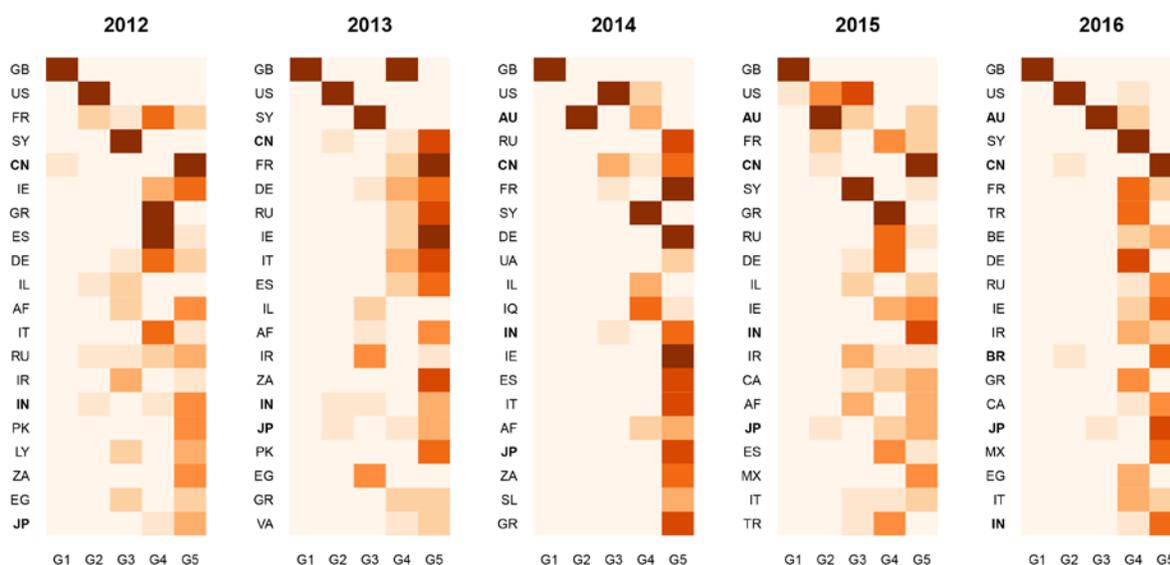
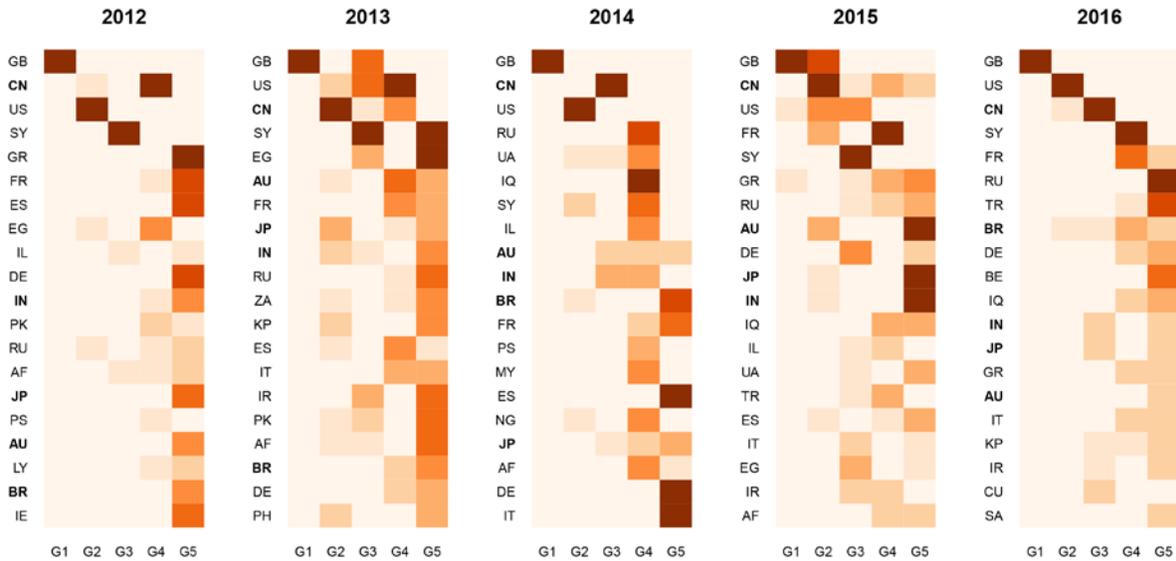
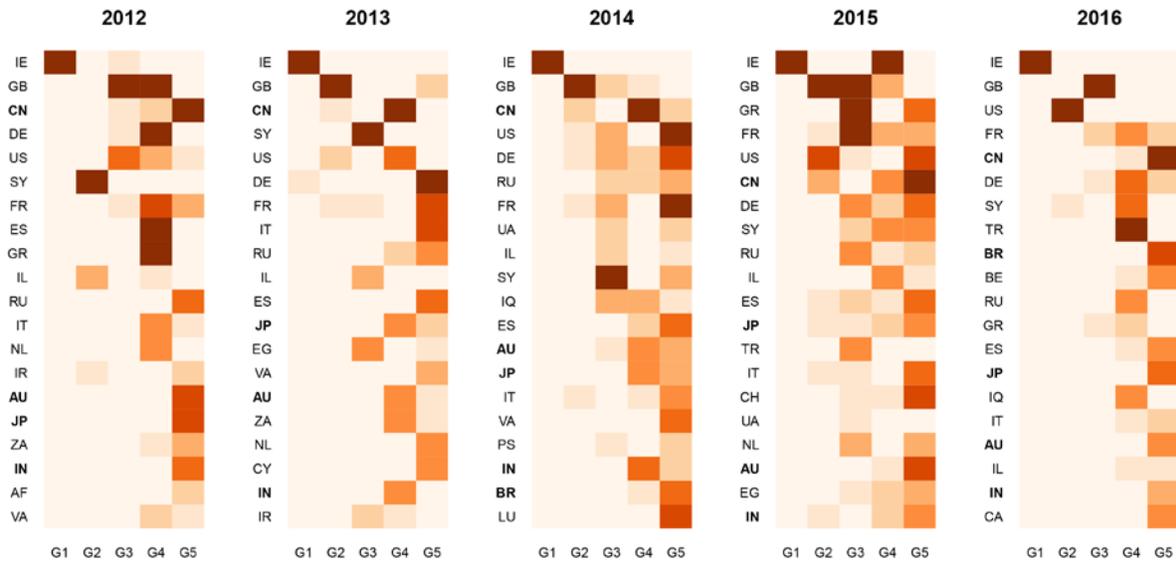


Figure 4: Representation of the world by the BBC in 2012-2015

Figure 5: Representation of the world by *The Irish Times* in 2012-2015

In matrices featuring European countries, we confirm the tendency of the *Guardian* (Figure 6) to cover Britain in isolation from the other EU countries: Britain only appear with Germany, Italy, France, Ireland, Spain and Greece (G4) only in 2013. The BBC (Figure 7) also tend to isolate Britain from other European countries, but Britain appears with Greece (G1) in 2013 and France

and Spain (G2) in 2015. In *The Irish Times* (Figure 8), however, Ireland often appear with other EU countries: the United Kingdom, Germany, and France in 2012; Germany in 2013; Germany, France, Britain and Poland (PL) in 2014; the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain and Sweden (SE) in 2015. Ireland is isolated in 2016, but it could be due to the UK’s referendum or incompleteness of the data for this year.

Figure 6: Representation of Europe by the *Guardian* in 2012-2015

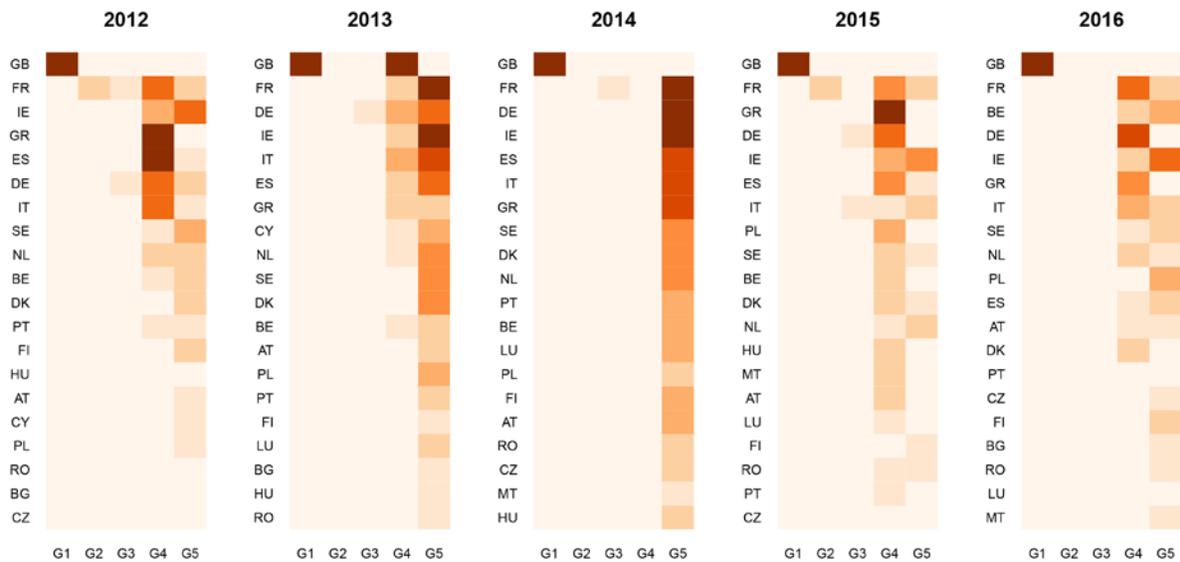


Figure 7: Representation of Europe by the BBC in 2012-2015

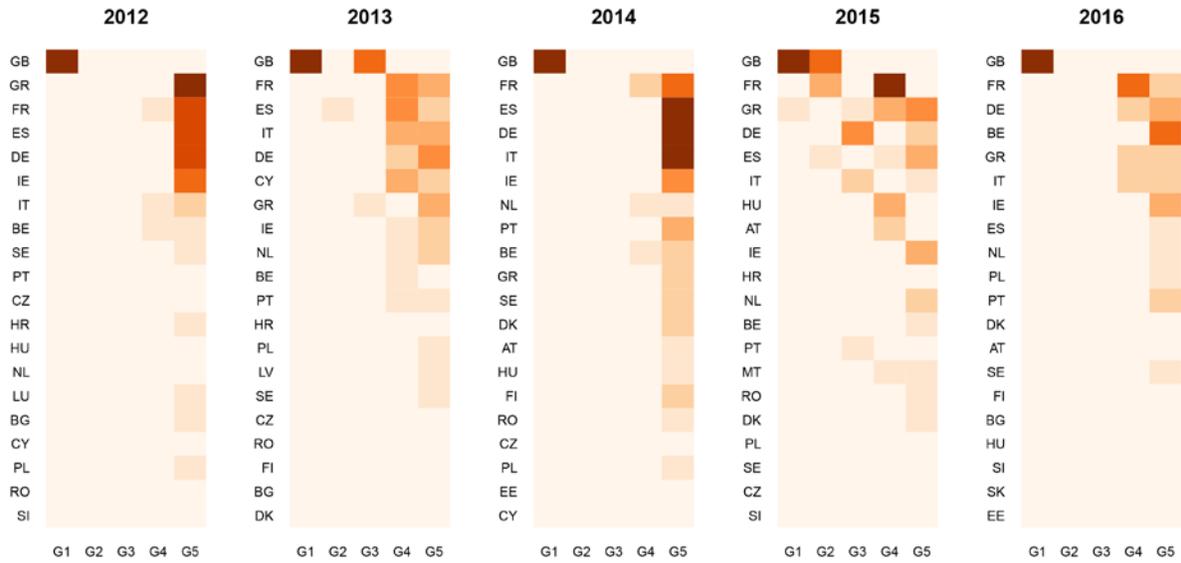
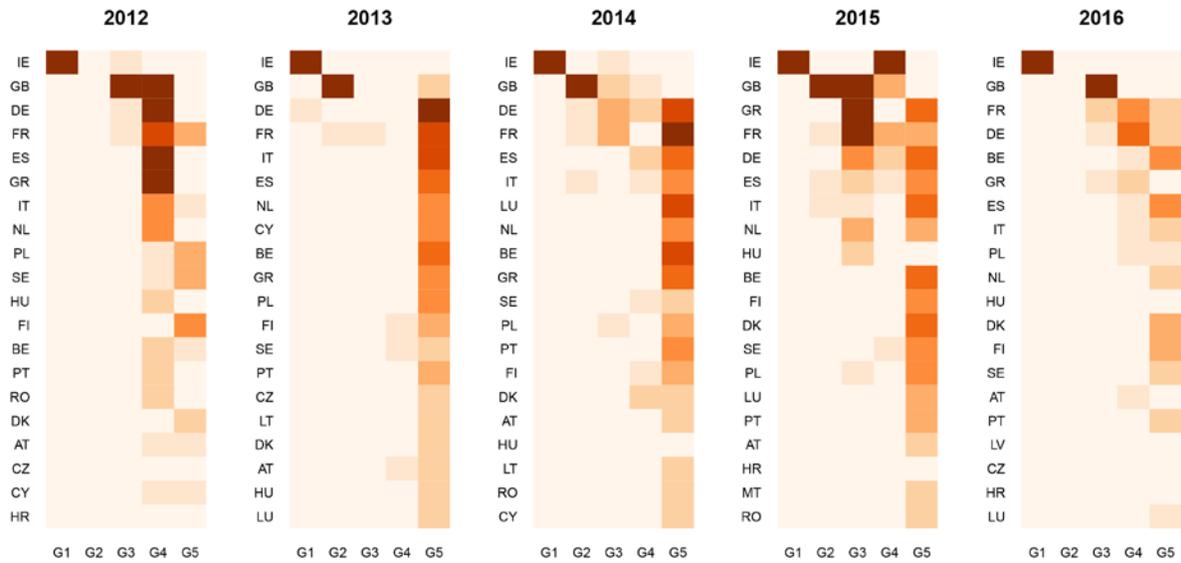


Figure 8: Representation of Europe by *The Irish Times* in 2012-2015



## Discussion

The unilateral and the bilateral analyses have shown that the British media paid less attention to the EU countries than the Irish media did in the five-year period. The BBC's unilateral coverage of the non-EU countries was even greater than of the EU countries, supporting the first hypothesis (H1). However, both the *Guardian* and the BBC mentioned the EU countries more frequently than the non-EU countries in stories mainly about Britain, emphasizing the UK's relations with the other European countries. This finding does not provide any support for the second hypothesis (H2).

More comprehensive pictures of the British media's representation of the world were obtained in the multilateral analysis. Among the 20 most frequently covered countries, I found that the British as well as the Irish media paid much attention to their home countries, making them the most frequently covered countries. This result is far from surprising considering the findings in news-flow research. It is also in line with the earlier finding that the British media is home-centric in its coverage of the EU (Baisnée, 2013; Machill et al., 2006; Trenz, 2004). In both the British and the Irish media, the United States and China were the most important foreign countries; among the EU countries, France was the most important countries to the British media, while it was the United Kingdom for the Irish media. In the *Guardian*'s home-centric cluster, the United States, Australia, France and China were found as countries equivalent to Britain, while they were the United States, Russia and France in the BBC and only the United Kingdom in *The Irish Times*. The British media's wider geographical attention was evident not only in the home-centric cluster, but also in the distinctive Middle Eastern and Asia-Pacific clusters. These clusters were also found in the Irish newspaper, but the number of countries in the cluster was smaller than the British counterparts. The existence of the non-European

countries in the home-centric cluster in the *Guardian*, and the Britain's heavy presence in the Asia-Pacific cluster in the BBC support the third hypothesis (H3).

The British media's wider international coverage, nonetheless, limited its attention to European neighbours. Among the top-20 countries, seven countries were the EU countries in the Irish newspaper, while it was only six in the *Guardian* and five in the BBC. Although neither of the home countries appeared in the European cluster in the matrix combining news from all the years, Ireland co-occurred with some of the EU countries in the matrices for 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. Such co-occurrences with the EU countries were only found in 2013 and 2015 in the British media. In the *Guardian*, Britain appeared with many EU countries in 2013, because David Cameron announced his plan to negotiate the country's status in the EU, and the British media also joined the discussion on the EU's plan to solve Greek government's debt crisis in this year. In the BBC, Britain was found with Greece in 2013 and 2015, suggesting its extensive coverage of currency-related topics as earlier studies has also shown (Machill et al., 2006). In 2015, although the BBC's stories about Spain were predominantly about football tournaments, the occurrence of Britain with France in G2 suggests that the broadcaster presented Britain as being under the threat of Paris-style terrorist attacks.

The British news media represented the United Kingdom along with other EU countries in the event of debt crises and terrorist attacks could have fuelled the British people's EU scepticism, but France, Greece, Germany and Italy were presented as Britain's partners in the context of the Middle Eastern security. In fact, the UK and France carried out airstrike in Syria; Italy, Greece and Germany played key roles in controlling the flows of refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The BBC's accurate representation of Britain's shared interest with other EU countries in foreign policies suggest that external threats near Europe could enhance perceived

importance of European partners, although they are primarily NATO allies to Britain in the security issues as far as the EU does not have its own military.

The lack of representation of Britain's relations with other EU countries in *Guardian* has already been reported (Trenz, 2004), but its consistently high coverage of the United States and Australia can be explained by its publisher's attention to overseas audiences. The *Guardian*'s website has a large number of overseas visitors particularly from these two countries (Elliott, 2015; Mayes, 2004). Its online news content for overseas audiences also includes stories on European countries, but its coverage of Europe could be different between for home and overseas audiences. For home audiences, the newspaper would detail Britain's relationship with other European countries as it did in 2013, but, for the overseas audiences, the newspaper would limit its attention to other European countries and avoid mentions of Britain's complex relations within the EU. While news stories targeting overseas audiences underplay Britain's relations with European countries, they overplay its relations with the Asian countries, placing Britain in a position close to the United States and Australia. Although the *Guardian* has different front pages for audiences in those countries, it was unlikely for the newspaper to produce a lot of news stories dedicated for the British audiences, because it increases the newspaper's operation costs considerably.

The BBC more often represented the Britain as having international relations the similar to other EU countries. This is hardly surprising considering its role as a public service broadcaster, but France was the only EU country prominent in its news coverage. The BBC covered fiscal issues in the euro zone extensively, and represented Britain in similar ways as Greece in those stories. This is presumably because London is Europe's largest centre of financial businesses, and the British government has been averse to financially contributing to the Greek bailout. However,

more importantly, the BBC also represented Britain as if it has a position close to many of the non-EU countries that include China, Australia, India and Japan. During the year before the referendum, the BBC emphasized the China's and India's bright economic prospects using expressions such as "economic growth" and "the second largest economy" or "fastest growing" and "billions of people" very frequently. Its news coverage on Australia was mainly about Australian government's detention of Southeast Asian asylum seekers in Papua New Guinea. The BBC's news about Britain in 2015 often mentioned Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia as secondary countries, representing the country's position in the world close to those of India, China and Australia. This enhanced coverage of the relationship between Britain was likely to be the result of the investment in the BBC's Asian headquarter located in Singapore in this year (BBC, 2015).

The emphasis on Britain's proximity to Australia by the *Guardian* could have benefited the Leave campaigners, who claimed to introduce an Australian-style immigration system. Although Australia's point-based immigration system does necessarily reduce the number of migrants, the news media's coverage on the Australian government's treatment asylum seekers from Southeast Asian could have given the British audiences an impression that Australia has a better control of flows of migrants. The BBC's representation of Britain in a similar manner as China and India in economic news could have given credibility to the Leave campaigners' claim that the British economy can prosper after leaving the single market with increase trade relations with the non-EU countries.

Considering the findings in news flow research that trade relationship is the most important factor affecting mass media's foreign news coverage (Wu, 2000), the British newspaper and broadcaster misrepresented Britain's position in the world. However, such news coverage was

accidental resulting purely from their commercial or journalistic considerations facing rapid globalisation in the media industry. It was necessary for the *Guardian* to expand its audiences beyond the relatively small news market in the United Kingdom, targeting large English speaking countries such as the United States and Australia. This required the newspaper to produce news stories from global perspective rather than European perspective. Similar, it was natural for the BBC to enhanced its coverage of Asia's growing economies in business news by making a large investment in Singapore.

The real problem of Britain was the gaps between the British media and non-media industries in the degrees of global operation. Thanks to the nature of the media products and the large English speaking population across the world, the British media organizations operates highly internationally, but other British businesses, particularly those in manufacturing and farming, are still predominately national or regional and heavily dependent on the European market due to the physical nature of the products and the low competitiveness in other markets.

### **Conclusions**

In news flow research, the trade relationship was identified as the most important determinant of the mass media's attention to the foreign countries, in which cases the EU countries should attract much of the media coverage in the British media. From this point of view, the high unilateral coverage of Australia by the *Guardian* and China by the BBC is a misrepresentation of the country's economic interest. Further, the multilateral analysis has also shown that the British media represented Britain in a position close to those countries in its news reporting over the years prior to the referendum. This way of representation of the United Kingdom could have

affected the British people's image of the country, which could be exploited by the Leave campaigners to make their cases in the referendum: they claimed that Britain will expand its trade relations to every corner of the world to achieve rapid economic growth just like China, and will introduce stricter immigration control on the UK borders with a "point-based" system just like Australia.

The multilateral analysis has also shown the importance of security issues in representation of the EU countries in the British media. The British media represented the United Kingdom's shared interest with the EU countries very well in the context of the Middle Eastern security, although it was unlikely that the Syria war and the Ukraine crisis increased the perceived importance of the EU, because many of the EU member states are also NATO allies. While external threats to Britain were important factors in media representation of the EU countries, the Greece debt crisis and the terrorist attacks in France, which occurred in Europe but did not affect the UK directly, could have diminished the sense that Britain is sharing interests with other EU countries in protecting the country. Similarly, the arrival of Syrian refugees as an external problem could consolidate the UK's membership in the EU, but it worked otherwise as it soon became its internal problem.

Finally, in earlier studies of mass media's roles in European integration, attention was constrained to representation of the EU institutions or member countries, but this study suggests that it was too narrow to fully explain people's attitudes towards the membership, because images of home nations, or national identities, play important roles in the transnational political process. As this study has clearly demonstrated, the multilateral analysis of news coverage is a very useful way of summarizing mass media's representation of the world. I encourage other

researchers to investigate media representation of countries beyond Europe utilizing similar analytical techniques.

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