

Examining the Relationship Between Presumed Influence of U.S. News About China and the Support for the Chinese Government’s Global Public Relations Campaigns

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Inspired by the influence of presumed influence (IPI) framework, the current study examines the inferred effects of American media coverage of China, which tends to be negative and to portray China as the West’s next enemy, and the potential real-life consequences of these perceptions in the form of support for China’s global public relations efforts. A survey of a large representative sample of residents in China’s five largest cities showed that Chinese respondents believed that dominantly negative U.S. news about China was influential on Americans’ perceptions of China. Further, the more they paid attention to such news, the greater they presumed the influence of the news on Americans. Structure equation modeling (SEM) analysis shows that presumed influence of U.S. news about China on Americans and negative emotions elicited by the news predicted support for the Chinese government’s global public relations campaigns. We discuss the implications of these findings for the robust influence of presumed influence research and globalized cross-border communication.

Keywords: influence of presumed influence, corrective action, U.S. news on China, international communication, mediated public diplomacy, public relations

In the 21st century, most U.S. news organizations have significantly reduced their foreign news coverage. However, news regarding China has bucked the trend with increased coverage (Peng, 2004; Willnat & Metzgar, 2012). Stone and Xiao (2007) found similar patterns, stating that China received significantly more coverage than any other country in the world in the post-Cold War era. Furthermore,

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research shows that coverage of China in Western media tends to be largely negative (Cheng, 2011), focusing on government censorship, party controls over the civic society, and human rights abuses in the country.

In particular, news frames about China in U.S. news magazines are characteristically negative. According to Stone and Xiao (2007), the "rise of anti-China coverage" led to the claim that Western media anointed China a new enemy in place of the USSR. Wang Qiu, a Chinese lawmaker, claimed that "sixty percent of all mainstream Western media reports smear China" (cited in Allen-Ebrahimian, 2016, p. 1). C. M. Leung and Huang (2007) analyzed the coverage of specific events in China such as the SARS epidemic in 2003 and found China was portrayed unfavorably in major English-language news media.

The perceived media hostility toward China is documented in op-ed pieces as well. Golan and Lukito (2015) analyzed the frames of editorials concerning China in two influential U.S. newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. They found that *The New York Times* framed China as a global power undermined by structural limitations, whereas *The Wall Street Journal* framed China as a direct threat to U.S. foreign policy interests.

This negative coverage of China has stoked anger, fear, and deep resentment among Chinese citizens and fuels nationalism in the country (Ramzy, 2009). Concerned about the unflattering Western angle and the potential influence of portraying China as the new enemy on both Chinese nationals and on foreign audiences, the Chinese government has aggressively developed a two-prong strategy to contain the feared undesirable influence of negative coverage in Western media (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2016). It has tightened control of the Internet with its infamous firewall program, which blocks access to sites of American and other Western news organizations in addition to Google and Facebook. Blocking Western news media on the Internet would presumably protect the Chinese from being influenced by their critical news reports about China. However, the Internet has made news media global; it increases the exposure of local audiences to foreign news media, making the home government's attempt to block foreign news media ineffective. Additionally, to counter the potentially harmful influence of Western, particularly U.S., media, the Chinese government sets aside \$10 billion annually to underwrite a global publicity offensive to polish its image (Ohlberg & Lang, 2016). In the past few years, it has also invested \$6 billion in expanding its international broadcasting service and global public relations campaigns (Donohue, 2011).

China's investments in such programs aimed at engaging global audiences via earned and paid media are consistent with a growing global trend where governments view global communication as an arm of foreign policy (Golan & Himelboim, 2016). In fact, research on mediated public diplomacy points to a global information competition between rival countries as the latest battleground in international relations focused on global public opinion (Entman, 2008; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009). To this end, an increasing number of governments have expanded their global public relations engagement through various paid, earned, shared, and owned media programs (Golan & Viatchaninova, 2014; Himelboim, Golan, Moon, & Suto, 2014; Kioussis & Wu, 2008).

Goals of Study

Set against this background, the present study aims to address these pressing questions: How do people in China perceive the influence of Western media in its coverage of China on themselves and on Western audiences? What roles do attention to news and negative emotions aroused by the reports on China play in affecting their perceptions? Finally, how does their presumed influence of reports on China with a Western angle affect their support for the Chinese government's global profile-raising campaigns and enhanced international broadcasting service?

To shed light on those questions, we propose a theoretical model in which attention to U.S. news on China is theorized to enhance the evaluation of influence of such news on others; the projected influence onto others in turn leads to support for government action. The model was inspired by the influence of presumed influence theory (Gunther & Storey, 2003), which suggests that an individual's belief about media power on others can lead that person to project media influence onto others and to change his or her attitudes or behaviors accordingly. The proposed model was also enlightened by past research (e.g., Lambe & McLeod, 2005; Meirick, 2004; Reid & Hogg, 2005), which reveals that the extent to which others are believed to be influenced by powerful media is subject to people's feelings about who is with them ("us" as an in-group) and who is not ("them" as out-groups). In this study, the self was conceptualized as Chinese, others as Americans, in appraising the influence of U.S. news on China. Such a cross-country, self-other comparison design has not been used in past research, so we therefore expand the literature.

Furthermore, this study proposes that presumed effects of U.S. news on China can be understood through the functional emotion theories and information-processing theory, especially through the key concepts of negative emotions and attention to news. To be specific, news attention and negative emotions will affect presumed effects on self and others, which will in turn affect support for government corrective actions.

To date, no research has attempted to integrate attention to news and emotions aroused by news into a framework to explain this biased belief about media influence. Using news coverage of China in U.S. media as the context, this study seeks to reveal that the belief about the influence of such news is influenced by negative emotions aroused by U.S. news on China and attention to such news.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

The Projection of Media Influence and Third-Person Effect

Recent media-effects research has explored the perceived or indirect effects of media messages. For example, the third-person effect hypothesis proposed by Davison (1983) suggests that people tend to believe that others are more likely to be impacted by mass communication than themselves. In the past 30-plus years, the hypothesis has been empirically tested in numerous studies (Andsager & White, 2007; Lo, Wei, Zhang, & Guo, 2016; Perloff, 1993, 2002), including of news coverage (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Neuwirth & Frederick, 2002). For example, Price, Huang, and Tewksbury (1997) found

support for the greater perceived effect of news on others. Consistent results were reported in more recent studies (e.g., Price & Stroud, 2006; Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2010)—people believed the effect of news to be greater on others than on themselves.

In international communications, previous research (Muller, 2013; Willnat, He, Takeshita, & López-Escobar, 2002) has explored whether exposure to foreign media affect local or home-country audiences' attitudes and opinions about the influence of foreign media, finding that others were believed to be affected more than oneself. Willnat et al. (2002) found that both Asian and European respondents believed that their national cultural values were influenced by exposure to U.S. media (e.g., Hollywood movies and TV shows), but they attributed greater influence of U.S. mediated violence on others than on themselves. Muller (2013) examined national identity building through the mass media. His study showed that the differential inference of media influence occurred in an international context—the news media presented media influences in their own country as much weaker than that in other countries (i.e., it does not affect us, and others are more likely to be affected by the news).

More recently, Gunther and Storey (2003) developed a more general model of indirect media effects. This model, known as influence of presumed influence (IPI), proposes that people tend to perceive communication as influential on others. As such, they will change their own attitudes or behaviors accordingly. In sum, the extant literature suggests that people in general hold the belief of a powerful media out there. Moreover, the more people believe that others attend to media, the greater the potential media effects they will likely project onto others (Chia, 2010). As a special case of IPI, the third-person effect hypothesis specifies that others will be more influenced than the self by media.

In the context of the current study, it is expected that Chinese residents will believe that the dominant but negative U.S. news about China is influential. They will also project greater influence of the news to others. Specifically, Americans, who are politically and culturally different from the Chinese (e.g., Americans are used to having a free and adversarial press), will be thought as being more affected than the Chinese. The first hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1: Residents in urban China will believe that the dominantly negative U.S. news about China will have greater influence on Americans than on themselves.

Attention and Influence of Presumed Media Influence

Previous research has reported that the ways people process news affects their appraisal of the effects of news on others and themselves (Neuwirth, Frederick, & Mayo, 2002; Wei et al., 2010). The literature suggests that people tend to infer media effects on others (McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997) according to their presumptions about others' exposure to media content. As Chia (2010) further argued, the more individuals believe that others attend to media, the greater the potential media effects they will be likely to project onto others.

As a key cognitive mechanism for processing media messages, attention to news functions as an antecedent that affects the biased perception of media effect on others. Lo, Wei, Lu, and Hou (2015)

argued that attention, which is a cognitive resource or mental energy critical to thorough processing of media messages, enhances audience learning from the news media beyond mere exposure. U.S. news on China differs from the official Chinese media in that it tends to be more critical about China, thereby making it more noticed by millions of Chinese. The attention given to U.S. news on China can be seen in the way the Chinese official media openly dispute negative stories presented in Western media and how the spokesperson of China's foreign ministry rebuts a Western correspondent. As such, we expect that Chinese residents will pay attention to U.S. news on China. More importantly, we expect that the more they pay attention to such news, the more they will believe that others are vulnerable to the influence of U.S. media.

Specifically, when people pay attention to American news about China, they will engage in elaborate processing of such news. Following this rationale, we expect that the more deeply Chinese residents process U.S. news on China, or the more they pay attention to it, the more they will presume greater influence of such news on others.

H2: Attention to U.S. news about China will be positively related to presumed influence of such news on Americans.

Emotions and the Presumed Media Influence

Emotions in response to media messages have long been considered an important area of media effects study (Nabi, 2002; Namkoong, Fung, & Scheufele, 2012). Dillard and Nabi (2006) argued that emotions could enhance or inhibit the persuasive effectiveness of media messages, depending on individuals' cognitive levels. That is, emotions motivate audiences to pay attention to and process the message. Additionally, negative emotions, such as anger and fear, were found to affect attitudinal changes (Nabi, 1999, 2002).

The roles of emotions aroused by media messages and inferred effects of media were examined in recent studies (Kim, 2015, 2016). In the context of election polls, Kim (2016) reported that the perceived effect of polls on others was not significantly related with anxiety, anger, or pride. In a similar study, Kim (2015) investigated how anger and anxiety as negative emotions mediated the relationship between presumed effect of polls and attitudes toward restrictions on polling reports and political participation. Findings showed that presumed effect of election polls on others was indirectly related through anxiety to support for restrictions of polling reports.

To further explore the relationships between emotions and presumed media influence, we propose that negative emotions will be a positive correlate of the presumed effects on others of news on China in U.S. media. This expectation is derived from the functional emotion theories, which suggest that emotion affects perceptual and cognitive processes (Izard, 1993). Drawing from functional emotion theories, Nabi (1999) suggests that discrete negative emotions affect information processing, message acceptance or rejection, and information recall. Existing research has also found that negative emotions such as anger and fear affect information accessibility and desired information seeking (Nabi, 2003). According to the theory of affective intelligence, negative emotions such as anger, disgust, contempt, and

hatred may promote individuals to rely on “previously learned routines to manage these situations, just as they do for familiar rewarding circumstances. They often simply ignore uncomfortable information or, alternatively, bolster their own views by seeking conforming information” (MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, & Marcus, 2010, p. 441).

Thus, negative emotions may function as a cognitive mechanism in assessing the impact of media messages. In appraising American news about China, negative emotions elicited by such critical news will likely motivate individuals to think about the influence of such messages and to process them deeply, which will result in greater projected influence of media messages on the public. Accordingly, with negative feelings aroused by the critical coverage of China in U.S. media, engaged Chinese residents would infer greater influence of such news on others.

H3: Negative emotions elicited by U.S. news about China will be positively related to presumed influence of such news on Americans.

Corrective Action as a Consequence of Presumed Influence

Parallel to the behavioral component of the third-person effect, research on the influence of presumed influence explores the practical, real-life outcomes of perceptions of media effects on others (Gunther & Storey, 2003; Tsfati, Cohen, & Gunther, 2010). In fact, identifying the potential real-life consequences of presumed media influence has stimulated a wide range of empirical tests in various social and political contexts (e.g., Cohen & Tsfati, 2009; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005). A meta-analysis by Sun, Pan, and Shen (2008) reviewed scholarship on the behavioral outcomes of perceived media influence and found that those outcomes fall into three key classifications: restrictive, corrective, and promotional actions.

The current study aims to test the IPI model by examining the corrective action as key consequences of perceived influence of biased media on foreign citizens.

Corrective action, according to Rojas (2010), refers to “political behaviors that are reactive, based on perceptions of media and media effects, and seek to influence the public sphere” (p. 347). Based on a representative sample of Colombian adults, Rojas found significant relationships between perceived media influence, perceived media bias, and the likelihood of engaging in a variety of corrective political behaviors such as protesting and voting. Lim and Golan (2011) examined the real-life consequences of perceived effect by studying the perceived influence of political parody videos on social media platforms. They identified a significant relationship between perceived influence on others and corrective action operationalized as social media activism. They argued that social media platforms empowered individuals to directly engage in corrective behaviors meant to mitigate the perceived influence of socially undesirable media on others.

Past research (Tsfati & Cohen, 2005) also found that perceptions of strong influence of biased media coverage indirectly led to an increased willingness to resort to violent protest. Another study (Cohen & Tsfati, 2009) reported that what voters think media do to other voters influenced their own voting decisions. This effect was persistent after controlling for political and demographic variables and for

perceptions of media influence on the self. In a recent study, Golan and Lim (2016) found support for a significant relationship between perceptions of ISIS online recruiting influence on others and the likelihood of individuals to counter jihadist messages via social media activism.

Additionally, recent studies on the third-person effect of media content found that it was the perceived effect of media messages on others that prompted people to take corrective actions. In a recent study of antisocial and prosocial messages on adolescents, for example, W. Leung and Lo (2015) found that perceived influence of the prosocial messages on others was significantly and positively correlated with support for restriction and corrective behaviors. Building on the growing scholarship on corrective behaviors as key consequences of perceived influence, we predict that:

H4: Presumed influence of U.S. news about China on Americans will be a positive predictor of support for the Chinese government's global public relations campaigns.

The Structural Equation Model (SEM)

To integrate the cognitive variables and emotions with the third-person effect hypothesis, we built a new model that articulates the theoretical linkages of attention to news, negative emotions, perceived effects of the news on Americans, and support for the government's global profile-raising public relations campaigns. We are particularly interested in exploring whether negative emotions and attention to American news about China enhance or mitigate the relationships between perceived effects on Americans and support of government public relations, and if so, how.

As Figure 1 shows, attention to U.S. news on China leads to perceived effects of such news on Americans, which will motivate respondents to support government in increasing funding for its worldwide public relations campaigns. The model will demonstrate the mediating role of negative emotions and presumed influence of U.S. news about China in predicting the dependent variable.

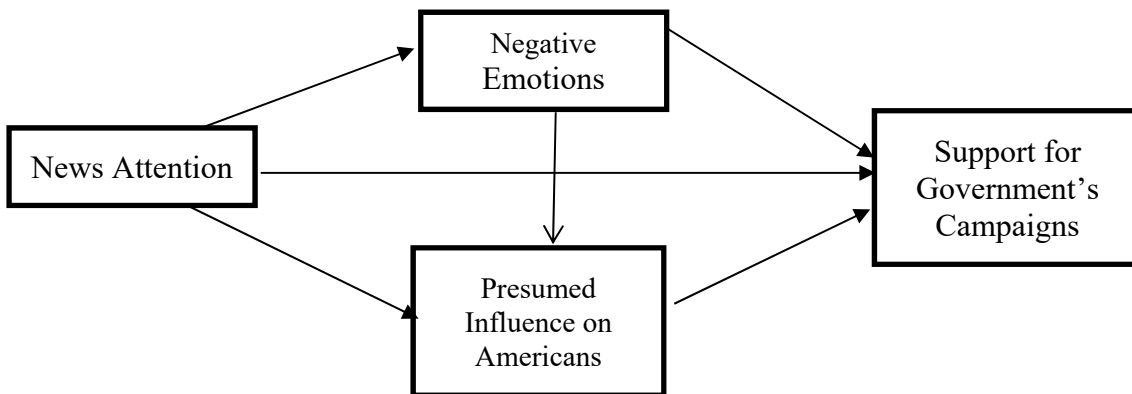


Figure 1. The proposed theoretical model.

Method

Sampling

We drew a sample from an online panel of Internet users living in five first-tier megacities across China: Beijing in the north, Shanghai in the east, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in the south, and Chongqing in the southwest. In drawing the sample, we used a population parameter from the most recent census of China to ensure that the sample matched the gender ratio of the population of urban residents in China's five largest cities. Specifically, the population is 51.19% male and 48.81% female, according to the 2010 Chinese census.

The fieldwork of the online survey began on January 28, 2016, and ended on February 8, 2016. An e-mail was sent to 2,000 respondents aged 18 or older who were randomly selected from the online panel's database. We verified those who agreed to participate in the survey by checking the actual time spent completing the survey and whether they missed some built-in common sense questions. The final sample size totaled 645, resulting in a response rate of 32.35%.

The sample is about evenly split between male (53%) and female (47%) respondents. The average age was 33.12, ranging from 18 to 69 years old. In terms of gender and age, the sample closely matched that of China's online population (of China's total of Internet users, 52.4% are male and 47.6% female; 73.7% are between 10 and 39 years old; see China Internet Network Information Center, 2016). However, the sample less closely matched the general population, which tends to be older (73.4% of China's 1.3 billion people are between 15 and 65 years old).

Of the 645 respondents, 16.1% finished high school, 23.4% had some college education, and 60.5% had a college degree. In terms of monthly income, 1.7% reported an income between \$501 and \$1,000, and 2% an income between \$1,001 and \$2,000. The majority (35.2%) had an income greater than \$6,000, followed by an income of \$4,001–\$6,000 (27.3%) and of \$2,001–\$4,000 (22.6%). Of the sample, nearly half (48.7%) had a household size of three people, with a range from one to 10 people. In terms of occupation, almost half (47.6%) of the respondents were managers or government officials or small-business owners. Blue-collar workers accounted for 11.3% of the sample, and service workers 9.6%. Teachers composed 6.1% of the sample, and students 2.2%. Military or police and retirees accounted for 13.3% and 0.09%, respectively.

Measurement

Attention to U.S. News About China. Respondents were asked to indicate how much attention they paid to American news, such as CNN, about China on the Internet and on social media. The 5-point response categories ranged from 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal. Results of an exploratory factor analysis confirmed that the three items were loaded in a single factor. The one factor solution accounted for 81.39% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.44). A composite measure of attention to U.S. news on China was constructed by averaging the three items ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .86$, $\alpha = .88$).

Presumed Influence of U.S. News About China on the Self. The self in presumed influence of U.S. news about China was operationalized as the surveyed Chinese urban residents. A question asked the respondents to rate the influence of American media coverage of China on themselves. The response categories ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all and 5 = a great deal ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.15$).

Presumed Influence of U.S. News About China on Americans. The other in presumed influence of U.S. news about China was operationalized as Americans as opposed to Chinese; it was measured with a parallel item (replacing "themselves" with "Americans"). The response categories were also a 5-point scale, where 1 = not at all and 5 = a great deal ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.00$).

Negative Emotions Elicited by American News About China. To assess the levels of negative emotion elicited by American news about China, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt angry, unhappy, and offended about U.S. media coverage of China on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much. Results of an exploratory factor analysis showed that the three items were grouped in a single factor, indicating that they measured the same underlying concept. The single-factor solution explained 77.97% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 2.34). The three items were averaged to create a composite index of negative emotions elicited by U.S. news on China ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.90$, $\alpha = .86$).

Support for Government's Global Profile-Raising Public Relations Campaigns. Support for the Chinese government's action to "tell the China story well" (Xiong, 2015) through global public relations campaigns and enhanced international broadcasting was measured by four items. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale: (a) China needs to increase global public relations funds; (b) China needs to increase the funds that can influence foreign social media; (c) China needs to increase the funds for multilanguage television services; (d) China needs to improve foreign media's coverage of China. Results of principal component analysis showed that the four items were grouped in a single factor, suggesting that they measured the same underlying concept. The single-factor solution explained 66.01% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 2.64). The average of the four items was used to create a composite index of support of government global public relations campaigns ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.79$, $\alpha = .83$).

Control Variables. Respondents were asked about their gender, age, education, monthly income, U.S. travel experience, media use frequency, and perceived credibility of U.S. news on China. These variables were used as controls in regression analyses because previous studies indicate that they are related to attention devoted to U.S. news on China and perceived effects of such news on self and others (Andsager & White, 2007; Kim, 2015; Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2008).

Results

H1 predicted that Chinese respondents would project greater influence of the dominantly negative U.S. news about China on Americans than on themselves. Results of a paired t -test— $t(644) = 6.99$, $p < .001$ —provided support for the hypothesis stated in H1. As expected, the respondents presumed

greater influence of news about China in American media on others than on themselves. Statistically, the difference between the two means was significant based on the *t*-test.

H2 predicted that attention to U.S. news about China would be correlated significantly and positively with presumed influence of such news on Americans. Two parallel standard multiple regression analyses were performed in which gender, age, education, monthly income, U.S. travel experience, television viewing, radio listening, online browsing, newspaper and magazine reading, attention to U.S. news about China, and negative emotions elicited by U.S. news on China were entered as independent variables. Dependent variables were presumed influence on self and presumed influence on Americans.

As Table 1 shows, attention to American news about China turned out to be the strongest predictor of the presumed influence of such news on oneself ($B = .39, p < .001$) and on Americans ($B = .23, p < .001$). As expected, higher attention to U.S. news on China was significantly and positively related to presumed influence of such news on Americans. Thus, H2 is supported.

H3 predicted that negative emotions elicited by U.S. news on China would be positively related to presumed influence of such news on Americans. As the same results of regression analysis in Table 1 show, negative emotions elicited by U.S. news on China was a significant predictor of the presumed influence on Americans ($B = .14, p < .01$). H3 is supported.

Table 1. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Presumed Influence of News About China.

Independent Variables	Presumed Influence on the Self	Presumed Influence on Americans
Gender	.00	.02
Age	.02	.04
Education	.15***	.10*
Monthly income	.01	.01
U.S. travel experience	.08*	-.01
Television viewing	.00	.04
Radio use	-.03	.02
Online browsing	-.04	.06
Newspaper use	-.02	-.03
Magazine use	.03	-.06
Attention to China coverage	.39***	.23***
Negative emotions	.08*	.14**
Total adjusted R^2 (%)	20.1	6.7

Note. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients from the final regression equation with all blocks of variables in the model. $N = 645$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

To examine the behavioral effects of presumed influence of U.S. news about China, H4 predicted that presumed influence of such news on Americans would be a positive predictor of support for the Chinese government's global public relations campaigns. A separate standard multiple regression analysis, which was similar to the previous procedures, was performed. Table 2 summarizes the results; it shows that presumed influence of U.S. news about China on Americans ($B = .11, p < .01$) was a significant and positive predictor of support for the Chinese government's global public relations campaigns to present a desirable image of China. H4 is supported.

Finally, to test the proposed causal model, we implemented structural equation modeling using Amos 22.0. Results of SEM indicate that although the chi-square for the model was significant ($\chi^2 = 118.89, df = 39, p < .001$), the χ^2/df ratio was low, at 3.05. The chi-square is sensitive to sample size; larger samples (e.g., > 200) will almost always result in a chi-square at $p < .05$. Considering the big sample of the present study, this result is not surprising. In addition, the comparative fit index (CFI = .97), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI = .96), the normal fit index (NFI = .96), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .06) indicate that the model fit was acceptable. The model explained 0.1% of the variance in negative emotions, 7.5% in presumed influence on Americans, and 12.2% in support for the Chinese government's global public relations campaigns.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Support for Government's PR Campaigns.

Independent Variables	Support for Government's Campaigns
Gender	.00
Age	.09*
Education	-.00
Monthly income	.05
U.S. travel experience	.14**
Television viewing	.01
Radio use	-.05
Online browsing	-.04
Newspaper use	.05
Magazine use	-.03
Attention to China coverage	.14**
Negative emotions	.10**
Presumed influence on self	.15**
Presumed influence on Americans	.11**
Total adjusted R^2 (%)	14.5

Note. Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients from the final regression equation with all blocks of variables in the model. $N = 645$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

From a process perspective, as shown in Figure 2, the SEM model shows that attention to U.S. news on China had a direct effect on presumed influence of such news on Americans ($B = .23, p < .001$) and support for the Chinese government's global profile-raising campaigns ($B = .26, p < .001$). Negative emotions also had a significant impact on perceived effects on Americans ($B = .14, p < .001$) and support for the Chinese government's public relations campaigns ($B = .12, p < .001$). Furthermore, presumed influence of U.S. news about China on Americans ($B = .12, p < .001$) had a significant effect on support for the Chinese government's public relations campaigns. These results provided additional support for H2, H3, and H4.

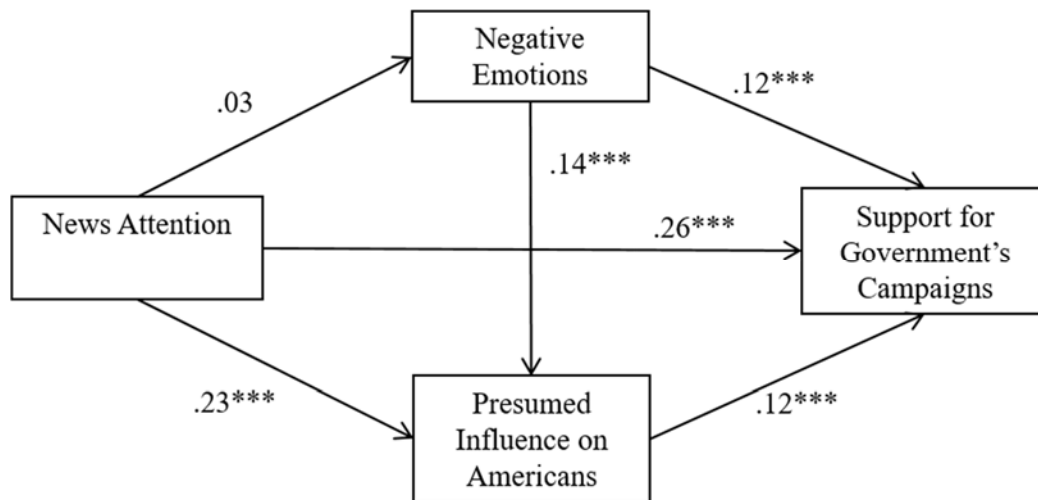


Figure 2. Structural equation model of variables predicting support for government's PR campaigns. Model fit indices: $\chi^2 = 118.89^{*}$, $df = 39$, $\chi^2/df = 3.05$. $CFI = .97$, $TLI = .96$, $NFI = .96$, $RMSEA = .06$. $N = 645$. *** $p < .001$.**

Conclusion and Discussion

The current study examines Chinese urban residents' beliefs about the influence of U.S. news on China, which tends to portray China as the new enemy of the West (Stone & Xiao, 2007) while keeping in mind the rise of China on the world stage as an economic powerhouse. Furthermore, the study also explores the behavioral outcomes associated with the presumed influence of U.S. news about China on foreign citizens.

Results of an online survey of 645 urban residents living in China's five largest cities showed that Chinese respondents believed that U.S. news about China, which dominated the Western media with its negative coverage, was influential on Americans' perceptions of China. The presumed influence of U.S. news on others is consistent with the growing literature of influence of presumed media influence. Results of our study indicate that the Chinese respondents tended to presume greater influence of U.S. news about China on Americans than on Chinese. As such, we documented that the presumed effect of

American news about China is robust in international communication. Moreover, the more respondents paid attention to such news, the greater the influence of the news on Americans they presumed. The results suggest the role of cognitive variables in enhancing the presumed influence of U.S. media.

More importantly, results show that the presumed influence of American news about China on Americans has real-life behavioral consequences. Presumed influence on Americans held significant and positive predictive power over support for the Chinese government's global public relations campaigns to present a desirable image of China to counter the negative coverage in Western media. Results of the follow-up SEM analysis show that attention to U.S. news on China and negative emotions elicited by such news were predictors of presumed influence of the news on Americans. The presumed influence of American news about China on Americans in turn predicted support for public relations campaigns to remedy the wrongs of American media in its negative reporting of China that framed China as a threat to U.S. interests.

These results add to the understanding of the behavioral consequences that may result from perceptions of media influence in the form of corrective action (Rojas, 2010). In particular, we find that residents of country A believe their government should take action to influence media in country B to correct any unflattering coverage of their nation. As such, our study also contributes to the growing body of literature testing and confirming that the influence of presumed influence literature not only leads to support for censorship of undesirable media content but also can lead to support of corrective action aimed at countering negative media influence (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Golan & Lim, 2016; Lim & Golan, 2011; Rojas, Barnidge, & Abril, 2016). These findings provide practical guidance for both policy makers and international relations scholars about the potential influence of presumed media influence on public opinion. Recognizing the competition between rival nations via mediated channels (Entman, 2008; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009), governments can gain public support for their strategic communication programs by highlighting the potential impact that their programs may have on foreign public opinion.

However, it remains to be seen whether the Chinese government's programs to present its desirable image to the world through global public relations campaigns and enhanced international broadcasting service will be effective. Future research can explore the presumed influences of such programs and campaigns in Western countries such as the United States. Future research of this sort will complement the findings of the current study and expand the literature of international communication in the era of globalization.

Limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. The sampling of this study relied on opt-in panels, which typically result in nonprobability samples. The less heterogenous sample may limit the generalization of the key findings. In addition, because of limited space, we used no more than three items to measure negative emotions, which are most common and applicable to the Chinese residents (e.g., angry; the Chinese are unhappy [about being demonized by the West]; the title of a popular book in China). Also, given the one-shot survey design instead of an experimental design, the relationships tested and reported in the present study are primarily relational. To make them causal, longitudinal or experimental studies will be required. This will be a new direction for future research.

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