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# AI's Country-of-Origin Effect <sup>[1]</sup>

In the late 1990's nation branding scholars began exploring the Country-of-Origin (COO) Effect. Rooted in marketing research, the COO Effect suggested that consumer labels impact individuals' willingness to buy products. For example, the "Made in China" label was once viewed as having a negative effect on consumers who worried about the quality of products that originated from China. The "Made in Germany" label had a positive impact on consumers who associated Germany with high quality products. The growing popularity of Generative AI, and the fact that different AIs have been developed in different countries, led me to examine a possible Country-of-Origin Effect in which AI narration of world events would differ based on the country in which a particular AI was developed in. As such, American AIs may promote American worldviews and values through their narration of world events, while Chinese AIs might promote Chinese worldviews and values. Such a difference would suggest that AIs are ideological devices that allow states to exert power by shaping users' beliefs, opinions and worldviews.

To test a possible Country-of-Origin Effect, I asked three Generative AI tools the following question: "Why does America support Ukraine in the War with Russia?" ChatGPT, an American made AI, responded that the US supports Ukraine for five reasons. First Russia's invasion was a "direct" challenge to the post-WW2 world order as Russia used force to redraw its borders. Second, America seeks to "contain" Russia and "weaken" Russia's threat to NATO. Third, US support for Ukraine was meant to "assure" NATO allies that the U.S. was committed to the Alliance. Fourth, the U.S. was motivated by financial interests as the war has benefited US arms companies and increased American oil exports. Lastly, the U.S. supported Ukraine due to "Global Geopolitics" as America competes opposite Russia and China for global influence. ChatGPT suggested that a Russian victory would "embolden" other nations, suggesting it might lead China to invade Taiwan.

Mistral, a European AI, addressed similar issues. Yet, there were subtle differences in language and emphasis. For example, Mistral argued that the US aid enabled Ukraine to contend with a "brutal" Russian invasion, while "defending democracy" and the rule-based order. These subtle differences are important as they frame Russia a brutal invader and the US as a benevolent defender. Mistral also listed "US National Interests" which include weakening the Russian threat to NATO and weakening Russia' military and economic prowess. Notably, Mistral emphasized the term "stability," stating that an "emboldened" Russia could destabilize Europe whole U.S. support or Ukraine signalled to "authoritarian regimes that aggression will be met with strong resistance, which is seen as crucial for global stability." Mistral's narration therefore once again contrasted Russia with the U.S. arguing that the former was a dangerous destabilizing agent while America was a stabilizing force in Europe. Crucially, both NATO and Europe were far more prevalent in Mistral's commentary when compared to ChatGPT.

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## **Effect in which AI narration of world events would differ based on the country in which a particular AI was developed in."**

DeepSeek, a Chinese AI, addressed the same issues, while using very different language. First, DeepSeek stated that "The U.S. leads a post-WWII international system built on rules like respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity." DeepSeek then added that a threat to the U.S.-led order could lead other nations to challenge the U.S., such as a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Although both ChatGPT and DeepSeek addressed the issue of Taiwan they did so differently with the American AI framing a Chinese invasion as a threat to global stability and DeepSeek framing a Chinese invasion as a challenge to U.S. dominance and hegemony. DeepSeek also mentioned that by supporting Ukraine the U.S. was able to "Weaken a Geopolitical Rival" without "risking a single American soldier in direct combat." Here, too, language is crucial as DeepSeek frames U.S. support to Ukraine as self-serving as America can weaken a rival without paying the costs of doing so.

DeepSeek also dealt with two novel issues. DeepSeek stated that the U.S. supported Ukraine due to Russian war crimes writing that, "The well-documented evidence of Russian war crimes...has created a strong humanitarian imperative to help Ukraine defend its people." Moreover, DeepSeek listed the need to counter "Russian Energy Blackmail." By helping Ukraine, the U.S. was decreasing European dependence on Russian oil and energy, while "strengthening Europe's long-term economic independence." These comments are important as they negatively frame Russia, who is both an ally of China and a potential geopolitical rival.

These results suggest that there is a Country-of-Origin Effect in Generative AI. At times, this Effect is pronounced. DeepSeek users may come to regard Russia very negatively given its war crimes and policy of extorting Europe through energy. Yet they may also have a negative view of the US which exploits Ukraine to weaken Russia without committing American troops. Conversely, ChatGPT and Mistral users may negatively view Russia due to its "brutal" invasion of Ukraine and its attempt to destabilize Europe. Other times the Effect is more subtle as AIs use different language.

Crucially, DeepSeek answers were also emblematic of Chinese foreign policies depicting the U.S. as enforcing a world order which mostly benefits the U.S.- be it in energy where U.S. oil will replace Russian oil or arms sales. Mistral's narration was emblematic of a European outlook stressing the Russian risk to European stability and security. ChatGPT's narration resonated with American foreign policies including its global geopolitical rivalry with China, the threat that China poses to Taiwan and US commitment to its allies across the world.

This Country-of-Origin Effect warrants attention from scholars and diplomats. Scholars should examine to what extent AIs promote states' norms, values and policies and to what extent AI narration shapes users' understanding of the world around them. Scholars should also conceptualize AIs as ideological tools that help nations shape global public opinion in accordance with their interests. AIs are thus an extension of state power. Diplomats should also experiment with AI tools to see how their nation and policies are depicted by different AIs. Negative depictions could be countered through digital nation branding campaigns.

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