COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE COVERAGE OF BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS BY CNN AND OAN FROM MAY 26 2016 TO NOVEMBER 8 2020

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and compare the Black Lives Protests' coverage at their peaks in the United States from 2016 to 2020 through two news channels, CNN and OAN, and how their political and social inclinations affected the way the news channels covered the events of the protests. The method used in this study is a qualitative content analysis of news articles and live television broadcasts by CNN and OAN. This study looks at 60 combined samples, 35 from CNN and 25 from OAN. This paper observes the language used to conclude whether the content is swayed or racialized. By examining and comparing the news channels' coverage, it was concluded that CNN exhibited sympathy towards the protests, while OAN viewed them as deviant and violent.

Keywords: Protest Paradigm, Black Lives Matter, CNN, OAN, Content Analysis, Media Coverage, BLM, News Coverage

INTRODUCTION

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a movement formed in 2013 through a hashtag posted on Twitter, #BlackLivesMatter, to defend black people's rights in the United States of America, symbolized by a fist with a black background. This movement has had many impacts on confronting and diminishing the embedded racism found in the roots of the United States. The movement was also utilized to address the violence and brutality used against black people by police forces. "The name Black Lives Matter signals condemnation of the unjust

killings of Black people by police. Black people are far more likely to be killed by police in the United States than white people" (Brian Duigan, 2020). Finally, having equal rights for all American citizens in specific and the whole world, disregarding their race.

"The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement began online when the co-founder Alicia Garza shared the hashtag '#BlackLivesMatter' following the murder of a young black boy named Trayvon Martin in 2013" (Gawthrop & Illingworth, 2020). By building its base through social media, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were used drastically to deliver the movement's message. However, such a movement was reimplemented recently after the murder of George Floyd, which took over social media platforms by having users post about the incident and having games such as Call of Duty display a message showing how they stand by black lives before each game begins. This led to "protests taking place daily in all 50 states of America, as well as in over 20 countries worldwide" (Gawthrop & Illingworth, 2020).

As with such worldwide events, content creators take advantage of such incidents to grab as much attention from the audience and dominate the event's coverage.

This movement hasn't just dominated social media. The protests are the most searched in the U.S. in Google history, and they commanded an immense amount of news coverage in early June. YouTube saw spikes in viewership of Black Lives Matter related videos then as well. (Beckman, 2020)

Since this was a matter to the public, showing interest in watching the news and videos of the protests regarding the incidents and trying to stay up to date as much as possible, news reports and media corporations accompanied the protest paradigm's usage. An additional element, blame attribution, was also found. Sometimes present were the language of crime, lawlessness, abuse, blame for nearby acts of violence, and inflammatory quotations from bystanders and official sources. There was little discussion of critical issues related to BLM formation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze how two different media outlets covered the social movement of The Black Lives Matter protests in regards to their political inclination, specifically how this movement was mainly targeting the lives of black American citizens which were taken away by police brutality and violence, a result of systemic racism.

Research Questions

1. How were the Black Lives Matter protests covered by CNN?

2. How were the Black Lives Matter protests covered by OAN?

3. Was the coverage influenced by the ideological inclination of both news networks?

Limitations

This research is based on the BLM movement's media coverage by two media channels, CNN and OAN. Although analyzing two media channels is sufficient to present different perspectives, having only two channels limits this research as general statements representing all media channels cannot be made. This limits the number of news reports analyzed due to the time constraint set for this research. As for the content being analyzed, OAN does not have enough articles regarding the topic being discussed; thus, it was necessary to resort to analyzing articles and videos. Qualitative content analysis is used to analyze researched reports; thus, this analysis will be done manually, without using statistics, therefore limiting the number of reports and content analyzed in this research.

Significance of the Study

This topic is of a high degree of relevance and importance, especially in the 21st century following numerous cases that have captured the media's and public's attention concerning police brutality towards African Americans. For decades, black people in America have been subjected to multiple injustices; even after the civil rights movement, which provided them equal rights, they remain treated unequally. One of the most prominent injustices is police brutality. After the death of George Floyd in May 2020, a series of protests and riots were triggered all over the country. When observing these incidents, the media plays a pivotal role in processing information and forming a conclusion over this issue. Thus, examining and analyzing how news outlets covered this subject will help the research paper, and future content analyses make several discoveries about the Black Lives Matter movement and the way it is perceived. This research will also show how a news outlet's political inclination can affect how it broadcasts news and reports to sway its viewers' perceptions and beliefs concerning this movement. This research will open a discussion about how news outlets may alter their content based on several factors.

Theoretical Framework

The qualitative content analysis is carried out in light of the frames below:

Table 1: Frames and their indicators

Frame Labels	Indicators
Injustice	- Do OAN and CNN attribute the cause of a problem to the government/police/military? - Do OAN and CNN provide evaluation about what is fair for the protesters? - Do OAN and CNN give protesters the right to express their grievances through a sense of moral outrage? - Do OAN and CNN provide protesters with a "political consciousness" to defy any form of justice?
Sympathy	- Do OAN and CNN support protestors' cause and/or reaction? - Do OAN and CNN enlist public support for protesters? - Do OAN and CNN provoke sympathy or compassion for protestors? - Do OAN and CNN seek to influence governmental authorities?
Accountability	- Do OAN and CNN highlight a government's failure within its agencies? - Do OAN and CNN point out a government's violations of law? - Do OAN and CNN stress the need for monitoring government's policies and actions? - Do OAN and CNN demand a change in the government's policies and actions?
Spectacle	- Do OAN and CNN emphasize the deviant and violent behaviour of protestors? - Do OAN and CNN disparage protestors by number? - Do OAN and CNN emphasize potential threats and negative consequences of protestors? - Do OAN and CNN depict protestors' negative emotions?
Protest Paradigm	- Analyzing the content provided by OAN and CNN through the protest paradigm. - Identifying which category the representation of the BLM protestors falls under: - Delegitimizing the protestors - Marginalizing the protestors - Demonizing the protestors

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will attempt to identify gaps in the literature related to the BLM protestors' representation and hopefully add to the conversation and research available concerning how two media outlets, CNN and OAN, covered the protests and their protestors depending on the outlet's political inclination. This study will help bring forth a new perspective as this comparative topic is yet to be discussed by other researchers. Nonetheless, looking at previous relevant articles and referencing their frameworks will help this study explore a new realm that supports the content of this research.

The study, "News media and the racialization of protest: an analysis of Black Lives Matter articles" by Bell and Leopold (2017) researches and analyzes the coverage of the Black Lives Movement by seven different newspapers based in America and reviews their content in the aims of determining whether the protest paradigm, as well as other frames, are present in a racial tone. The study does so by analyzing articles related to the topic published by different outlets such as the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times around Michael Brown's death. The method used in this study was qualitative content analysis. The article's findings conclude that the content reviewed followed the paradigm extensively as much of the language used had negative connotations, and the movement's goals were rarely discussed.

"The Framing of Race: Trayvon Martin and the Black Lives Matter Movement" is a study by Lane, Williams, Hunt, and Paulk published in 2020, which examines two national newspapers and analyzes how the coverage of Trayvon Martin and the Black Lives Matter movement was influenced by race. The method used was qualitative, as researchers employed Feagin's white racial frame as the framework for their content analysis. This paper's findings demonstrate that the news coverage of both the death of Trayvon Martin and the Black Lives Matter movement was heavily racialized as it embraces a pro-white/anti-black master-frame; thus, demonizing black people and portraying them as "lawless" while glorifying white people.

In 2018, Tillery's paper explored how social movement organizations (SMOs) associated with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign use Twitter through three content analysis studies. This study's key findings are that most tweets produced by BLM accounts were an emotional response between December 1, 2015, and October 31, 2016. The second important takeaway is that more tweets were created by BLM organizations that framed the movement as a battle for civil liberties than those that used gender, ethnic, and LGBTQ identity frames. The findings were that BLM activists encourage their followers less often to seek destructive repertoires of confrontation than encourage other political behaviors (Tillery, 2018).

This study concentrates on Black Lives Matter (BLM) in social media and how social media users engage with BLM by using hashtags. This was seen by examining 66,159 tweets mentioning #BlackLivesMatter in 2014, along with other hashtags posted with #BlackLivesMatter, to measure how the protest's framing is affected by online communities. The results show that there are multiple hashtags connected with #BlackLivesMatter. Such hashtags mention the movement's unity or approval, object against police brutality, including movement strategies, mention Ferguson, or convey feelings of countermovement (Ince et al., 2017).

Swanson's 2018 research aims to clarify BLM's movement, decide the degree to which Twitter trends were mirrored by newspaper coverage, and analyze whether newspaper coverage represents a state-wide political bias through public opinion. The method in Swanson's paper was quantitative as it employed primary data collection. Results show that 55.2 percent of those surveyed had little to no understanding of BLM or its aims, emphasizing a desire to analyze conventional media coverage.

The article "How George Floyd's death ignited a racial reckoning that shows no signs of slowing down" written by McLaughlin and published by CNN in 2020, states how George Floyd got killed by the police suspense of using a fake $20 bill at a grocery store. The $20 bill turned out to be real, but the police went on to kill an innocent African American. The article aims to stand with the Black Lives Matter movement and demonstrate how George Floyd was wrongly accused and portraying the protests as a movement rather than lawless riots.
The article "NYPD Arrest Top BLM Official Hawk Newsome," published by OAN Newsroom in 2020, analyzes the arrest of Hawk Newsome, the founder of the New York chapter of the Black Lives Matter. Hawk Newsome was at the protest, taking action and protesting for his rights while the NYPD arrested him due to potential violence. The article aims to address the reason for Hawk Newsome's arrest.

Mundt et al. address social media's potential position in helping movements grow and improve themselves internally, a mechanism known as scaling up. This study draws on a Black Lives Matter (BLM) case study that involves reviewing public social media pages and BLM group interviews; it is a qualitative content analysis method. The study indicates that while the benefits of using social media outweigh its dangers, it is essential to carefully monitor online media channels to minimize real, physical risks posed for activists by social media (Mundt et al., 2018).

"#BlackLivesMatter: This Generation's Civil Rights," written by Tanika Siscoe in 2016, aims to show how Black Lives Matter is important and how the organization wants to achieve its goal

by obtaining justice. This study's findings provided content about the BLM movement and how it has affected many people's lives. It also covers the importance of Black Lives Matter in comparison to All Lives Matter. The method of this study is quantitative content analysis (Siscoe, 2016).

"Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement: A Comparative Analysis of Two Social Movements in the United States" written by Dewey M. Clayton in 2018, aims to show the violent part of Black Lives Matter and how African Americans were put under physical threat because of the protests occurring in America. The findings were that the study provided content about how black protestors were injured and how the police and the government reacted to the protests. The methods of this study are a quantitative content analysis.

Overall, while previous studies provide insight into how protestors of the Black Lives Matter are, in some instances, racialized, this study looks into how two specific news outlets, CNN and OAN, covered these protests based on their political inclination. This study's findings will give future researchers a specific view of how political inclinations may distort a specific event's delivery.

METHODOLOGY

The method used is qualitative content analysis as the study uses procedures that focus on the set of thematic codes for frames derived from media movement literature.

Sampling Method

The sampling method is a simple random sampling technique in which the content analyzed will include 60 reports, 35 CNN articles, and 25 OAN articles that cover the Black Lives Matter protest.

Table 2: Sample Table

News Items	Number of Reports	Percentage
CNN	35	58.3%
OAN	25	41.7%
Total	60	100%

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 3: Findings Percentages

News Articles	Sympathy	Accountability	Injustice	Spectacle	Number of Articles	Number of Videos
CNN	45.7%	22.9%	45.7%	40%	30	5
OAN	0%	10%	15%	90%	8	12

CNN's articles and videos showed a high percentage, 45.7%, of sympathy towards the protesters and their cause, demonstrating the network's outlook on the protest as a whole. An article published by CNN which is in support of the protestors, the "George Floyd murals are popping up all over the world" article that stated, "the death of George Floyd has resonated worldwide, and the proof can be found on buildings from Minneapolis to Montreal, Belfast to Berlin" (Steele & Almond, 2020). This attests to the conclusion that CNN provokes sympathy and compassion towards George Floyd, the individual whose death triggered the protests. Nevertheless, although CNN supports the movement and is compassionate towards the protestors, they still criticized the protestors. CNN's reports often referred to the protestors as "violent protestors" on live television. "Police arrest CNN correspondent Omar Jimenez and crew on live television" May 29, 2020, and critiqued their actions in states like Chicago the looting and riots were excessive.

OAN showed 0% sympathy towards the protestors and the movement as an entirety. The news channel was heavily critical of the protesters' actions and attempted to deem them violent extremists. On a live television broadcast by OAN on September 2, 2020, "violence stemming from Black Lives Matter protests claims lives of dozens of innocent Americans" reporters used words such as "violent protestors" and claimed that the "radical left" is "attacking and killing innocent Americans" without providing any evidence to support that claim. Moreover, this shows that OAN does not sympathize with the protestors or the movement, as they also stated on live TV broadcast "Daily Caller: BLM movement wants to destroy America."

When analyzing the results concerning the spectacle frame, 40% of the CNN articles fall under that frame. As an example, in the article "Black Lives Matter blocks roads to airports in Minneapolis, San Francisco," reporters describe the behavior of the protestors as "disruptive" declaring that "Black Lives Matter protesters temporarily blocked roads to airports in Minneapolis and San Francisco on Wednesday as part of their "Black Xmas"

(Martinez, 2015). Although CNN criticized the protestors, the remaining 60% of their content analyzed did not attack the protestors and their actions. Unlike OAN, where 100% of their content analyzed depicted the protestors at fault and demonized them. OAN even went as far as to compare them to Nazis. In one of the live news reports, "Black Lives Matter, Antifa terrorist using Nazi tactics," broadcasted on August 6, 2020, videos of the protest were aired and compared to videos of a Nazi rally in Germany in 1933. As for the injustice frame, nearly 46% of the articles from CNN fell under it, which shows that CNN seeks to attribute the problem to the police and highlight their errors. The article, "It's been six months since Breonna Taylor died and activists aren't letting the world forget," published on September 14, 2020, stated, "Breonna Taylor had big plans before police knocked down her door in a deadly raid." The way CNN reports covered the attack on Breonna Taylor attests that they are sympathetic towards her and the incident by pointing out that the police were the perpetrators of violence.

For OAN, only 10% of the articles were in agreement with the indicators of the injustice frame; this confirms the fact that OAN is sympathetic towards the police and government officials as they rarely discussed their faults. OAN's article, "George Floyd protests in NYC turn violent" May 30, 2020, states that the FDNY confirmed that "four police officers were injured;" therefore, this demonstrates how OAN attempts to sway its viewers into sympathizing with the police rather than going against them. Lastly, nearly 23% of the articles and videos by CNN fall under the accountability frame, which shows that although they supported the protestors, they did not heavily criticize their opposition, which is the police. There were not enough articles directly holding the police accountable for their actions as they opted towards just reporting the events. Nonetheless, the article "It's been six months since Breonna Taylor died and activists aren't letting the world forget" states, "since then, no charges have been brought against any of the three officers involved in the March 13 shooting. Two of the officers remain on the force. A third officer was fired and is appealing to get his job back" (Vera, 2020). This draws attention to the fact that government officials have not been held responsible for their crimes against Breonna Taylor. Similarly, only 10% of the content analyzed from OAN fell under accountability; this again proves how OAN, as a far-right news channel, shapes its viewers' perspective.

The results of researching the coverage of two news channels on the Black Lives Matter movement represents how both news channels have different political and social context in their articles due to their political and ideological inclination. OAN, owned by a far-right Trump supporter, affected how they covered the BLM protests. All of the content analyzed from OAN, in some way or another, scrutinized and vilified the protestors. However, based

on the findings, OAN did not entirely dismiss the police's wrongdoings, but they tended to justify their crimes whenever it did mention them. OAN was also more heavily critical of the protesters showing no sympathy towards them and intensively highlighting and exaggerating their actions and their damage throughout 100% of their coverage. An example of that would be the article from OAN titled "Research shows defunding police could dramatically increase crime, cost thousands of black lives" published on June 18, 2020, in which the injustice displayed by police did not go unnoticed "police presence was likely responsible for up to 450 excess homicides every year." Nevertheless, the article attempted to justify the police's crimes stating that "96% of those killed were attacking the police."

On the other hand, CNN showed a more balanced coverage where they rarely had any ideological or political inclination. They included all the frame labels and presented them equally throughout the coverage of the protests, resulting in an approximate percentage ranging from 30% to 45%. While they did show much sympathy towards the protests, they did not bash the law enforcement officers. For example, the article "Black Lives Matter protesters return to the streets" published on July 16, 2016, highlighted injustice stating, "the protests erupted initially after videos surfaced showing fatal police encounters with two black men, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, in Louisiana and Minnesota, respectively." Additionally, they also highlighted sympathy stating, "in Washington, a group marched peacefully through downtown Saturday night, chanting, We young. We strong. We marching all night on." CNN also drew attention to the wrongdoings of the protestors by mentioning the following "at least two officers were injured by protesters -- one hit with a glass bottle and the other by fireworks, according to St. Paul police." This article shows how CNN attempts to show the whole picture and is relatively less biased than OAN.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the purpose of the research is to provide insight into how CNN and OAN covered the Black Lives Matter protest and movement based on their political inclination. Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a movement for African Americans' rights and justice who have been subjected to police brutality. The protests were covered on several media platforms, as it influenced black people in America and encouraged them to go on the streets to be part of the movement. This study shows how media outlets can be biased when delivering news to their viewers. Using a collective sample of 60 articles and videos from both CNN and OAN, this study's findings demonstrated a divided point of view.

On the one hand, CNN was more sympathetic towards the protesters and showed less bias, while OAN slandered the protestors and justified the police's crimes. Each study analyzed in the literature review provides information about the BLM movement and how it started

while providing statistics and stories of what the Americans have been through to get their rights and justice. Each study analyzed in the literature review included quantitative and qualitative methods of research. As such, much similar to Bell and Leopold's 2017 study, which analyzed the coverage of the protests by seven different media outlets to observe whether their content was racialized, this study adds to that by looking into whether the news outlet's political inclination tailored the protests' coverage.

For future reference and to further fill in the field gap, media coverage of the BLM protests across different countries should be analyzed. Although BLM started in the United States, it is still relevant globally. Doing so will help portray how the movement takes place and what the media has to say about it worldwide. This will allow for the research to be more reliable and less biased as it offers information from a variety of different resources, which will also allow for a better and more accurate comparison of media channels, since it would be on an international scale, rather than just being limited to the United States.

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