

Media Framings and Biases on Morey's Hong Kong Tweet

Yiming Chen

High School Affiliated to Shanghai Jiaotong University, Shanghai 200439, China.

alexchenjzib@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper is a case study and delves into the news outlets that report Morey's Hong Kong tweet and his clarification. Based on a literature review on media framing, I will analyze how the outlets present and comment on the same event differently and draw a cross-nation comparison between Vox and People's Daily. Furthermore, I will explore the driving force behind such inciting writing style. Finally, I will conclude that media framings serve to reinforce audiences' values and increase the prestige of media.

Keywords: Media framing; Morey Issue; Hong Kong; People's Daily; Vox.

1. Introduction

In September 2019, a tweet "Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong" by former Houston Rockets manager Daryl Morey halted the cooperation between NBA and China. Though Morey deleted the tweet afterward, the backlash from China and Morey's vague clarification still triggered waves of accusations from media outlets of both China and the US, which held opposite views. In this paper, I argue that, though focusing on the same issue, which is Morey's Hong Kong tweet and his clarification afterward, Vox and People's Daily, the mainstream media of America and China, composed their reports based on their political stance and presented the issue in a way that can reinforce the beliefs held by their target audiences.

2. Literature Review

Framing is a concept that encapsulates both microlevel and macrolevel. At microlevel, framing describes "how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006). At macrolevel, framing refers to "modes of presentation that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Many researchers have noticed this phenomenon in media studies. For instance, Gui (2021) identified and analyzed metaphorical and literal frames that shape the pandemic for the public on Chinese mainstream media program CCTV News, and concluded that the state-sponsored program professed "what roles people should play and what they could do" (Gui, 2021). In another study, researchers statistically investigated the positively tilted frames in news outlets while describing the Tea Party (Boykoff & Laschever, 2011). Both pieces of research explored the framing effect in media coverage. Yet, they only focused on a single nation respectively.

3. Research Design

The detailed methods are as follows: by analyzing the wording in *Vox* and *People's Daily's* news outlets on Morey's tweet, this paper will conduct a case study based on the notion of media framing.

4. Discussion

In the report on Morey's tweet, both Vox and People's Daily adapted framing to present their values. The clash of stances starts from Morey's tweet itself. Vox described the deeds of Morey as "a bit outside his lane as a sports guy but fundamentally banal in the context of western public opinion" (Yglesias, 2019). "Banal in the context of western public opinion" is a supportive explanation for

Morey's tweet from a western's perspective, combined with "a bit outside his lane", the description, in the early part of this news, suggests that there is not much a big deal in terms of Morey's tweet. Based on that, the following analysis can continue its pro-freedom and pro-democracy argument. Though commenting on the same tweet, People's Daily framed it in a completely different tone, which almost neglects the west's pro-democracy argument. The article was written from the perspective of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which prioritizes political stability and territorial integrity. To present this ideology, People's Daily considered Morey's tweet as "the slogan of violent extremists in Hong Kong" (People's Daily, 2019). "Extreme violent rogues (Jiduan Baoli Fenzi)", in this regard, is a phrase with a highly negative connotation, suggesting that the protestors were illegal and Morey's supportive claim for them was hence unacceptable. The phrase framed Morey as a separatist, who threatens the sovereignty of China. Therefore, People's Daily concluded that the stance in Morey's clarification "hurts the Chinese fans and offends the Chinese citizens" (People's Daily, 2019). By connecting the identity of a basketball lover to the status of a Chinese citizen, the presentation of the Morey issued by People's Daily can cater to the patriotism culture among Chinese readers.

Realizing the backlash from China, Morey clarified that he was "merely voicing one thought, based on one interpretation, of one complicated event" (Feng & Yue, 2019). While describing his reaction, Vox framed that Morey's stance was inferior to the Chinese government in the power dynamic. The author quoted several celebrities' Twitter and denounced the intention of such clarification as "to appease the Chinese", to "cater to the views of Chinese people" and "to please the Chinese government". Among them, "appease" has a disapproving connotation, combined with "cater to" as well as "please", the author implied that Morey was bowing to the Chinese consumers and political leaders because he failed to promote free speech as a fundamental human right and democracy as a political notion. However, People's Daily held an opposing view. "Did Morey apologize? No!" "You get sweets from China, then turn your back to the Chinese" (Feng & Yue, 2019). People's Daily solely selected quotes that expressed dissatisfaction and despise for Morey's clarification. By emphasizing the patriotic comments while ignoring the reactions of other Chinese, the article framed Morey as someone unwilling to confess his fault. Thus, readers could be guided to stay in line with CPC on this issue.

The reason why articles are composed in this way is connected with the role of modern media, which is to inform, and more importantly, to become more influential: "the more outrageous the content they post, the more likes and new followers they attract, and the more status they acquire" (Kolbert, 2021). From readers' standpoint, since they "often need to make sense of the information quickly, and forming new explanations or beliefs takes time", slogans and rhetoric that align with their values will be more understandable and acceptable than analytic, factual, and unbiased articles. By catering to the pre-existing beliefs of readers, media can gain more prestige. In this case, "social advocates" compose 44% of Vox audiences, who "believe many aspects of society need to change" (Vox Media Insights & Innovation, 2021). Vox catered to such belief with a pro-democracy and pro-freedom approach to Morey Issue, which implied that the Chinese society should change. People's Daily, with the mission of "advocating the Party's belief, guiding public opinion and warmly serving netizens since inception" (People. cn, n.d.), promoted the notion of territorial integrity to its readers and catered to their patriotism values. The strategy turns out well: Vox and People's Daily are both increasingly influential to their audiences. Compared to the 8.2 million visitors to Vox.com in July 2014 (Weigel, 2014), the number almost doubled to 17.3 million in July 2022. People's Daily, as an official media for CPC, has accumulated over 100 million followers on Weibo.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, by framing the Morey Issue in a polarizing manner, both news outlets attempted to define the "proper" way to act by speaking on behalf of the whole society. Such an illusion may cause audiences to conform to the values promoted by the media. In this paper, I compared the news outlets

that reported the Morey Issue and applied the notion of media framing to a cross-nation situation. Based on current findings, future research may explore more the separate roles that cultural and political factor plays in the process of constructing media framing.

References

- [1] Shoemaker, P. J. & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- [2] Scheufele, D. A. & Tewksbury, D. (2006). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x>.
- [3] Boykoff, J & Laschever, E. (2011). The Tea Party movement, framing, and the US media. *Social Movement Studies*, 10(4), 341–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2011.614104>.
- [4] Gui, L. (2021). Media framing of fighting covid-19 in China. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 43(4), 966–970. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13271>.
- [5] People's Daily. (2019, October 6). #Comment from People's Daily#: Morey, please do not use sensitive words and touch the bottom line of China. Weibo. <https://www.weibo.com/2803301701/lagqhDbFJ>.
- [6] Yglesias, M. (2019, October 7). The raging controversy over the NBA, China, and the Hong Kong protests, explained. <https://www.vox.com/2019/10/7/20902700/daryl-morey-tweet-china-nba-hong-kong>.
- [7] Feng, L & Yue, H. (2019, October 7). Neither Morey nor NBA's statement apologized. This is a provocation and defiance of China. <http://society.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1007/c428181-31385995.html>
- [8] Weigel, D. (2014, August 23). Here's what you need to know about politico's coverage of Vox, in two charts. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2014/08/here-s-what-you-need-to-know-about-politico-s-coverage-of-vox-in-two-charts.html>.
- [9] Kolbert, E. (2021, December 23). How politics got so polarized. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/01/03/how-politics-got-so-polarized?gclid=Cj0KCQjwntCVBhDdARIsAMEwACmLIWoDQdQ84sRf07Rs2dvM7dtt5946CNI7eWkNSYM1cjq-VSpW3mcaApPUEALw_wcB.
- [10] People.cn. (n.d.). Introduction to People.cn. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from <http://en.people.cn/102840/7560415.html>.
- [11] Vox Media Insights & Innovation. (2021, February 16). Insights & Innovation: Where Vox Media's audiences fall on the spectrum of advocacy. <https://www.voxmedia.com/2021/2/16/22286440/insights-innovation-how-vox-medias-audiences-fall-on-the-spectrum-of-advocacy>.