

Fighting The Frame: How Framing Police Brutality Influences Blame

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Abstract

Framing has been a prevalent subject within contemporary society, and many scholars have explored its effects on news media. Sociologists, in particular, have made great contributions to the concept; however, there is a significant lack of literature regarding the framing of police brutality in the news. This study explores how the framing of police brutality by legacy news sources affects how the audience assigns blame using semantic analysis to analyze a correlation between themes within articles and their comments.

Overview

This study will support and demonstrate a connection between Snow’s theory of framing and Tilly’s theory of blame by answering the question: How does the framing of police brutality in legacy news articles affect the way commenters assign blame to groups involved? This study uses articles produced by legacy news sources regarding Sonya Massey, a Black woman in Springfield, Illinois, shot in her home by two police officers over a dispute regarding a pot of boiling water. Semantic analysis is used to analyze a correlation between themes within articles and their comments. These correlations will then be compared among articles to measure the effects of framing.

Literature Review

This study will reinforce the use of Snow’s framing perspective in combination with Tilly’s blame process by highlighting the interdisciplinary relevance of the subjects. Media and sociology scholars approach the concept of framing from differing perspectives but both find that framing significantly affects the lives of those who are framed. Tilly agrees with this argument positing that blame is a key factor in establishing social movements (**Roberge2009?**). Many sociologists support Tilly’s claim that blame plays a heavy role in contributing to the effects of framing and acknowledge its connection to Blame. However, few ground the connection in empirical evidence and focus too heavily on the framing aspect of the study, neglecting the role of blame.

Research Questions

1. How does the framing of instances of police brutality by legacy news sources in articles affect which topics commenters focus on?

H0: The percentage of themes focused on in the comments will be reflective of the topic percentage in the article
Ha: The percentage of themes focused on in the comments will be different than the topics focused on in the article

2. How does introducing new information affect which themes commenters focus on?

Ha: Introducing new information will affect the amount to which commenters focus on topics in the article
H0: Introducing new information will have no effect on the topics commenters focus on

Methodology

This study will analyze legacy news source articles about Sonya Massey. Articles will be gathered from legacy news websites. Legacy news sources have a large following, consistent reliability with experienced editors, and less biased reports than non-legacy sources ((**Diel2017?**)). I have chosen to analyze articles about Sonya Massey because she has been one of the most recent and prominent cases of police brutality and has much coverage on social media. This study uses 12 articles from the legacy news sources New York Times, ABC, NBC, Washington Post, Fox News, and CNN.

Data

There will be two articles from each news source. “Article 1” will be the oldest article addressing Sonya Massey, and the “Article 2” will be the article directly after the oldest article. This study addresses the first question by finding the frequency of the words in the articles and comments that refer to the themes “Police” or “Massey.” The frequency of these themes (measured by the word count) in the articles are correlated to the themes present within the corresponding article’s comments. There will be a correlational comparison between “article 1” and “article 2” to explore effects of introducing new information. Both will be tested using a chi-square fitness of goodness test.