

Media's Impact on the Strengthening of Hostility Between Chinese and American Public

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Abstract: This paper shows how the media accomplishes its goals through the language and structure of the article about the Spy Balloon Incident. The analytical process is discussed from agenda-setting theory, Framing theory, and Priming theory, showing the underlying logic of the media and how they increase the hatred of the people of two countries towards each other's country through the spy balloon incident. With this thesis, the paper hope to make readers realize that the media is not necessarily presenting the real facts, but instead may be leading them to think what the polity or consortium behind the media wants them to think. This paper is different from the previous ones because it takes examples from the mainstream media outlets in two separate countries, rather than just looking at media outlets in a single country alone since they might work for the same polity and consortium, which means they have the same interest, and truth will not be revealed to people. This gives a more comprehensive perspective and logical integrity since it considers the issue from opposing sides. Unsurprisingly, the media are leading the crowd by adjusting the language and structure of their paragraphs.

Keywords: Media, Politics, public, animosity

1. Introduction

Following President Trump's inauguration, the relationship between the United States and China has plummeted, and along with the lack of agreement between the two governments, there is also growing animosity between the citizens of the two countries. However, as citizens of one country, people have very limited direct access to the other country, which leads to people making their judgments and forming their own opinions only through third-party access to information. In this process, the media plays a dominant role. They mislead and misinform people at the behest of the political or economic organizations that support them [1]. This process includes the impact of three media effect models, which are agenda setting, framing, and priming [2]. In this paper, this paper will carefully analyze news that reported the "spy balloon" earlier this year from CNN (edition.cnn.com/) and CCTV News(cctv.com), which are significant media outlets of the two countries, to show how this process misleads and misinforms readers and fulfills their intention.

A high-altitude balloon belonging to China was seen in North American airspace between January 28 and February 4, 2023, above Alaska, western Canada, and the contiguous United States. The balloon was shot down by the American Air Force on February 4 over American territorial seas off the coast of South Carolina. The FBI Laboratory in Quantico, Virginia, received debris from the

wreckage and transported it there for study. U.S. authorities said that the balloon had intelligence-gathering equipment but does not appear to have transmitted information back to China in June after conducting a preliminary review of the wreckage. The point is, however, that this paper randomly selected and scrutinized 10 articles from CNN and CCTV News respectively, but they did not share the same viewpoints and did not report the same emphasis on this finalized event.

It's very shocking that CCTV News, China Central Television's international arm, is supposed to be very objective media, but it shows a significant nationalistic-centered hostility to the US. For example, the title of an article is "The American Lie that has plagued the world", Instead of analyzing the problem comprehensively, the problem is directly directed to the United States with nationalistic sentiments, while avoiding the ballooning incident itself. Conversely, while the U.S. media does not show reciprocal hostility, it is still obvious that it is trying to attribute problems to China.[3]

2. Power of The Media

Much of our understanding of the world is second-hand –derived not from direct observation but from what we hear of that world from other sources, primarily the media. There are three widely studied theories and mechanisms of influence, which are agenda setting, Framing, and Priming. This paper will carefully analyze this media's influence on the balloon incident through these three theories.

2.1. Agenda Setting

Agenda setting refers to the "ability (of the news media) to affect the weight given to the topics of the public agenda." This theory, which has been extensively researched and applied to different media, contends that the media can influence public opinion by selecting which topics receive the greatest attention.[4]

The response and behavior of the Chinese side in this balloon incident perfectly illustrate this theory. We can take a closer look at the titles of some articles such as "The "Poisonous Train" is the Real National Security Threat to the United States" and "The History of the Use of "Spy Balloons" in the United States: decades ago, they were already used in WWI" (the content of the article corresponds to its title). Instead of directly answering and reporting on the spy balloon incident when confronted with this serious issue, these news stories direct the reader's attention to other topics. For example, one of the articles devotes 90% of the text to the potential hazards of the Ohio train derailment: how it exemplifies the degradation of infrastructure and how it can lead to national security problems, while at the end of the article, it reveals its true intentions "Infrastructure degradation and the slow decline in disaster response levels are less eye-catching than balloons in the sky, but the Ohio train derailment and chemical spill highlight how bizarre the current focus on so-called external threats to national security is", which conveys that the spy balloon incident is not a big deal, but the internal problems of the United States are what people should be concerned about. On the other hand, another article wrote about the previous history of the United States dropping spy balloons, It is trying to shift the attention and blame to the United States itself, ignoring the fact that the essential issue, in this case, is that China broke the rules.

After reading these articles, it's obvious that people's attention is directed to other topics because they give more weight to other events in the article. Thereby, people will stop focusing on the current issue itself and consider other events to be more important. Through agenda setting, CCTV News (Chinese media) shifts readers' attention to a series of American problems, thus making people think that it is an American mistake, or that the US is avoiding the issue. As this perception deepens, the Chinese public will lose sight of the real facts and be led by the media to the events they want people to focus on, and ultimately, it intensifies the animosity between citizens in both countries.

2.2. Framing

The framing theory in media helps us understand how information is presented to shape public perception and interpretation of events or issues. It is the process by which a communicator selects a framework through which to interpret a situation and builds the message around that framework.[5]

For instance, an article from CNN explained why a Chinese spy balloon was able to transmit information back to Beijing, and in this narrative framing can be observed in several ways.

The article strategically employs framing techniques to shape the narrative surrounding the Chinese spy balloon incident. It selects specific words and phrases, like "Chinese spy balloon," "capture imagery," "collect signals intelligence," and "transmit information back to Beijing," to frame the incident as a potential espionage or security threat, evoking feelings of anger and suspicion. Furthermore, it emphasizes the balloon's information-gathering capabilities, highlighting the security risk it poses. Simultaneously, it excludes certain details, downplaying their significance, such as the intelligence community's relatively low concern about the information collected, potentially diminishing the perceived threat. The article attributes actions and intentions to the Chinese government, portraying them as responsible for the balloon's actions, while also suggesting proactive measures taken by the US. It discusses real-world consequences, such as escalating tensions between the US and China and the postponement of a diplomatic visit by the US Secretary of State. These framing techniques work in concert to convey the narrative that the Chinese spy balloon poses a significant threat to US national security and that the US government is handling the situation appropriately, potentially fostering increased hostility among American readers.

2.3. Priming

The priming theory in media and communication suggests that media can influence how individuals perceive and interpret information by emphasizing certain aspects or frames of a story.[6] In an article from CCTV News called "Behind the 'removal of risk' is the anxiety of American hegemony—beware of the trap of 'removal of risk'" [7], priming can be observed in several ways.

First of all, the passage emphasizes U.S. Anxiety and Hegemony. The content primes the reader by repeatedly emphasizing U.S. anxiety and obsession with hegemony. Phrases like "restless and difficult to deal with," "anxious about hegemony," "obsessed with hegemony," and "hegemonic anxiety of the United States" create a frame that portrays the U.S. as the main driver of tensions and conflicts. Moreover, the content attributes blame on the U.S. by suggesting that the U.S. is responsible for the strained relationship with China due to its anxiety and efforts to contain and suppress China. Phrases like "the United States has become more and more anxious about hegemony" and "the United States has always viewed China with ideological prejudice" attribute the fault to the U.S. Also, the article presents counterarguments to support the idea that it's not China's fault. It mentions China's peaceful development goals and the positive contributions China makes to the world. Phrases like "China's goal is aboveboard," "China adheres to the path of peaceful development," and "What China brings to the world is opportunities rather than crises" are used to counter any negative perceptions of China. Last but not least, the content compares the actions and behavior of the U.S. to emphasize that China is not the aggressor or the source of problems. It contrasts the U.S. actions, such as "overthrowing the regimes of other countries by force" and "ignoring international law," with China's peaceful development goals and cooperation efforts.

In summary, the priming theory in this content works by framing the U.S. as the primary source of tension and conflict in its relationship with China. It primes the reader to view China more positively by emphasizing U.S. anxiety, obsession with hegemony, and actions that are portrayed as aggressive or unfair. This sequential order leads the reader to think that the issues between the U.S. and China are not primarily China's fault but rather the result of U.S. actions and attitudes.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper has delved into the intricate web of media influence using the lens of agenda-setting, Framing, and Priming theories to dissect the reporting of the "spy balloon" incident by two major media outlets, CNN and CCTV News, from the United States and China, respectively. Through these media effect models, it becomes evident how the media, whether consciously or inadvertently, contributes to shaping public opinion and fostering animosity between citizens of different nations.

This analysis underscores the immense power of the media in shaping public opinion and highlights the importance of critical media literacy. Readers should be aware that media outlets, whether intentional or not, often have their agendas or biases, which can significantly impact how they present information. In today's interconnected world, where international relations are complex and delicate, understanding the media's role in shaping perceptions becomes paramount in promoting informed and balanced perspectives and in fostering international cooperation and understanding rather than exacerbating animosities.

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