ABSTRACT

The Framing of the Charlie Hebdo Attack by French and U.S. Media Sources

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The 2015 terrorist attack on the Paris-based satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo was an event that garnered media attention around the world. How events, such as the attack against Charlie Hebdo, gain international responses is important to understand. This study used thematic analysis to examine how the attack on Charlie Hebdo was framed by the media in the United States and France. A sample of articles was obtained from the Associated Press and the Agence France-Presse, the top news wire services for the U.S. and France. The findings of this study will help demonstrate differences in how the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo was framed by U.S. and French media sources and how that framing shapes French and American opinions of world events.

Results and Discussion

In responding to the research questions, themes became present through analysis. Themes represent the topics that the news articles focused on. In some cases, within a theme there are different frames which suggest how the topic should be perceived.

Themes and Frames Presented in the Associated Press

- Freedom of Speech
- As an attack against freedom of speech laws/rights
- As an act of terrorism
- As an act of terrorism
- As highlighting limits on freedom of speech/rights
- Terrorism/Extremism
- As an act of terrorism
- As misrepresentation of the Islamic faith
- Global Solidarity
- JesuisCharlie as a global rallying call

Themes and Frames Presented in the Agence-France Presse

- Freedom of Speech
- As an attack against freedom of speech laws/rights
- As a violation of freedom of speech rights
- As an integral part of democracy
- As encouraging censorship/self-censorship
- Islamism
- As a misrepresentation of Islam
- As an act of terrorism
- As an act of terrorism
- Controversy of Content
- As a means of provocation
- As a way to stir-up hatred
- As a threat to peaceful co-existence
- Hope
- As a symbol of
- As a symbol of defiance towards terrorism
- JesuisCharlie
- Security
- As a threat to security
- As part of the security vs. freedom debate

While there were similarities in the themes presented in the AP and AFP samples, there were also differences that are important to note.

How The Associated Press and Agence-France Press Differed

- Number of themes and frames
- Word Choice
- Level of focus on the Victims
- Objectivity
- Proximity to the Attack

References


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Figure 1: A word cloud generated from the text of AP sources. Greater prominence is given to words that appeared more frequently.

Figure 2: A word cloud generated from the text of AFP sources. Greater prominence is given to words that appeared more frequently.

Figure 3: A word cloud generated from the text of both AP and AFP sources. Greater prominence is given to words that appeared more frequently.