An Examination of U.S. and Chinese Online News Coverage of the 2008 Olympics

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Abstract

The 2008 Summer Olympic Games put Beijing, China in the global media spotlight, as over 5,600 journalists from around the world traveled to Beijing to cover the Games. Because the U.S. and China operate under significantly different political structures, the purpose of this study was to examine one Chinese news website and one U.S. news website during the Games to determine what differences, if any, existed in the two countries' Olympic coverage.

This study was based on Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1956) four theories of the press, focusing on the Social Responsibility theory and the Soviet Communist theory. It was hypothesized that the U.S. media outlet, USAToday.com, would most closely resemble the Social Responsibility theory and that the Chinese outlet, PeoplesDaily.com, would most closely resemble the Soviet Communist theory. Content from both outlets was collected over a 17-day period, and a quantitative content analysis methodology was employed to examine the coverage.

The findings revealed that the U.S. news outlet seemed to show a greater bias towards athletes from its own country than did the Chinese news outlet. Additionally, the U.S. news outlet focused more of its coverage on athletes and the actual sporting events taking place at the Games, while the Chinese outlet afforded much more coverage to the host city/country. The results indicated that neither news outlet painted an entirely accurate picture of the Games for their readers. The U.S. news outlet seemed to closely resemble the Social Responsibility theory, as hypothesized, and the Chinese outlet resembled the Soviet Communist theory in some regards, but did not resemble it in other aspects of its coverage. These findings, along with further analysis, will be explained in greater detail in the poster presentation.