

The Variations in People's Daily's Framing on Different Online Platforms

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Abstract: Based on framing theory, this study compares the differences between the most authoritative and influential newspapers in China, and the People's Daily's news coverage on four online platforms, including the Chinese official website, the English official website, Weibo, and Twitter. By collecting and analyzing the media coverage of People's Daily on July 1 (known as the Party's Day of the Communist Party of China) and July 8, this study argues that People's Daily selects and constructs coverage differently on four platforms, trying to adapt to the specific character of various audiences and platforms. The findings indicate that the influence of the Party's Day on People's Daily's coverage was more reflected on Chinese platforms, and People's Daily constructs different narratives in two dimensions: website - social media and China-foreign news. This study adopts the research method of quantitative statistics and content analysis to investigate the changes in People's Daily due to different platforms, which will provide new insights into People's Daily's reporting strategy and value orientation.

Keywords: China, People's Daily, Framing Theory, The Party's Day, Online Platforms, Reporting Strategies

1. Introduction

With the development of technology, the frequently-used way that the public gets information has gradually shifted from traditional media to digital media. Thus some traditional media are also adapting to the development of the trend by gradually shifting their business from offline to online. Data shows that 73.4% of China's Internet users were online news consumers [1]. The communication dividends of online platforms attracted most traditional media to acclimate to the trend that digital media has become society's main way of information transmission, so they launched official accounts on different social media platforms and set up their official websites.

For instance, *People's Daily* (PD) is one of the prominent newspapers that represents the official attitude in China, which is controlled by The Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. Its editorials, and commentaries reflect the opinions of the Chinese government [2]. To spread official information, raise public awareness, and shape public opinion, PD registered official accounts on many popular social media platforms in China, such as Weibo, TikTok, Bilibili, etc., and also set up

an official website (people.com.cn). Among these platforms, Weibo is the most typical and popular one. In China, due to the blocking of Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and other international social media platforms, a burgeoning domestic social media market has emerged, with platforms such as Weibo, Douban, and Zhihu (same as Quora) dominating. Statistics show that half of China's 500 million Internet users have active Weibo accounts [3], which means that Weibo is dominating the microblogging industry in China, also means that using Weibo is the most effective way to distribute information to the Chinese public.

Meanwhile, the phenomenon of the trend of most individuals in current society preferring to receive information through Internet platforms happened throughout the world, so for spreading information worldwide need to report and propagandize on international platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping raised the diplomatic communication strategies for advancing the objectives of the Chinese Communist Party's external propaganda [3], PD registered a Twitter account for providing information about China to worldwide audiences, building an international communication network, and purchasing external propaganda objectives. In order to create an international communication network and purchase overseas propaganda goals, *People's Daily* opened a Twitter account to share information about China with audiences throughout the world., Data shows that Twitter is the world's most-used microblogging service [4]: there are 353.90 million registered users of Twitter currently, and they are all over the world. Therefore, it can be referred that Twitter is the most effective international social media platform that can spread information globally because it has an important influence worldwide.

It is evident that PD's motivation for beginning to operate on both national and international online platforms differs, so the question is: will the report on these four platforms also be different based on the motivation? In this paper, researchers compared the different framing of the posts that PD published on its different platforms (Chinese official website, English official website, Weibo Official account, and Twitter Official account) on the founding day of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and a normal day by context analysis.

2. Literature Review

This study is based on framing theory. Framing theory has two origins from sociology and psychology in the 1970s, but it was first defined in the field of news process by Entman in 1993. He argued that framing an event in news coverage meant selecting and highlighting it, which could "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described". By displaying or reusing information symbols, such as texts, photographs, videos, etc., news media can alter the audience's perceptions of the importance of information [5]. Analyzing the framework of media coverage can play a role in helping the public to have a better understanding of reporting techniques, value orientation, and ideological tendencies [6].

Framing theory has been widely employed in studies regarding Chinese media, especially PD. Existing framework research involving PD mainly contains two approaches: the first one focuses on the content of a single media's several reports on a particular topic; the other one is more likely to compare the content of reports on the same subject published (or produced) by various media. A typical survey researching PD's reporting framework on a specific topic done by Guan and Liu in 2019: They studied PD's framework for Japan by collecting and analyzing related coverage from 2001 to 2015, suggesting that the image of Japan in PD is shaped by a combination of geopolitical fears and geopolitical hopes [5]. Xinhui also focused on the China-Japan issue and analyzed Sino-Japan summit meetings over a long timeframe, clarifying the consistency of PD's reports on relevant events, a specific 'propagandized' text editing mode, and the emphasis on the Chinese head of state [6]. The other approach is to compare PD's reporting framework with other newspapers on a certain topic. For instance, representative research that compared PD's reporting framework with other newspapers on

a certain topic was done by Paul and Xu: they made a comparison of news framing of PD and the *New York Times* concerning the Chinese embassy bombing, which showed us how the two mainstream media directed people's attention and protected national interests in a way that is consistent with the respective governments' attitudes [8]. Yang's research on the NATO air strikes on Kosovo is also a typical example, which analyzed four newspapers in China and the United States, including the PD, provided further evidence that state interests dominate the media coverage framework [9]. Additionally, research on media coverage framing has been conducted on even larger sample sizes: Wu compared news coverage from different media outlets in 38 countries and pointed out that the United States dominated most topics [10].

The aforementioned research demonstrates the feasibility and value of the frame theory in comprehending media coverage direction and offers a more thorough understanding. However, previous studies involving PD generally focus on a certain issue and lack an analysis of the overall framework of PD's coverage. Besides, comparative analysis usually focuses on framing differences between different media, but few researchers concentrate on the differences in PD's reporting frames on different platforms, especially on domestic and foreign social media platforms. With the development of PD's coverage on different platforms in China and abroad, such as Weibo and Twitter, it is valuable to understand the content and differences of framing, which will provide a more comprehensive understanding for its journalists, readers, and researchers.

3. Research Question

According to the research of Paul and Xu, the framing that prominent Chinese newspapers choose is allied with its government's political ideologies [12]. It is assumed that PD's political posts on all platforms should make up a significant proportion on July 1 because it is CPC Founding Day, which is significant for CPC; correspondingly, this percentage also would decline on normal days such as July 8. Therefore, the first question to be researched is:

RQ1: What are the distinctions between the news categories The PD chooses to publish on the four different platforms?

On this basis, it is assumed that PD would just do the translation work rather than do other changes when they choose stories to post both on Chinese and English platforms. Thus, the other research question is:

RQ2: What distinctions exist in the news stories that PD chooses to publish on four platforms?

4. Method

This research encompasses the examination of four platforms. The selection of PD's Chinese and English official websites is driven by the fact that they resemble more traditional, and they are akin to the format of newspapers in the past. Additionally, Weibo and Twitter were chosen to explore the disparities between domestic and international social media in news reporting. By adopting framing theory as the theoretical foundation and employing a combination of quantitative statistics and content analysis methods with a focus on PD's framework, the content of PD's reports was meticulously collected and analyzed. The investigation commenced by scrutinizing recent reports and posts on four platforms: the official website (both Chinese and English versions), Weibo, and Twitter. To ensure a manageable study, only the homepage of the Chinese and English official websites was selected due to the overwhelming number of daily reports. The news featured on the homepage was considered sufficient to reflect PD's selection and emphasis on news.

Subsequently, PD's coverage or posts on the four platforms were meticulously collected and analyzed for content on two significant dates: July 1st, commemorating The Party's Day in China, and July 8, signifying a return to regular news coverage after The Party's Day. July 1st was deemed

a pivotal time to study the differences in PD's framework across the four platforms, particularly focusing on politically related news or posts. To provide a comprehensive comparison, July 8 was also chosen as a reference point. The number of reports or posts collected on each date is presented in the below table 1:

Table 1: Number of news on four platforms on July 1 and July 8

| Platform | Number of news on July 1 | Number of news on July 8 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Chinese official website | 133 pieces | 135 pieces |
| English official website | 59 pieces | 59 pieces |
| Weibo | 32 pieces | 27 pieces |
| Twitter | 19 pieces | 21 pieces |

After that, the collected news coverage are classified according to the categories used in PD's official websites of both Chinese and English versions, encompassing:

- Politics
- World
- Business
- Society
- Culture
- Sci-Tech
- Sports
- Military
- Life
- Education

The classified coverages are used for visualization processing to reflect the proportion of different news sections of PD on four platforms, to further study its various orientations in news selection.

5. Finding and Discussion

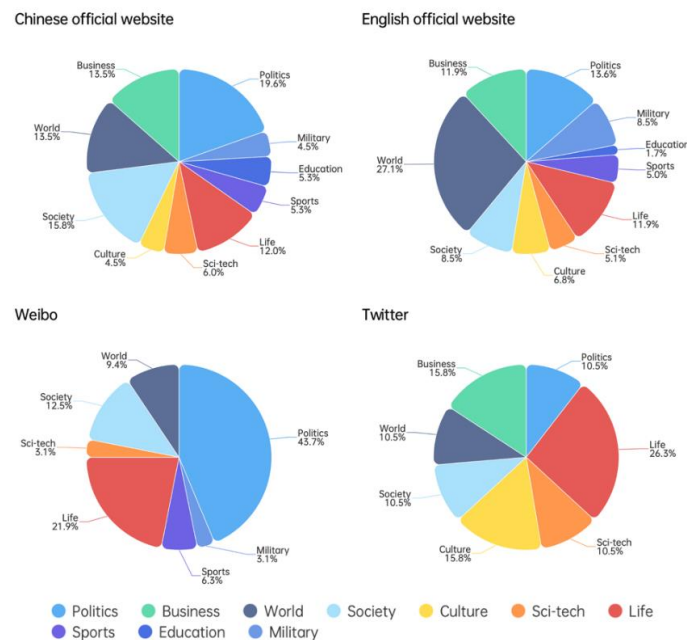


Figure 1: Proportion of PD's news sections on four platforms on July 1

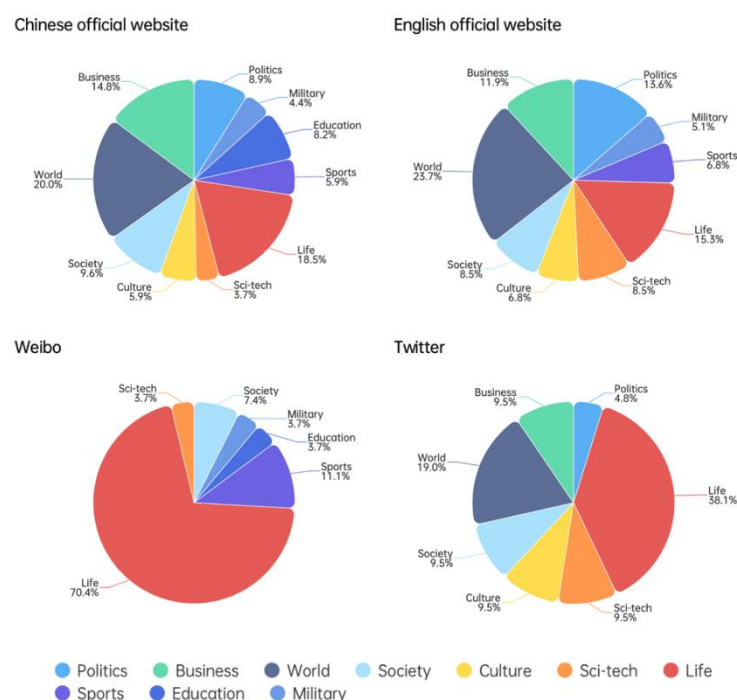


Figure 2: Proportion of PD's news sections on four platforms on July 8

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the percentage of PD-reported sections on the four platforms. In line with Pan and Qiao's two-level classification of news frameworks, the research examined the media's selection of news materials and the construction of news materials [12]. Focusing on the first level of news choice, the research respectively compared: (1) two websites involving the Chinese official website and an English official website, (2) two social media platforms involving Weibo and Twitter, (3) four platforms, to verify the differences of PD's reporting frameworks on the four platforms.

5.1. Contrast Between Two Official Websites

It was determined that Platform II (27.1%, n=16 on July 1; 23.7%, n=14 on July 8) displayed a significantly higher proportion of World News compared to Platform I (13.5%, n=18 on July 1; 20.0%, n=27 on July 8). This observation underscores PD's emphasis on proximity in its news elements. When catering to overseas audiences, PD tends to prioritize news related to their respective countries. The findings of the content analysis reveal PD's strategic use of news framing to advance its propaganda objectives, using more positive content to describe China-related information than to report on foreign countries. When mentioning China in the World News section, PD accentuates China's contributions to global economic development and political stability, exemplified by headlines such as "A high-level seminar on in-depth China-Africa economic and trade cooperation was held in Changsha" and "China becomes New Zealand's fastest-growing international science partner." However, when reporting on other countries, especially those with political conflicts or economic competition with China, such as the United States and Japan, PD tends to depict them as obstacles to world peace and development. For instance, the headline "The U.S. needs to show sincerity to improve ties with China" was featured on the English website on July 8, implying that the United States hinders the healthy development of China-US relations. This selective reporting technique to shape China's image is also evident in World News posts on Weibo and Twitter, but it is particularly pronounced on the two official websites.

5.2. Contrast Between Two Social Media

The pie chart illustrates the significant fluctuations in the content reported on Weibo on July 1 and July 8. On July 1, most of Weibo's posts were focused on politics (43.8%, $n=14$), whereas on July 8, life news dominated PD's coverage (70.4%, $n=19$). In contrast, the content pushed by PD on Twitter during the two days remained relatively stable, with both days being dominated by life-related news (26.3%, $n=5$ on July 1; 38.1%, $n=8$ on July 8). To validate hypothesis of this paper and examine whether the Party's Day had an impact on microblog content on July 1, the study further investigated the selection of microblog posts on other regular days. It was discovered that life news usually constituted the largest proportion of news when there were no major events. This indicates that PD increased the proportion of political reports on Weibo during the Party's Day, whereas Twitter was not significantly affected by this political event. This finding contradicts the initial hypothesis, suggesting that the Party's Day led to an increase in political news on all four platforms. Instead, it indicates that PD is selective in its reporting, primarily focused on publicizing and educating the domestic audience.

Furthermore, the substantial changes in Weibo's content indicate that PD is more adaptable in selecting news on social media compared to its official website. During significant events, PD's social media accounts can considerably increase related reports, but this emphasis on quantity is difficult to appear on the official website.

5.3. Contrast Among Four Platforms

The proportion of political news on the Chinese official website dropped from 19.6% ($n=26$) on July 1 to 8.9% ($n=12$) on July 8, and the proportion of political news on Weibo surprisingly dropped from 43.8% ($n=14$) on July 1 to 0% ($n=0$) on July 8. However, the two English platforms, the English official website and Twitter, did not show a significant change. The analysis revealed that the impact of the Party Building Festival on the framework of PD news reporting is more reflected in the two platforms for internal propaganda (Chinese website and Weibo), rather than the two platforms for foreign audiences (English website and Twitter). This finding revises the hypothesis and explains the differences in the reporting strategies of PD in Chinese and English platforms. In addition, it is also notable that life news took up a larger proportion on two social media than on two official websites, where different news sections were more balanced. As an authoritative mainstream media in China, PD has always appeared with the image of professionalism, and authority and reflecting the correct policy and line of the Party, covering various sections of news on both Chinese and English websites, trying to appear comprehensive and professional. However, to a certain extent, social media has dispelled this authority of PD. To adapt to the characteristics of social platforms and attract audiences, PD tries to be more friendly to the people on Weibo and Twitter, choosing more life-related content for news reports, reducing the emphasis on politics, business, and other content, and even the absence of political and business news. The above analysis of the two dimensions of the Chinese platform and English platform, official website, and social media will provide us with a new perspective to understand the differentiated news framework of PD in the four Internet platforms.

Furthermore, a typical case was chosen to better understand the differences in PD coverage across the four platforms. It was observed that on July 1, both the Chinese website and the English website featured the same title, and Weibo and Twitter also posted the same news on the same date. However, a comprehensive comparison of the coverage on the same topic across the four platforms revealed notable disparities between websites and social media, as well as between the Chinese and English versions. On the official website, the news was presented as a headline, whereas on social media, it appeared as a regular news report for the day, without particular emphasis. Furthermore, the Chinese platforms exhibited distinct characteristics from their English counterparts, encompassing differences

in titles, text, and images. The Chinese platform titles and texts were longer, more detailed, and more comprehensive in comparison to the English platforms. Additionally, the Chinese platforms included videos and authoritative pictures intended to accentuate the absolute correctness of the country's work and publicize the authority of the Chinese Communist Party, thereby reflecting the unity of the nation. In contrast, foreign reports appeared more neutral and standard. These variations may be attributed to the intended target audience and the respective news editing policies, and they might imply that PD is more focused on projecting the authority and strength of the Chinese Communist government in domestic society.

6. Conclusion

By comparing the differences of PD's news selection and construction on four different online platforms, this study mainly draws three conclusions:

(1) Emphasizing the relevance of news stories to their audiences, PD adjusts its reporting strategy to adjust to domestic and foreign audiences, respectively. On its English platform, it increases the proportion of foreign news. Meanwhile, when reporting world news, PD chooses more positive news in China than abroad. This may imply PD's distinct political orientation.

(2) The influence of the Party's Day on PD reports is more reflected in Chinese platforms, which may indicate that the main purpose of PD reporting the Party's Day is to publicize and educate the domestic audience. In addition, compared with the official website, on social media platforms, PD can adjust the proportion of coverage more flexibly according to major events such as the Party's Day to achieve the purpose of propaganda.

(3) As an authoritative official mainstream media, PD strives to adapt to the characteristics of the website and social media, adjusting its reporting strategies. On the official website, PD's reports are comprehensive and detailed, showing professionalism and authority. But on social media, PD's posts are mainly dominated by life news, trying to get close to the audience's life and show its folksy side to attract readers. These two different images constructed by PD on the website and social media testify to the difference in its reporting framework.

Based on framing theory, this study compared PD news coverages across four different platforms. It is further confirmed that PD has a clear political stance and ideological orientation as the organ of CPC. Meanwhile, the result shed light on some new features of PD's different reporting frameworks for various audiences that were not mentioned in previous studies, which may provide us with new insights into PD's reporting strategies.

Although this study was researched from a relatively comprehensive perspective, some limitations still exist. One of them is that researchers just collected PD's coverages for two days. As for the two official websites, only posts on the homepage of PD were focused because of their representativeness, while PD released more news than homepage news, indicating a limitation in data collection, and a larger dataset would provide more confirmation. Moreover, according to the subjects selected for this study, part of the data comes from Twitter. However, Twitter was renamed "X" on July 24, 2023 [13], and the uncertainty of this platform has increased from perspectives such as its operating model and upcoming user base change. The risk it would bring is that the reference ability of this study may be decreased because of these changes.

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