

Comparing Positivity and Negativity in News Reporting: A Study of Sri Lankan and International Media Channels

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Abstract

This study compares the levels of positivity and negativity in news items broadcast by Sri Lankan television media channels versus international television media channels. A panel of three non-media professionals rated the main news bulletins from five leading local and five leading international channels over a week. The ratings were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests to assess differences in positivity and negativity. Results indicate that international channels are rated significantly higher in positivity and lower in negativity compared to Sri Lankan channels. The highlight the fact about paying attention to reducing negativity of new reporting in Sri Lanka.

Introduction

The impact of media on public mental health is a critical concern, as news coverage can shape perceptions and emotional states. Negative media reporting, including trauma exposure and the normalization of violence, can contribute to psychological distress and societal issues. Conversely, the lack of coverage for positive events and achievements may deprive the public of motivational and uplifting content. This study aims to investigate the differences in the levels of positivity and negativity between Sri Lankan and international news channels to understand their potential impact on viewers' mental health.

Literature Review

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and emotional response. Research has demonstrated that exposure to negative news can contribute to heightened stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Gordon et al., 2018). Negative media content, particularly involving violence and trauma, can reinforce negative worldviews and emotional distress (Thompson et al., 2020). On the other hand, positive

media coverage has been linked to improved mental well-being and increased public motivation (Psycharakis et al., 2019). This study builds on existing literature by comparing news positivity and negativity in Sri Lankan and international contexts.

Media and Mental Health

Exposure to negative news has been associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including increased anxiety and depressive symptoms (Brennen, 2017). Studies show that media coverage of traumatic events can lead to emotional exhaustion and desensitization (Maier et al., 2021). Conversely, media that highlights positive stories can foster a sense of hope and resilience (Vogel et al., 2018).

Media Coverage Practices

Media outlets often emphasize sensational and negative stories to attract viewership (Dixon et al., 2021). This tendency towards negative reporting has been criticized for potentially exacerbating public distress and contributing to a pessimistic worldview (Smith et al., 2020). In contrast, international media may employ different strategies, potentially focusing more on balanced reporting and positive news (Lee et al., 2019).

Methodology

Panel and Rating

A panel of three individuals without media or mental health backgrounds rated the main news bulletins of five leading Sri Lankan television channels and five leading international channels over one week. The panelists, two males and one female, educated up to the Advanced Level (A/L), rated each channel on a scale of 0 to 100 for both positivity and negativity.

Definitions

Positivity: The extent to which news items generate a positive emotional response among panelists..

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Channel Type	Positivity	Negativity
Sri Lankan Channels		
Channel 1	15	95
Channel 2	20	90
Channel 3	10	98
Channel 4	25	90
Channel 5	12	85
International Channels		
Channel 1	35	65
Channel 2	45	55
Channel 3	35	60
Channel 4	50	55
Channel 5	40	50

Table 1: Positivity and Negativity Ratings

Negativity: The extent to which news items generate a negative emotional response among panelists

Sri Lankan News Channels

Positivity: Mean = 16.4, Standard Deviation = 5.6

Negativity: Mean = 91.6, Standard Deviation = 4.5

International News Channels

Positivity: Mean = 41.0, Standard Deviation = 5.9

Negativity: Mean = 57.0, Standard Deviation = 6.7

Independent Samples t-Test

Positivity

t-Value = -6.8 (df = 8)

Critical t-Value (for $\alpha = 0.05$) = ± 2.306

Negativity

t-Value = 8.2 (df = 8)

Critical t-Value (for $\alpha = 0.05$) = ± 2.306

Interpretation

For both positivity and negativity, the t-values are greater than the critical value, indicating significant differences between Sri Lankan and international news channels.

Discussion

The analysis reveals that international news channels are perceived as more positive and less negative compared to Sri Lankan channels. This suggests that

international media may employ strategies that focus more on positive news and provide a more balanced portrayal of events. In contrast, Sri Lankan media tends to emphasize negative and traumatic content, potentially impacting public mental health adversely. One of the major limitations in this study is the usage of a small panel size. Future research could involve a larger, more diverse panel for more robust results.

Implications

These findings highlight the need for media outlets to consider the psychological impact of their reporting. Emphasizing positive stories and reducing sensationalist reporting could improve public mental well-being and foster a more balanced worldview.

Conclusions

This study underscores significant differences in how positivity and negativity are represented in news reporting between Sri Lankan and international media channels. International channels tend to be more aware of more positive content and less negativity, which may be beneficial for public mental health. Future research could explore the impact of media content on specific demographic groups and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting positive news coverage.

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