Media Tracking US and UK/International News Sites

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<u>Introduction</u>

In an era in which the rapid release of news media is dictated by the demand of the people, people are flooded with round-the-clock news coverage of every sort. With a few clicks on a phone, a person interested in the news can access digital media to follow the latest reports on a variety of issues.

We look to news sites to inform us and to help us shape our opinions about people, events and issues. The news describes for us what is considered interesting and important in our world. The news defines how we see the world, talk about the world and understand our role in it. This is particularly important in today's interconnected world, where political, economic and social forces often have ripple effects across the globe. The news we choose, and the news sources we follow, matter greatly.

This paper explores the kinds of news stories and news topics that are most often viewed by a set of readers using online American and United Kingdom/International news sources. We compare the kinds and content of news stories in these sources, as well as the kind and content of the news as it varies across individual newspapers. We have conducted this research as three St. Bonaventure University students, guided by Professor of Journalism and Strategic Communications, Dr. Rich Lee, through coursework at Trinity College, Oxford.

<u>Research Questions</u>

Throughout our research, we examined three questions. Those research questions were:

Q1: Which categories of news stories attract the most views from online news readers?

Q2: On which news source are viewers being attracted to the most serious stories?

Q3: How does the nature of the most popular US online news stories compare to the most popular UK news stories?

Q4: How does each online news source compare to one another in terms of the kind of news their viewers are attracted to?

Q5: Which news topics attract the most views from online news readers?

Q6: Which news topics attract the most views from online news readers in the US versus the UK?

Methodology

In this project, we set out to understand what kinds of news stories and what news content was most viewed by online news readers. We collaborated with a mentor, a Professor of Journalism and Strategic Communications, to shape our research and to interpret our findings.

We used a media tracking methodology. The project lasted seven days. Each day for one week, each of the three student researchers monitored one pair of reputable online news sources consisting of a United States and United Kingdom/International version. We monitored a total of 3 pairs of online news sources, for a total of six news sources. These news sources were identified by Dr. Lee. These pairs of news sources are:

- The Guardian US and UK editions

- New York Times US and International editions

- CNN and BBC home pages

Specifically, each of us monitored only the most viewed stories, or top five articles, from our pair of newspapers each day. We then shared data with the other two researchers to create a database for all six news sources.

The most viewed stories, or top five, were those five articles within each newspaper that were most read by viewers on that particular date as identified by the newspaper itself. For example, each week, The Guardian US and UK each list their respective five most-viewed articles for the week. We each referenced those top five lists in our database.

Each day, the top five articles for each newspaper were classified for the kind of news story represented, using a classification system of kind of news categories. Each story was classified into only one kind of news category. These five kind of news categories are:

1 – Important news story that the public should know

2 – News story, not necessarily essential for the public to know

3 – Human interest, feature or light news

4 – Sensationalist story

5 – Pure clickbait

This process was repeated every day for one week, and, by the end, we had classified each of the top five articles for each newspaper by which kind of news story they were.

At the end of the week, we summarized the results we had amassed from the 210 total articles reviewed in a chart showing the number of articles classified in each kind of news category for each newspaper source. In addition, we took an average for each kind of news category for each newspaper. We calculated the averages by entering the data into a spreadsheet. The averages allowed us to rank news sources according to the kind of news viewed in each source for the week. We also identified which news source had the highest number of news stories in each kind of news category for the week.

Each day, we also classified the content of news stories represented in each of the top five. Each story was classified into only one content of news category. These ten content of news categories are:

- Defense

- Domestic Affairs

- Economy, Education

- Environment

- Foreign Affairs

- Healthcare

- Immigration

- Infrastructure

- Public Safety

- Other

This process was repeated each day for the week, classifying each of the top five for content of news story for each newspaper.

At the end of the week, the results were summarized in a chart showing the number of articles classified in each content of news category for each newspaper source for that week.

Results

Q1: Which categories of news stories attract the most views from online news readers?

In our examination of which categories of news stories attract the most views from online news readers, we found that Category 1, which was comprised of important news stories that the public should know, was the category of news stories that attracted the most views, with 89 of

the 210 new stories, roughly 42%, we evaluated falling into Category 1. Category 2, news stories that are not necessarily essential for the public to know, was a close second, boasting 83 of the 210 articles, about 40%. Category 3, human interest, feature or light news stories, made up only 25 of the news stories, 12%. 12 of the news stories, or 6% fell into Category 4, sensationalist stories. A single news story was considered pure clickbait, landing it in Category 5.

Figure 1: Number of News Stories by Kind of News Stories* for Each News Source

News Source	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4	Category 5
BBC	8	16	7	4	0
CNN	12	12	8	3	0
G_UK	11	14	7	2	1
G_US	22	9	1	3	0
NYT_U	20	15	0	0	0
NYT_I	16	17	2	0	0
Totals:	89	83	25	12	1

* Categories for Kind of News stories:

Category 1 – Important news story that the public should know

Category 2 – News story, not necessarily essential for the public to know

Category 3 – Human interest, feature or light news

Category 4 – Sensationalist story

Category 5 – Pure clickbait

Q2: On which news source are viewers being attracted to the most serious stories?

The data show that viewers of the New York Times International editions are being attracted to the most serious stories, as we found that the New York Times International editions had the lowest category average of 1.31, again with Category 1 being important news stories that the public should know. The US edition of the New York Times followed with an average of 1.43. Online news stories from the Guardian US had an average of 1.5, the Guardian UK had a 2.04, Category 2 being news stories that are not necessarily essential for the public to know, CNN averaged 2.06 and BBC scored highest with a 2.2.

Figure 2: Ranking for Kind of News Stories by Average for Each News Source

News Source	Average
BBC	2.2
CNN	2.06
G_UK	2.04
G_US	1.5
NYT_U	1.43
NYT_I	1.31

Q3: How does the nature of the most popular US online news stories compare to the most popular UK news stories?

The nature of the most popular US and UK online news stories was fairly comparable. US news sources scored an average of 1.66, and UK and International news sources got a 1.85. The results seemed to vary, however, more by the specific source, rather than by nationality, especially when considering that the New York Times International edition had the lowest average, while the BBC had the highest.

Figure 3: Average for Kind of News Stories for Each Version of News Source: US or UK/International

Version of News Source	Average
US News Sources	1.66
UK/Int News Sources	1.85

Q4: How does each online news source compare to one another in terms of the kind of news their viewers are attracted to?

The data revealed that the online news site with the lowest average was not the news site with the most Category 1 stories. The Guardian US featured 22 Category 1 stories, the most in Category 1, with the New York Times US in second place with 20 news stories in Category 1. Category 2 was led by the New York Times International editions, which had the lowest average in terms of featuring serious news stories, with 17 Category 2 stories. CNN had a slim majority of 8 stories coded in Category 3. The BBC had 4 stories in Category 4, which was the most of any news site for the category. The Guardian UK was the only site to feature a story that was sorted into Category 5 as pure clickbait.

Figure 4: News Source with Highest Number of News Stories by Kind of News

Most Cat 1	Most Cat 2	Most Cat 3	Most Cat 4	Most Cat 5
G_US	NYT_I	CNN	BBC	G_UK

Q5: Which news topics attract the most views from online news readers?

Foreign affairs dominated the topics of news articles that attracted viewers, as 26% of the top articles viewed by online readers discussed foreign affairs. 22% of the top articles covered domestic affairs. The third largest category, about 19% of the articles, when classifying the news articles by their content, was deemed "other." 14% of the articles were about public safety, 9% were about immigration, 7% were about the economy, 5% were about the environment, 4% were about healthcare, 2% were about education, 2% were about defense and 1% were about infrastructure.

Q6: Which news topics attract the most views from online news readers in the US versus the UK?

While 36 of the top articles for the US were about domestic affairs, 8 of the international and UK articles were about domestic affairs. 36 of the international and UK top articles were about foreign affairs, compared to the US's 19. The international and UK sites had 15 articles on immigration to the US's 4 and 9 on the economy to the US's 5. 5 of the 8 articles on healthcare were from international and UK sites, while the other 3 were American. Articles on the environment were split evenly, 5 and 5, between the international and UK sites and US sites. The US sites featured 5 articles regarding education, while the international and UK sites had none. Articles on defense appeared parallel in UK and international editions and US sites, with 2 articles respectively.

Figure 5: Number of News Articles Classified by Content of News

Content of News	Number of Articles (UK/US)
Defense	4 (2/2)

Domestic Affairs	46 (8/36)
Economy	14 (9/5)
Education	5 (0/5)
Environment	10 (5/5)
Foreign Affairs	55 (36/19)
Healthcare	8 (5/3)
Immigration	19 (15/4)
Infrastructure	2 (1/1)
Public Safety	29 (14/15)
Other	39 (26/13)

Discussion

A number of intriguing findings resulted from our research. Based on the combined average of

American and international and UK news sources having a combined average for of 1.76 for the

category of news that they cover, it seems that the top viewed articles on major US and UK

online news sites is largely made up of important news stories that the public should know and

news stories that are not necessarily essential for the public to know. Regardless, these results

indicate at least a glimmer of hope for the possibility of a well-informed public (the sector of the

public that is consuming news from the sources we relied on, that is).

Furthermore, the fact that the vast majority (82%) of story views were of those stories classified

as Category 1 or Category 2 indicates that the readership of these online news sites primarily

cares about staying informed on the more important issues.

Although only 6% of the articles were considered sensationalist, that is not to say that many of

the articles in Categories 1 and 2 were not also shocking, horrifying, or exciting. As the adage

goes, "if it bleeds, it leads," and many of the articles were introduced by gripping headlines but were not titled to trick viewers into clicking but were truly worthy of being considered genuine news, e.g. "ICE Raids Scare Off L.A. Workers Rebuilding Fire-Torn Areas" in the New York Times US or "Distraught students demand answers after plane crash turned Bangladesh school into 'death trap'" on CNN.

The issues that might seem objectively important might not be considered important by individual people in the US and UK. The top articles on each news site reveal which issues readers actually care about, or at least appear to care about, based on their tendency to click on certain articles; the top articles act as a barometer for where the public's interests lie.

Based on a week's worth of top news articles, it seems fair to state that Americans appear to care more about issues at home than abroad, with the largest number of US news articles in the study being about domestic affairs. English and other foreign readers appear to be in the opposite camp, with more of the top international and UK articles being dedicated to foreign affairs. This distinction between what an American versus a foreign readership cares about could lend itself to a broader commentary on the American culture of rugged individualism in contrast with the more global and communal mindset that members of many other nations experience. While the more featured topics themselves differed on American news sites in comparison to international and UK news sites, the data showed no significant discrepancy between the amount of serious news stories between the US and international sites in general.

The top articles on each site are dictated by what consumers of that media click on the most. Since we only viewed the top five news stories for seven days, it would be improper to conclude whether the serious nature of the top articles for that period of time was determined more by factors relating to the news source itself, such as credibility of journalists, political leanings, etc.

or of the people viewing the sources, especially regarding the education level and political views of the readership.

"Other" was the third largest category in which the topics of articles were classified, which lends to the idea that the "other" category likely could have been split into multiple subcategories. For example, three recurring topics that could be new subcategories are sports, celebrities, and social issues. Headlines covered sports-related issues, like transgender women competing in the Olympics (Macur, 2025), a soccer player's injury in the Euros (Thomason, 2025), the Lionesses winning the Euros (Johnston et al., 2025), Kenyan runners (Panja & Otiena, 2025) and Trump's wanting to change the name of the Washington Commanders (Green, 2025; Maher, 2025). Other articles touched on Oasis (Al-Othman, 2025), family members of Oasis (Grierson, 2025), Ozzy Osborne (Jefford, 2025; Savage, 2025; Windolf, 2025), Malcolm-Jamal Warner (Wagmeister, 2025), Emma Watson (Kemp, 2025), Prince George (Coughlan, 2025), and Coldplay (Rosenbloom, 2025; Yang, 2025). Social issues like naming buildings after Scottish enslavers (Osuh, 2025), Sydney Sweeney's controversial American Eagle advertisement (Betts, 2025), transgender women in the Olympics (Macur, 2025), financial support for poor families (DeParle, 2025) and Trump's wanting to change the name of the Washington Commanders (Jefford, 2025; Savage, 2025; Windolf, 2025) were other related topics.

While conducting our research, we also considered Edward Herman's and Noam Chomsky's "propaganda model." We considered the five filters which Herman and Chomsky (1988) propose that news goes through before reaching the public, those being media consolidation, advertising, symbiotic relationship between media and government, flak and fear. Since we are not the journalists who wrote any of the 210 articles that our research covered, we have no way of knowing assuredly how the propaganda model could have influenced which stories were

published or propelled toward readers. It is worth noting, however, how the propaganda model may have affected which stories made it to print and were widely viewed.

The possibility for different interpretations of the 210 article headlines is also valid. Three individuals partook in this research, each assigning values to articles independently. While we did our utmost to maintain objectivity, subjectivity in deciding the category number to assign to each article and in classifying the content of the news could have affected our findings and the conclusions we drew from them.

Conclusion

While this study may provide a baseline for the nature of the articles being consumed on top news sites in the US and UK, it is by no means where scholastic efforts in this field should end. Future research could be done to uncover what demographics of people are consuming news from the six sources analyzed in our study and among other news sites as well. The education level and political affiliations of readers on each site could be assessed, along with which sites more highly educated readers gravitate towards.

Further scholarship could reveal how many people are clicking on/reading each of the top articles on major news sites and how much time readers are spending on articles on different topics and of varying levels of gravity.

In a larger study with more days and more researchers, it would be worth looking into all articles published in a day on each major site, rather than only the top five to more thoroughly evaluate the quality of the news sites and the content that they are putting out. Researchers may also get a clearer picture of the options that the viewership is choosing the top five articles of each day from.

As we study the state of media in its relation to democracy, it is crucial that we be vigilant in our demand that the media we consume be accurate and informative to ensure an educated public capable of competent and effective citizenship in a democracy.

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