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"Mediatization and Metacoverage: A Comparative Analysis of German, British, and U.S. General Election News"

Abstract

This talk is based on a recent study that uses a framing approach and a comparative perspective to examine the relationship between "mediatization" and "metacoverage" in election news of three countries: the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. Metacoverage is operationally defined as campaign news about: (a) the behaviors and roles of the news media, who are political agents that participate in, and shape, political events and outcomes, and (b) the presence and roles of communications media in candidates' publicity efforts, including their advertising and public relations strategies, and activities of their media advisors and consultants. The amount and types (frames) of metacoverage in news of the 2000 U.S. presidential election, the 2001 British general election, and the 2002 German general election were content analyzed after an assessment of mediatization of the electoral systems of each of those countries. There were three major findings: (a) more metacoverage was observed in the highly mediatized U.S. election system than in election communication systems with less mediatization (Germany and Great Britain); (b) there was a pattern among all three countries in which similar topics were covered in conjunction with press and publicity frames; and (c) more strategy frames were observed in U.S. news than in German and British news, but strategy framed metacoverage tended to follow a discursive pattern in all three countries. These results are interpreted via the hybridization thesis, which states that "new" practices (re: metacoverage) in countries with lower levels of mediatization tend to follow patterns that exist in countries with high levels of mediatization.