

A content analysis of the news stories of *WikiLeaks* founder, in the *Guardian* newspaper in UK; "Hero for freedom of information" or "Hi-tech terrorist"?

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: Interdisciplinary Scope: UK, US</p> <p>Received: 04 January 2025 Revised: 21 January 2025 Accepted: 27 January 2025 Published online: 29 January 2025</p> <p>Keywords: framing theory, The <i>Guardian</i>, Julian Assange, representation theory, <i>WikiLeaks</i>.</p>	<p>When the classified documents from the Afghan war were released by the <i>WikiLeaks</i> on July 25, 2010, there was much debate about the impact of these documents and the accuracy of their release. But in addition to these debates, much attention was focused on the whistleblowing website's founder, Julian Assange, who was released from Belmarsh Prison in the UK after about a decade of legal prosecution. The international press has portrayed Assange in various ways, such as a "hero for freedom of information" or a "hi-tech terrorist". The present study aimed at examining and analyzing how Julian Assange, the founder of the <i>WikiLeaks</i>, is represented in the UK newspaper, The <i>Guardian</i>. By employing a quantitative content analysis, the researchers attempted to see whether Julian Assange is framed in any particular way. The news stories of the <i>Guardian</i> were considered from Afghan War Logs news in July 2010 to August 2012 which was when Assange sought asylum at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, shortly after his collaboration with the <i>Guardian</i> in publishing the leaks ended. The findings of the study revealed that; first, the dominance of the news value of prominence indicated that the news stories have focused on Assange and the personal events or issues related to him instead of those related to the release of the secret documents. Secondly, the researchers observed that Assange has been portrayed in the frame of the legal proceedings at the courts and the controversial conflicts such as rape allegations in Sweden, asylum request and his fight against extradition to the US. Finally, examining the adjectives mentioned in the news led to the conclusion that the representations of Assange have been mainly negative in the <i>Guardian</i> newspaper.</p>

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

A “hero for freedom of information” or a “hi-tech terrorist”, a democracy and transparency advocator or a dangerous autonomous political actor, these are some of the press representations of the *WikiLeaks* founder around the world. At the time of the release of the Afghan war logs (July 25, 2010) by *WikiLeaks*, there was much debate about the impact of these documents and the accuracy of their release. But in addition to these debates, much attention was focused on the founder of the whistleblowing website, Julian Assange, who was released from Belmarsh Prison in the UK after about a decade of legal prosecution. Although the disclosure of classified documents was not unprecedented before *WikiLeaks*, the publication of leaked information about the US military invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan occurred on an unprecedented scale and in a dramatic manner. In fact, the reason why the media paid attention to the disclosures by *WikiLeaks* was because this website was the first collective effort by an independent and anonymous group that considered its goal transparency and was trying to fight the secrecy of information by governments. Another reason for the global attention to these leaked documents was their publication in reputable newspapers including the *Guardian*. After the publication of the War Logs and the documents related to the US embassy, Julian Assange, who had founded the *WikiLeaks* in 2007, became a well-known figure worldwide. His name, along with the name of the *WikiLeaks*, was at the top of the media news for a long time and he became the representative face of the *WikiLeaks*. In late 2010, the news coverage about Assange increased due to the accusations of rape made against him in Sweden. That year, most newspapers tried to publish news related to the legal proceedings simultaneously with the news of the *WikiLeaks* revelations, and some even focused more on the events surrounding Assange’s legal case.

Aims

The present study therefore aimed at examining and analyzing how Julian Assange was represented in the UK broadsheet newspaper, The *Guardian*.

Methods

By employing a quantitative content analysis as the method of research, the researchers attempted to see how Julian Assange was framed by the socio-liberal British newspaper. The news stories of the *Guardian* were considered from the news items about the leak of Afghan War Logs in July 2010 to August 16, 2012 which marked the date that Assange sought asylum at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, shortly after his collaboration with the *Guardian* in publishing the leaks ended. Framing and Representation theories were also used for analyzing the findings.

Findings

The findings of the study revealed that first, the dominance of the news value of *prominence* indicated that the news stories have focused on Assange and the personal events or issues related to him instead of those related to the release of the secret documents. This was evident in the dominance of the two news elements of *Who* and *What* among all the news elements examined in the lead of the news stories and their headlines. Indeed, the most mentioned persons after *Assange* and *WikiLeaks* were *lawyers*, *judges*, and *legal experts*, in line with the findings related to the *What* element, which showed that the most repeated phrases and the most frequent topics were all related to the legal events and issues involving Assange, including the possibility of his extradition to the United States, the charges and the legal case against Assange in Sweden, and his appeal to the English Court of Appeal. Secondly, analyzing the results of the content analysis through the framing theory confirmed that the most prominent frames in which Assange was seen frame, as Assange was portrayed in the legal and crime frames related to the legal proceedings at the courts and the controversial conflicts related to his personal life rather than the disclosures by the *WikiLeaks*. Finally, through the lens of representation theory, the negative, neutral and positive attributes used about Assange were taken into account. Although many attributes were positive, the number of negative attributes were even more than the neutral ones used to describe him.

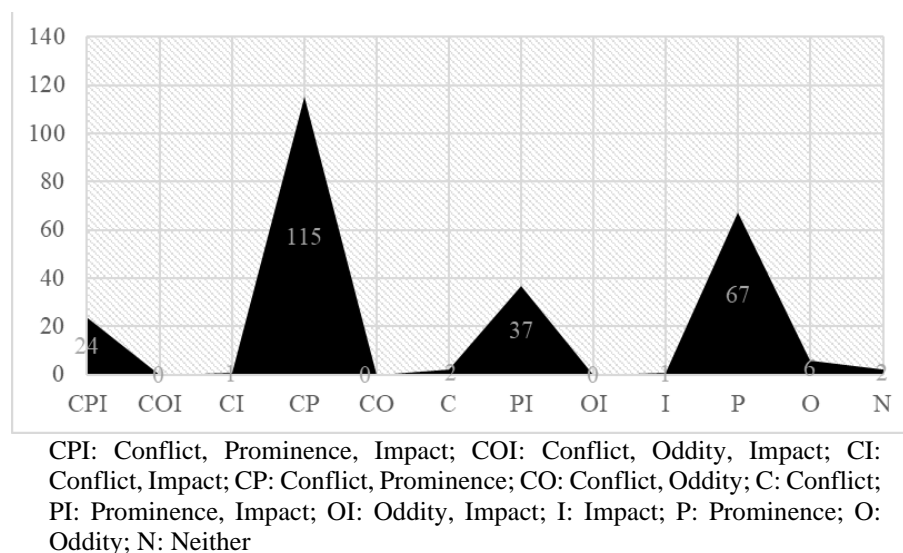


Figure 1. News values combined

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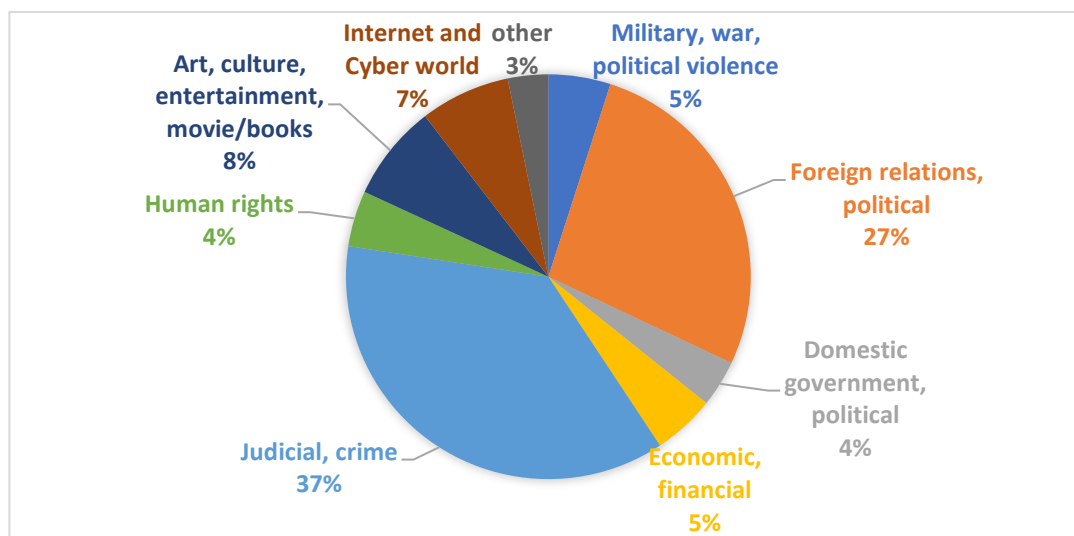


Figure 2. Most discussed topics in the news

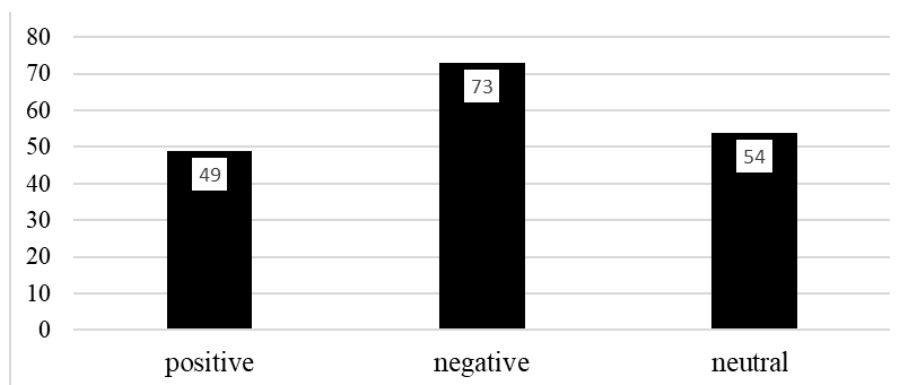


Figure 3. Adjectives or Attributes used to describe Assange

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that innovation and technological activities are key factors in the internationalization of businesses. Innovative companies with greater utilization of technology have higher capabilities to enter and compete in international markets. These companies, by leveraging innovation and technology, are able to offer new and tailored products and services that meet the needs of international markets, which helps strengthen their competitive position. While local competition typically has a negative impact on internationalization, innovation can moderate these negative effects and even turn them into a competitive advantage. The analysis results showed that the interaction between innovation, technological activities, and local competition directly affects the success of business internationalization. Innovation and technological activities can help reduce costs and exploit new opportunities, whereas local competition

generally has a negative impact on internationalization. These findings underscore the critical importance of innovation and technological activities in the success of business internationalization.

This research contributes to the existing literature in several ways. By analyzing the impact of innovation on business internationalization, it shows that innovation can directly and indirectly (as a moderating factor) positively influence companies' abilities to enter and succeed in international markets. This study employs SEM and fsQCA to analyze these effects, providing new evidence in this field. Additionally, by emphasizing the importance of technological activities, it reveals that these activities significantly impact business internationalization. The findings help managers understand the importance of investing in technology and innovation and plan to strengthen these activities. Furthermore, local competition can act as a barrier to internationalization. However, innovation can mitigate these negative impacts and turn them into a competitive advantage. These findings assist managers in developing effective strategies to manage local competition and capitalize on innovative opportunities. The use of SEM and fsQCA in this study provides researchers with new methods to analyze complex relationships between variables. These methods aid in better and more precise explanations of the effects of innovation, technological activities, and local competition on internationalization.

These results have important implications for managers and policymakers. Managers can enhance their ability to compete in international markets and experience better performance by strengthening innovation and investing in technological activities. This includes creating a culture of innovation within the organization, providing necessary resources for technological development, and encouraging creativity and innovation among employees. Additionally, identifying and capitalizing on innovative opportunities can help businesses strengthen their position in facing local and international competition. Policymakers can also improve the international performance of businesses by creating the necessary infrastructure and support for the development of innovation and technology. Establishing support programs for small and medium-sized enterprises to increase their innovation capacity and facilitate the internationalization process can contribute to the country's economic development. Financial and legal support, creating cooperative networks, and providing access to informational and research resources can play a significant role in this regard.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

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Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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