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A STUDY OF THE REPRESENTATION OF CRIME IN FRONT PAGE
HEADLINES IN THE GUARDIAN AND NEWSDAY NEWSPAPERS

A Thesis

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A STUDY OF THE REPRESENTATION OF CRIME IN FRONT PAGE HEADLINES IN THE GUARDIAN AND NEWSDAY NEWSPAPERS

Antonette Brotherson and K'sha Woodley

Abstract:

This study draws from McCombs and Shaw's (1972, 2003) agenda-setting theory to examine the techniques used in presenting front page murder headlines in 2007 by two daily newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago: the Guardian and the Newsday. The research answers two questions: What are the techniques used by the Guardian and Newsday newspapers in sensationalizing front page murder headlines? How frequent were front page headlines in the Guardian and Newsday during the period January to December 2007? Data were sourced and collected from archives, library and books. Qualitative and quantitative content analyses were utilized to identify salient and recurring themes embedded in the murder headlines.

The findings indicate that front page murder headlines feature prominently in both newspapers; and the use of bold and upper case font. Additionally, the researchers observe that there are front pages which had few or no murder headlines even when homicides are occurring in Trinidad and Tobago. Thus, the results further reveal that general elections, carnival and world cup cricket took precedent during the absence of these headlines. Continuing, newspapers utilize a combination of colours such as red, black, yellow, purple, pink, green and blue in presenting front page murder headlines. The language choice in the headlines

contains both literal and figurative meanings. Most of the murder headlines are not accompanied by photographs pertaining to the headlines. However, the few that are accompanied by photographs features mainly the victims of murder.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Newspaper and magazine “headlines excite emotion” (Evans, 1974).¹ The word headlines (“printed lines at the top of a newspaper article giving the topic; a brief news summary”)² as utilized above may seem vague however; Evans (1974) contends that general headlines are violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault); government (local and international); sports; business; accidents and disasters. One’s interpretation of ‘excite’ may be categorized as reactionary, yet this does not state the specific nature of the reaction, for example, anger, joy, grief, fear, and or pain.

“Newspapers were the first mass medium to deliver news”³ in Britain and many of its former colonies. Newspapers began in Trinidad and Tobago during colonial times as “one-page sheets that consisted primarily of ship arrivals and departures of old news from Europe.”⁴ Local events such as sports and crimes were secondary issues. Harold Evans looked at the history of newspaper headlines and observed that big headlines came late to newspapers. One such example was the single-sheet *Daily Courant* of 1702 which did not have a headline. Therefore, it is possible to presume that technological strides in society

¹ Evans, Harold. News Headlines: Book Three. (United States: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974) vii.

² Parragon Book. Queen’s English Dictionary. (New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2002).

³ Biagi, Shirley. Mass Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007) 50.

⁴ Biagi, Shirley. Mass Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007) 49.

have impacted newspapers' reporting of events, with crime not being an exception. Evans noted that there was a pamphlet originating from Britain that preceded newspapers which relied heavily on sensationalism. These pamphlets utilized large and active headings, for example, "THREE BLOODIE MURDERS." Robert E. Garst and Theodore Bernstein were the first to suggest the elements of a modern headline, for example, the *Boston Gazette* in 1781 carried the following headline, "CORNWALLIS TAKEN!" "What was distinctively modern about that was the size of the type across the whole of the leaflet; the size of the type; and the introduction of the verb, these are three of the elements of the modern headline."⁵

Today, the newspaper business in Trinidad and Tobago is thriving with three daily newspapers and other minor publications, for example, the Trinidad Mirror and Punch newspapers. The two newspapers chosen for this study are the Guardian which is the oldest newspaper in Trinidad and Tobago and the Newsday which is the most recent. The main techniques that newspapers generally utilize to present headlines are typography, language, colours, and images. These elements or techniques also aid in giving a dramatic effect to front page headlines and such have been utilized frequently to report crime news. In Trinidad and Tobago, the murder rate is high thus it is common for newspapers to sensationalize crime news and murder stories. The problem of sensationalism is not inherent in these devices but more so on how and when they are used. According to Mencher (2003), crime is one of the subjects that draws people to

⁵ Evans, Harold. News Headlines: Book Three. (United States: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974) 1.

the media. He also suggested that newspapers and other media have known for a long time what interest people hence print what they think people should know about events that affect them. This may then prove to be problematic because it suggests that newspapers specifically sensationalize crime news to generate public interest in a particular story. This study intends to examine murder headlines presented by the Guardian and Newsday newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago. The research will then be conducted in a qualitative and quantitative context in order to identify, describe, analyze and interpret the techniques used to sensationalize front page murder headlines.

A study of this nature is important in Communications because it will explore the ways in which different elements of the headline especially language are used to transmit information; persuade and control; foster social cohesion; and be an expression of the writer's creativity. Additionally, crime is a social problem in Trinidad and Tobago if one has to use 2007 murder rate of three hundred and ninety-five (395)⁶ as evidence. Thus the study will examine how these techniques may work to convey and/or conceal the intentions of the writer and open possibilities for change. The mass media is an important topic in Communications Studies hence this study is conducted on a widely circulated medium – the newspaper. Previous studies conducted on crime headlines have been from a sociological, psychological and social psychological approach excluding a communications approach.

⁶ Newsday reported on January 1st 2008 that there were 395 murders however this conflicts with the figures given by the then Police Commissioner Trevor Paul who reported an actual figure of 385.

Background and Problem

Crime is a major social problem affecting Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is the most southerly of all Caribbean islands and has a population of approximately 1.3 million.⁷ Over the last five years (2002-2007), Trinidad and Tobago has experienced a drastic increase in its murder rate. According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO), Trinidad and Tobago reported a total of 171 homicides in 2002, whereas in 2007 a figure of 395 homicides was recorded.⁸ According to the Express newspaper in April 2006, Trinidad and Tobago was said to be among the top six (6) homicidal nations in the world. Consequently, “a number of Internet websites and updated travel warnings from the British, Americans and Canadians embassies have all labelled Trinidad and Tobago as a “homicidal” nation.”⁹ It is therefore not unusual to read in newspapers, words such as “Menace,” “blemish,” “stain,” “dark,” “unacceptable,” and “plague” in relation to the increase in crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Newsday’s front page of December 27th 2007 carried the following headline, “Year’s murders climb to 375.” It is within this social context that the above words are echoed throughout Trinidad and Tobago in community, political, religious, business and social groups. For example, the government has held

⁷Heeralal, Cheryl. “T&T among top 6 homicidal nations...Jamaica on the decline.” Daily Express 5 April 10th 2006.

⁸Newsday reported on January 1st 2008 that there were 395 murders however this conflicts with the figures given by the then Police Commissioner Trevor Paul who reported an actual figure of 385.

⁹Heeralal, Cheryl. “T&T among top 6 homicidal nations...Jamaica on the decline.” Daily Express 5 April 10th 2006.

several public consultations on crime to include citizens in formulating solutions to the high murder rate; religious organizations have called for prayers in the nation; and citizens have hosted 'Walks for Peace.' All these excerpts are taken from the three daily newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago therefore it conveys that they are closely following measures to curb crime in the nation by community and other groups. However, this study maintains that the Newsday and Guardian front page murder headlines may distort the actual reality of crime in Trinidad and Tobago when they sensationalize and repeatedly publish murder headlines.

Rationale:

This study is being conducted to identify, describe, analyze and interpret the techniques used to sensationalize front page crime headlines. According to Mencher quoted in 'News Headlines: Book Three', crime inclusive of murder is one of the subjects that draw people to the media. Thus, the researchers find it interesting that on one hand, crime draws readers to the media and on the other hand, according to Cohen (1963), the press "is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about."¹⁰

The research will provide an in depth analysis of the techniques used to sensationalize murder headlines and the frequency with which they are used. Thus, one will be able to note trends in the portrayal of headlines. The nature of

¹⁰ Cohen, Bernard. The Press and Foreign Policy. (New Jersey, U.S.A: Princeton University Press, 1963).

the study does not require direct observation, thus studying 2007 murder headlines is a convenient means of investigation. Additionally, the researchers are aware of the debates pertaining to the power of the media and the extent to which the media creates an agenda or frame publications intended for an audience. Therefore, this study will create awareness of the power of language especially when used in a medium such as the newspaper.

Purpose and Significance:

The main purpose of the research is to identify, describe, interpret and analyze elements in murder headlines which aid in the sensationalism of crimes. The identification of the elements mentioned above will lead to answers to the techniques used to present murder headlines and the frequency of murder headlines in the Guardian and Newsday newspapers. Prior observation has led the researchers to recognize some headlines as major exaggerations thus it is likely that readers can make hasty assumptions by reading the front page alone. Thus, this study may lead to a clearer interpretation and understanding of the influence of newspapers in society. The researchers' chose the Guardian and the Newsday daily newspapers because the former is the oldest newspaper in Trinidad and Tobago and the latter is a recent newspaper. This study aims to

compare and contrast the techniques used by each newspaper in presenting front page murder headlines.

The topic under study is significant on two counts. Firstly, the study will investigate the techniques used by the Guardian and Newsday newspapers in sensationalizing front page murder headlines; and how frequently were front page murder headlines in the Guardian and Newsday front page headlines used during the period January to December 2007. This study on murder headlines represents significant developments for communication theory building. It is the intention of the researchers that this body of work will provide approaches to further study media and mass communications processes. The study should initiate the groundwork for critiquing the assumptions derived from other studies and theories.

Definition of Terms¹¹

Techniques – Methods of performing particular tasks in terms of how the producer designs and simultaneously uses font size, bright colours and images to present a particular headline.

Sensationalism – Writing and/or language related to exciting emotions which flows from the doctrine that all knowledge is obtained from sense impressions.¹²

Headlines – Printed lines at the top of a newspaper article giving the topic; a brief news summary.¹³

¹¹ These definitions are paraphrased from the Parragon Book. Queen's English: English Dictionary. (New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2002.) and Westmancoat, K. John. Newspapers. (London: The British Library, 1985).

¹² Westmancoat, K. John. Newspapers. (London: The British Library, 1985).

Daily – Daily, usually morning, newspaper.

Crime – An unlawful act or default which is an offense against the public and renders the person guilty of the act liable to legal punishment. (Halsbury, *Laws of England*)¹⁴

Murder – Intentional and unlawful killing of one person by another.

Cover – Report of an event or situation.

Coverage – Extent of newspaper's attention to particular events or situations.

Tabloid – A small-format newspaper that features large photographs and illustrations along with sensational stories.

Research Questions

1. What are the techniques used by the Guardian and Newsday newspapers in sensationalizing front page murder headlines?
2. How frequent were front page murder headlines in the Guardian and Newsday during the period January to December 2007?

¹³ Westmancoat, K. John. *Newspapers*. (London: The British Library, 1985).

¹⁴ Byrne, Tony and Colin Padfield. *Social Services*. (Oxford: Made Simple Books, 1990) 368.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review summarizes theories, studies and critically evaluates previous materials on and surrounding the topic of language, sensationalism and crime headlines. The main elements of the headline that aids in the sensationalism of crimes are typography, language, colour and images. Prior observation has led the researchers to recognize some headlines as major exaggerations thus it is likely that readers can make hasty assumptions by reading the front page alone. It is generally known that newspapers are a popular and cheap avenue for communication that reaches a wide cross section of the society. Therefore, the researchers question the possible influence, if any, that this media may have on its readership on the basis of sensationalism of crime headlines.

Continuing, Rotimi Taiwo's study entitled "Language, Ideology and Power Relations in Nigeria Newspaper Headlines" observes Nigerian newspaper headlines. His study reveals that

headlines have hidden ideological meanings; divided along some ideological lines reflecting the views of those whose interest is being undermined. The study concludes that emotion-inducing strategy in the hands of the editor used to initiate, sustain discourse and shape the views of the readers on national issues (Taiwo 218).¹⁵

¹⁵ Taiwo, Rotimi. Language, Ideology and Power Relations in Nigerian Newspaper Headlines. Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2004. 218.

Taiwo notes that language is central to creating reality and does not merely reflect it. Also, he notes that headlines play the role of precursors to the news so that they are constructed to evoke emotions in the reader. Language, written or speech is the chief means of communicating therefore it is essential to recognize its pervasiveness especially in a technologically advanced environment.

Additionally, Hayakawa and Hayakawa look at Adolf Hitler's success in "persuading millions to share his maniacal and destructive views,"¹⁶ to say that "we need to have a habitually critical attitude toward language – our own and as well as that of others" (Hayakawa and Hayakawa 1990). The researchers are not advocating that newspapers spread destructive agendas however this quote is significant because being critical of what one reads is important in decoding messages. They note that language has different roles and usages: to persuade and control, to transmit information, to foster social cohesion, and as an artistic expression. Also, Roberts – the author of "West Indians and their Language" notes that language

facilitates the transmission of ideas, emotions, desires from individual to individual...it is therefore external in the form of sound and symbols...*West Indians and their language* means West Indians and their ability to communicate ideas, emotions and desires and their ability to think....refers to one recognizable, identifiable or accepted entity used by one or more communities of speakers.¹⁷

Roberts is writing from a West Indian background therefore he is familiar with the nature and context of language(s) used in this setting. It is therefore critical to highlight that Newsday and Guardian press through language and other symbolic

¹⁶ Hayakawa, S. I., and Alan R. Hayakawa. Language in Thought and Action 5th Edition. (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990) ix.

¹⁷ Roberts, A. Peter. West Indians and their Language. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

means transmit ideas and emotions. He also acknowledges the social context of the language which seems to suggest that a West Indian audience is likely to recognize and accept the messages encoded in murder headlines and generate individual meanings.

Additionally, mass media communication theorists suggest that the media influences people and set the agenda for thinking and debate. Theories that will be used to provide a framework for this study are McCombs and Shaw's Agenda Setting theory; Albert Bandura's Social learning theory; Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding; and George Gerbner's Cultivation theory. Thus, a topic of this nature is significant in the field of communications because as Mencher suggests, the public believe and trust newspapers for accurate information. Additionally, crime coverage has been constant for years and one would think that people have become saturated but the reality is otherwise. The underlying issue in the research of crime headlines is to identify, describe, interpret and analyze the devices used to sensationalize murder headlines. Heath and Gilbert's study conducted in the United States revealed that people are wary of the news they see and read. Conversely, the researchers are aware that people use newspapers for different purposes however this study will not investigate people's reactions to newspaper headlines. Mencher 2003 noted that people act on the information they obtain from their newspapers and broadcast stations."¹⁸

Firstly, McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory claims that "the media may not only tell us what to think about, they also may tell us how to think

¹⁸ Mencher, Melvin. News Reporting and Writing. 9th Ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003) 5.

about it, and perhaps even what to do about it.”¹⁹ Additionally, agenda-setting theory is attributed to the process of framing. According to Robert Entman “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation for the item described.”²⁰ Again, agenda-setting theory shows to some extent that an agenda is being set where the media is seen as “engaging in active construction of messages, emphasizing certain aspects of an issue and not others.”²¹ This theory is applicable to the study; mainly because it holds the producers of the newspapers responsible for what they sell to the audience; this implies that other important issues may be with held from the audience since the producer is ‘free’ to set the agenda of newspapers.

Secondly, Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory aims at understanding the psychosocial mechanisms through which symbolic communication influences human thoughts, affect and action. The social cognitive theory of mass communication is based on three factors, social learning, observational learning and modeling. Social learning is then proposed to be a situation where behavior or actions is changed or molded through vicarious learning experience. It examines how our experiences with the media affect the way we acquire knowledge about the world and how this knowledge creates consequences for

¹⁹Griffin, Em. A First Look At Communication Theory.6th Ed. (New York McGraw-Hill College, 2006)403.

²⁰Griffin, Em. A First Look At Communication Theory. 6th Ed. (New York McGraw-Hill College, 2006)402.

²¹Griffin, Em. A First Look At Communication Theory.6th Ed. (New York McGraw-Hill College, 2006)405.

attitudes and behaviours. This theory is helpful in understanding the effects of news murder headlines and its mass-media content on the public. In addition, social learning theory will allow us to obtain a greater understanding of how the human mind works in obtaining the information put forward in the media as well as the psychological impacts.

Thirdly, Stuart Hall (1980) believes that the mass-media tend to reproduce interpretations which serve the interest of the ruling class. He says that the news performs a crucial role in defining events as well as serving to reinforce a consensual viewpoint by using public idioms by claiming to voice opinion. Hall also addresses the ways in which people make sense of the media texts and how they negotiate messages embedded in the media text. He claims that the structure of the message employs a code and yields a message. Hall also focuses on the concept of "representation" which says that reality is never experienced directly, except through the symbolic categories made available by society.

In light of Hall's claim, the context of newspapers should be considered since it is a scripted and public text for audience consumption; thus it is significant that people cannot enter the *Newsday* and/or *Guardian* and actively participate in the planning, editing and publishing of their newspapers. This concept of representation suggests that meaning is constructed which reiterates McCombs and Shaws' agenda setting theory. This theory is important to the study as its perspective of the media is one of encoding a message through language use; which the reader then decodes through negotiating the meanings implied in the text. Some aspects of his theory are applicable because newspapers

are communication texts which contain embedded messages from newspaper producers. This theory is important in the study as it argues that the media encodes messages through language which the reader then decodes through negotiating the meanings implied in the text.

Conversely, George Gerbner's Cultivation theory as quoted in Frey et al, proposes that television is a dominant force in shaping modern society. Gerbner's Cultivation theory is applicable to our study because it shows the effect of the mass media on its audience. Gerbner investigated how the media affects its' audience emotionally. The media is seen as the driving force which shapes and influence the audience perception of society. Gerbner believes that this effect creates an exaggerated belief that the world is 'mean and scary' so that the violence they see may contribute to social paranoia. Gerbner's Cultivation theory is applicable to our research because it allows the researchers' to understand the effect(s) the media have on its audience.

A study conducted by Jason Ditton et al entitled "From Imitation to Intimidation: A note on the Curious and Changing Relationship between the Media, Crime and Fear of Crime" notes that connections have been made between media reports and dramatizations of crime and peoples' fear of crime. The study analyzed quantitative responses of 167 respondents, and a qualitative sub-sample of 64 of the respondents. These connections though very attractive did not agree with the findings of their study which showed that an actual relationship of respondents reading and/or watching crime news and being fearful as a result was infrequent. "The qualitative material indicates that respondents' perceptions and

interpretations are more important than the frequency of media consumption and/or any objective characteristics of media material” (Ditton et al 595).²² The study further concludes that the dominant attitude that suggested the relationship between the media and crime leading to fear was inconsistent. Also, Ditton et al noted that fear is generated because readers view themselves as potential victims. They on the other hand suggested that it is premature to dismiss the media as being innocent in shaping people’s views about crime. It was suspected that “the causal relationship between media consumption and fear of crime might be the opposite of that commonly hypothesized (i.e. that scared people stay indoors and watch more television,” Gunter 1987: 33; Zillman 1980: 159). Lastly, “newspaper coverage of serious crimes occurring in places other than where their respondents reside has been shown by at least two studies (Liska and Baccaglioni 1990; Heath 1984) to be ‘reassuring’, as it makes people ‘feel safe by comparison” (Ditton et al 598).

Alternatively, one can argue that the findings of this study are not applicable to 2007 and the reality in Trinidad and Tobago however it is wise to note that the validity of the claim that people are generally scared because they see themselves as potential victims. Also, the levels of insecurity would vary depending on the neighbourhood one lives in. For example, some people feel safe in their villages mainly because it is not ‘Laventille’ and/or not in close proximity to it. This area is usually associated with crime hence it is used to demonstrate that an individual geographic location affects how safe or unsafe he/she may

²² Ditton et al. “From Imitation to Intimidation: A Note on the Curious and Changing Relationship between the Media, Crime and Fear of Crime.” Advance Assess Publication, 2004.

feels; regardless of what the Newsday, Guardian and/or television news are reporting about crime in the country.

Heath 1984 concludes that typical characteristics of the coverage of crime are randomness, localness and sensationalism (Heath 607). It is important to understand that even in Heath's study this relationship did not surpass five percent (5%) of the observed effects/correlations between the variables of crime and fear of crime reports. The implications of this are that the respondents were not fearful of local, random and sensational crimes. Heath notes that these characteristics were typical of crime coverage which implies that readers have become accustomed to crime stories. On the other hand, theories suggest that people are influenced by repeated phenomena so that one cannot necessarily state that sensationalism, localness and randomness are not creating fear even though they are 'typical'. It is significant that Heath's study was conducted twenty-three (23) years ago and characteristics of randomness and sensationalism was found in crime coverage. This not only suggests that sensationalism and crime is a modern phenomenon but it agrees to an extent with the subject of this research. Also, the study was not applicable to Trinidad and Tobago hence the reason why the researchers will be conducting similar studies. The results may be different since Trinidad and Tobago is a smaller nation and newspapers have a more vital status. Again, the group's research will identify techniques that newspapers utilize in their headlines; and the role of that the editors play in using headlines as marketing tools rather than tools to present crime news to the audience.

Additionally, Linda Heath and Kevin Gilbert's study of "Crime in Mass Media" looks at its effects on perceptions; the factors involved; mass media's portrayal of it; and the relationship between media use and fear of crime. Heath (1984) in particular, looks at the effects of newspaper reading on fear of crime. They carried out extensive research in 42 American cities to identify 36 newspapers that varied in terms of sensationalism of the crime, the apparent randomness of the crime and the location of crime. Heath observes that the location of crime interacted significantly with crime sensationalism and randomness. This study notes that reports of local crimes that were sensational or random were associated with higher levels of fear of crime, whereas reports of non local random or sensational crimes were associated with lower levels of fear of crime.

Chiricos et al (1997) study of "Crime, News and Fear of Crime: Towards an Identification of Audience Effects" look at how the use of sensationalized and emotional language in the text and headline of a story on violent crime can create massive levels of fear in readers in three newspapers, the US News, Times and Newsweek. The study revealed that the rape and murder of two teenage girls by six gang members was turned into national media frenzy. This was as a result of the headlines portrayed such as "Teen Violence: Wild in the Streets," "In a State of Terror," "Taming the Killers" and "Florida: State of Rage" which caused panic. It was found that American politicians then prepared policy amendments designed to combat the problem of crime. The politicians proposed to stem this 'epidemic'

by implementing castration, caning, fingerprinting school children and incorporating military technology in the latest ‘war on crime’.

Derek Chadee, a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, conducted a study in Trinidad and Tobago entitled “Fear of Crime Research in the Caribbean: Developing a Social Psychological framework.” Chadee notes that there is a lack of studies from a social psychological perspective thus his study would have filled in a gap in this field. Chadee suggests that a study of this nature “allows for a profound understanding of crime – its antecedents, consequences and implications for community living” (Chadee 209). Chadee studied the three daily newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago and found that there were no clear “relationships between fear of crime and the amount of time spent reading newspapers.” Also, Chadee suggests that the

media distort the presentation of crimes. The population depends on the media for crime news, with the majority rating the news as accurate. However the jury is still out as to the extent to which the media influence fear of crime levels and how this influence takes place (Chadee 2006).²³

This research studied the techniques used to sensationalize crime from a communications framework and is not a replication of Chadee’s study. Also, Chadee studied television as well as newspapers to determine the levels of fear and crime. The topic is important for study because of the debates surrounding the power of the media and the extent to which the media sets an agenda and/or frame messages delivered to its’ audience. The topic is also significant in the field of communication because it seeks to create an

²³Chadee, Derek. Current themes in Social Psychology. (Kingstown, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2006) 222.

awareness of the power of language use in newspaper headlines and their ability in forming perception in the minds of its readers. Thus, this study provides possibility for fruitful exploration in the future for understanding language use in the media as well as the power of the mass-media on individuals.

According to Alan Casty (1968), “our values and attitudes, our perceptions of the world and ourselves are shaped by the unique qualities of (our) mass communication experience.”²⁴ It is believed that the sensationalism of newspaper crime headlines particularly murders has an effect of shaping the readers’ beliefs, attitudes as well as perceptions. Additionally, headlines frame the interpretation of the article’s content; through their language use and may have created some element of fear in newspaper readers. Joseph Herberg quoted in Mencher (2003) noted that,

journalists are obliged to tell their stories briefly they must choose words that count, words that quickly and efficiently paint pictures. In addition, he said that the story is most effective when the journalist selects words in which the denotative and connotative meanings, the explicit and implicit meanings, mesh.²⁵

There is a gap in studies of this nature as there is a need to explain, analyze, evaluate and understand the techniques used by newspaper agencies when creating newspaper headlines and its effects on it’s the audience. In addition, there is also a need to understand the cognitive and affective effects of media texts. The cognitive effect deals with how the readers acquire the information being brought to them. Elizabeth Perse (2001) said that, “affective effects involve

²⁴Casty, Alan. Mass Media and Mass Man. 2nd Ed. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, 1968.3

²⁵ Mencher, Melvin. News Reporting and Writing. 9th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003)178.

the formation of attitudes positive or negative evaluation about something.”²⁶

Additionally, she said that “affective effects is concern with emotional reactions to media content, such as fright or amusement or the development of feelings towards other objects as a result of media exposure.”²⁷

²⁶ Perse, Elizabeth. Media Effects and Society. (NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Association Associates, 2001)3.

²⁷ Perse, Elizabeth. Media Effects and Society. (NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Association Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001)3.

Chapter 3

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the researchers used Content Analysis. This method allowed the researchers to describe the function, content and structure of the messages contained in texts. The researchers analyzed the content of twenty four (24) front page murder headlines for the year 2007. Twelve (12) front page murder headlines were taken from the Newsday and twelve (12) front page murder headlines from the Guardian daily newspaper representing one from each month. The researchers chose 2007 as the appropriate year to study because Trinidad and Tobago reportedly recorded the highest homicide rates in its history. Crime is a major social problem in Trinidad and Tobago. Prime Minister Patrick Manning attested to this fact when he claimed that “Neither crime nor criminals will disappear overnight...Their increased and organized activity have become a dark dimension of modern global society.”²⁸

Therefore, this study investigated the frequency of murder headlines and the techniques used to sensationalize front page murder headlines. According to Frey et al, “Content analysis is used to identify, enumerate and analyze occurrences of specific messages and message characteristics embedded in (the) texts.”²⁹ Qualitative content analysis involves the understanding of meanings associated with messages. Quantitative content analysis is used to describe and count the characteristics of messages embedded in the text. Content analysis is useful to the study as it allowed the researchers to describe the function, content

²⁸ Doobay, Stephen. “Doing their part.” *Trinidad Guardian* 5 April 2007.

²⁹ Frey et al. *Investigating Communication An Introduction to Research Methods*. 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1991)237.

and structure of the messages contained in texts. Qualitative content analysis allowed us to study the headlines as it appears in context as well as examine the underlying motivations of the producers of the newspaper crime headlines and the effects of the headlines on the readers. The quantitative content analysis involves the coding messages embedded in the texts. This was done using the intercoder reliability method. According to Frey et al, “Intercoder reliability is the most common method (use) for assessing reliability.”³⁰ Frey et al suggested that intercoder reliability can be done by “calculating the percentage agreement between or among the observations of independent coders.”³¹ Hence, in order to assess reliability the researchers had to calculate the percentage agreement between the independent coders.

Research Design

Front page murder headlines were randomly selected from the Newsday and Guardian newspapers. First, the researchers observed the days on which front page murder headlines appeared dealing specifically with murder news in Trinidad and Tobago; after which, simple random sampling was used to select the dates of each headline generated by drawing numbers from a bag. The bag contained the dates of the murder headlines for that particular month (for example, January 11th, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 29th, 31st) and the researchers then chose a

³⁰ Frey et al. Investigating Communication An Introduction to Research Methods. 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1991) 115.

³¹ Frey et al. Investigating Communication An Introduction to Research Methods. 2nd Ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1991)115.

date from the bag for a particular month (for example, January 31st). The researchers obtained the selected newspapers from the Trinidad and Tobago National Archives located in Port of Spain as well as the newspapers' websites.

The researchers analyzed the murder headlines utilizing content analysis. The coding categories for the headlines were determined by the researchers initially looking at all the newspaper headlines pertaining to murder in the Newsday and the Guardian for the year 2007; noting at what was said, how it was said and placing the words and phrases in a bag. The researchers then randomly selected twelve words/phrases from the bag and placed these words into categories. The headlines were coded as followed: types of headlines, language, colours and photographic content. The headlines were further categorized as listed below: **Headlines:** upper case, lower case, down style, banner headlines, drop head, drop shadow, sub-headline and reverse drop head. **Colour of headlines:** red, black, blue, yellow, pink, green, white and purple. **Language:** "beaten to death", "murder", "gunned down", "executed", "shot dead", "killings", "death", "senseless slayings", "use of figures", "killed", "gunmen go ballistic" and "murders mar weekend". Language was also further sub-divided into literal or figurative use of language. **Photograph/Images:** images of people crying, police officers and victim(s).

Additionally, the researchers chose intercoder reliability in order to ensure reliability. The researchers goal for intercoder reliability was seventy percentage (70%) agreement among the coders. The researchers randomly selected the independent coders so as to avoid the researchers' personal bias to cloud the

outcome of the study. The research had four inter coders – the researchers were coders one and three independent coders who had no previous knowledge of the study. The independent coders chosen are nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who are aware of the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. The coders had to be trained in order to complete the coding sheets for reliability testing. According to Neuendorf, “Training must be given to ensure the detection of subtle message elements.”³² This training session was necessary in order to deal with any misunderstandings as well as questions arising from the coders and to ensure the intercoder consistency. The researchers introduced and explained the definition and the coding category (see Appendix A) used in the study to the coders and elaborated in detail the process of coding. The independent coders were given one coding sheet (see Appendix B) for the Newsday and one coding sheet for the Guardian together with the definition of coding categories. Each coder received a total of twenty four (24) headlines, twelve (12) from the Newsday (Appendix C) and twelve (12) from the Guardian (Appendix D).

Despite the researchers randomly selecting front page murder headlines, the researchers also noted the frequency of the crime headlines in the Newsday and Guardian newspapers. The frequency of these crime headlines were measured by their occurrence in the Newsday and the Guardian. Again, the researchers analyzed all the front page murder headlines reported for each month in the year 2007. This was done by taking for example, the month of January which reported front page murder headlines on the following dates: 11th, 23rd,

³² Neuendorf, Kimberly. The Content Analysis Guide Book. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, 2002). 142

24th, 25th, 29th, and 31st writing down these headlines dates and calculating the total for that month. Hence, January reported a total of six (6) headlines. This was done for all the headlines from January to December. A sample front page headline of the Guardian and Newsday can be found in Appendix E and F respectively.

Data Collection

The researchers gathered twenty-four (24) newspaper headlines from the year 2007. The researchers first tried to source headlines from the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus in the library's West Indian section; however, the researchers found that many issues of the newspapers were missing. The researchers requested assistance from the media houses to collect the headlines and they gave directions to the Trinidad and Tobago National Archives located in Port of Spain. First, the researchers compiled all the newspapers for the Guardian and the Newsday that reported front page murder headlines after which the randomly selected the headlines were collected. The researchers visited the archives over a two weeks period, and were given free colour copies of the randomly selected headlines. The researchers were only allowed five copies each of the selected headlines.

In order to test intercoder reliability, the researchers randomly selected independent coders from St. Augustine and surroundings. It should be noted that even though the researchers selected independent coders found in St. Augustine, they live in different areas in Trinidad and Tobago. The researchers brought the

coders together to train them to code use the coding sheets in correspondence with the data. This training session took place one afternoon; the researchers distributed the coding sheets; introduced and explained the definitions on the category sheet for coding and elaborated in detail the coding process. This training session allowed the coders to understand the coding manual and also to encourage collaboration on differences they may have with coding a particular item. The coders had requested that the researchers remain close by during the coding process in case they had questions. The researchers remained detached as possible during this training session. The researchers collected the coding sheets then proceeded to code the same headlines given to the independent coders (see Appendix G and H).

Chapter 4

Results

In order to answer the research questions, the researchers used quantitative and qualitative content analysis and intercoder reliability to ensure the validity of the results. The results are as follows:

RQ1. What are the techniques used by the Guardian and Newsday newspapers in sensationalizing front page murder headlines?

The researchers observed that various stylistic devices such as typography, colours, images/photographs and language are used in presenting front page murder headlines. The findings indicate that white is the dominant and most frequently used colour in the Guardian. The researchers found that 92% of front page murder headlines were white. The pie chart, Figure 1, illustrates the colours use in the Guardian's headlines.

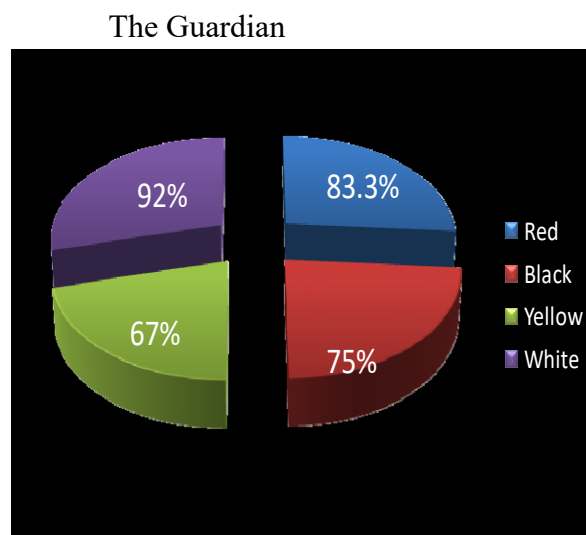


Fig 1

Results show that the Newsday when compared to the Guardian uses a combination of colours in its headlines. However, similar to the Guardian, white is also the dominant colour used in the Newsday. Figure 2 shows the combination of colours use in its headlines and Figure 3 shows a comparison of the similar colours use in both newspapers' headlines.

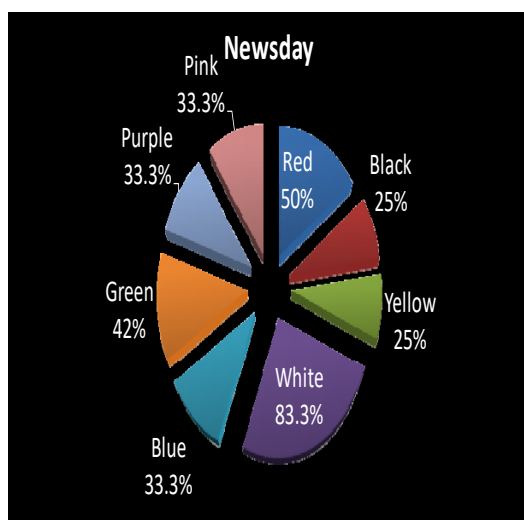


Fig 2

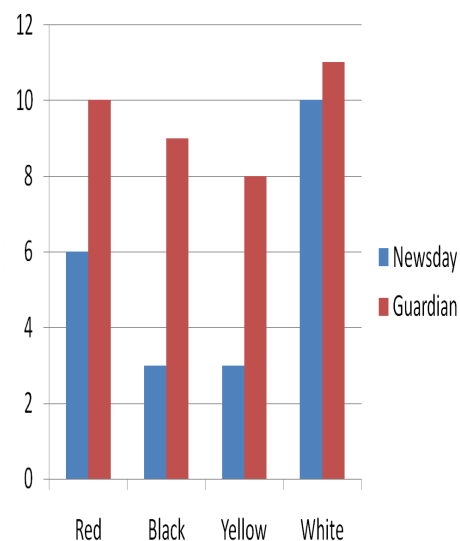


Fig 3

It was found that 42% of Newsday's headlines utilized drop head and drop shadows. 25% of its headlines were banner headlines and 14% of its headlines use reverse drop head. Despite this, 92% of Newsday's headlines were written in upper case as shown in Figure 4 below.

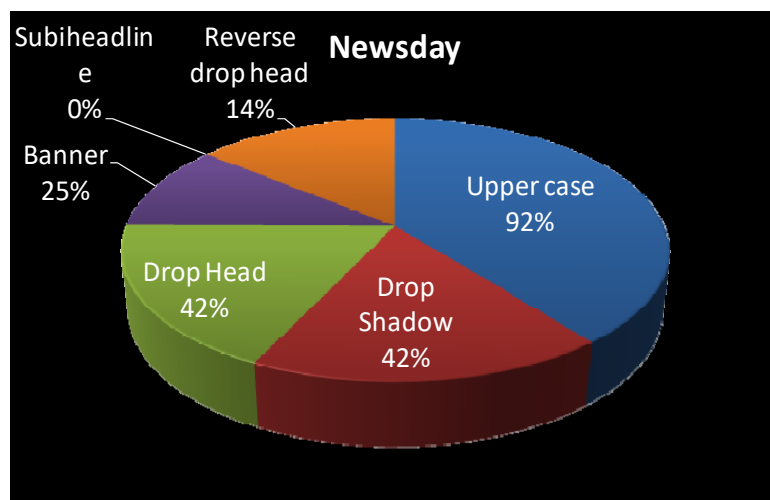


Fig 4

The findings reveal that 50% of the Guardian's headlines contained drop head, drop shadow and were banner headlines. Results show that 25% of the Guardian's headlines were also found to be written in lower case and down style capitalizing only the first word and proper nouns. In addition, it was found that 75% of the Guardian's headlines were upper case which can be found in figure 5 below:

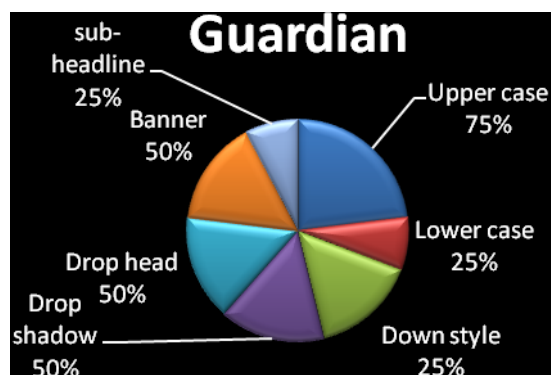


Fig 5

The researchers found that when comparing the techniques used in both headlines, the Guardian and the Newsday yielded a high percentage of upper case headlines dominating their front page with upper case occurring nine out of the twelve selected headlines (9/12) and eleven out of the twelve selected headlines (11/12) respectively. Results also indicated that the Guardian uses more techniques in its headlines when compare to the Newsday. The Guardian also utilized the use of down style and lower case letters in its front page which appear six out of twelve (6/12) times in its headlines. Moreover, in the Guardian, it was found that sub-headlines appeared three out of the twelve headlines (3/12). In addition to this, the findings indicated that reverse drop head was utilize in the Newsday's front page headlines appeared four out of the twelve (4/12). The diagram below illustrates these findings in Figure 6.

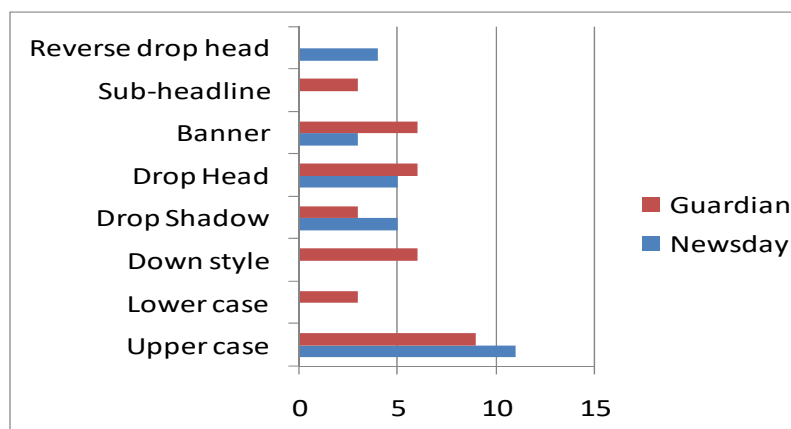


Fig. 6

Additionally, the Newsday produced five (5) out of twelve (12) front page murder headlines that were accompanied by photographs. Three (3) out of the five (5) headlines contained a passport size photo of the victim whereas two (2) out of the five (5) headlines depicted members of the family crying in the foreground of the picture. Moreover, the Guardian produced a total of two (2) out of twelve (12) front page murder headlines; one (1) depicting a passport size picture of the victim and one (1) containing the picture of the family crying in the foreground of the picture (see Appendix I).

Additionally, the findings show that words such as “murder”, “killed” and “death” were frequent in both the Guardian and Newsday’s front page headlines. The findings revealed that the word “death” was most frequent in the Guardian occurring seven (7) out of twelve (12) times. However, the word “murder” was most frequent in the Newsday appearing five (5) out of twelve (12) in front page headlines. In addition to this, the findings indicated that the word “death” dominated front page murder headlines overall. Moreover, words such as “gunned down”, “shot dead”, “executed”, and “murders mar weekend” which produced a low frequency rate in Newsday’s front page headlines and words such as “murder”, “beaten to death”, “killings” which produced a high frequency rate were thought to contained both figurative and literal meanings respectively. The findings also indicated that the ‘use of figures’ in the Newsday was both literal and figurative. The findings also indicated that words used in the Guardian such as “shot dead”, “senseless killings”, “murders mar weekend” and “gunmen go

ballistic” were considered to be figurative in meaning whereas, words such “death”, ‘use of figures’ and “killed” were considered to be literal in meaning.

Figures 7 and 8 demonstrate the observation found in the Guardian and the Newsday newspaper. The frequency of these words for the Guardian and the Newsday can be found in Appendix J.

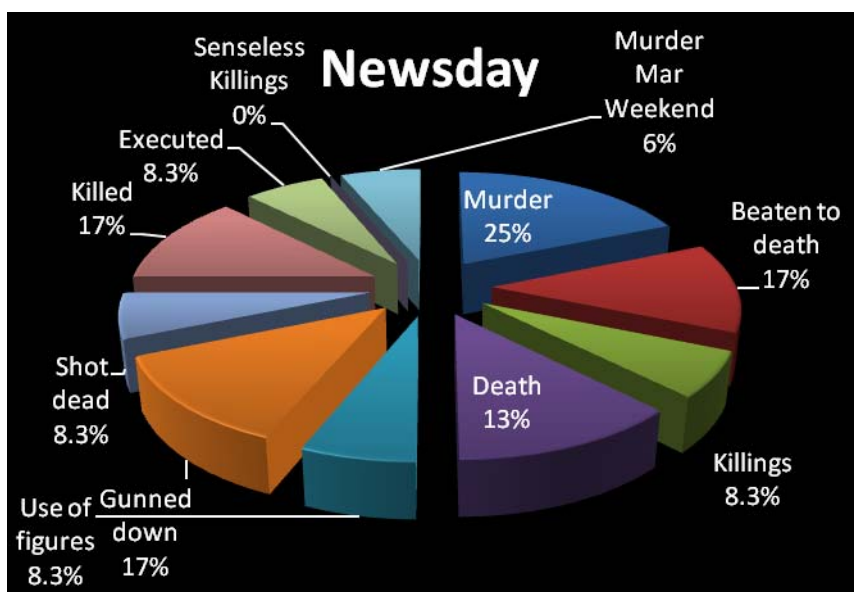


Fig. 7

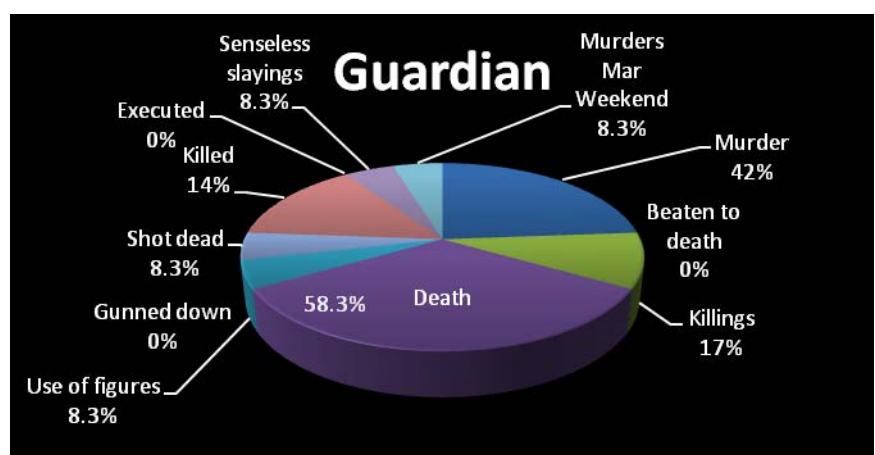


Fig.8

RQ2. How frequent were front page murder headlines in the Guardian and Newsday during the period January to December 2007?

The data produced 127 headlines. The results revealed that the Newsday (Appendix K) produced a total of 49 front page murder headlines and the Guardian (Appendix L) produced a total of 78 front page murder headlines for 2007. The frequency of these headlines is shown in figure 9. In January, the Newsday had six (6) headlines whereas Guardian had four (4). The Guardian eight (8) headlines for February whereas Newsday had one (1) headline for the same period. In March, the Newsday had five (5) headlines while the Guardian had four (4). The Newsday had four (4) headlines while the Guardian had six (6) for the month of April. In May, the Newsday had four (4) headlines whereas for the same period the Guardian recorded twelve (12) headlines. In June, the Newsday had three (3) headlines however the Guardian had one (1) for the same period.

Finally, the Newsday and the Guardian had four (4) murder headlines each for the month of July. The Newsday had two (2) headlines for August while the Guardian had ten (10). In September, the Newsday had one (1) headline whereas the Guardian had five (5) headlines. The Newsday had no front page murder headlines for October however; the Guardian had three (3) headlines. In November, the Newsday had eight (8) headlines in comparison to the Guardian who had twelve (12). Newsday recorded twelve (12) front page murder headlines for December whereas the Guardian recorded nine (9).

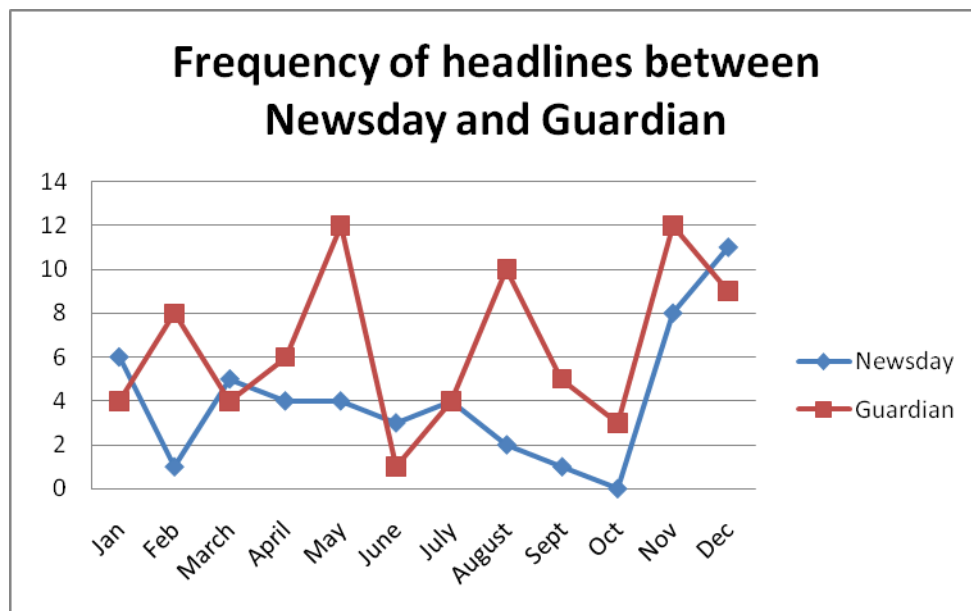


Fig.9 shows a mapping relationship between the Newsday and the Guardian's production of front page murder headlines. The highest point of the frequency indicated that there were twelve (12) front page murder headlines in the months of May and November in the Guardian. The results revealed that the lowest point of the frequency of front page murder headlines occurred in February, September and October with February and September producing only one (1) front page murder headline and the month of October displaying no headlines in the Newsday. Additionally, the findings indicated that the lowest point of the frequency occurred in June with one (1) front page murder headline in the Guardian.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The aims of the research were to study the representations of murder in front page headlines, and to identify the techniques used to present these headlines. The study sought to answer two (2) research questions: What are the techniques used by the Guardian and Newsday newspapers in sensationalizing front page murder headlines? How frequent were front page murder headlines in the Guardian and Newsday during the period January to December 2007? Following from the aims of the research, the results were analyzed on the themes of language, frequency, typography, colours and images.

Firstly, the main technique used by the Guardian and the Newsday to sensationalize murder headlines was language. The results showed that the dominant words used in headlines for Newsday and Guardian were **‘murder,’ ‘killed,’ and ‘death.’** Words that appeared in the Newsday alone were ‘gunned-down’ and ‘beaten’. One word that appeared once in the Newsday and the Guardian but for the different stories was “mar.” Incidentally, “mar” and “ballistic” were noted by the researchers as figurative because both had the lowest percentage of recurrence.

Language was therefore linguistically important especially when considerations are given to the role of words in a social context, for example ‘murder’ – Trinidadians are very much aware of this word and what it denotes and connotes. The fact that the unofficial murder rate for 2007 was three hundred and ninety-five (395) is an indication that the use of ‘murder’ in front page headlines

is linguistically important. The researchers acknowledged murder as the politically correct term for the intentional and unlawful killing of one person by another, hence it maybe necessary for the Guardian and Newsday to utilize it at times.

Additionally, Taiwo noted that “our words are never neutral, they carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak or write” (Taiwo 218).³³ The researchers did not investigate the intent of the editors of both newspapers, however, due consideration should be given to their word choices and the interests that they might reflect, whether intentional or not. Newspaper editors play a crucial role in shaping issues in the society and setting the boundaries of what is talked about and how it is talked about (Quoted in Taiwo 218 from Henry and Tator 2002).³⁴ Each newspaper would bring a different angle to the newspaper in terms of presenting a story. Coincidentally, the Newsday and Guardian presented the same story for January 31st 2007:

Guardian January 31st: Crowbar killings: Grandparents bludgeoned to death.

Newsday January 31st: Cascade Couple beaten to death.

It is interesting to observe the distinctions between the choices of language that both newspapers use. The language that Guardian used denotes and connotes horror. One might think that “Crowbar” was sufficient for readers to understand the incident yet they went on to use “bludgeoned.” Apparently, ‘crowbar’ was the murder weapon however; the Newsday did not mention the murder weapon and

³³ Quoted in Taiwo from Fiske, 1994; Fowler, et.al. 1979).

³⁴ Taiwo, Rotimi. Language, Ideology and Power Relations in Nigerian Newspaper Headlines. (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2004) 219.

their use of language can be considered mild in comparison to the Guardian newspaper. Therefore, the researchers acknowledged that there are varying degrees of sensationalism in language as can be seen from the example above. Both newspapers had pictures of the relatives crying below the headline and that was where the similarities ended. The significance of this finding is that headlines repeat and symbolize violence, in that the words used reveal the “source of power, abuse, dominance, inequality and bias and how these sources are maintained, reproduced and transformed within specific social, economic, political and historical contexts” (Taiwo 219). Also, this quote from Altheide (2002) reinforces the symbolism in the language used in murder headlines, “*crime* refers not only to certain illegal acts, but also to the language, images, and symbols that are used in discussing kinds of behaviour and activities, often condoning acts to prevent crime” (Altheide 125).

McCombs and Shaw noted media set an agenda where they are seen as “engaging in active construction of messages, emphasizing certain aspects of an issue and not others.”³⁵ Likewise in the example above, the Newsday and the Guardian constructed messages about the same story and the latter chose to emphasize the murder weapon while the former did not. Therefore, one can infer that maybe emphasis was placed on the murder weapon to satisfy the curiosity of the readers in the case of Guardian; and in the case of Newsday, they felt that “beaten to death’ was enough information for the readers. Moreover, it is

³⁵Griffin, Em. A First Look At Communication Theory.6th Ed. (New York McGraw-Hill College, 2006)405.

important that words such as “ballistic” and “mar” was noted by the researchers as figurative because of their low percentage of recurrence.

The researchers assumed then, that the Guardian and Newsday use “mar” and “ballistic” in extreme cases, especially when the story within the headline was particularly ‘gruesome.’ This to, the researchers noted because Newsday used “mar” on June 30th, “Three Murders Mar Weekend” and Guardian used it on June 18th, “Murders mar weekend as Jamaat man among 6 killed” which can be a reaction against the number of deaths over a short period of time. These words were infrequent in the front page headlines when compared to “murder” and “killed.” The researchers noted that “murder” and “killed” might seem common place in headlines so that there is ‘acceptance’ from the readers. Hence, the researchers agreed with Fairclough that “our discourses reflect the societal norms and beliefs, i.e. we say things in conformity with the way they should normally be said in society, and there are certain things we do not say because society has constrained us not to say them” (Quoted in Taiwo 219). Again, the researchers want to highlight language as the dominant technique used to sensationalize murder in crime headlines because communication occurs within the realms of language, which in this context, is the principal means of communicating with the public.

Secondly, the frequency of murder headlines for 2007 was one hundred and twenty-seven (127) – 49 of the headlines came from then Newsday and 78 from the Guardian. In January, the Newsday had six (6) headlines whereas Guardian had four (4). The Guardian eight (8) headlines for February whereas

Newsday had one (1) headline for the same period. In March, the Newsday had five (5) headlines while the Guardian had four (4). The Newsday had four (4) headlines while the Guardian had six (6) for the month of April. In May, the Newsday had four (4) headlines whereas for the same period the Guardian recorded twelve (12) headlines. In June, the Newsday had three (3) headlines however the Guardian had one (1) for the same period. The Newsday and the Guardian had four (4) murder headlines each for the month of July. The Newsday had two (2) headlines for August while the Guardian had ten (10). In September, the Newsday had one (1) headline whereas the Guardian had five (5) headlines. The Newsday had no front page murder headlines for October however; the Guardian had three (3) headlines. In November, the Newsday had eight (8) headlines in comparison to the Guardian who had twelve (12). Newsday recorded twelve (12) front page murder headlines for December whereas the Guardian recorded nine (9).

Continuing based on what was mentioned above, the highest frequency was twelve (12) front page murder headlines in May and November for both newspapers and the lowest frequency was zero (0) front page murder headlines for October in the Newsday. Additionally, it was noted that in February, March and October, events such as Carnival, World Cup Cricket, Chief Magistrate – Justice Sharma and General elections dominated front page headlines. In February the Newsday reported one (1) front page murder headline because Carnival events took precedent in the headlines which left the researchers to ask if this absence meant that no crimes had occurred in the country. In October, there

was no crime headlines reported in the Newsday because General Elections were the main focus of headlines. Based on McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory, it could be noted that in those months where front page murder headlines were absent and/or limited that emphasis was placed Carnival over others so that both newspapers contributed to setting an agenda for their audience.

Altheide noted that "newspaper is a business, a commodity" (Altheide 67).³⁶ Newspapers earn revenue by selling papers to the public and by selling audience demographics to advertisers. The Guardian and Newsday are two of three daily newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago. It should be noted that both newspapers like other businesses desire to generate income; however competition from television news may compel them to sensationalize crime which is perceived as a topic that 'draws' the audience to purchase newspapers. In light of this statement by Altheide, the researchers wondered if crime headlines were sensationalized when there were no alternative 'quick' selling headline topics, for example political elections and/or carnival. Therefore, one can infer that newspaper and its contents are largely in the economic interests of the producers of the messages; regardless of what meaning they may have encoded or not. The researchers are not stating that meanings and symbols represented in murder headlines are secondary to the economical interests of the Newsday and Guardian. However, it is important to note that sensationalizing headlines in general has the sole intent of stimulating the audience's interest so that they purchase these newspapers. In this regard, it was noted how the Newsday and Guardian

³⁶ Altheide, David L. Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002.

presented murder headlines in a Trinbagonian context so that they would be understood and convey meaning to individual readers.

Thirdly, the researchers identified typography as another technique to sensationalizing murder headlines. Upper case types were the dominant type face used in murder headlines for both newspapers – in Newsday, 100% and Guardian 75%. Newsday had zero (0) percent of lower case type in their headlines whereas Guardian had 25% of lower case type. The use of figures was also significant in the Guardian’s murder headlines unlike that of the Newsday. The researchers believe that both newspapers used this technique to emphasize the severity and abnormality of what had happened in a short time frame and also the underlying intent might be that the death of one person is ‘too’ much. Additionally, it can be inferred that readers may give more attention to the actual number 6 rather than six written in letters because this seems to reinforce the severity of the crime rate. Two headlines that displayed figures are as follows, “Police Woman, Husband, Daughter among Victims: 4 Shot Dead in Morvant (Newsday) and “Gunmen go ballistic: Six Shot Dead in 24 hour period,” (Guardian).

Fourthly, colours were used to compliment murder headlines for both newspapers. The researchers identified eight (8) colours that were frequently used – red, white, black, yellow, purple, blue, pink and green. Newsday utilized six (6) colours whereas the Guardian used four (4). The colours that both newspapers had in common were red, black, white and yellow. Guardian had a higher percentage of red (83.3%), black (75%), yellow (67%), and white (92%) whereas the dominant colours for Newsday red (50%), white (83.3%), green

(42%), pink, purple and blue – the last three (3) sharing 33.3%. The language in and of it self conveyed meaning however the addition of colour gave maximum effect to the headlines. For example, there was this headline: “Gunmen go ballistic/Six shot dead in 24 hour period.” The researcher observed the use of white in the latter portion of the headline. The combination of white and the numbers was interesting because it suggested bleakness against a black background especially when six people had just died. The reverse of this is that the researchers questioned and wondered if one person had died within that same period if it would have been portrayed likewise. It is again significant here to include McCombs and Shaw’s agenda-setting theory which stated that the media to some extent set an agenda and are “engaging in active construction of messages, emphasizing certain aspects of an issue and not others.”³⁷

Edward Tufte (1997) noted that colours are encodings thus the researchers find it significant that the producers of newspaper messages intend that certain colours carries meaning especially when used in a specific context. Jacci Howard Bear noted that colours are more than a combination of red and blue or yellow and black. They are non-verbal communication. Colours have symbolism and colour meanings that go beyond ink” (Quoted in About.Com). She also warned that as one “designs brochures, logos, Web sites, and [newspaper headlines] it is helpful to keep in mind how the eye and the mind perceive certain colours and the colour meanings we associate with each colour.” The researchers found this quote significant in the context of murder headlines because as noted by Jacci Howard

³⁷Griffin, Em. A First Look At Communication Theory.6th Ed. (New York McGraw-Hill College, 2006)405.

Bear certain colours may have specific cultural meanings and create physical reactions.

Sometimes colors create a physical reaction (red has been shown to raise blood pressure) and at other times it is a cultural reaction (in the U.S. white is for weddings, in some Eastern cultures, white is the color for mourning and funerals).³⁸

Fifthly, there was consistent use of images on the front pages of both newspapers; however, 80% of these images were irrelevant to the murder headlines. The Newsday had four (4) photographs – two with people crying and two of the murder victims. Similarly, the Guardian had two (2) photographs – one with people crying and the other of the murder victim. It is significant to note that even if the photographs were irrelevant to certain headlines that they were also well placed. For example, October's headline which was at the lower end of the page read, "Policeman chopped to death." Above the headline is an enlarged picture of a cemetery so that the audience is left to interpret this in a number of ways. The researchers questioned the intent of the producer of the text who knew that the picture of the cemetery was irrelevant to the headline. It would seem natural that in the absence of actual photographs from the incidents that the producers of the newspapers would use images that would create a similar tone to the murder headline.

Additionally, the researchers thought the placement of the photographs was compatible to Robert Entman's (Quoted in Griffin 2003) position on framing where he noted that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and

³⁸ Bear Howard, Jacci. "Color Meanings." About.Com. 2008 About, Inc., A part of The New York Times Company. 16th May 2008 <<http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/color/a/symbolism.htm>>.

make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation for the item described.”³⁹ Robert Entman’s (Quoted in Griffin 2003) position on framing is not only applicable to photographs but to the treatment of language as well.

These findings relate to existing literature on a theoretical level in that previously, Evans noted that “headlines excite emotion” and the frequency of headlines for 2007 testified of this. “Excite” in this context conjures up an emotional response or reaction, yet does not state the specific nature of the reaction, for example, anger, joy, grief, fear, and or pain. According to Evans, murder falls under the category of general headliners so that it did not surprise the researchers that these headlines were very popular. The use of big, bold font are not new to headlines, however with the introduction of technology, there have been various enhancements to headlines which aid in the sensationalism of murder headlines. According to Evans, “what was distinctively modern about the headline [that] was the size of the type across the whole of the leaflet; the size of the type; and the introduction of the verb, these are three of the elements of the modern headline.” This therefore coincided with the techniques used by the Newsday and the Guardian to sensationalize crime. The researchers cannot ignore the role of the producer of the text when reading this headline: “Triple Murder: Witness to killing among three (3) shot dead in Curepe.”

³⁹Griffin, Em. A First Look At Communication Theory, 6th Ed. (New York McGraw-Hill College, 2006)402.

Hence our findings support McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory because the editors are "engaging in active construction of messages, emphasizing certain aspects of an issue and not others."⁴⁰ The findings showed that murder headlines were absent from the front page in February and October because carnival activities dominated headlines in February and in October, the general election campaign news dominated newspaper coverage. Therefore it seemed that the both newspapers really tells the audience what to think about and choose when to emphasize certain issues and when not to. It should be noted that both newspapers 'feed' from the society to an extent and apparently tries to cover current interests, hence the coverage of events like Cricket World Cup and General Elections. There is a need for balance in the coverage of issues and events.

Additionally, Chiricos et al (1997) study of "Crime, News and Fear of Crime: Towards an Identification of Audience Effects" looked at the use of sensationalized and emotional language in the text and headline of a story on violent crime. The study conducted in the United States revealed that the rape and murder of two teenage girls by six gang members was turned into national media frenzy. Similarly, three (3) newspapers sensationalize the story until American politicians prepared policy amendments designed to combat the problem of crime. The result of sensationalism in this context is significant and can be termed positive because it propelled legislative changes in that state. On the other hand, this has not happened in Trinidad and Tobago despite the high frequency of

⁴⁰Griffin, Em. A First Look At Communication Theory.6th Ed. (New York McGraw-Hill College, 2006)405.

murder headlines, for example, November was termed the “Bloody month” because there was a murder for every day of that month. It is significant to mention Derek Chadee who the three daily newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago and found that the:

media distort the presentation of crimes. The population depends on the media for crime news, with the majority rating the news as accurate (Chadee 2006).⁴¹

The researchers are unsure if Chadee’s use of ‘distort’ means sensationalism however the researchers found his findings to be consistent with the language results.

New topics for further research that was generated from the findings are: What emotions do front page murder headlines stimulate in the audience? Is the newspaper a dominant force in shaping thought in Trinidadian society? How do individual readers negotiate and decode meanings encoded in murder headlines? Ditton et al found that “newspaper coverage of serious crimes occurring in places other than where their respondents reside has been shown by at least two studies (Liska and Baccaglini 1990; Heath 1984) to be ‘reassuring’, as it makes people ‘feel safe by comparison” (Ditton et al 598). This offers another possibility for research to investigate whether Trinidadians in certain areas feel safer in comparison to others due to newspaper coverage of serious crimes.

Finally, the study had a number of limitations. The availability of time was a major issue as the researchers are full time students with only a year in which to conduct the study. More time would have allowed the researchers to study one

⁴¹Chadee, Derek. Current themes in Social Psychology. (Kingstown, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2006) 222.

hundred and twenty seven (127) front page murder headlines for 2007 more in depth. This could have given the researchers a more extensive idea of the trends in terms of techniques used to sensationalize front page murder headlines. Information and similar studies from a Caribbean perspective were limited which would have grounded the social context of this study.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Headlines as used in newspapers are “printed lines at the top of a newspaper article giving the topic; a brief news summary.”⁴² General headlines are violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault); sports; business; accidents and disasters. This research studied the techniques used to sensationalize crime and the frequency of murder headlines. The findings of the study suggest that language used inclusive of words such as “murder,” “killed” and “beaten,” dominated the front pages of the Newsday and the Guardian to report crime news.

Stuart Hall claims that the media encode messages hence drawing from his claim the researchers found that the public to some extent can be persuaded to a particular ‘reality’ because of the process involved in disseminating a newspaper that they are oblivious to. Also, it is important to note the combination of techniques used by the newspaper in presenting front page murder headlines. Words with the addition of colours and/or photograph which appeared in the text were left to the interpretation of the reader(s). It was also noted that a headline in one colour may have had a different interpretation than those with red, black and /or white.

Additionally, this study has implications for communication scholars and the wider community. Trinidad and Tobago has three (3) daily newspapers thus they are very much driven by competition. In terms of Communications, findings

⁴² Queen’s English: English Dictionary. New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2002.

are significant in that newspapers are trusted to report facts and their portrayal of them are able to inform and simultaneously distort the audiences' perception about the rate of murder(s) in Trinidad and Tobago. This process opens up other avenues for further research which communication scholars may find interesting. Two examples of these are: Is the newspaper a dominant force in shaping Trinidadian society? How do individual readers negotiate and decode meanings encoded in murder headlines?

This study does not attempt to confirm that the audience is docile but recognizes that a newspaper is scripted and planned so that messages are encoded within. It is left to the audience however to negotiate and decode meanings encoded in front page murder headlines. This communication research on murder headlines represents significant developments for communication theory building. It is recommended that newspapers rotate topics so that crime would not be so regular on the front pages. Another recommendation is that other researchers should study the language which is used in crime headlines. Finally, this study tries to reveal sensationalism within the techniques and frequency of murder headlines in the Newsday and the Guardian daily newspapers. The researchers hope that the knowledge provided here will benefit other researchers.

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Appendix A

Glossary of Coding Category Definitions⁴³

Banner- (i) Title of a newspaper on front page or above editorials on leader page;
(ii) large headline across all or most of top of page.

Down style: A headline style that capitalizes only the first word and proper nouns.

Drop head: A small headline running below the main headline; also called a deck.

Drop shadow: A thin shadow effect added to characters in a headline.

Figurative: pictorial or symbolic representation/ use of similes, metaphors, etc.

Literal: taking words in their usual or primary sense without using metaphor or allegory.

Lowercase: Small characters of type (no capital letters).

Subheading: Lines of type, often bold, used to divide text into smaller sections.

Uppercase: Type using capital letters.

⁴³ Harrower, Tim. The Newspaper Designer's Handbook. 6th ed. New York: The McGraw Hill Companies Inc, 2007.

Appendix C

Sample Headlines
Newsday 2007

1. January 31st: Cascade Couple beaten to death
2. February 7th : Kidnap victim executed
3. March 28th : Love triangle lead to \$700 murder
4. April 14th : New Man kills Old Lover
5. May 29th : Hours before giving evidence Priest's Brother Gunned Down
6. June 1st : Baby Beaten to Death
7. July 30th : Three Murders Mar Weekend
8. August 27th : Father of 3 Murdered
9. September 26th :Curepe Killings continue Triple Murder In Apple Bar
10. October: No murder headlines
11. November 12th : Santa Cruz Horror, Jilted man scalps ex's lover
12. December 11th : Cousins gunned down in Petit Valley, 2 killed in Morvant/Laventille : Woman shot dead in New Grant

Appendix D

Sample Headlines
The Guardian 2007

1. January 31st: Crowbar killings
2. February 2nd: Sons of Top Laventille peacemaker dead
3. March 30th: Boy chopped, burnt and killed
4. April 28th: Murder most foul
5. May 7th: Club owner killed
6. June 18th: Murders mar weekend as Jamaat man among 6 killed
7. July 9th: Gunmen go ballistic
8. August 26th: Senseless Slayings
9. September 26th: Triple murders\witness to killings among 3 shot dead in Curepe\Death stalks east
10. October 1st: Policeman chopped to death
11. November 5th: 2 shot dead
12. December 27th: Christmas lime murder

Appendix E
Sample front page headline – Guardian

LIBRARY
JUN 20 2007

The Trinidad
Guardian
THE GUARDIAN OF DEMOCRACY

CURRENCY	CASH	BUY	SELL
US\$	6.0000	6.1557	6.3403
CAN\$	5.5185	5.8089	6.0703
STG	11.4679	12.0504	12.6892
EURO	7.7813	8.1908	8.6003
ECS	2.0755	2.2560	2.4139
BDOS	2.8326	*****	3.2152

www.guardian.co.tt 30189 MONDAY, JUNE 18, 2007

**Murders mar weekend
as Jamaat man among**

SIX **Page 5**

KILLED

Appendix F
Sample front page headline – Newsday

Trinidad & Tobago

Sunday Newsday

NO. 5213 DECEMBER 30, 2007 104 PAGES

ON RETURN FROM VISITING GIRLFRIEND

'CHURCH BOY' SHOT DEAD

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND INFORMATION NATIONAL ARCHIVES

MARY SINGH tries to hold back tears as she reacts yesterday to her son's murder outside their St Joseph home.
PHOTO BY RHONDOR DOWLAT

STORY ON PAGE 3

TEEN KILLED: Christopher Singh, 18, of Agostini Street, St Joseph was killed on Friday.

BHUTTO ASSASSINATION COVER-UP

IN GR

WI win first S/Af

Appendix G

The following table shows the intercoder reliability percentage agreement among the four coders based on the content categories in the Newsday and the Guardian. Each category was observed in the year 2007 and is analyzed within each month for both the Newsday and the Guardian. The researchers are coder 1 and coder 2, 3 and 4 are the independent coders. The letter N-black represents the Newsday and the letter G-red represents the Guardian.

Content category		Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3	Coder 4	%	%				
		N	G	N	G	N	G				
Headlines	A	11	9	11	8	11	9	11	9	100	75
	B	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	2	-	75
	C	-	6	-	6	-	6	-	6	-	100
	D	5	3	5	-	5	-	6	3	75	50
	E	5	6	4	6	5	6	5	6	75	100
	F	3	6	3	6	3	6	2	5	75	75
	G	-	3	1	-	-	-	-	3	25	50
	H	4	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	50	-
	I	4	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	75	100
	J	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	75	100
	K	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	100
	L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	M	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100	-
	N	2	6	2	6	2	6	1	6	75	100
Images	A	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	75	100
	B	2	1	3	1	2	1	2	1	75	100
	C	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100	-
Frequency of words/phrase	A	3	5	4	5	3	5	3	5	75	100
	B	2	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	100	-
	C	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	100	100
	D	2	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	75	100
	E	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	100	75
	F	2	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	100	-
	G	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100	100
	H	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	100	100
	I	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100	-
	J	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100
	K	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100	100
	L	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100
Figurative	A	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	2	50	50
	B	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	25	25
	C	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	50
	D	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	50
	E	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100	-

Appendix H

The following table shows the intercoder reliability percentage agreement among the three coders based on the content categories in the Newsday and the Guardian. Each category was observed in the year 2007 and is analyzed within each month for both the Newsday and the Guardian. The researchers are coder 1 and coder 2, 3 and 4 are the independent coders. The letter N-black represents the Newsday and the letter G-red represents the Guardian.

Content Category		Coder 2	Coder 3	Coder 4	%	%			
		N	G	N	G	N	G		
Headlines	A	11	8	11	9	11	9	100	75
	B	-	3	-	3	-	2	-	75
	C	-	6	-	6	-	6	-	100
	D	5	-	5	-	6	3	75	25
	E	4	6	5	6	5	6	75	100
	F	3	6	3	6	2	5	75	75
	G	1	-	-	-	-	3	25	50
	H	-	-	1	-	1	-	50	-
	I	3	3	4	3	4	3	75	100
	J	5	6	6	6	6	6	75	100
	K	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	100
	L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	M	1	-	1	-	1	-	100	-
	N	2	6	2	6	1	6	75	100
Images	A	1	1	2	1	2	1	75	100
	B	3	1	2	1	2	1	75	100
	C	1	-	1	-	1	-	100	-
Frequency of words/phrase	A	4	5	3	5	3	5	75	100
	B	2	-	2	-	2	-	100	-
	C	1	2	1	2	1	2	100	100
	D	1	7	1	7	1	7	75	100
	E	1	1	1	1	1	2	100	75
	F	2	-	2	-	2	-	100	-
	G	1	1	1	1	1	1	100	100
	H	2	3	2	3	2	3	100	100
	I	1	-	1	-	1	-	100	-
	J	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100
	K	1	1	1	1	1	1	100	100
	L	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	100
Figurative	A	1	1	-	1	1	2	50	50
	B	2	-	-	-	-	-	25	25

Appendix I

The graph Figure A1 below represents what percentage of Guardian's photograph portrays the victim(s), police officers or people crying.

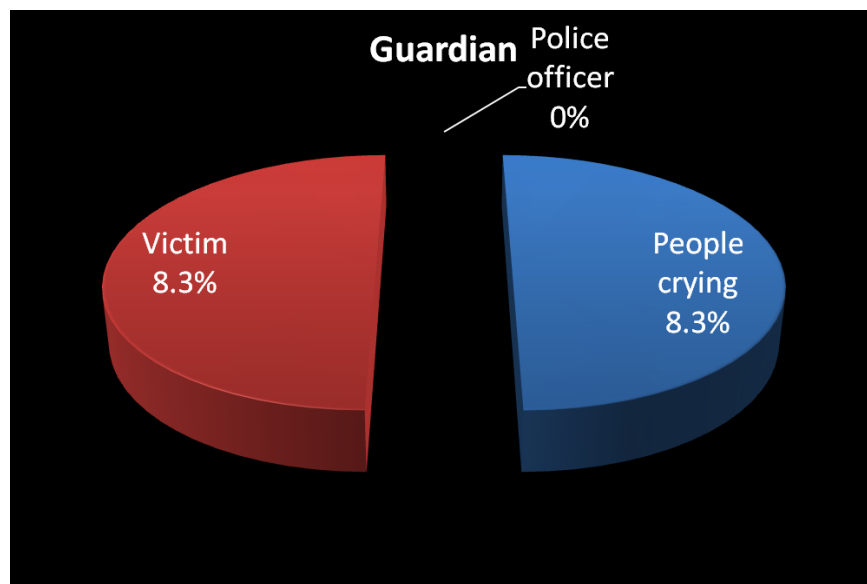


Fig. A1

The graph Figure A2 below represents what percentage of Newsday's photograph portrays the victim(s), police officers or people crying.

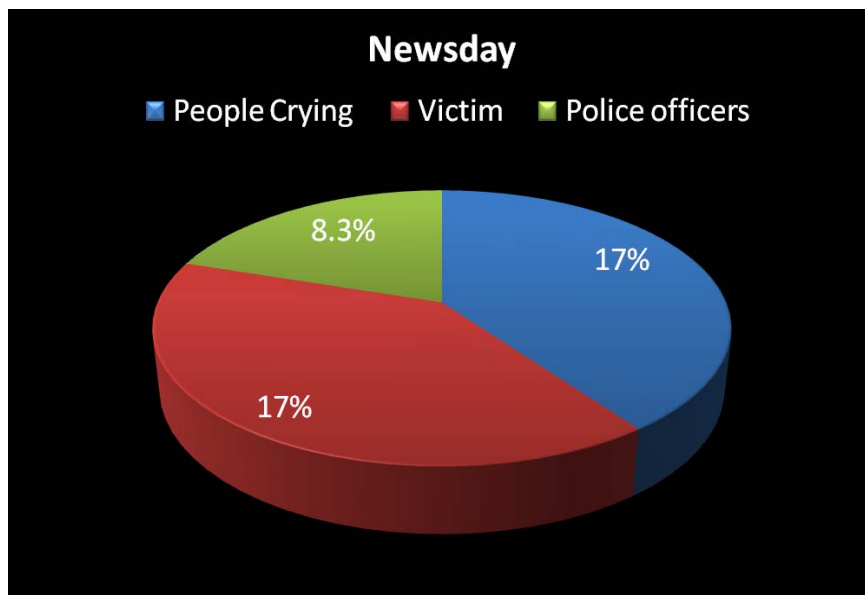


Fig A2

Appendix J

The following graph Figure A3 shows the frequency of words and terms use in both the Newsday and the Guardian. The graph demonstrates that the word “**death**” was frequently use whereas words and terms such “**killings**”, “**gunned down**”, “**shot dead**”, “**executed**”, “**senseless killings**”, “**murder mar weekend**”, “**gunmen go ballistic**” and ‘**use of figures**’ had a low occurrence.

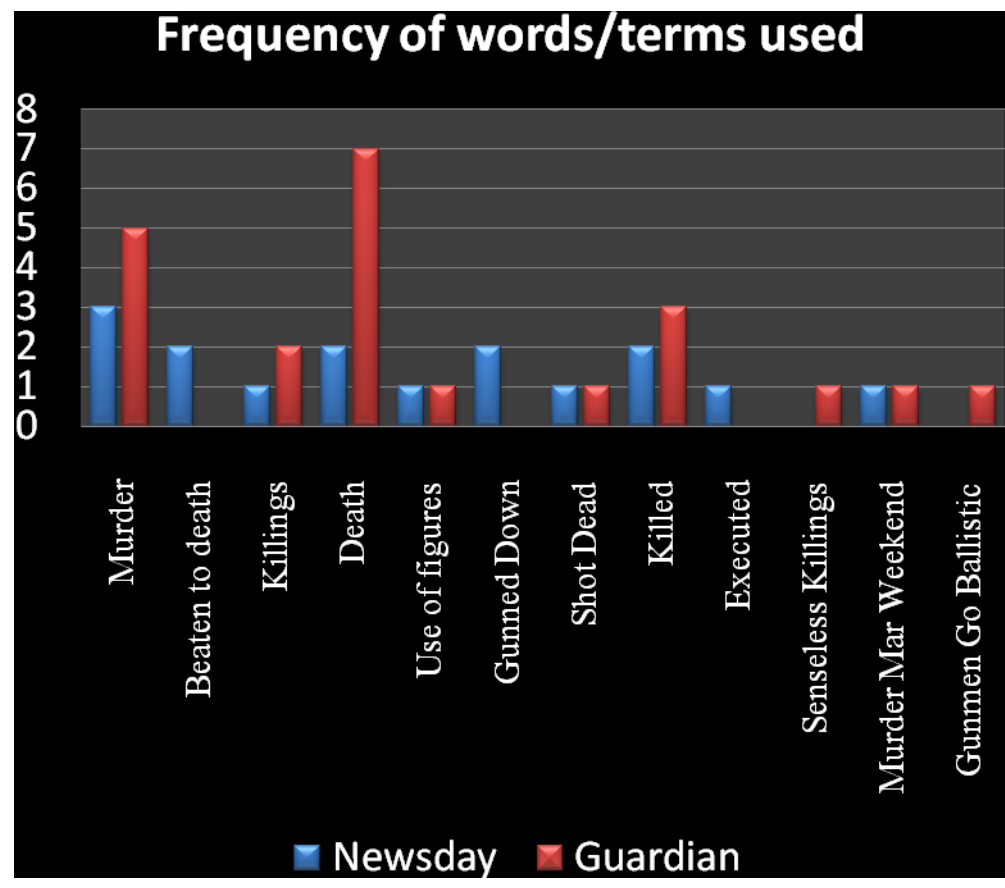


Fig A3

Appendix K

Headlines Set 1
Newsday 2007

1. Murders in Maracas/Morvant
2. Police Woman, Husband, Daughter among Victims: 4 Shot Dead in Morvant
3. Morvant Massacre
4. Morvant Murder Victims Mowed down by 13 Bullets
5. Killer Weekend 11 Dies: Four Murders
6. Babies found crawling in grandparents' blood Cascade Couple Beaten to Death
7. Kidnap Victim Executed
8. Boy 15, Chopped and Burnt to Death
9. Mystery Death in Arima
10. Love Triangle Leads to \$700 Murder
11. Gruesome Murder over Bicycle Gardener Beheaded
12. Fyzabad Dad Killed in Bed
13. Killed for Touching Girl
14. Murder Mayhem in Maracas/Killer Held in Rum Shop
15. New Man Kills Old Lover
16. Woman Hacked to Death
17. Killed on Eve of Baby's Christening
18. Vindra Killed in Diego
19. Two Men Shot Dead
20. Hours before Giving Evidence: Priest's Brother Gunned Down
21. Baby Beaten to Death
22. Undertaker Kills Man
23. 5 Murders in 48 Hours: Man Killed as He went for Walk
24. Murdered Man Dreamt his Death
25. Murders Rock Arima, Belmont, Aranjuez: Six Gunned down
26. 2 Men Killed in Diego
27. Three Murders Mar Weekend
28. Teen Murder on way to Party
29. Father of 3 Murdered
30. Curepe Killings Continue: Triple Murder in Apple Bar
31. 3 Murders in One Day
32. Santa Cruz Horror, Jilted Man Scalps Ex's Lover
33. Divali Day Mayhem: 2 Killed in South
34. Red Dawn: 2 Killed by Police, 2 Shot in Gang war, Man Dead: Wife Chopped, Toddler Beaten to Death
35. Murders Continue to Shock Figure now 325: Yesterday: 1. Kerry Alexander 18 Arima 2. Unidentified Woman, Caura 3. Doyle Sieunarine, 69 Kelly Village

36. Top Banker's Stepson Murdered: Bodies of Man, Caretaker found in Car Trunk
37. Murdered in Front Daughter, Girl 3 sees Mom Murdered
38. 3 Men Shot Dead
39. 'Machine Gun Kelly Shot Dead'- Holy Man killed
40. Cousins Gunned down in Petit Valley: 2 killed in Morvant/Laventille
41. Woman Shot Dead in New Grant
42. Girl Killed for Gossiping: Deadly Bad Talk
43. Woman Kills Arouca Man
44. Potter Shot Dead outside Bar
45. Murder in Tobago for 2007
46. Year's Murders Climb to 375
47. Bakr Accused Shot Dead
48. 'Church Boy' Shot Dead
49. Three Men Gunned down

Appendix L

**Headlines Set 2
Guardian 2007**

1. Crime of Cowards
2. Morvant Massacre
3. Man Killed at Cane Farm Fete
4. Crowbar Killings
5. Shootout in Central
6. Hell in Paradise
7. Slain Business Man
8. Man killed protecting Toddler
9. Sons of Top Laventille Peacemaker Dead
10. Give us Guns
11. Babies Shot
12. Kidnapped Victim Killed
13. Hang them
14. Boy Chopped, Burnt, Killed
15. No End to Sean Luke
16. Deejay Killed in Morvant
17. Bloody Friday
18. Another Murder
19. Prominent Business Man Slain
20. Murder Most Foul
21. Club Owner Killed
22. Gang-style Killing
23. Vindra's Blood
24. Murder 101
25. Vindra Murdered
26. Charged
27. La Puesta Death House
28. Vindra Suspects
29. No Court, No 'Scanny': Vindra Murder Case put off Today
30. Weekend of Pain
31. 3 Shot Dead
32. Kidnap Killing
33. Murders Mar Weekend as Jamaat Man among 6 Killed
34. Murder in a Cow Pen
35. Gunmen go Ballistic
36. Puppet Master
37. Two Killed
38. Casino Barman Killed
39. Death Penalty for Gangs

40. Man Gunned down
41. Chopped to Pieces
42. Grandmom Shot
43. Crime up 51% but 44% murder down
44. Senseless Slayings
45. Peacemaker Stabbed to Death
46. Tommy's Son Killed
47. Shot by Gold Train Robbers
48. Couple Shot Dead in St. Augustine
49. Gangsta Wrap: G-Unit gang Leader Gunned Down
50. Fresh Hit: Another G-Unit Gangster Gunned Down
51. Triple Murders: Witness to Killing among 3 shot dead in Curepe.
52. Death Stalks East
53. Policeman Chopped to Death
54. Princess Town Market Vendor Murdered
55. Bailor Shot to Death on High Street
56. 5 Murders in 1 Night
57. 2 Shot Dead
58. Divali Day Murder
59. Scalped, Chopped, Castrated: Man Mutilated in Love Triangle Killing
60. Mom Killed with Ice Pick
61. TSTT Chairman's Stepson Murdered along with Watchman Stuffed in Trunk
62. hardware Dealer Killed
63. Three more Murders take Toll to 327
64. St. Ann's out Patient gives Son Weedicide: Murder Suicide
65. Murders Set to Pass Last Year's Toll
66. Baby Cuffed to Death
67. Tabanca Explain Grande Murder/Suicide: Death House
68. Slain Teen Laid to Rest
69. Three More Murdered
70. 62-Year Old Bar Owner Gunned down
71. Parang Lime Turns Deadly
72. Murders Rise to 357 with Five more Deaths
73. 'Horn' Leads to Suicide
74. Delivery Man Killed in Belmont
75. Christmas Lime Murder
76. Five Bullets for Morvant Man/Witness in Failed Bakr Case Shot Dead
77. Gunmen kill three more as Murder Toll Climbs to 385/Killing Fields of T&T 2007
78. State Witness Gunned down