Framing of the US–Venezuela diplomatic relationship in major US newspapers

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VICTOR BONOMI & PO-LIN PAN

Abstract: This study examined news coverage of diplomatic relationship between the United States and Venezuela in three major US newspapers— the New York Times, Washington Post and Christian Science Monitor. This content analysis was conducted over two distinct stages that represented the first hundred days of the first and second presidential periods of Hugo Chavez. Data found that news coverage of diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela was characterized by a positive tone that described the bilateral relation in the first period. The tone had changed drastically when a negative portrayal of this relationship was covered in the second period. The most frequently cited sources included Venezuelan government officials and US government officials. Moreover, news themes relevant to Hugo Chavez were consistent across Chavez as a military man and leftist.

INTRODUCTION

Hugo Chavez arrived at his political scene in a society devastated by the previous governments in Venezuela. According to Cuevas, Téllez, and Mercado (2009), income and poverty levels reached a higher record that covered 72.4% of all Venezuelan households three years before Chavez's arrival. Moreover, Roberts (2003) found that the before Hugo Chavez's presidency, dominant parties were represented by entrepreneurs that failed to improve Venezuelan economy, resulting in destructive consequences to Venezuela. Chavez's controversial diplomacy and charisma made a negative way into US media. Hawkins (2009) reflected Hugo Chavez's declarations on his closing presidential campaign speech in 2006 in which he asked his followers to fight against the devil and the imperialist government of the US. However, Merolla and Zechmeister (2010) concluded that Chavez is perceived as more charismatic than his political rivals in Venezuela and other Latin American politicians.

Hugo Chavez's characteristics reflected important aspects of his personality during his presidency. The purpose of this study was to investigate US news coverage of the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela during two distinct periods— 2 February 1999 to 12 May 1999, as well as 10 January 2007 to 9 April 2007. These two periods— the first

hundred days of the first and second presidential terms of Hugo Chavez— represented phases of intense debate in global community about the constitutional reforms proposed by Chavez. The selected frames demonstrated possible shifts in the framing of diplomatic relationship, and explored how US newspapers explained certain events and issues around global society (Reese 2007; Boykoff 2009). Using a census of news articles from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Christian Science Monitor*, this study was aimed at examining: (1) news portrayals of diplomatic relation between the US and Venezuela, (2) news portrayals of Hugo Chavez, (3) topics relevant to the portrayal of this diplomatic relationship, and (4) source attribution changes in Chavez's two presidential periods.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Political movements in Venezuela

The year of 1958 represented the beginning of a 53-year journey of democracy in Venezuela. This voyage was triggered by a coalition of politicians, citizens, journalists, military leaders, and soldiers who overthrew the last dictator of the contemporary history of Venezuela, Marcos Pérez Jiménez. This transcendental event opened the door to the *Junta Militar de Gobierno* (Military Government Board) led by Rear Admiral Wolfang Larrazábal, who intended to guide the country towards the lights of democracy, in which he eventually succeeded. Venezuelan democratic progress has been taken in the longest period in South America (Tarver & Frederick 2005). After that, the political spectrum of the country was clearly dominated by three political parties: *Acción Democrática* (AD), *Comité de Organización Política Electoral* (COPEI), and *Unión Republicana Democrática (*URD). Representatives from these political parties took part in the *Pacto de Punto Fijo* (Punto Fijo's Pact) in 1959, which claimed respect for the next electoral outcome, and established an agreement to share the political power of the country. As time passed, delegates from AD, and COPEI exchanged the presidential seat for many periods, while petroleum appeared as a source of economical profit, and the armed forces remained quite in the political scene (Boykoff 2009).

In the decade of the 1980s, the Venezuelan government joined a political policy that emphasized on neoliberal capitalism. This brought devastating consequences to the population, increased the poverty levels across the country to 65%, and reduced the per capita income by more than 25% (Wilpert 2007). Moreover, Roberts (2003) argued that the ruling parties failed to stop the economic slide that brought destructive effects on the nation. The events presented above resulted in el *Caracazo* in 1989, which consisted in an intense protest executed by civilians who were violently complaining about the rise of gas prices. Unfortunately, more than a 1000 protesters, and civilians were killed during these protests (McCaughan 2005).

This scenario brought Hugo Chavez to the political stage in Venezuela. In 1992, his lower middle-class military man led a failed coup attempt asking for changes in the political system of the country. Before being captured by the government officials on the night of 4 February 1992, Chavez told the publics that the objectives they had set for themselves were not achieved in the capital city, but it is time to reflect. New opportunities will arise and the country has to head definitely towards a better future' (Jones 2007). Six years later, Hugo Chavez won the presidential election and ruled the country since then.

Hugo Chavez era

Hugo Chavez's presidency was characterized by democratic elections, referendums, constitutional reforms, and for his constant victories in the electoral ground. He won two presidential elections (1999 and 2006) and a midterm recall referendum (2004), and had the majority of seats in the National Assembly during his twelve years in power. His party also won a higher number of governors, and mayors positions across the country than any other political organizations in the nation (Gunson 2006). This Venezuelan president also survived a coup attempt in 2002 when the armed forces took him out of power, after a massive march ended in violent protests. Few hours later, Hugo Chavez was held as a prisoner, and the opposition leaders unconstitutionally dissolved the parliament and the Supreme Court. The temporary government led by Pedro Carmona Estanga collapsed immediately as Hugo Chavez was back in power 48 hours later (Gunson 2006).

His mandate was also the object of controversy, especially when he revoked RCTV licence (open-signal TV station) to operate in May 2007. The TV channel was characterized by its constant criticism on the governmental performance in subjects such as inflation rates, devaluation, trade barriers, and price controls (Farias 2008). The presidency of this military man was also characterized for his constant political and financial support to Latin American governments, such as the ones led by Evo Morales (Bolivia), Rafael Correa (Ecuador), Fidel and Raul Castro (Cuba), among other anti-US administrations, as well as establishing strong diplomatic bonds with the governments of Iran and Libya (O'Grady 2007).

The Bolivarian revolution was characterized by the confronted positions of the government and the opposition parties. Rojas (2010) claimed that the revolution led by Hugo Chavez has established a clear difference between the neoliberal economic models of the past, and began to build a social democracy that believed in a social economy based on solidarity. Moreover, the Bolivarian process was producing changes in the legal structure to guarantee the democratisation of the capital, and the fair distribution of the wealth. On the other hand, Farias (2008) argued that Hugo Chavez implemented the same type of policies of the past governments, such as inflation, devaluation, price controls, corruption, and the nationalization of private companies (e.g., CANTV—national telephone company, Electricidad de Caracas—electric-utility company; and VIASA—Venezuelan airline).

Petroleum and diplomatic relationships

The two main issues in the diplomatic table between the US and Venezuela are petroleum and the relationships between both countries developed through the last 12 years. In terms of oil, Venezuela won the diplomatic battle for the conquering of supranational agreements among countries of the Caribbean and South America. Sanders (2007) explained this when he exposed how the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) proposed by the US faced clear opposition from countries aligned with the Venezuelan government. As a result, Chavez's administration proposed the creation of PetroCaribe and ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas). PetroCaribe established that Venezuela would provide crude to the states participating in the agreement (with beneficial payment conditions). On the other hand, the ALBA does not include the US as a member. Therefore, the decisions taken by this organism represents the consensus of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Barbuda, Dominica, and

Saint Vincent and the Granadines. Today, the Caribbean energy security is strictly related to Venezuela's supply of petroleum. This issue clearly challenges the US diplomatic and business strategy in the region.

In this set of ideas, the diplomatic relations of Venezuela evolved consistently with those countries that were historically against US diplomatic policies. One of the biggest allies of the Venezuelan government was Iran, a country that intensified its confrontation with the US especially in 2007, when the government of Ahmadinejad did not suspend its uranium enrichment process (Kazemzadeh 2009). Moreover, Cuba was another big ally of Hugo Chavez. Monreal (2006) claimed that Caracas became the most connected city to Havana. While this was the part of the continent's reality, the diplomatic relationship between Castro's administration and US authorities continued to decline with the passing of the years (Brenner, Haney, & Vanderbush 2002; Brenner & Jimenez 2006). Libya was another example of the anti-American allies that Hugo Chavez wanted to collaborate. Dobson (2011) examined a close relationship between Moammar Gaddafi and Hugo Chavez. Dobson argued that the South American country could represent one of the exile destinations of the dead Lybian leader, while Nmoma (2009) stated that Gaddafi made the US to consider his government as a threat to American interests.

Diplomatic relationship in news coverage

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the United States shared a solid and prosperous bond over the course of the previous 40 years of democracy before Chavez's presidency. During Chavez's presidential periods, US news media seemed to criticize this diplomatic relationship. The *New York Times* (1992) opinion-based article claimed: 'Invest in Venezuelan Democracy'. The report asked for support to ex-president Carlos Perez from the US government. It also demonstrated the great relationship between US governments and the South American countries, especially in the economic cooperation. Greenhouse (1993) claimed Venezuela as a winner of the Clinton's economic plan in the aluminium sector, where some of the most profitable US companies relocated their business in Venezuela, Brazil, and Australia. Moreover, Friedman (1997) explained how Venezuela became the biggest oil supplier to the US. However, as Hugo Chavez was elected in 1998, the diplomatic bond between two countries became deteriorated. Consequently, the portrayal of this Venezuelan president was converted into a negative way. Chavez's constant attacks of the US and his close relationship with Cuba, Iran, Belarus, Nicaragua, and Russia became the reasons that affected the diplomatic dialogue between the two countries (Merolla & Zechmeister 2010). Moreover, Venezuelan government officials announced the cancellation of the agreement for ambassador-designate Larry Palmer in 2010. As a result, US government officials annulled the diplomatic visa of Bernardo Alvarez who was an ambassador of Venezuela.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing theory

Framing offered a way to describe the power of mediated messages, and framing analysis explained a precise way in which influence over a human consciousness was exerted by the transfer of information from one location—such as speech, utterance, news report, or

novel—to that consciousness (Iyengar 1990; Entman 1993; Entman & Rojecki 1993; Pan & Kosicki 1993). Framing also involves selection and salience. As stated by Entman (1993), framing is to select some aspects of reality and make them more salient in mediated messages, and the purpose of framing is to promote a particular definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. Moreover, Entman suggested that a frame encourages audiences to make connection between an issue and particular considerations relevant to its definition, causes, implications, and treatment. Thus, it is fair to say that news frames function to lead audiences to interpret an issue or event. In fact, news frames can exert an impact on audiences' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Tewksbury & Scheufele 2009).

The potential influences on frame building come from elites, including interest groups, government bureaucracies, and other political figures, and most of them routinely engage in all kinds of frame building efforts (Scheufele 1999). For instance, Luntz (2007) found that political campaigns are spending more and more resources on message testing and delivery in order to control how messages are framed in news media. Moreover, Bennett (1990) concluded that mass media professionals strive to index the range of voice and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to views expressed in mainstream government debate about some particular topics. However, Miller, Andsager, and Riechert (1998) suggested that media coverage of candidates in presidential primaries is often different from the way that candidates frame their issue stance in press releases, and that candidates are only moderately successful in getting their frames across in election coverage. Although empirical evidence on the linkage between elite communication and the way that issues are framed in mass media is mixed, many studies showed much stronger influences of messages released by various political interest groups and policy makers on the ways journalists framed issues (Andsager 2000; Nisbet, Brossard, & Kroepsch, 2003). Therefore, these influences seem to be strongest for issues, where journalists and various politicians in the policy arena can find shared narratives around which they can construct issue frames.

Framing US diplomacy

Applying framing theory in news and foreign policy, the bulk of studies indicated that politicians seeking support are compelled to compete with each other and with journalists over news frames. News coverage of US diplomacy was investigated over the course of the years. Dickson (1992) explored the framing of conflict between the US and Nicaragua. The findings suggested that the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* articles analysed from 1983 to 1987 showed a pattern of legitimating US government policy. On the other hand, Johnson, Davis, and Cronin (2009) quantitatively and qualitatively analysed 197 newspaper articles in the US to explore news coverage of the Mexican presidential election of 2006 and the economic relations between the US and Mexico. Pan (2008) examined how the relationship between the US and China seemed to shape US news coverage of China's new leaders. Pan concluded that US relations with China had significant impacts on the portrayal of new Chinese leaders. Moreover, Cassara (1998) analysed news articles related to human rights in four US newspapers, namely the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Los Angeles Times.* The aim of the study was to examine news coverage of human rights in Latin America from 1975 to 1982 and the impact of Jimmy Carter's human rights agenda

in the news. Cassara concluded that Carter's policy on human rights brought more news coverage to the region. Entman and Page (1994) examined news texts that exhibited homogeneous framing at one level of analysis, competing frames at another. In the case of the pre-war debate over US policy towards Iraq, the news frame included only two remedies—war now or sanctions now, with war (likely) later, while problem definitions, causal analyses, and moral evaluations were homogenous. Between the selected remedies, framing was contested by elites, and news coverage offered different sets of facts and evaluations. This study also suggested that the power of news frames can be self-reinforcing, and any critique transcending the remedies inside the frame (war now or more time for sanctions) breached the bounds of acceptable discourse was unlikely to influence this foreign policy. In this vein, the views can gain few adherents and generate little perceived or actual effect on public opinion, and then elites felt no pressure to expand the frame so it included other treatments for Iraqi aggression.

Framing Hugo Chavez

A limited number of studies were dedicated to study Hugo Chavez, and even fewer investigations applied framing theory to analyse this political figure. Any studies devoted to examine the relationship between the US and Venezuela were not found, while some examined how political figures or groups were portrayed in media coverage. For instance, Lugo-Ocando, Guedes, and Canizalez (2011) assessed how news professionals (journalists and editors) used historical events to frame the accounts and narratives in their news stories in order to provide legitimacy to certain political groups and negatively affect others. The study investigated cases, such as the ones of Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva (ex-president of Brazil), Nestor Kichner (ex-president of Argentina), Evo Morales (president of Bolivia), and Hugo Chavez (president of Venezuela). The study focused on (1) the coup attempt against Chavez on 11 April 2002, (2) how the media played an active role during this event, and (3) how the relationship between the media and the governments mentioned above was broken.

Boykoff (2009) analysed news articles from the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post* to identify possible themes that emerged about Hugo Chavez. This was accomplished by using an inductive approach that resulted in the identification of four themes: the *Dictator Frame*, *Castro Disciple Frame*, *Declining Economy Frame*, and *Meddler-in-the-Region Frame*. Schiller (2009) examined the documentary— *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* that portrayed a coup attempt overthrowing Hugo Chavez from power for 48 hours on 11 April 2002. Schiller claimed the importance of different individuals in the production, and distribution process of the film to frame the importance and authenticity of the documentary. The goals of the study were accomplished by interviewing distributors, activists, and producers from Caracas and New York City. Gill, Arroyave, and Soruco (2006) examined 65 *New York Times* articles relevant to Hugo Chavez from 2001 to 2002. The authors divided the frame of time into three sub-periods (pre-coup, coup, and post-coup). The focus of the study was to examine how the US media portrayed the Venezuelan president, finding that pro-Chavez supporters had space in the media until the president was overthrown in a coup attempt on 11 April 2002.

CURRENT STUDY

Few studies examined the diplomatic relation between the US and Venezuela, as well as the portrayals of Hugo Chavez in news coverage. This study was aimed at exploring news coverage of this diplomatic relation and Hugo Chavez during two distinct periods, 2 February 1999 to 12 May 1999 and 10 January 2007 to 9 April 2007. Two periods represented phases of intense debate in the international community, because of the constitutional reforms proposed by Hugo Chavez. Two periods also denoted the first hundred days respectively of two presidential terms of this Venezuelan leader. This study assumed that framing building efforts came from US political elites and other political groups in leading how Americans perceived Hugo Chavez in some particular ways. Based upon historical review, before Chavez's arrival to his first presidential incumbency, the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela was cooperative. Thus, US government might expect Chavez as a compliant leader in South America before his first presidential term. Consequently, news frame that was built by political interest groups, government bureaucracies, or political actors would be positively connected to the portrayals of Hugo Chavez in US newspapers. However, during Chavez's first presidential incumbency, the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela became deteriorated. Framing Hugo Chavez in his second incumbency may be directed to a negative way in US newspapers. Therefore, the study hypothesized that framing differences should have emerged between Chavez's first and second presidential incumbencies in news coverage. In this vein, the first and second research questions were proposed to examine how the diplomatic relationship between two countries was covered and how Chavez was described in major US newspapers. Thus,

> **RQ1:** How is the diplomatic relationship depicted in US newspapers during Chavez's first presidential incumbency in comparison to his second incumbency?

> **RQ2:** How is Hugo Chavez portrayed in US newspapers during his two presidential periods?

According to the principles of framing theory, some issues can be set through the use of framing, and the way an issue is described selects or highlights certain aspects of its reality and neglects or downplays others. Therefore, this study would look at which particular topics were mentioned and what kinds of sources were covered, while Hugo Chavez was depicted in US newspapers during his first and second presidential periods. Moreover, the study examined whether there were some changes in relevant topics and source attributions from his first incumbency to second incumbency. Therefore, two research questions were proposed in the following.

> **RQ3:** What topics are frequently mentioned relevant to the portrayals of diplomatic relationship in US newspapers during Chavez's first presidential incumbency in comparison to his second incumbency?

> **RQ4:** Are any differences in source attribution in US newspapers during Chavez's two presidential periods?

METHOD

This study was designed to explore news coverage of the diplomatic relationship between the United States and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in three prestigious and influential US newspapers—the New York Times, Washington Post and Christian Science Monitor. A content

analysis was utilized to accomplish the purposes of the study. The stories analysed two different periods: The first period was from 2 February 1999 to 12 May 1999, which represented the first hundred days of the first presidential term (1999–2006) of Hugo Chavez. The second period was used to examine news stories from 10 January 2007 to 9 April 2007, which represented the first hundred days of Chavez's second presidential term (2006–2012).

Content analysis can be used to examine large body of communication messages in a systematic procedure. Krippendorff (2004) defined content analysis as a research technique for making *replicable* and *valid* references of certain secondary data. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) defined content analysis as an approach to exploring and analyzing communications using a systematic, objective, and quantitative method to measure certain variables. They also suggested three important concepts that justified the advantages of using this technique to accomplish the aims of this study. First, content analysis is systematic, meaning that the content to be analysed was selected by using a rigorous criterion of selection. Second, content analysis is objective, meaning that personal interpretations of reality would not be part of the findings, and third that content analysis is quantitative, meaning that it is a precise technique that allows researchers to give an accurate representation of what is analysed.

Sampling design

The content analysis employed for this study used a census of news stories related to the US diplomatic relationship with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Hugo Chavez published in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Christian Science Monitor* between 2 February 1999 and 12 May 1999, and between 10 January 2007 and 9 April 2007. Two periods were selected because they represented the first 100 days of each presidential term of Hugo Chavez. They were phases characterized by an intense debate in the international community, because of the constitutional reforms proposed by this South American president. The frames of time selected would identify shifts in the framing of the relationship, especially because from the 1970s to the 1990s (prior to Chavez's arrival to the presidency), the diplomatic relationship between two countries was characterized by strong cooperation and economic bonds (Gill, Arroyave, & Soruco, 2006; Boykoff 2009; Rojas 2010). The criteria for using three newspapers were relevant to their circulation numbers and international news focus. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (2011), the *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* were selected as two top preferred newspapers in the US in 2011, while the *Christian Science Monitor* was recognized for its international specialized coverage.

Unit of analysis

Each news story was used as one unit for all categories in this content analysis, and as would be described below, the number of newspaper stories related to US diplomatic relationship with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Hugo Chavez increased in number from the first period to the second period. The key terms employed to obtain news articles related to the purpose of the study were; 'Hugo Chavez', 'Venezuela', and 'Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela', which resulted in the following number of articles for each time period. In the

first period, 2 February 1999 to 12 May 1999, 21 stories from the *New York Times*, 10 stories from the *Washington Post*, and 7 stories from the *Christian Science Monitor* were found, and the content analysed. For the second time period, 10 January 2007 to 9 April 2007, 28 stories from the *New York Times*, 38 stories from the *Washington Post*, and 17 stories from the *Christian Science Monitor* were also examined. Since the relationship was characterized by ideological and political differences between their dignitaries over the last six years, a larger sample size was found in the second period.

Coding categories

Four major categories were designed in this content analysis, and they were US diplomatic relation with Venezuela, Hugo Chavez's portrayals, topics associated with the US and Venezuelan diplomatic relationship, and source attributions. The major coding categories were described in the following:

US diplomatic relation with Venezuela was used to look at the *tone* of news reporting utilized in news stories that described the state of diplomatic relationship between the two countries. This category was employed to identify whether major US newspapers used different news tone to cover Chavez's first and second presidential terms, which included: (1) positive, (2) negative, and (3) neutral.

Hugo Chavez's portrayal was employed to examine how major US newspapers described Chavez during his two presidential periods and compare how US newspapers covered this Venezuelan leader though the use of specific characters. Eight major characterisations in depicting Chavez as: (1) military leader, (2) socialist, (3) democrat, (4) dictator, (5) corrupt, (6) populist, (7) US enemy, and (8) leftist, such as a revolutionary, a Marxist, or a threat to the US.

Topics associated with US diplomatic relation with Venezuela were included in order to verify the most dominant topics relevant to his presidential periods. This category included several topics, namely (1) oil problems, (2) Constitutional reform, (3) corruption, (4) bilateral differences, (5) Chavez's controversial statements, (6) Hugo Chavez's first day in office, (7) Caribbean issues, (8) property rights in Venezuela, (9) Venezuela's neighbours, (10) Chavez's support for paramilitary organizations, and (11) Venezuela's allies, such as ideological differences and diverse opinions about the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Europe.

Source attribution was defined as any person who was cited, interviewed and covered in news stories. Moreover, sources can be experts, witnesses, victims, official specialists, among others (Sundar 1998). Sources' comments and job titles were highlighted, and any sources appearing more than once in the story would be coded once in each unit analysis. This category included: (1) government officials, (2) political opposition party leaders, (3) political pro-government party leaders, (4) international opinion leaders, (5) pro-government followers, (6) opposition followers, (7) independent leaders, (8) US government officials, (9) media workers, (10) Venezuelan governmental institutions, and (11) US government institutions, such as American citizens, and Latin American citizens.

Inter-coder reliability

Two graduate students coded all materials in this contents analysis. The first coder analysed all news stories and the second coder examined 10% of news stories. Holsti's (1969) formula

was used to calculate the inter-coder reliability. The results showed that the values of reliability for all coding categories ranged from 0.82 to 0.96.

RESULTS

RQ1 was proposed to investigate how the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela in major US newspapers. As indicated in Table 1, the positive description of the diplomatic relationship between two countries was commonly applied in the first period (15.79%), but such positive description was not employed in the second period ($\chi^2 = 14.27$, df $= 1$, $p < 0.01$). On the other hand, the results found a significant change ($\chi^2 = 26.90$, df $= 1$, $p < 0.01$) that the negative description of the diplomatic relationship was most frequently used in the second period (54.65%), while the negative description of the diplomatic relationship was less used in the first period. Finally, the neutral description was less applied in the both period, especially in the second period ($\chi^2 = 19.35$, df $= 1$, $p < 0.01$). It further demonstrated that US newspapers would not be inclined to use a more neutral tone to examine the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela in the second period, but attempt to use a more negative tone to look at such relationship.

RQ2 looked at the portrayals of Hugo Chavez during his presidential incumbencies. Nine dimensions were used to examine how Hugo Chavez was covered in these three US newspapers. As demonstrated in Table 2, Chavez was described as a military man in 30 newspaper articles, 23 of them from the first period (60.52%), which represented a significant change ($\chi^2 = 39.44$, df $= 1$, $p < 0.01$) in his portrayals in comparison to the second period (8.14%). In addition, it was another significant change ($\chi^2 = 4.81$, df $= 1$, $p = 0.03$) that Chavez was recurrently portrayed as a leftist during the second period (11.63%), while he was never described as a leftist in the first period. Finally, it was only slight change ($\chi^2 = 2.79$, df $= 1$, $p = 0.09$) that Chavez was ever covered as an enemy to the US in the second period (6.98%), but never described as such an infamous figure in the first incumbency.

RQ3 was devised to examine important topics associated with the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela in Hugo Chavez's first and second presidential incumbencies.

Table 1 – Description of Diplomatic Relationship between the US and Venezuela.

Description of diplomatic relation	The first period (N = 38)		The second period (N = 86)		χ^2
	N	%	N	%	df = 1
Positive tone*	6	15.79	0	0	14.26
Negative tone*	2	5.26	47	54.65	26.90
Neutral tone*	8	21.05	0	0	19.35

*$p < 0.01$

Table 2 – Portrayals of Hugo Chavez in Two Periods.

Portrayals of Hugo Chavez	The first period (N = 38)		The second period (N = 86)		χ^2
	N	%	N	%	df = 1
Military man***	23	60.52	7	8.14	39.44
Socialist	0	0	3	3.49	1.36
Democrat	1	2.63	0	0	2.28
Dictator	1	2.63	3	3.49	0.06
Corrupt	0	0	0	0	0
President	26	68.42	60	69.77	0.02
Populist	1	2.63	4	4.65	.28
US Enemy*	0	0	6	6.98	2.79
Leftist**	0	0	10	11.63	4.81

$*p < 0.1$; $**p < 0.05$; $***p < 0.01$

As demonstrated in Table 3, it was a significant change ($\chi^2 = 46.47$, df = 1, $p < 0.01$) that the topic of constitutional reform proposed by Hugo Chavez was most frequently mentioned in the first period (50%) in comparison to the second period (1.16%). Additionally, the topic of Chavez's controversial statement was expressively mentioned in the first period (7.89%), while this topic was least mentioned in his second incumbency ($\chi^2 = 6.96$, df = 1, $p = 0.008$). Moreover, the results found a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 8.24$, df = 1, $p = 0.004$) that US newspapers frequently covered the topic of Chavez's first day in office of his first presidential term (13.16%), but had not not recurrently mentioned his first day in office of his second presidential term (1.16%). Finally, another significant change was also found ($\chi^2 = 5.65$, df = 1, $p = 0.02$) that the topic of property rights was covered in the second period (26.74%) much more frequently than the first period (7.89%).

RQ4 was proposed to examine any difference in source attribution in major US newspapers during Hugo Chavez's first and second presidential incumbencies. Eleven various sources were used to look at differences in source attributions during two periods. As indicated in Table 4, Venezuelan government officials were cited 70 times, which represented 56.45% of sources cited in three newspapers for both periods. Moreover, it was significant ($\chi^2 = 6.62$, df = 1, $p = 0.01$) that Venezuelan government officials were more frequently cited in the first period (73.68%) than the second period (48.84%). Additionally, pro-government party leaders were cited differently in newspapers in the first and second periods as they were only represented with 3.22% of sources citations. More specifically, it was another significant change ($\chi^2 = 3.83$, df = 1, $p = 0.05$) that pro-government party leaders were cited as news sources in the first period (7.89%) more frequently in comparison to the second period (1.16%). On the other hand, US government officials were cited four times during the first

Table 3 – Relevant Topics Mentioned in Two Periods.

Relevant topics	The first period (N = 38)		The second period (N = 86)		χ^2
	N	%	N	%	df = 1
Oil problems	2	5.26	13	15.12	2.41
Constitutional reform**	19	50	1	1.16	46.47
Corruption	0	0	2	2.33	0.90
Bilateral difference	2	5.26	3	3.49	0.22
Chavez's controversial statement**	3	7.89	0	0	6.96
Chavez's first day in office**	5	13.16	1	1.16	8.24
Caribbean issues	1	2.63	0	0	2.28
Property rights in Venezuela*	3	7.89	23	26.74	5.65
Venezuela's neighbours	1	2.63	5	5.81	0.58
Paramilitary organisations	1	2.63	0	0	2.28
Venezuela's allies	0	0	0	0	0

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

period, but they were frequently cited in the second period, which reached a total of 18 citations with 20.93% of total amount of sources cited in three US newspapers ($\chi^2 = 5.246$, df = 1, $p < 0.022$). Finally, there were no significant differences between the two periods in other source attributions.

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

The present study explored how US newspapers portrayed the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela. A census of 124 news stories about US diplomatic relationship with Venezuela and Hugo Chavez published in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Christian Science monitor* were content analysed. The results of this content analysis brought a number of unprecedented elements in relation to how the diplomatic relationship was portrayed in US newspapers. The results showed a consistent trend that was maintained in both frames of time, even in the second period where the diplomatic relationship was portrayed as clearly negative, and Venezuelan government was characterized by its silence towards US media and Venezuelan media. Venezuelan government officials were the most frequently cited source in three newspapers. One important aspect was the fact that the government sources cited during the first and the second period could be clearly differentiated by the tone of their declarations. On the other

Table 4 – Source Attribution in Two Periods.

Source attribution	The first period (N = 38)		The second period (N = 86)		χ^2
	N	%	N	%	df = 1
Government officials*	28	73.68	42	48.84	6.62
Opposition party leaders	4	10.52	8	9.30	0.05
Pro-Government party leaders*	3	7.89	1	1.16	3.83
International opinion leaders	6	15.79	12	13.95	0.072
Pro-Government followers	4	10.53	7	8.14	0.186
Opposition Party followers	2	5.26	1	1.16	0.171
Independent leaders	3	7.89	3	3.49	1.11
U.S. government officials*	4	10.53	18	20.93	1.96
Media workers	2	5.26	2	2.33	0.73
Venezuelan govt. institutions	2	5.26	2	2.33	0.73
U.S. govt. institutions	0	0	0	0	0

*$p < 0.05$

hand, the citations included in the first period were characterized by a civic, diplomatic, and respectful tone toward US government officials, and vice versa. The second period reflected a more violent rhetoric of Venezuelan government officials towards these instances. More specifically, the first declaration was made by Hugo Chavez to the US and international community regarding his compatible views with US government—'If you are attempting to determine whether Chavez is left, right or centre, if he is a socialist, communist or capitalist, well, I am none of those, but I have a bit of all those'. Otherwise, the phrases were cited in the second period, such as 'I promise to liberate Latin America from the Imperialist North American Plot to enslave the region'.

Additionally, Hugo Chavez was portrayed negatively in both periods. During the first period, he was described as a military man, and almost each article reminded the fact that Chavez was involved in a failed coup attempt in 1992 against ex-president Carlos Andres Perez, but this condition was substituted in the second period for adjectives, namely 'populist', and 'leftist'. Finally, Chavez was described as the new Fidel Castro of the region, comparing him with one of the greatest political enemies of the US in the last four decades.

The results presented the two most important findings in this study. First, during the first hundred days of the first presidential term of Hugo Chavez, the diplomatic relationship between two countries was characterized by either positive or neutral tone, which was exposed by including the commonalities both countries shared, and by the exposing the positive comments made by Venezuelan opposition party leaders.

This frame changed drastically for the second period, where a negative tone around the relationship between two countries was the main element portrayed by three major newspapers. Venezuelan government sources and US government officials were cited and declarations pronounced by Hugo Chavez were published by the *Washington Post* during Bush's tour of South America. These types of declarations and the bilateral differences exposed by the newspapers consolidated a negative concept centred on the declining of diplomatic relationship between these two countries.

Finally, this analysis explored the most relevant topics associated with the diplomatic relationship. Chavez's first day in office was one of the four most relevant topics associated with the two countries; while being described as a military man, Chavez's first day as president was centred on the changes the leader proposed during his campaign. The second most important topic was centred on the natural resource of the country—oil problems. The number of news articles mentioning this resource was significantly increased in the second period, where new taxes were imposed on transnational companies exploiting the resource in the state of Bolivar, Anzoátegui and Monagas. On the other hand, property rights were also a main theme during the second period, specifically after CANTV and Electricidad de Caracas were nationalized and bought by Venezuelan government from US companies. Finally, the constitutional reforms proposed by the Venezuelan leader brought an intense debate in the international community, which was exposed as one of the most discussed topics during the first period. These four topics, while being controversial were placed with the tones to describe the state of the diplomatic relationship during both periods.

Limitation and future research

This study examined how *the New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Christian Science Monitor* portrayed the diplomatic relationship between the US and Venezuela. However, access to different newspapers in the US would give readers a broader picture about the state of the bilateral relationship of two countries. The use of different frames of time may result in diverse and interesting findings, which could provide alternative knowledge of the field. The investigation of different elements of news framing research could also provide another perspective on this economically important diplomatic relationship. What remains essential was to explore this issue from a quantitative perspective, which could avoid the inclusion of personal perspectives in the interpretation of the data. A number of significant investigations could also provide more information about the declining diplomatic relationship of the United States of America and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

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