

A frame analysis utilising media and social media sources: The 100 chefs incident

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Background

Early 2015 a newspaper article was published voicing the concerns of 100 chefs in relation to new food allergen rules recently set out in the UK (Dominiczak, 2015). The news article emphasised that the chefs felt that “spontaneity, creativity and innovation” were being harmed by the requirement to state the presence of 14 allergens in the dishes they produce (see Food Standards Agency, 2013). Following the release of this article many food allergy/intolerance concerned consumers took to the internet to voice their views.

Objectives

This study aims to explore how users position and define themselves and others in relation to an online debate (e.g., through the use of frames).
In considering the use of frames and positions we also hope to investigate how communication styles and behaviours related to this food allergen topic (the 100 chefs incident) varied across the different news media and social media platforms.

Method

Several sources of data were collected soon after the release of the original news article. Sources included three news media articles, user comments from the initial online article, and related Twitter posts.
This study utilises the qualitative analytic approach frame analysis. The approach taken here attempts to consider patterns within the sources of information, language use and emphasis, as well as placement of information (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Findings

The analysis highlighted six frames:

- 1) The medical nature of food allergy and intolerance** - *“when a diner says they have an allergy that means their body’s immune system attacks allergens they’re allergic to ... this needs to be taken seriously”*
- 2) Personal responsibility** (e.g., asking and checking about allergens before ordering) - *“It is a total fiasco and in my view is the responsibility of the allerger to ask, not the restaurateurs to list”.*
- 3) Responsibly should lie with others** (e.g., businesses and suppliers) - *“It’s not just chefs that need to be looking for allergen information, it’s also a supplier’s duty of care to pass the information on from their manufacturers”*
- 4) The issue of fairness**, and the desire to make food venues safe for all. Writing for the Guardian, Liz Smith suggests that some of these top chefs *“should be leading the way in making it easier for everyone to enjoy good food”.*
- 5) A political issue** - commentaries framed as anti or pro EU, e.g., framing the legislation as an unnecessary European push for power - *“Today, I’ve been eating creative British food, which hasn’t conformed to any nice safe EU clap-trap! #14Allergens #100Chefs”*
- 6) The financial implications** in accommodating the new regulations (e.g., administration and training costs), but also the beneficial implications of providing allergen information, e.g., tapping into a growing and lucrative “free-from” market.

These frames highlighted ways that this debate varied across different media/social media platforms, e.g., focusing on single topics, discussion fluidity (moving from topic to topic), and potential post length (i.e., free rein vs. character number restrictions).

The analysis illustrated potential ways claimants position themselves (e.g., their rights and roles), as well how users reassign and challenge the position of others during debates (Harré et al., 2009). For example users challenged the “top” descriptor for the chefs involved – “these regulations don’t stifle creativity. All chefs should know what ingredients go into their food”. This was also illustrated by the use of the Twitter hashtag #100CluelessChefs.

Conclusions & Implications

This qualitative study explored how claimants positioned themselves and others through the use of frames during an online debate relating to food allergy/intolerance. The analysis illustrated ways that user-positions can be defined, redefined, and challenged in the light of new or varying information.
Implications include insights into concerns and the production of myths (e.g., relating to legislation); findings also have significance for understanding the efficacy of social media platforms, and the need for moderation. The study itself makes a methodological contribution through the use of frame analysis with social media data, as well as qualitative applications to social media research more generally.

References

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