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Media Analysis of News Articles during COVID-19: Renewal, Continuity and Cultural  
Dimensions of Creative Action

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# Media Analysis of News Articles during COVID-19: Renewal, Continuity and Cultural Dimensions of Creative Action

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## Abstract

Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to adapt quickly and reexamine interactions and responsibilities towards communities in creative ways. This presentation details a qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) of fifty online news articles (*Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*) published between March 17th and August 6th, 2020 using the keywords “creativity” and “COVID-19.” Informed by a definition of creativity as actions that are considered both “new” and “appropriate” (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999), articles describing a “creative action” were kept for analysis. The presentation discusses the themes derived during this analysis- “renewal and continuity” and “the multidimensionality of creativity” which elaborate and contextualize a perspective of socio-cultural creativity theory and propose two implications of this study. The first implication posits that creativity was an observable, cultural response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second implication offers a broader concept of how cultural resources function as dynamic constraints on creativity.

## Body of Research Brief

### Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative media analysis were twofold. First, the research seeks a deeper understanding of how individuals and communities responded creatively to COVID-19 and the resulting quarantine. The researchers conceptualized this study by observing diverse responses to quarantine regulations. It was clear that our society was affected at every level. This study gathers a range of data, published reporting by the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, to analyze a group of responses. Second, this research applies a socio-cultural perspective of creativity (Glaveanu et al, 2019) to inform the data analysis and coding process. Researchers utilized this perspective because it describes the dynamic range of creative action at both the individual and cultural levels (Glaveanu et al. 2019). The data collection necessarily included examples of both individual, group, and domain specific creativity. Analysis of such diverse data required a theory that unifies prior creativity research of multiple domains within a common perspective. Sociocultural creativity theory, relatively new within the field, offered researchers the vocabulary and theoretical frame to compare multiple aspects of creativity in a single analysis.

### Data Collection

The media analysis was conducted by searching through the archives of two national newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. These two newspapers were chosen for several reasons. Both the NYT and LAT are newspapers with high relative readership and wide coverage. The broader audience of these newspapers provided the researchers with articles touching on events across the entire country. Additionally, these

newspapers are situated in states that experienced the outbreak of COVID-19 very differently. The researchers considered that different approaches in governmental and societal reactions in New York and California might provide a balance within the sample data. Articles published between March 19<sup>th</sup> and August 6<sup>th</sup> were considered viable for inclusion. The primary criteria for acceptance were the keywords, “Creativity” and “COVID-19.” Articles were discarded if they did not refer to any specific action as creative or use the term in a way that was significant to the content of the article. Although hundreds of articles met the criteria for selection, the researchers limited their analysis to fifty articles divided between three researchers for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using two rounds of coding. The first round of coding was conducted asynchronously by the three researchers. After an initial round of open coding, the researchers met to compare codes and create a codebook with examples and quotes (Saldaña, 2014). The second round of coding use the data analysis strategy of Theoretical Proposition (Yin, 2018) to organize the codes within the perspective of a sociocultural theory of creativity. To address the validity and reliability of the codes, coding occurred iteratively. Coding was discussed in team meetings and coding was examined across team members (Merriam, 2009). When new concepts emerged, the team discussed them. Three codes “creativity for social justice,” “negative impact of creativity,” and “creative resilience” were added during the discussions. Then, the research team reread the media articles and coded for these three new codes and updated the data, attesting to adequate engagement in the data analysis (Merriam, 2009). The codebook was shared again with updated data, to make sure the codes were applied consistently to the articles across the team members.

### **Findings**

The data analysis provided two overarching themes of creativity within the articles. The first theme was the “Multidimensionality” of creativity. This theme included articles that chronicled the diverse ways creativity was applied as a response to the pandemic. Examples include symphonies that changed the format of their performances from in-person to online. Artists of all kinds were forced to change their creative practice to conform to new environments. Creativity was used as an expression or tool of resilience to help individuals stay connected during the isolation of the quarantine. Some artists thrived under these new restrictions, producing new art and finding inspiration through solitude. Others struggled with the cancellations and isolation forced on them by restrictions. Many artists who relied on performances as income were left without funds while they waited for government assistance. Loss of income was not the only reported negative consequence. Many artists reported feeling anxious, isolated, and deprived of a sense of joy and meaning. They view their art as a way of life, not just their employment.

The second theme of creativity derived from the data analysis was “Renewal and Continuity.” This theme addressed the broader cultural adjustments, as well as personal adjustments within specific domains of creativity. Religious institutions that traditionally gather as groups to celebrate religious holidays were forced to adjust their plans to meet the restrictions of the COVID-19 quarantine. Many of these congregations found alternative locations to meet outdoors, other used online forums to gather virtually. These improvisations show communities use resources to renew and uphold cultural meaning.

Schools were forced to shift theatre performances to online platforms. Fashion shows, television award shows, concerts, gallery artists, comedian, among others were forced to alter their tradition to meet new environmental standards. Architecture was highlighted in both newspapers as an example of how a domain might shift because of new cultural expectations. Office buildings with open designs, a popular demand before the crisis, are rethinking how to adjust their use of space to account for social distancing.

The researchers arrived at two emergent conclusions from this media analysis. The first conclusion was that creative actions comprised an observable, communal, and cultural response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The volume and diversity of the creative responses documented by both newspapers supported this conclusion. Moreover, the researchers only selected a portion of the articles that met the criteria for analysis. A larger, funded research team would find many more observable acts to confirm this conclusion. The second conclusion emergent from this study was the essential role of cultural resources to facilitate creative improvisation in a changing environment. Populations that experienced inequality before the quarantine faced additional constraints to their creative responses.

This study suggests the following implications for further research. Utilization of the sociocultural perspectives of creativity facilitated the discussion of both individual and cultural creativity within the same theoretical structure. Further research using this perspective of creativity should expand interpretation of creative actions to include the broader spectrum of domains where creativity is studied. Additionally, the importance of cultural resources to supply affordances for creative action may be an important finding for creativity researchers who wish to address social justice issues within creativity research.

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### **Researcher Bio**

David Mattson is a second year PhD student at Drexel University School of Education. David received a master's degree in education with an emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction from George Mason University in 2018. Prior to returning to academia, David taught ESL in Guadalajara Mexico for three years and taught English as a second language in Virginia for three years.

David's research interests center around the intersection of creativity, cultural psychology, teacher professional development and culturally responsive pedagogy within art education.