

The Ideologies of Politicians, Critics, and Protesters Through the Appraisal Framework in CNN Online News on Anti-Asian Discrimination During COVID-19

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Abstract

This mixed-methods research examined the ideologies of politicians, critics, and protesters as represented in CNN online news reporting on anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The dataset consisted of 35 CNN online news articles published between 2021 and 2023, yielding 3,091 evaluative tokens. Adjectives and adverbs were extracted using TagAnt as primary evaluative units and were manually coded according to the appraisal framework. Quantitative analysis was conducted to calculate frequency and percentage distributions of appraisal resources, followed by qualitative discourse analysis to interpret their ideological functions. An inter-rater reliability procedure was implemented to enhance coding consistency. The findings indicated that appreciation was the most frequently used attitudinal resource (47.49%), followed by judgment (44.42%), while affect was the least frequently used (8.09%). Engagement analysis showed a predominance of monoglossic strategies (70.53%), suggesting authoritative positioning in news discourse, while graduation resources were mainly realized through force (69.88%), intensifying representations of racism and social urgency. These patterns suggested that CNN predominantly evaluated anti-Asian discrimination through value-based and moral assessments rather than explicit emotional expression. Politicians were mainly represented through judgment and authoritative engagement, positioning them as institutional actors responsible for policy and governance. Critics were characterized by dialogically expansive engagement and critical judgment, foregrounding structural racism and accountability. Protesters were primarily associated with heightened affect and greater access to graduation resources, emphasizing emotional urgency, collective identity, and demands for social justice. Overall, the study demonstrated that CNN's evaluative language systematically differentiated ideological roles, shaping public interpretations of anti-Asian discrimination as a moral, social, and political issue during the pandemic.

Keywords: Appraisal framework, Ideology, Anti-Asian discrimination

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Introduction

News discourse played a crucial role in shaping public understanding of social crises during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to race and discrimination. Rather than merely reporting events, news texts evaluated social actors and actions, thereby circulating ideological meanings. Previous studies have shown that news discourse is inherently value-laden, reflecting ideological positioning through lexical choices and evaluative framing (Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995; Bednarek, 2006). Such linguistic choices, therefore, require systematic examination, especially when addressing sensitive issues such as racism and public protest. During the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian discrimination intensified globally, manifesting in verbal harassment, physical violence, and structural exclusion. Empirical research documented a rise in xenophobia and racialized violence against Asian communities, often driven by fear, misinformation, and the racialization of disease (Dhanani & Franz, 2020; Chen et al., 2020). Official statistics further support this trend, reporting a notable increase in hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those targeting minority groups (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). Public survey data further indicated that a significant proportion of Americans had witnessed anti-Asian bias during the pandemic, reflecting the widespread visibility of such discrimination in everyday contexts (Ellerbeck, 2020). This pattern is consistent with broader findings that COVID-19 responses have been accompanied by forms of racism and discrimination at both social and institutional levels (Devakumar et al., 2020). These developments generated widespread social protests and extensive news coverage. As a global news outlet, CNN reported frequently on these events. As an online news platform, it reflects key characteristics of digital journalism, including immediacy, accessibility, and wide dissemination, which influence how news content is produced and consumed (Eriksen & Ihlström, 2000; Flavián & Gurrea, 2008); however, research in critical discourse analysis has demonstrated that such reporting reflects institutional values and ideological orientations; however, research in critical discourse analysis has demonstrated that such reporting reflects institutional values and ideological orientations through evaluative language and selective representation of voices (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998).

Within Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), which conceptualizes language as a social semiotic resource for meaning-making, the appraisal framework offers a systematic model for analyzing evaluative meaning in discourse. Developed by Martin and White (2005), the framework explains how attitudes are expressed, dialogic space is managed, and evaluative force is scaled through the subsystems of attitude, engagement, and graduation. Although appraisal analysis has been widely applied to political and news discourse (Martin & Rose, 2007; White, 2012; Etaywe & Zappavigna, 2021), its application to pandemic-related protest news concerning anti-Asian discrimination remains limited. Appraisal analysis has also been applied to news discourse in various cultural contexts, including studies on Thai media, which demonstrate how evaluative language systematically constructs ideological meanings in news reporting (Arunsirot, 2012). Moreover, existing studies have rarely differentiated ideological representations across distinct social actor groups within a single corpus. Politicians, critics, and protesters represented three influential yet

ideologically diverse voices frequently cited in protest-related news. Politicians typically spoke from institutional positions of authority, critics articulated evaluative perspectives outside governmental structures, and protesters expressed grassroots demands for justice and social change. Previous research suggested that these groups employed distinct evaluative strategies to legitimize authority, challenge dominant narratives, or mobilize collective action (van Leeuwen, 2008; Thompson, 2014). Examining how these groups were linguistically evaluated, therefore, provided deeper insight into how legitimacy, authority, and emotional intensity were distributed across social actors.

In response to these gaps, the present study investigated the ideologies of politicians, critics, and protesters in CNN online news reporting on anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic using the appraisal framework. This study offers several significant contributions. First, it extends appraisal research to pandemic-related protest news, an area that has received limited systematic linguistic investigation. Second, it provides a comparative analysis of institutional, interpretive, and grassroots voices within a single international media corpus, thereby revealing how ideological meanings are differentially constructed across social actor groups. Third, by integrating quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative discourse interpretation, the study combines empirical rigor with interpretive depth, offering a comprehensive account of how evaluative language functions ideologically in mainstream news discourse. Through this integrated approach, the research contributes to both media discourse studies and appraisal theory by demonstrating how ideology is systematically embedded in evaluative patterns rather than expressed through explicit political statements.

Purpose of study

1. To investigate the appraisal subsystems of attitude, engagement, and graduation employed in CNN online news coverage of protests associated with anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To uncover the ideological orientations embedded in CNN news reporting through a linguistic analysis based on the appraisal framework.
3. To examine the ways in which CNN discursively portrayed the ideological representations of politicians, critics, and protesters in reports on protest movements related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

1. What appraisal subsystems of attitude, engagement, and graduation were employed in CNN online news coverage of protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What ideological orientations were revealed through the use of appraisal resources in CNN news reporting on protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. How were the ideological representations of politicians, critics, and protesters discursively represented in CNN online news reporting on protest movements related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was grounded in systemic functional linguistics, with particular emphasis on the appraisal framework developed by Martin and White (2005). This framework was employed to examine how evaluative language functioned as a linguistic resource for expressing ideological meanings in news discourse. The appraisal framework conceptualizes evaluation through three interrelated subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation, which together explain how speakers or writers position themselves, represent social actors, and align readers with particular value systems.

Within this framework, attitude referred to the expression of feelings, moral judgments, and value-based assessments, encompassing the subcategories of affect, judgment, and appreciation. This subsystem enabled the study to identify how emotional responses, ethical evaluations, and assessments of social events were linguistically encoded in news reporting. Engagement focused on the management of dialogic space, examining how news texts incorporated, acknowledged, or excluded alternative viewpoints through monoglossic and heteroglossic expressions. This dimension was essential for analyzing how ideological authority and legitimacy were negotiated through the representation of different voices. Graduation addressed the scaling of evaluative meanings by examining how intensity and emphasis were amplified or softened through linguistic choices, thereby revealing degrees of ideological commitment as follows:

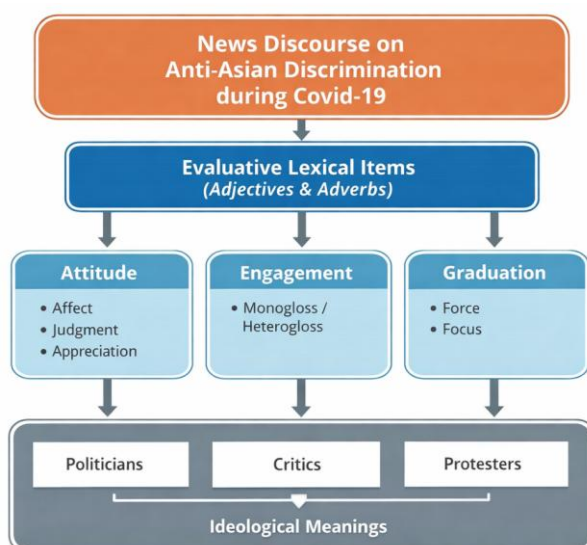


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study

Research Methodology

This section describes the methodological procedures employed to investigate ideological meanings in CNN online news reporting on anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative analysis of linguistic patterns with qualitative interpretation of evaluative meanings. The methodology was designed to ensure systematic data selection, transparent analytical procedures, and theoretical alignment with the appraisal framework. The following subsections outline the processes of data collection and data analysis used to address the research objectives.

1. Data Collection

The dataset comprised 35 online news articles published by CNN between February 2021 and October 2023. These articles addressed anti-Asian discrimination within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic began in late 2019, the data collection period was limited to 2021–2023 because this timeframe marked a critical turning point in public awareness of anti-Asian hate crimes in the United States. In February 2021, several high-profile violent incidents targeting Asian Americans received nationwide media attention, intensifying public debate and protest mobilization. These events culminated in widespread demonstrations and heightened political discourse, particularly following the mass shooting in Atlanta on March 16, 2021, which further amplified national concern regarding anti-Asian violence.

This period, therefore, represented the peak of public attention, protest movements, and documented increases in anti-Asian hate crimes. Media coverage during this time became more evaluatively charged, as journalists increasingly framed incidents within moral, political, and social justice narratives. Consequently, the 2021–2023 timeframe provided a particularly rich and analytically significant corpus for examining how ideological meanings were

The dataset was further categorized according to three groups of social actors frequently cited in protest-related reporting: politicians, critics, and protesters. Politicians referred to government officials and policy makers; critics included commentators, activists, and public intellectuals; and protesters referred to individuals or groups participating in demonstrations or collective actions. This categorization enabled systematic comparison of ideological representations across social actor groups within the same corpus.

To prepare the data for appraisal analysis, the selected articles were processed using TagAnt, a part-of-speech tagging tool developed by Laurence Anthony (2023). TagAnt was used to identify and extract adjectives and adverbs, which were treated as the primary units of analysis. This selection was theoretically motivated by the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005), which identifies adjectives and adverbs as prototypical realizations of evaluative meaning within the attitude subsystem, including affect, judgment, and appreciation. Moreover, these word classes play an important role in the graduation subsystem, as they allow evaluative meanings to be intensified or softened through gradable forms. By focusing on adjectives and adverbs, the study ensured analytical clarity and methodological consistency while remaining aligned with the theoretical principles of the appraisal framework. The extracted items were compiled into a dataset for subsequent quantitative and qualitative analysis.

2. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a mixed-methods approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative procedures within the appraisal framework. After data preparation, the extracted adjectives and adverbs were examined in their immediate textual contexts to determine their evaluative functions. Each lexical item was manually coded according to the three appraisal subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation, following the analytical categories proposed by Martin and White (2005).

In the first stage, attitude resources were identified and classified into effect, judgment, and appreciation to examine how emotions, moral evaluations, and value-based assessments were expressed in the news discourse. In the second stage, engagement resources were analyzed to determine how dialogic space was managed through monoglossic and heteroglossic expressions, indicating whether alternative viewpoints were acknowledged or constrained. In the third stage, graduation resources were examined to identify how evaluative meanings were intensified or softened through force and focus.

Quantitative analysis was subsequently applied to calculate the frequency and percentage distribution of appraisal resources across the three groups of social actors: politicians, critics, and protesters. These numerical results provided an overview of dominant evaluative patterns and enabled systematic comparison among the groups. Qualitative interpretation was then employed to explain how recurring appraisal patterns functioned ideologically within the discourse.

To enhance the reliability of the appraisal coding, an inter-rater procedure was incorporated into the analysis. The coding process involved two raters: the researcher and an independent coder with an academic background in discourse analysis and familiarity with the appraisal framework. A subset of the dataset (approximately 20% of the total evaluative items) was independently coded by both raters using the same coding criteria. The level of agreement between the two raters was calculated using percentage agreement. The overall agreement rate reached 90%, indicating high consistency in the classification of appraisal resources. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved through careful reference to the definitions and analytical guidelines proposed by Martin and White (2005). This procedure strengthened the reliability and credibility of the analysis and minimized potential subjectivity in the interpretation of evaluative language. To enhance transparency in the analytical procedure, a sample of the coding scheme is presented in Figure 2.

Item No.	Appraising items	Attitude Analysis			Engagement	Graduation			Appraised
		Affect	Judg.	Apprc.		Force		Focus	
						Intensification	Quantification		
A6-34	Actors and athletes have delivered impassioned responses.	sat			monogloss	quality			responses

Figure 2 A sample of the coding scheme (CNN, March 4, 2021), The history of attacks against Asian Americans is complicated. Addressing it will be, too, Critics, Article 6, adjective no. 34)

Figure 2 illustrates the coding scheme used in this study. Each evaluative lexical item extracted from the corpus was systematically analyzed according to the three domains of the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005): attitude, engagement, and graduation. The first column indicates the word number and article code (e.g., A6-34), allowing traceability to the original corpus. The second column presents the appraising item in its immediate clause context. In this example, the adjective “impassioned” from the clause “Actors and athletes have delivered impassioned responses” was identified as an attitude resource under affect:satisfaction (sat, as it conveys emotional intensity and evaluative involvement. The engagement column indicates whether the clause was presented monoglossically or heteroglossically. In this case, the statement was coded as monogloss, since it was presented as an authorial assertion without attribution to an alternative voice. Under graduation, the evaluative force was classified as force: quality, as the adjective intensified the characterization of the responses without quantifying them. No focus adjustment was identified in this instance.

This coding structure ensured systematic categorization of evaluative language across the dataset and enabled consistent comparison of how different social actors were discursively positioned. By integrating attitude, engagement, and graduation into a single analytical table, the scheme enhanced methodological transparency and enabled the reliable identification of ideological patterns in the corpus. Because the quantitative component involved categorical frequency data, a chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether the distribution of appraisal resources significantly differed across the three groups of social actors (politicians, critics, and protesters). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Result

This section presents the findings of the study derived from the analysis of appraisal resources in CNN online news reporting on anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results were reported using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative frequency data with qualitative interpretations of evaluative patterns. The presentation of results was organized according to the three appraisal subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation, and further differentiated by three groups of social actors: politicians, critics, and protesters. Quantitative findings provided an overview of dominant appraisal patterns, while qualitative observations illustrated how these patterns functioned ideologically in news discourse.

1. What appraisal subsystems of attitude, engagement, and graduation were employed in CNN online news coverage of protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The analysis examined the use of attitude, engagement, and graduation resources in the dataset to provide an overview of evaluative patterns in news discourse. The distribution of appraisal resources across the three subsystems is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 The appraisal resources of attitude, engagement, and graduation

Appraisal Type	ADJ	ADV	Number	Percentage
Affect	185	16	250	8.09
Judgment	831	542	1373	44.42
Appreciation	948	520	1468	47.49
Total	2013	1078	3091	100
Monogloss	1,389	791	2,180	70.53
Heterogloss	624	287	911	29.47
Total	2,013	1078	3,091	100
Force	1,558	602	2160	69.88
Focus	455	476	931	30.12
Total	2,013	1,078	3,091	100

Table 1 presents the distribution of appraisal resources across the three subsystems of attitude, engagement, and graduation in CNN online news reporting on protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that evaluative meanings were predominantly realized through adjectival and adverbial resources, highlighting the central role of evaluation in news discourse.

Within the attitude subsystem, appreciation constituted the largest proportion (47.49%), followed by judgment (44.42%), while affect occurred least frequently (8.09%). This pattern suggested that the discourse focused primarily on evaluating events and social actions rather than foregrounding personal emotions. Frequent use of appreciation and judgment reflected an ideological orientation toward assessing social significance and moral responsibility, whereas the limited presence of affect indicated a restrained emotional framing.

In terms of engagement, monoglossic resources dominated (70.53%), indicating that evaluations were often presented as authoritative or taken for granted, with limited dialogic openness. Heteroglossic resources were mainly realized through attribution and reported speech, allowing the inclusion of external voices while maintaining editorial control. Regarding graduation, force resources were used more frequently (69.88%) than focus resources (30.12%), emphasizing intensity, urgency, and severity rather than categorical precision.

The distribution patterns revealed that CNN news reporting framed anti-Asian discrimination as a morally significant and socially urgent issue. The dominance of appreciation and judgment, combined with monoglossic engagement and intensified graduation, demonstrated how appraisal resources systematically shaped ideological meanings in protest related news discourse.

2. What ideological orientations were revealed through the use of appraisal resources in CNN news reporting on protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The attitude subsystem captured evaluative meanings related to emotions, moral judgments, and value assessments, while the graduation subsystem revealed how these evaluations were intensified or softened. Concentrating on these two subsystems allowed for a more fine-grained examination of ideological meanings than subsystem-level analysis alone. The distribution of attitude and graduation subcategories is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of attitude and graduation resources in the dataset

Appraisal Subsystem	Category / Type	Instances	Percentage
Attitude	Attitude		
	Desire	29	0.94
	Happiness	8	0.26
	Unhappiness	157	5.08
	Security	22	0.71
	Insecurity	14	0.45
	Satisfaction	7	0.23
	Dissatisfaction	13	0.42
	Judgment		
	Normality	751	24.30
	Capacity	219	7.09
	Tenacity	25	0.81
	Veracity	62	2.01
	Propriety	314	10.16
	Appreciation		
	Reaction	348	11.26
	Composition	700	22.64
	Valuation	422	13.64
Total		3,091	100

Table 2 (Continue)

Appraisal Subsystem	Category / Type	Instances	Percentage
Graduation	Force (Intensification)		
	Quality	848	27.43
	Process	823	26.63
	Force (Quantification)		
	Number	85	2.75
	Mass	37	1.20
	Extent: Proximity (space)	35	1.13
	Extent: Proximity (time)	275	8.90
	Extent: Distribution (space)	15	0.49
	Extent: Distribution (time)	42	1.36
	Focus		
	Sharpen	650	21.03
	Soften	281	9.08
Total		3,091	100

Table 2 presents the distribution of attitude and graduation resources in CNN online news reporting on protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that evaluative meanings were primarily realized through attitudinal and gradational choices, highlighting how values, judgments, and degrees of emphasis were linguistically constructed in the discourse.

Within the attitude subsystem, judgment and appreciation accounted for the majority of evaluative resources. Frequent use of normality (24.30%) and propriety (10.16%) reflected an ideological emphasis on moral responsibility and social norms, while high proportions of composition (22.64%) and valuation (13.64%) indicated a focus on the structural characteristics and social significance of protest-related events. In contrast, affect resources occurred less frequently, suggesting a restrained emotional framing and a preference for moral and value-based evaluation. In the graduation subsystem, force resources were used more extensively than focus, particularly intensification types such as quality (27.43%) and process (26.63%), emphasizing severity, scale, and urgency. Resources related to extent, especially proximity (time) (8.90%), were further highlighted, whereas focus resources played a secondary role. Overall, the distribution patterns framed anti-Asian discrimination as a morally significant and socially consequential issue, with strong emphasis on moral evaluation and urgency rather than emotional expression or categorical negotiation.

3. How were the ideological representations of politicians, critics, and protesters discursively represented in CNN online news reporting on protest movements related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To address this research question, the analysis examined the distribution and patterns of appraisal resources across three groups of social actors: politicians, critics, and protesters. Evaluative language associated with each group was analyzed to identify differences in attitudinal and gradational choices, revealing how ideological meanings were discursively represented through the portrayal of these actors. The comparative distribution of appraisal resources across the three social actor groups is presented in the following Table 3.

Table 3 Appraisal patterns in the representation of politicians, critics, and protesters

Group	Tokens	Attitudinal Choices			Engagement Choices		Graduation Choices	
		Affect	Judg.	Appre.	Mono.	Hetero.	Force	Focus
Politicians	786	50	338	398	565	221	550	236
Critics	983	84	434	465	632	351	679	304
Protesters	1322	116	601	605	983	339	931	391
Total	3091	250	1373	1468	2180	911	2160	931
Percentage	100	8.09	44.42	47.49	70.53	29.47	69.88	30.12

Table 3 presents a comparative distribution of appraisal resources across politicians, critics, and protesters in CNN online news reporting on protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The table allows systematic comparison of attitudinal, engagement, and graduation choices associated with each social actor group. Across all groups, attitudinal evaluation was dominated by judgment and appreciation rather than affect. Protesters demonstrated the greatest use of judgment and appreciation of resources, indicating frequent moral and value-based evaluations of their actions and roles. Critics also showed a high concentration of evaluative judgments, reflecting their role as interpreters of protest-related events, whereas politicians were evaluated through comparatively fewer attitudinal resources, suggesting a more restrained portrayal. In terms of engagement, monoglossic resources predominated across all groups, particularly for protesters and critics, indicating limited dialogic openness. With respect to graduation, force resources were more frequent than focus for all groups, with protesters showing the highest degree of intensification.

The distribution patterns indicated that protesters were the most evaluatively foregrounded social actors, followed by critics, while politicians were represented through more moderated evaluative choices.

These patterns revealed clear ideological distinctions in the discursive construction of social actors in CNN online news reporting on anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether appraisal subsystems significantly differed across social actor groups. The results indicated that differences in attitude distribution were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 3091) = 7.09, p = .131$. Similarly, graduation resources did not differ significantly across groups, $\chi^2(2, N = 3091) = 0.49, p = .782$. However, engagement choices showed a significant association with social actor groups, $\chi^2(2, N = 3091) = 28.40, p < .001$, indicating that dialogic positioning varied systematically across politicians, critics, and protesters. Theoretically, this pattern suggests that ideological differentiation in CNN's reporting was realized less through variations in evaluative polarity (attitude) or intensity scaling (graduation), and more through dialogic positioning strategies (engagement). In other words, while the types of evaluation and degrees of intensity remained relatively stable across groups, the way voices were framed, whether through monoglossic assertions or heteroglossic attribution, significantly shaped ideological alignment. This finding highlights the central role of engagement as a mechanism for negotiating authority, responsibility, and legitimacy in protest discourse, reinforcing the view that ideology in mainstream news is often embedded in patterns of voice management rather than overt attitudinal contrast, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Chi-square test results for appraisal subsystems across social groups

Subsystem	χ^2	df	p-value	Significance
Attitude	7.09	4	.131	Not significant
Engagement	28.40	2	< .001	Significant
Graduation	0.49	2	.782	Not significant

Discussion

This study addressed three research questions concerning the use of appraisal resources and the construction of ideology in CNN online news reporting on anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. In relation to RQ1, the findings demonstrated that all three appraisal subsystems, attitude, engagement, and graduation, were systematically employed in the dataset. However, attitude resources, particularly appreciation (47.49%) and judgment (44.42%), predominated over affect (8.09%). This suggests that CNN framed anti-Asian discrimination primarily through moral evaluation and social valuation rather than through individualized emotional expression. One possible explanation for this pattern lies in journalistic conventions: mainstream news reporting tends to prioritize institutional accountability and social significance over overt emotional framing in order to maintain professional credibility. Thus, evaluation was embedded in moral and structural assessments rather than explicit emotional language.

Regarding RQ2, the distribution of appraisal resources revealed underlying ideological orientations. The prominence of judgment, especially categories related to normality and propriety, indicates that

discrimination was framed as a deviation from accepted social norms and moral standards. Furthermore, the dominance of monoglossic engagement (70.53%) suggests that evaluations were frequently presented as authoritative and taken-for-granted, thereby reinforcing institutional legitimacy. The extensive use of graduation resources, particularly force (69.88%), intensified representations of racism, violence, and urgency. Together, these patterns suggest that CNN constructed anti-Asian discrimination as a morally serious and socially urgent issue. Ideology, therefore, was not expressed through explicit political statements but through patterned evaluative choices that positioned readers toward moral condemnation and social concern.

With respect to RQ3, the comparative analysis of politicians, critics, and protesters revealed differentiated ideological representations across social actor groups. Although the distribution of attitude resources did not significantly differ across groups, $\chi^2 (4, N = 3091) = 7.09, p = .131$, and graduation resources likewise showed no significant variation, $\chi^2 (2, N = 3091) = 0.49, p = .782$, engagement choices demonstrated a statistically significant association with social actor groups, $\chi^2 (2, N = 3091) = 28.40, p < .001$. This indicates that ideological differentiation was primarily realized through dialogic positioning rather than through variation in evaluative type or intensity. Protesters were the most evaluatively foregrounded group, particularly through intensified graduation and judgment resources at the descriptive level; however, the inferential analysis suggests that what most distinguished the groups statistically was their pattern of engagement. Critics were frequently associated with dialogically expansive heteroglossic strategies, reinforcing their role as interpretive voices contextualizing discrimination within broader legal and structural frameworks. In contrast, politicians were more frequently framed in monoglossic, institutionally anchored terms, emphasizing authority and responsibility rather than emotional urgency. This statistically grounded differentiation supports the interpretation that journalistic balancing strategies operate through voice management, positioning institutional actors as authoritative decision-makers while representing grassroots actors through heightened dialogic negotiation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that CNN's news discourse constructed ideology not merely through overt evaluative polarity, but through patterned dialogic alignment. By embedding moral judgment, value assessment, and especially strategic engagement positioning within its reporting, the discourse shaped public interpretation of anti-Asian discrimination as a moral, political, and socially urgent issue. These results support previous claims in critical discourse studies that ideology in media discourse operates implicitly through evaluative framing and structured voice management rather than through explicit attitudinal contrast alone.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that CNN online news reporting on protests related to anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic relied extensively on evaluative language to construct ideological meanings. The findings showed that all appraisal subsystems' attitude, engagement, and graduation were systematically employed, confirming that evaluation rather than neutral description constituted a central feature of news discourse. Ideological meanings were predominantly realized through attitude and graduation resources. Judgment and appreciation framed anti-Asian discrimination as a moral and socially significant issue, while extensive use of gradational force emphasized urgency and severity. These patterns indicated that the discourse prioritized moral evaluation and social impact over emotional personalization. In addition, the comparative analysis of social actors showed clear ideological differentiation: protesters and critics were more evaluatively foregrounded through intensified, judgment-oriented appraisal choices, whereas politicians were represented through more restrained, moderated evaluations.

The study confirmed that ideological meanings in CNN news reporting emerged from patterned and systematic evaluative choices rather than from explicit ideological statements. By applying the appraisal framework to the analysis of social actor representation, the research provided empirical evidence of how news discourse shaped public interpretations of anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Suggestions

1. Practical and Policy Implications

1.1 Regulatory bodies should establish clear media guidelines to ensure balanced and responsible reporting on hate crimes and racial discrimination.

1.2 News organizations should critically monitor engagement strategies to avoid marginalizing minority voices in protest-related coverage.

1.3 Anti-discrimination agencies may apply appraisal insights to strengthen public communication and legitimacy in mainstream media discourse.

1.4 Journalism programs should incorporate training on evaluative language and ideological framing in reporting on social justice issues.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

2.1 Future research should conduct comparative studies across multiple news agencies to examine ideological variation.

2.2 Further studies should expand linguistic analysis beyond adjectives and adverbs to include broader discourse features.

2.3 Longitudinal research should explore how media evaluative patterns interact with anti-discrimination policy development.

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