

A DIVIDED MEDIA:
A FRAMING ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES TELEVISION NEWS
COVERAGE OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

by
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ABSTRACT

Television news organizations report stories through several communicative frames, which impact wide-ranging public opinion, garner immense power, and can influence entire populations. This study examines how U.S. television news organizations reported on Syrian immigrants before and after August 18, 2016 - the date of publication of the powerful photo/video of Omran Daqneesh. While encapsulating the innocence and devastation of many trapped in Syria's ongoing civil war, this Aleppo toddler's experience made global headlines and touched the hearts of millions.

A quantitative content analysis of two separate television news organizations, Fox News and MSNBC, was conducted to study the valence and frame type of two politically diverse news sources (i.e., conservative and liberal), using broadcast transcripts pertaining to Syrian immigrants. This thesis analyzes how framing characteristics varied between the sources and scrutinizes how reporting changed before and after the photo/video's release. Broadcast transcripts were retrieved from the LexisNexis database.

Primary results exhibited that in the two weeks after the event, television news sources more commonly reported the incident using an episodic frame, while MSNBC reported more positively toward Syrian immigration. Additionally, overall reporting was more positive, regarding Syrian immigration, while many broadcasts were simply valence neutral.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of January 4, 2011, a Tunisian man named Mohamed Bouazizi began the day selling fruits and vegetables to provide for his widowed mother and six siblings. Later that morning, Tunisian authorities questioned him about his permit to sell merchandise within Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, but, as per the city's Office for Employment and Independent Work, no permit is needed to sell goods from a cart (Thorne, 2011). Because Bouazizi could not provide the required documentation or payment to alleviate his situation, he was asked to surrender the cart. Upon his refusal, Bouazizi was allegedly slapped by a policewoman. In an act of humiliation, desperation, and anger Bouazizi set himself on fire, in front of a government building, in protest. His behavior resonated with others, sparking demonstrations across Tunisia and eventually spreading throughout Northeast Africa, the Middle East, and Syria, the geographical focus of this thesis (Jansen, 2011).

This chapter provides a brief historical overview of Syrian immigration, discusses the rationale and theoretical framework, identifies research questions, and introduces the applied methodological approach. The purpose of this quantitative content analysis is to understand how Syrian migrants have been framed by selected U.S. television news outlets, Fox News and MSNBC.

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Background of Syrian Refugee Crisis

A series of uprisings, disputes, and demonstrations, eventually dubbed the Arab Spring, initiated a chain of events that challenged the stability of many systems of authority, including the government of Syria. In March 2011, four individuals were killed by Syrian forces after protesting the arrest of 15 school children, who had written rebellious graffiti on a public wall. These students were purportedly tortured for their actions, increasing anti-government sentiments in Syria (Daoud, 2011).

The first major Syrian protest included substantial anti-government opposition against the Ba'athist authority of Bashar al-Assad, the current president of the Syrian Arab Republic. Assad's refusal to step down brought about military and police violence, resulting in mass casualties. Further unrest continued to engulf the nation after Assad's attempts to quiet the rebellion, aiding in the development of the Free Syrian Army. These actions shifted the dissension from a civil demonstration to a civil war (Sinjab, 2013).

By 2012, the outbreak of war and the formation of newly founded terrorist cells forced Syrians to flee their homes. Divisions between Islamic fighters, ethnic groups, and foreign powers continue to impact this war-ravaged nation. As stated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over 11 million Syrians have been displaced. The breakdown is as follows: 6.6 million have fled their homes, along with another 4.8 million leaving Syria altogether (Italianer, 2016).

The migration of Syrians has developed into an international mass exodus into safer countries, particularly Turkey, Germany, and Greece. Although millions of Syrians

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have been relocated, a multitude of others, a large number from Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Eritrea have requested entry into Europe and other western nations (Farah, 2016). The reports surrounding this mass migration were heavily circulated by American press after a photo of a dazed 5-year old boy sitting in the back of an ambulance was released. According to Cumming (2016), "the image of Omran Daqneesh, whose bloodied and dust-caked face was captured on camera, is a reminder of the ceaseless civil war in Syria and the toll it has taken on the country's children" (para. 2).

The photographer who captured the video and subsequent screenshot was identified by the Associated Press as Mahmoud Raslan who claimed Omran was rescued from a damaged building with his parents and three siblings. Within 24 hours of its publication, the video had nearly 350,000 views and had been shared thousands of times on social media (Bond, 2016). Since then, the video has been viewed 3.4 million times, shocking the world and triggering further international media attention (Katz, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses framing theory to analyze how Syrian migrants were represented, within U.S. television news media, before and after the photo of the Aleppo toddler went viral. In the United States, media are tasked with effectively and honestly reporting news from around the world. In contrast, Wilkins (2015) states, "the media constructs the news within the boundaries of a particular viewpoint (frame)," which may cause the perception

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of a news report to change depending on the source (p. 62). Therefore, U.S. media outlets can influence how the public interprets different issues.

Framing can be characterized as a theory that emphasizes how media agents highlight some aspects of a situation or individual and downplay others. In order to understand how events are framed, Iyengar (1994) purported thematic and episodic framing. According to Benjamin (2007), "thematic frames are those that apply a wide-angle lens to the coverage of an issue – focusing on trends over time and highlighting contexts and environments" (para. 1). This type of analysis is more likely to include social and political factors, whereas episodic framing concentrates on individual case studies and discrete events. This thesis applies Iyengar's techniques to understand how U.S. television media conveyed the events of Syrian immigration to the American public.

The thesis uses valence framing effect to determine if a news report's rhetoric was either appealing (positive) or unappealing (negative). Initial research by Bizer, Larsen, and Petty (2010), states, "framing a person's attitude negatively can lead to more resistance to an attack on that attitude, than does framing the same attitude positively" (p. 59). Thus, negatively conceptualized attitudes are more resistant to later persuasion. This thesis uses this concept to determine the level of appeal presented within the television news reports examined.

The practical application of this study includes a clearer understanding of how information should be presented to the public. Reporters can change the frame of stories, resulting in media bias. According to Sexton (2015), "most implicit racial biases are consequences of subtle messages seen in the media or popular culture, suggesting that

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one group is good and another is bad" (para. 1). This thesis distinguishes what framing techniques occur and how they affect the representation of immigrants in U.S. television media, which is important information for both news organizations and the public to recognize.

Method

Accordingly, this quantitative content analysis seeks to examine how United States television news media reported and framed Syrian migrants during two separate one-week periods, immediately before and after the photo of Omran Daqneesh went viral. Two television news organizations, Fox News and MSNBC, are used to investigate this proposal along with an analysis of responses to the images of Daqneesh. Complete transcripts, obtained from the LexisNexis database, are used for this thesis. Also, the considerable amount of airtime devoted to the coverage and evaluation of foreign-national entry and the absence of previous research adds to the appropriateness of this study.

Contemporary assessments indicate that beginning in 1996, Fox News maintains a conservative-leaning. For example, "during the late stages of the 2012 presidential campaign, Barack Obama received far more negative coverage than positive, on Fox News" (Holcomb, 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, "60% of Fox News viewers describe themselves as conservative, compared with 23% who say they are moderate, and 10% who claim to be liberal" (Holcomb, 2014, p. 1). According to Baragona (2016), Fox

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News has a viewership of over 3.8 million Americans, while MSNBC maintained over 1.6 million viewers.

Although audience membership does not determine how ideologically skewed an organization is, it may allude to the political leaning of the source. More specifically, past studies have discovered that Fox News covers topics in a way that speak to more conservative viewpoints, on issues ranging from the Iraq War to climate change (Aday, Livingston, & Herbert, 2005). For example, Fox News frames the issue of climate change in a way that emphasizes their scientific uncertainty, aligning more with conservative perspectives (Krosnick & MacInnis, 2010).

In contrast, MSNBC coverage could be regarded as left-leaning, according to Holcomb (2014):

In the final stretch of the 2012 campaign, 46% of Obama's coverage on Fox was negative, just 6% was positive, with the other 52% as simply factual or unbiased. But, MSNBC produced an even harsher narrative about the Republican nominee, Mitt Romney: 71% of Romney's coverage was negative, versus 3% positive. (p. 1)

Because of the recorded opposing political leanings, Fox News and MSNBC are appropriate representatives for this comparison of left and right wing media coverage of the Syrian immigration crisis.

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Research Questions

Various studies have examined the presence of media framing, but few researchers have assessed the existence of biased reporting in relation to Syrian immigrants (Eveland & Dhavan, 2003). According to Eveland and Dhavan (2003), news organizations are mindful of differences in the interpretation of their language, thus seeking to cater to their target audiences (p. 115). Therefore, the following hypotheses and research question is proposed:

H₁: Television news coverage of Syrian immigrants will be more episodic following the photo of Omran Daqneesh, than they were before the photo's publication.

H₂: MSNBC will frame immigration stories using an episodic frame more than Fox News.

H₃: MSNBC will report more positive coverage of Syrian immigration into the United States than Fox News.

H₄: The frequency in number of reports about Syrian immigrants will increase following the release of the photo of Omran Daqneesh.

RQ₁: Will the overall coverage from both networks be more positively or negatively valenced toward Syrian immigrants?

Summary

Chapter 1 provided a brief overview of the historical background of the Syrian refugee crises, delivered a rationale for the study, a concise synopsis of framing theory

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and the methodological approach, identified hypotheses, and posed a research question. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature regarding Syrian immigration, U.S. television media, and a comprehensive review of framing theory. Chapter 3 outlines the method, while Chapter 4 discusses the research data. Lastly, Chapter 5 reviews the implications of the research and its limitations.

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CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the international refugee crisis is outlined in detail, along with the effects of discord across the Middle East. The relationship between the photo/video of Omran Daqneesh and the Arab Spring will be reviewed, along with a reflection on the photo's impact on the Western world. Next, the chapter will present various aspects of U.S. immigration policy and the portrayals of immigrants in American television news media. Lastly, framing theory is thoroughly covered, along with an analysis of the specific aspects of the concept, such as valence effects, human-interest frames, and lens types.

Beginning with European settlers, the conversation on U.S. immigration policy has continued to evolve. Recent global unrest and conflicts have compelled millions to flee their home countries, flooding into Europe, while others desperately apply for U.S. refugee status. Globally, the United Nations estimates some 65.3 million people have been displaced (Wildman, 2016). Triggered by the Arab Spring, the migration crisis is a result of civil war, producing over 6 million Syrian refugees. According to a Pew Research Center analysis that originated from the U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center, "a total of 38,901 Middle Eastern individuals were awarded refugee status in the United States during fiscal year 2016, making up almost half (46%) of the nearly 85,000 total refugees who entered the country within that same time frame"

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(Connor, 2016, para. 2). Furthermore, Syria (12,486) and Somalia (9,012) were the source of more than half of fiscal 2016 Middle Eastern U.S. refugees (Connor, 2016).

According to the Associated Press, Mahmoud Raslan captured the video of the aforementioned toddler on August 17, 2016. The photo/video was originally shared across several social media platforms by a group of antigovernment activists and citizen journalists, known as the Aleppo Media Center (Katz, 2016). Later, the boy was identified by medical workers as Omran Daqneesh, age 5. He was pulled from a damaged building after a military airstrike in the northern city of Aleppo, along with his parents and three siblings.

Omran's 10-year-old brother, Ali, died from his injuries, while the rest of his family was discharged after receiving medical treatment. Following the video's initial release, the image of Omran was broadcast and published around the globe, sparking worldwide outrage, discussion, and concern (Allen, 2015). The photo below illustrates many grave characteristics of the conflict, including its impact on immigration, foreign policy, national security, and millions of innocent lives.

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Figure 1. Omran Daqneesh, after sustaining injuries during an airstrike in Aleppo, Syria (Raslan, 2016).

This image secured the attention of Western media, garnering comments such as, "the picture of a wounded Syrian boy depicts just a fragment of the horrors of Aleppo," (Larimer & Bever, 2016, p. 1). The *International Business Times* stated, "this heartbreaking photo of a little boy, dragged from Aleppo rubble, shows the suffering of Syrian children" (Larimer & Bever, 2016, para. 7). According to Baldacchino and Sammut (2015), figures and images of anonymous arrivals (i.e., immigrants) tend to foster fear and panic, while images of affected children, stir feelings of humanitarian support and compassion, which is central to this thesis' rationale.

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Immigration in the United States

Preceding studies generally address four main immigration questions, including whether the United States should allow immigration at all, how many individuals should be permitted to come into the country, what kind of immigrants should be accepted, and from where (Williamson, 2016). Most research emphasizes these points, relative to Mexican and South American arrivals, versus those from other global locales (Grimm & Andsager, 1999). Since the United States shares a border with Mexico, it is understandable that more information is available regarding these locations.

O'Brien (2009) postulates that, "the words we use are evidence of how we think, which, in turn, ultimately determine what we do" (p. 32). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the relationship between the term immigrant and the narrative that the word carries. According to Nunez (2013), the expression "immigrant" is many times used synonymously with "alien," "refugee," "asylum seeker," and "citizen." Because each of these terms implies exceptionally different connotations, each can move a discussion from a positive tone to a negative one. For example, Cunningham-Parmeter (2011) studied immigration-related U.S. Supreme Court cases and the metaphors used to describe immigrants, concluding that the Court's figurative messages were, "immigrants are aliens, immigration is a flood, and immigration is an invasion" (p. 1545). Additionally, the study purports that confusing such important terms with other meanings has extreme social and legal consequences (Curmingham-Parmeter, 2011).

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In regard to terminology, Fernandez et al. (2013), acknowledges the media's confusion in their coverage of the word "immigration" and argues that this misunderstanding leads to negative perceptions and higher abstractions, which are both characteristics associated with prejudice. Feelings of social and political alienation, along with isolationist sentiments, divide the immigration conversation into a national argument, rather than an international discussion (Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996). Again, by restricting this issue to one that occurs only within specific regions or countries, many immigrants are framed as invaders of a national space, or "enemies at the gate" (Curmingham-Parmeter, 2011). These descriptions of immigrants foster forms of racism and construct a wide-ranging dehumanization of immigrants. Esses and Lawson (2013) reiterate this claim, finding that media portrayals include depictions that suggest immigrants spread infectious diseases, that refugee applications are often bogus, and that terrorists may enter Western nations disguised as refugees. Furthermore, Klocker and Dunn (2003), analyzed media representations of asylum-seekers between August 2001 and January 2002, finding that 90% of the descriptive terms used by the federal government were negative, while expressions such as "illegitimate," "illegal," and "threatening" became common throughout the rhetoric of news anchors and interviewees.

Cisneros (2008) and Schemer (2012) both detail how newspaper, magazine, and television reports portray immigrants in the United States. For example, Cisneros (2008) "examined magazine covers from major publications, such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, focusing on cover images and titles, to identify the metaphor of immigrants as invaders, as the driving articulation of immigration in popular discourse" (p. 572). Dixon (2000)

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and Entman (2000) found negative portrayals of minorities in news reporting that consequently affected an audience's stereotypic attitudes. Fayyaz and Shirazi (2013) also found that American media "reflected and reproduced certain xenophobic stereotypes of non-Western foreign subjects" (p. 53). These examples allude to an intrinsic bias within the U.S. press system.

As stated above, Cunningham-Parameter's (2011) conclusion that "immigrants are aliens, immigration is a flood, and immigration is an invasion" indicates that a person who originates from another country or culture may be considered "other," positioning the migrant as a threat to the majority. The concept of "the other" was first outlined by Edward Said (1979) with an analysis of European control in the Middle East. According to Hjern and Nagayoshi (1999), "the larger the minority, the more threatened the majority feels and, therefore, the more averse the majority becomes. Moreover, the majority becomes averse since it perceives the minority as a threat to its dominant position" (p. 815).

Similarly, because 78% of American adults identify with some form of Christianity, immigrants from Muslim-majority regions may be characterized as threatening because of their religious affiliation. Again, this correlates to the majority's aversion to the growth of a minority (Newport, 2011). This reaction "fosters feelings, in the form of Islamaphobia or aggression towards Muslims, isolating and alienating one of the fastest growing religious segments of the American population" (Ali, 2012, p. 1027).

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Media Structures

The United States judicial system defined the "press" as, "every sort of publication which affords a vehicle of information and opinion" (*Alma Lovell v. City of Griffin*, 1938). The First Amendment prohibits any infringement on the autonomies of the media or publishers. In addition, these permissions directly correlate to freedoms of speech, which are also granted in the First Amendment, allowing media entities to publish information without any fear of government censorship or interference.

These American characteristics of freedom are shared with other Western societies, creating a common value among Western cultures. According to Bell (2000), liberal democratic principles and institutions, which incorporate freedoms of the press, command almost universal commonality in the West. In contrast, Eastern media organizations do not experience substantial democratic or government protections. These differences have "created a struggle between the Jihad and the McWorld, which have led to negative psychological perceptions of the East and its people" (Gregg, 2005, p. 3). With the existence of such sensitivities it is possible that a reporter could hold an inner bias against individuals from Eastern cultures, resulting in subjective coverage. According to Sexton (2015), "most implicit racial biases are consequences of subtle messages seen in media or popular culture, suggesting that one group is good and another is bad" (p. 1). This partiality can result in an unconscious distortion of reality.

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Media and Beliefs

Beginning in the 1940s, individual television stations made their way into America's largest cities (Baughman, 2009). Today, there are more than 184 million U.S. homes with television sets (Nielsen, 2016). In addition, the percentage of American homes with televisions receiving traditional TV signals via broadcast, cable, CBS, Telco, or broadband Internet signals is currently 96% (Nielsen, 2016). Therefore, television is a prominent medium for news consumption within the United States.

Prior (2013) contends that media conglomerates change their rhetoric or political leaning based on the potential for attracting larger audiences. This creates a push-pull relationship between media and their audience. Thus, consumers gravitate towards likeminded thinkers. According to Ruggiero (2000), when individuals utilize a news source, like television, they are most likely going to consume views that reinforce their own pre-established belief system. For instance, reputable statistics and past studies (e.g., DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007) show that Fox News covers topics in a way that speak to more conservative viewpoints, on issues ranging from the Iraq War to climate change (Aday, Livingston, & Herbert, 2005). For example, Fox News describes issues of climate change in ways that emphasize their scientific uncertainty, aligning more with conservative perspectives, while MSNBC promotes opposite viewpoints on the topic (Krosnick & MacInnis, 2010). Therefore, this divide distinguishes stark contrasts between differing political philosophies.

According to Anand (2017), "U.S. media has come under intense scrutiny, with analysts, politicians, and even journalists accusing it of bias and sensationalism" (p. 2).

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This intentional slant of coverage has tainted the reputation of American media, which was exemplified throughout the 2016 presidential election. For example, Gentzkow (2006) asserts that, "news organizations slant reporting toward the beliefs of their customers, in order to build a reputation for quality" (p. 281). Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng (2006) found that Americans prefer to consume information that concur with the opinions they already hold. These scholars identified that viewers who consume news that counter their beliefs often balance that information with material that supports their previous opinion, while never considering other viewpoints. Although the criticism is valid, news media does supply the public with information, in the hopes audiences and individuals are able to consume and process information, according to their personal needs.

Framing

The mass communication theory of framing is "a process through which media emphasize aspects of reality and downplay others" (Miller, 2005, p. 275). Originating from a study titled, *Framing Analysis*, Erving Goffman (1974) described the concept as a way in which we interpret our world, using a primary framework. Framing theory has continued to evolve, leading to how we understand it today. Davie (2017) states, "it occurs when the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning" (para. 1). Subsequently, framing theory progressed into other academic disciplines including political communication, psychology, speech communication,

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organizational decision-making, economics, health communication, and media studies (Rendahl, 1995).

Primarily due to McCombs and Shaw's (1972) introduction of agenda-setting, framing theory expanded into media and mass communication studies. McCombs and Shaw reviewed the 1968 presidential election and found that the public perceived certain topics as more important when the news media allotted more time and attention to certain issues. As a result, they concluded that the topics the public views as critical are more commonly promoted by media sources (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Framing is an additional level of agenda-setting. To create a news report, "journalists decide which facts to include or emphasize, whom to use as sources, and what is really 'at issue'" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 37). In effect, these choices create a frame that supports the story, define what belongs in the report, and signal what consumers should perceive as important (Tiegreen & Newman, 2008). Therefore, news outlets can determine what issues are selected for consumer consumption and what reports are worth highlighting or ignoring. These actions produce news coverage that may alter the way coverage appeals to an audience. Thus, agenda setting affects what a consumer views as significant, while framing theory describes how the story is assembled.

Entman (1993) proposed that the words *framing*, *framework*, and *frame* are not lexes used only within scholarly works, but terms used in common communication that include a variety of meanings. Entman attempted to establish a precise understanding of

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framing theory. He proposed four ways in which to describe framing within the media, using *selection* and *salience*, by:

defining problems - determining what a causal agent is doing, with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnosing causes* - identifying the forces creating the problem; *making moral judgments* - evaluating causal agents and their effects; and *suggesting remedies* - offering and justifying treatments for problems, while predicting their likely effects. (Entman, 1993, p. 52)

To emphasize the theory's flexibility, Entman (1993) closed by stating, "not every frame contains these characteristics and many may perform more than one function, while some may perform none" (p. 52). Although Entman leaves the theory open to further interpretation, he produced a framework from which scholars describe how framing operates within the context of media studies.

Further analyses have led to other understandings of media framing. Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991) describe it as, "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (p. 3). McCombs (1997) advocated that, "framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media's agenda when a particular object is discussed" (p. 32). While both definitions imply that frames are intentionally exploited, both articles discuss the impact on the viewer. Baumgartner and Jones (2009) state "frames are a tool that actors within coalitions, as well as decision makers, can strategically employ to sway

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policy and influence outcomes" (p. 447). This indicates a tremendous influence on viewers who are managed by media agents. From McCombs' (1997) statement, media decides content that is presented to viewers (i.e., thematic qualities). Thus, media can set the frame, directing the audience in what and how to think, and affecting their overall interpretation of a news report (Crow & Lawlor, 2016).

Again, framing is a concept that incorporates numerous facets of study. The reach of current literature has facilitated its expansion into the analysis and effects of media content. DeVreese (2005) introduced two main approaches to framing: frame-building and frame-setting. Frame-building refers to "the factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames" (DeVreese, 2005, p. 51). Also, frame-building includes internal factors (i.e., occupational constraints, such as editorial policies and news values) and external factors (i.e., interactions between journalists and elites) (DeVreese, 2005). Frame-setting refers to "the interaction between media frames and an individuals' prior knowledge and dispositions" (p. 52). This characteristic presents the audience with the journalist's individual interpretation of a situation or issue (Bruggemann, 2014). Frame-setting exhibits how an individual or societal position is accepted by the content presented.

Thematic and episodic frames. As stated, Iyengar's (1994) study introduced two additional rhetorical devices, episodic and thematic framing. Episodic framing presents a subject by exhibiting a specific example, case study, or event-oriented report (Gross, 2008). For example, a news story that covers immigration policy, by presenting an account of the difficulties experienced by an immigrant uses an episodic frame. Thus,

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episodic frames tend to be more emotionally appealing, compelling viewers to become ardently involved in the story. According to Gross (2008), "partisans frequently highlight an individual's story, illustrative of a broader problem, as a compelling way to make their case to an audience" (p. 171).

Thematic framing "presents collective or general evidence, focusing on trends over time, while highlighting general support" (London, 1993, para. 7). For example, a report that covers childhood obesity by displaying improvements in fitness and health, over a 6-year period, is thematically framed. Therefore, thematic frames are inclined to focus on systematic issues, which lack the emotional component inherent of episodic frames (Benjamin, 2007).

Various studies suggest that news reports can reject the dichotomy of thematic and episodic framing. Wouters (2015) affirms that news stories deal with news content, not the effects of exposure. Hence, humans do not need to be assigned to characteristics, such as thematic or episodic. Aversely, Iyengar (1994) purports that reporting must contain a principal frame with most commentary falling under the category of episodic. This major distinction is fundamental because this contrast determines if viewers deem the solution through individual-level (i.e., episodic) or broader systemic-level resolutions (i.e., thematic). Lastly, emotional interest or narrative strength plays a significant role in determining the power of the frame. Hart (2010) studied frame strength within the context of climate change, finding that the emotional strength of the viewer determined the power of the frame. As stated, a conclusion can be made in saying that when there is

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little emotional appeal, thematic frames are more effective, while the reverse is true when expending an episodic topic (Gross, 2008).

According to Benjamin (2007), “episodic frames reduce life to a series of disconnected episodes, random events, or case studies, while thematic frames identify shortcomings at the community or systems level” (para. 4). Thus, the audience will attribute a solution based on the recognized frame. For example, episodic frames will include how to fix the *individual* experiencing the problem, while a thematic frame highlights how to fix the *conditions* that created the problem. This pattern is reinforced by Zhang, Yan, Stewart and Porter (2016) in a study that scrutinized problem-solving responsibilities at both the individual (i.e., episodic) and societal (i.e., thematic) levels.

The authors state:

If individuals are primarily responsible for causing problems, solutions should be sought at the individual level, such as changing risk behaviors and seeking help.

If problems are also attributable to systemic flaws, then the society at large should share responsibilities by providing societal remedies, such as policy and regulatory intervention and community support. (p. 188)

Accordingly, societal responsibility based frames emphasize political, social, and economic solutions, while individual responsibility based frames focus on specific cases.

A wide range of topics are able to be explored through thematic and episodic conceptions. For example, Chong and Druckman (2007) discuss how frames affect public opinion, regarding topics such as democratic values, liberalism vs. conservatism, free speech, and public safety. Additionally, more undefined topics, such as how sexual

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identity is framed within the law, are able to be assessed through these techniques (Appleman, 2011).

Human-interest frame. Scholars have established many theoretical and operational definitions for the term framing. According to Matthes (2009), there are two basic genres of classification: general and specific. "General definitions describe the term frame without clear guidelines for operationalization" (p. 350). Gitlin (1980) describes general frames as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little inferred theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 143). While these definitions are useful, they do not operationally define the concept of framing, like specific or emergent genres. Specific frames are usually used explicitly for a particular study and are fixed throughout the research, which limit their ability to be applied to different topics (Gitlin, 1980). While general frames may be less defined, they are able to be employed in different study types.

The human interest frame is "classified as general and brings an individual's story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem" (Valkenburg, Semetko, & DaVreese, 1999, p. 220). In this thesis, human interest framing will be used based on its current application to political, immigration, and refugee issues. Steimel (2009) defines this frame's function as "placing the emphasis on the personal and emotional side of an event, issue, or problem. In a human interest context, the news is typically presented in a narrative format that focuses on how issues affect particular people" (p. 225). By definition, human interest frames should be reflected upon when studying social and political topics, such as immigration policy.

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Human-interest frame and new media. Compared to the last decade, Americans are spending more time-consuming news (Doherty, 2015). Digital and social media platforms play progressively larger roles in news consumption and are reversing viewership declines of traditional platforms, such as radio and television (Doherty, 2015). According to Baker (2015), digital and social networking has increased 90% over the last two years, allowing consumers to access content without television or radio. This development has created a highly competitive news market, in which the human-interest frame is commonly employed to attract viewers, since it attempts to emotionalize reporting (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2006).

Because human-interest frames incorporate individual stories, they would be considered episodic in nature (Iyengar, 1994). For example, Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud (2015) state, "human-interest framing potentially raises public awareness of the difficulties faced by marginalized individuals (i.e., immigrants) whose status and experiences stand in contrast to those of most citizens" (p. 785). Others, such as Semetko and Valkenburg (2006) identified the human-interest frame in European television reporting, concerning the 1997 Amsterdam meetings of European heads of state and the coverage's episodic scope. These scholars found that Holland's television news content was just as episodic as in the United States.

Frame valence. Framing theory includes several classifications and characteristics, including valence. Levin (1987) defines valence as, "where an attribute, object, or event is framed either positively or negatively" (p. 85). According to Issac and Poor (2016), the valence of frames exert influence on judgment and decision-making in

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the news market. For example, positive framing “generates more positive associations and thus seems more attractive, than negatively framed options” (Krishnamurthy, Carter, & Blair, 2001, p. 382). This thesis will examine the valence of the frames used in television news coverage.

Valence has wide ranging effects on framing and viewer perceptions, resulting in several studies that scrutinize its function. For example, Bos, Lecheler, Mewafi, and Vliegenthart (2016) analyzed immigrant integration and media framing effects in the Netherlands. They found that attitudes towards immigrants and intercultural behavioral intentions are affected by the frame of the story; the multicultural frame exerts positive effects, and the victimization frame exerts negative effects. Others, such as Schuck and de Vreese (2006), studied news framing and its effects on public support for EU enlargement, finding that participants in the opportunity frame condition (i.e., positive) showed significantly higher levels of support compared to participants in the risk condition (i.e., negative).

Political inclination. Political ideology will serve as a key characteristic of this thesis due to the right and left leanings of the examined news outlets. Also, recognizing what constitutes “negative” or “positive” rhetoric was an imperative step in establishing the validity of the findings. The operational definitions of these positions are displayed in Table 1, which indicate the explanations of negative (i.e., conservative) and positive (i.e., liberal) coverage, regarding the possible entry of Syrian immigrants into the United States.

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Table 1

Explanations of Negative and Positive Positions on U.S. Refugee Entry

<i>Conservative</i>	
Problems (Costs)	Refugees may pose as terrorists; would make it difficult to distinguish between terrorists and refugees
Causes	Civil war and terrorist activity (ISIS/ISIL/IS/al-Qaeda)
Solutions	Christian refugees to receive different treatment than Muslim refugees; halt the arrival of any refugees from countries with a strong presence of ISIS or al-Qaeda
Overall Leaning	Negative – a worsening of an individual's state, within the United States
<i>Liberal</i>	
Problems (Costs)	Refugees may pose as terrorists
Causes	Civil War; U.S. involvement in the Middle East creates a Middle Eastern hatred of the Western world, which allows for increased terrorist recruitment
Solutions	Reduction of U.S. involvement in the Middle East; foreign policy reforms; accept refugees
Overall Leaning	Positive – an improvement of an individual's state, within the United States

**Table 1 indicates the definitions of conservative and liberal positions on the issue of immigration into Western countries, specifically the United States, within this thesis*

It is reasonable to assume that conservatives will take a negative stance based on voting records pertaining to the restriction of refugee resettlement and the official platform of the Republican National Committee (Haas, 2016). Adversely, the liberal

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stance will advocate for the entry of refugees (i.e., positive), established through congressional voting records on measures permitting refugee resettlement and the platform of the Democratic National Committee (Haas, 2016). In summary, a positive report is one that positively frames the state of the refugee, while a negative report is one that negatively frames the state of the refugee. Other studies, such as Garz (2014) and Baum (2005) have used similar methods to determine frame type.

Summary

Chapter 2 outlines a timeline of the international refugee crisis, along with its connection to the photo of Omran Daqneesh. It presents a thorough reflection on the studied photo/video's effect on Western media, while also including consumer perceptions of both the image and crisis. Next, it provides an overview of U.S. media and beliefs, while describing refugee portrayals in American news reporting. Framing theory is covered in generalities, then progresses into the specifics of thematic and episodic lenses, human interest frames, and valence effects.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

To address the objectives of this thesis, a content analysis will be conducted. The inquiries posed include:

H₁: Television news coverage of Syrian immigrants will be more episodic following the photo of Omran Daqneesh, than they were before the photo's publication.

H₂: MSNBC will frame immigration stories using an episodic frame more than Fox News.

H₃: MSNBC will report more positive coverage of Syrian immigration into the United States than Fox News.

H₄: The frequency in number of reports about Syrian immigrants will increase following the release of the photo of Omran Daqneesh.

RQ₁: Will the overall coverage from both networks be more positively or negatively valenced toward Syrian immigrants?

The assessment incorporates a study of 101 broadcast transcripts from two U.S. television news outlets, Fox News and MSNBC, airing between August 10, 2016 and August 24, 2016. Past literature utilizes broadcast transcripts within content analyses, establishing a foundation and rationale for this method of data collection (Freitag & Daniel, 2016).

Also, Riff, Lacy, and Fico (2005) contend that a time frame, such as the one above, is

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acceptable practice for a content analysis of this scope. Krippendorff (1980) described content analyses as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text to their context of use" (p. 10). Weber (1985) defines the technique as, "a research methodology that utilizes a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text" (p. 9). This thesis examines news stories that originated from television news broadcasts of politically diverse news outlets (conservative and liberal). Coding included the different dates the reports aired (before and after the photo of Omran Daqneesh went viral), the dominant frame type (thematic, episodic, or unclear), and the valence of the transcripts (positive, negative, or neutral).

Sample

For the purposes of this thesis, broadcast transcripts, regarding Syrian immigration, were analyzed. Fox News and MSNBC, two U.S.-based television news channels, were studied. These news sources were determined as appropriate representations of U.S. television news based on their national recognition, differing political leaning, and use in similar studies (McDowell, 2004). In addition, opposing political angles are represented by the two news organizations selected. Fox News was determined to slant conservatively (i.e., right) and MSNBC was determined to lean liberally (i.e., left). According to DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007), the viewership of Fox News is overwhelming more conservative than that of MSNBC, establishing a vital political differentiation.

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This thesis examined news reports before and after the photo/video of Omran Daqneesh was released and subsequently went viral on August 17, 2016. The transcripts included news stories beginning on August 10, 2016 (i.e., one week before the event) and ending August 24, 2016 (i.e., one week after the event). The study was able to assess how and if the reporting on Syrian migrants was affected by the attention garnered by the photograph /video of Omran Daqneesh (see Appendix B). Broadcast transcripts were collected through an advanced LexisNexis database search, using the terms immigrant, immigration, refugee, asylum seeker, Syria, and Syrian. The transcripts included news stories dated August 10, 2016 through August 16, 2016 and August 18, 2016 through August 24, 2016. If a transcript included these terms, but did not focus its narrative on the topic of Syrian immigration, it was excluded from the data set. Lastly, transcripts were not limited to a specific time restriction, such as primetime, but included all transcripts that matched the abovementioned criteria.

Coding Categories

The "highlights" section of each broadcast transcript was determined as the unit of analysis. Each transcript obtained from the LexisNexis database included an initial lead paragraph, that summarized each news story and was labeled "highlights." According to Ungerer (2000), lead paragraphs describe the essence of a complicated news report in limited text and fairly represent the reports entire content. Past studies have used leading paragraphs as units of analyses because of the techniques level of reliability (Bell, 1991). Althaus, Edy, and Phalen (2001) support this method and say that lead paragraphs act as

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an acceptable description of an entire news article. Although valence may change throughout the transcript, depending on the person speaking, the highlight section is an appropriate account of the article as a whole (Tuchman, 1972). In summary, this thesis determined the lead paragraph as the unit of analysis, but each broadcast transcript was coded in its entirety.

Transcripts describing Syrian immigrants as a threat to American ideals, problematic, or dangerous were coded as negative. An example of a negatively coded phrase is: "to protect American interests, we must suspend immigration from some of the most dangerous regions of the world that have a history of exporting terrorism, which is where many of these immigrants are coming from" (Guilfoyle, 2016, p. 44). Transcripts describing Syrian immigrants as welcome, accepted, and consistent with American history were coded as positive. An example of a positively coded phrase is: "we are a nation of immigrants and these individuals deserve the right to legally and rightfully enter this country" (Bash, 2016, p. 4). Lastly, if a transcript was neither positive nor negative it was coded as neutral. These types of stories presented neither positive nor negative views of Syrian immigrants.

Content from the two news organizations were coded using the following characteristics: television news outlet (Fox News or MSNBC); air date (August 10, 2016 through August 16, 2016; and August 18, 2016 through August 24, 2016); political skew (conservative or liberal); frame type (thematic, episodic, unclear) valence type (positive, negative, neutral). These variables were determined as appropriate categories based on

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past literature and the established intent of this thesis concerning the political skew, frame type, and valence of U.S. television news media coverage of Syrian immigrants.

Intercoder Reliability

Prior to actual coding, four trial rounds of transcript analysis training were conducted to ensure high rates of reliability and to reduce the opportunity for contaminated data. Data analysis was conducted by two coders, including the author and one additional individual. As the primary coder, the author discussed what coders should observe in each news story, while giving examples and definitions of how to code the variables. Before coding autonomously, both coders reviewed the coding scheme and discussed all concerns. Next, trial coding was conducted, using news stories outside of the official sample. After coding decisions were reviewed, coders moved into three supplementary rounds of training and pilot coding. As stated, the coded variables included frame type, valence, and political affiliation. Coders also noted the frame used as thematic, episodic, or unclear, along with a positive, negative, or neutral valence. Political leaning was classified as right, left, or neutral, which correlate to either conservative or liberal tendencies.

According to Lombard, Snyder-Dutch, and Bracken (2002), intercoder reliability is, "the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion" (p. 589). Thus, reliability was assessed by evaluating the level of agreement on the frame type used and the valence of each transcript. Published guidelines by Lombard et al. (2002) specify that a minimum of 10%

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overlap of commonly coded material is needed, while some tests suggest a necessary overlap of 5%-7% (Kaid & A.J. Wadsworth, 1989). Accordingly, material was coded to equal an overlap of 10%. Thus, 11 transcripts were randomly selected from the study's sample of 101.

As stated, coding procedures for generic framing were established by Iyengar's (1994) study, using either thematic or episodic terminology. Again, if a transcript could not be determined as either thematic or episodic, it was categorized as unclear.

Shanahan, Mcbeth, Hathaway, and Arnell (2008) claim that, "episodic frames involve concrete or specific instances that illustrate an issue, whereas thematic puts issues in a general or conceptual perspective to present evidence" (p. 119). For example, "the heartbreaking story of Omran Daqneesh" was coded as episodic (Green, 2016, p. 18).

"The horror generated by the image of Omran in the orange chair reiterates the anguished global response to this crisis" (Krauthammer, 2016, p. 2) was coded as thematic.

Intercoder reliability can be calculated several ways. Poppy (1988) identified over 39 different agreement indicators for coding nominal categories, such as Scott's pi (π), Fleiss' kappa (K), Krippendorff's alpha (α), and Holsti's formula. For the purposes of this thesis, Holsti's formula was used, which is represented by the formula: $CR = 2M/N1+N2$, where M represents the number of decisions coders agreed on and N equals the number of decisions made by each individual coder. Coders determined frame type (thematic, episodic, or unclear) and valence (positive, negative, or neutral). Overlapping coded material was examined, in which coders reached an agreement coefficient of .82 for frame type and an agreement coefficient of .91 for valence. Lastly, when describing

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coefficients using Holsti's formula, Neuendorf and Skalski (2002) state, “coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices” (p. 145). Thus, the level of coder agreement for this thesis is acceptable by the established reliability standards.

Summary

Chapter 3 presents each research question and hypothesis, while explaining the quantitative method used in this thesis. It exhibits a thorough outline of the method used (i.e., content analysis) and describes the data sample, which included broadcast transcripts from before the publication of the photo/video of Omran Daqneesh (i.e., August 10 to 16, 2016) and after the photo/video's circulation (i.e., August 18 to 24, 2016). Next, the chapter introduced coding categories used, unit of analysis (i.e., each transcript's highlight section), and details intercoder reliability assessments.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This thesis assesses the coverage about Syrian immigrants broadcast by two U.S. television news networks, Fox News and MSNBC. The goal of the thesis aims to analyze how news concerning Syrian migrants were reported between August 10, 2016 through August 16, 2016 and August 18, 2016 through August 24, 2016. These ranges were determined based on the circulation of the video/photo of Omran Daqneesh. Specifically, the study researched how differing political positions affected reporting on Syrian immigrants. Each transcript was coded for both independent and dependent variables. Independent variables included political leaning (i.e., conservative or liberal), air date (i.e., August 10 to 16, 2016 and August 18 to 24, 2016), and each television news organization (i.e., Fox News and MSNBC). Dependent variables included frame type (i.e., thematic, episodic, or unclear) and valence (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral). The results were gathered after conducting a quantitative content analysis. In this chapter, each research question and hypothesis are outlined and explained using corresponding data tables. By illustrating the results, the data tables supplement written findings.

In the study, chi-square testing techniques were used to test for significance, against the null hypothesis. According to Bentler, Bonett, and Douglas (1980), if a chi-square test yields a p-value smaller than .05, the results are considered statistically significant and the null hypothesis is rejected. If this occurs, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

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Coverage and Frame Type

Table 2 shows the results of H₁: Television news coverage of Syrian immigrants will be more episodic following the photo of Omran Daqneesh, than they were before the photo's publication. A chi-square test of independence was performed to analyze the relationship between the publication date of news transcripts (i.e., before or after) and the frame type (i.e., thematic, episodic, and unclear). In the table below, H₁ was supported. The use of an episodic frame increased significantly after the event (N = 31; 54.4%) compared to before (N = 8; 18.2%). The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, 101) = 14.49, p < .05$. As predicted, Fox News and MSNBC coverage of Syrian immigrants did become more episodic following the release of the photo/video of Omran Daqneesh.

Table 2

Date of Transcript Publication and Frame Type

Date	Thematic	Episodic	Neutral
Before Photo	21 (47.7%)	8 (18.2%)	15 (34.1%)
After Photo	18 (31.6%)	31 (54.4%)	8 (14%)
Totals (N=101)	39 (38.6%)	39 (38.6%)	23 (22.7%)

Note: N = 101; $\chi^2 = 14.49$; df = 2; p < .05

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Political Leaning and Frame Type

Table 3 illustrates the results of H₂: MSNBC will frame immigration stories using an episodic frame more than Fox News. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to analyze the relationship between the political leaning of the source (i.e., Fox News and MSNBC) and the frame type (i.e., thematic, episodic, and unclear). H₂ was not supported. Thus, MSNBC (N = 17; 45.9%) more commonly used an episodic frame, but the difference between the sources was not statistically significant. Also, the relationship between the variables was not significant, $\chi^2(2, 101) = 3.31, p = .191$.

Table 3

Political Leaning and Frame Type

Political Leaning	Thematic	Episodic	Unclear
Right	29 (45.3%)	22 (34.4%)	13 (20.3%)
Left	10 (27%)	17 (45.9%)	10 (27%)
Totals (N=101)	39 (38.6%)	39 (38.6%)	23 (22.3%)

Note: N = 101; $\chi^2 = 3.31$; df = 2; p = .191

Political Leaning and Valence

Table 4 illustrates the results of H₃: MSNBC will report more positive coverage about Syrian immigration into the United States than Fox News. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to analyze the relationship between political leaning (i.e., right and left) and valence of broadcast transcripts (i.e., positive, negative, and neutral).

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H₃ was supported. Thus, the results show that the relationship between these variables is statistically significant, $\chi^2 (2, 101) = 28.27, p < .05$. Left leaning television news sources did report more positive coverage of Syrian immigrants (N = 23; 62.2%) than right leaning television news sources did (N = 11; 17.2%).

Table 4

Valence and Political Leaning

Political Leaning	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Right	11 (17.2%)	24 (37.5%)	29 (45.3%)
Left	23 (62.2%)	0 (0%)	14 (37.8%)
Totals (N=101)	34 (33.7%)	24 (24%)	43 (42.6%)

Note: N = 101; $\chi^2 = 38.27$; df = 2; p < .05

Frequency and Date of Publication

Table 5 illustrates the results of H₄: The frequency in number of reports about Syrian immigrants will increase following the release of the photo of Omran Daqneesh. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to evaluate the number of television news stories published between August 10, 2016-August 16, 2016 and August 18, 2016-August 24, 2016 on the topic of Syrian immigration. H₄ was not supported. Thus, the results concluded that the difference in these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (2, 101) = 1.264, p = .261$. Although there was a slight increase in the number of transcripts that

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discussed Syrian refugees after the photo's release, the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 5

Frequency and Date of Publication

Frequency of Articles	Before	After
Fox News	31 (47.7%)	34 (52.3%)
MSNBC	13 (36.1%)	23 (63.9%)
Totals (N=101)	44 (43.6%)	57 (56.4%)

Note: N = 101; $\chi^2 = 1.264$; df = 2; p = .261

Overall Valence

Table 6 illustrates the results RQ₁: Will the overall coverage from both networks be more positively or negatively valenced toward Syrian immigrants? A chi-square test of independence was conducted to analyze the valence of each news source. Results show that the relationship between the variables is significant, $\chi^2 (2, 101) = 36.46$, $p < .05$. The overall coverage of Syrian immigrants was more positive (N = 34; 33.7%) than negative (N = 24; 23.8%). However, neither positive nor negative frames were found in a large number of the coded transcripts, where N = 43, equaling 42.6% of the total number of television news stories.

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Table 6

Overall Valence

Valence	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Fox News	9 (13.8%)	24 (36.9%)	32 (49.2%)
MSNBC	25 (69.4%)	0 (0%)	11 (30.6%)
Totals (N=101)	34 (33.7%)	0 (0%)	43 (42.6%)

Note: N = 101; $\chi^2 = 36.46$; df = 2; p < .05

Summary

Chapter 4 offers the results of the coded and analyzed data. Five chi-square tests of independence analyzed four hypotheses and one research question. Each attempted to identify the statistical significance between the variables, either rejecting or accepting the null hypotheses. The results exhibited statistical significance between the variables in H₁, H₃, and RQ₁. Significance between variables in H₂ and H₄ was not found.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This thesis studied how Fox News and MSNBC, two U.S. television news organizations, reported on Syrian immigrants between August 10, 2016 to August 16, 2016 and August 18, 2016 to August 24, 2016. These time frames represent the weeks before and after the publication of the notorious photo/video of Omran Daqneesh. Collected broadcast transcripts were analyzed regarding the style and political inclination of Fox News and MSNBC, frame type (i.e., thematic, episodic, or unclear), and textual valence (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral). This content analysis highlighted the immense interest surrounding the Syrian civil war and the ensuing immigration crisis. The included quantitative assessments encompassed 101 broadcast transcripts, totaling over 1,200 pages of news content. Both Fox News and MSNBC were appropriate organizations for the study and provided the necessary contrasts needed for comparison. The two sources were comparatively examined, while being scrutinized based on differences in political affiliations and framing techniques. Finally, the testing of each hypothesis and research question produced and revealed important subjects for future discussion and scholarship.

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Frame Type

Past literature extensively covers the subjects of episodic and thematic framing. These topics are commonly assessed in content analyses in numerous areas of study, ranging from psychology and economics to communication studies. In this thesis, the research questions asked measured how thematic and episodic frames were used between August 10, 2016 and August 24, 2016.

As hypothesized, episodic frames were more commonly applied after the image's publication. Although Daqneesh's story is one of thousands of similar tragedies, his stunning reaction, expression, and experience was able to represent millions of affected lives, resonate in the hearts of Western citizens, and others around the world. While the incident was not directly personal to the millions who connected with it, the majority of the studied transcripts reported on the story from a human interest perspective. For example:

The haunting image of a little boy harmed by an airstrike in Aleppo is a reminder of the horrors overseas. He's five years old, he's Omran Daqneesh, and was rescued from the rubble of a destroyed building, covered with dust, blood drying on his face, his left eye swollen shut, and he's in a state of severe shock. They are calling this the image that shocked the world. (Bolling, 2016, p. 309)

This quote demonstrates the dominant theme and frame of the majority of transcripts reviewed, preceding the event. According to Gross (2008) media organizations recognize the power of emotional appeals and their connection to the audience. Thus, this result is in agreement with other scholars in other fields of study.

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Overall frame type was tested, concerning the political leaning of Fox News and MSNBC. Regarding this emotionally charged topic, the results indicated that both news organizations reported more episodically, versus thematically. However, while MSNBC did slightly use episodic framing more often, the increase did not significantly differ from the use of episodic framing by Fox News.

Valence

As hypothesized, when compared to the coverage aired on Fox News, the liberal-leaning news organization MSNBC did report more positively about Syrian immigration to the United States. Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) suggest that liberals tend to favor out-groups (i.e., Syrian refugees) whereas conservatives tend to justify their prejudicial positions. In the findings of this thesis, this statement holds true. Testing showed that the liberal-leaning source favored Syrian immigration to the United States (i.e., supporting the out-group), while the conservative source was not as acquiescent to the same immigration policy.

Although the results indicate that liberal-leaning sources reported more positively about Syrian immigrants, this does not mean that right-leaning sources reported about Syrian migrants negatively. Further testing showed that overall news coverage was more positive than negative; however, neither positive nor negative valences were found in large quantities concerning Fox News. Many transcripts were judged to be neutral.

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Publication Date and Frequency

A final hypothesis predicted that the number of news broadcasts, directly covering Syrian immigration, would increase following the photo/video's publication. Results revealed that there was a slight increase, but the measure was not statistically significant. Hence, the hypothesis was not statistically supported.

Scholarship Contribution

The results of this thesis identify differing political opinions (i.e., conservative or liberal) that surround this contentious issue of immigration. The results emphasize the need for the populace to understand how reporters frame issues to their own political affinities, consequently affecting the individual opinions of the general public.

News media should attempt to report factual information so that viewers can develop their own unbiased opinion. This study suggests that Fox News and MSNBC inject political associations into their rhetoric, which alludes to a necessary reevaluation of objective U.S. news reporting. Overall, this thesis was successful in answering important questions regarding framing and subjective reporting, while enhancing the case for further studies of the U.S. press and news media.

Limitations

According to Bigalow and Poremba (2014), viewers consider and adopt the first opinion they hear. This thesis does not identify or discuss whether broadcast transcripts begin with positive coverage of immigrants and end with negative. Nor is the

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reverse considered. For example, if a viewer perceives a more positive initial attitude, he/she will usually adopt that opinion, even if the opposing position is presented within the same broadcast (Bigelow & Poremba, 2014). Because of these population-wide implications, future research should examine how opinions are formed and change over time, using entire news broadcast transcripts.

The decision to review only two U.S. television news sources is one of the most evident limitations of this study. In prior research, the organizations used were considered a fair reflection of the national television news industry (Feldman, Malibach, Roser-Renouf, & Leiserowitz, 2012). However, numerous media outlets exist, includes social media platforms, newspapers, online publications, and other television news networks in the current news media market. Also, Fox News and MSNBC do not always affiliate themselves with a conventional liberal or conservative standpoint. Thus, this study may not include the necessary balance of opinions, representing all segments of the news industry and ultimately the overall population. Accordingly, it is important for future researchers to explore whether other media contain biased rhetoric, along with their effects, while incorporating a larger sample of news organizations.

As identified, the terms immigration, immigrant, refugee, asylum seeker, Syrian, and Syria were used to generate the analyzed transcripts, which limited the database search to only those specific terminologies. Transcripts that reported on the event for this study, but never specifically included the precise terms, were not included in the data sample. While keyword searches are common in content analysis practice, articles that may have pertained to this study could have been overlooked (Hsieh & Shannon, 2016).

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Also, each term has a different meaning, both in perceptual and official contexts. A more succinct study could be initiated, researching just one term, such as Syrian. The author of this study chose to use all said terminology based upon their common usage and meanings included in past literature.

The frames used during the middle of the Syrian crisis may not be the same frames used today. According to Gilbert, Lieberman, Morewedge, and Wilson (2016), "intense pleasant or unpleasant situations trigger psychological processes that are designed to weaken, and thus intense states may subside more quickly than mild ones" (p. 14). Thus, the intense reaction of both the media and public may skew initial statements made by interviewers and interviewees alike. Because this study analyzed one week prior to the release of the image/video and one week following, a lengthier scope may have garnered more constant results as the emotional intensity of the event decreased over time.

After reviewing and coding news media text, the 2016 presidential race undoubtedly played a role in the rhetoric surrounding the immigration debate, including Mexican and South American immigration to the United States. This could have distracted both the media and audience from concentrating on the humanitarian crisis in Syria. If the photo were released after the November election a different result might have been observed.

The photo/video of Omran Daqneesh used in this thesis was used because of its tremendous emotional appeal, which could also be noted as both a limitation and strength of the study. "Suffering is a defining quality, a limiting experience in human conditions.

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Images of political conflict, forced migration, famine, substance abuse, chronic illnesses, crime, child abuse, and the deep privations of destitutions take us into the intimate details of pain” (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996, p. 23). According to Kennicott (2013), “images of suffering children compel us to move from sentiment to action, from passivity to engagement. In the past century, we have credited photographs of dead, wounded, or starving children with galvanizing political opinion, such as the unpopular war in Vietnam” (para. 9). This explanation could point to a limitation based on the extreme characteristics of the photo, which garner immense emotional appeal versus more calculated responses. Since the public tends to respond with more emotion to photos of suffering children, the reaction of the media may have been different had the study used a photo of an adult in need, which could have helped the study's balance.

Future Research

Television is a vastly utilized news medium in the United States; however, news information can now be transmitted via social media 24 hours a day directly to individual citizens. Future studies should test the same subject matter, across a variety of mediums.

According to this study, frames used by television news outlets may have been affected by the publication of the photo/video of Omran Daqneesh. While specifically exploring television media's reaction and subsequent effects on coverage, the study did not examine how news broadcasts personally affected the thoughts and opinions of the audience. Many times, public opinion correlates to a change in government policy

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(Hobley, 2012). This detail has considerable implications within many areas of future study.

In this quantitative analysis, regarding Syrian immigrants in U.S. television news media, results suggest that Fox News (i.e., conservative media) will report more thematically and negatively compared to MSNBC (i.e., liberal media). Although results are statistically supported, future study should attempt to explore why thematic framing is used more commonly in conservative media and what types of rhetoric are conservative reporters verbalizing in their descriptions and interpretations of tragic humanitarian disasters, such as the one discussed in this thesis.

Lastly, further study is necessary to uncover why conservative television news networks do not report more positively towards an innocent population, like Syrian immigrants. Additional scholarship could elucidate if this commentary style is based on fear of "the other," fact, or other features.

Conclusion

This thesis applied quantitative content analysis techniques to the proposed inquiries and developed insights into how U.S. television news media covered Syrian immigrants within a specific time frame surrounding the release of published images of an affected Syrian toddler, Omran Daqneesh. A review of literature evaluated the topics about U.S. immigration policy, past societal rhetoric, media structures and beliefs, along with a deep analysis of framing and proceeding lenses. As stated, a content analysis of Fox News and MSNBC coverage was conducted to attain the results. Data collection,

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sampling techniques, coding, coder training, and statistical computations were performed. After reviewing over 1,200 pages of broadcast transcripts, totaling 101 total records, four hypotheses and one research question were assessed. Testing included several chi-square calculations in order to properly examine the collected data.

Results indicated that overall episodic frames were more commonly used compared to thematic frames. Additionally, the more liberal television news outlet employed episodic framing techniques more than the conservative source, but not to a statistically significant extent. However, the left-leaning source was more likely to report on Syrian immigrants more positively, when compared to the conservative news outlet.

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APPENDIX A

Coding Sheet

Unit of Analysis: each transcript "highlight" section

Purpose: to clearly understand how Syrian immigrants have been framed by *Fox News* and *MSNBC*. Broadcast transcripts, that pertain to Syrian migrants, will be used. The words immigrant, immigration, refugee, asylum seeker, Syrian, and Syria, will be inputted into the LexisNexis database to obtain the transcripts. Transcripts that didn't address Syrian immigrants were disqualified.

Independent Variables -

Television news outlet: 1 - Fox News; 2 - MSNBC

Air Date: 3 - before photos release; 4 - after photos release

Political Skew: 5 - right-leaning; 6 - left-leaning

Dependent Variables -

Framing: 7 - thematic; 8 - episodic; 9 - unclear

Valence: 10 - positive; 11 - negative; 12 - neutral

In order to answer each research question or hypothesis, two trained coders were used to code each news story. Subsequent to the coding process, the categories will be compared. To maintain consistency and reliability, operational definitions were established.

Operational Definitions -

Episodic Frames: frames that denote news events through distinct cases or episodes that illustrate the issues

Ex. "The facts surrounding Omran Daqneesh's situation in Aleppo..."

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Thematic Frames: frames that denote news events by exhibiting societal context to the presented issues

Ex. "This is how an Aleppo toddler changed international rhetoric..."

*Any articles where a prevailing frame could not be determined were coded as "unclear."

Valence: where an attribute, object, or event is framed either positively or negatively
Ex. Statements like, "refugees may pose as terrorists; entry would make it difficult to distinguish between terrorists and refugees," would be coded as negative. These statements regress of the position of a refugee, within the United States. Statements like, "Syrian immigrants contribute to the local economy" would be coded as positive. These statements progress the position of the refugee, within the U.S. Also, neutral articles presented both positive and negative valence description of Syrian migrants.

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APPENDIX B

Omran Daqneesh, after sustaining injuries during an airstrike in Aleppo, Syria (Raslan, 2016).

