

COMPARING MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE GULF OIL SPILL IN THE US AND UK:
IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The following research is a content analysis of 114 articles written by the American and British news media outlets in the first month following the BP Gulf oil spill in April 2010. The goal of the research was to identify any dominant frames evident in the reports and to compare the two countries to see if there was a difference in the dominant frames used. Positive, negative, and neutral tones were also evaluated to determine if there was a difference between the countries. The results show that both countries reports predominantly used an ecology and action frame, while British media outlets also used an economic frame. Both countries reported with primarily a negative and neutral tone. The implications of these findings for crisis communication managers are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During a company's lifespan it is safe to say that it will undergo a crisis situation at one point or another. Defined as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes," (Coombs, 2007) a crisis needs to be effectively handled by communication managers to ensure the stability of the organization. It is during the initial stages of a crisis that management techniques should be undertaken in order to manage the relationship with the organization's stakeholders. However, what techniques crisis managers should use largely depends on the way in which the media frames the event in both traditional and online media forms.

On April 20 2010, the company BP faced a crisis when one of its oilrigs, Deepwater Horizon, in the Gulf of Mexico exploded causing fatalities and damage to the environment. Media organizations around the world rushed to report on the story of the spill. The CEO of BP even accused the media of rushing judgment and worsening the crisis by reporting the situation before it was even possible to collect all of the facts (Wardell, 2010). As a transitional organization, one that operates in two or more countries, BP faced a greater likelihood of undergoing a global crisis (Coombs, 2008). Because BP has operations in host and home countries, the BP Gulf oil spill affected the home country (Britain) and a host country (America) in different ways. The media reports covering the spill could have dramatic consequences on the way BP is perceived and may differ in focus with each country that is involved in the crisis. Depending on the stakes, is it possible that certain countries framed the story in different ways? Is it possible that the media in the United States framed the story differently than the media in the United Kingdom? There is little comparative research done between countries in crisis situations and knowing if countries have a difference in focus can help crisis communication managers in their efforts to manage an organization's reputation.

Thus, it is imperative that research is done that can provide information to assist crisis communication managers in knowing what reactions are common from the media when reporting on a crisis. Although plenty of research has examined what organizations say post-crisis, prior research has done little content analysis to examine what tendencies the media have when reporting on a crisis situation. Due to this gap in research, the following study will undertake an extensive content analysis of the articles by popular American and British newspapers in an attempt to identify any prevalent frames used in post-crisis global news communication.

In sum, the concept of media framing is important because it can help us to understand mass communication effects and suggests valuable ideas for communication practitioners. Frames can offer new insights for journalists, planners of communication campaigns, and social activists. Understanding what frames dominate news coverage helps companies and news organizations advance in their political goals (Tankard, 2001).

The following research will use the BP Gulf oil spill crisis as a case study in determining if there were any dominant frames used by the media outlets of the U.S. and the U. K. The research will then evaluate if there was a difference in the frames used between the two countries and if the media outlets primarily used a positive, negative, or neutral tone when framing the oil spill crisis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review will provide the history of framing theory and how it relates to the media and media coverage. In addition the chapter will take a more in depth look at BP as an organization, the Gulf oil spill, and its effects on Britain and America.

Framing Theory

In 1974, Erving Goffman introduced the concept of framing, referring to the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by the media, media professionals, and their audiences (Reese, 2003). Goffman assumed that individuals could not understand the world fully and constantly struggle to interpret their life experiences in order to make sense of the world around them (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Since the introduction of the idea, framing has been used as a paradigm for understanding and investigating communication and related behavior in a wide range of disciplines. These include psychology, speech communication (especially speech discourse analysis and negotiation), organizational decision-making, economics, health communication, media studies and political communication (Hallahan, 1999).

The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having multiple implications. When reporting on the BP oil spill, the media could decide to focus on one of the many facets that are involved with the spill and dismiss reporting on others. For example, if a majority of reports discussed the economic toll that the spill would have on a country, people could interpret that this is the most pressing issue involved with the crisis. Members of the public develop opinions based on their interpretations of media messages and then talk to the public about them. Because of this, frames can be seen as patterns of

interpretation through which people classify information in order to understand and handle it efficiently.

In addition, framing also tells the people how to think about a particular topic by showing certain aspects of a story and highlighting and omitting particular points of view. Media outlets, political officials, corporations and non-profit organizations often emphasize specific aspects of reality in an effort to persuade the public to interpret a message in a particular way (Scheufele, 2004). The topic that the media focuses on in a report, as well as the tone used, may influence how the event will be viewed. In this way, the framing of the story directs interpretation. For example, if reporters speak in a positive manner to describe the war efforts in Iraq and inform the public of the progress being made, the public is likely to feel more positively of the events.

Fully developed frames typically perform four functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment, and remedy promotion (Entman, 1993). Elaborating in more depth on the framing process, Entman (1993) suggests:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Frames, then, *define* problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs benefits, usually measured in terms of cultural values; *diagnose* causes – identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments* – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggests remedies* – offer and justify treatments for the problem and predict their likely effects. (p.55)

According to Tankard et al. (1991), journalists often think of a frame 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). For example, a journalist could

choose to focus on the individual at fault during a crisis or may decide to report mainly on the outcomes of an event. Such concentrations could affect how a reader understands the situation and alter the thoughts they have about the crisis.

Even the context in which the photography and visual broadcasts are used can alter the way a story is communicated. Variables, such as styling, camera angle and perspective portray a visual image that can be utilized as a framing technique. Print media can also present stories differently depending on the page placement (McCombs, 1997). Would it not be natural for a person to believe that an article on the front page is of more importance than one placed on the fifteenth?

Another topic involving the media, and the way that they frame their reports, involves agenda setting. The premise is that in agenda setting the media's picture of the world becomes the public's picture. To further the point, McCombs (1994) states that the media's agenda sets the public agenda, especially concerning public issues. The degree of emphasis that is placed on a particular issue in the mass media can have a direct effect on the way the public prioritizes such issues. The media who do not tell us *what to think*, but successfully informs us on *what to think about* (Cohen, 1963). For example, using strong language and emotion in a news report could leave a reader feeling similar emotions.

McCombs (1994) has argued that framing is simply a more refined version of agenda setting. From the perspective of agenda setting, framing means making aspects of an issue more salient through different modes of presentation and therefore shifting people's attitudes (Scheufele, 2007). Scheufele also says framing focuses not on *which* topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media, but instead on the particular *ways* those issues are presented. Framing is an essential part of public deliberation because it is a process that utilizes strategic actors, tone and

symbolic resources to participate in collective sense making about public policy issues (Gamson, 1996). For example, *FoxNews* television analyst Glenn Beck utilizes his show to discuss matters of public policy. By providing strong tone and opinion, plus diagrams and pictures, he frames the American government in a negative way, calling for the public to take action to create change.

Understanding how an event is portrayed and what frames are being used can help organizations move forward in accomplishing their goals. For example, beginning in 2005, the polls began to show that the American peoples' approval of the way that the Bush administration was handling the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were dramatically decreasing (Franklin, 2007). At the same time of this dramatic decline, the press had begun to negatively frame the war in Iraq and focused less on the terrorism stories that had previously been the trend. According to Aday (2010) the 2005 Bush administration completely lost the ability to control the frame that was being used by the media in regards to the Iraq war. By the time the elections rolled around in 2008, it became very clear that political campaigns should be framed with concerns of the war.

Barak Obama utilized strategic framing tactics concerning the war, which helped him reach his political goals. Utilizing the word "change" in most of his campaigns allowed him to portray the idea that he would bring America away from what the Bush administration had been doing. In fact, Obama framed this notion of change in a way that allowed the American people to perceive that *they* have the power to right what they believe to be wrong. As quoted on his website, barackobama.com, "I'm asking you to believe. Not just about my ability to bring real change to Washington... I'm asking you to believe in yours."

In general, it is likely that national news media outlets are in tune with the national government and never is that tie stronger than in a time of crisis (Topoushian, 2002). According to Williams (2003) following the 9/11 crisis, "Journalists quickly abandoned all pretense of objectivity and became the uncritical mouthpiece of the US state" (p. 177). This use of

communication strategies inevitably has an effect on the national opinion of the events that take place during a crisis by providing the information the government believes to be relevant.

Framing Analysis Research

The target audience of a news report could strongly affect the frames that are used by the media. Depending on the interests and relevance of the subject to the audience, different foci could be used. This difference could be found when comparing the dominant frames used in news reports that discuss world events. Understanding the tendencies of different countries could help global crisis communication managers in their post-crisis communications efforts.

Wigley and Zhang (2009) suggest that journalists have frequently used frames of reference to help individuals understand a broad range of events and ideas within public affairs and that these frames of reference become salient to the individual when they discuss the various topics of public interest. The frame a journalist chooses to use focuses on the scope of the issue, identifies who is responsible and who is affected, where the issue should be addressed, and which ideological principles or values are relevant (Cobb & Elder, 1983). For example, a journalist could use a human-interest frame, when reporting on a story, by highlighting who is most affected by the event that has occurred. In contrast, a reporter could write about the same story using an ecology frame that focuses on reporting the environmental toll that event could have caused and fail to include information about the people who are affected. Frames such as the human-interest, as well as a political, and economic frame can be found in other studies that evaluated the media's coverage of dramatic events, such as one that looked at the news framing of the Gulf War II (Dimitrova et al., 2005a, 2005b).

Many studies in social science have examined frames used in health, war, politics, and diplomatic relations. Phalen and Algan (2001) studied the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* coverage of the 1995 Fourth UN World Conference on Women and found that the newspapers concentrated more on the geographical contexts between China and the United

States, emphasizing the diplomatic concerns between the two countries, rather than the women issues presented at the conference. This research did not look for specific frames, but instead evaluated the themes of focus. For example, did the news report focus on the conference, or the struggle between the U.S. and China? Findings of this research showed that secondary issues were the main focus and that only 20% of articles “about” the event mentioned the issues of the conference.

In a study completed by Carpenter (2007) that investigated the Iraq War found that the frames used by international, national, and local news sources differed drastically. The research evaluated the difference in the frames and sources used by elite and non-elite newspapers. In addition, research completed by Dimitrova, Williams and Trammell (2005) looked at the online coverage of 246 websites and the way they framed the 2003 Iraq war. The frames used were derived from previous research and included: the military conflict frame (emphasis on the military conflict/action among individuals, groups, or institutions), the human interest frame (emphasis on the human participants in the event), the responsibility frame (emphasis on the party/person responsible for the event, issue, or problem), the media self-referential frame (emphasis on the news media), the diagnostic frame (emphasis on what caused the event or problem), the violence of war frame (emphasis on injuries/causalities and the destruction or aftermath caused by war), and the anti-war frame (emphasis on the opposition to war), prognostic frame (emphasis is on the prognosis, the outcome of the event). It was found that the American websites framed the story differently than other countries focusing on responsibility, while other countries focused on human interest and military conflict frames.

Li and Morgensen (2002) found numerous frames when evaluating the first eight hours of U.S. news reporting on the September 11 attacks. The frames that were found changed over the

eight hour time frame throughout the media coverage and included: economy, environment, safety, politics, human-interest, disaster, and religious frames. Also, the German company Media Tenor conducted a study that compared the coverage of the 2003 Gulf War in five countries, evaluating focus, rather than specific frames. Many differences were found among the countries and the focus of their reports. For example, the American reports rarely showed visuals of wounded soldiers while other countries would. The study also observed that the BBC frequently reported on the working conditions for soldiers, whereas American reports did not.

An and Gower (2009) performed a content analysis of crisis frames used in reports on business in 2006. A total of 247 stories were analyzed and placed into one of five categorical frames: attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, morality and economic. The study found that the attribution of responsibility frame was the most commonly used throughout all crises, however, the dominant frame changed depending on the type of crisis.

Media, Framing, and Crisis Communication

A crisis is an event that is never planned and happens suddenly. Very few stakeholders experience a crisis directly but are influenced by the crisis and how the organization handles the crisis. The crisis can affect a stakeholder's purchase intentions and willingness to engage in negative word-of-mouth (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Most stakeholders learn about a crisis through mediated messages such as news stories about the crisis. Thus it is important for crisis managers to understand how media framing a crisis can have serious impact on the way people perceive and react to the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Understanding how media frame a crisis can aid in a crisis manager's ability to handle their organization's efforts post crisis communication more effectively. Coombs (2007) explains that post-crisis communication entails what management says and does after a crisis and how they convey these messages to the public.

A review of the role of framing in crisis communication will elaborate on this point. The review begins with a general discussion of crisis frames and moves to specific applications of frames to crisis media coverage.

Often, crisis situations are open to multiple interpretations that subject them to framing by the media. According to Coombs (2007), the crisis framing effect can occur in these moments. A frame focuses on particular elements of a crisis event causing stakeholders to concentrate on those elements when constructing their views of the crisis. A crisis frames tells stakeholders how to interpret the crisis event. More specifically, the crisis frames indicates how responsible the organization is for the crisis. Crisis frames are a key element in understanding how stakeholders will react to a crisis. The more people view an organization as responsible for the crisis, the more damage that crisis can inflict on the organization's reputation. Crisis frames do influence what crisis response strategies should be the most effective in that particular crisis (Coombs, 2007). Media systems can play a significant role in determining the way a crisis is managed through the way they frame a crisis.

How the media frame a crisis is a valuable research topic in crisis communication. An and Gower (2009) completed a content analysis of crisis news frames of crisis coverage in 2006 of the top ten crisis prone businesses as identified by the Institute for Crisis Management. The five frames that were used were conflict, morality, economic, attribution of responsibility and human-interest. The findings revealed that the frames used depended largely on the type of crisis. For example, if the crisis was categorized as accidental then the media used the human-interest frame less than they did in preventable crises. The research also found that in preventable crises the most common news frame was the attribution of responsibility. This frame was also the most

common frame to be used when the media reported on the crisis situations, followed by the economic frame.

Holladay (2010) used frames to evaluate the results of crisis management efforts. In the study, Holladay examined the print news coverage of crises to determine whether or not the organization was being used as a source and whether or not it was telling its side of the story to the stakeholders. Surprisingly, the results indicated that reputation repairing and information giving strategies were limited and organizational spokespersons were not used prominently in media reports. The results indicate print news coverage creates a challenge for crisis communication managers. Ideally, news coverage would portray an organization in a positive light by reporting the organization's side of the story. That is why media relations is a critical part of crisis management (Holladay, 2010). However, if the media portrays the organization in a negative way by ignoring the organization's side to the story then crisis managers should focus on other communication options in order to protect reputation.

Agenda-setting Effects on Major Corporations

In recent decades there has been an increase in the amount of business news coverage involving the way an organization attempts to manage issues and crisis situations. This coverage is especially important considering the fact that most consumers and external stakeholders form their opinions of a company based on the media coverage of that organization. Daily coverage of an event and the company's involvement in the major problems and issues creates and influences the public's perception and provides a strong message on the salience of the crisis (Carroll 2003). For example, a story with a large headline and lengthy text found on the front page of a newspaper conveys a message of importance and focuses the public's attention. According to

Carroll and McCombs (2003) establishing this salience among the public is the initial stage in the formation of public opinion.

As observed by Carroll and McCombs (2003), plenty of research has been done to show a positive correlation between the frequency of news coverage and the level of public concern over the issue. Brosius and Kepplinger (1990) examined the media and public agenda during an energy shortage in Germany. The rapid rise in media reports on the issue was associated with growing public concern. Research has also been done in a laboratory setting, such as the experimental design used by Wang (2000) that examined an online newspaper. If subjects were exposed to articles that discussed racism, those subjects found the issue to be much more salient than the subjects who were not exposed to the stories.

When discussing business news, the first level of agenda setting involves the salience of the organization. The second level of agenda setting occurs when the media emphasizes the attributes of the organization. These attributes can involve the various traits that define the organization and is likely to affect the public's attitude toward the business. At this second level of agenda setting that the news coverage relays, not only the facts, but also feelings and tone that are absorbed by the public and influence public perceptions (Carroll 2003).

Through an exhaustive research literature analysis, Carroll and McCombs (2003) established several propositions that are supported by their findings concerning news coverage and how it affects public opinion. First, the amount of coverage is directly correlated with the public's awareness of the organization. Second, the amount of news coverage that focuses on particular attributes of a firm correlates positively with the proportion of the public who define the firm by those attributes. Lastly, the public will perceive a company's attribute similarly to the tone in which the media primarily covers such attributes.

The Use of Tone

The use of tone in news reports can have a dramatic affect on they way the public perceives a crisis situation. Positive, negative, or neutral tones all convey a different message and can generate emotion toward a group or organization. According to Entman (1993) exaggerating an incident of violence can create irrational fears; or focusing on superficial scandals of political coverage can increase political cynicism (Capella & Jamieson, 1997).

Dowie (2002) emphasize that bad news is generally seen as more interesting than good news and that, because of this, the media may focus on reporting crisis situations. Kensicki (2001) completed a framing analysis and looked specifically at the tone used in the *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and the *Silent News* coverage of the Deaf President Now political movement. Kensicki (2001) found positive tones were evident in coverage of the movement.

However, categorizing latent content categories such as tone can be difficult and requires greater interpretation by coders. Establishing thorough instructions for what constitutes positive, negative or neutral tone is imperative for the validity and reliability of a study. Dimitrova, Williams and Trammell (2005) evaluated the framing of the Gulf War and placed articles into one of three categories: positive, negative, or neutral. The study operationalized tone by looking to see if the reports focused on a positive or negative attitude toward the war and found that countries who supported the war reported more positively than the countries who opposed the war. Looking at reports on FOX and NBS news channels of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, Aday (2010) categorized tone by quotes. Positive quotes were those that generally expressed support for the policy in the Middle East, while negative quotes were of a critical nature on the situation. Mixed and/or neutral quotes were those that were found to be noncommittal or

balanced. The research found that both news channels reported negative stories more frequently but commonly underreported the bad news.

BP

BP, also commonly known as British Petroleum, is one of the world's largest energy companies, providing not only oil for transportation, but also heat and light energy, retail, and pharmaceutical services. Active in thirty countries, BP brought in 239 billion dollars in revenue for the year of 2009. BP has been a leading researcher in air pollution, has created BP Schools to globally get people into the classroom, has set world records for being the first oil field in Western Europe to produce 2 billion barrels of oil, and was the first major energy company to acknowledge the threats of global warming (BP, 2010).

History of BP

In 1900 Britain explorer William Knox D'Arcy and his team was sent to Persia to look for oil that could help Britain in hard economic times. Eight years later the team was able to send back news to London that they had succeeded and within a year, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which would one day become BP, was in business. By 1914, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company had plenty of oil, but nobody to sell it to, until Winston Churchill took an active approach. Churchill made a speech in Parliament that encouraged the Royal Navy to switch from coal to new oil-fueled technology. A majority agreed and this was when the UK became a major stockholder in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. In 1917, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company bought British Petroleum, a German subsidiary that had needed help getting its product to customers (BP, 2010).

In 1969, BP announced that they discovered oil in Alaska but would not receive government permission to drill for another eight years. However, they would undergo the largest engineering project in American history, known as the Trans Alaska pipeline that would transport the oil 1,200 miles to an oil refinery. With the idea of drilling on American soil, a new kind of environmentalist was born and BP

attempted to silence those fears by funding an Environmental Control Centre to explore the science and policy of environmental issues. This allowed BP to find innovative ways to create and market new products made from petroleum, including food for dogs, poultry and fish, and BP became the leading supplier of animal feed in American by the 1980s (BP, 2010).

In 1988 BP bought a British oil exploration and production company, Britoil, which foreshadowed a major growth that would provide them the ability to purchase and gain full ownership of Standard Oil of Ohio. After acquiring full rights, the American oil company became the cornerstone of a new division for BP, known as BP America (BP, 2010)

Amid continuous controversy over global warming, BP launched their Beyond Petroleum Campaign and became the first major energy company to acknowledge the threat of global warming and publicly agreed to do its share in minimizing this risk. BP's CEO, Lord John Browne was even quoted, "It would be unwise and potentially dangerous to ignore the mounting concern." In response, BP cut its carbon emission in 1998 by 10% and a year later initiated a carbon capture project that could store CO₂ in power plants (BP, 2010).

Continuing in its efforts to provide service while being environmentally concerned, in 2001 BP opened the greenest gas station in Essex, England and announced the largest solar project in the world that brings electricity to 150 villages in the Philippines. In addition, BP creates a new global business in 2005 known as BP Alternative Energy that utilizes a multi-billion dollar budget that devotes itself to providing low-carbon power. CEO Browne announced during the launch, "We are determined to add to the choice of available energies for a world concerned with the environment," (BP, 2010).

Although BP has continued to promote its environmental and safety devotions, it has had its fair share of serious accidents in the past decade. In 2000 CEO John Browne announced plans to "renew our commitment to safety" after a series of equipment failures which resulted in fires. Then, in 2005, fifteen people were killed in an explosion at BP's Texas City refinery and Browne promised that there would be "no stone

left unturned” while investigating what happened and correcting all safety issues. Eventually, Tony Hayward would take over for Browne after a few additional problems and promised to focus “like a laser” on safety (Elkind, 2011).

In June 2008, oil began to flow from the Gulf of Mexico from the world’s largest floating platform. The facility can produce up to 250,000 barrels of oil a day, accessing reservoirs that lie beneath one mile of ocean and three miles of mud, rock and salt.

BP Oil Spill

On April 20, 2010 an explosion occurred on BP’s Deepwater Horizon oilrig in the Gulf of Mexico resulting in the death of eleven rig workers. According to BP, the blowout was caused when natural gas from under the sea floor shot uncontrollably up the drill column and over the rig. Once the gas had escaped it took only the smallest of sparks to ignite the mechanical equipment. The burning and sinking of the Deepwater Horizon caused an initial debt of \$650 million in equipment and the loss of eleven lives in an explosion whose exact cause is still undetermined. During the several months that it took BP to cap the hole created by the explosion, 206 million gallons of oil spilled into the Gulf of Mexico (Elkind, 2011).

The Oil Spill and its Effect on America

Regrettably, any time a harmful product is spewed into the ocean at such a volume certain negative repercussions are going to occur. Whether economic or environmental, plenty of areas in America suffered from the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Tourism numbers along the Gulf Coast plummeted and local businesses suffered as a result. Because of these effects, BP has been required to compensate losses to the companies affected by the spill and has spent over eight billion dollars and made 171,676 payments as of September, 2010 (BP, 2010).

Also, environmental concerns existed and Nancy Rebalais, a marine scientist in Louisiana, was quoted in *The Washington Post* stating, "The magnitude and potential for ecological damage is probably more great than anything we've ever seen in the Gulf of Mexico," (Eilperin, 2010).

The economic effect that the oil spill has had on America economically has also been witnessed since the explosion of BP's oilrig in April. According to FOXNews in July, 2010, while quoting Nathaniel Karp, chief U.S. economist for the Birmingham-based BBVA Compass bank, around \$4.3 billion of total economic impact has already been created from the spill (FOXNews, 2010). The tourism, fishing, shipping, and energy economies tied to the Gulf have all taken a colossal economic hit in damage and could take years to recover.

The United Kingdom and BP

As of 2010, around 18 million Britons held stock in BP (Wardell, 2010). Due to the possible financial repercussions in the aftermath of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, British lawmakers began to push British Prime Minister David Cameron to have U.S. President Barack Obama to stop "bashing" BP in the media. In fact, since April 2010 the share slide of BP's market has almost halved their market value and BP has lost its title as Britain's largest company (Warden, 2010).

Even London Mayor, Boris Johnson, was quoted in the Huffington Post stating, "I would like to see a bit of cool heads rather than endlessly buck-passing and name-calling. When you consider the huge exposure of British pension funds to BP it starts to become a matter of national concern if a great British company is being continually beaten up on the airwaves" (Warden, 2010).

Before the accident on April 20, BP was the largest company in Britain with a stock market value of approximately £122 billion. Since April, BP has lost £49 billion of its value and has taken a 40 percent drop in its share value. Due to BP's previous position at the top of the London Stock Exchange, it was a large part of almost every pension fund in the country. This

dramatic drop in value has taken a toll on millions of workers since the firm's dividend payments accounted for £1 in every £6 paid out in dividends to British pension pots (Armistead, 2010).

A Different Crisis

A transitional organization is one that operates in two or more countries and has operations in host and home countries. The home country is where the organization is based and the host countries are where the organization has assets such as production or distribution facilities. The rise in transitional organizations creates a greater likelihood of an international crisis, one that is managed in two or more countries (Coombs, 2008).

There are two types of international crises: Host and Global. A host crisis is one that is isolated in one or more host countries but does not affect the home country. A global crisis is one that affects the home country and one or more host countries (Coombs, 2008). The BP Gulf oil spill can be classified as a global crisis since the event affects the home country (Britain) economically and a host country (America) economically and environmentally.

Two key challenges in an international crisis is adapting to the demands of the stakeholders and dealing with media outlets in different countries. In these situations, crisis frames can act as constraints that define the crisis for most stakeholders. How news media report stories that are of interest to their audiences can differ in various countries, resulting in different media frames for the crisis. If different frames are used, an organization will have to manage two different crises because the frames define the crisis for most stakeholders. In turn, the crisis frames help to determine which crisis response strategies would be most effective in that crisis. If an international crisis has multiple frames, crisis managers face a more complicated situation when they attempt to craft their crisis response messages (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

There is very limited research examining international crisis communication and comparative research is even harder to find. Frandsen and Johansen (2010) examination of the messages in the Arla Foods Mohamed cartoon crisis is one of the few comparative studies. However, it compares messages Arla Foods used in Denmark and the Mideast and does not provide information that can inform researchers of the media frames in an international crisis. The current research project will explore this important subject. If crisis frames differ in the news media, the communication challenges for crisis communications can become increasingly complex and an even greater potential for international crises (Coombs, 2008).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to Bantimaroudis (2001), American and European journalists often make drastically different decisions on content selection and patterns of coverage when reporting crisis situations depending on what is important to the country. If it is an environmental crisis for one country and an economic for another, the journalists in two countries may decide to focus their reporting efforts on the separate topics.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate if there were differences between frames used by British and American online newspapers when informing the public of the recent BP Gulf oil spill crisis. By examining only the text of the articles, the study will assess what frames and tones that the media focuses on and determine if any of the frames are more dominant than others. Considering these facts, the researcher has posed the following research questions:

RQ1: What media frames will be evidenced in news reports of the BP Gulf oil spill crisis?

The answer to this question will help understand what frames were being used when reporting on the BP Gulf oil spill. Perceptions are critical in a crisis and the media help to shape perceptions by defining the crisis frame. Crisis managers then need to adjust their communication efforts to compliment the existing frame or take actions to try to influence the crisis frame.

RQ2: Is there a difference in the dominant frames used by the British versus the American news reports?

There is little comparative research done for international crises, and the BP Gulf oil spill is a perfect opportunity to study an international crisis because of the differing stakes in the United States and the United Kingdom. The use of different frames in the two countries would create different demands on the crisis communication efforts. Different frames would necessitate different responses and would

result in the need for crisis managers to develop the appropriate responses without appearing contradictory.

RQ 3: Is there a difference between the tones used in the British and American news reports on the BP Gulf oil spill crisis?

Tone is critical in shaping views of the organization in a crisis. Media coverage is one marker of how the organization in crisis is being perceived—its crisis reputation. If media coverage adds to the negative perception of a company, it makes crisis management more difficult because it is likely to increase the reputational threat of the crisis. Crisis managers need to find a course of action that can reduce or eliminate the negative frame. Neutral or positive coverage helps the crisis managers and is an indicator that their responses are being effective.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHOD

This study evaluated the content of news stories that reported the event of the Gulf of Mexico BP oil spill that occurred on April 20, 2010. By examining the way in which the content was framed, the study assessed what frames and tones the media focused on when informing the public about the oil spill crisis. The analysis will reveal if any of the frames were used more often than others and if there was a difference in the dominant frames used in each country. Tone of the articles was evaluated as well to determine if there were possible differences between the two countries on this aspect of the news stories.

Wright (1986) defined content analysis as “a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories” (p. 125). This method has been used to draw inferences about the nature of communication and the characteristics of communication content (Wright, 1986). In addition, this method has been popular because the researcher cannot encroach upon what has been said. By using this method, the outcome of the study is minimally influenced by the researcher because the content is unaffected and each category is mutually exclusive and allows for all possibilities to be categorized (Berger, 2000).

Establishing coding categories that are structured around clearly defined criteria are imperative to the accuracy of research that utilizes content analysis. This criterion is tailored to each study and enables researchers to code precisely, resulting in a low probability of misplaced information. By having coding categories that are not mutually exclusive and exhaustive, news reports in this study could be coded incorrectly due to confusion as to which category a report may fit.

Sampling

A total of 113 articles were collected (54 American and 59 British) within a month of the Deepwater Horizon oilrig explosion and were categorized by frame and tone. This period of time was chosen to ensure the articles reflected a time frame where the crisis event was still seen as relevant and being reported on a consistent basis. This strategy is similar to the one used by An and Gower (2009) on their evaluation of crisis frames in reports on businesses in 2006. A quantitative content analysis of only the text was done to look at what was being said and not on the overall presentation of the material.

The American newspapers (*New York Times* and *USA Today*) and the British (*The Express* and *The Guardian*) were chosen because of their high circulation numbers and availability of archived articles on *LexisNexis*. All of the newspapers used have over 200,000 subscribers and fall within the highest circulated papers within their respective country (newspapers.com). In the US, *USA Today* is number one in circulation while the *New York Times* is number 3. In the UK, the *Express* is number 6, while the *Guardian* is number 10. Table 1 provides the circulation data for the four newspapers. High circulation publications were chosen because there is a greater potential impact. Using newspapers with high circulation allows evaluation of newspapers with broad audiences that have to decide what to cover and how. Papers with higher circulation numbers have the greater potential to reach and to influence a large number of stakeholders with their stories than small circulation newspapers. *LexisNexis*, an easily accessible online article search database, was used because of completeness and the ease of accessing this database.

Table 1
Circulation Numbers in 2011 (Paperboy, 2011 & Newspapers, 2011)

News Outlet	Circulation
USA Today	2,114,000
New York Times	1,040,000
The Express	665,731
The Guardian	288,917

Each article was found through *LexisNexis* by searching for the following keywords and phrases: BP, BP oil spill, Deepwater Horizon, and Gulf oil spill. All articles that were found in this search that reported on the oil spill were used for the content analysis. However, only the articles that were written by the newspaper staff writers were used. Articles that were supplied by other means, such as the *Associated Press* were disregarded for the purposes of this research to ensure that a true sample content from the four newspapers was being evaluated. One limitation of using the *LexisNexis* database is it only contains the text of the story. As a result, the content analysis was text based and did not evaluate pictures or other multimedia forms that might have appeared in the newspaper itself or in the stories on the newspaper web sites.

Coding and Unitizing

Each article was examined in its entirety by the researcher and two neutral coders to ensure intercoder reliability. This method was commonly used in previous content analysis of framing research done by Dimitrova et al. (2005a, 2005b), Aday (2010), and Li (2001). Both coders were trained and given instructions separately on how to classify each article. A coding questionnaire was given to the coders that asked questions pertaining to each frame category (human-interest, government action, BP action, ecology, economic and attribution of responsibility). Under each category was a list of questions that were answered with a 'yes' or

‘no’ response. For example, “Does the story provide a human example or ‘human face’ on the issue?” was a question that was asked as a part of the *human-interest frame*. The coder could then establish the dominant frame by summing up the ‘yes’ responses under each category. The coding sheet is provided for reference in the appendix.

Any discrepancies between the coders of an article were resolved through group discussion. Utilizing Cohen’s Kappa there was an intercoder reliability of .85 when categorizing tone and 1.00 when categorizing the articles into frames. A detailed explanation of how the coders categorized each article by frame and tone can be found in the following sections.

Table 2
Intercoder Agreement for Frames and Tone

Variable	Coder Agreement
Government Action Frame	100%
BP Action Frame	100 %
Attribution of Responsibility Frame	100%
Economic Frame	100%
Ecology Frame	100%
Human Interest Frame	100 %
Tone	85%

Framing Analysis

Articles were evaluated on the frames that were used in reporting the story of the BP oil spill and initially used five *a priori* categorical frames. However, as done in other research such as the one completed by Matthes (2009), the coders and researcher were not restrained from finding other frames that could be derived through content analysis of the articles collected. The five *a priori* frames were: *human-interest frame* (emphasis on the human’s affected by the responsibility), *economic frame* (emphasis is on the economic effect associated with the event),

ecology frame (emphasis is on the environmental effects of the event), *government action frame* (emphasis is on the U.S. government's response and involvement) and *attribution of responsibility frame* (emphasis is on who is responsible and what could/should have been done to prevent the problem). The initial coding resulted in a large number of stories being placed in the "other" category. These "other" stories were reviewed further for any patterns. What emerged from this exploratory analysis was the *BP action frame* (emphasis is on information regarding what efforts BP had taken and a diagnosis of the crisis). A diagnostic frame was not chosen as an additional categorical frame because most articles that discussed the cause of the spill only did as a sub-frame to the *BP action frame*.

The coders were instructed to read each story in its entirety. After reading the news report they were to answer each question provided in the coding sheet with a 'yes' (1) or 'no' (0) answer. This method was used to report what frames were evidenced in the report. If more than one frame had a 'yes' (1) response, then the coder was to tally the number of those responses for each frame to establish the dominant. However, if more than one frame provided the same number of 'yes' (1) responses, then the coder was instructed to review the title of the article. If the title specifically discussed an attribute that fell into one of the categorical frames, then it would be used to determine the dominant frame. For example, an article that was coded with both an *economic* and a *BP action frame* but the report was titled, "BP attempts to use golf ball in sealing well," then the report was coded with the *BP action frame*. If, the title of the report did not provide enough context to distinguish how the article should be coded, then the coder was instructed to refer to which section of the paper the article was found (i.e. Economic, Business, Politics, etc.).

The five *a priori* frames- *human-interest, economic, environment, government action, attribution of responsibility* and *ecology frames* were derived from previous studies completed by Dimitrova et al. (2005a). This research looked at the coverage of 246 international news websites and examined the immediate response to the 2003 Iraq War. The purpose of the study was to observe which frames were being used and to discover if any differences were found in the predominant frames used by the countries. The predefined frames were found from previous research that had been completed by Li et al. (2002), Kamhawi (2002), and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). These frames were mutually exclusive and chosen to be of proper fit for this research study because both studies evaluated the frames used in news reports internationally on a global crisis.

Below, in Table 3, are examples of statements that were found and how they were categorized. If an article presented information that could fit into more than one categorical frame then the headline and news section in which the article was located were used to establish the final predominant frame category. For example, if an article discussed the economic and environmental effects that the oil spill had, but the title read “*BP stocks fall after spill,*” and was found under the *Economic* news section, than the article was categorized as an *economic frame*.

Table 3
Examples of quotes found in each categorical frame

Frame	Quote
Attribution	“BP could have prevented this spill from occurring.”
Government Action	“President Obama will hold BP accountable for millions of dollars in relief efforts.”
BP Action	“BP is working toward having the spill capped by Friday.”
Economic	“BP’s share value has dropped 40% since the oilrig explosion and has a drastic effect on pensions.”
Ecology	“The magnitude of environmental damage could be the greatest that the Gulf of Mexico has ever seen.”
Human Interest	“The families of those who were lost in the explosion mourn.”

Tone

Previous research studies, including those completed by Deephouse (2005), Hurwitz (1976), and Janis (1943) have used content analysis in which positive, negative, and neutral content was coded. These studies used the Janis Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance that requires data to be coded into three categories: favorable (positive), unfavorable (negative) and neutral. These studies used key words and phrases as the unit of analysis and then used a sum of each category to establish the overall tone of an article. For example, the positive, negative, and neutral codes within each story would be added together. If there were more positive than negative codes in a story, the story was coded as positive. If there were more negative than positive codes, the story was coded as negative. If there were equal numbers of positive and negative, or only neutral codes, the story was coded as neutral.

The researcher and coders thoroughly discussed what a positively and negatively charged word/phrase would be defined as. For the purpose of the research, a positively charged word/phrase was defined as “a statement that provides a favorable or hopeful outlook to the situation.” A negatively charged word/phrase was defined as “lacking positive attributes that express negation or disapproval of the situation.” Because previous research does not thoroughly provide definitions of positive and negative words/phrases, these definitions were established by the researcher. The coder was then asked to provide examples of words or phrases that could be categorized as positive and negative by evaluating an unrelated news report found on the *New York Times* website.

This same method was used and an overall evaluation of the entire article was completed and the content was categorized into one of three tones: positive, negative, or neutral. Each positive and negative word or phrase was tallied in an article to decide the overall tone in the news report. Phrases and words such as “successful relief efforts”, “overcome” and “forward progress” were categorized as positive, while ones like “terrible catastrophe”, “environmental disaster” and “horrible event” would be classified as negative. All articles that spoke of the crisis in a simple factual manner or had a similar amount of positive and negative phrases and mixed tones were classified as neutral. All discrepancies found when coding tone were resolved through discussion.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The following chapter will present the results of the analysis of the BP spill news coverage of the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Guardian*, and *Express*. Each research question and the associated findings will be discussed and tables and histograms are provided to display these results. A total of 113 articles were collected (54 American and 59 British) and were categorized by frame and tone. The following results will present the trends, differences, and tendencies of the American and British media when reporting on the BP Gulf oil spill. Several similarities were found between the two countries and the frames and tones used in the reports.

The first research question asked, “What media frames will be evidenced in news reports of the BP Gulf oil spill?” The analysis, as shown in Figure 1, of the 54 American articles revealed a total of nine *attribution of responsibility frames*, four *human-interest frames*, 17 *BP action frames*, 18 *ecology frames*, and four *economic frames*, and two *political action frames* were found. The British articles used a total of six *attribution of responsibility frames*, two *human-interest frames*, 15 *action frames*, 20 *ecology frames*, and 13 *economic frames*, and two *political action frames*. Given these numbers, it can be concluded that the answer to the first research question is that the countries reporting showed evidence of all six frames. However, the British and American news outlets relied heavily upon the *ecology* and *action frames* when presenting BP oil spill information to their audiences.

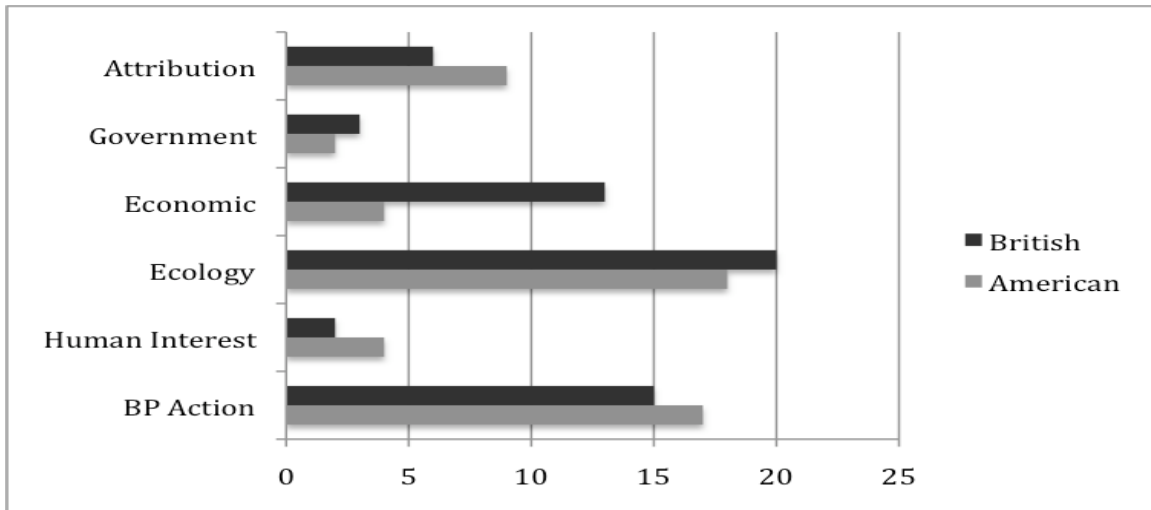


Figure 1: Observed Frames in American and British News Articles

The second research question asked, “Is there a difference in the dominant frames used by the British versus the American news reports?” A series of chi-square analyses was performed to compare the frames used in British and American news articles. Only the use of the *economic frame* between the British and American media outlets showed a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 17) = 4.77, p < .05$ between the British and American news reports. Figure 2 shows the chi-square results for each of the six frames. This information provides the answer to the second research question that while both countries showed no significant difference in their use of *ecology, attribution, and BP action frames*, British media outlets used an *economic frame* more frequently than the American.

Table 4
Chi-square Results When Comparing Frame Use By Country

Frame	U.S.	U.K.	χ^2	p-value
BP Action	17	15	.125	.724
Human Interest	4	2	.667	--
Ecology	18	20	.105	.746
Economic	4	13	4.765	.029
Government	2	3	.2	--
Attribution	9	6	.6	.439

--: Insufficient sample size

The third research question evaluated the tone used in the reports, asking, “Is there a difference between the tones used in the British and American news reports on BP Gulf oil spill crisis?” Of the 54 American articles that were collected four were found to be positive, 23 were negative and 27 were neutral. In comparison, the 59 British articles that were collected, 6 were found to be positive, 20 were negative and 33 were neutral. A series of chi-square analyses were performed to compare tone used in British and American news articles. The chi-square results were insignificant suggesting the answer to the third research question is that the media outlets primarily used a neutral or negative tone with no significant difference between the two countries.

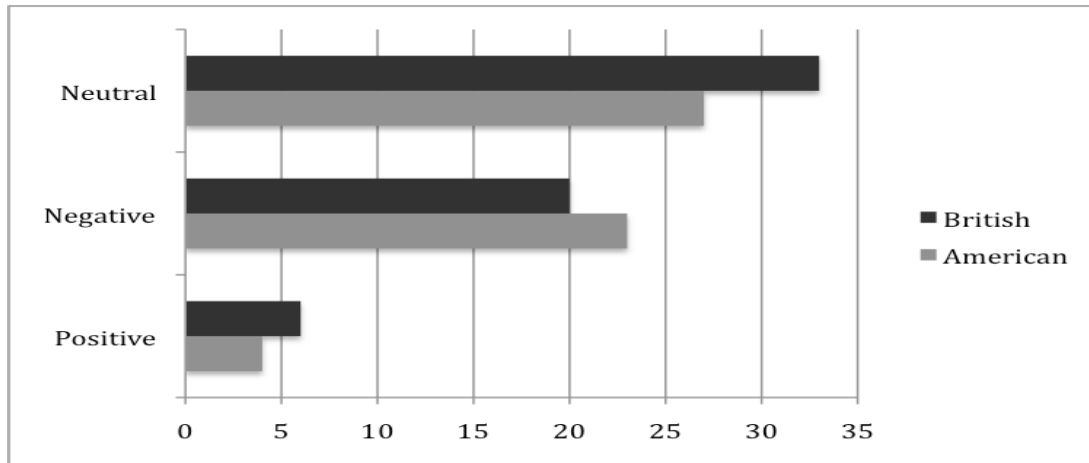


Figure 2: Tones Used in American and British News Articles

Table 5
Chi-square Results When Comparing Tone Use By Country

Tone	U.S	U.K.	χ^2	p-value
Positive	4	6	.4	--
Negative	23	20	.209	.648
Neutral	27	33	.6	.439

--: Insufficient sample size

In addition to the analyses related to the three research questions, the articles were broken down by week to see if particular frames were more dominant at certain moments during the month after the oilrig explosion. For example, the *human-interest frame* was found only in the first two weeks after the explosion . Other findings show that the *action frame* was found more frequently in the third and fourth week (26 of the 33) after the explosion. All other frames used were found somewhat evenly throughout the month following the explosion. Table 6 provides a table that summarizes the timeline by weeks and shows the frequency of frames used in each category. This additional analysis simply explored if there was a pattern in news story frames over the course of the first month of the crisis.

Table 6
Frequencies of Frames Found in Each Week

Frame	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Attribution	2	5	5	3
Government	1	1	2	1
Economic	5	6	2	4
Ecology	11	8	7	12
Human-Interest	5	1	0	0
BP Action	3	4	16	9

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

International crises, such as the BP Gulf oil spill, are extremely complex since the events impact stakeholders in two or more countries. This dramatic event should make international crises a central aspect of crisis communication. Unfortunately, international crises are an understudied topic in crisis communication (Coombs, 2010; Lee, 2005; & Taylor, 2000). Moreover, the international crisis communication research lacks comparative research-- how the same international crisis affects each country it touches (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). Given that news media coverage helps to shape how stakeholders define a crisis, it is important for crisis managers to know if the reports will differ when a crisis affects two or more countries. The BP Gulf oil spill raised economic concerns in Britain, versus an environmental and economic concern in America. These differences could create separate anxieties for the country's audiences and could impact the frames used when writing for the interests of those audiences. If the British and American news frames differed, the BP crisis managers could be managing two very different crises. Evaluating the news reports in America and Britain on the BP Gulf oil spill provides researchers and crisis managers with the ability to determine if the BP oil spill was one crisis or two different crises for BP.

Implications

Crisis communication is an applied field of study and should rely on research to inform practitioners. With continuous maturing of the crisis communication field, crisis managers need information and recommendations that are provided through scientific research (Coombs, 2007). We need to build a body of research that helps to inform and to improve the practice. As a result

of combining theory and practice, it is common in crisis communication research to discuss the implications for both research and practice. This section will discuss possible implications of this study for research in crisis communication and practice in crisis communication.

Research Implications

Most people experience a crisis indirectly through traditional and online media. As a result, how these mediated sources frame the crisis has a serious effect on how stakeholders perceive the crisis and the organization experiencing the crisis, and the attitudes they have toward the organization. It is possible that the frames could be different in various countries involved in an international crisis. The BP oil spill qualifies as an international crisis because BP is based in the UK and the crisis was occurring in the United States. This study analyzed if any trends could be found in the frames used by the American and British news reports when covering the BP Gulf oil spill and if there were any differences in the dominant frames found between the countries. In addition, tone was also evaluated in order to understand if the media wrote more predominantly with a positive, negative, or neutral tone and if there were a difference between America and Britain coverage. The frame and tone comparisons help us understand if the international crisis is being treated as a singular or plural crisis. The international crisis is singular if one frame dominates the news coverage in countries involved in the crisis. The international crisis is plural if different frames appear in the news coverage in the countries involved in the crisis.

This research suggests that there may actually be more similarities than differences in the way the news media framed this international crisis. Both countries predominantly reported with an ecology and action frame. In addition, both countries primarily used a neutral and negative

tone with no significant difference between the two. Even when evaluating the frequency of the other frames used by the two countries there was no significant difference in use. In this circumstance, these findings provide information to show the possibility of international news reports using similar frames when informing the public of a crisis situation.

The one difference found with the economic frame is insightful. BP crisis managers needed to address the economic aspect of the crisis in Britain. Simply ignoring the economic frame would have hurt BP in Britain. America, on the other hand, did not report with an economic frame as frequently. The difference in one frame illustrates the complex nature of international crises. However, this research study is exploratory and speculative and researchers need to examine a wide array of international crises before offering generalizations. Future research should include a multitude of different types of crises and a mix of different countries in order to determine if news frames for international crises are more similar or different.

As discussed at the end of the results section, the two countries used most frames evenly throughout the period of time that the articles were collected. However, two of the six frames provided different results. The *human-interest frame* was only found in the first 9 days after the explosion and each of these articles used specific individuals stories to portray how they were affected by the spill (death, economically, etc.). With these results, it can possibly be assumed that the media will only look at how specific people are directly affected within roughly the first week and will then proceed to report on what is affected on in the larger scope within the time following. With this particular case, the *action frame* became more prevalent beginning in the third week after the oilrig explosion. This is most likely a result of the understanding of the measures needed to stop the spill and the plans that were being implemented by BP. Due to the multiple attempts that began to be taken during this time, reporters were focusing on what was

being done as a dominant frame in informing the public. Future research could look at similar crises to see if the same pattern of *human-interest frames* emerge. Confirming this result would help crisis managers better prepare for the media coverage they might face in a similar crisis.

This project addresses an international crisis, which is a subject that is understudied in crisis communication. This research adds knowledge to the limited understanding of international crises by applying media frames to gain insight into how news media outlets are defining an international crisis for their audiences.

Practical Implications

It is important for crisis communication managers to understand the news media's crisis frames because it will have a strong affect on their message creation. In these situations, crisis frames can act as constraints that define the crisis for most stakeholders. Ignoring these frames or pursuing their own can cause crisis managers to risk managing the "wrong crisis" and producing ineffective management efforts.

The examination of both the British and the American media outlets focused primarily on the *action* and *ecology frames*, in addition to a heavy focus with *economic frames* by the British. Although the other frames were used in the media reports they were not as commonly used in the collection. These results indicate that when reporting on a crisis situation, no matter the country, the media will focus directly on *what* is most presently affected and less on what *could be* or *who* is affected. By understanding frames, crisis communication managers can create more effective messages when they work within the existing frame. Managing within the current frames, instead of attempting to re-define the crisis can help to increase credibility with stakeholders. It can be difficult for corporations to successfully create a new frame that differs from the news media

frames. If an organization works to manage “their crisis” rather than the one the stakeholders perceive, it can be construed as a failed attempt to handle the crisis. This attempt to redefine the crisis, if unsuccessful, can result in ineffective crisis communication efforts by the stakeholders (Coombs, 2010).

Due to the economic toll the oil spill was having on BP and its stock value, the British media outlets were somewhat focused on this aspect of the story since many Britons own shares in the company. Crisis communication managers need to understand the effect that a crisis can have on the economic value of a company and, when possible, work toward providing the media with positive information that informs the shareholders of the security of their investments. Open and honest communication between the company and its shareholders is vital in creating loyalty and weathering stress created by the economic toll. Emphasizing what you are doing in response to the crisis and the loyalty you have to such a mission could help ease a shareholder’s fear about the future of the organization.

However, the economic frame differences found in the study highlight the complexity of managing international crises. If news media in different countries utilize different frames for the crisis, crisis managers are managing multiple rather than one crisis. Managing multiple crises can result in different and even conflicting information demands. BP needed to address economic concerns for its British audience but that information was considered irrelevant and misguided by the American audience.

Due to the fact that the media will inform on what is affected, crisis communication managers should utilize this information in their public relations efforts by explaining to the public what they know and what they are doing to manage the crisis. If the media are not

provided with a statement from the organization it may be given biased or incorrect information from third party sources (Coombs, 2007). After the initial stages of explaining what has occurred, it is natural for the public to wonder what is being done in response. The analysis of the news frames over time supported this belief. Crisis communication managers should remember to supply as much information about their actions as possible to the public. Failure to talk about what is being done could result in negative evaluations of the organization because the crisis managers are violating stakeholder expectations.

The results showed that neither the British nor the American media outlets used a positive tone often when reporting on this crisis situation. This result is logical because could be difficult to find the positive in a crisis situation that resulted in economic and environmental catastrophe, not to mention death. Until positive outcomes are prevalent, it can be assumed that the media will continue to use neutral or negative tone in reporting to the public on a crisis.

Communication managers should utilize this information and emphasize on reporting absolutely *any* positive information that surfaces during the event. One positive aspect would be progress being made to help stakeholders and/or end the crisis. Realistically, the news media may still focus on the negative aspects because the negative often makes for a better crisis story.

Negatives in a crisis can be dramatic and that is a key news value (Dowie, 2002). The initial days after a crisis is when the public will be the most interested in what is happening and scrutinizing a company's response. Influenced by the tone of the reports, people will be likely to form a negative opinion of the organization if they do not believe any progress is being made.

Practitioners must be prepared for the negative tone and realize that what they say or do could only change the coverage minimally. Essentially, crisis managers must recognize that they will need to weather the storm created by the crisis.

Limitations and Future Research

While the researcher diligently worked in completing this study, it does have several limitations. First, while the researcher attempted to train the coders on how to categorize each article, some discrepancies in coding the tone variable were found. Differentiating between negative and neutral tones was problematic at times and was discussed in order to come to an agreement. Although a list of words was given to help coders define tone within the article, at times there was discrepancy in circumstances that were not provided as examples. The researcher and two coders examined each article in question and worked together to decide upon which tone category these discrepancies should be placed. Future research that evaluates tone should create an extensive coding process that clearly defines positive, negative and neutral tone.

Other limitations include the number of articles that were collected. A total of four newspapers were evaluated as a result of availability, thus providing a small number of articles within the time period. There is a potential that more stories and more sources might have changed the results. Additional research should consider collecting a greater number of articles from both the American and British media outlets. This would need to be done soon after the occurrence of the crisis situation to ensure availability. Instead of evaluating two news outlets from each country, future researchers should consider reviewing at least three to four from both countries in order to examine a greater range of coverage.

In addition, the evaluation of the articles was simply text based. Using visuals such as images and figures might have changed the results. It is possible that the visuals might present different frames than the text that was provided. Future research could examine the articles in their complete version (text, images, multimedia, etc.) in order to discover if any additional frames were found through these presentation enhancements.

As noted earlier in the chapter, the need to conduct similar research using different crisis types and international crises using different countries is necessary to determine if the results hold true across other types and with other countries. While these findings are valid in this crisis situation, future research should look at other crises to determine whether or not these frames are transferable from one crisis to another. This study evaluated an environmental accident, but there are still many other types of crises such as product harm and management misconduct (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Would you find similar results using these crisis types? This study looked at Britain and America as the two countries involved in the crisis. Would you find the same results if different countries were involved? How the media respond in a crisis situation is valuable knowledge for all crisis managers. It is imperative that further research is done which evaluates the type of content (such as media frames) that the general public is exposed to during these events. It is only by evaluating the exact content and information provided by such research that we will be able to get an accurate description of media crisis frames used in international crises.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

By using the BP Gulf oil spill as a case study, this research described media reporting within the first month of an international crisis situation. This window is critical because people are likely to be searching for information pertaining to the event and will turn to the media during this search. How journalists frame this information can have an effect on the public's perception of the crisis and the organization involved in the crisis. It is imperative that crisis managers understand media tendencies when reporting on international crises in order to more effectively handle post-crisis communication efforts. By anticipating media frames, crisis managers can tailor their information to fit the information needs created by specific frames.

The results of this study showed many similarities between the American and British news reports, indicating that journalists will have the tendency to report on what is being affected by the crisis. Crisis managers can create more effective messages when working within existing frames, rather than attempting to create their own crisis frames (Coombs, 2010). While exploratory, this research indicates the value of analyzing news coverage frames during an international crisis. This same framework can be utilized for future researchers designed to help practitioners prepare for post-crisis communication.

APPENDIX: CODING SHEET

Online News Coverage of the BP Oil Spill Coding Sheet

1. Source: Online news from _____
2. Date: _____
3. In your best judgment, what is the tone used in the news story? _____
 - 1) Positive
 - 2) Negative
 - 3) Neutral

Frames: Mark each question as yes (1) or no (2).

Attribution of Responsibility

4. Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem? _____
5. Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem? _____
6. If yes, who should be responsible for the situation? _____
7. Does the story suggest that BP is responsible for the issue/problem? _____
8. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue? _____
9. Does the story suggest that an individual or group is responsible for the issue/problem?

10. Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action? _____

Human Interest frame

11. Does the story provide a human example or “human face” on the issue? _____
12. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy- caring, sympathy or compassion? _____
13. Does the story show or discuss how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem? _____
14. Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors? _____

BP Action

15. Does the story discuss what BP is doing in its relief efforts? _____
16. Does the story discuss how BP is capping the hole? _____
17. Does the story discuss how BP has handled the reactions of the spill from the public?

Political Action Frame

18. Is there a mention of the reaction of President Barack Obama to the spill? _____
19. Does the story explain any government action being taken in response to the spill?

20. Does the story discuss any changes to regulation created by the government? _____

Ecology Frame

21. Does the story contain information on the effects that the spill will have on the environment? _____

22. Is there a mention of the effects on animals? _____

Economic consequences frame

23. Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future? _____

24. Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved? _____

25. Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action? _____

Other

26. Does this article focus on any topic other than the previously mentioned? _____

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