

June 2015

Indexing the White House Statements Regarding Snowden and NSA: A Content Analysis of U.S. Elite Newspapers' Opinion Pieces

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Abstract

The current study aims to advance knowledge about indexing and elite debates by examining and comparing coverage of a complex issue in the official government statements and opinion sections of two elite American news organizations. More specifically, this research examines whether or not *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* used any news frames promoted by The White House regarding the former NSA contactor Edward Snowden and his whistleblowing attempts. Results of the textual analysis of The White House Statements and selected opinion pieces indicate that indexing did not occur and a variety of opinion took place. Listed results fall in the theoretical realm of the indexing hypothesis. The study demonstrated that opinion journalism serves an important role in facilitating debates around salient issues and informing the public about those debates.

Indexing the White House Statements Regarding Snowden and NSA:

A Content Analysis of U.S. Elite Newspapers' Opinion Pieces

by

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Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Media Studies

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June 2015

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Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my committee members for your patience, guidance, insights, and mentorship, that kept me motivated to constantly improve throughout this challenging experience. I appreciate your flexibility and accessibility. Thank you for sharing with me your thoughts, input and pointing me in the right direction required not only for this research study, but also for my professional life in general. It has been honor and pleasure learning from you.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction to the Study	1
Section 2: Literature Review	5
Section 3: Research Method	36
Section 4: Results.....	43
Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	57
References	68
Curriculum Vitae	768

Section 1: Introduction to the Study

This research paper examines indexing in the context of media coverage of Edward Snowden's data leaks about the United States' National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance programs. The issue, which still remains a topic of heated public and political debates, came to international attention in June 2013, when Snowden, a former NSA contractor, revealed classified information to several media outlets. The documents Snowden shared with the media revealed the existence of numerous global surveillance programs run by the NSA with the cooperation of corporations and European governments (Greenwald, 2014).

The data breach has sparked public debate about privacy and security, government overstepping its power, and antiterrorism policies. The leaks have also provoked government officials to reevaluate current NSA policies and security measures (Ball et al., 2013). Snowden himself has become a subject of controversy, as many would call him a whistleblower and a patriot, while others consider him a traitor and a criminal. Snowden has proclaimed that his only motivation for leaking the documents was to inform the public about what is "done against them" (Greenwald et al., 2013).

Media played a vital role in Snowden's revelations. Allegedly, Snowden tried to draw attention to the problematic programs through internal and regulated mechanisms of whistleblowing: by reporting his concerns to highly-ranked agency officials and officers who had more access to classified data, but were told not to raise the topic (Gellman, 2013). Eventually, it was media that helped Snowden to break the news. He started to contact reporters anonymously in late 2012, warning them about the risks they would incur by being in touch with

him (Gellman, 2013). The first revelation was published on June 5, 2013 in *The Guardian*, and a few days afterward Snowden revealed his true identity in the video clip published on *The Guardian* website. Within months, classified documents had been obtained and published by other international media, such as *Der Spiegel* (Germany), *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* (United States), *O Globo* (Brazil), *Le Monde* (France), and many others (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2013).

Since the issue of government surveillance has concerned average citizens, the public was very involved in the discussion and public opinion has become a battlefield for political actors. Politics is based on socialized communication and the capacity to influence people's minds. The workings of politics are staged for the media so as to obtain the support of citizens who become consumers in the political market (Bennet et al., 2007). In efforts to exert their opinion, a number of public political figures and agencies issued official statements regarding the NSA leaks scandal and put significant public relations effort in promoting preferred frames to media and the general public. The President of the United States has a unique relationship with the media: in fact, a number of studies show that the President can influence media agendas, especially when the issue involves foreign governments.

The role of media in the scandal stretched beyond just publishing official documents at the contractor's request. Journalists had to explain the complex subjects to the audience, provide background information, amplify certain aspects of the problem and, eventually, facilitate public discussion about the problem and realize their functions as the watchdog for the government. In a democratic society, media in general and opinion journalism in particular is devoted to looking at

a variety of views and perspectives, including questioning the official statements of both state and non-state actors. In a democratic society, media is expected to portray a variety of views coming both from political actors and non-state actors and fairly convey competing ideologies. However, a number of media studies theories argue that even in democratic societies with no direct legal or financial mechanisms of government influencing media, media cannot be truly objective. The U.S. media have been surrounded with questions that it occasionally fails in its responsibility to function as “watchdog” or as the “Fourth Estate” (Carlyle, 1905; Schutlz, 1999). One of the theories supporting this view is the indexing hypothesis, which predicts that news coverage of political and public policy issues tends to reflect the debates of elites. When political elites are in consensus on an issue, news will generally reflect that consensus; when political elites have controversies, news coverage will replicate the parameters of the disagreement (Bennett, 1990).

In order to evaluate the role of media in providing a platform for a variety of opinions, this paper will analyze how the NSA leaks scandal was framed in the White House statements and will examine whether or not indexing of official views occurred in the elite U.S. media.

The significance of this study is based on three related grounds. First, my study adds to the limited body of scholarly work exploring the unique and complicated relationship between the news media and the government, in particular with the president of the United States. Although scholars agree that relations stand out from other press-government connections, there is no systematic approach to examining that relationship (Wanta et al., 2004). Second, the study adds to the knowledge of opinion journalism and its role in a democratic process. Third, the

study explores a unique case that combines the aspects of both foreign and domestic issues. The study of media coverage in general and indexing in particular has generally been neglected in recent years, with most academic energy being devoted to studying indexing in regards to foreign policy and military conflicts. Studying the coverage of the complex and multi-dimensional issue, I seek to introduce a new angle to analyze media indexing.

Apart from being useful to academic research, the study also has practical implications that focus on discussing the effects of framing and indexing in media on the watchdog functions of media, public involvement in democratic process and the importance of opinion journalism. The work can be useful both for journalist, editors and for public relations professionals.

This examination of indexing presents the following research questions posed based on the previous scholarship on newspaper opinion framing and indexing:

RQ#1: How did the White House statements frame Edward Snowden's leaks?

RQ#2: How did *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* frame Snowden's leaks in their opinion articles?

RQ#3: Did the two elite American newspapers index the viewpoints in their op-eds and editorials according to the views expressed in the White House statements regarding Snowden's leaks?

Section 2: Literature Review

Power Dynamics in Media and Politics

Politics is based on socialized communication and the capacity to influence people's minds. Therefore, communication is a spring for social changes or a guarantee of stability, depending on the situation. Many times, the workings of politics are staged for the media so as to obtain the support, or at least the lesser hostility, of citizens who become the consumers in the political market. For instance, in their extensive analysis of the George W. Bush political decisions, Bennett et al. (2007) argued that powerful elites are assured that reality can bend according to their will. The press consents to this assurance because it tends to forget that politicians have biased intents and hidden agendas. Scholars argued that the ability of politicians to mask biases depends on their communication strategies and public relations resources. The higher quality of resources means that policies are more likely to be positively met by the press and, therefore, by the general public.

Scholars also have pointed to the so-called culture of consensus established in Washington politics that reinforces the existing power dynamics. This consensus forms the conformity-enforcing dynamics among all the policy-making participants. Part of the consensus is that journalists are a part of political environment, not separate from it as it may seem. In order to be successful, they must function as a part of the system, but without knowing politicians personally and without participating in the back-door, hidden communications and public relations campaigns. This is also enforced by the fact that many policy-making players

(including journalists) come from the same social circle. Opponents during the workday, they are comfortable with being friends in the evening hours.

Many scholars have noted the economic forces and financial constraints that reinforce the existing media practices. Unlike many other countries, the U.S. government does not openly sponsor domestic media outlets. However, according to scholars, there are less direct ways of exerting financial influence on the press. For instance, being profit-driven implies dependence on stakeholders and advertisers (Bagdikian, 1987; Gans, 1979; Benson, 2009).

On the contrary, Whitten-Woodring (2009) stated that being commercially oriented can serve to keep the media free from complete elite control. News organizations strive to be profitable, and the most common business-model is to sell the audience to advertisers. This implies that the media should build that audience, and serve the masses, not elites only. In the traditional media market, the media that serve only a selected circle do not survive. However, smaller news organizations can cope with the market if they provide alternative information to people who are not satisfied with the mainstream media. Based on these patterns, it can be concluded that while elites can influence the news media, they do not have exclusive control over them.

Finally, another part of the consensus is the fact that only a selected range of voices and opinions ends up in the news, although the Washington political landscape is rather diverse and offers a variety of opinions. This notion is developed into a theory better known as the indexing hypothesis.

Indexing Hypothesis

Indexing is a theory of news content and press–state relations first formulated as the indexing hypothesis, which predicts that news coverage of political and public policy issues tends to reflect the debates of elites. When political elites are in consensus on an issue, news will generally reflect that consensus; when political elites have controversies, news coverage will replicate the parameters of the disagreement, states the hypothesis (Bennett, 1990).

Put differently, the hypothesis argues that those issues and views that are subject to high-level political debate are most likely to receive news attention that is more or less critical; issues that are not subject to debate receive less critical attention. Therefore, the indexing hypothesis attempts to predict the nature of the news content. Thus, it predicts that as the degree of conflict among officials over some political or policy topic escalates, the amount of controversial opinions reported in news increases. While the prediction sounds obvious, there is one serious implication: press inquiries do not go beyond the parameters of elites' discussions, and the press does not typically question issues if similar questions do not originate from the elites (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007). Also, indexing violates the “marketplace of ideas” of the public sphere (Bennett, 1990).

The indexing hypothesis was first introduced by Lance Bennett (1990), who analyzed 4 years' worth of *New York Times* publications about the civil unrest in Nicaragua, where the United States sponsored the counterrevolution forces. Bennett concluded that the coverage had little relation to public opinion, but followed the elite debate instead. While *The New York Times*

claimed that it strived to show various points of view, Bennett proved that all of the controversial views came from Congress.

Before coming up with the indexing hypothesis, Bennett (1988) conducted a similar study of the military actions in El Salvador that were also supported by U.S. funds. Military actions were neglected by the press, and officials did not provide any commentaries. In the research, Bennett traced the connection between these two facts. In the 1990 essay, he noted that various other theories of mass communication and media and government relations were similar to the indexing hypothesis.

In his later work, Bennett continued to refine the indexing hypothesis and support it with examples from recent American history, but he also attempted to show the overwhelming effects that the limiting of the press can have on politics and society (Bennett et al., 2007). When analyzing the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the scholars noted that the press was caught up in the anti-terrorism hype and lost the ability to think critically. The hype, however, was carefully structured by the Bush administration, which conducted a massive, well-structured information campaign, similar to an effective consumer marketing campaign. Even though the media eventually realized this, the pattern of negligence and hype regarding governmental decisions about national security issues had been set.

In further research, the indexing hypothesis became a part of a bigger picture of press and government relations (Bennett, 2011). Concluding his resume of media–government relations work, Bennett suggested that the audience should take control over the information it consumes. The audience should be defining facts and fiction and should look for alternative interpretations.

Reasons for Indexing

According to Bennett (1990), indexing comes from the journalists' established routines, especially their overdependence on sources. The scholar also said that indexing stands on the popular assumption that elected officials are the best representatives of public opinion, and that, therefore, they seem the most appropriate sources for news. Self-censorship for the sake of corporate values and the news-making roles of politicians stand among other reasons for indexing that were pointed out by the scholar. Later research elaborated on the reasons for indexed news; most scholars named the established newsroom practices as key reasons for indexing news. Among these practices are overdependence on sources, systems of accreditation, self-censorship, and pressure from editors.

In a study of the news coverage of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Cook (1994) pointed out the beat system as an established routine that reinforces indexing. His study of the coverage showed that the military actions remained unquestioned by the media, although the invasion occurred after a failure of American policy in the region. Cook described the "Golden Triangle" of key newsbeats (press releases), which included the White House (dominant), State Department, and Pentagon releases that comprised 28% of the broadcast time. Congress was also very active in beats responses, but Congress was on recess during the time of the study. However, the scholar noted that the absence of the Congressional press releases was not critical, because Congressional statements tended to be in line with other official newsbeats.

There were a variety of controversial opinions in other official press releases, such as those in which the president was the main actor of the White House releases. Department of

State newsbeats were comprised mainly of the official spokespeople's opinions. Pentagon releases were comprised of the opinions of politicians, military officers, soldiers, and defense experts. Foreign sources were extremely rare in the newsbeats and surprisingly rare in media reports. Among often-used non-government media sources, Cook (1994) named defense and foreign policy experts and other journalists. However, he noted that most of the experts were former military officers or former government employees. The system of official accreditation was another factor that was found to reinforce indexing: journalists were often specifically assigned to official institutions, and covering those institutions and their decisions became the primary role of assigned reporters.

Other scholars have pointed out that indexing can also be enforced because of editors' routines and self-censorship (Lewis & Reese, 2009). If a journalist quotes the official, he/she is not likely to be disapproved by the editor, but if a journalist quotes an alternative source, the editor might be hesitant to publish that. Consequently, journalists tend to cut off alternative sources. The study noted that official, over-simplified statements provide an easy way for journalists to explain complicated political issues for the public while still meeting tough editorial deadlines.

According to some scholars, indexing is in a paradoxical way reinforced by the expectation of journalists to cover both sides of every public policy issue. Journalists specifically look for debates among politicians to cover both sides and achieve so-called objectivity (Sparrow 1999). Thus, media reports still reflect the elites' debates. Attempting to illustrate his point, the scholar analyzed a number of political campaigns in which the media

played the role of “attack dog” and campaigns in which the media played the role of “lap dog.” His main conclusion was journalists and editors have distinct expectations, and, therefore, they can be predicted and manipulated.

In his further research, Sparrow (2006) expanded on the role of the media routine and practices and the market pressure and stated that the assumptions about news production have become almost institutionalized:

Media clearly are an institution in the political system of the United States: an institution in the sense of being a crucial political and governmental actor, an institution in the sense of being an ordered aggregate of shared norms and informal rules that guide news collection, and institution in the sense of being an ordered aggregate of shared norms and informal rules that guide news collection. (p. 155).

Official sources provide convenient and always-available commentaries, concluded the study by Lewis and Reese (2009); therefore, journalists turn to them often simply out of convenience. Michael Ryfe (2006) argued that journalists have certain habitual rules that dictate how news should be produced; this practice does not favor diversity in opinions. The findings of Hamilton, Lawrence, and Cozma (2010) showed that indexing is also enforced by the coverage of other national media outlets.

Supporting the Indexing Hypothesis

The indexing hypothesis is a relatively new concept for media research. There are a number of studies supporting the hypothesis as well as studies identifying the limitations of indexing.

Zaller and Chiu (1996) found strong correlations between the direction of elite debate and the tone of press coverage after the extensive analysis of the news coverage of the U.S. foreign policy debates between 1945 and 1991. The study also showed that reporters tended to be more critical of official sources when talking about communists and less harsh when they talked about military actions, especially those involving the U.S. troops. The study aimed to explain this tendency and also looked at the exceptions to the rule.

Another supporting study (Entman & Page, 1994) focused on the media coverage of the U.S. policy in Iraq during the Persian Gulf military intervention. The research question of the study asked how much critical distance the news could develop from the official positions. The study showed that news coverage was within the parameters of the political elites, and the more critical views were avoided. Even though the debates were rather heated, only participating official sources were quoted.

The Domke et al. (2006) study of the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States also supported the indexing hypothesis. In the study, the researchers focused on the Patriot Act that was quickly adopted after the attack and granted government officials extensive powers to combat terrorist activities. For instance, the Act suggested that federal agents could detain noncitizens, initiate e-mail and internet surveillance, and intensify the monitoring of student visas. Many human rights advocates and interest groups spoke against the Act, but, regardless,

the Act was very quickly passed. It is suggested in the research that the Bush administration used the media to get Congressional support for the Act. The study analyzed public communications by President Bush and U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft as well as media coverage of the Act. The authors paid attention to timing and highlighted the perspectives of media messages; they also studied Congressional debates to gain insight into their relation to administration and press coverage.

Limitations of Indexing

Most often, scholars point out that indexing is not universal for all public policy or political topics, but only occurs when certain events take place. According to some scholars, indexing is more likely to occur when issues of national security and war, especially involving American troops, are brought up. Hallin et al. (1993) explained the limitations related to the need of the government to control information and keep media patriotic. In earlier research, Hallin (1986) noted a greater degree of objectivity from media due to the failures during the Vietnam War, the end of the Cold War and bi-polar world ideology and frames, and, finally, the advance of media technologies.

Contrary, domestic news are less indexed to officials (Lawrence, 2010). In 1996, Bennett together with Klockner conducted a study comparing media coverage of abortion and of the Iran-Contra controversy in the 1980s. It turns out, when covering abortion, media engaged a wider range of opinions from a variety of sources, official newsfeeds being far from dominant. But when covering the international conflict, indexing occurred. A study of news coverage of police

force usage (Lawrence, 2000) showed that indexing had lower chances of occurring in situations of emergencies or fast-unrevealing situations.

Callaghan & Schnell (2001) claimed that when covering domestic issues, journalists tend to use some of the already existing frames that sometimes do not have much to do with what their sources suggest. Moreover, when journalists are pressured by the official sources, they tend to oppose these sources (Zaller, 1998), and this pattern mostly occurs when covering domestic issues like elections.

Criticism

There are a number of studies that do not support the indexing hypothesis or that question its interpretations. The criticism mainly comes from the notion that the hypothesis gives too much credit to elite dominance (Althaus, 2003; Harp et al., 2010) and portrays journalists as passive. For instance, Harp et al.'s (2010) analysis of the Iraqi War coverage showed that it was Iraqi people who shaped the narration of the coverage, even though official opinions were represented extensively in the news. Also, the study concluded that reporters themselves voice their criticism and questions about the war policies. Another extensive analysis of the Iraqi War coverage (Hayes & Guardino, 2010) showed that although the pro-war perspective dominated the coverage, voices of opposition came not from the domestic officials, but from foreign sources.

The Fourth Estate

In media studies, indexing hypothesis is a part of a larger discussion about the complicated relations of media and government (Bennett, 2011). The U.S. media have been surrounded with criticisms that it occasionally fails in its responsibility to function as “watchdog” or as the “Fourth Estate” (Carlyle, 1905; Schutlz, 1999). This chapter talks about the origins of the “Fourth Estate” concept. The concept of media being a watchdog for a government dates back to the end of the 17th century, when European liberal theorists started to realize that excess royal powers did not benefit the society (Norris, 2010). Many agreed that a free press would control government and offer reliable protection from the excesses of power (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). The press had even got the name of the Fourth Estate, suggesting that its primary role was to check on those in the other three branches of government.

In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution was approved in 1791, granting freedom of press and petitioning the government. One of Thomas Jefferson’s main justifications for the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights was that a lack of censorship would enable the news media to act as a watchdog over the government and thereby render the government more responsible and responsive (Mueller, 1992). Many political science scholars have argued that the First Amendment is even more important for American society than the right to vote. This notion is based on the premise that it is the press that informs citizens about public figures who run offices. Moreover, it is the press that makes them public in the first place (Francke, 1995).

While the concept has quickly gained popularity among the public, political theorists, and, especially, journalists, there has been little explanation of how exactly media can insure there is no overstepping of power. The controversy comes mostly from two related, yet quite opposing viewpoints. The first one states that the main role of media as the Fourth Estate is to directly influence the other three branches of government in the decision-making process. The second viewpoint states that media's role is rather to educate the public about the actions of the other three branches. The public, in turn, has a more direct influence on the government by participating in elections. Therefore, media influences government not in a direct way, but through citizens.

These viewpoints are related, as they come from the Lippmann school of thought. Lippmann (1922) stated that public perception and opinion are determined by the mass media. In Lippman's mind, media was not a watchdog, but rather a "beam of a spotlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision" (Lippman, 1930, p. 364). The notion was narrowed down by Cohen (1965) with a famous phrase that media cannot influence what we think, but they can influence what we think about. It is assumed that in democratic societies, what the public thinks has a strong impact on policy makers' decisions.

A number of studies have analyzed various aspects of the press–government relationship. A group of scholars (Bennett et al., 2004, 2007; Davis, 2000) have studied this relationship from the position of professional public relations. Both studies looked at how political institutions manipulate media through press releases, access to events and speakers, and press conferences. In his study of U.S. news, Bennett (2004) argued that politicians try to influence journalists in

various ways, therefore admitting that media have power over them. Davis (2000) conducted a similar study in Britain, looking at how professional public relations influences news, especially the source and media relations aspect. He stated that institutions are increasingly using public relations technologies to access and dominate the media and that alternative sources are adopting public relations technologies to keep up with the competitive media access environment. He argued that public relations has the potential for widening source access for media and, subsequently, for the public.

Other scholars (Crouse, 1974; Lusoli & Ward, 2005) have looked at these relations during a specific campaign. For instance, Lusoli and Ward examined how media, especially the Internet, were used during the 2004 European Parliament elections. The study showed that professional public relations are influenced by media and public attitude. The authors argued that because of the weak media interest in the elections, the official campaigns were also weak.

As we can see, studies of the media–government relationship are very mixed and controversial. According to Tan and Weaver (2007), the controversy stems from the differences in research approaches.

Challenges and Criticism

The concept of the Fourth Estate was widely challenged, in academia and among public figures. Many opponents of the concept have stated that media should have watchdog responsibilities but still be subordinate to government branches. This notion is based on the premise that governments are working for the public good and completing tasks that affect a lot

of people. Media can sometimes disrupt the government's tasks and does not necessarily care about the public good (Coronel, 2010).

A related view, prevalent in socialist regimes, is that the press should be a partner for the government and work together with the government for the public good; therefore, the media are turned into collective propagandists and agitators. A similar opinion, widespread in poor countries, states that media should not be disruptive to the public by concentrating on negative news, but should rather talk about positive developments.

A comparable concept that used to be more typical of Asian countries stressed the dominance of collectivism over individualism. This view was based on the assumption that citizens are willing to sacrifice individual freedoms in exchange for common economic well-being. Therefore, media should persuade citizens to support the government (Xiaoge, 2009).

Elsewhere, particularly in post-conflict societies, questions have been raised about whether adversarial media can endanger democratic consolidation and spark chaos (Coronel, 2010).

Another strain of criticism, common in both liberal and non-liberal societies, comes from the notion that the media is mostly entertainment-driven and the news is evaluated on its entertainment value (Schultz, 2000). The easiest way to create entertainment value is to employ scandals; therefore, the media is always on the look for "juicy" scandals amid provocations to be popular. The lookout for scandals strengthens the "politics of permanent scandal". There is unending controversy and frenzy on the political stage but not much substantial reform.

Instead, scandals—just like elections—become an arena for political struggle among elites, rather than a venue for mobilizing the public to strive for change (Tumbler, Waisboard, 2004).

At the same time, other scholars point out that lowering the press content standards has negatively affected the watchdog functions of media. According to the long-time British trade union leader Ron Todd, there have been three main effects of lowering the press content standards: the level of political and social debate has been lowered, dissemination of information about what elites are doing has been restricted, and the government is no longer subjected to the scrutiny of the press (Schultz, 2000).

Other scholars have pointed to the trivialization of journalism and emphasize the negative effect it has had on the watchdog media functions. Lee (1976) noted that the emergence of the “new journalism” greatly affected the watchdog functions of the press in the 1880s. Krippendorf (1980) recognized this shift in the U.S. press in the 1890s. British scholars have conducted similar research: in the sixties, Williams (1969) pointed out that only the elite press was talking about politics, while the mass press was more concerned with crime or sports.

Some researchers have raised warnings about the effect of the trivialization of journalism on the public’s engagement with politics. According to Lawson (1989), the reduction of responsible journalism to “flickering farce—screaming headlines, titillation and pseudo crises—is no mere circus; it does carry political meaning. It engenders a dangerous indifference. Junk journalism forms a huge swamp in which too much articulate resistance is submerged” (p. 52). Mughan and Gunther (2000) argued that the more TV news created the image of

government as inefficient and wasteful, the more it encouraged the audience to be indifferent when real wrongdoings happened.

Other studies have supported this opinion that negative reporting undermines support for public officials, and consequently, makes it more difficult for them to govern effectively. They also suggested that negative media reports lead to disappointment with governments as well as disillusionment with democratic institutions and democracy itself (Sajo,2003).

Another strain of criticism comes from the profit-driven nature of the media industry. Hamilton (2004) argued that financial forces have determined news media coverage in the United States since the Penny Press Revolution in the 1830s. Habermas (1992) argued that the commercialization of the press in the 1830s had been part of the “refeudalization” of the public sphere, in which political life was a private matter taken under control by the state and the powerful corporate actors.

In the United States, the commercially-driven newspaper industry developed earlier than in any other country. Privately owned newspapers displaced newspapers affiliated with political parties. In the 20th century, the United States was the first to develop a commercially-driven broadcasting system (Hallin & Giles, 2005). While media scholars agree that private ownership *lets* media stay formally independent from government, many agree that being profit-driven implies dependence of other sorts. In particular, media ownership is often viewed as limiting objective reporting. As ownership becomes more and more concentrated and media companies become vertically integrated, many critics are concerned that the intent to make news more commercially effective results in poor news coverage that leaves many voices, especially

minorities, underrepresented (Bagdikian, 1987; Gans, 1979). According to a survey of journalists, self-censorship is very widespread in news media (Pew Research Center, 2004).

Whitten-Woodring (2009) stated that being commercially oriented can, however, serve to keep media free from complete elite control. News organizations strive to be profitable, and the most common business model is to sell the audience to advertisers. This implies that media should build that audience and serve the masses, rather than serving elites only. In the traditional media market, the media that serve only a selected circle do not survive. However, smaller news organizations can cope with the market if they provide alternative information to people who are not satisfied with the mainstream media. Based on these patterns, the author concluded that while elites can influence news media, they do not have exclusive control over them.

Framing

Another challenge for journalists comes from the difficulty of obtaining objectivity—journalists tend to use various prisms when covering reality, choosing to select, amplify, or leave out some issues or aspects of issues. Scholars call these prisms “frames” and agree that they serve as main ideas that organize content and context (Tankard et al., 1991). Organizing material with frames is called framing and is an essential part of the news-construction process (Hickerson et al., 2011), as it helps to organize the world and to present the information. Consequently, the way an issue is presented in the news influences how it is perceived by the audience (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

Framing has garnered scholarly attention for decades, and yet the concept of framing is still being explicated and operationalized by various scholars. Borah (2011) attributed the

attractiveness of framing to the multiplicity of definitions, methodologies, and sponsors of framing. Scheufele (1999) attributed the vagueness of existing framing research to the lack of a commonly shared theoretical model, which causes empirical limitations. By systematizing the existing research on framing in political communication, he came up with a comprehensive model of framing that identified four key concepts that are important for understanding, conceptualizing, and operationalizing framing: frame building, frame-setting, individual-level process of framing, and feedback loop from audience to journalists.

One of the first definitions of framing was presented by Goffman (1974). The scholar called frames the “schemata of interpretation,” frameworks that help in making sense of everyday life. Gitlin (1980) defined news frames as the means for journalists to manage a large amount of information and package it for the audience. Entman (1993) viewed framing as a means for journalists to select and amplify certain aspects of the issue, noting that to frame is to “select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a 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” (p. 52). Frames perform four basic functions: (a) identify problems, (b) define causes of problems, (c) provide moral judgments of the situations, and (d) offer solutions to the problems. News frames would have at least two of these functions, while fully developed frames would have all four (Entman, 2004). This approach to identify frame elements has been named as a basic model for frame analysis by multiple scholars (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009). Kurtzleben (2010) uses Entman’s four frame functions approach in the analysis of *The New York Times* coverage of the U.S. troop surge in Iraq. Alyas

(2007) also uses Entman's framework when examining the role of the United States Congress in framing the image of Saudi Arabia. Mayock (2014) used the framework to analyze policy stories in the 2011 King County metro funding debate.

Frame-building processes consist of frame construction and frame promotion. Frame construction is a strategic process that is often attributed mostly to elites (Scheufele, 1999), and it is supposed to influence the frames used by reporters. Frames produced by elites are influenced by their political power and relevancy (Bennett, 1990), the purposes of the message or type of media (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012), calculations of whether these frames have cultural and political resonance with journalists (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987) and with the public (Entman, 2008) as well as whether the frame has a potential to be discussed by the opponent (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The most successful frame components must be *noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged* in order to resonate with the journalists and the audience (Entman, 2004). Frame components can be distinguished from non-framed news messages by their ability to stimulate support for certain policies and resonate with the audience (Entman, 2003). However, it was noted by Sheaffer and Gabay (2009) that when smart strategic frame building takes place, it is very difficult to separate political and communication acts and to identify successful frames.

Frame promotion includes choosing communication channels and altering the choice over time depending on immediate needs (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010). However, elites are aware that promoting too many frames can overload the processing media capacity (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and that switching between frames damages the success of a political actor (Iyengar &

McGardy, 2007). Therefore, frames tend to have consistency and magnitude that tap *prominence* and *repetition* of similar messages. Successful frames will have both resonance and magnitude; however, substantive news frames sometimes do not even need magnitude. An example of this is the media coverage of the hijacked airplanes that crashed into the World Trade Center towers on 9/11 (Entman, 2003).

Political public communication requires framing that promotes perceptions and interpretations that benefit one side while obstructing the other. Elites care about public opinion because they want people to support or at least tolerate elite activities. Therefore, elites would like to bend reality according to their needs, and the media seems to follow the game, forgetting that politicians have biased intents and hidden agendas (Bennett et al., 2007). The ability of politicians to mask biases depends on their communication strategies and public relations resources. The higher quality of resources means that policies are more likely to be positively met by the press and, therefore, by the general public.

Situations of crisis and fast unraveling issues—for example, the scandal around the leaks of classified information—provide very limited time to act and constitute excellent opportunities for the opposing side to push its agenda. Therefore, controlling public opinion requires selecting certain frames and cueing the public on how these elements mesh with their own perceptions (Entman, 2004). Because power is the ability to get others to do what one wants (Nagel, 1975), “telling people what to think about” (Cohen, 1963) is how one exerts political influence in the modern world. Thus, political forces strive to shape messages that influence public discussion agendas, or, in other words, promote certain frames.

Understanding how frames work allows us to identify the White House's preferred version of reality and helps us in evaluating the impact of media in facilitating the discourse about the Snowden scandal.

Agenda-setting and agenda-building

The aforementioned ideas of Walter Lippman (1992), who first identified the link between events and their images in the public's minds, and the further refinement of those ideas by Bernard Cohen (1963), who famously stated that the press does not tell people what to think but rather tells what to think about, gave origins to a later formalization of agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972).

The concept of agenda-setting was first introduced by McCombs and Shaw based on their study of the 1968 presidential election. For their study, they interviewed a sample of registered voters who had not yet committed to either candidate and asked each respondent to identify and rank a few important issues as they saw them. The authors then compared the issues on the media agenda with key issues on the undecided voters' agenda. They found that salience of the news agenda highly correlated to that of the voter's agenda. The authors concluded that the media had significant influence on what voters perceived as important issues.

The study argues that when it comes to choosing and displaying news, editors and newsroom staff play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.

McCombs (1981) himself acknowledged a few important limitations about the study had. While it traced a connection between media reports and public opinion, the exact dependency relationships between news and its audience were not very clear. The study did not examine if it was the public that influenced media agenda. The study argued that the media can influence the audience, but the authors noted that the vector of such influence is not very clear. A study by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) played an important role in the further development of the agenda-setting theory and demonstrated causality.

After the concept was introduced, it came into the focus of various communication scholars, and the agenda-setting research rapidly expanded beyond its original theoretical domain - the interface of the mass media agenda and the public agenda. While earlier agenda-setting studies focused mostly on the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda, later studies identified that the process of how new issues came into focus was not always initiated by the media (MacKuen & Combs, 1981). Earlier studies focused mostly on public agenda setting and ignored policy agenda setting, which was mainly studied by political scientists (Rogers & Dearing). As such, scholars recommended that mass communication research should focus on how the media and public agendas may influence elite policy maker's agendas; for example, scholars should examine how political elites get their news and how this affects policy-making. Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) used that suggestion and created a preliminary theory of political agenda setting which examined factors that might influence agendas of policy makers.

Based on the aforementioned conclusions, scholars have identified three types of agenda-setting: public agenda setting, where the public agenda is the dependent variable; media agenda

setting, in which the media's agenda is treated as the dependent variable ("agenda building"); and policy agenda setting, where policy makers' agenda is treated as the dependent variable ("political agenda setting"). Therefore, "setting" an agenda refers to the effect of the media agenda on society and the transfer of the media agenda to the public agenda; "building" an agenda includes more mutual relations between the mass media and society, when both media and public agendas influence public policy.

Agenda-setting theory has a strong connection to framing theory (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; Rubin & Haridakis, 2001). Scheufele (2000) argued that while agenda-setting relies on the notion that the media have the power to increase the salience of issues, framing is based on the assumption that small changes in the wording of news stories can affect how the audience interprets them.

Kiousis (2004) found a strong correlation between the amount of attention that news outlets pay to political figures and both the public salience and the strength of public attitudes toward these figures. In further research, Kiousis et al. (2010) concluded that the salience of issues in public relations messages can increase the salience of these issues on the media and public agendas. This suggestion comes from the theory of the second-level agenda setting that suggests that news media attention can influence how people think about a topic by selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of an issue and ignoring others (Ghanem, 1997). Therefore, second-level agenda setting is closely linked to framing theories.

Agenda-building aspect of the agenda-setting theory was further developed in the studies examining relations between the press and various types of political elites. Scholars agree that

among other types of elites, the president of the United States has a very unique relationship with the news media (Wanta et al., 2004). Lang and Lang (1983) argued that the president and the media reinforce each other. Media coverage cues the White House's official responses and, in their turn, the president's addresses are covered, discussed, and debated in the news media. The public also plays a role in these relations: media coverage influences what is discussed by the general public, and public opinion, in turn, can influence what the White House talks about.

There is no systematic approach to examining the president–press relationship (Wanta et al., 2004). The earlier research in that field showed rather inconsistent findings (Wanta et al., 1989). For example, the research showed that while President Carter in 1978 and President Reagan in 1985 were influenced by media agendas, President Nixon in 1970 influenced the press agenda, and President Reagan in 1982 was found to influence the print media but was influenced by the broadcast media. These inconsistencies show that there are other factors involved in the presidential role in agenda setting. Further research has paid more attention to the types of issues that the president can influence. The president has influence on coverage for which he or she is an important source. On other issues that require professionals and experts, the president has less influence, suggested Wanta (1994). International affairs is an example of an issue that would tend to be influenced by the president, while an economic situation coverage would be less influenced by the president. Also, when it comes to social problems, the president uses the media for a guideline about the importance of issues to which he or she should respond.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping theory is closely related to indexing hypothesis, especially when it comes to discussing specific factors that influence indexing, for example, newsroom workflow. It is an accepted fact that mass media have to face very large volumes of information, but only capable of disseminating a fraction of that information. Gatekeeping studies this process of message selection. Gatekeeping studies identify certain conditions under which information flows through media channel; common elements, such as individual, system, and item-specific that influence the outcomes of those decisions; and how the above factors are influenced by the nature of the medium itself.

The concept of gatekeeping was first introduced by Kurt Lewin (1943), who studied how food reaches consumers' family dinner tables. Lewin concluded that each product has to go through channels of barriers (gates) before it reaches a consumer. David Manning White (1950) first applied Lewin's principles to mass communications in studying how the theory applies to media. White examined how the wire editor of a newspaper decided whether stories were to be published or not. The study showed that those decisions were highly subjective. Scholar argued that a news story had to go through a series of gatekeepers, each of whom makes decisions if the story should proceed to the next gate. While a number of studies supported that conclusion (Snider, 1967), a study by Gieber (1956) shows findings that contradict mentioned research. When examining newsroom routines of 16 telegraph editors, he found that his subjects acted rather passively as gatekeepers and were not guided by personal judgements. The study showed that there are other factors influencing gatekeepers – the routines of the job. Westley and Maclean (1957) argued that media itself can perform as a gatekeeper.

A comprehensive look on gatekeeping was offered by Shoemaker (1991). Her comprehensive model of gatekeeping included factors from outside the organization, factors within the organization and individual factors. Shoemaker has identified five levels of analysis at which gatekeeping has been examined – the level of an individual communication worker, the routines or practices of work, the organizational level, the social and institutional level, and, finally, the social system level. Organization makes decision to employ or fire gatekeepers, to assign them powers, organization also establishes editorial policies and establish work routines. Organization level is where the theory gets very close to the reviewed aspects of the indexing hypothesis.

Although gatekeeping theory has been studied extensively over the last five decades, it remains in focus of communications scholars. Wide-spread internet access and an increased flow of information present new challenges for the theory.

Op-Eds and Editorials

This study focused specifically on opinion journalism mainly because op-eds (opposite-editorials) and editorials are meant to represent elite debates (Henry & Tator, 2002), which makes them perfect subjects to account for indexing. Moreover, editorials and op-eds also function as a means for educating elites and the general public about the most salient issues (Sommer & Maycroft, 2008); therefore, op-eds and editorials may influence elites (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Golan, 2013).

Even though editorials and op-eds represent opinion journalism, each genre has its specific characteristics and distinctive features. The editorial section is meant for the newspaper's editorial board to express the newspaper's views on salient political and social issues (Hallock, 2007). They are published unsigned on the editorial page. According to famous editor and editorial writer Waldrop (1967), the editorial serves three basic functions: as a source of personality, of "conscience, courage, and convictions" as a way of demonstrating that a newspaper is an active part of its community; and as a guide to the whole newspaper operation. Because elite newspapers often have their executives, such as the editor and the publisher, as members of editorial boards, editorials reflect content that is important to publishers and executives. In situations when there are disagreements and conflicts, the publisher has the final say, followed by the editor and the editorial page editor. Therefore, editorials are likely reflect the views of both publishers and editors (Kem et al., 1983). Editorials have different takes and interpretations; therefore, editorials are often subjects of framing studies (Ross, 2003; Richardson, 2005; Golan, 2010; Squires, 2011). Editorials provide important contributions to the marketplace of ideas as well as diversity of opinions.

Finding on whether or not editorials influence elites vary. A study of Congressional votes from 1956 to 2006 found that editorials in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* did not cause changes in Congressional policy positions (Habel, 2012). Davis and Rarick (1964) concluded that editorials are effective at stimulating a public debate, but not in changing elite opinion per se. Hynds (1984) argued that editorials influence public opinion while helping people to make their own judgments rather than forcing expressed opinion on them. A study by

Ladd and Lenz (2009) actually shows that editorials influenced the success of the UK Labour Party in the 1997 elections.

The op-ed (opposite-editorial) is another type of opinion article that is meant to provide expert opinion from people who are not affiliated with that particular newspaper.

Op-eds, short for “opposite the editorial page”, are designed to bring new opinions to the editorial section (Shipley 2004). Scholars identified two types of op-ed contributors: columnists and guest contributors. Columnists are selected by the newspaper’s editorial staff. Although they are usually paid by the newspaper, columnists are independent in their opinions and content, with the exception of the headline (Golan & Wanta, 2004). Guest contributors are experts who are invited to express their opinions within their field of expertise. Newspapers often inform the audience that they may not support the views expressed in op-eds. The op-ed section is meant to serve as a platform for debates and constitutes what is previously described as a “public sphere”—an established site of citizens’ debates (Habermas, 1989). Ideally, the concept of a public sphere forum implies equal participation from citizens of all social levels and includes a diversity of opinions on the market of ideas. Moreover, while diversity and equal participation are seen as a democratic value, they can also be seen as a way to reach larger readership (Rosenfeld, 2000).

However, diversity is sometimes missing in op-eds, argues a number of studies (Day & Golan, 2005; Golan, 2013). The study focused on op-ed contributors for the Los Angeles Times and The New York Times, with a smaller sampling from The Washington Post, and it demonstrated that most contributors were people with some degree of celebrity or prominence (Seldner, 1994). A survey of op-ed page editors showed that the majority of op-ed contributors

were usually professional journalists and public figures, and that editors had very strong control of the op-ed section (Ciofalo & Traverso, 1995). The analysis of two months of op-eds before congressional authorization of the use of force in Iraq in 2002 revealed that only 25% of the op-ed space was allocated to voices not affiliated with the elite press. Moreover, about half of this space was occupied by politicians, military officials, or other public figures. Lesser-known people did not have equal access to contribute to op-eds in the national elite press (Nikolaev & Porpora, 2008). Unequal access results in what Habermas called “distorted communications”—not fair representation on views and ideas. For instance, the study of framing the 2011 Egyptian revolution in two elite European newspapers, the International Herald Tribune and the European edition of the Wall Street Journal, revealed that the majority of contributors were American newspaper columnists. In addition, while op-eds provided various perspectives on issue frames, named issue frames were similar for both papers (Golan, 2013).

Lack of gender diversity also undermines diversity. For example, a study examining six months of The New York Times op-ed articles revealed that 87% of all outside contributors were men (Goldin, 1990). A similar study conducted two years later revealed little progress: 84% of op-ed contributors were male (Wolf, 1995).

In general, the lack of diversity is a problem common for both op-eds and editorials. A study by Golan and Munno (2014) examined the diversity of opinions in both op-eds and editorials in The New York Times and The Washington Post regarding Latin America and point to the homogeneity of authors’ nationality, gender, and professional expertise. As a result, the majority of opinion pieces reflected similar frames. Moreover, both editorials and op-eds are subject of

limitations of space and time. Therefore, many important issues and perspectives may be left out of the media agenda and the public market place of ideas.

It is important to discuss in a wider context of the agenda-setting function and overall realization of the watchdog functions of the press the opinion pieces that end up being published and those that are left out. The lack of diversity at the very core of a public discussion forum sparked many academic and public discussions about the reasons and consequences of media bias. On one hand, the elite press is often accused of having a liberal bias (Alterman, 2003). On the other hand, a number of studies argue that media coverage is too supportive of government policies. A more complex view on media bias is called the indexing hypothesis that is the key concept for this study.

Based on the existing indexing research, the current study hypothesizes that media are not likely to present a diversity of opinions regarding a topic if the elites agree on the issue. Consequently, media are likely to present a diversity of views if the elites disagree. Based on the previous scholarship on newspaper opinion framing and indexing, the current study presents the following research questions:

RQ#1: How did the White House statements frame Edward Snowden's leaks?

RQ#2: How did *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* frame Snowden's leaks in their opinion articles?

RQ#3: Did the two elite American newspapers index the viewpoints in their op-eds and editorials according to the views expressed in the White House statements regarding Snowden's leaks?

Section 3: Research Method

Sampling and Methodology

The current study aims to examine indexing of the White House statements regarding Edward Snowden in two elite American newspapers. Indexing is not universal for all public policy or political topics (Hallin et al., 1993), and with a topic as complex as a breach of classified information, it is important to examine the elite debates and the indexing that occurs in the press coverage.

Textual analysis, also known as discourse analysis, was used to evaluate whether or not two elite U.S. newspapers, *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, indexed the frames promoted by the White House in op-eds and editorials. Textual analysis is considered to be an effective method in mass communication studies because it analyzes mass media messages at the level of the actual texts that would have influence on the actual people who receive these messages and follows their cognitive processing of such texts (van Dijk, 1985). Textual analysis is often used by scholars to find problematic aspects in official government messages regarding the issues of public importance (Lindegren-Lerman, 1985), to analyze media framing of issues of public importance (De Fina & King, 2011; Escobar & Demeritt, 2012; Strega et al., 2014) and studies of media-mediated discussions (Iyer, 2009). While quantitative content analysis allows evaluating the volume and amount of news messages (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005), textual analysis allows comparing the meaning and interpretations of messages (van Dijk, 1985). Textual analysis allowed a more focused study of metaphors, examples and speech figures that are sometimes used in opinion journalism. Pan and Kosicki (1993) say journalists use various

rhetorical tools to invoke images, increase salience of a point, and increase vividness of a story. While content analysis often neglects rhetorical structures, textual analysis identifies them as key elements of text (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

The New York Times and *The Wall Street Journal* were selected because they are considered to be mainstream media (Tucker, 1998) that are defined by academics to reflect national policy and claim a national audience (Rivers, 1975), yet both papers are also considered to be “prestige press” (Boykoff, 2003)—that is, elite, quality newspapers (Abrahamian, 2003) read by the American literati and intelligentsia, whom political scientists would describe as the “attentive public.”

Previous research has named these newspapers as major influencers on public affairs discourse (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005) and decision makers at national and global levels (Doyle, 2002; McChesney, 1999), with policy actors routinely monitoring these newspapers for salient aspects of contemporary public policy issues (Boykoff, 2007). Moreover, these newspapers are likely to influence news coverage in regional and local media outlets, with other reporters consulting them for decisional cues on what is worth covering (Subramony, 2000). Academics often use these newspapers to examine the dominant news frames associated with certain issues or aspects of issues (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Carvalho & Burgess, 2005).

Both of them give a platform for opinion journalism, both print and online, and both host two forms of opinion journalism: op-eds and editorials. In addition, these newspapers represent different sides of political spectrum and are likely to represent a variety of opinions in the opinion journalism sections.

Sampling

The study has two types of sources: statements from the White House (Whitehouse.gov) and op-eds and editorials from the selected newspapers.

Official Statements

Statements and articles dated from June 5, 2013 until January 17, 2014 were chosen. Named dates were chosen because the first notion of NSA leaks first appeared in the press on June 5, 2013 and became a concern of government and media. January 17, 2014 was the date when the President Barack Obama commented on the NSA reforms, and there was less government attention to the initial NSA scandal after that date.

The official statements were retrieved from the official White House website *whitehouse.gov*. The search mechanism available on the website was used. Using the keywords “Snowden,” “NSA,” “surveillance,” and “leaks,” 37 documents were retrieved. Documents belonged to various sections of the website, including the *Briefing Room, Statements and Releases, Speeches and Remarks, and Press Briefings*. Upon a careful review of these documents, we identified that that documents from the *Briefing Room* section (Q and A sessions with the White House press secretary, Mr. Carney), usually included several answers about the subject. A few other official statements contained more than one frame. Therefore, the total number of statements was 54. As such, the unit of analysis is an individual paragraph in which the government frame was promoted.

The sample set for opinion pieces was accessed and compiled through Lexis Nexis database using the key words and key phrases “Snowden,” “NSA,” “leaker,” and “leaks”,

“surveillance”, “espionage”, “security breach”, “data breach”. A total of 247 articles were identified from *The New York Times*, out of which 201 were relevant. Relevancy was identified by only selecting articles that have the issue as the central topic of the article. A total of 150 articles were identified from *The Wall Street Journal*, out of which 128 were relevant. Therefore, the article total was 329. Further refinement identified articles that were published in the newspaper version, excluding *The New York Times Opinions* and blog sections that attracts experts and professionals, but doesn’t appear in the paper version. The refinement also excluded “feedback from readers” that contained public reaction to op-eds and editorials. Therefore, I identified 37 qualified op-eds from *The New York Times* and 21 op-eds from *The Wall Street Journal*. The total for op-eds was 58. I identified 12 qualifying editorials from the Wall Street Journal and 11 from the New York Times, 23 editorials total. Therefore, the total number of opinion pieces was 81. In the initial stages of this project it was planned to analyze op-eds separately from editorials due to their unique characteristics. However, the preliminary analysis demonstrated that for the purposes of this study it is more effective to treat them as one type. Results below demonstrate that editorials and op-eds in the given sample had a lot in common. Moreover, the sample did not have a substantive number of guest op-eds contributors. Therefore, most op-eds and editorials were written by newspaper staff or permanent columnist, who although excluded from an everyday newsroom dynamic, are a part of the newspapers’ team. Moreover, the results below demonstrate that it was more important for the purpose of this to trace changes in frames that occurred over time rather than from genre to genre.

Treating op-eds and editorials as one type of coverage is frequently used in qualitative studies (Hauck, 2001).

Once all opinion newspaper pieces and government statements were collected, each article was textually analyzed for problem, solution, moral attribution and solution, and overall frame. This approach to identify frame elements was presented by Entman (2004), and defining problem, causes, attribution and remedy for improvements has been named as a basic model for frame analysis by multiple scholars (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009). Each article was broken down to frame elements, coding table included seven graphs: media outlet name to account for differences between *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* coverage. Next graph included the date of publication to account for difference occurring in coverage over time. These two categories were used to sort the rows: articles were sorted according to time (from earliest to latest) and divided according to the outlet – that way of sorting proved to be the most effective for stated research questions. Third column contained articles' name and author for convenient reference. Next four columns identified four elements of frames presented in opinion articles, as stated by Entman (2004): problem, solution, moral attribution and solution. Entman points out that words and images comprising the frame can be distinguished by their capacity to stimulate support or opposition to the sides in a political conflict. Determining the tone of the fragment depends on the general impressions someone may glean from that sentence (Druckman, 2001). However, the impression does not depend solely on the sentence. It is necessary to examine the context of the article and the sentences in order to determine the impression. That is why I often included keywords and citations from opinion articles for accuracy in frame elements. Irony,

sarcasm and speech figures – frequent characteristics of opinion journalism - often presented difficulties in selecting separate keywords and phrases, in those cases graphs included full sentences and excerpts from analyzed articles. For instance, in one of the analyzed op-eds, Snowden’s actions are called “illegal” (Firestone, 2013), though in the context the word didn’t have negative connotation, while out of the context it can appear negative. “Naive” in the context is more negative, while out of context it can be neutral.

Same method was used to analyze government statements, but the table had a slightly different layout. Since all statements came from the same source, the first column contains the date of the statement to account for changes over time. Names of the documents were included in the same column for easier reference. Next four columns layout remained similar to the table analyzing articles: problem, cause, moral attribution and solution.

Next step included the interpretation of the collected data. Textual analysis gave me an advantage of partly overlapping data collection and analysis. Within a qualitative research design, data analysis and collection are simultaneous processes argued Merriam (1988) and Marshall and Rossman (1989).

Because the issue selected was so complex and included various aspect of domestic and international issues, I started the analysis with the expectation to face an array of frames. That is why it was decided that instead as grouping findings by frames, it is more effective to group findings by themes. Once individual frames were identified, I grouped them into themes based upon frequencies and the relationships of common frame elements. Same pattern was used to interpret government statements as it was used to categorized opinion pieces.

The final step was a comparison between two groups of themes - government statements and newspaper articles—to examine how opinion pieces utilized or questioned the frames promoted by the White House and to test for the hypothesis. The results of this analysis are presented below.

Section 4: Results

The textual analysis revealed that both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* were critical to the frames provided in the White House statements. Although some components of the government frames were positively presented in the opinion pieces, most of the time the government frames were not only identified, but they were also challenged or questioned. There was a diversity of opinions regarding Snowden's leaks, both in the *New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*; however, very few would directly support government frames. Findings also point to differences in frame elements between studied newspapers, but, overall, opinion article frames—both favorable and unfavorable—appeared more diverse and in-depth than did the frames promoted by the White House.

Overall, the study identified four main frames promoted by the White House that, however, would alter over time.

It is important to reemphasize that I analyzed each fragment depending not only on the particular sentence in which a fragment occurs, but also on the paragraph and sometimes the whole article.

Government Frames

Research question 1 asked what frames dominated the examined government statements. I identified four main frames promoted by the White House. Most often, they portrayed Snowden as a criminal, someone who committed “very serious crimes” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013) who needed to come home to face “our justice system under the Constitution” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013), where “every aspect of

the United States system of justice [would be] available to him.” Therefore, Snowden “ought to be returned . . . through law enforcement channels, which is the normal mechanism” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013). What he did would be viewed as an indication of malicious intent: “Programs are designed to thwart potential terrorist attacks against the United States and [its] allies” that might harm U.S. security (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013).

Addressing Snowden’s revelations themselves, the White House was not very consistent in its statements. The attributes of the promoted frames, such as, for example, a proposed solution altered sometimes changing radically. For example, a frame addressing Snowden’s revelations of U.S. spying on foreign countries (problem) included variations in moral attributions from *positive* to *neutral*: “We do what other nations do, which is gather foreign intelligence” (Remarks by the President on Review of Signals Intelligence, 2014). Statement signified positive attitude towards foreign intelligence programs led by N.S.A. Statement is further reinforced by naming the programs approved and constitutional: “NSA’s foreign intelligence activities are conducted pursuant to procedures approved by the United States Attorney General” (Remarks by the President on Review of Signals Intelligence, 2014). However, later remarks dicte that The White House Acknowledged the problem with the named programs and suggested a solution to work with foreign governments to address the issue: “engage in direct communications through diplomatic channels with a number of countries on these matters”; “we are working with our friends and allies to discuss these matters” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2013).

A **terrorism frame** was very prominent in the White House statement. It was emphasized many times that Snowden is a threat to national security, his revelations undermine safety and security, and all the public/political opposition concerns regarding the programs are not valid, as the programs are meant to preserve fragile national security.

Another very prominent motif emerging from the White House statements indicates **disagreements and debates** regarding the issues with the legislative branch:

For instance, The White House blamed the Congress for speaking up against the programs:

“These programs (NSA programs) are subject to congressional oversight and congressional reauthorization and congressional debate. And if there are members of Congress who feel differently, then they should speak up” (The White House, 2013).

Further statements became even more emotionally charged: “These are the folks you all vote for as your representatives in Congress, and they're being fully briefed on these programs. And if, in fact, there was -- there were abuses taking place, presumably those members of Congress could raise those issues very aggressively. They're empowered to do so.” (The White House, 2013).

This quote from the Press Briefing also reinforced that statement: “Well, again, I think—again, the fact is they've known about these programs, they've approved these programs, they've provided oversight over these programs. I know that some members don't show up for these briefings. I know that some members choose appearances on cable television over these briefings, but the briefings exist and have happened.” (The White House, 2013). In the “And if people can't trust not only the executive branch but also don't trust Congress and don't trust

federal judges to make sure that we're abiding by the Constitution, due process and rule of law, then we're going to have some problems here." (The White House, 2013).

Frames in Opinion Articles

Opinion articles present a diversity of frames and frame elements. Overall, five significant themes emerged both in op-eds and editorials in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The themes were identified by incorporating frames and/or frame elements (i.e., problem or cause of problem) similar in nature into larger groups.

While it was not within the research goals to trace differences in coverage between the analyzed newspapers, it was impossible to ignore the fact that viewpoints of the newspapers differed. Differences in coverage can be explained by the fact that named newspapers represent different sides of political spectrum, therefore, are likely to represent a variety of opinions. There is a wide variety of opinions in the opinion articles, even within a single newspaper.

Theme 1: Internet and technology. The first theme unites frames and/or frame elements (problem, cause of problem) identified by both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* that point to Internet, technology, and Internet technology (IT) industry players as the main problem or cause of the problem associated with the Snowden's leaks and N.S.A. surveillance. In reference to technology, coverage differed between *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. As for *The New York Times*, in the articles that contained this frame or frame elements, technology often emerged as the negative force. There were several references to "the brute force of powerful supercomputers" (*The New York Times* Editorial Board, 2013, p. CR10) that create a "virtual world . . . awash with subterfuge, malware and deception" (Glenny, 2013). This world is

hard to navigate: “The existence of complex systems of communication beyond the Surface Web makes it hard to grasp exactly what is going on in the world of cybermalfeasance” (Glenny, 2013). Moreover, it is hard to control: “our whole life is out there in the cloud, summed up in four letters: data” (Kauffman, 2013). Therefore, personal privacy becomes provisional, and often falls under the control of the industry giants. “We have long since surrendered a record of our curiosities and fantasies to Google. We have broadcast our tastes and addictions for the convenient,” writes M. Frankel (2013) in a *The New York Times* op-ed about the downside of consumers’ convenience. Frankel further points to loopholes in corporate data storage. “The Internet industry has only sharpened its efforts to track users online, which it considers essential to profitability.” Further exploring the problem, a small number of *The New York Times* op-eds and editorials indicate that giving consumer and other data to the industry would not be such a great problem if not for the corporate-government surveillance agreements that are usually not known by users. For example, one *The New York Times* editorial says, “The very collection of data by the likes of Facebook, Microsoft, and Verizon creates a vast reservoir of information that intelligence agencies can tap into” (*The New York Times* Editorial Board, 2013). “If data can be stored, it can also be altered,” agrees guest contributor Jochen Bittner, the editor of the German *Die Zeit* (Bittner, 2013). “Our gadgets and our digital networks are being used to spy on us by ultra-powerful, remote organizations”, says another NYT columnist, blaming Americans in their so called “digital passivity” (Lanier, 2013).

For *The New York Times* opinion pieces, the proposed solution to the frame is to take the rapidly developing technology under control, both state and corporate, “to collaborate with big

software companies” (*The New York Times* Editorial Board, 2013) or to stop the corporate-government surveillance agreements. Individuals should take personal control over their own consumer information by giving up the convenience “of one-button Amazon shopping” (Frankel, 2013).

Contrary to the “demonizing” of technology, a number of opinion pieces from *The Wall Street Journal* (*WSJ*) go into the details of how exactly the programs function, what are the algorithm and what is metadata. Notably, these articles have mostly positive moral attribution. In the editorial that appeared just a few days after the first of Snowden’s revelations – the very first editorial from the *WSJ* sample, in fact – the newspaper explains that metadata is an effective tool and should not be feared by actually explaining metadata and big data. “The NSA is collecting “metadata”—logs of calls received and sent, and other types of data about data for credit card transactions and online communications. Americans now generate a staggering amount of such information—about 161 exabytes per year ... These data sets are so large that only algorithms can understand them, ” states the editorial and points that the only solution would be just having a more robust surveillance (The Wall Street Journal editorial board, 2013). A subsequent editorial reinforces the idea: “Data-mining is a tool to infer patterns and relationships, but you can't connect the dots without, well, dots. There really is safety in numbers,”(The Wall Street Journal editorial board, 2013). An even later editorial from the *WSJ* sample, dated December 17, 2013, argues in favor of metadata by attempting to explain how it works: “The problem is that metadata is only useful if it is pooled, formatted and organized so it can be searched quickly and accurately.”

The concepts of metadata and useful technology are also developed in op-eds that generally support editorials. “Authorities are not tapping individual calls or reading emails—that requires a warrant from a judge. Instead, they are using new database technologies to monitor records of millions of phone and Internet communications,” writes a *The Wall Street Journal* contributor (Grovitz, 2013). “Telephone metadata is generated by communications companies, and it belongs to them, not to their customers. Its acquisition by the government therefore doesn't implicate the Fourth Amendment,” writes *WSJ* guest contributors Pompeo and Rivkin (2013).

Government statements did not frame internet and technologies.

Theme 2: Looking for political reasons. Theme two consists of frame elements, mostly “cause of the problem”, and concentrate on naming political forces as primary sources of problems associated with the N.S.A. leak scandal. Regardless of what was named as the problem or whether the frame contained positive or negative moral attribution, the cause of the problem related to political decisions of current or previous administrations. For example, the contributors often pointed to changes in security and intelligence programs as the main reasons for whistle blowing. While both papers explore political reasons, coverage in *The Wall Street Journal* differs from *The New York Times* coverage. Changes in expenditures on intelligence are never mentioned in the White House statements regarding Snowden.

In this theme, outsourcing national security to private contractors is one of the most prominent causes of the problem. Outsourcing is most often tied to post-Iraqi war political steps. The concentration on outsourcing is most covered in *The New York Times*. According to one *The New York Times* op-ed, “Seventy percent of America’s intelligence budget now flows to private

contractors” (Shorrock, 2013). “The early days of the Iraq war... ushered in the era of private contractor, wearing no uniform, but fighting and dying in battle”, argues an the very first op-ed from *The New York Times* sample (Keller, 2013). “What has received less attention is the fact that most intelligence firms ... involve another common aspect of intelligence work: deception” notes another *The New York Times* contributor (Ludlow, 2013).

As causes of the problem, contributors also point to specific political decisions, such as The Patriot Act, or to specific personalities or political entities. “So if the country is a little less willing to accept assurances that collecting our private data is a way of making us safe, and this surveillance comes with safeguards to prevent real abuse – you can thank Dick Cheney,” argues a *The New York Times* contributor (Keller, 2013). “Obama administration has argued that Congress, since 9/11, intended to implicitly authorize mass surveillance... Americans deserve better from the White House – and from President Obama, who has seemingly forgotten the constitutional law.” (Granick & Sprigman, 2013). “For years, as the federal surveillance state grew into every corner of American society, the highest officials worked to pretend that it didn’t exist... For years, members of Congress ignored evidence that domestic intelligence-gathering grown beyond their control,” editorial points to Congress (*The New York Times* Editorial Board, 2013).

The Wall Street Journal carried an op-ed claiming, “The Obama administration has decided it wants out from nettlesome foreign entanglements, and now finds itself surprised that it’s running out of foreign influence” (Stephens, 2013).

Theme 3: Terrorism, a new take on an old frame. Indexing and framing research often point to the terrorism frame as one of the most prominent in post-9/11 American press (Bennett et al., 2007; Domke et al., 2006). Textual analysis shows that the terrorism frame was a very prominent one in the White House coverage, and was still present in both newspapers analyzed in the current study. However, framing of terrorism and antiterrorism in *The New York Times* op-eds differed from those in *The Wall Street Journal*.

The Wall Street Journal framing of terrorism resembles the traditional terrorism frame pointed by post-9/11 framing and indexing studies (Entman, 2008). An editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* justified security measures of all sorts if it prevented terrorism. It noted that “the data sweep is worth it if it prevents terror attacks that would lead politicians to endorse far greater harm to civil liberties” (*The Wall Street Journal* Editorial Board, 2013). Another *The Wall Street Journal* article claimed, “Intelligence agencies, with court authorization, have been collecting data in an effort that is neither pervasive nor unlawful. As to the data culled within the U.S., the purpose is to permit analysts to map relationships between and among Islamist fanatics” (Mukasey, 2013). “The U.S. must remain vigilant against terrorist attacks against the homeland. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, considered the world's most capable and dangerous terrorist organization, is determined to attack the United States,” warns the *WSJ* guest contributor Ms. Feinstein, a Democrat from California who is chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, one of the handful guest experts from the sample (Feinstein, 2013).

The unique aspect of *The New York Times* op-eds and editorials is that many authors took a very critical take on the frame. While some authors emphasized that Snowden did terrorists a

favor, some other op-ed contributors recognized that the society had gone too far with security measures. Some agreed that politicians and corporations had overused the terrorism frame: “The interesting thing about the security measures that are taken today is that they provide, as Prince puts it, the ‘illusion of security;’ another way to put it is that they provide ‘security theater.’ Or perhaps it is actually theater of fear” (Ludlow, 2014).

When talking about the unnecessarily expanded military and security complex, one op-ed argues, “We need a robust military and intelligence network, for these (*Al Qaeda*) threats are real ... But there are trade-offs, including other ways to protect the public, and our entire focus seems to be on national security rather than on more practical ways of assuring our safety” (Kristof, 2013). However, not all op-eds in *The New York Times* maintained a similar tone. A few of them did resemble more traditional take on the terrorism frame. As one op-ed contributor expressed his opinion in *The New York Times*: “Yes, I worry about potential government abuse of privacy from a program designed to prevent another 9/11—abuse that, so far, does not appear to have happened. But I worry even more about another 9/11” (Friedman, 2013). A NYT op-ed suggests in opposition that the country should carry on the programs for the sake of battling external threats.

Theme 4: In search of moral attribution. It appeared that the moral evaluations of Snowden’s leaks was some of the most discussed frame components in both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Both op-ed contributors and editorial board provided frames that would concentrate heavily on moral evaluations of what Snowden did. Evaluations and expressed a variety of opinions ranging from “traitor” to “hero”.

“At least Mr. Snowden has the courage of his misguided convictions” (WSJ editorial, 2013).

“Snowden deserves a chance to make a second impression” concludes New York Times op-ed contributor T.Fredman. “History, the real sort, will judge his kindly”

Ultimately, these articles— positive and negative—would make moral evaluations of the central topic.

This concentration on moral evaluation can be attributed to the genre of the examined texts—op-eds and editorials that allow experts to articulate their opinions regarding salient issues (Golan, 2010).

Theme 5: Identifying government frames. This theme merges frames and frame elements that openly identify frames promoted by government. This is not a separate frame type per se, but rather an attempt to examine how opinion pieces identify official statements, both in the op-eds and in editorials. Identifying that theme got me closer to answering the research question number three.

Overall, both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* were very critical in identifying the frames promoted by the government and spoke negatively on the attempts to portray Snowden and comment on his revelations. The authors talked openly about the flaws in frame construction and promotion made by the White House. For example, a *The New York Times* writer noted, “The effort [to frame the leaks] was a failure . . . clarified nothing of importance, [and] . . . raised major new questions about whether the intelligence agencies had

been misleading Congress and the public” (“More Fog from the Spy Agencies,” 2013). Op-eds from the both papers pointed out the inconsistencies in the government’s statements: “Before we go any further, let's correct the president on some factual matters. The court that administers the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act is not transparent; its rulings, including the ‘secondary order’ leaked by erstwhile NSA contractor Edward Snowden” (Taranto, 2013). “It has become one of the trademarks of the Obama administration: decry human rights abuses abroad . . . , express outrage over Chinese hacking while carrying on a sophisticated spying operation of your own citizens” (Nocera, 2013).

As mentioned, the critical approach government statements was typical both for op-eds and editorials. An editorial from *The New York Times* noted: “The Obama administration’s response has been that the United States seeks to gather foreign intelligence as other nations do. That is not in dispute, and no doubt much of the public indignation by France and other governments is largely rhetorical” (*The New York Times* Editorial Board, 2013). Another editorial in *The New York Times* calls The White House response “a pathetic mix of unsatisfying assurances about reviews under way, platitudes about the need for security in an insecure age” (*The New York Times* Editorial board, 2013).

Indexing of government statements in op-eds and editorials

Research question 3 asked whether or not *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* indexed the viewpoints in their op-eds and editorials according to the views expressed in the White House statements regarding Snowden’s leaks.

Overall, the identified frames and themes reveal that government frames were rarely reflected without any criticism or questioning. In particular, from the very start of the scandal—that is considered the original publication of Snowden’s leaks—op-eds and editorials were not satisfied with the framed reasons provided by the White House statements, and they offered further analysis of the political, financial, or social reasons leading to the scandal. Both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* questioned the messages promoted by the administration. For instance, both newspapers used their op-ed sections to examine the reasons that led to the breach. While discussing possible reasons, editorials and op-eds often pointed to budget cuts, outsourcing services to private companies, and flawed background checks of federal employees as potentially contributing to the breach. The *New York Times* op-eds and editorials pointed to flaws of previous administrations as potential reasons, while *The Wall Street Journal* op-eds talked about the hard-to-control nature of the Internet. Frames promoted by the White House pointed to disagreements between the White House and other governmental branches, so disagreement mainly originated from official sources, which supports indexing theory. Results demonstrated that journalists were more vocal in their opinions and went beyond citing official sources.

Findings point out to differences between frames used in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, but, overall, opinion article frames—both favorable and unfavorable—appeared more diverse and in-depth than did the frames promoted by the White House. Differences in coverage can be explained by the fact that named newspapers represent different sides of political spectrum, therefore, are likely to represent a variety of opinions. There

is a wide variety of opinions in the opinion articles, even within a single newspaper, but the White House-promoted frames did not find much support in either part of the spectrum.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The indexing hypothesis is an important part of understanding press and government relations. Previous studies indicated that news coverage of salient issues can be predicted by the nature of elite debates regarding those issues. Indexing is attributed to various factors—internal newsroom dynamics, source availability, and type of covered issue (foreign affairs, domestic crises, military actions)—all these issues are predicted to have different influences on indexing the elite debates (Bennett, 2007; Sparrow, 1999). This research aims to advance knowledge about indexing and elite debates by examining and comparing coverage of a complex issue in the official government statements and opinion sections of two elite American news organizations. More specifically, this research examines whether or not *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* used any news frames promoted by The White House regarding the former NSA contactor Edward Snowden and his whistleblowing attempts.

The results of the examination point to a critical approach to the frames promoted by government op-eds and editorials had in their portrayal of Snowden's leaks. Although some components of the government frames were positively presented in the opinion pieces, most of the time government frames were challenged or questioned. Regardless of the diversity of opinions regarding Snowden's leaks both in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, very few would directly support government frames. Moreover, newspapers' frames typically were more in-depth than were the frames promoted by the White House.

The results indicate that four main frames were promoted by the White House. Those frames would, however, appear to be inconsistent, altering over the examined period of time, with rather frail proposed solutions and changing moral attribution. Opinion article frames, both favorable and unfavorable, appeared more diverse and in-depth when they were promoted by the White House. Both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* questioned the messages promoted by the administration. For instance, both newspapers used their op-ed sections to examine the reasons that led to the breach. While discussing possible reasons, editorials and op-eds often pointed to budget cuts, outsourcing services to private companies, and flawed background checks of federal employees as potentially contributing to the breach. The *New York Times* op-eds and editorials pointed to flaws of previous administrations as potential reasons, while *The Wall Street Journal* op-eds talked about the hard-to-control nature of the Internet. Frames promoted by the White House pointed to disagreements between the White House and other governmental branches, so disagreement mainly originated from official sources, which supports indexing theory. Results demonstrated that journalists were more vocal in their opinions and went beyond citing official sources.

Listed findings fell in the theoretical realm of the indexing hypothesis. The analyzed media materials pointed to elite disagreement, while the elite consensus was the key condition for indexing to have taken place. According to the indexing hypothesis, press inquiries do not normally go beyond the parameters of elites' discussions, and the press does not typically question issues if similar questions do not originate from the elites (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007).

The results are consistent with previous studies that examine indexing. As stated by the previous studies, indexing is not likely to occur when elites are in disagreement (Bennett, 2007). Indexing stands on the popular assumption that elected officials are the best representatives of public opinion, and that, therefore, their elite discussion seems the most appropriate source for news. The White House releases have been identified as dominant and the most influential as news sources and, similar to the study of the news coverage of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait by Cook (1994), even the absence of the Congressional releases did not seem to influence the debate as the Congressional statements were reflected in the official White House releases in one way or another.

According to previous studies, indexing is in a paradoxical way reinforced by the expectation of journalists to cover distinctive sides of every public policy issue. Journalists specifically look for debates among politicians to cover both sides and achieve so-called objectivity. Attempting to illustrate the point, Sparrow (1999) analyzed a number of political campaigns in which the media played the role of “attack dog” as well as campaigns in which the media played the role of “lap dog.” His main conclusion was journalists and editors have distinct expectations, and therefore, they can be predicted and manipulated.

Another factor that might have contributed to a variety of opinions originated in the nature of the issue is that since the conflict unraveled both internationally and domestically, authors could have better access to sources. This factor is often emphasized in indexing research. According to some scholars, indexing is more likely to occur when issues of national security and war, especially involving American troops, are brought up. Hallin et al. (1993) explained

that this occurs due to the need of the government to control information and keep media patriotic. In earlier research, Hallin (1986) noted a greater degree of objectivity from media due to the failures during the Vietnam War, the end of the Cold War, bi-polar world ideology and frames, and finally, the advance of media technologies. Contrary, domestic news is less indexed to officials (Lawrence, 2010). Callaghan & Schnell (2001) claimed that when covering domestic issues, journalists tend to use some of the already existing frames that sometimes do not have much to do with what their sources suggest. Moreover, when journalists are pressured by the official sources, they tend to oppose these sources (Zaller, 1998), and this pattern mostly occurs when covering domestic issues. This statement is backed by the presented examination.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretical implications of this study focus on indexing research and opinion journalism research. Overall, the results of the current study add to the limited knowledge regarding indexing of official sources in the context of international affairs. While the study shows that editorials and op-eds were very critical of the governmentally-promoted frames, the refinement of indexing hypothesis implies the predicated relations between press and political elites, which suggests that under certain circumstances such an elite consensus, media are very likely to not be critical to official frames. Apart from the predictable nature of news coverage, this also means a greater influence on politics and society (Bennett et al., 2007).

This study also adds to the limited body of scholarly work exploring the unique and complicated relationship between the president of the United States and the news media.

Although scholars agree that relations stand out from other press-government connections, there

is no systematic approach to examining that relationship (Wanta et al., 2004). Scholars tend to pay attention to the types of issues that the president can influence and conclude that the president has influence on coverage for which he or she is an important source, with other issues that require professionals and experts, the president has less influence. International affairs are an issue that would tend to be influenced by the president, while coverage of a complicated domestic issue would be less influenced by the president. This statement is backed by the current research as well. Existing research on press-president relations also suggests that when it comes to social problems, the president uses the media for a guideline about the importance of issues to which he or she should respond (Wanta, 1994).

Apart from supporting the body of scholarship on the U.S. news media's relationship with American society and the government, the current findings also reinforce the findings of several existing editorials and op-eds that emphasize the opinion journalism serves as an important democratic function (Rosenfeld, 2000) and plays an important role in informing both the media and the audience about salient issues (Entman, 2008). When contributors are not a part of a regular news-media dynamic, they are likely to become “attack dogs” rather than “lap dogs” and are more difficult to predict and manipulate (Sparrow, 1999).

Practical Implications

Practical implications of this study focus discussing the effects of framing and indexing in media on the watchdog functions of media, public involvement in democratic process and the importance of opinion journalism.

For public relations professionals, the study proves the importance of strategic and planned - yet flexible - communications. Government frames were negatively met in media partly because of flawed frame promotion. Frame promotion includes choosing communication channels and altering the choice over time depending on immediate needs (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010). Entities that promote too many frames can overload the processing media capacity (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and that switching between frames damages the success of a political actor (Iyengar & McGardy, 2007). Therefore, promoted frames need to have consistency and repetition of similar messages. The ability of politicians to mask biases depends on their communication strategies and public relations resources. The higher quality of resources means that policies are more likely to be positively met by the press and, therefore, by the general public. (Bennett et al., 2007).

Situations of crisis and fast unraveling issues—for example, the scandal around the leaks of classified information—provide very limited time to act and constitute excellent opportunities for the opposing side to push its agenda (Entman, 2004). In the studies scenario media were ahead of the game and had more information about the case. Moreover, media were active participants in the scandal and likely had their own agenda. In difficult cases like this, success for public relations professionals is selecting certain frames and cueing media on how these elements mesh with their own perceptions

Consequently, media should be critical of government statements when covering these types of stories. Government is an important and convenient source to turn to, but in order to make coverage fair, media should strive to go to outside sources more. Contrary to public

relations professionals' assumption, government benefits when media cover multiple sides of a story and provide alternative opinions. Bennett et. al. (1999) argued that news fairness is positively related to trust in government, i.e. if public believes that the news are reported in a fair way and controversial points are presented, public tends to trust government. The study also shows the importance of reforming of the established newsroom practices – when excluded from the regular newsroom dynamic, authors tend to be more critical. It can give publishers ideas of how to improve the established work practices in fast-paced deadline-driven contemporary daily news production cycle. Also, the study shows that opinion journalism serves as an important democratic function and plays an important role in informing both the media and the audience about salient issues. Therefore, publishers and media managers should rethink the role of opinion pages. A good example of unsuccessful opinion section marketing is *NYOOpinion* App. Just when this study was in the making, in October 2014 The New York Times announced that its app *NYTOpinion* would be shut down its app because it turned out to be not profitable and didn't draw enough audience. The app was dedicated to opinion pieces only, and the shutdown was announced just four months after the launch. Knowing the importance of opinion journalism, publishers should think of new creative ways to market op-eds and editorials.

For the public, this study demonstrates complicated relations between press and government. It proves that the audience should take control over the information it consumes. The audience should be defining facts and fiction and should look for alternative interpretations (Benett, 2011). For journalists, this study points to value of critical approach to promoted materials and value of a source variety.

Limitations

However, this current study has certain limitations that might have affected the results, such as qualitative methodology and limited sampling among opinion pieces. While the presented qualitative textual analysis attempted to explore how opinion pieces and op-eds were situated within the broader elite discourse and identified and analyzed media frames on a cognitive level, a quantitative analysis could have allowed for a bigger picture of how the promoted frames find their place in mainstream media (Harp et al., 2010). Another limitation of this current study is that it only examined two U.S. elite newspapers. Previous research has named *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* as major influencers on public affairs discourse (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005) and decision makers at national and global levels (Doyle, 2002; McChesney, 1999), with policy actors routinely monitoring these newspapers for salient aspects of contemporary public policy issues (Boykoff, 2007). Both newspapers were selected because they are considered to be mainstream media (Tucker, 1998) that are defined by academics to reflect national policy and claim a national audience (Rivers, 1975), yet both papers are also considered to be “prestige press” read by elites (Boykoff, 2003). While the selection of those elite newspapers was justified by the study’s objectives, further examinations of other media outlets could also offer important results.

Another strand of limitations of this study might come from the study design. This study only looks at one type of official sources – the White House statements and studying more types of official sources could lead to important results. Previous studies examining indexing in regards to international issues point to the “Golden Triangle” of official sources (press releases),

which include the White House (dominant), State Department, and Pentagon releases. Congress was named one of the influential sources of official opinions. It was noted in a study by Cook (1994) that the absence of the Congressional press releases was not critical, because Congressional statements tended to be in line with other official newsbeats. However, in this case studied White House Statements pointed to existing disagreements with Congress. Moreover, complex issues such as the one described in this study involve more government agencies and interest groups, therefore, examining indexing could involve studying more official sources in order to track elite disagreement. Studying different types of sources could add important results.

Other limitations of this study might come from the focus of this study on opinion journalism, and not from regular news coverage. The choice to examine specifically op-eds and editorials was justified by their ability to represent elite debates (Henry & Tator, 2002), which made them excellent subjects to examine for indexing. Moreover, editorials and op-eds are also believed as a means for educating elites and the general public about the most salient issues (Sommer & Maycroft, 2008), and therefore, they may influence elites (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Golan, 2013). However, examining news coverage of the same issue could add important results.

Moreover, even the very nature of the N.S.A. leaks scandal yield could be problematic for studying indexing. The role of media in the scandal stretched beyond reporting and providing a platform for various opinions publishing. In this case, media were actively involved in the scandal, at least in the very beginning, because it was media that helped Snowden to

expose classified information. It happened, allegedly, after the traditional established mechanism of whistleblowing – addressing the higher official within the organization – failed (Gellman, 2013). First, the journalists took risks to get in touch with Snowden and then took risks to resist pressure to stop publications of classified information. For the months following the revelation, media remained the only way for Snowden to speak as he would decline other forms of contact. Unlike most issues examined in indexing studies, in this case media coverage began earlier than the administration actions. Obama administration wasn't fully aware of the issue, nor it was not aware of how many documents and what kinds of documents are in the possession of Edward Snowden, what did he intended to do with it. Media was in control of the situation. Therefore, media were not only the watchdog, but the active participant in the scandal. Examining indexing in regards to another similar complex issue that had less media involvement might add different results.

Prospective studies

Research on both opinion journalism and indexing is rather limited. The results invite further reflection on the power of media in influencing political elites. Future studies should further develop and pursue the empirical outcomes of the indexing hypothesis. Future research needs to investigate the effects of well-crafted government campaigns with consistent and salient messages on opinion journalism covering the same issues. These shortcomings and considerations notwithstanding, this study applied the notion of indexing in a qualitative study of

a very complex contemporary issue that can be considered both domestic and international. The study demonstrated that opinion journalism serves an important role in facilitating debates around salient issues and informing the public about those debates.

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Education

Syracuse University 2015

Masters of Arts: Media Studies Syracuse University, NY, USA

Coursework in qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, digital media research, digital entrepreneurship, media management, human-computer interaction, website ergonomics

Moscow State University 2012

Master of Arts: Business Journalism and Media Management Moscow, Russia Graduated with honors.

Coursework in foreign media business models, media financial management, financial journalism, Internet history and security. Graduate thesis on Foreign Media Bureau Management: The Washington Post Moscow Bureau Case Study.

Experience

(ZeroChaos) under contract to Google October 2014 to Current

Advertising Data Manager

Washington, DC

Evaluate relevancy and efficiency of Google Ad campaigns;

Create reports regarding campaigns flaws;

Inspect visuals, QR codes, banners and other advertising materials;

Evaluated advertising and promotion programs for compatibility with various devices

Health2 Resources July 2014 to December 2014

Communications Intern

Vienna, VA

Assisted with design and maintenance of H2R websites and offer website development support and QA;

Performed fact-checks and research on health industry trends;

Created media relations/overview reports for clients;

Developed positive relationships with trade media and client stakeholders;

Wrote press/media packages including press releases, FAQs, talking points, pitch packages and strategy and provided follow up materials;

Syracuse University August 2013 to May 2014

Graduate Researcher

Syracuse, NY

Publicized Center's events and activities;

Oversaw the Center's website and social media,

Wrote articles and facilitated connections with contributors;

Researched qualitative data and provided daily monitoring of free speech agenda;

Handled travel documents and awards applications for Center's visitors

BBC, British Broadcasting Company March 2012 to August 2012

Multimedia Producer

Moscow, Russia

Developed multimedia stories for the <http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian> (newsgathering, research, interviewing, layout, photo and audio);

Covered rolling daily news (crime, politics, media and technology)

American Councils for International Education September 2010 to January 2012

Grant Programs Assistant

Moscow, Russia

Administered USAID Global Youth Service Day Eurasia 2011 grant: wrote press-releases, contacted non-profits across Eurasia, conducted seminars and webinars on organizing community projects;

Assisted FLEX Alumni Coordinator in organizing alumni events including: Professional Development Week, Sign language seminar, festival for people with hearing disabilities, public speaking seminar and Pre-Departure Orientation alumni panel;

Assisted in logistics for FLEX finalists, handled visa and travel documents

The Washington Post September 2011 to November 2011

Research Fellow

Moscow, NY

Provided day-to-day social media monitoring and research;

Reported from events;

Provided backgrounds, dossiers and other supporting materials.

Moscow News January 2009 to January 2011

Culture and arts reporter

Moscow, NY

Covered art and culture for English-speaking audience

Presentations

Pop Culture Association Conference 2013 Lomonosov State Conference for Young Researchers 2011, 2010

Skill Highlights

QA Testing, Project management skills, Graphical User Interface Testing, Usability Testing, Media relations training, HTML, Financial communication training, Final Cut Pro, Print and electronic media, Qualitative and Quantitative Research, Constant Contact, Microsoft Office Suite, SEO knowledge, Google Apps and Google Analytics.

