

Bachelor's thesis

Framing the United States federal government shutdown in American newspapers

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Stories in the news: Media, discourse and context

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Abstract

In this thesis, I study how the most recent federal government shutdown in the United States (22 December 2018 - 25 January 2019) is framed in *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* in terms of positivity and negativity. Precisely, these newspapers were chosen due to their opposing political ideologies, whereby the first one is more conservative and the other one is more liberal. In order to analyze framing, headlines and narratives of news stories were studied in terms of whether they framed the shutdown positively, negatively or neutrally, for which a unique coding scheme was established. Hereafter, the datasets were compared on consistency in framing in the headlines and framing in the narratives of the article. Our findings confirmed findings from previous studies, wherein evidence was found that the conservative paper would be more positive than the liberal paper in headlines and narratives. Results also showed that *The Washington Times* predominantly used neutral framing, which could be related to large impact of the shutdown on many citizens, and that *The Huffington Post* predominantly employed negative framing, which was fairly expected considering its strong liberal orientation. Also, there was evidence for great consistency between headlines and narratives, implying that headlines were not solely used for their attention-grabbing and mildly persuasive function. The research opens up possibilities for researching framing in the news with a different approach, and serves as evidence for the notion that one cannot always assume that every idea in the media is free of personal interests.

Keywords: Framing, United States, government shutdown, positivity, negativity, positive framing, negative framing

Introduction

In modern times, many individuals see headlines flashing on their phone notifications, social media feeds, televisions and newspapers. News provides us with information about newsworthy events, whether it is about the presidential elections or about the town elections. However, how does one know that what the news is sharing on a daily basis can actually be accepted? News outlets claim to be credible sources, but research into framing of news stories suggests otherwise. Journalists are in the position to let their own political interests shine through the news article. Whether this is done unintentionally or intentionally, so-called framing techniques are used to influence the public into forming opinions on, for instance, political matters.

When President of the United States, Donald Trump, announced a federal government shutdown on 22 December 2018, many were in awe. Historically, government shutdowns occur when the fiscal year has ended and no new funding legislation for the next fiscal year can be passed. In the recent shutdown, President Trump announced the shutdown as a result of a disagreement between Congress and the President about an appropriations bill to use federal funds for his wish for a United States-Mexico border wall (Ferris, 2018). The government was reopened on the 25th of January 2019. This has been the longest shutdown in United States government history (Zaveri, Gates & Zraick, 2019). During this period, several departments with hundreds of thousands of employees had to close, and other federal employees were required to work without getting paid. The shutdown cost the American economy at least \$11 billion (The effects of the partial shutdown ending in January 2019, 2019).

Both the event and the controversy around it were a logical motive for numerous news outlets to write about the subject, informing readers about what had happened and what would follow. In this study, I aim at investigating how the federal government shutdown in the United States was framed in two newspapers with opposing political orientations. I will analyze positive and negative framing in headlines and in the narrative of news articles. Additionally, I will investigate to what extent positive and negative framing in headlines and narratives are similar.

Theoretical framework

Firstly, it is important to define ideologies, which is an ambiguous term in the study of discourse analysis. The term is supposed to imply a combination of 'ideas' and 'logies' (Freeden, 2006), entailing a high level of abstraction and interpretation. It may also be a belief that is reflective of one's life process. Therefore, political ideology is often encountered as "a simple descriptor for a discrete set of major political belief systems", inextricably linked with for example liberalism, conservatism and socialism (Freeden, 2006). Due to its interpretive nature, ideology is considered to be a set of beliefs through which one is able to reflect upon particular developments and situations encountered in one's life.

Ideologies can be related to framing, as framing describes "the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences" (Reese et al., 2001, pp. 7). Specifically, framing can be seen as the practical output of belief systems. However, researchers often formulate their own definition of what the phenomenon actually entails (Scheufele, 2000; De Vreese, 2005; Entman, 2007), which is usually more limited and unambiguous in its interpretation compared to Reese et al. (2001). In this thesis, framing is defined by means of observed political ideology measured through positive, negative and neutral framing in the news.

Framing in the news

Common belief tells the public that news outlets are a credible source, but this might not always apply. For instance, research on satirical news shows that these outlets have the ability to report daily news with more context, details and background information than 'regular' news outlets in the United States (Reilly, 2012). 'Regular' news outlets were sometimes found to have left out several details about specific political matters, in contrast to satirical news shows that showed all perspectives of that same political matter. These satirical outlets (e.g. The Onion in the United States) are often acknowledged to have changed public discourse, opinions and political trust (Brewer et al., 2013). The often corporately owned 'regular' news outlets professionally produce news narratives and find ways to 're-present' issues of great civic importance by providing a one-sided perspective on an issue (Reilly, 2012). 'Regular' outlets are generally more popular than the satirical outlets, even though the satirical outlet provides a more thorough outline of news stories.

To elaborate on different types of news, it is also implied that in news outlets that often present political and economic news, the responsibility frame and conflict frame is

often found (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). A connection is made with news in the United States, of which it is mentioned that American political news is often presented as conflict (Patterson, 1993; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Considering the fact that the United States knows a multiparty government (i.e. Republicans and Democrats), opposition and thus conflict is evident, which is subsequently displayed in the news. Each frame found in Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) enables the highlight of certain aspects of an issue, and their use may vary per type of story and newspaper. These results thus pose questions on public understanding and evaluations of issues, institutions and political actors (Valkenburg, Semetko & De Vreese, 1999).

Furthermore, similar comparative framing analyses have been conducted with regard to major politically loaded events (Polackova, 2018). When comparing news articles on terrorism in the media, differences could be found between liberal and conservative news outlets. For instance, while conservative newspapers described Muslims negatively, liberal newspapers were considerably less negative towards Muslims and occasionally showed signs of compassion (Polackova, 2018). In addition, conservative newspapers remained neutral in terms of criticizing the Republican government's response and sometimes tried to justify it, while liberal newspapers were in clearly negative towards the Republican rhetoric.

Similar results were found in Pan et al. (2010), who studied framing of gay marriage legitimization for conservative and liberal newspapers. Conservative newspapers tend to focus on American tradition, family values and religious disciplinary, which are commonly valued by conservatives. On the other hand, liberal newspapers emphasized equal human rights and support of gay marriage; common values for liberals (Pan et al., 2010). One can therefore note that framing in terms of positivity and negativity is not obviously present in this study, it can be noted that newspapers with specific political orientations adhere to framing events in terms of their personal values rather than remaining neutral.

Additionally, Druckman (2001) suggests that framing might not be a tool that journalists purposely employ to manipulate readers, but rather a way of providing insensible citizens with guidance from credible sources. Framing is therefore an accessible technique to change attitudes of the public on political affairs, whether it is intentionally or unintentionally done. This way, controversial topics could be framed in a particular manner to influence an audience subconsciously (Nelson et al., 1997). For example, journalists could make a particular value of a social actor or event more salient in news articles. An audience then assigns higher importance to that value and tolerance is enhanced due to lack of other perspectives on the social actor or event.

News headlines

A vast majority of readers often only read the headline of an article (Condit et al, 2001; Tannenbaum 1953). Headlines introduce the topic of an article and attract reader's attention, since they are the first thing one sees when skimming through the newspaper. Also, headlines can influence the way readers interpret news articles (Condit et al., 2001; Pfau, 1995).

With regards to textual framing and research into consistency between headlines, it is known that journalists may use exaggerated headlines to attain more readers due their attention-grabbing function (Condit et al., 2001; Chesney et al., 2017). Headlines could misrepresent the narrative of an article by making exaggerated claims or by simply misinforming readers (Chesney et al., 2017). In terms of the effects of exaggerating headlines, researchers found that an audience felt that dissonance between headlines and narratives was misleading as well as dissatisfactory (Condit et al., 2001).

Furthermore, Kingsbury and Hart (1943) compared headlines of articles regarding military action (militarism/preparedness versus disarmament/cooperation) from different newspapers. Each headline was analyzed in terms of positivity and negativity, and measures of framing were specifically found on the issues of militaristic-pacifistic problems, reparations and prohibition (Kingsbury & Hart, 1943). However, the methodology of this research lacks external validity, as only a small dataset was analyzed. With that being said, this approach has given me the idea to measure framing in terms of positivity and negativity, which seems like a relatively unexplored approach.

The Washington Times and The Huffington Post

The decision to include *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* for this research is based on information published by the Media Bias Chart (Media Bias Chart: Version 4.0., 2018). The Media Bias Chart is based on analyses of several news outlets across the political spectrum, in which overall quality of the newspaper is also considered. *The Huffington Post* publishes their stories to their audience of 86 million people (Huffingtonpost.com traffic overview, 2019) in over thirty languages and is on the liberal side of the political spectrum. *The Washington Times* also has a large international reach from over 15 million readers in the United States, Europe and Australia (Washingtontimes.com traffic overview, 2019), and is on the conservative side of the political spectrum.

The Washington Times is founded by the controversial Sun Myung Moon. An example of his controversial manners can be found in one of Moon's speeches, where he said: "*The Washington Times* is responsible to let the American people know about God", as

well as "The Washington Times will become the instrument in spreading the truth about God to the world" (Ahrens, 2002).

On the other hand, *The Huffington Post* is often categorized by other news sources as a liberal-leaning newspaper (Fahri, 2012; Kludt, 2017). For instance, journalism professionals have also judged the newspaper to be an advocacy newspaper (Sterling, 2009). During the presidential elections of 2016, news stories were regularly noted with the following editorial note: "Donald Trump regularly incites political violence and is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist and birther who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims—1.6 billion members of an entire religion—from entering the U.S" (Younge, 2018). After Donald Trump became president, the notes were no longer added to news stories. With this action, however, *The Huffington Post* has provoked a clear impression that neither Donald Trump nor the Republican party's ideology is supported.

Research question and sub-questions

In this thesis, I aim at answering the following research question.

Research question: How do news articles in *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* frame the federal government shutdown in the United States with regard to positivity and negativity?

In order to answer the main research question, 3 sub-questions are established. This allows for a more structured and in-depth approach towards answering the main research question.

Sub-question 1: How do headlines of news articles in *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* frame the federal government shutdown in the United States with regard to positivity and negativity?

Sub-question 2: How do narratives of news articles in *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* frame the federal government shutdown in the United States with regard to positivity and negativity?

Sub-question 3: How does positive and negative framing in headlines and narratives of news articles about federal government shutdown in the United States in *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* correlate?

Hypotheses

In the occurrence of the federal government shutdown in the United States, the Republican party and the Democratic party have had different opinions on whether the issue could be benefiting or disadvantaging the country. Assuming that Republicans would be rather supportive of the government shutdown, and Democrats will not support it, the following hypotheses are established for sub-questions 1 and 2.

H1: *The Washington Times* will frame the federal government shutdown significantly more positive than *The Huffington Post* in headlines.

H2: *The Washington Times* will frame the federal government shutdown significantly more positive than *The Huffington Post* in narratives.

Condit et al. (2001) and Chesney et al. (2017) have shown that headlines and narratives of news articles are often inconsistent in terms of framing. However, studying this phenomenon in terms of positivity and negativity is quite an unexplored field. Still, evidence inferring regular presence of inconsistencies between headlines and narratives led me to infer that this finding can also be assumed in terms of positivity and negativity. The following hypothesis is thus established for sub-question 3.

H3: *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* will not display consistency between headlines and narratives when framing the federal government shutdown.

Method

Materials

In order to answer the proposed questions and test the hypotheses, a corpus of 60 news articles was established. From this number, 30 were collected from *The Huffington Post* and 30 from *The Washington Times*. All articles were written by English-speaking journalists. As previously mentioned, both news outlets are from the United States and have a large, worldwide audience. While *The Huffington Post* has a relatively progressive-liberal character, *The Washington Times* is more conservative.

The corpus contained articles that were published between 22 December 2018 (the start date of the shutdown) and 25 February 2019 (one month after the end date of the shutdown). The articles were selected via the search engine Google, by using the search terms *government* and *shutdown*. For this, the advanced searching tool was used, where the desired timeframe and keywords were applied. The first five articles from the search were used to establish the coding scheme, as will be explained below, and were excluded from the final corpus. Next, 50 news articles were chosen from the sixth result on. To increase reliability and reduce the amount of work, a simple random sample was chosen from this collection that was listed from numbers 1 to 50 for *The Washington Times* and 51 to 100 for *The Huffington Post*. From this dataset of fifty articles per newspaper, thirty random numbers were picked by a random number generator on the Internet, for which each number represented a particular article in the corpus. This was then repeated for the other newspaper, which eventually resulted in a sample that contained thirty news articles from *The Huffington Post* and thirty articles from *The Washington Times*.

Model of analysis

Kingsbury and Hart's (1934) model of analysis consisted of a coding scheme that was specifically focused on headlines about militaristic practices during World War I. Therefore, using the exact same coding scheme in this thesis would not allow for validity, as it would not measure the government shutdown, nor would it be applicable for both headlines and news narratives.

A coding scheme was thus established for this thesis that would ensure high validity and interrater reliability. Firstly, some questions from the Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) framework were used as a part of the scheme, which resulted in a primary coding scheme with six conditions for each of the three frames (condition 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 in the coding

scheme). The news frames and associated questions of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) are generally suitable for content analyses regarding political communication. This also entails that the coding scheme with 6 conditions was not yet particularly tailored to framing of the government shutdown as it is still too general. To counteract this, five articles from *The Washington Times* and five articles from *The Huffington Post* were chosen and analyzed on the writing tools and techniques that would come forward frequently. For instance, it was found that often either the Democratic party or Republican party was supported or opposed, which differed per newspaper. These remarks were noted down and combined into coding conditions 2, 3, 4 and 10. A final coding scheme of 10 conditions allows for a clear and unambiguous method to coding headlines and narratives.

Similar wording was used in the conditions. For example, in the positive frame a condition said “The story/headline shows *support* towards President Trump when he is brought into relation with the government shutdown”, while the negative frame contained “The story/headline shows *opposition* towards President Trump when he is brought into relation with the government shutdown”, and the neutral frame contained “The story/headline *neither supports nor opposes* President Trump when he is brought into relation with the government shutdown”. This was done to avoid ambiguity and allow for an uncomplicated coding process. The model of analysis can be found in appendix 1.

Two steps were followed in developing this model of analysis. Firstly, the ten conditions were established as described previously. Considering the short length of a headline and therefore the lack of text to be present for more conditions, 2 out of the 10 conditions would have to be present in order for a headline to receive a positive, negative or neutral code. For the narratives, 4 out of 10 conditions would have to be present in order for it to receive a positive, negative or neutral code. In addition, both coders could use the code ‘neutral’ when both positive and negative framing could be found and when not enough conditions were deemed present for either a positive or negative code (i.e.: less than 2 conditions for headlines, or less than 4 conditions for narratives). This was decided upon during the development of the coding scheme, after several articles were found to have both positive and negative conditions present (N = 4 out of N = 10). The code ‘neutral’ is therefore used for such articles, as they can still be coded, but in a manner whereby neutrality is the golden mean between positivity and negativity.

After the development of the coding scheme, the 10 conditions were distributed into 4 themes so that this framework could potentially be used for future research in framing political news. The first theme includes conditions that focus on primary observations with

regards to how the shutdown is framed. Condition 1, 3 and 5 are part of this theme. The second theme includes social actors (individuals, groups, parties) that are brought into relation with the shutdown. Condition 4, 6 and 7 are included in this theme. The third theme focuses on the mention of governmental agents (e.g. President Trump, Republicans, Democrats, Senate, House of Representatives, government in general) brought into relation with the shutdown. Condition 2, 8 and 10 are included into this theme. Lastly, a theme focuses on the financial consequences as a result of the shutdown. This theme includes condition 9. As previously mentioned, the conditions can be found in appendix 1.

Procedure

From all news articles, the headlines and narratives were coded using the coding scheme designed that assisted coders to correctly categorize positivity (0), negativity (1) or neutrality (2) in relation to the federal government shutdown. If a headline or narrative was coded as positive on the federal government shutdown, then this could imply conservative framing, as support for the government shutdown is present. However, if a headline or narrative was coded as negative, then liberal framing could be present, as it would oppose the government shutdown. If a headline or narrative was coded as neutral on the federal government shutdown, then this would imply that the headline or narrative was neither liberally nor conservatively framed.

All headlines and narratives were coded by a coder that is professionally proficient in English and recoded by a second coder, whose English proficiency is also at the professional level. Both coders were third-year bachelor students of the English-taught study International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen. The interrater reliability for the dataset 'headline' was good: $\kappa = .91, p < .001$. The interrater reliability for the dataset 'narrative' was also good: $\kappa = .82, p < .001$.

Statistical treatment

A frequencies test is conducted to establish general information and provide a brief overview of the data, including standardized residuals and the distributions of framing in headlines and narratives for the newspapers.

To determine how positive and negative framing in headlines were distributed in the two newspapers, a Fisher's Exact Test was conducted. Another Fisher's Exact Test was conducted to test how positive and negative framing in narratives was distributed in the newspapers.

Lastly, another Fisher's Exact Test was performed to test for framing consistency. A comparison between the coding results of the datasets 'headlines' and 'narratives' per newspaper showed whether consistency could be found, and therefore whether each newspaper employed inconsistent or consistent framing in either the headlines or narratives. Every time a Fisher's Exact Test has been reported, it has been checked whether the assumptions of the test are met.

Results

The research deals with one main research question that asks “How do news articles in *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* frame the federal government shutdown in the United States with regard to positivity and negativity?” Three sub-questions were established to provide an in-depth answer, which separately deal with framing in headlines, narratives, and consistency in framing between these two components.

A frequency analysis for headlines and narratives is done in order to establish preliminary observations with regard to frames per newspaper. Table 1 below reveals that the majority of the total amount of headlines is more neutral. For narratives, the negative evaluation seems to take the overhand. However, there appear to be more neutral headlines in *The Washington Times* and more negative headlines in *The Washington Times*. With regards to narratives, *The Washington Times* again seems to be more neutral, while *The Huffington Post* appears to contain more negative narratives. In the following statistical treatments, it will be determined whether these preliminary observations will be accepted or rejected.

Table 1: The frequencies and standardized residuals of headlines and narratives coded as positive, negative and neutral displayed per newspaper

	<i>The Washington Times</i>		<i>The Huffington Post</i>	
	Headlines N(SR)	Narratives N(SR)	Headlines N(SR)	Narratives N(SR)
Positive	4 (1.4)	4 (1.4)	0 (-1.4)	0 (-1.4)
Negative	7 (-1.4)	12 (-1.0)	17 (1.4)	20 (1.0)
Neutral	19 (0.8)	14 (0.6)	13 (-0.8)	10 (-0.6)
Total	30	30	30	30

As will be mentioned below, analysis of the standardized residuals showed that each cell contributed equally to the significant differences. This entails that the observed frequencies for all headlines and narratives in table 1 are similar to the expected frequencies.

Headlines

Regarding sub-question 1, the conducted Fisher's Exact Test showed a significant relation between the distribution of positive and negative frames in headlines and the political ideology of the newspaper ($p = .008$).

The Washington Times

To elaborate, a z-test comparing column proportions showed that *The Washington Times* uses positive headlines (13.3%) just as frequently as negative (23.3%) and neutral headlines (63.3%). So, positive framing in headlines is neither found more or less than negative or neutral framing.

The Huffington Post

Turning to the second newspaper, a z-test comparing column proportions showed that *The Huffington Post* uses significantly more negative headlines (56.7%) than neutral headlines (43.3%). Also, a z-test comparing column proportions showed that *The Huffington Post* uses significantly more neutral headlines (43.3%) than positive headlines (0%). Analysis of the standardized residuals showed that each cell contributed equally to the significant differences. However, the difference between positive headlines (0%) and negative headlines (56.7%) is found to be insignificant according to a z-test comparing column proportions. So, negative headlines are found more often than neutral headlines, but not more than positive headlines.

Comparing headline frames

In order to assess the difference between *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* in the manners they employ positive or negative framing in headlines, a Fisher's Exact Test was conducted with frames as a row variable and newspaper as a column variable.

A z-test comparing column proportions showed no significant differences between *The Huffington Post* and *The Washington Times* for positive, negative or neutral headlines. This means that one newspaper does not use particular frames in headlines more than the other newspaper.

Narratives

Regarding sub-question 2, the conducted Fisher's Exact Test showed a significant relation between the distribution of positive and negative framing in narratives and the political ideology of the newspaper ($p = .040$).

The Washington Times

Similar to headlines in *The Washington Times*, a z-test comparing column proportions showed that *The Washington Times* uses positive narratives (13.3%) just as frequently as negative (40.0%) and neutral narratives (46.7%). So, positive framing in headlines is neither found more or less than negative or neutral framing.

The Huffington Post

With regards to *The Huffington Post*, similarities with regards to results of the headlines are also found. A z-test comparing column proportions showed that *The Huffington Post* uses significantly more negative narratives (66.7%) than neutral narratives (33.3%). Also, a z-test comparing column proportions showed that *The Huffington Post* uses significantly more neutral narratives (33.3%) than positive narratives (0%). Analysis of the standardized residuals showed that each cell contributed equally to the significant differences. However, the difference between positive narratives (0%) and negative narratives (66.7%) is found to be insignificant according to a z-test comparing column proportions. So, negative narratives are found more often than neutral narratives, but not more than positive narratives.

Comparing narrative frames

In order to assess the difference between *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* in the manners they employ positive or negative framing in narratives, a Fisher's Exact Test was conducted with frames as a row variable and newspaper as a column variable.

A z-test comparing column proportions showed no significant differences between *The Huffington Post* and *The Washington Times* for positive, negative or neutral narratives. This means that one newspaper does not use particular frames in narratives more than the other newspaper.

Consistency between headline and narratives

Regarding sub-question 3, the conducted Fisher's Exact Test showed a significant relation between the distribution of positive and negative framing for *The Washington Times* ($p < .001$). Table 2 below displays the distribution of the frames in the headlines and narratives for *The Washington Times*.

Table 2: Results for *The Washington Times*

		Narratives			
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
		N(SR)	N(SR)	N(SR)	
Headlines	Positive N(SR)	3 (3.4)	1 (-0.5)	0 (-1.4)	4
	Negative N(SR)	0 (-1)	6 (1.9)	1 (-1.3)	7
	Neutral N(SR)	1 (-1.0)	5 (-0.9)	13 (1.4)	19
	Total	4	12	14	30

Analysis of the standardized residuals showed that one cell had a standardized residual greater than ± 3 . This cell has a positive standardized residual, which implies that the observed frequency of positive framing in narratives is higher than the expected frequency, when measuring consistency with positive headlines. There were $N = 4$ positive headlines in *The Washington Times* and it was expected that there would be fewer positive narratives, namely $N = 0.5$. However, $N = 4$ positive narratives were found in the analyses, which is higher than expected. This cell is therefore a major contributor to the statistically significant results for consistency.

In addition, another cell had a standardized residual of 1.9, which is close to limit of ± 2 for standardized residuals to be considered in results. This indicates that although this cell may not have had a statistically significant role in the outcomes of the statistical tests, the observed count for negative narratives ($N = 6$) was considerably higher than the expected count ($N = 2.8$) when analyzing consistency with negative headlines. This cell is also a major contributor to the statistically significant results for consistency.

Likewise, a Fisher's Exact Test was also conducted for *The Huffington Post*. This test showed a significant relation between the distribution of positive and negative framing for *The Huffington Post* ($p < .001$). Table 3 below displays the distribution of frames in the headlines and narratives for *The Huffington Post*.

Table 3: Results for *The Huffington Post*

		Narratives		
		Negative N(SR)	Neutral N(SR)	Total
Headlines	Negative N(SR)	16 (1.4)	1 (-2.0)	17
	Neutral N(SR)	4 (-1.6)	9 (2.2)	13
	Total	20	10	30

Analysis of the standardized residuals showed that one cell had a standardized residual greater than ± 2 , indicating that the observed count of neutral framing in narratives is higher than the expected count, when analyzing consistency with neutral headlines. There were $N = 13$ neutral headlines in *The Huffington Post* and it was expected that there would be fewer neutral narratives, namely $N = 3.4$. However, $N = 9$ neutral narratives were found in the analyses, which is higher than expected. This cell is therefore a major contributor to the statistically significant results for consistency.

In addition, a second cell had a standardized residual of -2, indicating that the observed count of neutral framing in the narratives is lower than the expected count when analyzing consistency with negative headlines. There were $N = 17$ negative headlines in *The Huffington Post* and it was expected that there would be fewer neutral narratives, namely $N = 5.7$. However, $N = 1$ neutral narratives were found in the analyses, which is lower than expected. This cell is therefore a major contributor to the statistically significant results for consistency.

Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how two American newspapers with different political orientations namely, *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* framed the federal government shutdown of the United States in terms of positive and negative framing. The study was broken down into analyses on headlines and news narratives as well as consistency between headlines and narratives. Chesney et al. (2017) and Condit et al. (2011) had previously suggested that headlines and narratives are not always consistently framed. On top of that, with regards to conservative and liberal newspapers writing about the same issue, differences were found in terms of how articles are framed (Pan et al., 2010; Polackova, 2018). It seems that journalists frame issues based on the values that adhere to their political orientations, rather than remaining neutral. The main aim of this research was to contribute to the field of framing research and studies of events that had a major societal impact and reached a worldwide audience.

The main research question was “How do news articles in *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* frame the federal government shutdown in the United States with regard to positivity and negativity?” To answer the first sub-question, *The Washington Times* has not employed more positive framing than *The Huffington Post* in headlines and narratives, and *The Huffington Post* used significantly more negative framing than *The Washington Times* in headlines and narratives. In terms of neutral framing, no difference was found between the two newspapers. Regarding most frequently used frames, *The Washington Times* mostly used neutral framing in headlines and neutral or negative framing in narratives. *The Huffington Post* used negative framing most often in headlines and neutral or negative framing in narratives. Lastly, results suggest that both *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* show a lot of statistically significant consistency in framing of headlines and narratives.

Hypothesis 1 “*The Washington Times* will frame the federal government shutdown significantly more positive than *The Huffington Post* in headlines”, hypothesis 2 “*The Washington Times* will frame the federal government shutdown significantly more positive than *The Huffington Post* in narratives” and hypothesis 3 “*The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post* will not display consistency between headlines and narratives when framing the federal government shutdown” cannot thus not be confirmed.

So, to answer the main research question, it can be stated that *The Washington Times* mostly framed the shutdown neutrally in a consistent manner and *The Huffington Post* consistently used negative frames most often, although both statements are not supported by

statistically significant results. In addition, it can be stated for both newspapers that headlines are not employed to grab the reader's attention by explicitly using provocative positive or negative framing, since consistency between headlines and narratives is present, although opposing statements were made by previous research (Condit et al., 2001; Tannenbaum, 1953; Pfau, 1995; Chesney et al., 2017). A possible explanation might be that most of the studies date back many years and journalism might have changed in terms of rules and regulations. It might not be as simple for journalists to use exaggerated headlines as an attention-grabbing tool, since it might be perceived as misleading for the public. On top of that, individuals may have generally become more critical about the news, which makes these exaggerations redundant for journalists to use. With regards to Chesney et al. (2017), conclusions were drawn based on selected articles, and no random sampling was employed. Therefore, this study might not be representative of generalizing statements made about news headlines and narratives.

Additionally, findings of Pan et al. (2010) and Polackova (2018) are also not supported by findings of the present study, as no significant differences were found between the two newspapers with regards to framing in narratives. Possible explanations for the results might be related to the fact that the impacts of the government shutdown were not very positive and do not inherently adhere to personal values of either conservatives or liberals, as was the case in studies by Pan et al. (2010) and Polackova (2018). Therefore, it might have been unusual if *The Washington Times* would be supportive of this. On the other hand, it was expected that *The Huffington Post* would be more negative about the shutdown, also due to the impacts on many American citizens and the general opposition towards a Republican government.

The current research contributes to the theory on framing political events in the news. Firstly, the present study explores a relatively uncommon approach to study framing, namely, framing in terms of positivity and negativity. Additionally, a major strength is that the coding scheme was particularly tailored to the topic of this dissertation, thus ensuring a reliable and valid approach, which could be used for future research in framing political news.

The societal relevance of the present study lies in the fact that media outlets play a very crucial role in the construction of events and the way this is portrayed to the public. Individuals' attitudes and perceptions of an event might therefore be influenced by the media. For major national events such as the government shutdown, it should thus be a priority for journalists to objectively inform the public about what has happened, how it could happen, how the government dealt with the event, and what will be done to prevent such an event

from happening again in the future. This can only be achieved when news articles are written neutrally, rather than framed in a conservative or liberal manner.

Limitations

Although this study reached high amounts of interrater reliability due to the unambiguous coding scheme, external validity was a limitation. A larger study with more newspapers and more articles would have to be conducted before findings could be generalized to other newspapers with opposing political ideologies. Unfortunately, a limited amount of time did not allow this.

Also, our study lacked a qualitative analysis of the news articles. The results are only based on the self-established coding scheme, and may therefore not be able to fully measure framing in the news the way qualitative research is able to. Further qualitative analysis would provide a more in-depth analysis of framing in terms of positivity.

Lastly, reliability could be a limitation in the present study. Although the coders were instructed to be as objective as possible in coding, personal bias towards either newspaper's political orientation could have been present.

Future research

As previously discussed, I recommend studying framing of the federal government shutdown by means of positivity and negativity according to the methodology employed in the current study, but on a larger scale. Assuming that the government shutdown is not a regular instance in the United States, it would also be interesting to look at other major national events in politics, such as the discussion around gun control or the by President Trump proposed wall at the Mexican border. In addition to this, researchers could focus on studying these issues in other newspapers that have different political orientations.

Furthermore, there are not many contemporary studies that approach framing in terms of positivity and negativity. As briefly mentioned in the theoretical framework, many newspapers are corporately owned. This may imply that journalists can make particular decisions in wording or framing based on possible corporate interests. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyze news articles written by independent and corporately owned newspapers with regards to differences in framing in terms of positivity and negativity.

Lastly, it would be interesting to measure whether readers experience a change in attitudes towards specific issue after reading headlines and/or narratives from either a conservative or liberal newspaper for a certain amount of time. Since a longitudinal research

like this focuses on cognitive development over time, it would be more time-consuming for the researcher as well as for a participant.

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Appendix 1: Coding scheme

A positive evaluation will be given when 4/10 of the following conditions are deemed present in the narrative and when 2/10 of the conditions are deemed present in the headline.

1. The story/headline implies that the government shutdown is generally approved and/or is gaining ground.
2. The story/headline shows support for the Republican and/or opposition towards Democratic party in relation to the government shutdown.
3. The story/headline mentions factual statements on the government shutdown commented on by means of positive/uplifting language.
4. The story/headline uses quotes from individuals-groups-parties that positively mention the government shutdown.
5. The story/headline employs adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion with regards to the government shutdown.
6. The story/headline emphasizes how individuals and/or groups are positively affected by the government shutdown.
7. The story/headline reflects agreement between parties-individuals-groups on the topic of the government shutdown.
8. The story/headline suggests that some level of government is responsible for the government shutdown that is seen as a good situation.
9. The story/headline mentions the financial gains now or in the future as a consequence of the government shutdown.
10. The story/headline shows support towards President Trump when he is brought into relation with the government shutdown.

A negative evaluation will be given when 4/10 of the following conditions are deemed present in the narrative and when 2/10 of the conditions are deemed present in the headline.

1. The story/headline implies that the government shutdown is generally disapproved and/or is put down.
2. The story/headline shows opposition towards the Republican party and/or support for the Democratic party in relation to the government shutdown.
3. The story/headline mentions factual statements on the government shutdown commented on by means of negative/condescending language.

4. The story/headline uses quotes from individuals-groups-parties that negatively mention the government shutdown.
5. The story/headline employs adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, apathy or anger with regards to the government shutdown.
6. The story/headline emphasizes how individuals and/or groups are negatively affected by the government shutdown.
7. The story/headline reflects disagreement between parties-individuals-groups on the topic of the government shutdown.
8. The story/headline suggests that some level of government is responsible for the government shutdown that is seen as a bad situation.
9. The story/headline mentions the financial losses now or in the future as a consequence of the government shutdown.
10. The story/headline shows opposition towards President Trump when he is brought into relation with the government shutdown.

A neutral evaluation will be given when 4/10 of the following conditions are deemed present in the narrative, and when 2/10 of the conditions are deemed present in the headline.

1. The story/headline does not imply that the government shutdown is generally either approved/gaining ground or disapproved/put down.
2. The story/headline does not show support and/or opposition towards the Republican and/or Democratic party in relation to the government shutdown.
3. The story/headline does not mention factual statements on the government shutdown commented on by means of positive or neutral language.
4. The story/headline uses quotes from individuals-groups-parties that neither positively nor negatively mention the government shutdown.
5. The story/headline does not employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, apathy or anger, or empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion with regards to the government shutdown.
6. The story/headline does not emphasize how individuals and/or groups are either negatively or positively affected by the government shutdown.
7. The story/headline does not reflect agreement or disagreement between parties-individuals-groups on the topic of the government shutdown.

8. The story/headline does not suggest that some level of government is responsible for the government shutdown that is seen as a good or bad situation.
9. The story/headline does not mention the financial losses or financial gains now or in the future as a consequence of the government shutdown.
10. The story/headline neither supports nor opposes President Trump when he is brought into relation with the government shutdown.