

# **Oil spill accidents in the media:**

Portrayal of environmental issues in conservative vs.  
progressive newspapers in the UK and the US

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## **Abstract**

The presentation of the environmental issues in the media always reaches certain divisiveness about the topic. This divisiveness stems from two outlooks towards the environment; human supremacy over the environment and human equality with the environment. Environmental issues are part of wider discourse on politics and economy and incorporate the inherent values of the society. These values are reflected in the media and influence the understanding of the environmental issues. To analyze how social values influence the media portrayal of divisive environmental issues, the present study looks into the media framing and agenda setting of oil spill accidents. Compared to other environmental issues, such as global warming or alternative energy sources, oil spills are not frequently the focus of academic research. To improve that and to study how social values influence the media frames, this thesis analyzed the articles from two progressive and two conservative newspapers in United States and United Kingdom. The findings of the content analysis show the overarching presence of the environmental catastrophe frame in portrayal of oil spills. At the same time, more news coverage is given to the spills, which directly impact the societies newspapers are part of. The results are situated within theories of framing and agenda setting, focusing on the portrayal of the environmental issues.

**Key words:** Agenda Setting; Conservative Media; Content Analysis; Environmental Issues; Framing; Newspapers; Oil Spills; Progressive Media; United Kingdom; United States

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“The disappearance under the waves of the Prestige is either the end of an environmental disaster or the beginning of one. About 5,000 tons of crude have already fouled sandy beaches and clogged rock pools of some of Spain's most beautiful shoreline.”*

(Loss of Prestige, The Guardian, 2002)

*“Eight days after the first explosion on the rig, which left 11 workers missing and presumed dead, the tenor of the response team's briefings changed abruptly Wednesday night with a hastily called news conference to announce that the rate of the spill was estimated to be 5,000 barrels a day, or more than 200,000 gallons -- five times the previous estimate.”*

(Robertson, 2010)

Media framing of oil spill accidents is critical to our understanding of these all too common environmental disasters. When oil tanker Prestige sank in 2002, the accident was portrayed as the biggest catastrophe in recent years. In the week long accident, before the tanker sank, the amount of oil flowing out to the sea was measured to be around 20,000 metric tons (Cedre, 2012). Yet just eight years after the Prestige sank, the world witnessed a much larger oil spill accident. When the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded off the United States coast, an opening emerged in the underwater well that leaked oil for almost three months before it was finally sealed. In the end, 11 lives were lost during the accident and 630,000 metric tons of oil was spilt into the environment (NOAA, 2013).

In the past decade, over 25 oil spill accidents that resulted in more than 1,000 metric tons of oil spilt each have occurred worldwide (Green Conduct, 2013). The frequency with which these accidents are happening is shocking, but not all oil spills are given the same amount of coverage by the media (Anderson, 2002). Oil spill accidents are perceived as disasters and as such attract high profile coverage in news media, since the media portrayal of environmental issues is focused on ‘bad’ news (Anderson, 2002). News coverage primarily centers on specific events, rather than on covering broader issues. As such, oil spill accidents possess a high level of cultural resonance in showing opposing inherent values: the hesitance of environmental protection against the economy; the image of an out of control industry against the technological domination over nature (Anderson, 2002). Additionally, the coverage of environmental issues is influenced by journalistic news values that reflect the editorial identity of the media outlet and are shown in the decisions concerning the news selection and the way the news is framed (Anderson, 2002).

Media framing and agenda setting are two concepts applied to this study on oil spill accidents and their portrayal in news media. “To frame is to select some aspects of a 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” (Entman, 1993, p.52). Framing is essential for structuring and understanding the world around us. Frames by themselves carry a certain interpretation of events, and in the media world that is important, because the more influential these views get, the more internalized in the society they become. Framing can be seen as the process of choosing a few aspects of perceived reality and building a narrative that emphasizes connections among them to encourage a particular interpretation. “Messages are undeniably attached to the frames chosen to describe them” (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008, p. 54). Developing from this, agenda setting presents another dimension for successfully performing the first function of framing – bringing focus to problematic situations and defining them as worthy of public and governmental action (Entman, 2007). Agenda setting theory assumes a relationship between the media emphasis to a certain issue and the degree of importance this issue has for the public (Ader, 1995).

Oil spill accidents are unique events worthy of examination because they represent a global scale problem that affects the environment people live in all around the world. Whereas other environmental issues, such as global warming, receive more attention from the scientific community, oil spills are largely ignored as a research focus (see Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; Nerlich, Forsyth, & Clarke, 2012). To act on this problem, this thesis examines the portrayal of five different oil spill accidents in four newspapers from two countries, namely the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US). Comparing how the oil spill accidents are framed in these two countries, which share the same language, shows how the inherent cultural values impact the development of frames regarding environmental issues. Previous research identified that cultural values are a prominent factor in the news coverage of environmental issues (Wilson, 1991; Dunwoody & Peters, 1992). Even though oil spills are considered to be a newsworthy topic by the media, media coverage of the specific oil spill accident is not always proportionate to the amount of damage that it provoked. Therefore, major factors influencing whether an issue is covered and how it is covered are the cultural values and images (Anderson, 2002). The two countries selected for this research are the UK and the US, because even though they share the same language and other perceived similarities, such as culture and shared history, there exist deep ideological differences between the countries, which are reflected in the media (Nerlich et al., 2012).

To add another dimension to the research, the newspapers in question belong to either the conservative or progressive political ideologies in the selected countries. Researching this topic provides insight into how differently oriented media are shaping the understanding and social context of oil spill accidents. The media representations of environmental issues are socially constructed and reflect editorial identity through decisions of news selection and framing (Anderson, 2002). Conservative and progressive values are therefore embedded into the news coverage; since liberals perceive environmental issues as a catastrophe and the focus of conservatives is on economic and financial aspects of the issue, the divergence of the values should be projected in the media framing of environmental issues (Anderson, 2009). The portrayed views get incorporated into societal understanding of the accidents, and with that, they become reusable at the occurrence of similar cases. The relevance of this research is therefore in studying the similarities and differences between selected newspapers and countries on the same issues, trying to determine why and how these distinctions appear. Building on those points, this thesis will try to answer the two following research questions:

*RQ1: How do progressive newspapers in the United Kingdom and the United States of America frame oil spill accidents compared to the conservative newspapers from these countries?*

*RQ2: How much agenda access do progressive newspapers in the United Kingdom and the United States of America give to oil spill accidents compared to the conservative newspapers from these countries?*

To research how the selected oil spill accidents are portrayed in the newspaper media, two countries were chosen as the basis for comparison, the UK and the US. Even though the similarities between these countries seem to be prevailing, the media reflects the existing ideological differences between them (Nerlich et al., 2012). The influence of these differences is observable in various subjects, one of them being the environment. Even though the UK and the US share the overarching protective sentiment towards the environment, how this sentiment is manifested differs (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007). In the UK, the debate around the movement was closely linked to the public health preservation and by 1950's, it shifted to incorporate also the 'second generation' (Buckingham, 2008). This shaped the public perception toward the preservation of the environment (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; Buckingham, 2008). In the US, however, the situation is different. Whereas the environmental movement was especially strong in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with so-called 'green



decade' and large acceptance and incorporation of environmental laws, the turn came in early 1980's (Brulle, 2000; Kline, 2011). The backlash of critics of the environmental movement, focusing on economic concerns, gained popularity in the public and also in politics (Kline, 2011; Laidley, 2013). Grouped together with socially embedded skepticism, the environmental debate in these two countries is nowadays largely divergent. Boykoff (2007) points out that debate around environmental issues in the US is politically divisive, with a large difference between Democrats and the Republicans; this, however, does not apply in the case of the UK, where both Labor and Conservative parties have taken up similar stances on environmental issues. This political difference extends into the media portrayal of environmental issues. However, Boykoff (2007) identified a shift in the news coverage of climate science in the second half of the previous decade that seem to suggest a converging coverage of the issue, leaning towards scientific consensus. Nevertheless, the news coverage of environmental issues is still subjected to opposing cultural values, especially environmental protection, technological domination over nature and economy (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978; Anderson, 2002). Comparing British to American progressive and conservative newspaper coverage of oil spills will provide additional understanding of news framing priorities and differences between the two cultures.

Cultural values influence the news coverage of environmental issues, which are socially constructed and do not reproduce the 'truthful' facts of a specific issue (Wilson, 1991; Dunwoody & Peters, 1992; Anderson, 2002). Therefore, since culture influences the framing process and how the frames are accepted and internalized in the society, this research also examined how political orientation of a newspaper affects the framing process. The division of newspapers on conservative and progressive steams from right and left wing political orientation, also known as conservative and liberal political streams. While the political orientation of a newspaper is visible in political reporting, it can also influence the reporting in other areas, for example with choosing alternative non-governmental and scientific sources (Song, 2007). Analysis of media bias largely features politically sensitive issues, where it is assumed bias would be most visible. It generally also focuses on the American press (see Eisinger, Veenstra & Koehn, 2007; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Bedingfield, 2012; also Entman, 2007). For instance, Koh (2012) compared photographic coverage of political candidates in 2010 mid-term election in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* to see if they would favor one side against the other. Despite assumption of bias, the analysis revealed fairly equal coverage. In previous research environmental issues also sometimes feature as the research basis for comparing two differently oriented media

(Boykoff, 2007).

The focus of this thesis was on discovering the similarities and differences in framing of oil spill accidents in newspaper media, which might point towards the deeper ideological differences between the UK and the US, as well between conservative and progressive newspapers. To study how these distinctions might translate into portrayal of oil spill accidents in the newspaper media, one progressive and one conservative newspaper from the UK and the US had been selected for this research. The featured newspapers are *The Times* and *The Guardian* from the UK, and *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* from the US.

In the context of the overview of background and rationale for analysis, the social and scientific relevance of this thesis can be presented. Firstly, researching the media portrayal of oil spill accidents will broaden the knowledge of news framing of environmental issues. The oil spill accidents are not often the focus of media framing analyses compared to other environmental issues, such as climate change (Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff, 2007), nuclear energy (Culley, Ogley-Oliver, Carton, & Street, 2010), and biosolids (Goodman & Goodman, 2006). Therefore, to expand and improve on the knowledge of media frames of environmental issues, this research will look at pre-existent and emerging new framing categories. Secondly, the research will uncover the differences in framing influenced by political orientation or culture of the country. In this way, the present research will provide a basis for society to evaluate and comprehend patterns in media framing of environmental issues.

The present study proceeds firstly with developing a theoretical framework concerning framing theory and the theory of agenda setting. It explores these theories primarily as they relate to the studies of the natural environment, connecting them to relevant media studies. The theories are compared to each other, and strengths and weaknesses of each are discussed. Additionally, more focus is given to the framing theory, with the presentation of the types of frames, framing effects and cultural role on shaping media frames. The next section continues with the presentation and argumentation of a sample of oil spill accidents, and carries on to the methodological section. A detailed description of research design is then presented, followed by a discussion of the content analysis employed. The section finishes with presenting the collection of data and the process of the analysis. The fourth section presents the data analysis and findings of the content analysis of five oil spill accidents in the two UK newspapers and the two US newspapers. Lastly, a conclusion and discussion section follows, with the limitations of the research discussed there, as well as possibilities for further research.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This paper builds on two different theories. Firstly a review of the framing theory will be presented, followed by the agenda setting theory. Both of these theories deal with how a message is constructed in the media, but they focus on two different fields (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing theory focuses on how the media messages should be interpreted, whereas agenda setting theory focuses on media telling audiences what they should think about (McCombs, 2005). In distinguishing these concepts, a basic definition of McCombs (2005) sees framing theory dealing with dominant attributes in a message that foreshadow the way public thinks and talks about issues, whereas agenda setting theory refers to the prominence these issues get in the public. Both of these theoretical perspectives will be applied to the media's coverage of environmental issues followed by an examination of major 21<sup>st</sup> century oil spills.

### **2.1. Framing theory**

The framing theory has been primarily developed by a sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974, where he explained that frames are used to construct and understand the reality around us (Goffman, 1974). Through Goffman studying framing began to mean studying the organization of social information in everyday life (Bowe, Oshita, Terracina-Hartman, & Chao, 2014). Framing theory encompasses three areas of studies, namely management and organizational studies, social movement and media (König, 2014). The first one focuses on behavioral effects of framing, the second one on the relationship between cultural views of movements and framing and its effect on mobilization. Lastly, in media studies framing is focused on how journalists present and shape public knowledge of issues (König, 2014). This research will focus on the field of framing in the media studies, specifically on framing of environmental issues by the news media.

#### **2.1.1. Media studies and framing**

Framing in media studies presents the preferred way of interpretation of the events described in the news. Facts journalists gather before reporting on a certain event remain neutral, until they are written, and with that, framed (Kuypens & Cooper, 2005). With frames a journalist has the ability to “simplify, prioritize and structure the narrative flow of events” (Norris, 1995, p. 357), and with that a journalist has power to influence what their audiences think and talk about (McCombs, 2005). When putting together a story, journalists take some aspects from it and make them a primary focus for their audiences. This type of framing is successful if it contains viewpoints that make it easier for the public to understand what the issue is

about. By reusing a specific frame when reporting about a similar situation, journalists get the audiences accustomed to it. This process describes how some frames become a normative way for covering a specific type of event, used by the journalists in reporting and by the public in understanding and structuring the thoughts around the issue (D'Angelo, 2002).

“Frames should be viewed as an abstract principle, tool, or ‘schemata’ of interpretation that works through media texts to structure social meaning.” (Reese, 2001, p. 14) To keep the power they are assigned at first, the frames must be consistent with values of the society. In reporting about a story, journalists choose a frame to use from the multitude of frames available in the society, and with that they provide the public with explanations of the problem, encourage passing of judgments on the responsible actors and lead the discussion on finding possible solutions (Bishop, 2013). Robert Entman (1993) saw framing as selecting some aspects of the perceived reality and making them more prominent in text. The role of framing as described by Entman (1993, p. 55) is to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. Media frames have also been described as “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration” (Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991, p. 3).

In recent years new approaches to framing have developed. Fung, Brossard and Ng, (2011) describe frames as not always having the power to shape the way an individual interprets a message; the only way framing effect will occur is if the frame resonates with individual’s existing schema. The theory builds on the predisposition that each individual possesses certain knowledge constructs in their memory. The activation of this knowledge depends on different circumstances, such as when the knowledge was stored, or similar attributes of the situation triggering the stored memories. When an individual is faced with a news story highlighting certain aspects of an issue, relevant frame-related thoughts will be activated only if the information in the news story is matched by the knowledge the individual holds (Fung et al., 2011). This theory emphasizes that audiences are not simply influenced by media messages and do not simply integrate them passively. Rather, audiences actively interpret relevant information in the messages to form judgments (Fung et al., 2011).

### **2.1.2. Framing of environmental issues**

“The way we frame environmental issues has important consequences for the way the public perceives and acts on them” (Lakoff via Bortree, Ahern, Due, & Nutter Smith, 2012, p. 78).

Environment is not a separate entity, but is intertwined with other issue areas, such as economics, energy, health and security. In these overlap areas, politics and journalism suffer because of the lack of frames that capture the reality of the situation. Lakoff (2010) defines this as ‘hypocognition’ in the case of environment. Hypocognition or the lack of ideas, positions environmental frames falsely, because it frames the environment as separated from ‘us’. “We are an inseparable part of Nature. Yet we separate self from other, and conceptualize Nature as other.” (Lakoff, 2010, p. 76). For Lakoff (2010) this presents a starting point of false or lacking environment frames, which are present in the society. There exist fragmented frames, describing one point of the problem, but there is no single comprehensible frame that ties all the layers together. Once these false frames become reified, or made real, they become an integral part of the society and do not disappear until institutions or cultural practices confirming them also disappear, which Lakoff (2010) sees as a very slow process.

The lack of cohesive frames in reporting about the environment has been noticed by other researchers in the academic world (Cox, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013). Even before the development of environmental frames, environmental communication itself presents some challenges to public discourse. Environmental communication was defined as “the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationships to the natural world; it is the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and negotiating society’s different responses to them” (Cox, 2013, p. 20). Two important elements of this definition are pragmatic and constitutive. Environmental communication is pragmatic because it educates, informs and influences people to take action. It is also constitutive because it shapes how public perceives nature and therefore helps in building public environmental conscience. Environmental communication highlights problems, creates values and enforces aims and objectives (De Blasio & Sorice, 2013). Through the traditional public sphere (and also through alternative public spheres of new media worlds) the best practices of environmental communication can become adapted social practices. “The rhetoric of environmental communication is responsible for building issues in the mediated [political and] public space,” (De Blasio & Sorice, 2013, p. 61), which can influence the development of frames for easier social understanding.

Weighted down by the journalistic norms of presenting both sides of the story to attain the goal of objectivity and to avoid bias, portrayal of environmental issues creates confusion about the facts in the public (Fitzgerald, 2013). On one side the evidence of environmental issue is presented, but it is questioned by opposing statements in the same article. This leads

to confusion about the truth of the facts and additionally limits the pressure on governments to take action to deal with the situation (Painter in Fitzgerald, 2013). Environmental issues deal with impact on species and ecosystems, meaning that coverage of these issues cannot be done successfully from a general political discourse, but must move into a discourse of scientific inquiry (Fitzgerald, 2013).

#### **2.1.2.1. Pre-existent environmental frames**

Research into how environmental issues are framed in the media has shown that there exist emerging frames that journalists employ while covering environmental issues. While various studies name them differently, there are some frames that repeat throughout the analysis of environmental media frames.

The first frame that existing research defines is ‘ecological’ (Boykoff, 2008). This frame deals with evidentiary consequences of the studied issue; in climate change that can be floods, heat waves, and/or impact on the plants and the animals (Boykoff, 2008; Trumbo, 1996). Trumbo (1996) acknowledges the existence of the same frame, but names it ‘the impact of the issue’. The ecological frame is one of the most popular frames; it is also very diverse and it incorporates various sub-frames.

The second frame that is recognized in previous research is ‘political’ (Boykoff, 2008). The political frame is relevant because it deals with political consequences of the environmental issues, such as changes in the legislation. Trumbo (1996) sees this frame as ‘actions statements’, and considers it as the frame that employs calls for political action or simply reports about the political action that was taken in regards to the environmental issue at hand. This frame is used less frequently compared to the ecological frame. However, in their study on how the media frame biohazards, Goodman and Goodman (2006) found out that regulatory and legal frame is the one used most frequently, while the environmental frame is employed less frequently (49% against 9%). Depending on the environmental issue being analyzed and its focus, the frequency of use between ecological frame and political frame differs. The political frame can stand by itself, or it can be connected to the economic frame (Boykoff, 2008).

The economical frame is usually counted as a sub-frame to political frame, because economical consequences can be evaluated only on the basis of political action (Anderson, 2009). This frame fits into the broader debate of environmental issues, because it points out the financial impacts the environmental issue has had either on the government or on privately owned corporations. The economical frame is also used more frequently by conservative

media, whereas progressive media more frequently employs the ecological frame, with the focus on the catastrophe metaphor (Anderson, 2009).

The environmental issue specific research provides additional frames employed by the media, but the ecological, political and economical frames are the overarching frames employed across all studies.

### **2.1.3. Types of frames**

The most important part of framing is to provide the context in which the information is presented and processed by the audiences. Hallahan (1999) found seven models of framing that have an impact on the sphere of public relations. He split the categories according to the events which are the focus of framing and came to these categories: situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility and news. Situations frame the relationships between individuals in different situations from everyday life; in attributes some characteristics get highlighted more than others, creating a biased view of a person or an object. In choices, the frames are used to portray either negative or positive terms to make people overcome the uncertainty in a specific situation. Actions describe the likelihood of a person to act to reach a desired goal, influenced by alternatives stated in positive or negative terms. Issues frame social problems, which can be explained differently by all the parties trying to make their point of view clear. Responsibility is dealing with attributing causes of events to different factors; when the factor is people, they usually try to minimize their own fault in the events. The last one is a news category, which describes how the media use familiar, culturally known themes to present information about events (Hallahan, 1999).

Regarding the focus of this research on media portrayal of oil spills, the two most relevant categories are the category of issues and the category of news. Framing of issues deals with the question of interpretation – how a particular problem should be understood. Issues can be constructed around individuals, organizations or on the societal level. Framing has a primary role of defining social problems and moral actions in dealing with them (Hallahan, 1999). Issues are constructed around claim makers, who want to influence the agenda building and bring certain events into focus. Oil spills are by themselves already in the public news sphere; primarily because these events are sensational in nature, but also because they are considered a threat to the environment.

The category of news framing deals with how to present difficult ideas in a familiar and culturally known way to the public. Journalists use frames to construct social reality for their audiences. By selecting what to present and what to ignore, and by using dominant social

frames, journalists shape the way news are defined and understood (Hallahan, 1999).

#### **2.1.4. Role of culture in shaping media frames**

Culture presents a primary base for the constitution of knowledge, meaning and comprehension of the outside world, and is as such an important linking element between news production and news consumption (Van Gorp, 2007). This linkage is established by a shared collection of frames. Framing is culturally embedded in both sides; firstly, it refers to the manner in which journalists shape news content within a specific frame, and secondly, it refers to the audiences who adopt those frames and see the world in the same way as journalists (Van Gorp, 2007).

The connection between culture and framing was highlighted already by Goffman (1974), who sees frames as a central part of culture and emphasizes their institutionalization in different ways. For Goffman (1974), culture presents an organized set of beliefs, values, codes and frames that are shared in the collective memory of a society. Individuals, as part of the society, have internalized these values and frames. The collection of frames the individual is able to access depends on the internalization and all individuals in the society make use of their cultural backgrounds to understand media messages, just as the journalists apply and amplify the backgrounds in the media content and present them to their audiences (Van Gorp, 2007).

The success of the frames in the public mediated world is closely linked to culture (Buijs, Arts, Elands, & Lengkeek, 2011). Cultural resonance is reached when the content of a specific frame is compatible with certain elements within a culture, and as such cultural resonance presents one of the most important determinants for the success of a specific frame. Through the cultural resonance the frames appear more appealing, because they seem natural and familiar to the audience (Buijs et al., 2011).

##### **2.1.4.1. Characteristics of frames and culture**

Following Goffman's work, van Gorp (2007) developed six premises connecting culture with framing. First is the existence of more frames than just the ones that are currently applied. Alternatives exist for both the journalists and their audiences, which can lead to different definitions of issues and topics. These distinctions enable journalists and the audiences to realize that the same events can make different sense depending upon the used frame.

The second premise is that frames are independent of media content, precisely because they are part of culture. The audiences understand the meaning because they are already on



some level familiar with it. By inherently suggesting the preferred theme, frames determine which meaning the audience will attach to the issue (Van Gorp, 2007).

The third premise is that because frames build upon the individual's cultural background, their use seems normal and process of social construction invisible. Fourth, the cultural approach encompasses the impact of social structure in the framing process itself. As such, the way individuals interpret media content is not only dependent on their motivation, but is guided by cultural processes (Van Gorp, 2007).

Fifth premise sees frames as very stable, because they are part of culture. This persistent character of frames means that they change very little. But in contrast to the stable character of frames, the framing process is very dynamic. Frames can be contested by journalists and the audiences, new ones emerge and some might disappear, without the frames themselves changing at all (Van Gorp, 2007).

The last premise recognizes the essence of framing in social interaction. Journalists interact with their sources and the audiences with the media content, and with each other. "Framing involves the interplay that occurs between the textual level (frames applied in the media), the cognitive level (schemata among the audience and media makers), the extramedial level (the discourse of frame sponsors), and, finally, the stock of frames that is available in a given culture." (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 64).

#### **2.1.4.2. HEP vs. NEP**

In the past centuries the prevailing theory regarding the environment focused on human beings. Humans were regarded above everything else, and the world around them was subjugated and could be exploited to further the advancement of human society. This perspective came under question around the 1970's. Sociologists Catton Jr. and Dunlap (1978) proposed an alternative outlook on the environmental situation, citing that the dominant perspectives shared one element – an anthropocentric view on the environment. They grouped these theories together under the 'Human Exceptionalism Paradigm' (HEP) (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978). Accepting the assumptions of HEP, sociologists of that time could not meaningfully deal with the social implications of the ecological issues. "The HEP became increasingly obstructive of sociological efforts to comprehend contemporary and future social experience" (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978, p. 42). The HEP paradigm includes several assumptions, all of them revolving around exceptionalism of humans. Firstly, because of culture, human beings are unique among earth's creatures. Secondly, as opposed to biological traits, culture can be different around the world and can change very quickly. Third,

the differences between human beings are the result of cultural upbringing rather than birth. Based on that, these differences can be socially altered or eliminated in due time. Based on previous assumptions it follows that the progress is limitless, because with culture all obstacles can be overcome (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978).

Challenging these perspectives, the environmental sociology was developed as a consequence of events such as energy crisis in 1973. What distinguishes environmental sociology from previous views is the “acceptance of ‘environmental’ variables as meaningful for social investigation” (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978, p. 44), and the focus on interaction between the environment and society, instead of on humans. Favoring the same perspective as Lakoff (2010), who sees humans as part of natural world, Catton and Dunlap (1978) develop the ‘New Environmental Paradigm’ or NEP, which presents an alternative view of the environment. In contrast to the HEP paradigm, the NEP paradigm sees human beings as one of the species on the Earth, all of which are interdependently involved in the shaping of our social life. Secondly, human actions have many unintended consequences on the environment, because of existence of linkages between environment and society. Third, since the world is finite, social progress, cultural development and economical growth are limited by physical and biological constraints (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978).

Besides challenging the relationship between humans and nature, the emergence of the NEP influenced the environmental debate in media and public spheres and with it the accepted cultural views and frames. But since both paradigms still exist in the society, this creates a rift which prevents the emergence of unified frames. For Lakoff (2010) this rift between seeing the human world as part of nature or above it leads to ‘hypocognition’ or false positioning of the environmental frames in the public sphere.

Environmental sociology has therefore developed as a sub-discipline in the US, but it grew in interaction with European countries. Besides numerous similarities, such as research themes, development of non-governmental environmental organizations and emerging policies, there are still differentiations present between environmental sociology in the US and in Europe (Mol, 2006). “The development of effective social responses to global environmental crises depends critically upon understanding the means by which human-induced environmental change is deeply embedded within global, social, political, and economic relations and epistemic constructions.” (Haluzá-DeLay & Davidson, 2008)

#### **2.1.4.3. Values and their impact on environmental frames**

Conflicting cultural values influence what people chose to believe and do regarding

controversial public debates. This is especially true for environmental issues (Price, Walker, & Boschetti, 2014). Cultural theory can explain why people perceive information differently; society perceives different phenomena, even the environment, through cultural filters. That is why different opinions about every aspect of the information lead to different policy preferences (Lima & Castro, 2005).

Cultural values present a very important basis upon which the norms of proper behavior are later on developed. Cultural values and norms are the cause of environmentally responsible individual behavior. Environmental behavior benefits from altruism and helping behavior and is regarded as a pro-social act (Nilsson, von Borgstede, & Biel, 2004).

‘Self-transcendent’ values, such as high levels of altruism and pro-environmental values have an impact on an individual’s engagement in sustainable behavior and concern levels about environmental issues (Slimak & Dietz, 2006). Framing of these self-transcendent values with environmental issues proposes a new method for strategy creation, raising awareness of specific situations, like climate change. This is known as ‘deep framing’, which describes a connection between a specific communication strategy and a set of deeper values (Lakoff, Dean, & Hazen, 2004).

## **2.2. Agenda setting theory**

Agenda setting theory is focused on the idea that there exists a strong correlation between the importance the media puts on specific events and the importance attributed to them by media audiences (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). As Bernard Cohen (1963, p. 13) puts it, “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about”. Agenda setting theory presents a set of criteria for the media, by which their audiences are able to interpret the importance of the issue being reported. The first step of the agenda setting theory is reporting the issue to the public, by which the news is deemed important for them. The importance of the issue is measured through the amount of information available in the news about it and its position, whether it is published on the front page or somewhere else (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Media shapes the perception of its audiences by selecting which events will be reported on and additionally, by giving prominence to some events, while pushing others to the side. This way, media insinuates which people, issues and events are deserving of public attention (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002).

Media selects the issues it will report to its audiences by a set of criteria based on established values, from geographical closeness of the event to the sudden or negative events

(Anderson, 2002; Cox, 2013). These criteria present inseparable part of journalism discourse and are interchangeable throughout time and space (Campbell, 2004). These criteria are opposing the set of convictions and constructions of reality the majority of the media audiences holds and in this way they have an impact on the audiences. For those working in the media world, these criteria present a routine to follow, which makes people form a consensus opinion about the issues at hand (Van Dijk, 1988).

Agenda setting theory in journalism has developed throughout the years under the influence of the new technologies. Newspapers employ long front page articles, with banner headlines and photographs to distinguish the important stories from the not-so-important ones. Television features more important news in the beginning of the news program, covering the event with broader coverage and giving it more time compared to other events. With the emergence of the internet and online editions of so-called traditional media, the researchers recognized that new media sets agendas differently than traditional media (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002).

### **2.2.1. Agenda setting vs. framing**

Agenda setting theory is regarded by the academic world as part of the communication processes, together with framing and priming. Though not the same, the three theories are viewed to be interconnected and share similar cognitive processes and effects (Weaver, 2007). The most important difference between framing and agenda setting is that framing focuses on how issues are reported and discussed in the media world, whereas agenda setting (and priming) focuses on which issues are highlighted, or what is covered by the media (Weaver, 2007). Agenda setting and priming are two intertwined theories, which focus on the effects of media constructing the issue importance on the public opinion and on governmental politics. Therefore, agenda setting centers on which issues are made salient, whereas priming focuses on the consequences the agenda setting has on public opinion (Weaver, 2007).

Agenda setting theory takes place on two levels. First level is centered on perceived importance of issues, whereas the second level considers the perceived importance of attributes of these issues. Framing, on the other hand, takes place when journalists use specific perspectives and frames to draw attention to certain attributes of the objects of the news coverage, as well as the objects themselves (Weaver, 2007). For McCombs (1997), framing on the second level of agenda presents a selection from a limited number of thematically connected attributes to be included on the agenda when discussing a particular subject. Since there are many different agendas of attributes, a theoretical map is needed to help journalists

order the different kinds of frames (McCombs, 1997).

For both theories there exist various definitions, with various levels of agreement between definition. There are researchers who do not agree with linking agenda setting and framing. According to those theories, agenda setting and framing differ because of their dissimilar theoretical premises (Scheufele, 2000). Agenda setting is based on the theory of attitude accessibility, where by increasing the importance of the issues, the ease of retrieving the specific issues from memory while making judgments also increases. Framing, on the other hand, relies on prospect theory. Here it is assumed that minor changes in the description of a situation raise the interpretative schemas, which impact the interpretation of receiving information, as opposed to making particular aspects of issue more prominent (Scheufele, 2000).

Despite similarities between the concepts of framing and second level agenda setting, such as focus on how issues are presented in the media and which are the most prominent aspects of those issues, it seems that framing theory is more developed. In comparison to the agenda setting, framing includes a broader range of cognitive processes, among others moral evaluations, appeals to principles, causal reasoning and recommendations for treatment than second level agenda setting (Weaver, 2007).

### **2.2.2. Influence of agenda setting theory**

Agenda setting theory impacts the perceived importance of issues in the news. News affect the audiences' issue priorities and focus their attention on a specific issue. Agendas transform when the particular issue is solved. Agenda setting theory consists of three subdivisions: the media, the public and politics (Váně & Kalvas, 2013). All three have their own agendas, but are also interlinked with each other through crowded networks. Different events taking place in real life impact the agendas of all three subdivisions. The position a specific event holds on the agenda is determined by the intensity of the attention (Váně & Kalvas, 2013). The media agenda refers to the importance of issues as they appear in the media. The public agenda presents a set of collective responses to the current most important problem question in the center of the public debate. The politics agenda is a set of issues under consideration by the government official (Jenner, 2012).

The media agenda has the most impact on agenda-building. Here, the focus is on how issues are created and why some issues come to command the attention of the public while others fail (Scheufele, 2000). The public agenda is born though the media agenda: once the issue is placed on the news, it will catch the attention of public and become a political issue

(Scheufele, 2000). The media agenda does not mirror the priorities of the public, but its role shapes the public agenda.

Media agenda setting is important because when the public has no experience with a specific issue, it is more likely to rely on the media for information and interpretation of the issue. People today are seen to live in two different worlds, a real world, which is limited by experience of individuals themselves and their acquaintances, and media world, which is shaped by decisions of journalists and editors (Brown & Deegan, 1998). Issues can be categorized on this polarization of real vs. media world; issues, in which people had personal experience, are termed as ‘obtrusive’, and issues, in which people had little to no experience, are labeled as ‘unobtrusive’. The distinction can also be made by whether the issue has direct consequences for the individual, as is the case with obtrusive issues, or whether there are no direct consequences for the individual, as in the case with unobtrusive issues. Environmental issues in general fit into the ‘unobtrusive’ category, meaning that the public relies on the information provided by the media to understand the events (Brown & Deegan, 1998). This means that media has an even stronger influence and impact on how the public perceives these issues, which positively correlates with the extent of the public concern for such issues (Ader, 1995).

### **2.2.3. Setting the environmental issues on the agenda**

“All issues are ultimately controversial because conflicts are discernible on three levels: whether the issue exists at all, whether it ought to be resolved, and how it should be resolved. However, not every conflict becomes an issue. To become an issue, a conflict must be identified as such, and a solution is required” (Dearing & Rogers via Váně & Kalvas, 2013, p. 291). Different actors compete to influence the agenda setting debate for environmental issues. Media reporting about the environment can be divided into three categories: small news articles for the part of the audience with special interest in the environment, dramatic and big scale news on specific issues and poorly disguised PR for business (Krøvel, 2012).

As was mentioned before, most research places environmental issues into the unobtrusive category, “as they often deal with distant (in time and/or space) and ambiguous processes, complex causes and effects, uncertainty, and future risks” (Djerf-Pierre, 2012, p. 503) and as such, environmental issues might be subjected to being forced off the media and public agenda by more obtrusive issues. But in the cases which have direct consequences for the individuals and the public, such as nuclear meltdowns and oil spills, these specific issues become obtrusive and more important (Djerf-Pierre, 2012). These kinds of disasters are

perceived as key high-impact events, which can steer news attention to specific areas for a limited amount of time (Anderson, 2002).

News media has a tendency to focus on negative developments, for instance in case of economic recession, the news coverage about the economic situation increases. Likewise, the attention of the news towards war increases with the increased level of conflict around the world. However, in the case of environmental news coverage, the situation is turned. Except in the cases of major catastrophes, where the news coverage increases, the link between the severity of environmental problems in longer periods of time and amount of news coverage is much weaker (Djerf-Pierre, 2012).

#### **2.2.3.1. Processes of environmental agenda setting**

The process through which agenda setting of the environmental issues takes place, occurs in three forms: problems, policies and politics. Problems include variety of events; the most important being crises, changes in accepted indicators, or even personal experience of major policy maker. These problems highlight specific issues, changing them from a condition to a problem (Keskitalo, Westerhoff, & Juhola, 2012). Policies include existing policies and different proposal to change them. These proposals are backed by different actors, and if they are feasible, they might catch the attention of and receive the backing by the public. These proposals present an alternative to the proposed agenda setting and they gain importance by being included in the agenda setting (Keskitalo et al., 2012). The third form is politics, which includes elections, changes in the public mode and the administration. Politics can promote particular aspects of the agenda or present the opposition to them (Keskitalo et al., 2012).

Because the public relies on the media for information about environmental issues, the media also hugely impacts the agenda setting processes in these cases. In addition to turning a specific issue into a problem, media also contributes and influences the public by supplying a particular framing or context of the issue (Keskitalo et al., 2012). Media reporting on environmental events has significant impact on the national level, as “dramatic events are the most likely means by which to link actual environment indicators and their salience for the media, the public, and policymakers” (Soroka, 2002, p. 27).

#### **2.2.3.2. Influence of photographs on the environmental agenda setting**

The media world relies on visual material to support their stories. Photographs in the newspaper media, video material on television and a combination of both online serve to back up the claims the journalists are making and introduce an additional confirmation of the importance of the issue, as well as complying with the suggested framing (Anderson, 2002).

Photographs are important because of the perception that they convey the truth or evidentiary proof that words cannot express sufficiently enough (Jenner, 2012). Especially in reporting about environmental issues, such as oil spills, photographs sometimes show a more alarming perspective of reality than just words from a source. In addition to media news coverage, the photographs also have a strong impact on people's perceptions of a certain issue. These effects become relevant to the public's perception of the importance of the issue (Jenner, 2012). However, news information and photographs about environmental issues do not have the same affect on the public agenda. "Environmental news stories increase public attention toward environment – immediately and for an extended time – but they do not influence policymaker attention. News photographs have a contrary effect. In response to photographs that appear in the media, congressional committees respond with certainty, but the public appears to be largely ambivalent" (Jenner, 2012, p. 291). News photographs have a greater influence on the political agenda and resonate stronger there than in the public. The reason behind this contrasting effect between news stories and news photographs is that photographs can also exist outside of journalism discourse, meaning that communication is managed and guided to a lesser degree with photographs than with stories (Jenner, 2012). Furthermore, photographs present truthful evidence to power and with that they direct attention and lead the action. Compared to general public, political sections and committees are composed of people who have more knowledge on a single topic and also have more power for cohesive action on the same topic. In that regard, news photographs have more influence on the political agenda while news stories resonate more with the public agenda (Jenner, 2012).

### **2.3. Environment and role of culture in the UK and the US**

This research focuses on two different countries – the United Kingdom and the United States of America. These two countries were selected because they share the same language and have a similar cultural background, which is important considering the influence that culture has on the media world.

Although the similarities between these two countries might be prevailing at first glance, there exist also deep ideological differences between the selected countries, which are reflected in the media (Nerlich et al., 2012). These differences are shown in political and economic fields. The UK and the US share a commitment to the economic freedom and both countries view natural resources as inexhaustible treasure chests, which has significantly shaped their understanding of the environment (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007). Nevertheless, "its long history, the power of traditional cultural institutions and a more constrained physical



geography have shaped public perception in the UK towards preservation of the environment” (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007, p. 208). The US on the other hand, has been influenced by the importance of economic freedom granted through liberal democracy and higher personal consumption patterns, which has resulted in a more laid back view of the environmental issues, especially at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nerlich et al., 2012). The second element which influences the environmental debate is socially embedded skepticism, which is more prominent in the US than in the UK (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; also Nerlich et al., 2012).

Considering all this, the focus of this thesis is on discovering the similarities and differences in framing and agenda setting of oil spill accidents in newspaper media, which might indicate the ideological differences between the UK and the US.

### **2.3.1. The United Kingdom**

Both in the US and the UK, environmental concern has grown out of two different tracks: one is the conservation and the other is public health. These are linked to the thought that the spread of industrialization is perceived as a threat to the wilderness and the rural landscapes (Buckingham, 2008). The first environmental protection movements sprang up at the beginning of urbanization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the UK, these movements started to connect protection of the environment to the public health, which prompted the politics to act upon environment protection. By the 1950's the environmental concern debate started to focus on the issues of 'second generation'; meaning that the consequences on the environment are not immediately visible, because of subtle or delayed effects (Buckingham, 2008). These environmental movements in the past typically happened when the economic growth started to decline and the societies started to evaluate the costs of economic growth (Buckingham, 2008; also Laidley, 2013). European environmental movements after the 1960's, including the UK's, were marked by increasing enrollment in higher education. The society, influenced by the time of peace and prosperity, turned towards protecting the environment, which still marks the UK's outlook on environmental values and media environmental discourse (Buckingham, 2008; also Boykoff & Rajan, 2007).

### **2.3.2. The United States**

In the US, the politics have had a strong influence on the environmental debate, which has resulted in a more laid back view of the environment. This was influenced by constant aim to achieve higher economic growth, based on exploitation of natural resources, and supported by embedded technological optimism. However, it is important to note that part of the American culture is also nature preservation. The development of the environmental movement has

started even before the American civil war, and has peaked with the establishment of the Yellowstone National Park in 1872 (Brulle, 2000; Kline, 2011). By early 1900's various laws and government bodies had been established to help regulate the environmental preservation (Brulle, 2000). The movement has continued throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and peaked at the end of 1960's with the so-called 'green decade'. "The result was an assortment of legislation that created a bulwark of environmental laws and agencies designed to incorporate environmentalism into the political arena" (Kline, 2011, p. 111). However, the movement's successes created an important backlash that drew upon economic concerns and criticism of putting ecological needs above those of humans (Kline, 2011). The economic prosperity on the nation-level after the Second World War has impacted the American environmentalism view. The rise of a 'new class' with the liberal ideology of free market has embedded the culture of skepticism and critique (Laidley, 2013). This all has affected how the US media and public perceive and deal with the environmental issues. Since the environmental issues, such as climate change, had first gained importance in the media world in the late 1980's, the US media adopted a critical approach to the opinion of the majority of scientists (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007). These scientists placed partial blame for global warming on acts of humans, which the US media challenged. The skepticism of the environmental issues and their potential damages is more prominent in the US, in part because the majority of skeptics and deniers originate from the US universities or think-tanks. This enables them to more easily reach and influence policymakers and the media (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007).

### **3. OIL SPILLS**

Oil spills are a major environmental problem, because they have immediate short term and long term consequences to the environment they pollute. Oil spills are most often portrayed in news coverage as environmental disasters. As these events always in some way have direct consequences to the public, they are perceived as obtrusive issues (Djerf-Pierre, 2012). Because of this, oil spills often get some news coverage by the media world.

Academics have also given much attention to environmental issues due to the conflict these issues raise in the media world and also among the public. For instance, the portrayal of the climate change has been thoroughly studied through comparison between different countries and on different media (see Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; Nerlich et al., 2012; Price et al., 2014). The research possibilities of the climate change debate have been done extensively, but in this narrowed focus, the oil spill events have been pushed to the side. To broaden the understanding of how media portrays this environmental issue, the research has been conducted on five different oil spills. The specific accidents were selected because they were the major oil spill accidents that happened in recent years, that is from year 2000 onwards. This was determined through comparison of several lists of major oil spills in the past 20 to 25 years (Green Conduct, 2013; also ABC News, 2010; Pearson Education, 2014).

#### **3.1. Accident of the oil tanker Prestige in November 2002**

Oil tanker Prestige sank off the northwest coast of Spain on November 19, 2002. The Greek tanker was on the way from Russia's St. Petersburg to Singapore, via Gibraltar, with 77,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil aboard. Off the coast of Spain, on November 13, 2002, the tanker's engine was damaged and the crew lost control over the ship. After the aerial inspection established the ship was leaking fuel, the surrounding countries refused to dock the ship at one of the close ports. Battling high waves and bad weather, the ship broke in two parts and sank 3,500 meters deep, 250 kilometers off the Spanish coast on November 19. In the end, the tanker spilled almost a third of its cargo – 20,000 metric tons of oil (Cedre, 2012). Even after the sinking, the oil continued to leak out. Even four years after the sinking, in March 2006 new slicks were found near the area where the tanker sank, and the scientists confirmed that they came from the tanker (Bosch, 2006). The spill managed to contaminate six countries, and is considered the worst in the history of Spain and Portugal, who were hit the hardest (Cedre, 2012). Ten years after the accident, the legal trial took place. The Galician high court verdict proclaimed impossible to establish criminal responsibility for the spill, absolving the Spanish government of any responsibility. Only the tanker's captain, Apostolos

Mangouras, was found guilty of ‘disobedience’ for his response to the accident and was given nine months suspension (Hamilos, 2013).

### **3.2. Accident of the oil tanker Tasman Spirit in July 2003**

Oil Tanker Tasman Spirit was on its way to Karachi harbor in Pakistan, loaded with 67,000 metric tons of oil. On July 27, 2003, the tanker ran grounded in the access channel. In the resulting damage to the hull, 27,000 metric tons of oil got spilt (ITOPF, 2013). Lightering operations managed to recover some 13,000 tons of oil, before the recover process was interrupted due to bad weather conditions, which resulted in the ship’s collapse a month after the accident, on August 22, 2003 (Cedre, 2006). The spill has polluted 16 km of coastline, affecting the wildlife in the area and also having an impact on people living in the area. “Dead fish had been washed ashore, [...] small portion of mangrove trees had been affected, [...] few minutes on the beach mean a certain headache, followed by nausea, and possible vomiting.” (Abbas, 2003) The accident is considered the worst in Pakistan’s history.

### **3.3. Montara oil rig blowout in August 2009**

The drill rig West Atlas in Montara oil field in the Timor Sea suffered a blowout on August 21, 2009, resulting in an oil eruption. Before the leak was capped, 74 days after the eruption, the oil spill was measured between 4,500 to 30,000 metric tons. A lot of that had burned out in the fire that followed a failed attempt to stop the leak on November 1, 2009 (Cedre, 2011 b). The leak was capped on November 3, 2009, by pumping mud into the well, before the wellbore was cemented. This served as a precedent in how to cap the leaking well in Deepwater Horizon accident half a year later. The accident is considered to be one of Australia’s worst oil disasters, causing a spill over 14 km long and 30 m wide, after the accident started (ABC News, 2009; Cedre, 2011 b).

### **3.4. Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion in April 2010**

On April 20, 2010, the oil rig Deepwater Horizon suffered an explosion, followed by a fire in which 11 people were killed. Two days later the rig, located 80 km offshore the US in the Gulf of Mexico, sank (Cedre, 2011 a). The attempts to seal off the well, which was leaking oil from the start off accident, were unsuccessful. A temporary solution was accomplished on July 15, 2010, when the well was capped by bolting a sealing cap on top of the blowout preventer. The well was finally permanently sealed on September 19, 2010, when heavy kill mud and cement were pumped into the well, sealing off the flow paths (Bryant, 2011). In the end, the leakage from the well measured up to 630,000 metric tons of oil (NOAA, 2013). This places the Deepwater Horizon accident at the top of oil disaster accidents in history, and the

largest one in the US (CNN, 2010; Robertson & Krauss, 2010). The leak had contaminated 1,600 km of coastline, and is viewed to be the largest accidental marine oil spill with disastrous consequences to the environment (Barron, 2012). The long term environmental consequences of the spill are still being evaluated, but immediately after the spill, the wildlife in the area was severely affected. The wildlife damage included fishes, birds, sea turtles, dolphins and other mammals; with whale sharks, bluefin tuna and sperm whales being placed under observation (Barron, 2012).

### **3.5. ExxonMobil Nigeria oil spill in May 2010**

ExxonMobil Corporation suffered a ruptured pipeline in Akwa Ibom state in southern Nigeria on May 1, 2010. The leak was stopped a week later, but the damage of spilt oil is estimated between 3,000 and 90,000 metric tons (Vidal, 2010; Green Conduct, 2013). The oil spills in oil field contaminated water and coastal settlements of the large fishing communities living in the area. The ExxonMobil oil spill had contaminated waters some 20 km from the shoreline. This was the third spill of ExxonMobil in the area in the six months, the previous two happening in February 2010 and December 2009 (Clyde, 2010; Nossiter, 2010; Vidal, 2010). After the spill, the Nigeria government highlighted the frequency of the spills, claiming damages to the fragile coastal communities; the frequent oil spills in the Niger delta area have polluted the air, soil and water, endangering the environment and health of the local population (Eboh, 2010).

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This research on framing and agenda setting of environmental accidents in the UK and the US newspapers was conducted by content analysis of newspaper articles. The research proposed to answer the following two research questions:

*RQ1: How do progressive newspapers in the United Kingdom and the United States of America frame oil spill accidents compared to the conservative newspapers from these countries?*

*RQ2: How much agenda access do progressive newspapers in the United Kingdom and the United States of America give to oil spill accidents compared to the conservative newspapers from these countries?*

The content analysis is the best method to answer the proposed research questions, because only by article content analysis the frames can be identified. Additionally, the content analysis is appropriate, because it covers a multitude of means for textual analyses, covering a variety of fields – comparing, contrasting, and categorizing the gathered data, with both numeric and interpretative means (Schwandt, 2001). To avoid overlooking issue specific frames, the content analysis was conducted by inductive category development. This means that framing categories were developed at the end of the analysis, by comparing recognized frames employed by the newspapers. Finally, these established categories was then compared to the theoretical framework and pre-existent frames. To answer the research question about agenda setting, the length of the articles, as well as whether or not the visual material was included and noting the other details of the articles, was studied.

The specific countries were chosen because of their background cultural similarities, which influence development of frames, and shared language, which makes the comparison easier by avoiding potential misunderstandings due to translation. These two countries are also often the focus of research of other environmental issues, namely climate change (see Trumbo, 1996; McCright & Dunlap, 2000; Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; Nerlich, et al., 2012). One of the most interesting discoveries in the comparative research on media coverage of climate change is the reporting in culturally specific ways, though this does not by any means limit the way an issue is socially constructed in a specific country (Bowe, at al., 2014). Previous research had found that American and European

journalists often make different decisions about content and coverage patterns when reporting about crisis situations, depending on what is important to the country. If the event is an environmental catastrophe for one country and an economic disaster for another, the journalists' reporting efforts might differ in focus and topics (Bantimaroudis & Ban, 2001). This fact is important in researching oil spill accidents because how the accident is framed shows what is considered important about it. Additionally, both countries place in the top 15 of the world's oil consumers (EIA, 2012).

Focusing on framing and agenda setting of oil spill accidents, this research tries to broaden the research focus of environmental issues, which has been disproportionately focused on climate change. The method of content analysis on framing and agenda setting corresponds with previous research in the field of environmental issues (see Boykoff, 2007; also Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; De Blasio & Sorice, 2013; Bowe, et al., 2014).

#### **4.1. Content analysis**

This research uses a content analysis method, where categories were developed inductively and then quantified. Content analysis was used to research the types of frames employed by selected newspaper media and, additionally, to determine the amount of coverage the selected newspaper media dedicated to the environmental accidents. This type of research is appropriate because it provides a possibility to research which frames the media companies are using and how they compare between themselves and also between the specific accidents. For framing analysis, the inductive category development was used in this research to avoid missing issue-specific frames, which might emerge from the content analysis. This approach does not use predetermined categories, but allows the data to influence the categories and names for them (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It allows for freer analysis of news stories.

The inductive category development was done through open coding, where the main themes in the articles were found and coded. This was done in different stages. Firstly, the gathered data was analyzed for any repeating themes. When a theme started repeating, it formed a category. This is how different categories emerged, such as category of themes dealing with numerical information on oil spills, category of themes dealing with consequences of the oil spills, category with themes of proposed solution for the spill, and categories with political and economic themes. Themes that did not repeat at the first glance were put in other category. During the second stage of the analysis the other category was further analyzed. The themes were analyzed to see if there were any recurring themes repeating throughout the data. If a theme repeated, a separate category was established and the

data was removed from other category. From this process emerged the blame and contextual information categories. In the third stage of the analysis, the categories with similar themes were merged together to create a bigger category. This means that all the political categories were merged to create a unified political category. This process was repeated with other categories. The environmental catastrophe category was created by merging consequences and numerical information themes, while the blame category was created with merging attribution of blame and counterclaim to blame categories. Solution action and economic categories were not merged with additional categories. The general category was created during the last stage of the analysis. All the rarely used themes in the other category were assigned to the general category, along with the category that provided contextual themes about the accidents. In the end, through the analysis of the themes in the remaining categories, the categories were assigned a name. After the inductive category development was finished, the themes in specific categories were quantified to show how high the usage of employed frames is. The emerged framing categories were then compared to the existing frames recognized in previous research. The framing results are additionally supported by the amount of coverage the specific accident got in a newspaper, which was measured by the combined length of the articles.

#### **4.1.1. Newspapers**

The dataset for this study was composed of newspaper articles from four newspaper media companies, two from the UK and two from the US. The research examined The Times and The Guardian from the UK, and The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times from the US, trying to determine how these newspaper media companies frame oil spill accidents. The four newspapers were selected because they are perceived to be ‘quality’ or ‘prestige’ newspapers in the selected countries and also worldwide (Boykoff, 2007). These newspapers also feature high readership and have an influence on setting the tone for media coverage in their countries (Boykoff, 2007; also Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008). These newspapers also have a long publishing history, known political stance, well-educated readership and are considered to be agenda setting (McCombs, 1972; also Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008). The sample of newspaper accidents was compiled through a search of internet database Proquest/ABI Inform ([www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)), using specific key phrases corresponding to each of the five environmental accidents. The articles about the Prestige accident were collected using key phrases ‘Prestige oil spill’ and ‘tanker oil spill Spain’. The article search for Tasman Spirit accident included key phrases ‘Tasman Spirit oil spill’, ‘Pakistan’ in



connection with ‘oil spill’, and ‘Karachi’ in connection with ‘oil’, and has yielded 8 articles. The key phrases for the Montara accident were ‘Montara oil spill’, ‘West Atlas drilling rig’ and ‘Timor sea’ in connection with ‘oil spill’. The articles of the Deepwater Horizon accident were collected using key phrases ‘BP oil spill’, ‘Deepwater Horizon rig explosion’ and ‘Gulf of Mexico oil spill’. The article search of ExxonMobil Nigeria accident was conducted using key phrases ‘ExxonMobil’ in connection with ‘oil spill’ and ‘Nigeria’, ‘ExxonMobil’ and ‘ruptured pipeline Nigeria’ and ‘ExxonMobil’ in connection with ‘Niger delta’ and ‘oil spill’.

Newspaper articles have often been the focus of research in the study of environmental issues. In the past decade or two, online media has gained a lot of attention and importance, but the research still mainly focuses on (printed) newspaper media, especially regarding environmental issues (see Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; Nerlich, et al., 2012). Newspaper media is one of the longest present media in the world, and as such can provide a look into culture and society over extended periods of time. Employing different tactics, such as big headlines, photographs, and the length of the articles themselves, newspapers provide the perfect medium for comparing how different newspapers in different times set the agenda (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002).

#### **4.1.1.1. The United Kingdom**

In the UK, newspaper production and consumption are polarized, with ‘quality’ newspapers on one side and ‘red-top’ newspapers on the other (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005). “At the nation level, there are a small number of what were known until recently as “broadsheet” or ‘quality’ newspapers characterized by extensive political and economic comment, which have relatively small but well educated and influential readerships (*The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, and weekend stable-mates)” (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005, p. 1460). The remaining, so called ‘red-top’ newspapers are more populist oriented, which highlight crime, sex and celebrities in their coverage (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005).

From the UK, *The Times* and *The Guardian* were selected for the analysis, with regards to their quality and status, assuming this will provide broader and greater development of arguments and perspectives than in other newspapers (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005). The clear political stance, explained further in specific newspaper section, also factored into the decision to include the newspapers in the analysis.

The Times is a daily newspaper, which was established in 1785, and has a daily circulation of 396 thousand printed copies (ABC, 2013). The newspaper has a reputation for

supporting conservatives with their central-right editorial policy and a commitment to traditional institutions and their independence (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005). With the reputation of a quality newspaper, covering political and economic topics, the newspaper was included in many content analysis studies in the past. Regarding the coverage of environmental issues in *The Times*, with a focus on climate change, the articles revealed the predominate stance of the newspaper in supporting skepticism debates, and focusing on financial aspects of the issues in line with their conservative position (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Boykoff, 2007; Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008; Nerlich et al., 2012).

*The Guardian* is a daily newspaper, which was established in 1821 and has an average daily circulation of 194,000 printed copies (ABC, 2013). *The Guardian* has a known center-left political stance, representing liberal, social democratic politics, and a reputation for reporting about the sensitive topics, as well as a long-standing active role in covering environmental issues (Wells, 2004; Carvalho & Burgess, 2005). As with *The Times*, *The Guardian*'s articles featured in numerous content analysis studies (Boykoff, 2007; Bowe et al., 2012). Likewise, with the environmental issues the focus had often been on the climate change debate due to its dominance as the most important environmental problem of our time. The results found *The Guardian*'s articles taking a politically motivated approach to the issue, critically analyzing governmental policies, while emphasizing the dangers of the issue. One of the most important findings include *The Guardian*'s interest in keeping the environmental issues on the agenda, even when other newspapers are not reporting about it (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005).

#### **4.1.1.2. The US**

The US newspaper media sphere is very fragmented. While there are newspapers that have nationwide coverage, the regional and community newspaper prevail in numbers (Antilla, 2005). Nevertheless, due to influence and circulation numbers, the national newspapers are considered to be the prestige press in the US (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). In this category are included *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, as well as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). I focus examination on *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* because of their high readership and their influence in setting the tone for coverage for the rest of the media industry in the country (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008).

*The Wall Street Journal* has a circulation number of 1,480,000 printed copies, which places the newspaper in the first place in the US (Alliance for Audited Media, 2013). The

Wall Street Journal was established in 1889, and today it is a daily newspaper specializing in business and economic news. It is favored by conservative audiences and has a reputation for being a conservative newspaper (Koh, 2012). Because of its status as part of the prestige press and also as a leader in the newspaper media industry in the US, The Wall Street Journal has been included in numerous research of the US press. Regarding the environmental issues The Wall Street Journal showed “trends of reliance on journalistic norms at the expense of accuracy in covering the climate science consensus on anthropogenic global warming” (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007, p. 1200).

The New York Times is a daily newspaper, which was established in 1851. The newspaper has a daily circulation of 731 thousand printed copies, placing it third in the US, after The Wall Street Journal and USA Today (Alliance for Audited Media, 2013). The New York Times has a reputation of being a liberal newspaper (Nerlich et al., 2012; Koh, 2012). The inclusion of The New York Times in previous academic research has revealed that the newspaper’s standing regarding the environmental issues leans more on the skeptical side, especially regarding the climate change debate (Antilla, 2005; also Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007).

#### **4.1.2. Conservative vs. progressive newspapers**

The distinction between conservative and progressive media comes from the media companies’ general political direction and presents a framework on how certain events are interpreted by these media. Conservative media take a more right or central-right political stance as opposed to progressive media, which have a left or central-left political stance. The difference between the two proposes that progressive media has a skeptical stance to power figures, is inclined to rationalism and supports transparency and openness of the government policies (Waldman, 2010). Opposing that, conservative media supports government policies without skepticism and favors one-sided interpretation of the events (Waldman, 2010). Progressive news media in comparison to conservative media tries to provide alternative views about the issues at hand or in some cases also the space for the issues that other news media are ignoring and pushing to the sides (Song, 2007).

#### **4.1.3. Sampling**

Time period researched was determined by the oil spill accidents themselves, since they ranged in time from one week to three months. As the focus of this research is on framing, the time periods of the accidents have to be included. A starting point for each sample is from a week before the accident itself to one month after the accident. This provided a sufficient time

period to count in the research the immediate and short term consequences of the events. Even though it is not likely for the newspapers to have published articles before the accidents occurred, the time limit was set to one week before the accident to see if the places and/or companies featured in the news coverage and if so, how they were framed.

This research project included articles on five different oil spill accidents in four different newspapers. The specific accidents were selected because they present the major oil spill accidents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Green Conduct, 2013; also ABC News, 2010; Pearson Education, 2014). The number of articles available is dependent on how much time has passed before the accident was over, on the severity of the accident and also the proximity of the accident to the countries selected for the analysis. There are 7,617 articles in total covering the selected five oil spill accidents by the four newspapers, which is also the population size as seen in Table 1. Regarding specific accidents, there are 2,180 articles about the Prestige tanker sinking, 19 articles about Tasman Spirit tanker sinking, 49 articles about Montara rig explosion, 5,321 articles about Deepwater Horizon rig explosion and 48 articles about ExxonMobil's ruptured pipeline accident in Nigeria.

**Table 1: The number of all available articles of specific environmental accidents in the specific newspaper**

Newspaper	Accident				
	Prestige	Tasman Spirit	Montara	Deepwater Horizon	ExxonMobil Nigeria
<b>The Times</b>	361	2	5	1274	2
<b>The Guardian</b>	258	3	3	642	11
<b>The Wall Street Journal</b>	657	11	34	2218	32
<b>The New York Times</b>	904	3	8	1187	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	2180	19	49	5321	48

The first accident analyzed was the Prestige oil tanker accident in the time periods from November 6, 2002, to December 19, 2002. During the selected dates the four newspapers have released 126 articles regarding this accident. The second accident was the sinking of the Tasman Spirit oil tanker in Pakistan. The analyzed time frames were between July 20, 2003, and September 22, 2003, in which the four newspapers published 3 articles. The Montara oil rig explosion was the third accident to be analyzed, namely between August 15, 2009, and December 3, 2009. There were 8 articles about this accident from the four selected newspapers. The largest analyzed accident was the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion, which was the fourth selected accident. Between April 13, 2010, and August 15, 2010, the four newspapers produced 2,500 articles. The last accident was a ruptured pipeline of ExxonMobil Oil Corporation in Nigeria, and it covered the dates from April 23, 2010, to June 8, 2010. There were 5 articles from the four newspapers reporting about this accident.

The sample of the researched five accidents in the applied timeline consisted of 2,642 articles, presented in Table 2. The number presents the available articles from the five oil spill accidents in set time frame of one week before the accident to one month after the accident from the four newspapers, collected from the Proquest/ABI Inform database.

**Table 2: The number of available articles in the set time frame by specific environmental accident and by specific newspaper**

Newspaper	Accident				
	Prestige	Tasman Spirit	Montara	Deepwater Horizon	ExxonMobil Nigeria
<b>The Times</b>	33	1	1	771	0
<b>The Guardian</b>	36	3	1	351	3
<b>The Wall Street Journal</b>	34	2	0	551	0
<b>The New York Times</b>	23	2	1	827	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	126	8	3	2500	5

Since the Deepwater Horizon accident has the largest amount of articles, compared to other accidents, every twentieth article was analyzed, trying to keep a proportionate balance. This means 125 articles of Deepwater Horizon accidents were analyzed in the selected time period. Due to a small number of articles available on oil tanker Tasman Spirit sinking, Montara and ExxonMobil's Nigeria accidents, all of the articles available on these accidents were analyzed. This brought the total sample size to 367 articles.

During the analysis, all the articles appearing in the searches that were not actually related to the accidents themselves were excluded from the analysis. In total 94 articles were discarded. These articles included passing mentions of the accidents and actors involved in them in the coverage of other events, which is why they showed up in the database search. In the case of ExxonMobil accident in Nigeria, this was the third accident the company had in a period of six months, resulting in the majority of articles covering one of the preceding accidents, which was tied to a kidnapping case. Since the articles in that case were not tied to the selected accidents by more than a sentence, frame analysis could not be done, resulting in the article exclusion. In the end, the article sample consisted of 273 articles, presented in the Table 3.

**Table 3: The number of sampled articles, divided by the environmental accident and by the newspaper**

Newspaper	Accident				
	Prestige	Tasman Spirit	Montara	Deepwater Horizon	ExxonMobil Nigeria
<b>The Times</b>	33	1	2	38	0
<b>The Guardian</b>	36	3	1	18	3
<b>The Wall Street Journal</b>	34	2	5	27	0
<b>The New York Times</b>	23	2	2	41	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	126	8	10	124	5

#### **4.1.4. Data analysis**

Gathered data was analyzed in two ways. The processing of the collected data entailed framing analysis. This was done through an inductive method of analyzing the framing devices and careful observation of other emerging framing patterns. In the process, the collected articles were thoroughly read through several times, during which the focus was on framing devices. In the end, a total of six main categories were established by grouping together the similar codes, using the method of inductive category development (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The first category encompasses the information dealing with the establishment of the accidents as an environmental catastrophe; here, the numerical information about metric tons of oil spilt are included, as well as the number of days the accident took place, the areas affected, the wild lives lost, and so on. In addition, the category includes also the information about the perceived consequences of the accident. The second category was named action statement and it includes the proposed solution plans and their realization. The third category is legislation and politics. Here are included the calls to revise the existing legislation in immediate connection with the accident taking place, counter claims to the proposed legislative action and other political movements as a consequence of the accident. The difference between action statement category and legislative category is that the first category of action statement deals primarily with hands-on approach of stopping the oil spill. All the political action fit under legislative category, and was therefore not included in the action statement category. The fourth category deals with attributing the blame. It includes clear blame statements for the accident and their opposition by the accused side. The fifth category is financials, and takes into account the information about the influence of the accident on the responsible party and also on the oil and job markets. The last category consisted of all the information that was relevant for this research, but could not be placed in a specific category, as well as providing other contextual information needed to understand the complex situation revolving around the oil spill accident. All the categories will be supported by representative quotes from the collected articles in the following results section.

Analysis of the articles from the agenda setting perspective included noting the number of available articles and the length of the articles in words (Ader, 1995; Dickerson, 2001; Barnes et al., 2008). Issue salience of newspaper articles has been measured in different ways; sometimes by the number of articles available, but common focus is also on the length of the article. Liu, Vedlitz and Alston (2008) for example reformatted the collected articles and counted the lines of each article. In other research measuring the number of words in the article as a method to determine issue salience has also been used (Barnes et al., 2008). To

test the relationship between the number of articles available by specific oil spill accidents and newspapers, the Chi-Square test was performed. Lastly, the analysis also included counting the number of times the articles appeared with a photograph (Schultz, 1999; Jenner, 2012). This method of analysis was used, because it can be judged that the newspapers place more importance on the issues covered if they include a photograph with the text article (Fahmy, Kelly, & Kim, 2007). By comparing the number of photographs included in the articles between the separate accidents, the difference in the number of photographs will serve as an orientation point of how high the accident is perceived as important by specific newspaper.

The results of the content analysis were compared on four levels: by specific event, by the type of newspaper, e.g. progressive and conservative, by country and a cross comparison of all newspapers for framing and agenda setting.

## 5. RESULTS

The content analysis of the articles from the four newspapers from the UK and the US provided the findings for this research. The findings will be presented in two categories, mainly in framing and additionally in agenda setting. The gathered results were split into two sections; firstly, the findings about agenda setting of oil spill accidents are presented to situate the accidents and provide the overview framework in which the results of framing analysis will be presented. Secondly, the presentation of the framing results follows, with a deeper look into the usage of specific frames in oil spill accidents by the newspaper media.

### 5.1. Agenda Setting

The content analysis was used to determine how much agenda access oil spill accidents get in the newspaper media. The prominence of specific events points to the importance of these events to the newspapers (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). Findings about the agenda setting helped to establish that. The following section presenting the agenda setting results gives an overview of the number of articles, their length in words, the number of articles published with photographs and the number of articles published on a front page per oil spill accident and per newspaper. Table 4 shows the results of agenda setting content analysis.

**Table 4: The agenda setting results per accident and per newspaper**

Agenda setting	Conservative newspaper									
	The Times					The Wall Street Journal				
	P	TS	M	DH	EM	P	TS	M	DH	EM
# of articles	33	1	2	38	0	34	2	5	27	0
Length in words	14,162	52	738	17,156	0	16,475	56	4,991	19,261	0
# of articles with a photo	11	0	1	26	0	14	0	1	13	0
# of articles on the front page	2	0	1	5	0	23	2	0	7	0
Agenda setting	Progressive newspaper									
	The Guardian					The New York Times				
	P	TS	M	DH	EM	P	TS	M	DH	EM
# of articles	36	3	1	18	3	23	2	2	41	2
Length in words	17,731	1,570	222	11,805	2,058	8,936	219	2,046	27,309	1,623
# of articles with a photo	34	2	1	12	1	11	0	2	30	1
# of articles on the front page	21	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	4	1

The most important agenda setting finding is that the attention of the four newspapers was mainly focused on two of the accidents – the Prestige tanker sinking in Spain (46.2%) and the Deepwater Horizon rig blowout in the Gulf of Mexico (45.4%). These two accidents therefore account for 91.6% of all analyzed articles (see Appendix, Table 1). The other three



accidents received less attention from all four newspapers, as shown by the number and the length of the articles available about these three accidents, seen in Table 4. Nevertheless, there exists a noticeable divergence in the influence of values of newsworthiness between the conservative and progressive newspapers (Cox, 2013). This is evident in the coverage of the ExxonMobil oil spill in Nigeria, which both progressive newspapers covered and the conservative did not. The most important values of newsworthiness include closeness and impact of the event, as well as the perceived influence of the event on the society, which all affect the agenda access (Anderson, 2002; Cox, 2013). The low number of articles on Tasman Spirit (2.9%), Montara (3.7%) and ExxonMobil Nigeria (1.8%) accidents suggests that the four newspapers deemed these events of lower importance compared to Prestige and Deepwater Horizon accidents. The newsworthiness of these accidents was therefore perceived not as significant or even not significant at all compared to Prestige and Deepwater Horizon accidents. This finding sheds new light on the newsworthiness of oil spill accidents. Previous research disagrees on the inherent newsworthiness of oil spills. Monika Djerf-Pierre (2012) sees all oil spills as obtrusive issues with easy access on the media agenda. However, Brown and Deegan (1998) disagree, and place all environmental issues into an unobtrusive category that enters the media agenda with difficulty. As is shown here, oil spill accidents do not by itself have guaranteed access to the agenda, but have to satisfy a number of newsworthiness values to enter on the media agenda, which opposes the finding of Djerf-Pierre (2012).

Even though all newspapers produced a relatively similar number of articles regarding the oil spill accidents, articles in the American newspapers were significantly longer (40 thousand words, opposed to 32 thousand in the British newspapers). Liu, Vedlitz and Alston (2008) see article length as an indicator of issue salience; therefore, based on the article length, this research shows that American newspapers attribute more attention to the environmental issues of oil spills compared to the British ones. However, based on a political orientation, both sides appear to be relatively equal.

Progressive newspapers have used more photographs with their articles as opposed to conservative ones (72% against 45%). As Jenner (2012) found, environmental news photographs increase attention and concern towards the ongoing events. The high usage of visual material with the articles additionally highlights the perceived importance of the accidents by the newspapers, especially combined with the article placements and front page covers (Fahmy, Kelly, & Kim, 2007). Even though conservative newspapers appear to have a higher number of front page article placements, with The Wall Street Journal's 32 articles, it is important to note 20 of those were short news articles, without photos or prominent

placement. Previous research highlights the importance of article placement, which reflects the ideological position of the newspaper regarding the issue, as well as the issue salience of the accidents (Barnes et al., 2008; Liu, Vedlitz, & Alston, 2008). As progressive newspapers placed more articles in the spotlight on the front page, as well as consistently used more visual material with their articles, this research can conclude that progressive newspapers place higher importance on oil spill accidents than conservative ones (Schultz, 1999; Fahmy, Kelly, & Kim, 2007).

A Pearson Chi-Square test was performed to see if there exist significant association between newspapers and oil spills articles. The test indicated a significant association between the two variables which was significant at the .05 level ( $p = .025$ ). However, the assumptions of Chi-Square testing were violated, with 60% of the cells having a count of less than 5. This posed a threat to the reliability of the test (Sirkin, 2006). To avoid a type I error, where significance is perceived even though there is none, another Chi-Square test was performed including only the Prestige and the Deepwater Horizon accidents in the Oil spills article variable. In this test the assumptions were met, indicating even stronger significant association between the two variables at the .01 level ( $p = .007$ ).

## **5.2. Framing**

Inductive framing analysis showed the existence of different framing categories, which were grouped together by their main theme. These categories included the information about environmental catastrophe, action statements, legislative action, attribution of blame for the accident, financial consequences and one general category. The results of the framing analysis firstly present an overview of frames used by the selected newspapers about oil spill accidents, followed by comparison between newspapers of same political standing or country of origin. Lastly, the framing findings for specific oil spill accident are presented to give a more detailed look into how specific accidents were framed.

### **5.2.1. Comparison of frames used across the newspapers**

The content analysis of the newspaper articles about five different oil spill accidents in four newspapers from the UK and the US has shown that the newspapers mainly use five different frames in reporting about oil spill accidents. The numbers for each frame and sub-frame are presented in Table 5, while Table 6 presents the numbers for each framing category for specific newspaper.

**Table 5: Frames used by British and American newspapers on oil spill accidents**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>1 Environmental catastrophe</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>98.5</b>
a. Numerical evidence	189	69.2
b. Consequences	80	29.3
<b>2 Action statement</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>24.5</b>
a. Solution action	67	24.5
<b>3 Legislation</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>38.8</b>
a. Call to change legislation	81	29.6
b. Counterclaim to legislative action	7	2.6
c. Other political action	18	6.6
<b>4 Attribution of blame</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>29.6</b>
a. Attribution of blame	59	21.6
b. Counterclaim to blame	22	8.0
<b>5 Financial</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>19.7</b>
a. Financial consequence of the accident for the actors	54	19.7
<b>6 General</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>34.7</b>
a. Other	55	20.1
b. Contextual information	40	14.6

**Table 6: Frames used by specific newspaper on oil spill accidents**

<b>Frame</b>	<b>Sub-frame</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>			
		<b>G</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>WSJ</b>	<b>NYT</b>
<b>Environmental catastrophe</b>	Numerical evidence	50	40	46	53
	Consequences	24	11	20	25
<b>Action statement</b>	Solution action	19	21	13	14
<b>Legislation</b>	Call to change legislation	23	16	23	19
	Counterclaim to legislative action	3	2	2	0
	Other political action	0	1	9	8
<b>Attribution of blame</b>	Attribution of blame	16	16	16	11
	Counterclaim to blame	7	6	5	4
<b>Financial</b>	Financial consequences	8	19	16	11
<b>General</b>	Other	13	15	12	15
	Contextual information	10	13	9	8

*Note: the newspaper names are shortened, where G is The Guardian, T is The Times, WSJ is The Wall Street Journal and NYT is The New York Times.*

As Table 5 and Table 6 show, the most used frame by newspaper media for reporting about oil spill accidents was the environmental catastrophe frame. Most articles combined one or two sub-frames in that category, which is why the usage of frame measured up to almost 100 per cent. The most popular sub-frame was one of numerical evidence (69%), followed by consequences (29%). Action statement frame was sometimes used with the environmental

catastrophe frame, to present the solution action of preventing and/or stopping the oil spill. The use of both frames and sub-frames is illustrated in the quote below from The Times:

*The massive oil spill pouring from a ruptured well in the Gulf of Mexico is expected to reach the Louisiana coast today, threatening hundreds of species and prompting an environmental catastrophe. Dozens of vessels were trying to contain the spill, using a variety of methods. Crews triggered a series of controlled fires to burn off the thickest parts of the slick, while booms, skimmers and chemical dispersants were trying to stop the rest from reaching shore. Heavy seas, forecast to last into next week, are hampering the operation. BP was due to start drilling a new "relief" well that would allow them to stop the flow from the seabed, although officials said that it would take at least two months to complete (The Times, 2010).*

The quote above starts with the numerical evidence sub-frame (massive oil spill, hundreds of species) and continues with consequences sub-frame (contain the spill, booms, skimmers and chemical dispersants were trying to stop the rest from reaching the shore). The quote finishes with action statement frame, pointing to the proposed solution action of drilling a new relief well to stop the leaking oil. The popularity of environmental catastrophe frame points to the findings from previous research, where ecological frame is a prominent one in framing of different environmental issues (Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff, 2008). Therefore, this finding of the research confirms the significance of the ecological frame in media portrayal of environmental issues. The usage of action statement frame is linked to environmental catastrophe frame, as the example above illustrates. Action statement frame deals primarily with proposed solution to the oil spill itself, and can be connected to Trumbo's (1996) framing category of remedies, where information about proposed or implemented solution was given, as well as presenting a debate around solutions.

The second most used frame was the legislative action frame, which dealt with political and legislative propositions. As a result of an oil spill accident, some politicians called to change the existing legislation, which was perceived to be lacking, as it led to the accident. This sub-frame was the most used one of the legislative action frame, followed by the counterclaim to the action or other political action. The latter sub-frames were not used as frequently (only in 25 articles). The call to change the legislation sub-frame is shown below in the first quote, while the counterclaim to the action is illustrated in the second quote from The Guardian:

*The French president, Jacques Chirac, last night led the calls for dangerous tankers to be outlawed as*

*the sinking of the Prestige threatened an environmental catastrophe (The Guardian, 2002). David Osler, of Lloyd's List shipping newspaper, said that opposition from the powerful shipping and oil lobbies would make it difficult to speed up the process of retiring old-fashioned tankers operating around the world. Some single-hull tankers have been given special dispensation to continue operating until 2015 (The Guardian, 2002).*

The political frame, which also encompasses regulations and legal changes, was identified in previous research of environmental issues (Goodman & Goodman, 2006). In coverage of some issues, such as nuclear and biohazard material, the frame is frequently used, while in covering of other issues, such as the climate change, the frame is used less often (Boykoff, 2008). In the coverage of oil spill accidents the legislative frame is second only to the environmental catastrophe frame. The two quotes above illustrate how the frame is employed by the newspaper media. In the first quote the need to change the existing law is highlighted (e.g. dangerous tankers to be outlawed, threatened an environmental catastrophe) to prevent similar accidents occurring again. However, these calls to change the legislation can be countered, as it is shown in the second quote (make it difficult to speed up the process, have been given special dispensation).

The fourth frame that the newspapers used was the attribution of blame frame. Who are the actors to be blamed for the accident happening was the most frequently used sub-frame in this category (21%). The countering claims to blame were mostly used in the Prestige accident. Both sub-frames were used in the following quote from The New York Times:

*Mariano Rajoy, the Spanish deputy prime minister, said Madrid would seek an explanation from London of Gibraltar's "failure to comply with norms," because the Prestige refueled in Gibraltar but was not inspected by port officials. The British ambassador to Madrid, Peter Torry, said the Prestige had not been heading to Gibraltar, a position confirmed by Crown Resources, the company shipping the oil. "The suggestion that the accident off Galicia is linked to Gibraltar's alleged failure to comply with community legislation is wrong," Mr. Torry said in a statement (The New York Times, 2002).*

The quote above starts with attributing the blame for the Prestige accident to the Great Britain. This is evident from 'seeking an explanation', 'failure to comply with norms', and 'not inspected'. The government of Spain is attributing the blame to Gibraltar, and by extension to Great Britain, as the failure to inspect the tanker is seen as the cause of the accident. This statement implies that the inspection would have resulted in the tanker being

declared not operational for business, which would prevent the accident. However, this blame is refuted in the following sentence by a representative of the British government. The attribution of blame frame is a frame that is popular in framing of politics (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). However, in framing of environmental issues the frame is not widely represented. Previous research shows that the framing of environmental issues focuses on ecological consequences, political and economic debate, scientific results and public perceptions of the issue and affects of the issue on culture (Trumbo, 1996; Goodman & Goodman, 2006; Boykoff, 2008). The use of attribution of blame frame in framing of oil spill accidents is therefore unique for this kind of environmental issues. During the framing analysis, three patterns emerged regarding the usage of attribution of blame frame. The most obvious pattern is of governments ascribing the blame to other actors or factors, be it other governments (Prestige), oil corporations (Montara, Deepwater Horizon) or lacking legislation (Prestige, ExxonMobil Nigeria). On the other hand, governments come under criticism for dealing with the oil spills, which was also an observed pattern in all analyzed accidents. The last observed pattern concerns the counterclaim to blame sub-frame, where accused party either accepts the blame and consequences, or tries to pinpoint the blame to another party (Prestige, Montara and Deepwater Horizon).

The last categorized frame was dealing with financial consequences for the actors involved. This frame was used solely in the Deepwater Horizon accident, measuring how the evolving accident influenced the financial standing of the corporation, as well as the damages to the environment the corporation had to pay. The use of the financial frame is shown in the next quote from The Wall Street Journal:

*BP's American depositary receipts climbed 45 cents, or 1.4%, to 31.85, after the oil company said it won't issue further dividends this year and confirmed an agreement to set aside \$20 billion to help pay for claims as a result of the Gulf oil spill (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

The financial frame, or economic frame, as it is called in previous research on framing of environmental issues, is one of frames employed throughout all environmental issues (Anderson, 2009; also Boykoff, 2008). Dealing with oil spill accidents, the frame is employed to present the financial consequences to the actors responsible for the oil spill accidents.

The last category 'general' incorporated all pieces of information relevant to the oil spill accidents. It includes all the sub-frames that could not be labeled clearly under previously mentioned categories, and are illustrated in the quotes below:

*Thousands of demonstrators marching behind a banner reading 'Never again' took to the streets of the Galician capital Santiago de Compostela in torrential rain yesterday to protest against the [Prestige] catastrophe (The Guardian, 2002).*

*After a herculean clean-up and hundreds of millions of pounds of losses, there is almost no visible reminder of the nightmare of Christmas 1999, when the Maltese registered Erika foundered and spewed out 20,000 tonnes of oil, much of which coated 250 miles (400km) of French coastline (The Times, 2002).*

*The tanker was reportedly registered in the Bahamas, was managed by a Liberian company based in Athens and was chartered by a Russian subsidiary based in Switzerland - a bewildering maze that sometimes suggests efforts to avoid stringent regulation (The New York Times, 2002).*

*Australia is poised to become the world's second-biggest gas exporter after Qatar within a decade, following a string of major discoveries off its northern and western coasts. Chevron Corp., ExxonMobil Corp. and Royal Dutch Shell PLC are among companies investing billions of dollars into gas-export projects, triggering a jobs boom in the states of Western Australia and Queensland (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

*That disaster, which claimed the lives of 11 rig workers, has made headlines round the world and BP now claims it is close to plugging the leak. By contrast, little information has emerged about the damage inflicted on the Niger delta (The Guardian, 2010).*

The top five examples show the usage of the sub-frames that could not be placed in any of the developed categories. The first one is a conflict or protest frame, the second one show the description of similar oil spill accidents in the past and the third one highlights the globalization sub-frame, which points to complex web ownerships in the oil industry. The fourth example is of economic frame connected to Australia, the country where the Montara accident happened. Lastly, the fifth example shows the comparison between the Deepwater Horizon and ExxonMobil Nigeria accident.

Beside the five main framing categories, the article content analysis additionally showed other possible framing strategies. One of those is comparing the accident to the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989. That spill was considered the worst modern one, before the Deepwater Horizon accident. Even before that accident, the parallels to the Exxon Valdez accident were drawn over all the analyzed accidents, as shown below:

*Environmental groups fear an ecological disaster. They claim that if all the oil leaked, it would be one of the largest spills ever, about twice the size of the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill off Alaska (Prestige, The Guardian, 2002).*

*The first scientists to survey the effects of the damaged rig 125 miles (200km) off the coast of West*

*Australia described it as an environmental disaster and compared its long-term effects to those of the Exxon Valdez spill near Alaska in 1989 (Montara, Times, 2009).*

*According to government figures issued Monday, 4.1 million barrels of oil flowed into the Gulf from the BP spill -- some 16 times as much oil as in the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster. Yet less than one-quarter of the amount of shoreline has been oiled in the Gulf spill as was affected in the Valdez incident, according to estimates from officials overseeing the Gulf response (Deepwater Horizon, The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

*As many as 546 million gallons of oil spilled into the Niger Delta over the last five decades, or nearly 11 million gallons a year, a team of experts for the Nigerian government and international and local environmental groups concluded in a 2006 report. By comparison, the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989 dumped an estimated 10.8 million gallons of oil into the waters off Alaska (ExxonMobil Nigeria, The New York Times, 2010).*

### **5.2.2. Framing in conservative newspapers**

Both conservative newspapers have been consistent in framing of the oil spill accidents, with small differences between them. Primarily both newspapers have used the overarching theme of environmental catastrophe in framing all accidents, supporting the claim by numerical evidence and evident consequences. This finding is supported by previous research of framing of environmental issues, where the environmental frame was shown to be the most prominent (Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff, 2008). The numerical evidence sub-frame is illustrated below with the quote from The Times:

*An offshore oil slick measuring 18 nautical miles by one mile was moving northwards, but parallel to the coastline, thanks to prevailing winds. A six metre (20ft) swell was also helping to break up the oil, which was lying in patches of between five and 15 metres in diameter (The Times, 2002).*

Both newspapers employed the financial frame more often than the progressive newspapers, especially in the case of Deepwater Horizon accident. Considering the previous research found that conservatives tend to emphasize money frame, this finding corresponds to that (Anderson, 2009). In addition to employing the financial frame more frequently, both conservative newspapers also relied on backing the environmental catastrophe frame by numerical evidence. This implies that for conservative newspapers to not consider environmental issues with skepticism, the numerical and economic evidence must be present (Jacques, Dunlap, & Freeman, 2008).

While the frames used by both newspapers seem relatively similar, but in some cases the differences were visible. While covering the Prestige accident, The Times used the



counterclaim to legislative action sub-frame, which was the sub-frame The Wall Street Journal did not use. On the other hand, The Wall Street Journal employed more legislative sub-frames in the covering of the Deepwater Horizon accident, namely the call to change legislation, counterclaim to the legislative action and other political action. Additionally, in the Montara oil spill, The Wall Street Journal also used more frames in the articles compared to The Times. Beside the environmental catastrophe, the American newspaper also used the legislative action and the attribution of blame frames. The attribution of blame frame in the Montara accident used by The Wall Street Journal is shown below:

*Mr. Ferguson sharply criticized the actions of Northern Territory regulators in relation to the spill at the Thai company's oil platform (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

The quote above illustrates the attribution of blame frame, because it pinpoints the blame for the oil spill to the actions of Northern Territory regulators (the territorial government and regulators have been previously shown to be lenient with pressing the oil companies to follow prescribed regulations). One pattern became distinguishable in the usage of attribution of blame frame, namely government of country where the oil spill happened attributed the blame for the spill to somebody else. Both newspapers employed the same frame in next examples: in the Prestige accident, the Spanish government attributed the blame to Gibraltar and British government by extension, while also blaming the company owning the oil tanker and the captain of the tanker; in the Deepwater Horizon accident, the US government blamed BP for the oil spill. In the example above, the Australian government attributed the blame to regional territorial government and regulations. The frame was employed only by The Wall Street Journal. Both newspapers incorporated counterclaim to blame sub-frame in the Prestige and Deepwater Horizon accidents, where the accused side rebutted the accusation and pointed to somebody else (in Prestige accident, the British government pointed to EU regulations, while in Deepwater Horizon accident, BP pointed to other companies operating the rig).

### **5.2.3. Framing in progressive newspapers**

As was the case with the conservative newspapers, both progressive newspapers used similar frames while reporting about the oil spill accidents. The main frame used in this case was also the one of the environmental catastrophe, supported by numerical evidence and visual consequences available at the time. This finding corresponds to previous research of framing of environmental issues (Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff, 2008). Action statement frame was used in

connection to environmental catastrophe frame and was employed equally by both newspapers. The popular sub-frames numerical evidence and consequences of environmental catastrophe frame are illustrated in the following quotes from The Guardian and The New York Times:

*Spain was bracing itself for an environmental disaster last night as a tanker carrying 77,000 tonnes of fuel began spilling oil while struggling to save itself from sinking off the north-west Atlantic coast (The Guardian, 2002).*

*Clean-up crews have begun to remove tons of thick black sludge from beaches in northwestern Spain scarred by an oil spill that threatens birds, marine life and the livelihood of thousands of fishermen (The New York Times, 2002).*

The differences in frames between the two newspapers were noticeable in specific accidents. The Guardian's coverage of Tasman Spirit and ExxonMobil's Nigeria oil spill was additionally framed by legislative action and attribution of blame frame. The New York Times, on the other hand, supported the other frames in the Montara spill articles with the attribution of blame frame. The examples below show the attribution of blame and legislation frames used by The Guardian in framing the Tasman Spirit accident:

*Pakistan's environmental protection agency has been criticised for failing to step in to help tackle the problem (The Guardian, 2003).*

*There was growing pressure on the oil industry to stop using old, cheaper tankers (the Guardian, 2003).*

In the first quote the Pakistani environmental agency is blamed for not helping with the oil spill. The quote also shows The Guardian's usage of attribution of blame frame, where who is attributing the blame is unclear; similar occurrences were noted also in Prestige and Deepwater Horizon accidents. The second quote is an illustration of the employment of legislation frame, where 'growing pressure' represents the use of the call to change the legislation sub-frame, as the oil industry is still allowed to use old, cheap tankers.

#### **5.2.4. Framing in newspapers in the UK**

Both The Times and The Guardian use similar frames in regards to the oil spill accidents. The most used frame is the one of environmental catastrophe for all the accidents. This finding is supported by previous research, which found the ecologic frame is the one most used (Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff, 2008). The Prestige sinking was framed similarly by both newspapers, with the use of action statement, legislative action and attribution of blame

frames in both newspapers. Tasman Spirit accident was additionally supported by those three frames, but only by The Guardian. The Guardian was also the only newspaper that covered ExxonMobil's Nigeria oil spill, again using the same three frames. The employment of environmental catastrophe and action statement frames is illustrated below:

*On 1 May this year a ruptured ExxonMobil pipeline in Ibeno in the state of Akwa Ibom spilled more than a million gallons into the delta over seven days before the leak was stopped. Local people demonstrated against the company but say they were attacked by security guards. Community leaders are now demanding \$1bn in compensation for the illness and loss of livelihood they suffered. Few expect they will succeed. In the meantime, thick balls of tar are being washed up along the coast (The Guardian, 2010).*

The quote above starts with employing numerical evidence sub-frame (spilled more than a million gallons), continues with action statement frame, in this case a proposed solution to the spill (demanding \$1bn in compensation for the illness and loss of livelihood), and finishes with the consequences sub-frame (thick balls of tar are being washed up along the coast).

While The Times primarily used the frame of environmental catastrophe in all the accidents, in the Deepwater Horizon accident the newspaper used the financial frame more frequently than The Guardian, which corresponds to previous research, where conservative newspapers rely on numerical evidence and financial standings more than progressive ones (Anderson, 2009). The usage of financial frame is shown here:

*An operation was under way last night to cap the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico, as BP faced the growing prospect of a \$10 billion (Pounds 6.7 billion) payout for the economic and environmental damage caused (The Times, 2010).*

*However, BP was a big drag on the index again. Shares in the oil group dropped 17 1/4p to 391 1/2p -- their lowest level since October 2008 -- amid worries that the group's dividend may be under threat because of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico (The Times, 2010).*

### **5.2.5. Framing in newspapers in the US**

The analysis of the American newspapers showed similar framing results to their British counterparts. In covering the oil spill accidents, both newspapers primarily used the environmental catastrophe frame, which corresponds with findings in previous research (Trumbo, 1996; Boykoff, 2008). The difference compared to the British newspapers is that

the American newspapers did not use counter claims to the legislative action in the Prestige accident. This is due to the fact that the proposed law in Europe was already accepted in the US after Exxon Valdez oil tanker accident under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990.

However, both newspapers used more frames in the Montara oil spill than the British ones. While both used the attribution of blame frame, the conservative The Wall Street Journal also used legislative action frame, as shown here:

*Canberra pledged to tighten processes for approving applications to explore for oil and gas offshore, review all wells drilled in the past five years, and hire more industry specialists to monitor well operations as part of its response to the Montara oil spill, which sent more than 20,000 barrels of crude spilling into the waters of the Timor Sea for two months last year (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

### **5.2.6. Accident of the oil tanker Prestige**

The sinking of the oil tanker Prestige was the first accident analyzed. The sinking of the tanker and the subsequent oil spill garnered much attention from UK and US news media. The frames used by the newspapers built on numbers to support the claim of firstly looming and later realized environmental disaster, with consequences described and different solution plans introduced. In this case two countries played the blaming game, with accusations thrown in both directions between the governments of Spain and the UK. The accident also captured the attention of the European Union, sparking a debate on whether changes in law were necessary or not.

The four newspapers used the concepts of the ecological disaster and changing political landscape to frame the ongoing accident. The overarching frame was the one of environmental catastrophe, supported by numbers of oil spilt and evident consequences, such as oil reaching land. Illustrating the environmental catastrophe frame are these quotations from The Guardian and The Wall Street Journal:

*The vessel was last night close to an especially rich part of the Atlantic seabed known as the Galician banks, which environmentalists warned would be devastated if the tanker was allowed to sink and spill its load there. The Prestige has already left a deadly trail of pollution behind it in north-west Spain, after thick black oil washed up on beaches along a 100-mile stretch of coast at the weekend (The Guardian, 2002).*

*During a violent storm last week, the 26-year-old, single-hulled tanker Prestige sprang a leak off the shores of Galicia, the largest fishing region in Spain. Tugboats towed the vessel farther out to sea, but failed to prevent almost 4,000 metric tons of its cargo from spilling into the sea and covering several of*

*Galicia's beaches in a coat of black slime. The disaster threatens the livelihood of tens of thousands of Spaniards involved in the fish and tourism industries (The Wall Street Journal, 2002).*

The accident has instigated a political debate about oil tankers and maritime safety, resulting in calls to change the existing legislation. The frames of legislative action were used by all four newspapers, while the frames of opposing views were used only by the British newspapers:

*France and Spain have agreed to ban tankers sailing within 200 miles of European coasts unless they could meet strict new safety standards, including reinforced hulls (The Guardian, 2002).*

*The European Commission urged member states yesterday to accelerate the introduction of new shipping safety rules that might have prevented the disaster involving the oil tanker Prestige (The Times, 2002).*

*The tanker industry claimed that the big shipyards of South Korea, Japan and China were already at full stretch and could not supply enough double-hulled replacements if their fleets were forced into early retirement (The Times, 2002).*

The first quote from The Guardian shows the already changed legislation sub-frame; due to the tanker accident the governments of Spain and France had banned tankers sailing near their coasts if the tankers were not following all new regulations. At the time, the new regulation was still in the process of being adapted to the existing legislation of all member states of the EU. The second quote, from The Times, builds up on the first quote, where the European Commission urged all the member states to integrate the new maritime regulations sooner than by 2015. However, the third quote is countering the proposed acceleration of legislation, as it would lead to serious problems for oil industry (e.g. could not supply enough double-hulled replacements). The reason the counter claim to legislative action was used only by the British newspapers is that in the US the law has already been accepted in 1990, as a consequence of the Exxon Valdez oil spill accident.

Lastly, the frames of the attribution of blame and the counterclaims to blame were featured prominently in the articles on this accident. These frames were used by all four newspapers as seen in these excerpts:

*The Prestige disaster has plunged the government of Spain, the Galician authorities, the British government, the EU and the ship's operators into a round of bitter accusations and counter-accusations over who precisely was to blame, not only for the sinking but also for the wider circumstances of the disaster (The Guardian, 2002).*

*Britain sought yesterday to rebut allegations that it should be held responsible for the environmental disaster off northwestern Spain caused by the sinking of the Prestige. In a toughly worded statement it accused the European Commission of failing to check its facts and demanded public confirmation that neither Britain nor Gibraltar was responsible for the incident (The Times, 2002).*

*The Spanish government said it had evidence showing the Prestige was headed towards Gibraltar, where the vessel had refueled in June without being inspected, in violation of European Union rules. Both the British government and its embassy in Madrid denied the Prestige was headed for Gibraltar or that the territory had violated EU law (The Wall Street Journal, 2002).*

The first quote uses attribution of blame frame to encompass all actors that can potentially be blamed for the unfolding disaster. The second quote employs counterclaim to blame sub-frame, where government of Great Britain clearly tries to distance itself from the accusations (e.g. rebut allegations, accused the European Commission for failing to check its facts). Lastly, the third quote employs attribution of blame and counterclaim to blame sub-frames. Firstly, Spanish government accuses Gibraltar of not following regulations, which is why the tanker was headed there again, while the British government is denying both accusations. The attribution of blame frame has shown emerging patterns of usage by all four newspapers. The employment of frame includes governments trying to attribute the blame to somebody else; in this case Spanish government blaming Gibraltar and Great Britain. Likewise, the generalization of 'row' and 'blaming game' between governments has been used by the four newspapers, as well as generalization of unidentified somebody 'criticizing' and 'blaming' governmental action in dealing with the spill.

### **5.2.7. Accident of the oil tanker Tasman Spirit**

In framing of the sinking of the Tasman Spirit oil tanker and subsequent oil spill, all four newspapers have mainly focused on framing the event as an environmental catastrophe. The frames used were numerical evidence of the spill, with inherent reasoning why this accident can be considered a disaster and clearly stated consequences of the spill. The frame was additionally supported by action statement frame, with proposed solution for the spill.

The Guardian used the most variety in their framing of the accident. In addition to the main environmental catastrophe frame, The Guardian also used the frames of attribution of blame and legislative action:

*A Greek-registered oil tanker that ran aground off Karachi's coast has developed cracks in its hull and is threatening to spill tonnes of oil in rich fishing waters (The Guardian, 2003).*

*Pakistani port officials warned yesterday that they faced a major oil spill along the southern coastline*

*after a tanker that ran aground in heavy storms began to crack open (The Guardian, 2003).*

*Pakistan's environmental protection agency has been criticised for failing to step in to help tackle the problem (The Guardian, 2003).*

*There was growing pressure on the oil industry to stop using old, cheaper tankers (The Guardian, 2003).*

The first and second examples illustrate the use of the numerical evidence sub-frame of the environmental catastrophe frame (threatening to spill tonnes of oil, major oil spill). The third quote attributes the blame to the Pakistani environmental agency for insufficient reaction to the spill with the use of attribution of blame sub-frame. The last quote illustrates the use of legislation frame, where the 'growing pressure' is used to call for change to legislation sub-frame, as the oil industry is still allowed to use old, cheap tankers.

The Times in their one article about the accident used the frame of environmental catastrophe, backed by the numerical evidence of the disaster. The same frame was used also by The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, the latter supporting the frame also with the evidence of the consequences of the spill. The quotes below illustrate the employed frames:

*An oil tanker broke up off Pakistan's Arabian Sea port of Karachi after spilling 7,000 tonnes of oil, sparking fears of damage to marine life (The Times, 2003).*

*An oil tanker off Karachi is threatening to break apart and spill thousands of tons of oil into rich fishing grounds (The Wall Street Journal, 2003).*

*A thick layer of oil covered the sea near the tanker, Tasman Spirit, and witnesses said they saw crude oil gushing out of a crack that had appeared in the middle of the ship (The New York Times, 2003).*

### **5.2.8. Montara oil rig blowout**

The Montara accident in Australia was framed by the four newspapers mainly through the use of the environmental catastrophe frame. To support the frame, the articles provided information about the quantity of spilled oil and the evident consequences the spill already had by that point. Proposed solution plan to stop the spill or to deal with the consequences was used in the action statement frame.

The British newspapers both framed an accident as the environmental catastrophe, using numbers and consequences evident to back the reasoning to perceive the accident as a disaster:

*Millions of litres of oil have leaked into the Timor Sea, famed for its coral reefs and home to dolphins, humpback whales and other marine life. The slick, which has already spread over an area 10 times the size of London, continues to expand at the rate of 2,000 barrels of oil a day (The Guardian, 2009). PTTEP estimates that between 300 and 400 barrels of oil a day is pouring into the ocean, but the Australian Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism said on Thursday that it could be as much as 2,000 barrels a day. Conservationists estimate that the oil is covering an area of at least 5,800 square miles (15,000sq km) (The Times, 2009). Gilly Llewellyn, who led a WWF team on a three-day survey of the slick, told The Times: "We were in an area that is teeming with marine life and we literally found ourselves in a sea of oil that reached as far as we could see. It was sickening, because we were seeing dolphins surfacing in the oil and birds feeding in it." (The Times, 2009).*

The American newspapers used additional frames to support the main environmental catastrophe one. Both newspapers used also the attribution of blame frame, with The Wall Street Journal using both attribution of blame and counter claim to blame from the accused side.

*An Australian government report on the incident made public last month criticized PTT for "widespread and systemic" shortcomings. The blowout, it said, was "an accident waiting to happen." Investigators said that local regulators were too cozy with PTT and didn't engage in rigorous oversight, a charge similar to one leveled at U.S. regulators in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon spill (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

The example illustrates the attribution of blame frame (regulators were too cozy, didn't engage in rigorous oversight). Both American newspapers followed the previously recognized pattern of the government attributing the blame to somebody else. In this case, the Australian government blamed the company operating the rig for the oil spill; in The New York Times the frame was employed to refute the generalized accusation that the law is lacking, therefore the blame lies with the government.

The conservative paper The Wall Street Journal also used a legislation frame, both the call to change current legislation and countering the proposed action by the opponents, as seen in the example:

*Australia committed Wednesday to shake up its regulatory regime for offshore oil and gas drilling after one of the biggest oil spills in the country's history, but stopped short of imposing onerous safety requirements on an industry that generates huge amounts of jobs and government revenue (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*



### 5.2.9. Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion

Deepwater Horizon rig blowout was the largest accident analyzed. This accident got the most attention from all four newspapers (presented in detail under point 5.1.4.). For this accident the four newspapers used the most varied frames; beside the frame of environmental catastrophe, which was used most frequently, the frames of action statement, legislative action and attribution of blame were used; likewise, the importance was on the financial consequences of the spill, which is the frame that was used frequently in this case.

The overarching frame was of the environmental catastrophe, supported by numerical evidence of the oil spilt and by the consequences and description of the consequences. The action statement frame was used to cover the proposed solution action to stop the spill. The frame was additionally supported by general contextual information. The following examples illustrate the use of the environmental catastrophe frame:

*Britain's biggest oil company was last night facing an environmental disaster expected to cost more than the Exxon Valdez tanker spill as thousands of tonnes of floating oil began to reach the US Gulf coast (The Guardian, 2010).*

*According to the latest estimates, 39 million gallons have vented from the well -- nearly four times the volume spilt by the Exxon Valdez in 1989 (The Times, 2010).*

*In Alabama, frustration about cleanup and containment efforts mounted Sunday as oil washed up on stretches of white beaches for a second straight day and threatened inlets. Authorities ramped up efforts to limit the damage but struggled in big tourist towns such as Orange Beach and Gulf Shores, where oil that was alternately thick and gooey or fine like ground-up coffee gathered in the surf and spread across the sand (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

*Officials had hoped that a four-story, 98-ton containment dome deployed over the weekend would funnel 85 percent of the leak from the riser pipe to a pipeline connected to a containment ship. But it became clogged by an unexpectedly high buildup of gas hydrates, crystal structures that form when gas and water mix in the low temperatures and high pressures of deep ocean waters (The New York Times, 2010).*

The frames of legislative action and attribution of blame were used by all four newspapers, but less frequently. With the attribution of blame frame the focus was primarily on US government, which blamed the spill on BP, the corporation that owned the drilling rig (in 58% of articles that employed attribution of blame frame). Other blame claims included general non-sourced accusations of BP and other companies involved. The usage of blame frame is shown in the following examples:

*At a White House press conference, Mrs Napolitano and Robert Gibbs, Mr Obama's spokesman, made clear that, under US law, BP was responsible for the spill and the cost of the clean-up, on a day in which the British company's shares tumbled (The Times, 2010).*

*While BP continues to acknowledge its responsibility to shut off and clean up the oil, it is being barraged by government officials and civil lawyers who are redoubling efforts to ensure that the company's legal obligations are clearly defined and strictly enforced (The New York Times, 2010).*

Counterclaim to blame presented BP attributing the blame to companies that operated the rig, or involved companies pointing at each other (in 60% of the articles), as shown in the examples below:

*He [BP spokesperson] pointedly referred to Transocean, the owner of the stricken rig, as having responsibility for many aspects of the drilling and declined to comment on any criminal or other legal claim (The Guardian, 2010).*

*BP and its many partners and suppliers in the Deepwater Horizon project are beginning to jockey over where to assign blame for the April 20 blowout, which killed 11 workers, sank a huge floating oil platform, and left a damaged well leaking an estimated 5,000 or more barrels a day into the Gulf (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

The frame of legislative action was used exclusively to describe the call to change the legislation, as seen here:

*As the government wrestled with the many safety issues raised by the disaster, it imposed a drilling freeze late last month that halted virtually all new oil exploration in the gulf. On Tuesday, the Obama administration announced new standards that will allow resumption of drilling in water less than 500 feet deep (The New York Times, 2010).*

Relatively popular by all four newspapers was also the frame of financial consequences, dealing with the monetary loss the responsible actors for the accident suffered. The financial frame was employed more frequently by conservative newspapers than progressive newspapers, in 33 articles as opposed to 18 articles. This fact corroborates previous research, which states that the conservatives rely more on numerical evidence and economic consequences (Anderson, 2009). The usage of frame is shown in the following examples:

*The firm's shares plummeted by 13% yesterday, wiping pounds 12bn off the company's value, as*

*financial markets reacted to the news that oil is likely to continue spewing into the Gulf of Mexico for at least two more months. It was the worst one-day fall for 18 years for what was once Britain's most valuable company (The Guardian, 2010).*

*BP PLC said Friday it would honor all "legitimate claims" for damages stemming from the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, as the company's stock continued to fall amid investors' concerns about potential litigation and a total cleanup bill that could run well into the billions of dollars. BP's share price has fallen about 12% on the London Stock Exchange since the crisis began, to 575.50 pence on Friday, wiping some \$23 billion off its market value (The Wall Street Journal, 2010).*

### **5.2.10. ExxonMobil Nigeria oil spill**

ExxonMobil's oil spill in Nigeria in May 2010 was covered only by the two progressive newspapers; meaning The Guardian and The New York Times. In framing the accident, both newspapers used the environmental catastrophe frame, supported by numerical evidence of the spill and evident consequences, as well as action statement frame. The usage of the popular frames is illustrated below:

*On 1 May this year a ruptured ExxonMobil pipeline in Ibeno in the state of Akwa Ibom spilled more than a million gallons into the delta over seven days before the leak was stopped (The Guardian, 2010). Community leaders are now demanding \$1bn in compensation for the illness and loss of livelihood they suffered. Few expect they will succeed. In the meantime, thick balls of tar are being washed up along the coast (The Guardian, 2010).*

*Not far away, there is still black crude on Gio Creek from an April spill, and just across the state line in Akwa Ibom the fishermen curse their oil-blackened nets, doubly useless in a barren sea buffeted by a spill from an offshore Exxon Mobil pipe in May that lasted for weeks (The New York Times, 2010).*

*On the beach at Ibeno, the few fishermen were glum. Far out to sea oil had spilled for weeks from the Exxon Mobil pipe (The New York Times, 2010).*

The three examples show the use of environmental catastrophe frame; the numerical evidence sub-frame (spilled more than a million gallons; oil had spilled for weeks from ExxonMobil pipe) and evident consequences sub-frame (thick balls of tar are being washed up along the coast; oil-blackened nets). The action statement frame describes a solution action for dealing with the consequences of the spill (demanding \$1bn for the illness and loss of livelihood).

The attribution of blame frame was used only by The Guardian, where local residents blame oil corporations for the spill. The usage of frame is shown in the following example:

*They mostly blame the companies' vast network of rusting pipes and storage tanks, corroding pipelines, semi-derelict pumping stations and old wellheads, as well as tankers and vessels cleaning out tanks* (The Guardian, 2010).

Both newspapers employed legislation frame calling for changes. The illustration of the frame is present in the following example:

*President Goodluck Jonathan must lead this process and toughen Nigeria's regulatory framework to protect the people of the Niger Delta* (The Guardian, 2010).

## **6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

The results from the content analysis of the frames employed by the two progressive and the two conservative newspapers from the UK and the US show that four frames emerge from the data about oil spills. They are the environmental catastrophe, action statement, legislation, and financial frame. Additionally, one frame that is issue specific emerged during the analysis, namely the attribution of blame frame. These five emerging frames present the answer to the first research question of this thesis, namely “How do progressive newspapers in the United Kingdom and the United States of America frame oil spill accidents compared to the conservative newspapers from these countries?” Results of agenda setting on the other hand reveal some differences in attributing the importance of the specific accident for each of the newspapers. These differences are the answer to the second research question of this thesis, which was “How much agenda access do progressive newspapers in the United Kingdom and the United States of America give to oil spill accidents compared to the conservative newspapers from these countries?” The differences in the setting of the agenda for the newspaper media of different political orientation are commented on in detail in the following section.

### **6.1. Emerging pre-existing frames**

Through the usage of the four frames, newspaper media in the UK and the US presents the unfolding oil spill accidents to their audiences. All four newspapers emphasize the environmental catastrophe of the oil spill accident, which is likely how their audiences will perceive them; that is, primarily focusing on the evident consequences and the proposed solutions for dealing with the spill and the short term consequences. The action statement frame is closely linked with the environmental catastrophe frame; similarly to the numerical evidence and the consequences sub-frame, the action statement of solution frame is employed to primarily support the environmental catastrophe frame. The secondary importance of the legislative action and financial frame is shown by the lower percentages of articles, in which they were employed. This means that the focus of the framing through pre-existing frames is on the environmental catastrophe information.

#### **6.1.1. Environmental catastrophe and action statement**

The environmental catastrophe frame is the prevailing one in the coverage of oil spill accidents by the newspaper media in the UK and the US. This frame was used in almost all of the sampled articles (98%). The prominence of this frame shows that it is important for newspaper media to present to the public as detailed information as possible in order to

showcase the gravity of the situation, focusing on numerical evidence and consequences. The usage of action statement frame to additionally support the environmental catastrophe frame also highlights the need to show the action of working on the potential solution for the accident (24%). The environmental catastrophe frame was equally employed by progressive and conservative newspapers, and also the newspapers from the UK and the US. The differences occur in the coverage of specific accidents, namely in the usage of the number of sub-frames employed.

The environmental catastrophe frame is an obvious match between research on oil spill accidents and existing research on other environmental issues, like the ones by Trumbo (1996) and Boykoff (2008). Likewise, the action statement frame matches previous research of environmental issues with a category that dealt with covering proposed solutions to the issue (Trumbo, 1996). The ecological frame, which deals with evident consequences of the chosen environmental issue on the environment itself, can be perceived to be a generic frame, which means it is applicable to a variety of environmental issues. Since the ecological frame has already been shown to be the frame most frequently used by the news media in the coverage of other environmental issues, the presence of this frame here confirms those findings. The obvious reusability of environmental catastrophe frame by newspaper media suggests that it is a frame the public is used to. As such the environmental catastrophe frame has become a normative frame, when reporting about oil spill accidents. With constant reuse of the frame, the journalists and the society at large have become accustomed to structure the thoughts around oil spill accidents in this way. This is in line with D'Angelo's (2002) understanding of how frames achieve the normative status through reuse.

As the previous literature discusses, the ecological frame presents the evidentiary consequences of the issue or its impact on the environment. In the present case with oil spill accidents, this effect is usually on the clearly evident short term consequences of the spill, such as oil reaching the beaches or polluting other living areas for humans and animals. All four newspapers, regardless of their political orientation or country of origin, employ the environmental catastrophe frame in the coverage of oil spill accidents, which confirms its status as a generic frame.

### **6.1.2. Legislation**

Another pre-existing frame, which has emerged from the sample, is the legislative action frame, which is present in 39% of the articles. The presence of the legislative frame is in accordance with theoretical framework, as the previous research also found this specific frame

to be employed by the media while covering other environmental issues (Goodman & Goodman, 2006). The usage of legislative frame in news coverage of oil spill accidents and other environmental issues show that these types of issues are sensitive topics that are tightly linked to existing law and other regulations. In times of crisis, such as oil spills, these regulations come under revision because they are judged to be lacking since they did not prevent the spills from occurring. The call to change legislation frame highlights this process. This is important, because the way the media reports about an issue affects how that industry is regulated (Goodman & Goodman, 2006). With a divisive topic such as the environment, this becomes of central importance. In this regard, news framing of environmental issues influences legislation surrounding them; however, the impact of those calls once the issue has been resolved is unknown. With oil spill accidents this question is aimed at how many of those framed legislation calls actually get implemented into the existing law, to try and prevent similar accidents from occurring.

### **6.1.3. Financial**

The last pre-existent frame that emerged from the data analysis is the financial frame. This frame was used in 20% of the articles. On the basis of the sampled articles, it can be concluded that presenting the financial consequences for the main actors involved in the oil spill is not in the focus for the newspaper media in the UK and the US. The frame is not a dominant one in the portrayal of oil spill accidents, even though it is generally used in framing of other environmental issues. However, the frame was more often employed by conservative newspapers in the Deepwater Horizon accident than by progressive newspapers. In previous research political and economic factors sometime fall in the same category, since economic factors are less present and usually linked to political actions (Goodman & Goodman, 2006; Boykoff, 2008). In this research, the categories were split for better overview, since the financial frame has been associated with a conservative political orientation (Anderson, 2009). In contrast to the previous research, the financial frame is more present in framing of oil spill accidents than other environmental issues. However, the employment of the frame is subjected to clear knowledge of who the responsible actor is, as is in the case of the Deepwater Horizon accident.

### **6.2. Emerging issue-specific frames**

In addition to the three pre-existent media frames, one issue-specific frame emerged after the inductive category development content analysis of the gathered data from the four newspapers about the selected oil spill accidents. Its existence suggests that broadening of the

issue specific research of environmental issues is useful, as it shows the particulars of the media portrayal of oil spill accidents. As the theoretical framework pointed out, there exists a lack of research into framing of oil spill accidents compared to the research of other environmental issues, so it is important to pay attention to this issue-specific frame.

### **6.2.1. Attribution of blame**

The attribution of blame frame is specific for this type of environmental issues because in oil spill accidents the media try to clearly identify and label the responsible actor. Previous research showed that past oil spill accidents, with a clearly identifiable responsible actor, were covered employing this frame (Anderson, 2002). However, the employment of the frame cannot be linked to the previous research of other environmental issues. In framing of other environmental issues, the responsibility frame was used to affect the political action regarding the issue (Boykoff, 2007), or to renounce any responsibility of particular government towards the issue (Antilla, 2005; Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Boykoff, 2007).

The attribution of blame frame is specific for the oil spill accidents, because these accidents require a long term management of the environment to achieve a complete restoration of the affected area. This procedure requires both sufficient time and sufficient funds for the environmental and economic restoration of the area. The attribution of responsibility frame is described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as a blaming process, during which the responsibility for a specific event is attributed to a certain actor. This results in the actor receiving less than favorable media coverage. The responsibility frame was also featured in Hallahan's (1999) seven models of framing, where it is described as a frame that deals with attributing causes of events to different actors.

During the analysis three general patterns of employment of the attribution of blame frame were recognized. Firstly, governments of the countries where the spill accident took place try to attribute the blame to somebody else, be it other governments or oil corporations. Secondly, the governments of the countries where the spill accident happened face criticism because of their dealing with the spill and consequences. Lastly, the accused side either accepts the blame or tries to shift the accusation to somebody else.

### **6.3. Agenda setting**

The setting of the agenda for the newspaper media regarding oil spill accidents presents key findings about the political orientation division on the progressive and the conservative newspapers. As Althaus and Tewksbury (2002) have written, the prominence of events shows what is important, or what should be perceived as such. Of five selected accidents, the most



attention was dedicated to the Prestige tanker sinking and the Deepwater Horizon rig blowout accidents by all four newspapers (91.6%), while the others received relatively little attention compared to these two accidents. In the case of ExxonMobil's Nigeria accident, only the two progressive newspapers covered the event.

Different factors influence the development of the agenda, such as closeness of the event, the consequences of the event, and the perceived influence the event will have on the society (Anderson, 2002; Cox, 2013). While it goes beyond the scope of this paper to examine the reasons for greater agenda attention, we could speculate that with the Deepwater Horizon accident, the consequences and the influence of the event on the society are more significant than in the case of the Tasman Spirit. That is primarily due to the location of the accident (United States), and the origin of the responsible actors (a British company); closer ties to the society the newspapers operate in results in more attention given to this accident. Further research should test if these are in fact the reasons.

The low amount of articles available on the Tasman Spirit, Montara and ExxonMobil's Nigeria accident suggest that the closeness and impact of the accident on the society which the newspapers belong to influence the amount of attention the event receives. Those accidents, even if they were big oil spill accidents, can be classified as unobtrusive, small news articles (Djerf-Pierre, 2012). Whereas Djerf-Pierre perceives all oil spill accidents as obtrusive issues, this research shows that oil spill accidents only receive large amounts of attention if they impact the society in which the newspapers operate, which is consistent with Brown and Deegan's (1998) placement of environmental issues into unobtrusive category.

Beside the number of articles available for specific accident and the length of those articles, the analysis of agenda setting for the oil spill accidents looked also into the amount of articles that were published with photographs. As Jenner (2012, p.275) wrote, "photographs are believed to influence public and policymaker attention to issues (and issue attributes) because they convey a truth or evidentiary proof that cannot be expressed as powerfully in words". Environmental news photographs have been proven to increase attention and concern towards the unfolding accident (Jenner, 2012). The findings of the agenda setting analysis support this theory, as more than half of the time, the articles had a photograph published with them. The number of those articles, however, was larger with the progressive newspapers compared to the conservative ones.

#### **6.4. The country-specific influence on framing**

The current British culture towards the environment is characterized by its focus on

environmental protection (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007). This is in line with the more frequent use of solution action sub-frame of the British newspapers (in total, in 40 articles opposed to 27 articles). The American culture on the other hand, even though it is focused on protecting the environment, is more skeptical towards changing and the influence the environmental issues have on the environment itself (Kline, 2011; Nerlich et al., 2012). This could explain why the American newspapers more frequently employ the consequences sub-frame, combined with the numerical evidence sub-frame of the environmental catastrophe frame (combined 53% against 46%). As framing is culturally embedded, the alternative views exist for both the journalists and their audience (Van Gorp, 2007). Additionally, frames are independent of media content, and by their inherent suggestions the audience determines the meaning of the issue (Van Gorp, 2007). Perceived differences of British and American newspapers framing can therefore be connected to their cultural differences.

The geographical location of the accident in connection with the extent of the consequences that reach the society in which the newspapers operate seem to influence the amount of attention the oil spills receive. However, no matter the prevailing cultural outlook towards the environment, both countries consider the oil spill accidents important, judging by their appearance on the newspaper media agenda (Fung et al., 2011).

## **6.5. Discussion**

Some general conclusions can be drawn from the content analysis of newspaper articles about framing and agenda setting of oil spill accidents. The first one is that even though oil spill accidents are perceived as environmental issues that always receive media attention, this does not hold true in all examples. The findings of this research confirmed the view of Monika Djerf-Pierre (2012) that only the cases with direct consequences to the public receive extensive media attention and with it coverage. In those cases the spills are perceived as an obtrusive issue, while otherwise the spills are seen as unobtrusive. In addition, this confirms the view of Alison Anderson (2002) that the news coverage of oil spills is socially constructed and influenced by cultural values. The public relies on the information provided by the media to understand the events happening, especially with unobtrusive issues (Brown & Deegan, 1998). However, the findings show that the media in those cases dedicate decidedly less attention to the oil spill accidents. This finding counteracts the perceived role of media in setting of unobtrusive environmental issues on the agenda.

From a broader outlook the results show that only issues that directly influence society will receive extensive media coverage. This also implies that the socially unobtrusive issues

do not get the media attention they might deserve. This, however, is important, because in the cases like that the public relies even more on the media to present and portray the issue to them. With problematic and dividing topics, such as environmental issues, the lack of news about the topic might suggest to the public that the issue has been solved or should not be perceived as a problem anymore, while in reality the issue is not covered simply because it does not impact a certain society for a time.

The second general conclusion points to the overall framing of oil spill accidents as environmental catastrophes. This frame is built on the deeply integrated cultural value of environmental protection that both the UK and the US share (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007; Buckingham, 2008, Nerlich et al., 2012). However, the differences in the employment of the consequences sub-frame and action statement frame point to the conflicting cultural values between the two countries (Price et al., 2014). This is also transferable to the progressive and conservative prism; the values in question here are related to altruism and environmentalism (Slimak & Dietz, 2006). The portrayal of environmental issues presents a conflict between values of environmental protection and economic gain, which highlight the deeper ideological rift of understanding the environmental debate (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978; Anderson, 2002). In the society, which on one side recognizes the exceptionality of humanity and on the other side equalizes the humans with the environment, the existence of conflicting cultural values is to be expected (Catton Jr. & Dunlap, 1978). However, due to this, the frames used by the media are perceived to be lacking and fragmented by some researchers (Lakoff, 2010). The results of the framing analysis nevertheless cannot confirm this view. Even though the analysis defined five main frames in newspaper coverage of oil spill accidents, the four frames of the action statement, the legislation, the attribution of blame and the finance are in subordinate position to the environmental catastrophe frame, or are intertwined with it and used to support the frame. Therefore it can be concluded that in the framing of oil spill accidents the hypocognition or lack of single comprehensible frame is not as pronounced as in framing of other environmental issues (Lakoff, 2010; Cox, 2013; De Blasio & Sorice, 2013).

Nevertheless, the overarching employment of one frame cannot completely eliminate the thought of a lacking single comprehensible frame. Since other frames are used to support the portrayal as an environmental catastrophe, it shows the frame is not complete on its own. For media portrayal of environmental issues the lacking frames point to the cultural rift in how to approach and perceive the environmental protection movement. However, as Boykoff (2007) pointed out, the media representation of climate change is slowly converging. To evaluate this trend further research is needed, but it might show a step towards the bridging of

divergent cultural values, at least in the UK and the US.

The present research tries to clarify the ways in which British and American progressive and conservative media frame oil spill accidents. Additionally, this research looked into how those media set the oil spill accidents on their agenda. While the results of this research confirm and are in line with previous findings, it is important to note that methodology of this research was slightly different from previous studies. While this thesis used inductive category development through open coding, the previous research, especially on framing, was much more quantitative in nature (Goodman & Goodman, 2006; Boykoff, 2007). The aim of this research has been to broaden the understanding on how media are framing environmental issues. The focus of previous research has been on other issues, such as global warming or nuclear energy (Antilla, 2005; Goodman & Goodman, 2006; Anderson, 2009; Bowe et al., 2014). In shifting the focus to oil spill accidents, this research was trying to provide insights into how differently oriented media shape the understanding and social context for these issues. The research has shown that oil spill accidents gain in prominence, if they have direct influence on the society (Djerf-Pierre, 2012). Additionally, media frames employed by the newspapers exhibit issue-specific characteristics (Anderson, 2002). The existence of both frames, ones previously known and new issue-specific one, can be relevant for similar future research. With this, the current research contributes to the academic knowledge on framing of environmental issues. The existence of specific employed frames is also relevant for the society, as it highlights how the media perceive oil spill accidents. This is important because it incorporates inherent cultural and social predispositions about those issues, as was shown in comparison between two political orientations and two countries.

However, this research shows some limitations and opens up several prospects for future research. Firstly, only two newspapers were chosen to represent a country and provide basis for cultural insights. This was done due to time constraints and feasibility of the research, but future research should expand the focus to more newspapers and also to other media fields. Similarly, only two newspapers were chosen to represent a political orientation of the media. To show that the findings of this research do not apply only to these specific newspapers, future research should include a wider variety of the media with same political orientation and country of origin. This might additionally contribute to make generalizations about the media frames employed in covering of oil spill accidents. The focus of this research was on five oil spill accidents that happened in the last 15 years. To expand the academic knowledge on framing and agenda setting the future research could also look at older oil spill or focus on specific type of oil spills, such as tanker sinking oil spills, to study whether

framing of those accidents differs from frames recognized by this research. Therefore, future research should focus on including more media outlets of different political orientation or origin to establish the patterns of framing and agenda setting of oil spills. Additionally, further comparison should be done researching framing and agenda setting of other environmental issues, which would strengthen the impact of recognized frames, if they are indeed repeating frames used by the media to frame environmental issues. Alternatively, one of research possibilities is in studying how media audiences are affected by the frames employed in covering oil spills and/or other environmental issues and the impact these frames actually have on the public. Lastly, in regards to the methodology used by this research, the content analysis included inductive category development. This means that it was done according to my own perceptions of the newspaper articles and is therefore subjective, even though I have tried to remain as objective as possible. However, the inductive category development showed the emergence of issue-specific frames. Future research should take this method in consideration to other quantitative approaches to frame analysis.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1: Cross tabulation of newspaper and oil spill variables

Newspaper * Oilspill Crosstabulation								
			Oilspill					Total
			Prestige	Tasman	Montara	Deep	Nigeria	
Newspaper	Times	Count	33	1	2	38	0	74
		% within Newspaper	44.6%	1.4%	2.7%	51.4%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Oilspill	26.2%	12.5%	20.0%	30.6%	0.0%	27.1%
		% of Total	12.1%	0.4%	0.7%	13.9%	0.0%	27.1%
	Wall Street Journal	Count	34	2	5	27	0	68
		% within Newspaper	50.0%	2.9%	7.4%	39.7%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Oilspill	27.0%	25.0%	50.0%	21.8%	0.0%	24.9%
		% of Total	12.5%	0.7%	1.8%	9.9%	0.0%	24.9%
	Guardian	Count	36	3	1	18	3	61
		% within Newspaper	59.0%	4.9%	1.6%	29.5%	4.9%	100.0%
		% within Oilspill	28.6%	37.5%	10.0%	14.5%	60.0%	22.3%
		% of Total	13.2%	1.1%	0.4%	6.6%	1.1%	22.3%
	New York Times	Count	23	2	2	41	2	70
		% within Newspaper	32.9%	2.9%	2.9%	58.6%	2.9%	100.0%
		% within Oilspill	18.3%	25.0%	20.0%	33.1%	40.0%	25.6%
		% of Total	8.4%	0.7%	0.7%	15.0%	0.7%	25.6%
Total	Count	126	8	10	124	5	273	
	% within Newspaper	46.2%	2.9%	3.7%	45.4%	1.8%	100.0%	
	% within Oilspill	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	46.2%	2.9%	3.7%	45.4%	1.8%	100.0%	