

Framing and biases in the press coverage of the crash of MH17 in Dutch and Russian state-owned news outlets.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the framing practices used in state-owned media outlets during an international crisis. This was done by studying the crash of MH17 and the manner in which the Russian state-owned media outlet *RT* and the Dutch state-owned media outlet *NOS* framed the crash. In order to do this, a qualitative content analysis was chosen as method where 20 news articles from *RT* and 21 news articles from *NOS* were analyzed from the direct aftermath of the crash, which happened on July 17, 2014. A deductive approach was further taken to the coding of the articles, where the existing news frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) were used: *attribution of responsibility*, *human interest*, *conflict*, and *morality*. From this analysis a clear overview of what framing practices were dominant in both *RT* and *NOS* was presented and what biases were present in the news coverage. The results revealed both similarities and differences in the way that *RT* and *NOS* framed the crash of MH17 that turned into an international crisis. Within the frame of *attribution of responsibility* there was a difference in the manner of the way that a certain blame was given to someone or not. For *NOS* there was a general narrative where no blame was assigned to anyone specific, as it was not clear who was responsible. For *RT*, however, blame was mostly put on the Ukrainian government. As for the *human interest* frame, there were similarities in the way that victims and relatives were mentioned for both the outlets, however this was not included too frequently. The frame *conflict* was quite present in the articles analyzed from *RT*, where anger and reproach were used often to signify that the fighting needed to be stopped or to criticize the mistreatment of the victim's bodies. *NOS* also framed a few of the articles analyzed in a similar way, however the frame was less often present. Finally, the frame *morality* was not quite often used in the articles across both outlets, however there were a few instances where this frame was used to display a preferred behavior with regard to how to respond as a country after such a disaster. This was the case for both *RT* and *NOS*. From these results, biases were

quite present in the case of *RT*, where *RT* actively put Russia's actions in a positive light. As for *NOS*, biases were present to a lesser extent, with *NOS* trying to establish a balanced coverage of the crisis. However, there were still some occasions where *NOS* was biased towards the national interests of The Netherlands.

KEYWORDS: *MH17, state-owned media, framing, media coverage, bias*

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1. Introduction

The crash of the flight MH17 on July 17, 2014 was a disaster where much media attention was given to its cause. The airplane crashed in the east of Ukraine with 298 passengers and crew on board (Openbaar Ministerie, n.d.). This disaster gained much media attention, especially from the Dutch and Russian media. These countries and its media were involved extensively in this coverage, with both of these countries having their own reasons for the coverage. As for The Netherlands, the airplane left from Amsterdam to go to Kuala Lumpur, and had 196 Dutch passengers on board (Openbaar Ministerie, n.d.). Therefore, the Dutch media was directly involved and active with providing information about what happened as this was a disaster with many consequences for the Dutch society. In addition, Russian media was also quite involved in covering the disaster of MH17. The flight crashed in an area, eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatist forces were fighting against the Ukrainian army, with much violence happening in this specific region. Due to the crash happening in this region, the situation turned into an international conflict and also further put pressure on the questionable circumstances of the crash and raised many questions about what exactly happened to the plane and who or what was responsible (Conflict in Ukraine, n.d.). The Russian media, especially in the immediate aftermath, was therefore concerned with expressing sympathy towards what had happened, while also balancing a story and explanation that they were not responsible for this.

Due to the crash of MH17 being in such close proximity to the fighting area between the Ukrainian army and the pro-Russian separatists, the conflict became more urgent and national and international media became involved. Questions like what had happened and who was responsible and how this could have happened was a much-discussed topic in this period.

1.1. Academic and societal relevance

While the crash of MH17 happened a while ago, it is still an ongoing investigation which increases its societal relevance significantly. This analysis into disaster coverage (that turned into an international conflict) of state-owned news media outlets will further provide insights into the way that these kinds of news media outlets frame certain events and

tragedies and the way that biases might be present in the coverage of news in state-owned news outlets. Especially in relation to such a tragedy and how news outlets react and cover an event that is of high interest to them to report on. In addition, after a year of preparing everything, the criminal process was started in the Netherlands in the week of June 7, 2021, and the judgment will be made somewhere next year after every piece of evidence is analyzed and brought forward to the court (Telegraaf, 2021). The societal relevance is therefore still quite high, with much attention still being given to this disaster.

Besides the societal relevance, the academic relevance is quite essential as well. Framing practices in news media remains a topic that is discussed often in scholarly works. Framing can have a significant influence on public opinion and the different frames used in a story can incur different feelings and emotions from people about a specific issue (Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). Previous research performed on international disaster news coverage focused primarily on news media in the context of natural disasters (Miles & Morse, 2007; Houston et al., 2012; Cox et al., 2008). Within this scholarly research, many are focused on the framing practices that arise from these news articles and the way that these can have an impact on public perceptions of the disaster (Cox et al., 2008; Houston et al., 2012; Miles & Morse, 2007). Bias is also referred to in a few scholarly works in relation to how these frames are constructed (Berlemann & Thomas, 2019; Miles & Morse, 2007; Jeong & Lee, 2019; Yan & Kim, 2015). For instance, Berlemann and Thomas (2019) investigated the distance bias that can exist in the reporting of certain natural disasters. Similarly, Jeong and Lee (2019) also found a specific bias in the way that disasters are reported on, and discovered that there was more attention given to certain disasters that had a higher death rate or that happened in countries of more importance to the nation an outlet was from. A patriotic bias is a bias that can arise from specific framing as well, where the coverage of the crisis or disaster is then catered towards one's nation or country (Ginosar, 2015). Ginosar and Cohen (2019) identify two different types within this type of bias, one focusing on public emotions and ensuring a type of empathy from the audience towards the actions a nation is performing and another one focused on the creation of an understanding for these actions by also pointing out why such actions are necessary.

In addition to the coverage and framing of natural disasters, man-made disasters are also a topic that is explored by scholars and shows the way that emotion is used in the

reporting of such disasters (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011; Pantti, 2010; Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007). Here, Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2011) discover the way that emotion used in journalistic reports leads people to change their behavior towards specific disasters, as emotion is found to be a motivator for people to become more involved in specific instances. Similarly, Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) found four different discourses related to emotion reporting and that there are differences in the manner that emotion can be presented. While research has been performed on disaster and crisis news coverage, the way that state-owned media cover these types of events is lacking. Combining and analyzing the frames that arise from the coverage, in addition to the biases, can help fill the gap that exists in the scholarly works on disaster news coverage and framing practices by state-owned media.

1.2. Research Question

This thesis will help fill the gap that was outlined in the previous section by addressing and researching state-owned media with regards to disaster news coverage and the type of framing that is present in such outlets. The research question that this thesis will answer is therefore:

“How have *NOS* and *RT* framed the crash of MH17 in the direct aftermath?”

Two sub questions are further also answered, which gives more insight into the biases that might be present for state-owned news outlets and, if it is present, in what way this manifests itself. The sub questions are:

1. “What types of biases are present in the press coverage of the crash of MH17 by *RT* and *NOS*?”

2. “What role does patriotic journalism play in the press coverage of the crash by *RT* and *NOS*?”

The news media is quite known for framing issues and conflicts in specific ways as to incur differing responses from the audience. Due to the crash of the MH17 in an area with much fighting happening, an international conflict erupted, which presents different ways in which the Dutch and Russian news media could frame the crash. This thesis will focus on the topic of the coverage of the MH17 crash and the framing that was involved with regards to presenting the issue or conflict at hand. Furthermore, only state-owned or -funded news media outlets will be analyzed to observe the way that these types of news media frame

certain issues and events. Here, the concept of bias is also considered, which could arise during the framing of events by these news outlets.

Two different state-owned news media outlets will thus be analyzed, one from the Netherlands and one from Russia. The aim is to research how one of the main news providers in each of these countries have covered the crash, which turned into a conflict, of MH17. For the Netherlands, the *NOS* will be analyzed and for Russia, *RT* will be analyzed. While there are some differences in the *NOS* and *RT* as media outlets, such as their respective audiences, there are several similarities that are important to the nature of this research. Both are state-owned and were involved in producing news articles on the downing of MH17, which is relevant to study the framing and biases that arise from both these news outlets.

The research question and the sub-question encompass both the framing practices of the state-owned outlets and further provides insights into the biases that might arise, in addition to patriotic journalism that might play a role in the coverage of the crash of MH17.

1.3. Outline thesis

After the short introduction, chapter two provides an overview of the previous scholarly works with special attention to the framing practices that can have a significant influence on the audience and biases that are an important factor within news media as well. In addition, the differences in notions of objectivity within news media is also shown, where there are many journalists that strive for this ideal, which in turn might still lead to a bias. After the structured and concrete portrayal of previous research into disaster coverage, framing, news media independence, bias and objectivity, chapter 3 outlines an extensive overview of the methodology. Here, further details are given as to the justification for the choice of a qualitative content analysis as well as a further frame analysis of the articles. This includes how the sample came about and an explanation for each category in the coding frame, which were the frames that were identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). After the methodology chapter, chapter four is presented, which gives a structured overview of the results of the analysis into the ways of framing the articles with regards to *attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, and morality*. Finally, chapter five summarizes the results, provides an answer to the research question and links these results back to the existing literature, specifically referring also to the biases and patriotic

journalism that comes forward from the analysis. This chapter also reflects on the implications for society and further adds what future research could be focused on.

2. Theoretical Framework

This thesis focused on news frames in state-owned news outlets and includes a further analysis into the way that biases are present within these news reports. In order to gain an understanding of framing practices, bias in news media, and news coverage by state-owned media, previous literature was drawn upon. This existing literature helped in constructing an overview of what previously had been written about the topic of news coverage of disasters, and further was used to create a theoretical framework that guided the data analysis of news frames in this research. In order to create this overview, this chapter first places previous literature on international news coverage of disasters and further state-owned media, especially with regards to media freedom. Further, bias and objectivity in news media is discussed, also in relation to state-owned media. Last, an overview is given of frame analysis and an explanation of its use in this thesis.

2.1. International news coverage of disasters

News media has, as one of its primary purposes, the ability to convey information about certain events happening in the world to the wider public (Houston et al., 2012). This “public” can differ depending on the news outlet, whether there is a focus on national or international audiences; large or small audiences etc. In addition, the content that is covered by news outlets can vary as well. With the focus of this research being on the news coverage of disasters, what can be observed is the way that existing scholarly works vary in what is being covered. Here, scholars have provided research into public perceptions (Cox et al., 2008; Houston et al., 2012; Yell, 2012); framing practices (Miles and Morse, 2007; An and Gower, 2009; Yan and Kim, 2015); and also bias (Berlemann and Thomas, 2019; Jeong and Lee, 2019). When looking into the international news coverage of disasters, a large majority of the research performed on this topic is concerned with natural disasters (Berlemann & Thomas, 2019; Cox et al., 2008; Houston et al., 2012; Miles & Morse, 2007; Yell, 2012).

With much written about news coverage of natural disasters, this body of research is, however, quite diverse in what approaches are taken and what exactly is researched within these scholarly works. Many articles from this body of research include the way that news media has the ability to influence public perceptions (Cox et al., 2008; Houston et al.,

2012; Yell, 2012). It is generally argued that the news media keeps the public informed about what is or has happened, including, in some cases, also contributing to a path of recovery (Houston et al., 2012). Besides keeping the public informed, there is a general agreement on the way that news media has the ability of influencing public opinion on, and attitudes towards disasters that happen and therefore can influence what kind of response is given (Cox et al., 2008; Yell, 2012). Yell (2012) highlights the way certain narratives are used in the reporting of natural disasters that further contribute to strong emotional feelings. By drawing upon certain language choices and narratives, like discourses of death and disaster or emotion discourse, it is made clear to the public how to feel about a certain disaster. The evoking of certain kinds of emotions or responses are, in many cases, done by the frames used in the news coverage. These frames can differ substantially depending on what kind of disaster took place. Cox et al. (2008) performed their research on the media coverage of natural disasters, focusing on the framing of recovery and found that the framing of such coverage towards certain aspects can have quite some consequences. Cox et al. (2008, p. 478) states:

The explicit lack of attention to the potential adverse health consequences of the fire and the wide-ranging, indirect promotion of emotional suppression that permeates the media texts occludes public acknowledgment and discussion of such implications.

Their research showed that framing disasters a certain way in news media can have serious implications for the people involved, like mental health issues due to the stigma that is put on this. Similarly, research performed by Houston et al. (2012) also focused on frames and frame changing in natural disasters and argue that the coverage and the frames of disaster recovery is lacking in a few places. For example, it is lacking in the potential of keeping the citizens informed about certain services that might be available to them after the disaster and further providing them an outlet where the community can plan for rebuilding post-disaster (Houston et al., 2012). Miles and Morse (2007) also further shed light on the framing of recovery procedures, however, they take a cross media approach, by also including television coverage. While they focus on the framing of recovery in disaster

news coverage, they analyze the way that the perception of risk is further highlighted and in what way the media coverage contributed to this risk perception.

Scholarly works on news coverage of disasters also refer to disasters as crisis events in some cases, since these are all associated with trying to find the cause of what happened, while also obtaining information (Yan & Kim, 2015). Similar to the natural disaster coverage research, many scholarly works referring to disasters as crises also focus on the influence of frames in news coverage on public opinion and perception. The research performed by An and Gower (2009) analyze news media coverage of crises, further specifically focusing on the five frames that are most predominant in newspaper and television news coverage: the human interest frame, the conflict frame, the morality frame, the economic frame, and the attribution of responsibility frame (these frames will be further elaborated on in the 'news framing' section). These same frames were also used by Yan and Kim (2015) in their analysis on a disaster that turned into a crisis. Their research contributes to a better understanding of what frames are dominantly present in the newspaper coverage of the disaster of an airplane crash in three different countries. Within this research, they also outline the possibility of a bias that might be present due to having specific national interests that can have an influence on the journalistic coverage. While Yan and Kim (2015) touch upon the potential bias, like national interests or ideological bias, that can be present in news coverage of crises/disaster and to be aware of this, they stay on the surface with the analysis on bias and do not further investigate what types of biases might be specifically present.

Although a further discussion of the concept bias is provided in section three, I would like to touch upon it here in relation to the news coverage of natural disasters, as it is a topic that is explored by other scholars as well, with regard to the news coverage of natural disasters. By showing the way that biases are present here, a first review is set up about the existence of biases in these types of news events, whereas later a more sophisticated review is presented about biases in general. Berlemann and Thomas (2019) analyzed the distance bias that exists in the reporting in international disaster news. This can be problematic in the sense that media reports can influence the amount of aid that is given to a specific area, and if there is a bias to what is reported and what is not reported, not every area will be able to get the same help or aid as other areas (Berlemann & Thomas, 2019). While Berlemann & Thomas (2019) focused on the distance bias that exists in the

reporting of certain natural disasters, Jeong and Lee (2019) further explored what other factors influence the reporting of natural disasters and found that disasters with a high death rate or greater financial losses gained the most attention by US news media. In addition, similarly to the results of the research performed by Berlemann and Thomas (2019), it was found that there was a geographical bias and the US media gave more attention to disasters that happened in countries that the US imported more from or gave more attention to countries with a smaller GDP (Jeong & Lee, 2019).

Besides the existing scholarship related to news coverage of natural disasters, there is also some body of literature that explores man-made disasters. These kinds of disasters differ from natural disasters in that they involve human error, mistakes or negligence (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). There is a difference in the reporting of these two types of disasters as well, due to the way that emotion is used. Previous scholars who focused on the reporting of man-made disasters have studied the way that emotion is used in journalism (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011; Pantti, 2010; Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007) and how this can be quite a powerful motivator for people to become more involved in certain political processes (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). As Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2011) highlight, emotional expression does not only involve a description of certain emotions, but more so work in such a manner that it changes people's feelings towards something and further is a dynamic process (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). Emotion in news media and the way this is mainly articulated in journalism is discussed by Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007), where they found four discourses. First, the discourse of horror is presented, which focuses on the victims and portrays the people that are affected by the disaster. The second discourse identified is that of empathy, where empathy and compassions are being expressed by different kind of people, whether political officials or ordinary people. The focus is therefore on reporting about people who have helped others or provides a simple display of compassion. The third discourse is that of grief, which describes the way that people are involved in the grieving process and often also includes a certain kind of community building element. Finally, the discourse of anger is highlighted. This mainly involves anger directed at the people or institutions responsible, but also includes anger directed towards the idea that action must be undertaken as people are suffering in some kind of way due to the disaster (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007).

Taking the discourse of anger a bit further, Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2011) identified a few instances where anger could be manifest in news coverage of disasters. For example, they found that anger is dependent on the circumstances of the disaster, whether this is man-made or a natural occurrence. In addition, who expresses the anger is also part of this discourse, where anger could be expressed by ordinary people as part of a critique, but could also be expressed by political officials or elites as a response to the assignment of blame. Finally, anger also needs a certain kind of object, something that anger can be directed towards. The question of responsibility is something that is a large part of the displays of anger, but this depends on who exactly is the one that is responsible and whether the question of guilt is clear (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011).

Public perceptions of a man-made disaster can be significantly impacted due to the use of emotion in news coverage, where use of language and what to mention in media coverage thus has a significant influence on the audience. In a similar vein, Vasterman et al. (2005) argue that media hypes and extensive media coverage of certain disasters can lead to an increase in health problems among the audience or victims. These media hypes, where the coverage of an event has such a high relevance where the media is constantly looking for the newest update, has the possibility to create negative effects on its audience, especially regarding health, also including stress disorders or depression. This is then due to what is highlighted in the media about the disaster and how frequent, thus the way that media frames the disaster (Vasterman et al., 2005).

When analyzing the existing literature on news coverage of international disasters, a clear trend can be found where in most of the scholarly works the framing practices and associated biases are explored. These trends are further highlighted in the other sections of this chapter.

2.2. Media freedom and independence (and State-owned/state-funded media)

As can be seen from the previous section, news coverage and journalism in general is quite involved in the framing of certain news stories and this can have quite an effect on the public when it comes to how the information is written, in addition to how often for example. What further then deserves attention is the way that media is organized. Due to the media being an important source for the public to gain information about things happening in the world, this should be done in the most optimal way (Djankov et al., 2003).

According to the public interest theory (also called Pigouvian theory), it is outlined that “[...] governments maximize the welfare of consumers” (Djankov et al., 2003, p. 341) and this theory states that government ownership of the media is then desired for a few reasons. The first reason is the way that information is a public good, so it is difficult to keep it away from others once it is out in the public for people to read or watch. Second, the supply of information through specific channels can be costly but once this is all set up, the costs of supplying information are low and can have increasing returns. Last, government ownership of the media can provide the public with less biased and more complete information and news than private ownership of media would be able to do (Djankov et al., 2003).

Another theory, called the public choice theory, further contrasts this by saying that government ownership of media outlets only distorts the information given, and are involved in manipulation practices. Government ownership of media is said to undermine democracy and markets, and private ownership has the advantage of providing alternative views to specific events. In addition, more competition amongst news outlets causes much of the information to be unbiased and accurate (Djankov et al., 2003). Kiwanuka-Tondo et al. (2012) uncovered similar practices in their research on framing of HIV news coverage across different news media ownerships. They found that in the case of the private ownership of the press, more articles could be written on a broader range of topics and also sources. In this case, private ownership thus has the advantage of showing different sides and sources to a story, while government ownership has the disadvantage of having to stick to official sources and government programs in the case of HIV coverage (Kiwanuka-Tondo et al., 2012). Djankov et al. (2003) further analyzes the ownership of media outlets across 97 countries and concludes that there is greater state ownership of the media among countries that are “[...] poorer, more autocratic, with lower levels of primary school enrollment, and with higher levels of state intervention in the economy [...]” (Djankov et al., 2003, p. 373). With greater state ownership of media also comes less free press. Djankov et al. (2003) concludes by stating that there are no benefits to state ownership of media outlets as is outlined by the public choice theory.

Generally, as outlined by Karppinen and Moe (2016), state media is seen as less independent than commercial media outlets, mainly due to the way that they can be influenced by political pressures. The main way that media independence should be seen, however, is that this journalistic independence can be created or established between many

different parties on the one hand and political interests, the state etc. on the other (Karppinen & Moe, 2016). Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) further highlight this and show the way that journalists perceive more political constraints and influences in state-owned media than in public or private news organizations. However, it is also highlighted that journalists working in a country where there are high levels of freedom of the press, the political and other influences on journalistic issues are still present (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011).

Media independence and media freedom are two topics that are often talked about in unison and also referred to as quite similar to each other. It could be said that media freedom encompasses media independence from any political pressures and also includes further freedom and independence from other types of environments or legal criteria (Whitten-Woodring, 2009). Here, media freedom is therefore still a topic that is very much associated with its organization within a country. The existing literature here is quite diverse, with differing opinions on what media freedom exactly is. Freedom of the media has been researched from different perspectives, one of these having a focus on human rights and the way that the behavior of the government can be influenced by the regime type and media system that corresponds with that (Whitten-Woodring, 2009), or the way that war and conflict influences the manner in which information is reported on in a democratic regime versus a non-democratic regime (Van Belle, 1997). Moreover, research has shown that states with a free press can also be influenced in its news coverage by the government and the preferences these can have, due to certain regulatory policies and policy information and the dependence of the media on this (Baum & Zhukov, 2019). Whitten-Woodring (2009) focuses on the influences of free media on government behavior across different regime types, and whether a kind of watchdog role is created for the media. She concludes that while free media does have a certain kind of watchdog role over government behavior, this does not then immediately result in a change in the human rights of citizens with regard to the governmental treatment. This research shows that while free media is ultimately sought after, a lot of other factors come into play when it comes to human rights and only in highly-democratized countries is this apparent (Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

Van Belle (1997) also contrasts regime types and the organization of the press, and further finds some differences in behavior and treatment. She shows in her research that regime type and the differences in a free press or not can have a significant influence on whether the source is treated as being legitimate and reliable. Free press in certain regimes

are seen as legitimate, but states where there is a restricted press are treated as being unreliable. It is further argued that due to this, in an international conflict, the domestic leader has the ability to sway the media in a certain way due to the leader being seen as a legitimate source when the conflict is against a non-democracy where there is no free press. The media from the non-democracy are seen as illegitimate and unreliable by the regime with a free press. However, when an international conflict erupts between two democracies with free press, both sources of news are seen as legitimate and the domestic leader can influence the media less, because of the sources from the other side also being taken as legitimate (Van Belle, 1997). This idea that news media is dependent and to an extent influenced by the government and its leaders is highlighted also by Whitten-Woodring (2009). Here, the issue is generally that news media is reliant on official sources for their news, however there is still a certain professional responsibility for journalists that pressures them to also look at alternative news sources and views (Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

But when exactly is there freedom of the media in a specific country and what are certain prerequisites for this to happen? There are several different scholarly works that have researched and looked into what the indicators are of press freedom (Becker et al., 2007; Whitten-Woodring, 2009). Becker et al. (2007) focused on the popular indicators that have been identified by mostly non-profit organizations that are engaged in measuring press freedom in countries. The idea central to their research is the way that the different organizations correlate with each other and in what way the measurements have changed over time. They found that there are distinct correlations in the measurements and the changes that have happened are consistent also with the drastic changes that might have happened within a media environment (Becker et al., 2007).

While Becker et al. (2007) stays on the surface of media freedom and does not go deeper into what these indicators specifically are with regard to media freedom, Whitten-Woodring (2009) shows several indicators that can be useful to consider when media is free from all influence and when it is not. She proposes that free media operates in four different environments. The first one being the legal environment, where there are no laws that restrict journalism and further ensures media freedom to be protected by the constitution. The second environment is the political environment, this includes that media is not subjected to censorship by the government, has the ability to access many different

sources and further ensures no violence against journalists. The third environment is the economic environment where media is free if it can operate in a manner that ensures no financial manipulation by any organization or actor, provides an environment where there is competition between different media outlets and to ease the distribution of information to people. Finally, the professional environment prompts journalists to be a critical eye by keeping government in check and reporting on this. In addition, this environment also prompts journalists to cover debatable stories, ensure marginalized people are heard and further disheartens self-censorship (Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

Media freedom and the indicators give a good sense of where there is freedom of the press and where this is present in a lesser extent. Coming back to government ownership of the media, it is important to note that ownership or funding by the government does not immediately mean there is control of the media (Whitten-Woodring, 2009). However, there are further scholarly works on media freedom and government ownership of the media that does form a discussion on media bias and how this is present in the government owned or funded press (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014; Durante & Knight, 2012; Baum & Zhukov, 2019; Roman et al., 2017). These scholarly works are related to military conflicts (Roman et al., 2017; Baum & Zhukov, 2019), protests (Zhang et al. 2017), national partisan control (Durante & Knight, 2012), and media freedom in general (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014). These will be elaborated on in the following section, to further highlight the way that bias is present across differing regimes and media structures.

2.3. Bias and objectivity in press coverage

Bias in state-owned or funded media is a topic that comes back in several scholarly works. For example, Roman et al. (2017) showed how the government in a country can influence what is being reported on and in what way. This influence can be reflected in the press by, for example, only showing one side of the conflict, which further has the consequence of controlling public opinion on certain issues (Roman et al., 2017). In addition, bias in and control of the media changes the behavior of viewers as well, as they might not (or especially do) want to view a specific television channel due to a certain bias towards the content that is displayed there (Durante & Knight, 2012).

Before going further into previous research concerning bias and what types are identified by differing scholars, the concept of objectivity should be discussed shortly to gain

an idea of what this means and how this concept has evolved over time for journalism. Press coverage and journalism is in many cases still concerned with objectivity and presenting “[...] true pictures of reality” (Wien, 2005). There are a lot of outside influences that may be able to influence the way a journalist works or what exactly is reported and what is not. However, as described by Wien (2005), the idea of objective reporting and objectivity among journalists is still a concept and ideal that many journalists strive for. Wien (2005) gives an overview of the theoretical schools in journalism and argues that over the years, objectivity has been the main striving point for journalists and that there are only a few indications of journalists not staying close to this ideal. This overview further shows the way that journalism stays connected to the positivist thinking and thus objective representations within its coverage, whereas this is criticized for showing “[...] much too simplified pictures of much too small bits of reality” (Wien, 2005, p. 13). Wien (2005) argues that journalism might profit off of changing to a different theoretical approach, where these critiques are then solved. Wien (2005) also observes that truth and objectivity in journalism are always to be taken together.

In contrast, Muñoz-Torres (2012) argues that the objectivity paradigm is losing its traction and that there are increasing debates on the concept of objectivity for journalism. A large aspect of this debate is that truth is being replaced by the notion of objectivity, which by itself is not possible to connect with each other. The notion of truth and connecting this to objectivity is counterproductive and confusing (Muñoz-Torres, 2012). Further building on the notion of objectivity, it can be mentioned that through the use of objectivity in journalism, biases are prevented. However, objectivity has many different aspects and ways to be addressed, and still then has the possibility to lead to a bias. As explained by Mothes (2017), there are many instances where even the striving of objectivity by journalists might still lead to a bias. Mothes (2017) mentions that the danger might become apparent for some journalists as there are some that strive for objectivity and see it as fully accomplished when presenting the hard facts in news coverage, instead of giving a portrayal of different viewpoints in a balanced manner. In these two cases both are instances of striving for objectivity, however these different cases have separate implications for certain influences. (Mothes, 2017). For example, “[...] whereas balance primarily aims to prevent journalists from withholding facts that oppose their individual opinions, a fact-based reporting style may only help repress the mere expression of these opinions” (Mothes, 2017, pp. 1079-

1080). Here it can be observed that objectivity has different components and meanings for different journalists. Mothes (2017) concludes from their research that the concept of objectivity is very much dependent on the individual level and the attitudes thereof, also highlighting what relevance is given to messages and what the value is of the information.

While objectivity in news coverage is desired in most instances, bias can manifest itself in many ways. Baum and Zhukov (2015) argue that for different types of regimes there are different biases that can be identified with regard to the reporting of military conflicts. For democracies a pro-challenger bias can be found and for non-democracies a pro-incumbent bias is present (Baum & Zhukov, 2015). This all has to do with a general bias that can be found in news media, called reporting bias, which highlights the tendency of the media to underreport or overreport events (Baum & Zhukov, 2015). Entman (2007) highlights three different meanings to bias that can arise in news reports, and describes them as distortion bias, content bias and decision-making bias. Distortion bias is when the news is shown in such a way that it brings across false realities, content bias is explained as news that favors one side more than the other instead of covering both sides equally of a political conflict, and decision-making bias is bias that comes in news stories where the story is influenced by the journalists and their mentality or motivations behind writing certain pieces of content. (Entman, 2007). Watanabe (2017) provides further changes to other types of biases that can be present in news media, such as statement bias (defined as the placement of opinions of either journalists or media organizations in a news article as well as an inclusion of a certain description of the event or issue at hand, while focusing on specific aspects) and gatekeeping bias (defined as quoting only certain sources in articles). These types of biases have been quite evident in the reporting of the Ukraine crisis by the Russian official news agency, with them actively presenting news in a manner that is consistent with their propaganda technique and essentially increasing the chance of those news stories also being published by foreign news media (Watanabe, 2017).

As can be seen from Watanabe (2017), but also Ravi (2005), the national interests of the country a journalist belongs to can influence their reporting of certain events. This is also called patriotic journalism, and has the ability to significantly influence the reporting and framing of events (Ravi, 2005; Ginosar, 2015; Ginosar & Cohen, 2019). A patriotic stance can then be found in the reporting, with journalists leaving the neutral and objective stance

and adopting a style that caters more to their own nation (Ginosar & Cohen, 2019). Ginosar and Cohen (2019) identify two types of patriotic expressions in journalistic reporting:

[...] expressions that appeal to public emotions, aimed at creating solidarity, empathy, and a generally positive attitude towards the military action [...] and [...] expressions that appeal to public cognition, aimed at creating an understanding of, and a justification for, 'our side's' motivations and activities (Ginosar & Cohen, 2019, p. 11).

The existing research regarding patriotic journalism, however, all focus on military interventions and violent conflicts. As Ginosar and Cohen (2019) point out, patriotic journalism can also manifest itself in other types of conflicts or crises. Due to the nature of the research focusing on state-owned news media, this patriotic view can manifest itself here and creates an interesting approach to the analysis as well.

2.4. News framing

With regard to news framing in disaster coverage by the media, Ewart and McLean (2014) identify the way that frames are used in the reporting on the aftermath of disasters. The frame that is mainly used in these types of news reports is the frame of blaming, where there are six so-called "disaster excuses" mentioned (Olson, 2000 as cited in Ewart & McLean, 2014). These disaster excuses are then used by officials as a way to push certain blame away from them, by mentioning the way that the previous administration is to blame or perhaps that a disaster of such size cannot be foreseen. However, as is argued, that citizens do blame the government for such events in the way that a disaster is dealt with by them. When dealing with disasters, there is a general desire to put the blame on someone or something, which can also be driven by the media (Ewart & McLean, 2014).

Through framing practices biases can evolve, as frames and the implementation of these frames seek, in the most general sense, to change the way audience members interpret an event and shapes the way they think and feel about specific events through the use of salient attributes (Entman, 2007; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Entman (2007) highlights the way that practices such as framing, priming and agenda-setting are closely related, where agenda-setting can be seen as the result of the

successful framing process due to the choices made in showing what should be seen by the public and government and what should not (Entman, 2007), and priming is the goal of the framing strategies and activities (Entman, 2007). Iyengar and Simon (1993) also show the way that agenda-setting, priming and framing are done and how these are related to each other. In their research on the news coverage of the Gulf Crisis, they argue that agenda-setting was involved in creating enough news coverage about this issue to make it the most important problem for the nation. In addition, the effect of priming can then be observed through the way that news coverage has an influence on the way that people evaluate politicians and the criteria used for this, especially in the aftermath of the crisis. Finally, framing is addressed in the way that the news reports are set up and the influence this can have on public opinion (Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

Framing practices and the theoretical frameworks behind framing has been thoroughly researched by Borah (2011), who analyzed a decades' worth of literature in framing theory. They point out that there are several studies that use very specific and unique frames that are basically only present in the study at hand. These unique frames create the issue that they cannot be linked to a larger body of literature and to the theoretical issues of framing, which does not contribute to a further understanding of the existing framing theory (Borah, 2011). Borah (2011) highlights the need for framing research that is connected to the already existing broader understanding of framing and can be placed within this existing literature and theory. Due to the fractured nature of framing research, it is beneficial that future research focused on framing makes use of the existing literature and theory in order to be able to further develop the framing theory (Borah, 2011).

Working towards an operationalization of the framing theory, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five news frames that were most commonly used in news stories from the existing literature on framing practices. These news frames were then used and tested to see what news frame was most prevalent and present. The news frames that were identified were: attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality. The attribution of responsibility frame mainly aims at attributing the responsibility for a specific issue or problem to a group, government etc. The conflict frame is focused on showing the conflict that is present between certain groups or individuals. The human interest frame is concerned with highlighting an emotional angle to

an event or crisis. The economic consequences frame reports on the economic consequences that go along with the issue or problem at hand (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). And finally, the morality frame “[...] puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). After identifying the five different frames, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) applied these to television news reports and found that the most commonly used frames in television news outlets were attribution of responsibility and conflict. In previous research, Valkenburg et al. (1999) only identified four news frames (conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, and economic consequences). These four frames were then later developed further into five news frames. The earlier mentioned four frames were analyzed in the research performed by Valkenburg et al. (1999) to find out what role these frames can play on the readers, especially regarding the way people think about issues and their recalling abilities. They found that in general the frames had significant influences on the way that people framed the story themselves and what aspects they would list in terms of what they just read (Valkenburg et al., 1999).

These frames mentioned above have been used in other research papers as a framework for how the most common frames are present and which ones, to further illustrate for each case study which frames are used in what situations, in quite diverse scholarly perspectives (Yan & Kim, 2015; Muhamad & Yang, 2017; Burscher et al., 2014). As examples, Muhamad and Yang (2017) focus on the news frames in U.S. newspapers and analyze the way that autism is framed, whereas Burscher et al. (2014) performed an analysis into how machine learning approaches these news frames. Looking more at previous research in disasters and conflicts and how these news frames are used as a theoretical framework, the research performed by Yan and Kim (2015) should be touched upon. As mentioned in a previous section, with their research on the Asiana plane disaster in 2013, Yan and Kim (2015) reported how these frames manifested themselves in the newspaper coverage of the countries involved, US, Korea and China (Yan & Kim, 2015). They highlight that while many reports could be put into these generic media frames, there were still some more factual information that was supplied in the researched news articles that did not fit into one of the frame categories. They therefore mention a potential for adding another frame to these (Yan & Kim, 2015).

From this chapter, it can be seen that framing practices and biases are quite present in the existing scholarly works on news coverage. It can be concluded, however, that international disaster news coverage and crisis news coverage are lacking the way that state-owned media cover these types of events, especially considering the way that the countries involved in the disaster have presented their story. In addition, the way that bias is involved is important as well, especially focusing on the patriotic bias that can be present in news coverage.

The next chapter will be focused on discussing the research design of the thesis.

3. Method

This chapter outlines the research approach and further highlights the sample and analysis approaches of the thesis. A qualitative approach to the research was chosen due to the focus of the analysis being on the interpretation of texts and further gaining a better understanding of the meanings that come forward.

3.1. Research Approach

As the aim of this research was to analyze articles produced by two different state-owned outlets in order to find out what frames were present, and further presenting what types of biases arose from these, a qualitative approach to the research was chosen. Because of the nature of the research question, a deeper understanding and analysis of the news articles is needed by using a qualitative approach in the analysis. Qualitative research entails an interpretive approach with much attention specified to detail and discussion of a phenomenon or issue. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research focuses on depth of detail, not on the quantity of data (Jackson et al., 2007). Further, qualitative research is concerned with understanding experiences, and how phenomena and certain issues are perceived or observed (Jackson et al., 2007; Linström & Marais, 2012). With the aim of qualitative research being “[...] contribut[ing] to a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to processes, meaning patterns and structural features” (Flick et al., 2000/2004, p. 65), this approach was chosen for the analysis of the data. Through the use of qualitative research methods, the focus on interpretation of meanings and phenomena, therefore resulted in conclusions that were able to answer the research questions in a productive way. The research question is thus answered by way of gaining a deeper understanding into how news stories are presented, described and framed.

3.2. Data Collection Method

A qualitative content analysis was conducted as the main form of data collection of the news articles that are analyzed. Qualitative content analysis is chosen due to the main subject being news articles which include much textual data, and is an important aspect of content analysis. As Mayring (2000) identifies, qualitative content analysis creates the

opportunity for a systematic analysis of texts. Content analysis is a way of conducting analysis into textual data by way of comparing and contrasting (Jackson et al., 2007). By choosing qualitative content analysis, the focus is on the interpretation of the text and further making sense of the data through the creation of categories that are highlighted by way of coding (Jackson et al., 2007). This type of analysis was best suited for this research as a qualitative content analysis “[...] focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The nature of this research was to interpret and analyze the meaning of the news articles produced by *NOS* and *RT*. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis was best suited to use in the analysis of the textual data of the news articles. Visual images accompany news stories in many cases, however the approach of this analysis will remain a textual analysis as its main data collection method. Through this method, a deductive approach to the analysis can also be performed, which is the approach this thesis used (Mayring, 2000). The theoretical framework was already identified from the previous research and was applied and used to analyze the news articles.

3.3. Sampling units

The data that was analyzed are the news articles from two different outlets based in two different countries. These news outlets are the *NOS* (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting), based in The Netherlands, and *RT*, based in Russia. These specific outlets were chosen by reason of the countries’ relation with the crash of MH17, especially considering the differences in the way that they were involved. For The Netherlands, the way that the country had to process the grief and loss of the 196 Dutch citizens that were on board the MH17, while at the same time investigate the cause of the crash, are some initial reasons The Netherlands is country that is interesting to research in this case. In addition, the way that these feelings are further reproduced in the news media, is another reason that makes The Netherlands an interesting country to focus on within this research, especially with regard to their involvement in this disaster and the role of the media in this.

Russia’s alleged involvement in the disaster of the MH17 is quite different from The Netherlands. From the side of Russia, while the crash of the MH17 can, and is, seen as an international disaster, Russia is involved in such a way that they might be blamed for what

happened due to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Russian officials and also especially the media are therefore occupied with presenting themselves to the international stage in a manner that is compassionate towards the lives lost, while at the same time ensuring they do not get blamed for their involvement and being seen as the cause of the disaster.

Choosing to focus on state-owned news outlets instead of other types of news outlets, was due to gaining an insight into what frames are manifested in these types of news outlets and further what kinds of biases then come forward.

The choice of analyzing *NOS* and *RT* were made after careful consideration of several factors. The intention was to choose a Dutch state-owned internationally focused news outlet; however, such a source does not exist anymore. The last Dutch state-owned internationally focused news outlet was *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, which ended in 2012 due to reorganizations and budget cuts (RNW Media, n.d.). Therefore, *NOS* was chosen as the state-owned news outlet to analyze as this is the Dutch state-owned news outlet. As for Russia, *RT* was analyzed first and foremost because of it being a state-owned news outlet. Due to the language barrier (not being able to speak Russian) and this outlet producing Russian news in English, *RT* was the best choice considering these different factors. So, an internationally oriented Russian state-owned news outlet was chosen. While these outlets have their differences, particularly in the different audiences they have, they also have particular similarities that make these outlets interesting to analyze. Both are state-funded news outlets that can be and also have been involved in producing news stories in favor of the country these outlets are located in. These state-funded news outlets from their respective countries are therefore interesting for this research, especially due to the disaster that happened and having to tread lightly in what news should be covered and in what way.

When looking at the policy report for *NOS*, the outlet introduces itself as being an integral part of the public broadcast corporation and has the goal of being the primary information source for Dutch citizens, which presents all sorts of news, sports and events from all over the world. The *NOS* states their news and journalistic principles to be trustworthy, independent and objective (NOS, n.d.). They further present the way that objectivity might be blurred due to the way that certain perceptions of events can be determined differently due to cultures, habits or even the needs of the audience (Hoofdredactie, 2016).

As for the policy report of *RT*, it is stated that *RT* is a global news outlet that provides news all day long. In addition, they state that:

RT covers stories overlooked by the mainstream media, provides alternative perspectives on current affairs, and acquaints international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events (RT, n.d.).

Furthermore, Russia's aims and methods with regard to presenting national or international news has been presented in previous research, with a focus on promoting Russian diplomacy and further presenting Russia in a manner that puts them in a good and positive light (Smirnova, 2020). Here, *RT* is also used to present the Russian view on certain world events and to convey this to an international audience. Bringing these frames further to light with regard to an international disaster, also for the Dutch state-owned news outlet *NOS*, significantly contributes to the already existing literature. These state-owned news outlets therefore provide a background that illustrates what makes them interesting cases to analyze and research and further compare with each other.

3.4. Units of analysis

The sampling strategy consisted of collecting the relevant news articles that were used in the analysis for this thesis. The units of analysis for this thesis were therefore only news articles. Opinion pieces for both of the news outlets, *NOS* and *RT*, have been excluded from the units of analysis. This strategy was chosen, because first of all, the opinion pieces portray the opinion of one or a few people, such as journalists or correspondents, and is thus already showing a way of framing and bias that is in line with what this person feels or thinks. In contrast, news articles are written with its main goal being to convey information. While these are also framed, they do not immediately show opinions of a certain person. The second reason for excluding these opinion pieces was due to there not being many to include in the analysis and therefore will not substantially contribute to the study at hand.

Purposive sampling was applied as a samplings strategy in order to come to a small sample that can help in increasing the depth of understanding in the research (Campbell et al., 2020). For the purpose of this research, purposive sampling was preferred, as a sample

could then arise that made sure the articles were discussing the disaster of MH17, which is important when analyzing the framing techniques that were used. Different criteria were thus used to come to a sample that encompasses the research aims of this thesis and furthers the depth of understanding.

When collecting the data, the word “MH17” was used as a search criterion on the outlets’ website search function, where a further selection was made afterwards with regard to what articles are included in the sample and which are not included. The time frame from which the articles in the sample consisted of is from the 18th of July until the 31st of July of 2014, in order to analyze the articles written in the direct aftermath of the crash. The direct aftermath of the crash was chosen to gain some insight into what the first reactions and news articles were reporting on in terms of the disaster, as this timeframe is crucial and quite hectic for news outlets where a lot of information and news can be brought to the public. The sampling strategy thus brought forth an analysis into the kind of framing that was used in this timeframe.

For *NOS* the sampling process was quite extensive, due to the many articles that were written within this timeframe after using the word “MH17” as a search criterion. The keyword “MH17” was thus entered on the website www.nos.nl, after which only relevant articles about the disaster was highlighted. By applying the chosen timeframe to this, a total of 444 articles were identified. In order to cut this down further, the criteria of having the word “MH17” in the title of the article ended up with 126 articles. Video’s, opinion pieces and articles with only photos were also excluded after which 73 articles were left over. Articles less than 300 words were as a final criterion excluded and the final sample for the *NOS* is 21 articles.

For *RT* the sampling procedure was less extensive, as there were less articles written within the timeframe of the 18th of July until the 31st of July 2014 than there were for *NOS*. For *RT* the word “MH17” was also used to search for the relevant articles that were written about the disaster. Here, the website www.rt.com was used to search for the articles. By applying the chosen timeframe to this, 28 articles were identified. The same criteria that were used to establish the relevant articles for *NOS* were also applied to *RT*, and the final sample for *RT* ended up at 20 articles.

In addition to the general criteria that were used for the outlets, each article was also analyzed content-wise, to ensure that not just the title included the word “MH17”, but

the actual article that was written was about the disaster of the MH17 as well. In this way, a comprehensive sample was collected that included news stories with the main subject being the crash of MH17.

The sample size of this research is thus 41 articles, 21 articles from *NOS* and 20 articles from *RT*. The sample is further illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of sample, sorted by date.

News articles			
	<i>NOS</i>	<i>RT</i>	Total
18/07/2014	6	0	6
19/07/2014	1	0	1
20/07/2014	0	3	3
21/07/2014	2	3	5
22/07/2014	1	2	3
23/07/2014	1	0	1
24/07/2014	0	1	1
25/07/2014	2	2	4
26/07/2014	2	2	4
28/07/2014	1	2	3
29/07/2014	1	3	4
30/07/2014	2	0	2
31/07/2014	2	2	4
Total	21	20	41

3.5. Data analysis

After establishing the sample of relevant news articles for the outlets, these were then analyzed by means of frame analysis. Frame analysis was used in order to find out what frames were used and constructed in news stories, which is especially relevant for this research because of the way that state-owned/funded news outlets frame their stories, which were analyzed in this thesis. Frame analysis and how this is performed can be explained as focusing on “[...] the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Through this analysis by focusing on these types of aspects, the frames that are used within a story can be observed. Borah (2011) suggests the need for a framing research that makes use of the already existing theories and information in order to be able to connect the results and also place it within the broader context of frame analysis. In addition, there are other critiques for qualitative frame analysis in the way that there can be a threat to the validity of the research, especially regarding the operationalization of the frames and how researchers, in some cases, try to “reinvent the wheel” when analyzing news frames and identifying which frames are used (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2010 as cited in Linström & Marais, 2012, p. 27). Therefore, the analysis of this research was performed by using an existing theoretical framework to build upon these already established news frames.

The coding of the articles was done by using the existing news frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000): *attribution of responsibility*, *human interest*, *conflict*, and *morality*. The first category, *attribution of responsibility*, presents the way that the disaster of MH17 is someone’s responsibility, whether a government, or the airplane itself. Within this frame the way that the cause of the disaster is sought after is also included, as this by itself also includes an attribution of responsibility and seeking causation is something that happens often after a disaster. In addition to seeking causation, the way that it is not clear who is to blame is also included in this frame, as there is something or someone responsible but it is not clear who. Especially in the direct aftermath of the crash, it was not yet known what had happened and who exactly was to blame. The second category, *human interest*, is involved in showing an emotional appearance to the story, including human experiences

and emotional angles to the tragedy. The third category, *conflict*, shows the way that conflict between two parties, which can be people, countries etc., are evident in the articles and the disaster of the MH17. The fourth category as part of Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) news frames, *morality*, portrays news in a way that it highlights religious aspects or in terms of the preferred behavior in a society.

An overview of the coding scheme can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding scheme

Attribution of responsibility	Human interest	Conflict	Morality
Governmental responsibility	Human face to story	Disagreement between parties	Moral message
Governmental ability to alleviate problem	Adjectives/ personal vignettes	Reproach	Reference to morality/God
Seeking causation*	Individuals and groups affected	Two sides or more	Social prescriptions about how to behave
Individual or group of people responsible	Private or personal lives of actors		
Not clear who is responsible**			

* the code was changed in order to capture specific aspects of the articles that were analyzed

** the code was added to this category to encompass a different dimension of the category that is an important factor in the articles as well

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified in their research another most commonly used frame as well, *economic consequences*. This frame was initially included in the analysis, but this frame was, after the analysis, excluded due to it being almost non-existent in the 41

articles analyzed. The other identified news frames are most commonly used in news stories and can also be applied to the disaster news coverage of MH17 in order to point out what frames are used within these news stories.

Another category, *facts*, was initially also included in the analysis, which was the factual information that was included in the articles. However, this category was excluded after the analysis of the articles as it provided no additional insights into the framing of the articles, as the factual information do not contain a specific frame.

Images were further excluded from the analysis of the articles. The focus here is on the textual frames that are present, also including the subtle framing techniques that can be used here.

The next chapter provides the results of the frame analysis that was outlined in this chapter that was performed into the articles by *NOS* and *RT*. The most dominant framing techniques will be presented that evolved from the analysis.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings that resulted from the analysis of all 41 articles published in the direct aftermath of the MH17 crash by *RT* and *NOS*. The four different frames are presented here and further elaborated on as to in what way the frames are used in the articles of both outlets. To further add to this, the quotations that are taken from the articles of *NOS* are translated from Dutch to English by me.

4.1. Attribution of responsibility

The analysis of the coverage of *NOS* and *RT* presented some similarities and differences in its use of the “attribution of responsibility” frame. The coverage of the MH17 in the immediate aftermath of the crash revealed that *NOS* tried to stick to a narrative that does not immediately blame anyone, but does acknowledge that something went wrong. The code *not clear who is responsible* was used in 9 out of 21 articles (42,85%), and therefore was the most dominant in the *NOS* articles. In these articles, there is no specific mention made of who is responsible. Referring to a UN Security Council session, *NOS*, for example, stated in an article “The Netherlands and Russia did not point to a specific perpetrator during the session” (NOS Nieuws, 2014a). In addition, what can be observed here is that *NOS* reported on this mainly in a question format, where it is not clear who is responsible which comes forward by way of questioning who is to blame for the crash. A few examples here was the use of the word “Perpetrators?” in a separate heading for an article (NOS Nieuws, 2014e) or the question of “[...] who operated it?” (NOS Nieuws, 2014b), referring to the missile that shot the plane out of the air and who was the one that operated the missile.

What is also worth noting is that this narrative of not assigning blame to anyone specific yet was used in 4 out of 9 articles that were all published on 18/07/2014 in *NOS*. There was a total of six articles from 18/07/2014 included in the sample, so a large section of these specific articles was framed in the way of someone is to blame but not knowing for sure who is to blame.

In contrast to *NOS*, from the analysis of the news coverage of *RT*, a different way of framing with regard to attribution of responsibility came forward. In the case of *RT*, there were several ways in which the code *governmental responsibility* was used, with this being

the most dominant code for *RT*. This code was used in 12 out of 20 articles analyzed (60%). Putting the responsibility on the government was used in several contexts, the first one involving the fighting that was happening around the crash site of the MH17 and this being framed as the Ukrainian government's responsibility. One article mentioned:

[President] Poroshenko ordered a ceasefire within a radius of 40 kilometers of the crash; however, this was broken a week ago, when the Ukrainian Air Force carried out a missile strike 30 kilometers from the MH17 crash site (RT, 2014k. Brackets added).

RT pushed the blame of the fighting within the area on the Ukrainian government. This negativity against Ukraine in the reporting of *RT* is quite evident also in a few other cases, where the Ukrainian government was mentioned as withholding an unbiased investigation:

Meanwhile, militia forces claim that Kiev is not interested in a fair and unbiased investigation into the downing of the Malaysian plane over Ukraine, so it is sabotaging the work of international experts (RT, 2014j).

Another context in which the frame arose in such a way that responsibility was put on a governmental body, was in the context of mentioning statements from others who were blaming Russia for being the one responsible for the MH17 crash. It is, for example, stated in an article "Washington has claimed that Moscow is 'culpable' in the Malaysian plane crash in Ukraine, as it was Russian authorities that gave the rebels heavy weapons and training" (RT, 2014i).

Furthermore, after mentioning these claims, *RT* highlighted on several occasions that there is no evidence backing these claims that Russia was the one responsible, stating: "Though there have been a lot of claims of Russia's involvement, none have been backed by proof" (RT, 2014g), or:

While Russia is being vilified as the country directly involved in the downing of the MH17 plane, the allegations have so far been based on a number of unverified claims rather than on real evidence (RT, 2014e).

RT therefore mainly framed their articles in such a way where one, the Ukrainian government is the one that is responsible for the fighting in the area and that this has caused investigators to not be able to reach the crash site, and two, highlighting how others are blaming Russia for downing the plane, which is then stated as being based on no real evidence.

Table 3. Overview of frequency in *attribution of responsibility* frame.

Attribution of responsibility	NOS		RT	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Governmental responsibility	5/21	23,81 %	12/20	60,00 %
Governmental ability to alleviate problem	2/21	9,50 %	4/20	20,00 %
Seeking causation	8/21	38,09 %	8/20	40,00 %
Individual or group of people responsible	7/21	33,33 %	4/20	20,00 %
Not clear who is responsible	9/21	42,85 %	4/20	20,00 %

Besides these differences in framing of the attribution of responsibility, there is also a similarity to be observed, with the code *seeking causation* being the second most

dominant code for both *NOS* and *RT*. Here, in both cases this was mainly used to present the way that an investigation is happening into what caused the plane to crash, stating: “The experts are to investigate the causes of the catastrophe of the MH17 flight that crashed in eastern Ukraine on Thursday” (*RT*, 2014c) or “Secondly, an investigation is conducted into the cause of the disaster” (*NOS Nieuws*, 2014f). Both *NOS* and *RT*, while mentioning that an investigation is ongoing, speculate about what could have possibly happened that made the plane crash. They both mention in multiple articles that the plane could have crashed due to a missile launch, with the *NOS* even mentioning in an article that it is “highly likely that the plane was shot down by a missile” (*NOS Nieuws*, 2014c). In some of these articles of *NOS* there is then also a bias in the reporting towards either Russia or Ukraine who could be behind the cause of the crash.

4.2. Human interest

Within the “human interest” frame, there is one dominant code present for both *NOS* and *RT*. For both the outlets the code *individuals and groups affected* was used in 4 articles. Here, the MH17 crash was framed in such a way that the people who were affected by the crash were presented. While the outlets are similar in the way that they both mention the individuals that are affected, they differ in their mention of who the ones are that are affected by the crash.

For example, *NOS* mainly referred to the victims themselves or the relatives of the victims when they discuss who is affected by the crash. In one article they mentioned the three Australian children that were on board the MH17, stating: “For all the lost children, but especially for the three Australian children Evie, Mo and Otis, a song was written” (*NOS Nieuws*, 2014g). Further, another article was dedicated fully to one victim, where a friend had the opportunity to discuss who the victim was and what he did in his life, titled “Despair among friends of MH17 victim” (*NOS Nieuws*, 2014h). Another example where the relatives of the victims (and also the victim) is referred to in the article is:

News of the plane crash reached Van Geene the same day. He called his sister and together they concluded that the Balinese and the Belgian must have been on board flight MH17. When the Indonesian government was one of the first to

release the names of the passengers shortly afterwards, he knew for sure: "And then everything stops" (NOS Nieuws, 2014h).

Similarly to *NOS*, *RT* also mentioned the victims or their relatives on some occasions, for example by also referring to the relatives of the Australian children who were on board the plane by stating:

Another Perth couple, Anthony Maslin and Marite Norris, who lost their three children - Evie, 10, Mo, 12, and Otis, 8, - and the children's grandfather, said the pain from their loss was "intense and relentless" (RT, 2014h).

However, while *NOS* sticks to the narrative of only victims and relatives that are the ones who are affected by the crash, *RT* goes further by mentioning the locals living in the villages surrounding the plane crash as people who are affected by this. They did this by addressing and quoting the locals:

Indeed, locals have said there is a smell coming from the debris. "Now you can smell this odor over here – there are no words to describe it," local Dmitry said, while some others earlier admitted carrying body parts to the crash site (RT, 2014b).

Furthermore, *RT* also made use of adjectives/personal vignettes in their reporting of the crash, with 4 out of 20 articles including this way of framing. The use of adjectives is something that is included quite often in an article written by *RT*, which then gives an emotional angle to the story. For example, words that are used include "grieving parents", "grief-stricken", "gruesome site of the tragic accident", or "utterly deplorable act" (RT, 2014h; RT, 2014b; RT, 2014f). To further illustrate, this use of adjectives can be observed in this full quote here: "The parents decided on a dangerous journey – right to the heart of *war-torn* Ukraine – to the Donetsk Region where the Malaysian Airlines plane crashed" (RT, 2014h. *Italics added*). The use of these kinds of words adds an emotional angle to a story and therefore creates a certain bias that ensures a feeling of sadness and also empathy.

Table 4. Overview of frequency in *human interest* frame.

	<i>NOS</i>		<i>RT</i>	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Human face to story	1/21	4,76 %	1/20	5,00 %
Adjectives/personal vignettes	1/21	4,76 %	4/20	20,00 %
Individuals and groups affected	4/21	19,05 %	6/20	30,00 %
Private or personal lives of actors	1/21	4,76 %	2/20	10,00 %

What should be noted from Table 4 is that while there are some uses of the human interest frame in the articles, it is not a frame that is used very often in both outlets. Especially in the articles of *NOS*, there is a significant lack of showing a human face to a story or adding adjectives/personal vignettes in the coverage of the MH17 in the direct aftermath.

4.3. Conflict

From the analysis of the articles, a way of framing the stories in terms of conflict was quite apparent for both *NOS* and *RT*. What can be observed is that the dominant code for both the outlets is *reproach*. For *NOS* this was used in 6 out of 21 articles and for *RT* this was used in 14 out of 20 articles. Here, there are some similarities and differences in the way that this code is manifested in the stories of the articles and outlets. As for *RT*, there were three main ways in which *reproach* was presented in the articles; condemning of the fighting near the crash site, condemning of the mistreatment of the victim's bodies, and

anger towards the urgent action needed with regards to an investigation but not being undertaken.

In 4 out of the 14 articles in *RT* where the code *reproach* was present, the way that there are people complaining about the fighting in the area and how this hinders the access to the crash site was highlighted as a type of reproach towards this fighting. This expression of complaint and disapproval is mostly shown by means of highlighting the way that the fighting continues in the area, despite continuous demands by officials or the United Nations Security Council to put a stop to the fighting in the area. One article stated, for example, “Kiev continued its military offensive even after the UNSC urged a halt to fighting in the area last week” (RT, 2014m). This shows a type of reproach where there is a disregard to the demand of some authorities and also a reproach from the other side, in which they condemn the fighting in the area already. From the reporting of the condemning of the fighting in the area of the crash, there was a clear indication of some one-sided reporting. *RT* focused solely on Kiev being the ones that are at fault by still being involved in the fighting despite multiple demands, including further reproach towards their conduction of the fighting, stating:

However, in practice the cruelty of Kiev authorities in fighting is going through the roof. Donetsk, Lugansk, Gorlovka and many other localities have undergone massive bombardments, including indiscriminate Grad fire and aerial assaults,” Churkin [Russia’s United Nations envoy] said, pointing out that residential buildings, hospitals and transportation hubs are deliberately being bombed (RT, 2014o. Brackets added).

Here, a reproach is formed in the way that someone else is reporting on the way that Kiev is “deliberately” and “indiscriminately” bombing places, which they highlighted as being “cruel”.

RT’s articles reported on the way that bodies were being mistreated on the crash site. From this reporting, other people are quoted saying they are either “shocked” or “furious” about the way that the bodies are being handled, after learning or hearing about this. One articles states, for example:

The international community has been expressing concerns over the crash site's integrity, with Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans, during a Meeting with Ukrainian president on Saturday, expressing his "shock" over reports of mishandling of the victims' bodies and "the site not being treated properly" (RT, 2014b).

This way of showing how someone else is "shocked" about learning that things are not being handled right, shows a type of reproach from one person or group of people to someone else's behavior.

Lastly, there are also a few articles that encompassed a type of *reproach* by commenting on the way that international experts or the people designated for the investigation were not at the crash site yet. A sense of reproach is created here by also highlighting and quoting other people who commented on the way that the investigation should be conducted urgently, but this is not being done. In one article it is outlined for example:

"We are interested in the most comprehensive and objective investigation," the PM said. "But we don't feel like there is enthusiasm among the international community and experts. Several dozen experts are currently in Kiev. Can they please come here faster? We are surprised and frankly angered that we have to keep the area untouched while we are waiting for them for so long" (RT, 2014b).

In addition, another article also outlines this irritation of not showing up sooner for the investigation, stating: "A day earlier DPR's PM, Aleksandr Boroday, accused the international community of lacking enthusiasm to investigate the plane crash" (RT, 2014a).

As for *NOS*, there are a few similarities with regard to the use of the code *reproach* compared to *RT*. For example, the *NOS* also highlights the way that there is a reproach towards the actions of Kiev in the way that they continue their fighting in the area despite the decisions made to stop the fighting. In one article it was noted that "Kiev's actions are at odds with President Poroshenko's decision to have a ceasefire within 40 kilometers around the crash site" (Nieuwsuur, 2014). Furthermore, for both *RT* and *NOS*, the way that reproach is shown in many of the articles is done through the highlighting of what officials think of

someone else's behavior. In this way there are also a few instances in which there are certain accusations made that are mentioned and further framed in such a way as to present a disapproval of someone's actions, in this case the accusations being made. For example, in article for the *NOS* it was stated that "Firth disrespects the way that the Russian press blame Ukraine for the crash" (NOS Nieuws, 2014b). The same thing also happened in *RT*, where there are accusations made, especially towards Russia for instance, and presenting the way that others are disapproving of their behavior. One article states, for example, "'What's happening is really grotesque and it is contrary to everything President Putin and Russia said they would do,' US Secretary of State John Kerry said on NBC television" (RT, 2014e). In the case of *RT*, however, by highlighting these accusations being made against Russia, they only highlight what is being said by others to then report on those accusations that are made against Russia are not true. For example, after the quote shown above, it is then mentioned in the article:

Western mass media, so sure of the Kremlin's hand in whatever bad things happen in Ukraine, has lately switched from calling anti-government forces in the east of the country pro-Russian to plainly Russian separatists (RT, 2014e).

This thus shows the way that *RT* highlights the accusations that are being made against Russia, in order to use it against the individual or country who made the comment and to provide further explanation afterwards.

The second most observed code in the articles was *disagreement between parties*. This code was significantly present in the analyzed articles of *RT*, with 11 out of 20 articles including this way of framing. The articles of *NOS* included this code somewhat less, with 5 out of 21 articles, however this is not much of a difference with the most observed code *reproach*. This disagreement between parties was therefore much more present in the articles of *RT* than those of *NOS*. The way that a disagreement between parties was noticed and presented, was mainly either through the way that the different countries disagreed with each other about the conflict and fighting that was happening around the crash site or some parties announce that something another party has set up was denied. For example, in an article by *RT* a comment was made about the way that the fighting should cease in

order for the investigation to be able to be conducted, however this was then denied by the other party. The comment was:

The UNSC demanded that Kiev set up a no-fighting zone in the area of the MH17 crash site, in accordance with its resolution of July 21. Instead, Kiev beefed up its military forces in the region, starting an offensive in the area of the crash (RT, 2014n).

A disagreement is therefore highlighted, in the way that one party demands an action and the other party does not comply. Another example is the blocking of a certain resolution, stating ““However, [Russia’s proposal] was unceremoniously blocked by some members of the Security Council, clearly not interested in strict compliance with resolution 2166,” Churkin explained” (RT, 2014o).

Table 5. Overview of frequency in *conflict* frame.

Conflict	NOS		RT	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Disagreement between parties	5/21	23,81 %	11/20	55,00 %
Reproach	6/21	28,57 %	14/20	70,00 %
Two sides or more	3/21	14,28 %	6/20	30,00 %

Similarly, *NOS* also included such mentions about the conflict happening around the crash site as a way to show disagreement between different parties. In addition, *NOS* also presents in one article a disagreement between Russia and Ukraine, where they point the finger to each other as to who is the one responsible and therefore disagree with each other. The article states:

There are quite a few conspiracy theories about the crash. Russia and Ukraine play a role in many of those stories. But in both countries the accusations about who is guilty also go back and forth (NOS Nieuws, 2014b).

Here, the disagreement about who is responsible therefore at the same time also presents a different frame about not being sure who is responsible, but attributing a responsibility to someone just by naming some parties.

What should be noted from the table is the way that the conflict frame is used more often in the articles of *RT*. This difference in frequency is quite large, with the most dominant code *reproach* used in 28,57 % of the articles for *NOS*, and the code being used in 70,00% of the articles analyzed for *RT*.

4.4. Morality

Within the “morality” frame, there is an immediate clear indication that the frame is not frequently used by either *NOS* or *RT*. For the few articles that used it, the dominant code is *social prescriptions about how to behave* for *NOS* and one of the most dominant codes for *RT*. For *NOS* this code was used in 3 out of 21 articles and for *RT* it was used in 2 out of 20 articles. There are some similarities in its use across the two outlets. For *NOS*, a certain preferred behavior is brought across by showing and highlighting what the Dutch people and companies are doing after the crash. The choice of words and by showing what they are doing, there are certain social prescriptions brought across as that kind of behavior is what is expected and preferred after such a disaster. For example, one quote shows the way that the Dutch have a certain kind of moral obligation to behave a certain kind of way, stating “This is a moral obligation for The Netherlands to the victims and our duty to international law. My country will not rest until there is justice” (NOS Nieuws, 2014a). In addition, companies are also shown as displaying behavior that is preferred and also quite logical after learning about the tragedy. For example, it is stated “Dutch organizations and companies are taking measures after the news that at least 154 Dutch people have died in the aircraft disaster in Ukraine” (NOS Nieuws, 2014d).

With *NOS* thus portraying what the Dutch people and companies are doing, and what can be seen as good behavior or preferred behavior after such a disaster, *RT* also

displays the way that Russia is showing good behavior and what is preferred. Here, they state for example:

Malaysia said on Saturday that Russia was trying its best to ensure unhindered access to the site of the crash. “They are trying their level best to assist Malaysia to ensure we have a safe site,” Najib told reporters (RT, 2014b).

Highlighting the way that Russia is performing in the way that is beneficial for everyone, especially after the disaster and the situation around the crash. The story then gives a sense of social prescriptions about how Russia needs to behave and that they are doing their best to uphold this.

Table 6. Overview of frequency in *morality* frame.

Morality	NOS		RT	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Moral message	2/21	9,52 %	1/20	5,00 %
Reference to morality/God	1/21	4,76 %	2/20	10,00 %
Social prescriptions about how to behave	3/21	14,28 %	2/20	10,00 %

The code *reference to morality/God* was also used in 2 out of 20 articles for *RT*. This reference comes forward in two different ways, one in which there is a description about someone that is at the crash site and is stated as performing a certain gesture that is associated with religion; “After that he took of his cap and marked himself with a sign of the cross paying the tribute to the memory of the victims of the catastrophe” (RT, 2014d). In addition, a reference to morality is made as well by stating this:

Tyler also referred to the issue of states keeping airspace open to maintain a revenue stream of air navigation fees, saying that he was sure “no country, no civilized person, would put a few dollars ahead of the value of human lives (RT, 2014).

By mentioning the value of human lives and the way that people would act in such a situation, shows a reference to a sense of proper actions or intentions among every person.

The next chapter will put these results further in the context of the existing literature and give suggestions for future research approaches. In addition, the research question and sub questions will be answered concretely.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This thesis examined the ways in which *NOS* and *RT* framed the MH17 crash in the immediate aftermath in their news articles. A few similarities and differences were found in the framing of the crash between *NOS* and *RT*, which will be provided and further discussed in relation to the existing literature in the following sections.

From the results there are some clear differences in the framing of responsibility. *NOS* made sure to not assign blame to anyone specific in the articles, but tried to keep the responsibility a question that needs to be answered, however the answer is not yet there so there were not many articles where specific blame was given to anyone. *RT* differed in this respect, by assigning a clear blame of the crash on the Ukrainian government in many articles, while also highlighting the way that other countries are quick to assign Russia as the one to blame and taking this opportunity to debunk those allegations against Russia.

Assigning blame to someone or something is an occurrence that happens often and fast in the case of a disaster, especially by the victims or people affected. This can also be driven by the media, with them framing the story in such a way that puts the blame on someone (Ewart & McLean, 2014). Especially in cases where it is clear that the disaster was not an accident, people try to find certain scapegoats and puts the blame on whoever caused this (Ewart & McLean, 2014). This is where the *NOS* differs in their way of framing, as they leave the question of who or what is to blame open in many articles. This thus shows that in some cases the news media tries to present and frame the events in such a way as to not incite any rumors or speculation. However, it is important to also reflect on the way that in the direct aftermath of the disaster it was not yet clear what had happened, so initially the reporting was just about trying to find out what caused the crash to happen and whether this was an accident or not.

The reporting and framing of the crash by *RT* show a clear bias towards presenting news in a way that highlights the side of Russia's actions, mainly in a positive way. As is shown by Iyengar and Simon (1993), the framing of events in a certain way can have a significant influence on public opinion. The framing of the crash by *RT* therefore clearly portrays the way they want their audience to feel about what is happening. Partly, a type of content bias can be observed here, defined as mainly showing one side of the conflict instead of covering both sides equally (Entman, 2007), with *RT* mainly portraying and

covering the conflict in a manner that highlights the way that Russia is not to blame. Here, a clear line of reasoning can thus be observed with *RT* being focused on the Russian side of the conflict. While the way that content bias is portrayed in the framing of the MH17 crash by *RT* can be seen in quite a similar way as Entman (2007) explained it, *RT* also showed a difference in the way of reporting the crash. *RT* still stated what the other party, for example Ukraine, was doing and therefore showed the other side of the conflict in several cases as well. This side is, however, mainly shown as a way to blame Ukraine for the crash or the fighting in the area, and thus the notion of a content bias is further manifested by putting the blame on someone else while still maintaining this notion of Russia's innocence and thus covering one main side of the conflict, Russia's side.

This type of bias and way of reporting is further also in line with patriotic journalism, explained as wanting to create a justification for and understanding of the conflict from your own nation or 'side' (Ginosar & Cohen, 2019). A justification or understanding of certain actions is created by *RT* due to their reporting of what others are blaming them for. They create a justification in the way that they report on the allegations that are being made against Russia and why these alleged actions are not true or based on no factual information. This thus deviates slightly from the definition given by Ginosar and Cohen (2019), however it is still a clear bias that comes forward from the framing of the crash by *RT*.

These ways in which the biases are portrayed in the coverage of the disaster/conflict in a similar but also slightly different way than the existing literature showed, indicates that certain things can be seen from a different perspective but still gives the same outcome, which is in this case the content bias and patriotic journalism that is present.

Such framing and the patriotic bias that arises from this can have significant influences on its audience and further implications, especially due to the international focus of the news outlet. Assigning blame to someone immediately after a disaster, such as the crash of MH17, can have serious implications at the international level, especially a disaster that should be handled carefully (also by the press) due to the innocent lives lost.

While this study clearly portrays the bias, and especially the patriotic bias, that is present in the framing of the articles by *RT*, there is a limitation in the number of articles analyzed. Future research could benefit from a more extensive analysis into this type of

bias, also including opinion pieces from both the outlets. This could then create a deeper understanding of the biases present, and further analyze this also for the *NOS*.

Furthermore, what also clearly arose from the results was the way that the people affected by the crash were referred to in the articles. There were two main ways that in which this was present, victims and relatives of the victims, but also the people further affected by the crash, the locals. While one might expect this type of framing, where the crash is framed in such a way that human experiences are evident and further emotional angles are added, to be quite evident in the reporting of such a disaster, the results show a different approach. For both *NOS* and *RT*, the referral to portraying the crash in the sense of showing victims or their names and further covering the way that people are affected by such a crash was lacking in relation to the way that other types of framing was present.

This differs from the main observation from previous research that disaster reporting highlights the people affected by the disaster, as well as the victims, and “instead of objective transmission of information, disaster coverage gives voice, counsel and comfort to the victim” (Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007, p. 3). Emotion within the reporting of disasters, especially man-made, is used in many of this type of coverage. Emotion was present in the reporting of MH17 in a few articles of both *RT* and *NOS* as well, with a focus on the discourse of horror, as was identified by Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007). This portrays the horror of the disaster, by discussing the way that people are affected by it. This is thus quite similar to the reporting by both the outlets, however what is notable is that this type of reporting was not used often. It should be mentioned then that the there are similarities with regards to the content of the discourse of horror but this way of framing the issue is lacking in both the news outlets. The disaster of the MH17 was therefore, in the immediate aftermath, not portrayed in such a way that emotion, or at least horror reporting, was extensively present.

As mentioned before in chapter two, placing emotion in journalistic practices has been shown as a practice that happens more often in disaster reporting. The use of this in news coverage has the ability to motivate people more to become involved in politics (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). With the emotional angle not being too present for both the outlets, this then creates the question of whether people were not motivated to act or become more involved in the political process when the MH17 disaster happened. This can have implications in the way of how people might respond to certain disasters, and

therefore shows the possibility of people not being interested in the disaster that happened and not wanting to act to help in, for example, also other types of disasters.

The way that this type of reporting was lacking for both *NOS* and *RT*, this might make one wonder about the portrayal of the people affected and whether this type of reporting and framing in the news stories is starting to disappear or might just not be present much in state-owned news outlets. Future research could therefore focus on whether this emotional and human angle was missing in the reporting of the disaster of MH17 a few years after the crash as well, in addition to also analyzing other types of news media, such as tabloid news media. This could give more insight into whether the inclusion of emotional and human angles in news stories is not desired only for state-owned news outlets or whether there is a clearer trend towards less emotional coverage with regards to a disaster that turned into an international conflict.

Additionally, another trend can be clearly identified from the results in the way that anger and disapproval was displayed about certain actions that were undertaken but also anger towards the actions that were delayed and were not undertaken quicker. Anger was displayed at the way that investigations were delayed and that there did not seem to be much enthusiasm among the investigators to start the investigation as well. This makes one wonder about if this kind of framing and displaying anger at the situation was done as a way to further place the international conflict that resulted from the disaster at the center of attention, instead of the disaster itself. What can be observed, however, is that a different kind of emotion can be discovered from the coverage than was previously discussed. Here, emotions arise in the manner that bring forward a discourse of anger. Anger is often displayed because it has the ability to “[...] be a powerful motivation for dissent and opposition [...]” (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007, p. 18). This can therefore serve as a way to fuel opposition, especially when there is a clear individual to blame.

Anger is often displayed in news coverage of man-made disasters, where anger can be shown by different kinds of individuals or groups of people (Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). The question of who the anger is directed towards also influences the display of anger in the reporting, however, in a general sense, anger is often directed at someone or something specific. The anger that is present in the coverage of MH17 is often also directed at someone, for example anger was shown towards Kiev in relation to the fighting that continued in the area. While there was not yet a clear individual or group of people who

were responsible for the crash, the news media found other ways to display this type of anger towards someone, not directly displaying anger towards the individual responsible for causing MH17 to crash. In the case of *RT*, and to a lesser extent *NOS*, this was specifically done through a biased reporting where anger is displayed by certain officials towards other parties, especially Kiev being the one responsible for the continued fighting in the area which caused investigations to be delayed.

Bringing across this type of anger in the news media was observed in the reporting of MH17, but is also still happening on a large scale today. Belarus just recently was able to force a plane to land in order to get a journalist that was on the plane in custody, and the media again stressed the way that there is anger present, for both officials and individuals also threatening and further implementing sanctions against Belarus (NOS Nieuws, 2021).

These recent developments, also including the recent developments of the MH17 case, brings to light a limitation of this thesis where only the direct aftermath was considered and analyzed. Future research could therefore benefit from further analyzing these recent societal developments and making a comparison between the two. This gives further insight into the framing of these events and whether there are changes in the way that certain international crises are covered or framed, also in regards to the use of anger in journalistic reporting.

Finally, the results clearly show that both the *NOS* and *RT* frame the crash of the MH17 in such a way that brings forward the way in which both countries are displaying correct behavior, and doing what is right after the crash. This is mainly done through showing empathy by providing what is being done by others in the country in remembrance of the victims. With a disaster such as the crash of the MH17, news media specifically highlights the way that the country the news outlet is based in is reacting to such a disaster. With this, a portrayal of good behavior is brought forward.

Here, a clear bias comes forward with regards to how both the outlets proceed to highlight their own countries' officials' statements, as well as providing the means by which the national country is dealing with such a disaster. While Wien (2005) indicated that journalists strive for objectivity in their reporting, there is quite a blurred perspective on this objectivity when it comes to both *NOS* and *RT* in their coverage of the crash of MH17 in the immediate aftermath. What can be noticed is the way that for both the outlets there is some bias present in the way that the coverage highlights the national country more than

the other's involved. While there are also indications where both outlets try to balance the coverage of the MH17, their way of specifically addressing the national interests or actions, shows in some occasions a bias. This can also be seen with the way that this type of bias was already shown in a previous section, where *RT* in several articles refer how Russia is doing its best to help and that Russia is not responsible. This therefore gives a bit of a blurred perspective, where in some occasions there are cases of trying to give a balanced portrayal of the conflict and crash, especially for *NOS*, while in some articles there are still traces of bias that is present in the way of national interests that are on the forefront. What can be concluded, however, is the significant difference between the two outlets in which this kind of bias is present, as for *NOS* this is less present than for *RT*.

These findings are further also consistent with patriotic journalism, as the national interests of the journalist can have a significant influence on the way that the journalists decide to report on events or issues (Ravi, 2005). With this focus on showing empathy from the country a journalist is based in, the news media reinforces a certain kind of patriotic journalism, for both *NOS* and *RT*. This type of patriotic journalism differs with the one that was highlighted before, as that was to mainly present justifications for certain actions that Russia was taking, specifically covered by *RT*. The type of patriotic journalism presented here is to bring across some sort of solidarity with the victims and thus show how each country is doing their best to display this.

The way that both *NOS* and *RT* as state-owned media outlets are involved in presenting news that is catered towards the national interests of the journalist or news outlet, creates certain implications for the manner in which these biases are then developed in these and other news articles, especially for state-owned news outlets.

Due to the fact that this thesis only focused on an in-depth qualitative content analysis, this resulted in a limitation regarding the thought process of journalists themselves as they wrote certain news articles. Future research could therefore focus on further establishing this patriotic journalistic coverage by also performing some in-depth interviews with the journalists regarding their news articles and discovering what their motivations are or whether this type of bias is one that is left unnoticed by many.

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Appendix A

Codebook

ATLAS.ti Report

Thesis research

Codes

Report created by Dionne van Wijnen on 2 Jun 2021

- **(Scientific) analysis**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 04/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Facts

- **Adjectives/personal vignettes**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Human interest

- **Degree of expense**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Economic

- **Descriptions**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Facts

- **Disagreement between parties**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Conflict

- **Discussions**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Facts

- **Economic consequences**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Economic

- **Explanations**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Facts

- **Financial losses or gains**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Economic

○ **Governmental ability to alleviate problem**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Attribution of responsibility

○ **Governmental responsibility**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Attribution of responsibility

Comment:

this also includes entire countries (as one government)

○ **Human face**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Human interest

○ **Individual or group of people responsible**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Attribution of responsibility

○ **Individuals and groups affected**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Human interest

○ **Moral message**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Morality

○ **Not clear who is responsible**

Created: 02/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 02/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Attribution of responsibility

○ **Private or personal lives of actors**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Human interest

○ **Reference to morality/God**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Morality

○ **Reproach**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Conflict

○ **Seeking causation**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Attribution of responsibility

○ **Social prescriptions**

Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Morality

○ **Two sides or more**

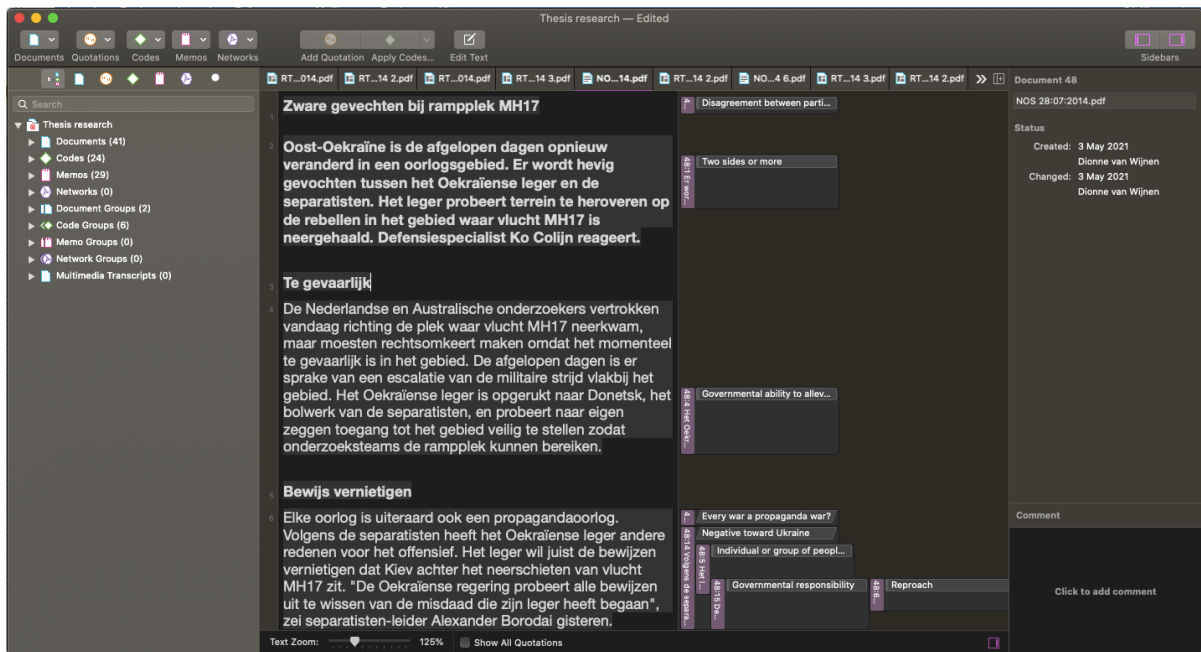
Created: 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 30/04/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Groups:

◇ Conflict

Appendix B

A screenshot of the deductive coding process of an article from *NOS*.



Appendix C

Fragment of quotation output

- **Reproach**

44 Quotations:

☰ 24:6 p 2 in RT 20:07:2014.pdf

Content:

OSCE observers at the scene complained about over vigilant self-defense fighters at the scene, but admitted they were providing some security.

☰ 24:8 p 3 in RT 20:07:2014.pdf

Content:

The leadership of the self-proclaimed republic has, according to Boroday, been irritated by the international experts not coming to the plane crash scene sooner.

☰ 24:10 p 3 in RT 20:07:2014.pdf

Content:

“We are interested in the most comprehensive and objective investigation,” the PM said. “But we don't feel like there is enthusiasm among the international community and experts. Several dozen experts are currently in Kiev. Can they please come here faster? We are surprised and frankly angered that we have to keep the area untouched while we are waiting for them for so long”.

☰ 24:21 p 7 in RT 20:07:2014.pdf

Content:

The international community has been expressing concerns over the crash site's integrity, with Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans, during a Meeting with Ukrainian president on Saturday, expressing his “shock” over reports of mishandling of the victims' bodies and “the site not being treated properly.”

☰ 25:8 p 4 in RT 21:07:2014.pdf

Content:

“I can say with confidence that if military operations were not resumed on June 28 in eastern Ukraine, this tragedy wouldn't have happened.

☰ 27:1 p 1 in RT 29:07:2014.pdf

Content:

Dutch PM tells Ukraine to stop fighting near MH17 crash site

☰ 27:3 p 2 in RT 29:07:2014.pdf

Content:

Rutte expressed his concern about the fact it appeared the investigators may today yet again not reach the site.”

Appendix D

Sampling units overview

ATLAS.ti Report Thesis research

Documents

Report created by Dionne van Wijnen on 2 Jun 2021

23 RT 26:07:2014 2.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

24 RT 20:07:2014.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

25 RT 21:07:2014.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

26 RT 21:07:2014 2.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

27 RT 29:07:2014.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

28 RT 29:07:2014 2.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

29 RT 21:07:2014 3.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

30 RT 20:07:2014 3.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

31 RT 20:07:2014 2.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

32 RT 31:07:2014.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

33 RT 29:07:2014 3.pdf

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **34 RT 22:07:2014.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **35 RT 22:07:2014 2.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **36 RT 28:07:2014.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **37 RT 28:07:2014 2.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:

 RT

 **38 RT 31:07:2014 2.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **39 RT 26:07:2014.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **40 RT 25:07:2014 2.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **41 RT 25:07:2014.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **42 RT 24:07:2014.pdf**

PDF Document

Groups:


 RT

 **43 NOS 18:07:2014 6.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:

 NOS

 **44 NOS 25:07:2014 2.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **45 NOS 30:07:2014 2.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **46 NOS 31:07:2014 2.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **47 NOS 29:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **48 NOS 28:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **49 NOS 31:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **50 NOS 26:07:2014 2.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:

 NOS

 **51 NOS 23:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **52 NOS 30:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **53 NOS 26:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:

 NOS

 **54 NOS 21:07:2014 2.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **55 NOS 18:07:2014 5.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **56 NOS 22:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **57 NOS 19:07:2014 2.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **58 NOS 18:07:2014 2.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **59 NOS 18:07:2014 3.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **60 NOS 18:07:2014 4.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **62 NOS 25:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:


 NOS

 **63 NOS 18:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:

 NOS

 **64 NOS 21:07:2014.pdf**

Text Document

Groups:

 NOS

Appendix E

Fragment of Memo output

ATLAS.ti Report

Thesis research

Memos

Report created by Dionne van Wijnen on 2 Jun 2021

 **anti-Kiev forces**

Created: 05/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 05/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Content:

In RT referred to as anti-Kiev forces
In NOS referred to as pro-russian separatists

 **Article about saving face for Russia**

Created: 06/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 06/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Content:

entire article about refuting all the “evidence” that was pointed out or put out there by other countries against Russia
and also putting the blame on someone else, mainly ukraine

 **community building element**

Created: 10/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 10/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Content:

community building element

 **costs of war**

Created: 06/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen, **Modified:** 06/05/2021 by Dionne van Wijnen

Content:

In the article discussing MH17, ends with a discussion into the war between ukraine and russia and how people have been affected by this (also including costs)