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The Storm After The Storm: A Comparative Framing Analysis of Governmental and News Reporting On Hurricane Katrina

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THE STORM AFTER THE STORM: A COMPARATIVE FRAMING ANALYSIS OF
GOVERNMENTAL AND NEWS REPORTING ON HURRICANE KATRINA

A Thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Communication Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

Hurricane Katrina is widely regarded as the greatest natural disaster to ever befall the United States. Following the storm's devastation of the Gulf Coast region, a media firestorm unleashed, seeking to ascribe responsibility to governmental actors for the "failed" response effort. Through a comparative framing analysis, this study sought to investigate how major news outlets, the White House, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency framed the response efforts that followed Hurricane Katrina.

Chapter One: Introduction

On Thursday, August 25, 2005 Hurricane Katrina made landfall as a Category Five hurricane. Hurricane Katrina was labeled the greatest natural disaster to ever hit the United States, leaving in its wake incalculable loss. Shortly after the storm passed, news stories broke. In the months following, major newspapers broke hundreds of articles recounting the utter devastation created by the storm, and the inadequacies of a federal government to prepare and respond to Katrina.

In 1963, Bernard Cohen made an insightful observation when he stated, “[the press] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Although the issue is still up for debate, some scholars believe that reporters and editors frame stories in a way that focuses on or reflect their personal feelings (Kuypers, 2009). This study seeks to compare the frames presented by the media, and compare those to the original reports provided by the White House Press Secretary and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

To understand framing analysis, one must first understand what a frame is. Jim Kuypers (2010), political communication scholar and framing researcher defined framing as, “a process whereby communicators, consciously or unconsciously, act to construct a point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be interpreted by others in a particular manner.” In essence, a frame is the central or underlying theme under which the facts or details are organized. The process of framing a particular event requires the

construction of a particular viewpoint, emphasizing certain facts to produce a specific interpretation of that event.

Framing analysis can be likened to the framing of a picture. When you frame a picture, you have to select a frame that best suits the image. The frame may enhance certain visual elements such as color, texture, or image within the photograph. If you were to reframe the photograph, other elements or colors might become more apparent to the viewer. Just as the frame changes the way a picture is viewed, the frame in which we place events or ideas will have the same effect. Frames force us to filter our perceptions in a very particular way, either enhancing or taking away from certain elements, ultimately appealing to the framer's view of the situation. As an acting definition, framing is the process whereby communicators, consciously or subconsciously, construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a particular situation to be viewed, emphasizing certain facts while deemphasizing others.

Framing analysis is a derivative of agenda- setting theory first postulated by McCombs and Reynolds in 1972. The central thesis of the theory hinges upon the argument that the “[media has the] ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda.” In short, the more salient an issue is, the more important the viewing audience will regard the issue to be. Mass media outlets have demonstrated this concept through the coverage of election campaigns, murder trials, and international conflict. While these major events are inherently important, the focus and attention given to those issues only serves to enhance the importance of the elements of the specific issues for the consumer. Given the written account and detailed descriptions provided by governmental agencies

and the media, employing a comparative framing analysis as the research method for this study should provide particularly fruitful results.

Based on the theory of agenda setting, a study done in the early 1970s found that, when asked, voters tend to share a commonality with what the media establishes as important. As agenda setting theory establishes what we, as readers should think about, agenda extension suggests how we should think about the issue at hand (Kuypers, 2009). As a method of approaching agenda extension, reporters not only establish what is being talked about, but also directly influence how we think about them in a value-laden sense of the word. One method by which this influence is channeled is through framing. This is accomplished through the process of pulling specific characteristics of an event and assembling a narrative that promotes a specific interpretation.

When put in the context of news reporting, the demonstration of the process becomes clear. Rarely do news reports contain every detail of an event. If reporting every detail became the norm, the news would not be digestible. Instead, news reports collect the data necessary to relay the general details of a particular event to the audience. The process by which the author filters certain details out, includes others, or highlights specific details more than others demonstrates the construction of a frame. At times, personal or institutional biases influence the decision as to what to include, exclude, or highlight in a given story.

This practice is equally true of governmental reporting. Although it cannot be empirically proven, much of the data collected in this study would suggest that the biases in governmental agencies are institutional, rather than individual. Governmental reporting

tends to simply provide basic facts, the detail to which the facts are given and the degree to which certain facts are highlighted demonstrate how government reports frame events.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Studying the messages describing the response to Hurricane Katrina, and the effects the messages had, has grown in prominence through the literature base. The role that the media played in constructing public knowledge and understanding of the recovery efforts has been a focal area of research, and within research, a pivotal point of contention for many scholars.

In 2007, Fahmy, Kelly, and Kim performed a comparative visual analysis of news wires and U.S. newspapers. Specifically, the authors looked to what images were selected by newspapers compared to what was made available by newswires. The study found that front-page photographs differed greatly between newspapers and newswires. The images in newspapers tended to focus more on the victims, specifically non-white victims, rather than photographs that encompassed the entirety of the storm. The authors ultimately came to the conclusion that by employing visual frames that reflect specific controversial issues, news outlets ultimately fail their responsibility of serving as the gatekeeper (Lewin, 1943) to information dissemination. The results of their study suggest that the role media outlets play in shaping public understanding and interpretation of events is indisputable. The decision to select one photograph over another is indicative that media bias is present within the selection process.

In 2005, Kuypers and Cooper performed a comparative framing analysis of the 2003 Iraq War. Looking at the stories from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the researchers analyzed stories from behind-the-line reporters as compared to stories published by embedded journalists. The results of the study found contradictory frames

on a given event, even within the same news source on multiple occasions. Although this study does not specifically look at framing as it pertains to a natural disaster, it does provide an excellent framework for comparing two competing frames.

Despite the popularity of research in the field of mass communication and a growing trend within framing analysis, little work has been done in the field of comparative framing analysis. From its beginnings as a formal research method in the late 1980's, framing analysis appears to be an up and coming trend in the field of qualitative mass communication research (D'Angelo & Kuyper, 2010).

Cole & Kelli (2008) looked at risk communication through the case study of Hurricane Katrina. As a principle of risk communication analysis, Cole and Kelli suggest that a lack of cohesive networks poses a significant threat to the credibility of governmental reporting. The study concluded that "message preparation before the crisis is essential, and to be effective, messages must be credible to their recipient and audience" (Cole & Kelli, 2008). We can draw several concepts from the findings of this study. First, the lack of message preparation prior to Katrina's landfall in New Orleans can explain why the media's framing of the event was preferred over governmental reports. Additionally, the acknowledged failures of the emergency communication equipment during the initial response may point to decreased credibility of government reports.

In 2011, Johnson, Dolan, and Sonnett preformed a quantitative content analysis looking at racial reporting in national television coverage after Hurricane Katrina. Given the dense population of African Americans living within New Orleans during Katrina, the authors sought to establish statistical support for claims that news broadcasts propagated

racial ideologies. The results of the study concluded an overwhelming presence of whites filling speaking roles in news reports, despite the presence of a strong African Americans population. The results suggest this was especially true in the hardest hit areas of New Orleans. Additionally, the results of the study concluded that reports of African American looters were especially critical without giving an opportunity for explanation for the behavior. The results of the study suggest that the media is an incredibly powerful tool in shaping public sentiment. Additionally, their ability to shape images along racial lines must be acknowledged.

Building on the concept of public influence, Lundy and Broussard (2007) looked at the role of public relations in shaping perception of a crisis event. Through a qualitative approach, the authors interviewed fourteen public relations practitioners through purposive sampling techniques. The results found, as a matter of practice, that news organizations were the main conduit through which organizations communicated with the public, including evacuees, citizens, and local constituents. Additionally, public relations firms indicated that planning a response for Katrina was not particularly useful, given the severity and magnitude of the storm. This research appears to contradict the findings of Cole and Kelli, with regards to the construction of messages prior to the crisis. Lundy and Broussard assert that the uniqueness of Katrina would render most preliminary work useless.

In 2006, Durham performed a critical analysis of how the Bush administration attempted to report the storm compared to those of mass media outlets. Durham argued that the Bush administration sought to displace media reports by distributing news releases through Public Broadcast System and National Public Radio. Through displacing

traditional news stories, specifically those critical of the Bush administration's response, Durham asserts the Bush administration sought to unhinge professional journalism as a legitimate reporting mechanism. This critical approach to analyzing political influence on news reporting suggests two issues. The first, that both agents have the ability to influence and manipulate public understanding of an event. Secondly, that both agents compete for the control or interpretation of a specific event.

Although both agents compete for dominant influence over public perception, Miller and Goidel in 2009 contend that news organizations are uniquely poised to both gather and transmit information, especially during a natural disaster. The case study of Katrina, as analyzed by Miller and Goidel, pointed to both the importance of news organizations in reporting on disasters as well as the limitations imposed on these reports by institutional biases. The researchers contend that news organizations may distort reality, perpetuate misinformation, and advance stereotypical analysis while under institutional scrutiny. Ultimately, their research suggests that news organizations are invaluable in reporting on events, and developments that transpire, but are limited in their ability to gather rich information on the issues of causality and consequence. The conclusions drawn by Miller and Goidel posit future consideration, especially given the consequential nature of reporting surrounding the response effort. They also provide insight in understanding the strengths and limitations imposed by institutional norms on how news outlets construct understanding, and ultimately build frames for understanding the nature of crisis events.

As previously stated, news outlets are ideally poised to report on and provide details on the development of a particular event (Miller & Goidel, 2009). Sifting through

the information and establishing what is important is a key function of the press. Agenda setting is the means by which news outlets sift through the details of events and make certain characteristics more salient than others. Barnes et al. (2008) looked at media agenda setting during Katrina by reviewing local, state, and national newspaper stories. Specifically, the authors used *Times Picayune*, the *Advocate*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*. Through a content analysis, Barnes et al. examined thematic changes as disaster response evolved over the year following the storm. The results of the study concluded that response systems were either not in place or were not prepared to deal with a storm of such magnitude. The perception, whether real or not, that disaster response systems were not in place to deal with such an event became a central theme in reporting on Katrina, and functions as the focal characteristic of agenda setting employed during the storm.

Although agenda setting focuses on establishing what we as readers should think about, agenda extension expounds on the concept by suggesting not only what we should think about, but also how to think about it. In 2006, Sommers et. al analyzed three aspects of media depictions of hurricane Katrina. Looking at the relationship between race and crisis reporting, the authors perform a critical analysis of the language used to report on particular issues. The results of the study found that even word choice affected the meaning of the message conveyed. Using terminology such as “refugee,” “evacuees,” “survivors,” or “victims” all carried different connotations. In each instance the word selected carries with it a unique interpretation of a story (Sommers, Apfelbaum, Dukes, Toosi, & Wang, 2006).

Of a similar vein of interest, Voorhees, Vick, and Perkins (2007) studied the portrayal of minority groups in the media in the wake of Katrina. Through content analysis, the researchers analyzed the nature of minority representation in news broadcasts. The results found that the majority of reporting framed ethnic minorities almost exclusively as the victim. This construction of minorities as victims served to illustrate the role that media takes in shaping the understanding of an event; regardless of how accurate that understanding is compared to reality. In many ways the effect these interpretations have on public perception of an event serve as contributing variables that go into frame construction.

While racial roles influence the way the media constructs frames, they are not the only point of contention between news story construction and reality. In 2007, Littlefield and Quenette looked at the portrayal of authority by media outlets during Katrina. Using a Burkean analysis, the researchers sought to understand how the media characterized the response effort to Katrina by legitimate authorities. Drawing from news articles out of national and local papers, the results found a clustering of results around the military, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the President, and federal/state governments. Littlefield and Quenette found the news media stepped outside the role of an objective observer and pointed blame towards those within positions of authority. From this perspective, the media created an evaluative view of reality. The construction of these perspectives, according to the authors, had the ability to influence how authorities frame their crisis responses.

Just as agenda extension tells us how to think about a particular event, framing analysis looks at how the collection of individual interpretations and agendas come

together to create an overarching theme which subsumes the events. Cho and Gower (2006) studied the effects of human interest as a frame on crisis news coverage. Through a factorial analysis, the researchers looked at how human interest frames and non-human interest frames compete, under the conditions of accidental and transgressional crises. While the results found that there was little difference in blame between accidental and transgressional crises, attribution of responsibility was more pronounced when a human-interest frame was present. From this analysis, we can assert that crisis response measures that fail to address human interests as a primary concern are more likely to be viewed in a critical light.

Although human interest is a focal crisis news frame, An and Gower (2009) found additional frames present within crisis reporting. Through a content analysis of crisis news in 2006, the authors found responsibility, conflict, morality, economic implications, and levels of responsibility to be prevalent frames. The results of the study found that news media outlets tend to assign specific blame to an individual or organization for a given crisis. This research, apart from expanding the horizons of framing analysis, points to the focal question of accountability for Hurricane Katrina. As noted by Cho and Gower (2006), even when a crisis is accidental, as was Hurricane Katrina, the assignment of responsibility is still present in the extension of media agendas.

In 2009, Dill and Wu looked directly at framing in regional and national newspapers. Through a content analysis, the authors established a distinct difference between the frames of local and frames of national newspapers. Dill and Wu chose to look at front-page articles from the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, and *Biloxi Sun Herald* for two weeks following the storm. The results of

the study confirmed local newspapers tended to make the destruction and devastation the central theme of their reporting, whereas national outlets appeared to cover devastation to a lesser extent, trumped by governmental and response criticisms. This research certainly sets up the groundwork for a framing analysis, looking at how major news outlets framed the events around Katrina, but does not specifically examine how frames compete as interpretations of events.

Chapter Three: Methods

A comparative framing analysis was conducted in this study. The study examined how both news media outlets and government agencies framed the events of and response efforts to Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, the study compared the frames present within sixty-five press briefings by the Office of the Press Secretary, 185 press releases from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and contrasted them to the frames presented in 312 printed newspaper articles. For the sake of thoroughness, the study focused on stories covered by *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today*. Appendix A has a cited list of all sources looked at in this study.

Articles were selected from the three major newspapers using the Lexis Nexis search engine. Boolean expressions were used for article identification including “hurricane” and “Katrina” in headlines and leads. Press releases and briefings were collected from the FEMA Press Release Archives and Office of the Press Secretary Archives, respectively. Articles and releases that made minimal references to the storm (eg. obituaries, letters to the editor, and news briefs) were excluded from the study.

There are several reasons why this research measure specifically focused on printed stories. First, printed media makes for greater transparency in the research method. With both electronic and hard copy versions available, anyone is able to access the data used to assess the warrants of the analysis of this study. Second, this minimized the interpretation of vocalic and nonverbal cues present within electronic media. Additionally, these papers are widely circulated and are considered papers of record. As they are widely circulated, the frames present within are more likely to be influential to a

greater number of readers. To understand the frames employed and to perform a comparison, the following research questions were posed:

RQ 1: How did the White House frame the recovery efforts to Hurricane Katrina?

RQ 2: How did FEMA frame the recovery efforts to Hurricane Katrina?

RQ 3 How did the press frame the recovery efforts to Hurricane Katrina?

RQ 4: Did the frames presented by FEMA, the White House, and the press coincide?

RQ 5: Did the frames presented by FEMA, the White House, and the press contradict?

To identify the frames the researcher read each article, briefing, and press release and established a thesis or organizing theme. After establishing the frame, each was compiled in a list, according to organization. Once all of the data was examined, the process was repeated to confirm the validity of the frames. From there, frames were documented and reported. Finally, frames were compared and contrasted to determine where correlations or contradictions existed.

Chapter Four: Results

White House Framing

President George W. Bush issued a number of statements and spoke at a number of public occasions regarding Hurricane Katrina, this study specifically looked at White House Press Briefings from Press Secretaries Scott McClellan and Tony Snow. The reasons for this are twofold: First, Presidential press briefings operated much like a question and answer period, allowing for pointed questions to be raised and responded to. Second, each of the newspapers addressed in this study had a representative at the White House briefings. As such, stories published after a briefing may have been influenced by the contents of the briefing.

As an agency, the White House had a vested interest in framing the response efforts in a positive light. Despite numerous attempts by questioners to address outlying issues such as rumors, criticisms, and finger-pointing, the White House remained steadfast on reporting the successes and continued efforts to address the needs of those devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Through this study, two major frames were identified.

Keeping Focused

A prominent theme present throughout all reports produced by the White House was the importance placed on keeping the focus on response efforts. From the onset of the recovery, the White House self-described President Bush and his cabinet as “focused” on helping those affected by the storm rebuild and recover. For the first several weeks following the storm, excerpts such as the following were present in most briefings:

... the President chaired a Cabinet meeting. As you heard from the President, this was very much an action-focused meeting. The President called this meeting to make sure that we are on top of the immediate needs and that we are moving forward on plans to address the long-term response. The President wanted to make sure that we are identifying and working to solve problems -- and if things are not working as they should, that we are fixing them and making them work. People continue to work round-the-clock (Office of the Press Secretary, 2005, p. 1).

Prefacing each briefing with statements such as these constructed the idea that the Bush Administration and his cabinet were focusing a great deal of their efforts helping those in need. As floodwaters began to recede, news stories seeking to ascribe responsibility for “delayed” or “inadequate” response efforts became more prominent. As these stories grew in prominence, the issue of federal accountability became more and more prevalent in White House briefings.

Q: Thank you. Recently Fran Townsend, when she came up from that podium, and Michael Chertoff, when he testified before Congress, were highly critical of former FEMA Director Michael Brown, and specifically both said he went outside the established rules for a FEMA director during Katrina. Appearing on television last Sunday, Mr. Brown says that is absolutely not true, that both of them should know better; he followed the same procedure that every FEMA director does in an emergency. Does the White House have an opinion on this?

MR. McClellan: Well, I think that our view is that we need to continue focusing our efforts where they should be, which is on helping the people of the Gulf Coast recover and rebuild their communities. That's what the President is doing. That's why he visited the region just last week, and that's where we're going to keep our focus. We're going to continue working to make sure the federal government is doing everything we can to support the people along the Gulf Coast as they rebuild their lives and rebuild their communities (Office of the Press Secretary, 2006, p. 9).

Despite efforts to draw attention to question of accountability, the White House remained dedicated to “staying focused” on helping victims. Excerpts similar to the last were present within briefings throughout September, October, and November 2005. The

reiteration of the term “focus” brings into light what the overarching frame was that the White House projected:

... right now we remain focused on the most immediate priorities, and that is continuing to help those who are in need and continuing to make sure they're getting the assistance they need and continuing to solve the ongoing problems. There are people working round-the-clock. There is a lot of progress that has been made, but there are ongoing challenges and ongoing problems. The President is not satisfied, and we've got to remain focused on the task at hand. But he made it clear that he wants to know what happened and how the response went and what the facts are. And we will do that at the appropriate time (Office of the Press Secretary, 2005, p. 3).

The central idea which subsumes the other details is that the federal government is doing everything within its power to address the needs of the victims, and we are seeing results.

Lessons Learned

Toward the end of the year and the onset of the 2006 hurricane season, questions began to arise regarding federal preparation for the “next storm.” As part of addressing those concerns, the White House acknowledged some shortcomings to the Katrina response efforts:

Our communications system was broken. It was broken between the local community and the state. It was broken between the state and the federal government, and quite frankly, broken inside the federal government itself. We did not have a good system in place to share information. We didn't have a good system in place to share communication with each other, to understand what each different department was doing from one side of FEMA to the other, from inside of DHS; we didn't have a system in place (Office of the Press Secretary, 2006, p. 4).

This message resonated through the last few months of the study.

Acknowledgment of responsibility for failed communication systems was a prevalent concern in most press briefings, but never actually appeared as a matter of criticism

within news reports. At the same token, most of the reports which followed from this acknowledged the communication disconnect, but expounded on the issue further. As the Director of FEMA stated in a press briefing:

First thing I did was to step back and look at what didn't work in Katrina, what things went wrong, what things worked okay but we could have done a lot better. And there were several significant things that I saw, based on my experience of handling disasters, what I saw simply didn't work.

The first and foremost was communications. There was a major breakdown in communications between the local government and the state government, a breakdown between the state government and the federal government, and then, quite frankly, a breakdown of communication inside the federal government itself between agencies. If you're going to run an operation, that type of communication system simply will not work.

So we went back and looked at how we're going to put this together. We based it primarily on the National Response Plan -- we're going to focus on having a unified command system. And that will go through our joint field office that you guys are familiar with. And everybody has bought into it. We've had exercises at the Assistant Secretary level, the Deputy Secretary, and even with the Secretaries in the White House. And everyone understands that have to be on the same page. As we do our 12R planning blocks, we all have to be there together doing it, sharing information and making sure that we're all -- have the same information and are responding in the same way (Office of the Press Secretary, 2006, p. 1).

Ideas similar to these were prevalent throughout White House reports toward the end of this study. From these briefings we can extrapolate two major frames. The first, that the Bush administration framed the response efforts in terms of dedication towards the response effort. Beyond the focus put on the response efforts, the frame suggests the administration sought to demonstrate a dedicated and thorough approach to rebuilding after Katrina. Secondly, the shortcomings in the response efforts were lessons to be learned. Despite the effects that the breakdown in communications had on the response efforts, the White House constructed the issue in a way that demonstrated a responsive

government, building better response plans for the future.

FEMA Framing

In many respects, the White House and Federal Emergency Management Agency sought to frame the response effort in a similar manner. Given shared accountability for the successes and failures of the response efforts in the press, this should come as no surprise. The approach taken to frame the response as a success differed greatly between both organizations. Although the White House framed the response in terms of focused and long-term approach, FEMA constructed a similar frame of success through specific details of the approach.

A Holistic Approach

FEMA reports covered details of Disaster Medical Response teams deploying from all over the country, the number of shelters established, as well as assurance that thousands of trucks carrying food, water, and ice were either en route to or had arrived at targeted areas with these supplies. (FEMA, 2005) Beyond notification of federal fund allocation to the response, FEMA provided a series of notification of additional resources allocated to response efforts. These include:

- Legal aid with disaster related legal questions
- Subsidized debris removal from public property
- Extended unemployment benefits (initially 26 weeks, but later extended)

- Pet rescue
- Temporary housing
- Hotel subsidization for displaced victims
- Minor emergency home repairs
- Crisis Counseling
- Translation assistance for federal aid applicants (available in any language)
- Peace Corps volunteer allocation
- Community Relations Teams to assist victims with the application process
- SBA Loans
- Disaster Recovery Centers

Providing the specific details of what measures were taken to help the victims of Katrina, paired with the extensive list of types of aid available, shapes the central theme of the FEMA response, FEMA is responding with everything in the arsenal.

By the Numbers

Throughout the federal response to Hurricane Katrina, FEMA instituted the practice of publishing weekly details of the emergency, transitional, and reconstructive activities being carried out in the gulf. Published at least once weekly, these reports listed specific details including, but not limited to, the number of applications for aid received, the number of MRE's (meals-ready-to-eat) distributed, gallons of water handed out, and the current dollar figure of federal funds allocated to the response effort. At the onset of the storm, press releases such as the following were issued:

“The priority at this time is to meet the immediate life saving and life sustaining needs of victims in the impacted areas,” said Brown. “FEMA, along with other federal partners and state governments, is coordinating a massive mobilization of resources for urban search and rescue efforts, housing, food and medical care.”

Federal response activities include:

- As of early August 31, more than 54,000 people were in 317 shelters. FEMA is working with a multi-state housing task force to address expected continued sheltering and eventual housing needs. More than 82,000 meals have been served in the impacted areas.
- More than 1,700 trucks have been mobilized through federal, state and contract sources to supply ice, water and supplies. These supplies and equipment are being moved into the hardest hit areas as quickly as possible, especially water, ice, meals, medical supplies, and generators. It may, however, take several days for supplies and equipment to reach all victims because of damaged and closed roads and bridges.
- Eighteen of FEMA’s Urban Search and Rescue task forces and two Incident Support Teams are working in Louisiana and Mississippi Eight swift water teams from California are also deployed making a total of 1,200 people conducting search and rescue missions. All 28 of FEMA’s teams are activated for response, with the balance staged, enroute or mobilized.
- Fifty-one teams from the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) have been deployed, including five Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) that are supporting New Orleans medical facilities and hospitals not fully operational. These teams have truckloads of medical equipment and supplies with them and are trained to handle trauma, pediatrics, surgery and mental health problems. Additional teams are staged in Anniston, Ala.; Camp Shelby, Miss.; and Baton Rouge, La., and will move out as conditions permit.
- NDMS has identified 2,600 hospital beds in a 12-state area around the affected area and is working with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to move patients to these facilities.
- USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service is providing food at shelters and mass feeding sites and issuing emergency food stamps, infant formula and food packages to households in need.
- FEMA is coordinating logistics with the U.S. Department of Transportation and Louisiana National Guard in support of the ground evacuation of refugees sheltered at the Superdome in New Orleans to the Houston Astrodome in Harris County, Texas.

A team of 66 transportation experts is supporting state and local officials in the damage assessment of highways, railroads, airports, transit systems, ports and

pipelines. The Department of Transportation is supporting detour planning and critical transportation system repairs (FEMA, 2005).

Details outlined in reports such as this pointed directly at the mobilization of resources and the rapid response to finding shelters for victims and providing them with essential emergency supplies, starting the day the storm hit Louisiana. The title of the article, “Life Safety Tops FEMA Priorities, Supplies Pour In” suggests both the level of importance that FEMA placed on responding to the crisis, as well as the allocation of resources to meet the needs of victims.

As time passed and the waters receded, FEMA continued to issue weekly statements, listing in terms of dollars and people, the recovery efforts. Weekly statements similar to the following were produced for Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana:

\$6.7 billion	To date, FEMA has approved nearly \$6.7 billion in federal funding to aid Mississippians through various Individual Assistance and Public Assistance programs, as well as mission assignments, which FEMA tasked to other federal agencies.
\$2.2 billion	FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has paid more than \$2.2 billion in flood insurance claims to policyholders in Mississippi. The NFIP plays a critical role in encouraging communities to adopt, implement and enforce broader floodplain-management regulations and programs.
\$1.5 billion	The U.S. Small Business Administration Disaster Assistance Program has approved more than \$1.5 billion in low-interest loans for homeowners, renters and business owners throughout Mississippi.
\$1.1 billion	More than \$1.1 billion in assistance has been disbursed to nearly 270,000 Mississippi households that have registered through FEMA's Individuals and Households Program (IHP). The IHP consists of Housing Assistance, which may be used to pay for rent, repair or housing construction and Other Needs Assistance (ONA) which may be provided for uninsured or under-insured disaster-related necessary expenses. ONA is a cost-share program which is 75 percent federally funded, 25 percent state funded.

\$747 million	The Public Assistance program has obligated nearly \$747 million for emergency work and infrastructure repair. This includes \$423 million for debris removal, \$42.5 million to repair public facilities, \$212 million for emergency protective measures, \$4 million to repair roads and bridges and \$50 million to restore public utilities.
34 million	Almost 34 million cubic yards of [sic] debris has [sic] been removed from public and private property so far. FEMA continues to reimburse Mississippi 100 percent for this expense and will do so until March 15, 2006.
515,600	More than 515,600 Mississippians have registered for assistance through the FEMA toll-free number at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or (TTY) 1-800-462-7585 for speech- or hearing-impaired applicants or online at www.FEMA.gov .
99,000	More than 99,000 people are temporarily housed in nearly 37,000 FEMA-provided travel trailers and mobile homes. This includes almost 2,000 units that are mobile homes fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or are ADA-friendly travel trailers.
900	More than 900 Community Relations (CR) field personnel have operated throughout Mississippi since the beginning of disaster response and recovery efforts. CR field teams visit communities and distribute resource materials, providing personalized assistance and helpful information to individuals, community-based organizations and local officials affected by the disaster. There are currently 40 CR field personnel working in Mississippi.
13	Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) operate throughout Mississippi to assist people affected by Hurricane Katrina. More than 426,000 Mississippians have visited DRCs since the first one opened Sept. 6, 2005, just days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall.
11	March 11, 2006, is the deadline for new applications to FEMA's Individuals and Households Program. Federal and state officials encourage households affected by Hurricane Katrina to seek aid. Assistance to current applicants will continue to be provided after this date, but no new applications will be accepted.
2	Two easy ways to register for disaster assistance. Call the toll-free FEMA Helpline number at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or (TTY) 1-800-462-7585 OR register online at www.FEMA.gov . People can also call the FEMA Helpline, at the same number, to provide additional information or to inquire about the status of an existing registration. (FEMA, 2006)

As can be seen in the previous chart, as the recovery efforts shifted from immediate emergency response to rebuilding and repairing, the details of the weekly reports shifted to demonstrate long term resources still available, the number of federal dollars allocated, and the number of families helped. Though the frame constructed by these reports remains consistent, the details used to construct the idea that FEMA is responding and people are receiving help changed over time. By the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, FEMA issued a series of press releases that contained information similar to the following:

Louisiana Statistics through August 17, 2006

- 3** Hurricane Katrina was the **third** strongest hurricane to make landfall in the United States. Hurricane Wilma was the strongest and the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 was second strongest.
- 12** At the peak of the disaster, **12** mobile DRCs were operating.
- 32** Currently, **32** families are living in hotels/motels.
- 59** At the beginning of the disaster, there were **59** fixed DRCs.
- 150** Currently, 150 housing inspectors are in the field to assess damage to homes.
- 12,400** U.S. Small Business Administration has approved more than **12,400** disaster assistance loans to businesses and non-profit organizations.
- 72,360** SBA has approved **72,360** loans to renters and homeowners.
- 418,000** More than **418,000** Louisianians currently hold National Flood Insurance policies.
- 950,000** DRC staff has provided, in-person, assistance to more than **950,000** households.
- 1 million** More than **1 million** inspections have been completed to date.
- \$1.3 billion** SBA has approved a total of **\$1.3 billion** in loans to business owners.
- 1.4 million** More than **1.4 million** applicants have registered for housing and other needs assistance.
- 45.6 million** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, along with private contractors working for some Louisiana parishes, have removed more than **45.6 million cubic yards** of debris under a FEMA-funded mission assignment.
- \$725 million** FEMA approved **\$725 million** in Community Disaster Loans to help keep essential services operating in communities hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina.
- \$4.7 billion** More than **\$4.7 billion** in SBA loans has been approved for renters and homeowners.
- \$5.1 billion** More than **\$5.1 billion** have been provided to applicants in housing assistance and other needs assistance.
- \$13.2 billion** More than **\$13.2 billion** has been paid under NFIP to policyholders in Louisiana. (FEMA, 2005)

Reports like this demonstrate the message that FEMA attempted to convey through framing their response efforts by the numbers: FEMA is taking an active role in responding to and meeting the needs of the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

News Outlet Framing

As a general consensus, the frames presented by White House and FEMA reports suggest a strong, federal response to the disaster in the gulf. In many regards, the frames presented by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* conveyed very different ideas about the federal response. Although headlines themselves do not construct frames, they do provide valuable insight into the stories they precede. Based on Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance (1986), headlines present contextual clues to message content with minimal processing effort.

Headlines such as *FEMA Fails Katrina Victims*, *A Compassionate Bush Was Absent Right After Katrina*, *A Swifter Response to Katrina Was Possible*, *'A Nightmare' of Missing Kids After Katrina*, *Brown Defends FEMA's Efforts*; *Former Agency Director Spreads Blame for Failures in Katrina Response* all suggest very different stories, but an overarching theme presents itself: the response to Katrina, to one extent or another, was not sufficient. Within news reports covering the Hurricane Katrina response efforts, three prominent themes were found: an insufficient or delayed federal response, a racially charged federal response, and a failed federal response.

Insufficiencies

In many regards, the understanding that federal response efforts to meeting the needs of the victims of Hurricane Katrina were not up to acceptable standards, was a prevalent theme in Katrina reporting. As stories in the press broke of stranded communities stuck between flooded wastelands weeks after the response efforts began, both congresspersons and members of the press investigated what had happened and why so many were still without the most basic necessities. In a September 7, 2005 Washington Post article, Senator Susan Collins was cited as questioning the weak response, especially in light to the extensive funding allocated to emergency preparedness following September 11, 2001.

“If our system did such a poor job when there was no enemy, how would the federal, state and local governments have coped with a terrorist attack that provided no advance warning and that was intent on causing as much death and destruction as possible?” the chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee wondered, announcing a probe into the response to Hurricane Katrina. “How is it possible that almost four years to the day after the attacks on our country, with billions of dollars spent to improve our preparedness, that a major area of our nation was so ill prepared to respond to a catastrophe (Milbank, 2005)?”

Apart from questions raised about the issue of preparation, emergency responses even came under sharp criticism in stories such as the *New York Times* article titled, “Stumbling storm- aid effort put tons of ice on trips to nowhere.” Detailed accounts of emergency responders rushing to the scene, only being told to turn around or to move to one destination after another, filled headlines across the country. Meanwhile, the mobilization of response efforts was even called into question.

Three days after landfall, only a handful of National Guard troops had arrived. Those forces were specialized units such as military police companies (to try to restore order), small search-and-rescue units (to seek out individuals trapped in

attics), small reconnaissance units (to map the devastation) and small medical units (Southern Maryland Extra, 2005).

Even as the response effort shifted from immediate emergency response to rebuilding, criticisms drawn from federal investigation on the response effort were present. “Criticism of the government’s sluggish response to Hurricane Katrina was largely deserved, the Homeland Security Departments internal watchdog concludes in a report rapping the agency for focusing on terrorism at the expense of preparing for natural disasters” (Leavitt, 2006) . Stories similar to these paint a clear picture that the federal response was neither timely nor effective.

Racial Undertones

While stories were occasionally run throughout the year following the storm, for approximately a two week period near the onset of the emergency response efforts, stories of racial indignation on behalf of the Bush Administration were found in all three papers. The theme first broke in a September 4, 2005 story wherein Lani Guinier, a Harvard University law professor expressed the following sentiment regarding the administration’s response to Hurricane Katrina:

Poor black people are "the canary in the mine. Poor black people are the throwaway people. And we pathologize them in order to justify our disregard. But this is not just about poor black people in New Orleans. This is about a social movement, with an administration that is bent on weakening the capacity of the national government to act. . . . I hope this is a wake-up call to all of America. To see this as the tip of the iceberg, the thin edge of the wedge. We ignored the early warning signals. But this is another early warning that we are ill prepared to function as a society (Duke & Wiltz, 2005).

The incorporation of this kind of analysis in news reporting certainly demonstrates how the media has moved beyond its role of agenda setting and into agenda extension. In the wake of the greatest natural disaster to hit the United States, stories continued to appear developing this frame further. On September 12, 2005, the *Washington Post* broke a story, citing the current President.

“I mean, it's puzzling, given his immediate response during 9/11, that he did not feel a greater sense of empathy towards the folks that were experiencing this enormous disaster," Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) said yesterday on ABC's "This Week" (Fletcher, 2005).

While stories similar to these were consistently prevalent for roughly two weeks of this fifty-two week study, the argument still underscores the major interpretation of the federal response efforts, one of inadequacy.

A Failed Response

Either as the central frame applied to the federal response effort or a subcomponent of another theme, some printed news outlets framed the response efforts as a failure. Typically, stories that framed the response as a failure include grim details of what appear to be something out of a horror story. Regardless, some stories cast the previously framed delayed response as the equivalent of not responding at all.

When it became clear that tens of thousands were marooned, the federal government was unprepared to rush life-saving supplies to the city's Superdome and convention center, to rescue the stranded and sick or keep order in the streets (FEMA fails katrina victims, 2005).

The adversarial agenda present within articles similar to this asserted the simple fact that the government was not poised to respond any better than they did should be taken into consideration when assessing the overall success of failure of the effort. This

approach, without otherwise coming out and stating it, framed the response as either an all or nothing success.

Katrina exposed FEMA as a dysfunctional organization, paralyzed in a crisis four years after the supposedly galvanizing attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. And it turned Brown -- a former executive of the International Arabian Horse Association who had no emergency management experience before joining the Bush administration -- into a symbol of government ineptitude (Grunwald & Glasser, 2005).

Labeling the organization responsible for emergency response efforts and the director of the organization as inept, certainly frame the agency, and any forthcoming content, as inadequate. The construction of the response efforts as a failure in governmental responsibility lends itself to the overarching theme present within almost all of the stories published by printed news stories. At the very least, news outlets constructed a frame which demonstrated a government either incapable or unwilling to respond to the needs of its citizens in crisis.

Coinciding Frames

Having now looked at how FEMA, the White House, and printed news outlets framed the response efforts, we can look to where frames coincided. In many respects, themes presented by both FEMA and the White House overlapped at various points. Although these overlaps do not demonstrate overlaps in framing, they do point to elements of the two frames that coincide. Both organizations framed the response efforts in terms of a strong, centralized approach. While the White House reports focused on the overarching message of governmental mobilization, FEMA provided more specific details outlining how the government had mobilized response and recovery efforts. While

the White House approached the frame from a more diplomatic, public affairs perspective, FEMA constructed the frame around detail orientation and construction.

Contradicting Frames

Given the similarities between FEMA and White House reporting, it's no surprise that their frames differed from the news outlets. The White House framed the response effort as a strong, centralized approach. The frames constructed around the racial tensions and adequacy of response efforts posed by media outlets clearly contradicts the White House's interpretation of the events. A reason for this contradiction may be that both frames speak to different issues. First, the White House constructed a frame to suggest that the response effort was exhaustive, and a primary focus of the Bush Administration. This interpretation does not suggest a definitive ruling as a failure or a success, but rather an interpretation which suggests that solving problems and helping victims was the name of the game. The media's framing of the response as either a success or a failure requires a value-laden assessment of the response efforts. At the point that the White House never attempted to frame the response in a value-laden approach, these interpretations seem to counteract each other without actually directly clashing.

Another contradiction came from competing interpretations as to the level of the response efforts. A major frame presented by news outlets was that of lacking federal response. The general interpretation of articles which constructed this frame suggests that FEMA was ill prepared to handle such a crisis, and in turn dropped the ball on getting aid to those in need. In stark contrast to this message, FEMA's approach to constructing frames with the "by the numbers" approach would suggest that resources were in fact

mobilized, and reports citing specific details of the number of families served and the amount of aid given would contradict the frame presented by news outlets.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Reporting on Hurricane Katrina differed greatly between government and news sources. Government reports often described the response effort as successful. These stories described a victim-centered approach to the response, the deployment of all available resources, and an ongoing effort to ensure the rebuilding of the Gulf region.

Stories published by news outlets described the event in terms of the shortcomings and failures they deemed apparent at the time. News outlets focused on a disorganized response effort; a non-existent response effort; a racially charged response; and the inadequacy of the Bush Administration paired with an inept leadership over FEMA.

Looking to the first research question regarding how the White House framed the hurricane response, the overarching frame is that of a highly focused, results oriented White House. Through the articulation of successful response measures and continued focus to return the gulf to its original state, the White House constructed a frame of a strong governmental response.

The second research questions asked how FEMA framed the recovery efforts. Through a more detail-oriented approach, FEMA constructed a frame of an exhaustive and long-term recovery response.

To the third research question, how printed news outlets framed the response, outlets varied in how they framed the recovery efforts. While the overarching theme suggests that the response efforts were inadequate, the frames constructed include a failed

response effort, a racially motivated response effort, or a delayed/dysfunctional response effort.

As to the fourth research question, regarding coinciding frames, although there were points of overlap in the way in which FEMA and the White House framed the recovery efforts, the two frames varied slightly, both in their construction and overall interpretation.

To the last research question, regarding the contradiction of frames, there were several points of contention. First, the White House and news outlets framed the federal approach in different ways. Although the White House presented the frame as a strong, focused federal approach, news outlets framed the response in terms of a failed fragmented debacle of the Bush Administration.

Second, FEMA framed the response efforts in terms of a detailed construction of response methods employed, whereas news outlets framed the response in terms of a lacking federal response. These two frames provide a glaring contradiction, which may be explained in the value-laden approach to assess the response efforts employed by news outlets.

To some extent, the differences in framing can be attributed to the sources each used to acquire their information. In many regards, the lack of source knowledge prevents the reader from adequately assessing the response in a non-biased manner. Although we know that the White House received their news from FEMA, and FEMA received their news from operations on the ground, the news reporting sources are largely unknown. It is highly unlikely that news reports were drawn from thin air, but the influences upon the

development of the stories would provide valuable insight into the discrepancy between governmental and non-governmental news sources.

Ultimately, these results would suggest a biased approach from both types of sources. The governmental reports never seem to clash head on with the reports published in major news outlets, as they appear to construct the event as a tragedy that received the best possible response, given the limitations imposed. This type of reporting goes along with the required “record it” theme present in most governmental publication. These reports tend to provide detailed lists of what was being done, and little analysis of the issues being discussed. It seems reasonable to assert that the limited analysis provided in White House and FEMA reports would suggest either an acknowledgement of failure, or a disregard towards responding to contradictory stories presented by the press.

Alternatively, news outlets published stories following the release of White House and FEMA reports that appear to contradict these stories. Just as governmental reports failed to address the claims of news reporters covering the response, news outlets failed to address government reports head on. It was the exclusive construction of organizational frames that opened both governmental and news reports to significant criticism.

Limitations

One limitation to this type of research is researcher bias. Although researcher bias cannot be entirely eliminated from the textual analysis, the sheer number of stories looked, as paired with researcher efforts to read and re-read the stories should ensure these frames are an adequate representation of the reports. Additionally, the fact that the

data used in this study were strictly limited to printed news media may not account for all possible frames constructed around the response to Hurricane Katrina. Lastly, due to the highly specific nature of this study, the results may not be generalizable to other studies of textual framing analysis in crisis situations.

Heuristics

Although this research provides clear insight into the way in which the government and the press frames the response to Hurricane Katrina, there are several areas in which the research could be expounded. Most notably, looking to the organizational construction of frames presented by media outlets would posit an insightful extension of the current research. Additionally, performing a quantitative framing analysis could enhance the internal validity of this study to confirm the prevalence of themes, which go into the construction of a frame.

Outside of this study, there are several areas of inquiry which could be examined to better understand the frames surrounding Hurricane Katrina. Looking at how the ground reporters constructed stories versus how office-bound journalists reported on the events would provide clarity to the question of reporter bias. Additionally, a separate study looking at how televised reports framed the event could yield insightful analysis to understanding how Katrina was framed.

Appendix A – Reports and Articles Analyzed in this Study

Anne Arundel Extra. (2005, September 22). Hurricane Katrina relief. *The Washington Post* , p. T02.

Anne Arundel Extra. (2005, September 29). Hurricane relief. *The Washington Post* , p. T02.

Anne Arundel Extra. (2005, October 6). Hurricane relief. *The Washington Post* , p. T13.

Appleby, J. (2005, October 21). Hospitals rework their disaster plans; after Katrina, some add satellite phones, boats, air evacuation to mix . *USA Today* , p. 3B.

Armour, S. (2005, October 27). Evacuees finding jobs away from Katrina territory. *USA Today* , p. 1A.

Associated Press. (2005, August 30). Coping with Katrina. *USA Today* , p. 10A.

Associated Press. (2005, August 26). Katrina pummels southeastern fla. with heavy rain; at least four have died. *The Washington Post* , p. A11.

Associated Press. (2006, January 6). Survivors of Katrina get a voice. *The Washington Post* , p. A06.

Babington, C., & Murray, S. (2005, September 8). Parties scramble for post-Katrina leverage; hill gop sets investigative commission; democrats criticize panel's makeup. *The Washington Post* , p. A06.

Bacon, J. (2006, April 7). 80 officers fired for Katrina no-shows. *USA Today* , p. 3A.

Bacon, J. (2006, February 21). La. governor unveils \$7.5b Katrina aid plan. *USA Today* , p. 3A.

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Baker, P. (2005, September 11). FEMA director recalled to d.c.; admiral assumes helm of Katrina relief. *The Washington Post* , p. A22.

Baker, P. (2006, August 24). Katrina survivor lauds Bush in what democrats call pr stunt. *The Washington Post* , p. A09.

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- Benedetto, R. (2006, February 24). White House study outlines Katrina lesson's. *USA Today* , p. 5A.
- Billard, M. (2006, February 22). Casinos rise out of Katrina's wreckage. *The New York Times* .
- Blais, J. (2005, September 8). Katrina stirs interest in past catastrophes. *USA Today* , p. 8D.
- Block, S. (2005, December 23). Give to Katrina, get a break. *USA Today* , p. 4B.
- Block, S. (2005, September 13). How to set up Katrina donations to help over the long haul. *USA Today* , p. 4B.
- Block, S. (2005, November 11). Katrina may complicate financial aid. *USA Today* , p. 4B.
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- Britt, D. (2005, September 30). In Katrina's wake, inaccurate rumors sullied victims. *The Washington Post* .
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Appendix B – Executive Summary

Purpose

Hurricane Katrina is widely regarded as the greatest natural disaster to ever befall the United States. Following the storm's devastation of the Gulf Coast region, a media firestorm unleashed, seeking to ascribe responsibility to governmental actors for the “failed” response effort. Through a comparative framing analysis, this study sought to investigate how major news outlets, the White House, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency framed the response efforts that followed Hurricane Katrina.

Framing Analysis

To understand framing analysis, one must first understand what a frame is. Jim Kuypers, political communication scholar and framing researcher defined framing as “a process whereby communicators, consciously or unconsciously, act to construct a point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be interpreted by others in a particular manner” (Kuypers, 2010).” The process of framing a particular event requires the construction of a particular viewpoint, emphasizing certain facts to produce a specific interpretation of that event. From this, the term frame can be understood as the central or underlying theme under which the facts or details are organized.

When put in the context of news reporting, the demonstration of the process becomes clear. Rarely do news reports contain every detail of an event. If reporting every detail in a detailed manner became the norm, the news would not be digestible. Instead, news reports collect the data necessary to relay the general details of a particular event to the audience. The process by which the author filters certain details out, includes others, or highlights specific details more than others demonstrates the construction of a frame.

For the most part, this practice is essential for the press to perform its function of reporting. However, at times, personal or institutional biases influence the decision as to what to include, exclude, or highlight in a given story.

Framing analysis is an ideal research method for analyzing large amounts of data. The data consists of stories, releases, and briefing, with an array of implications. However, framing analysis can only speak to the characteristics of the coverage, not the implications. This approach gives us the ability to look at central organizing themes throughout the data, instead of evaluating each piece independently. Comparative framing analysis allows us to then compare and contrast frames from the respective organizations to gain a richer understanding of messages communicated regarding the governmental response to Hurricane Katrina.

Research Questions

To understand the phenomena, the following research questions were posed:

RQ 1: How did the White House frame the recovery efforts to Hurricane Katrina?

RQ 2: How did FEMA frame the recovery efforts to Hurricane Katrina?

RQ 3: How did printed news outlets frame the response to Hurricane Katrina?

RQ 4: Did the frames presented by FEMA, the White House, and the press coincide?

RQ 5: Did the frames presented by FEMA, the White House, and the press contradict?

Methods

A comparative framing analysis was conducted in this study. The study examined how news media outlets and government entities framed the events of and response efforts to Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, the study compared the frames present within sixty-five press briefings by the Office of the Press Secretary, 185 press releases from the

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and contrasted them to the frames presented in 312 printed newspaper articles for one calendar year following the storm making landfall in the gulf. The study focused on printed news stories published by *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today*.

Articles were retrieved by using the LexisNexis database. Boolean expressions were used for article identification including “hurricane” and “Katrina” in headlines and leads. Press releases and briefings were collected from the FEMA Press Release Archives and Office of the Press Secretary Archives, respectively. Articles and releases that made minimal references to the storm (eg. obituaries, opinion editorials, and news briefs) were excluded from the study.

To identify the frames the researcher read each article, briefing, and press release and determined the thesis or organizing theme it contained. Each was compiled in a list, according to the organization that produced it. Once all of the data was examined, the process was repeated, as to confirm the validity of the frames. From there, the frames, based on relatively frequency, were documented and reported. From these results, identifying where frames coincided or contradicted was a matter of evaluating points of intersection.

Findings

- The White House often described the response in terms of the allocation of federal resources, shifting the focus to response efforts, instead of addressing questions of failure, avoiding the blame game, and eventually, acknowledging the lessons learned in crisis communication.
- FEMA described the response effort in terms of an all-encompassing approach. Quite literally, the “by the numbers” approach taken by FEMA pointed to the allocation of all available resources to meeting the needs of the residents of Gulf Coast.

- News outlets described the response in terms of inadequacies and failures, specifically:
 - Lack of federal action
 - Lack of federal action, due to the racial composition of New Orleans
 - Delayed federal action
 - Failed response efforts
- Frames coincided in the following areas:
 - Both FEMA and the White House coincided on response efforts, in terms of focusing efforts on the needs of the victims.
- Frames contradicted in the following areas:
 - The White House framing of the federal response effort compared news outlet reporting on the response effort.
 - FEMA's framing of the detailed approach compared to the news outlet reporting of a lack of response efforts.

Limitations

The following limitations were noted in this study:

- The data set was limited to printed sources, which may not account for every frame.
- Researcher bias could affect the identification of frames.
- The findings of this study cannot be generalized to other forms of crisis reporting.

Future Research

This study provides a springboard for additional research on the matter of framing the response to Hurricane Katrina. Some possible areas of exploration are:

- Replicating the study with the inclusion of local newspaper.
- Replicating the study with the inclusion of electronic media sources.
- Replicating the study with the inclusion of electronic governmental sources.
- Performing a visual framing analysis of still photography or video photography to examine additional or alternative frames.
- Performing a quantitative content analysis to establish the statistical significance of frames.
- Studying the differences in news reports from journalists on the ground in New Orleans, versus those based out of their central offices.

Conclusions

Comparative framing analysis provides a critical perspective in understanding how organizations ascribe meaning to events. While governmental reports tended to focus on the resource allocation and dedication to helping the victims of the storm, news

outlets tended to frame the response effort as “too little, too late.” Looking at how the two outlets reached different conclusions regarding the same response demonstrates the diversity and richness of mass communication.

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