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News media bias and the Syrian refugee crisis

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News Media Bias and the Syrian Refugee Crisis

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By Marisa Sara Campanella

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Abstract

Since 2011, turmoil has erupted in Syria causing the displacement of many individuals now seeking refuge. It has impacted other areas of the world, filling the media with stories of daily events surrounding the initial attacks. The increase in media coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis led me to question whether the stories in the news were accurate representations of what was actually happening. I chose to compare two distinct sources of news in a content analysis, Fox News and CNN, to see whether there was a discrepancy in how they reported the same topics. After analyzing seven articles from each news source, it was clear neither source was motivated solely by reporting fact. Media frames in each source were present that highlighted both their interests in politicizing the events and appealing to their audiences. Conclusions were drawn suggesting the need to consult multiple sources of news to guarantee accurate information.

Introduction

Although Syria is presented as being a presidential republic, it is highly authoritarian, with President Bashar al-Assad exercising political control over its people. In 2011 many individuals had been imprisoned for political reasons rather than for committing crimes. This was one way the regime deprived the public of their freedoms and it culminated with demands for democracy. Protests emerged and to appease these groups, al-Assad released the prisoners. Soon after, the government sent an army of troops into major cities to dissemble crowds, making it clear it would not stand for any demonstrations.

It was not long before opposition groups such as the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces formed and the international community imposed increasing sanctions on the Syrian government. In the meantime al-Assad's army grew and spread into more cities including Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo. The political unrest unfolding in Syria led many civilians to flee their homes. The number of refugees seeking assistance has now amounted to around 11 million.

The uprisings in Syria in 2011 have transformed over the past six years into a global crisis of refugees escaping the conditions in the Middle East to go westward. Major world actors have ignored the subsequent events resulting from the initial disaster, but those events have grown to become an international crisis that demands a reaction. The conflict has resulted in an increase of media coverage on incidents, including but not limited to killings of civilians, acceptance of refugees by other countries, and attempts to negotiate agreements, which will be the focus of the study.

Before further explaining, it is important to understand the issues regarding bias in media. Technology has become a part of Americans' daily lives, and we have increasingly become

reliant on different sources of media to get information. Pew Research Center indicated that although print is still the most common way adults read newspapers, there were 126 fewer daily papers in 2014 than there were in 2004, a number which is still increasing. The use of newspapers has decreased because people can now have any information they seek at their fingertips from a variety of competing sources. Following this, people are forced to make more decisions about where they get their news and tend to rely on few sources of media rather than getting their information from different sources each time. This becomes problematic when the sources are either inaccurate or feeding people biased information.

The purpose of my analysis is to highlight how news media has reported stories regarding the crisis, and from there conclusions can be drawn on how individuals' perceptions of the issue have been affected because of it. Biases present in specific sources of news media will be analyzed to show that news does not always consist of impartial information. This is significant because if we understood how a biased source could influence our views, we would have a more critical eye when examining world news. We should not rely solely on one source of information because it may be portrayed in ways that deviate from the whole truth. My study will examine how exactly events relating to the refugee crisis were framed in two different media sources between the years 2014 and 2016.

Literature Review

Before conducting my research, though, it is important to review the current existing literature on the subject. Similar studies have been done before, and after examining those works, three main themes emerged that seem to be significant. These are media frames and bias, personal and political agendas in the media, and the theoretical framework for this study of social constructionism. These topics will provide a solid foundation for moving forward and guide readers in understanding better the context of this research.

Media Frames and Bias

Much of the existing research on media and the stories they describe reveals certain frames when reporting news on refugees. Surette (2007) defined a frame as:

> A fully developed social construction template that allows its users to categorize, label, and deal with a wide range of world events. Frames simplify one's dealing with the world by organizing experiences and events into groups and guiding what are seen as appropriate policies and actions. (p. 39).

Framing is significant because it can trigger stereotypes and result in information shortcuts where media consumers simplify complex issues and respond in ways the media prompts them to. One way in which frames exist is through the media's tendency to limit what information it shares with the public. It is often selective in choosing what facts to disclose in its coverage, which then may lead to perceived biases by media consumers. Some people have even found they cannot solely trust one news source because they are not confident in the stories it discusses. Ahmad (2006) found evidence in his work that reinforced this perception of news. He completed a study in which thirteen interviews were conducted and four detailed email responses were examined regarding participants' sources of news and what perceived biases were present in the media post 9/11. Most of the participants had connections to the researcher through personal networks, professional organizations, or e-groups and were approached by him directly. All

involved in the study identified as "British Muslim," (p. 965) but they made up a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

Many respondents felt that news does little to educate and inform its viewers. One woman expressed that "the media was and is responsible for shaping public opinion since 9/11" (p. 966). Another stated that in times of war, "the government will do its best to manipulate the news, and so at such times it is essential to have access to a variety of sources" (p. 966). Ahmad (2006) concluded by recognizing that respondents perceived anti-Muslim bias in Western media, and that they believed the increased attacks against Muslims were a direct result of the bias. In reporting news both bias and superficiality may be present so there is a need to seek out other sources to receive valid information. Consumers cannot rely solely on one source to ensure that the information is neutral. Ahmad's article reflected views of news media post 9/11, but the same way Muslims perceived biases against them in the media, refugees can also be subject to biases whether they are perceived or real.

One way news sources can manipulate information that might lead to the presence of biases is by shaping it a certain way. Dowler (2004) had findings in his research that did this, but he looked at a different type of news. Although it strays from the topic of refugees, his findings are still relevant because they can be applied to current research on refugees. He completed a content analysis comparing 400 episodes of television broadcasts from two American cities and two Canadian cities. Verbal, visual, and behavioral forms of communication were scrutinized in stories pertaining to crime to reveal their presentation of fear, sensationalism, and either outrage or sympathy.

Dowler's (2004) findings indicated that although the types of crimes reported between American and Canadian news did not differ much, American news was more likely to be

sensationalized. American newsmakers have power in being able to choose what to report, so they used strategies and techniques to make their stories seem more appealing to viewers. For instance, because those who produced the news were not concerned with giving out true information about street-crime, stories regarding the topic were typically cursory. Rather than reporting direct facts, they framed their stories in ways that would attract the most attention. In this way their interests in attracting consumers was placed above reporting true information, so when reporting refugees it is likely that they would write in what they think would draw in the most readers or viewers.

The same way newsmakers put their interests first by catering their stories to a specific audience writers often impose their attitudes on readers or viewers through their reports. Particularly, negative connotations were revealed through the work of Melkote (2009), who quantitatively analyzed 300 *New York Times* articles related to Iraq and the war in 2003. He classified the types of coverage on the topics, Saddam Hussein, Bush, the UN, WMDs, U.S. Armed Forces, France, Germany, and Russia as favorable, unfavorable, or neutral. His findings exposed negative or unfavorable coverage in reference to Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction more than other topics. He also categorized sentences within news stories as reports, inferences, and judgments based on Hayakawa's (1972) definitions. "A sentence was coded as a report if, […] it could be verified or disproved" (p. 552), an inference "is a statement about the unknown made on the basis of the known" (p. 552), and a judgment "is an expression of the writer's approval or disapproval of the occurrences, persons, or objects he/she is describing" (p. 552). Saddam Hussein had the most inferences and judgments, followed by WMDs and then the United Nations.

Melkote (2009) concluded by referring back to his theoretical framework, the "agenda-setting effect" (p. 548), that news media dictates what the public should be concerned about. Readers receive specific information on topics that are framed a certain way, and this, in turn, shapes their thoughts and opinions toward those topics. Other information or news that may be equally significant is left out, so media consumers do not pay attention to it the same way. The New York Times provided Melkote suitable evidence of this phenomenon, but it can be found in other news as well.

A study done by Bradimore and Bauder (2011) that did look at the topic of refugees had similar findings. These researchers found one way in which news media set the agenda. They explored three Canadian news sources' coverage of the Tamil refugees who showed up on their shores in 2009. Their study was a critical discourse analysis, paying particular attention to the articles' headlines, bodies, and how each specific event was positioned and framed. In the news articles they analyzed, they discovered an initial presence of a "security-driven state perspective" (p. 649). This term is defined by the prevalence of government representatives' opinions; the first voices represented were those of government agencies, departments, and officials; they had the most dominance in the articles. The last voices cited, if at all, were advocates of the refugees.

In one article they examined, it was not until the final sentence where a call for government respect of due process and humanitarian concerns for the refugees was made. For those who do not go through the entire articles, only one side of the story is denoted. These media consumers are then left with a significant amount of government opinion and little from the refugees themselves. A "hierarchy of credibility" (p. 650), a style of writing that prioritizes one perspective by including more information about it than any others and placing it at the top of the article, is created and then gives meaning to what is perceived as most important and what

is less relevant. This hierarchy of credibility is used to set the agenda for the audience. In this

case, the public would think the opinions of the government officials were more critical than any

humanitarian concerns mentioned briefly at the end. Information referring to refugees is then

changed to reflect the opinions of or the points the creators of the media want to make in

reporting.

In addition to over representing particularly one voice to set their agenda, Bradimore and

Bauder's (2011) content analysis also identified framing through the use of language in news

media. In the articles they examined on the "boat people" entering Canada, the term, "illegal" (p.

640) was used consistently regardless of the refugees' ability to claim refugee status at the

border. They also found "human smuggling" (p. 646) a common phrase throughout headlines.

The authors identified that words like these caused the events to become a matter of security

rather than a human rights issue. They also found that refugees could be linked to crime and be

seen as criminals by media consumers through language indicative of police and crime. For

example, using suggestive verbs to describe the actions against refugees, such as being "seized,"

or "found," and "questioned" (p. 646) gave refugees another negative connotation.

These researchers also relied on Ulrich Beck's (1992) concept of a "risk society" (p. 642)

as examined in studies such as Adeyanju and Neverson (2007). Beck claimed that society has

transitioned from being defined by class to risk, now a "risk society" (p. 642). Society creates

public panic through the news by attributing risk to certain symbols. Bradimore and Bauder

(2011) referenced Adeyanju and Neverson's (2007) work because it used Beck's concept in real

terms. Their example was of a Congolese woman who was suspected of being diseased:

> The Congolese woman's body came to be of particular significance. Her outsider
> position as a non-citizen and African enabled the representation of her body as
> sickly, messy, and disordered, legitimizing fears of those outside the state as
> diseased, infectious, and risky. (p. 642).

These claims increased society's anxiety toward the woman, shifting the issue of her arrival from a question of morality to a question of risk. Being separated from society, it was easy for citizens to attribute those qualities to outsiders.

The perception of outsiders leads to another point that media frames through dehumanization support and maintain divisions between in-groups and out-groups. Dehumanizing refugees in the media can be used to create a dichotomy between groups to the point where media consumers see refugees as part of an out-group, and soon follows the conflict of "us" versus "them." Esses, Medianu, and Lawson (2013) focused their analysis on links between immigrants and disease, the ambiguity between viewing the refugees arriving and illegal immigrants crossing into nations illegitimately, and portrayals of refugees as terrorists. They revealed how reporters have an opportunity to take advantage of media consumers and that the media promotes dehumanizing immigrants and refugees.

One way the media exposed this frame was by creating a crisis regarding refugees by referring to them as "enemies at the gate" (p. 519). Their research also uncovered circumstances where refugees were used metaphorically as "dangerous and destructive pollutants that must be controlled" (p. 520). They explained that refugees are compared to animals in that they do not share all the emotions or have the same mental capacity as humans do. Claims like these are then used to justify individuals' positions in society as superior to refugees, maintaining the separation between "us" and "them." By removing the human aspect of refugees, consumers can more easily vindicate the poor treatment they receive. Once refugees are presented in ways that make them seem sub-human, consumers could then attribute this to all people considered refugees.

Personal and Political Agendas in the Media

Current literature on refugees and the media also reveals the theme of politics quite often. It can be said that news articles frequently cover a particular political party's views to appeal to their audience. Similarly, people may choose to get their information from a specific source simply because they know its political position aligns with their own. Lynch, McGoldrick and Russell (2012) focused on Australians' feelings about immigration and how asylum seekers in the news were used as a means to shape those feelings. Through the use of either "peace journalism" or "war journalism" the media shaped opinions of its readers to go along with its political views. Peace journalism can be distinguished because it includes the voices of all parties represented in its stories, whereas war journalism is more likely to polarize groups and target whichever is deemed the "other" (p. 275).

These two styles of journalism became especially present right around the time of the election in November 2001. After the attacks on the World Trade Center took place, potential threats and news of terrorism consumed the media. Increased levels of fear among the public then caused interest in political control to heighten, and the media became an outlet for politicians to exert power and gain public support. As part of a larger 15-country study, this study was completed to show how the incident of asylum seekers coming to Australia could be represented in several ways and to measure the types of audience responses. They placed thirty-six participants into one of two groups that received either a "peace journalism" or "war journalism" version of a story on asylum-seekers. Any comments they had afterwards were categorized into feelings of "anger towards politicians," "empathy towards asylum seekers," or "antipathy towards asylum seekers" (p. 284).

The war journalism article exposed a letter from the immigration department that requested more workers to deal with the increased amount of workload because of the asylum seekers. It followed that the highest recorded category (38%) from these readers was "anger towards politicians," compared to "empathy towards asylum seekers (13%)," and "antipathy towards asylum seekers (28%)" (p. 284). The peace journalism article expressed a call for more resources to be provided to the asylum seekers. These readers' comments fit mostly into the category of "empathy towards asylum seekers (48%)," rather than "anger towards politicians (9%), or "antipathy towards asylum seekers (28%)" (p. 285). These results show that politicians have an opportunity through the media to sway voters, and it is clear that their political views are present especially regarding asylum seekers. Religion, too, plays a part in transmitting political messages through the media. Evans looked at this question in his study.

For Evans (2011), two political distinctions displayed in the media were examined. Traditionally, the media was used as a way to enhance political ideas, but Evans identified ways two opposing groups used the media to their opinions on the public. He examined how four mainstream and six religious Israeli newspapers' market exposures changed. When it came to the religious papers, their exposure had significantly increased. Additionally, it was stated that the Haredi people intentionally avoided mainstream media. Because of this, they were limited to consuming news that excluded certain events and were only exposed to one perspective.

Most of the newspapers circulating in Israel were either overtly secular or religious. This was exemplified by the fact that the papers' personnel all identify with the same religion. He found that "the boards of *HaModia, Yated Ne'eman,* and *Yom L'Yom* are comprised of representatives from the particular religious division and associated political movements which support each paper," (p. 246). It is not uncommon for religious and political views to go hand in

hand. Fox News, too, covers political news aimed mostly at individuals belonging to the same religion. These papers felt they had an obligation to inform the public with news that aligned with their values. Papers that did not were criticized and consumers tried to stay away from conflicting information.

When the public was faced with current events that required action, the papers became a method for instructing groups on the proper way to act. For example, when discussing issues on providing resources and funds for educational institutions, secular media did a great job of showing how the Haredi institutions already received a great deal of money. On the contrary, religious media claimed that criticizing their funding objectives was a form of discrimination. By doing so each paper tried to gain support either in favor of or opposed to granting these resources. Although they are associated with religion, it was the political agenda for funding their own institutions that was made a priority in reporting news. Media has the power to sway audiences one way or the other in times when an impactful conclusion needs to be reached, and this becomes a substantive issue when deciding how to approach the influx of refugees.

Dealing directly with making decisions regarding refugees, Yaylaci and Karakus (2015) completed a study that looked at newspaper coverage of the recent increase of refugees in Turkey. They examined articles from three newspapers over the course of one year and found that the political attitudes of the papers towards the Turkish government affected the portrayal of refugees in their stories. After the crises began in Syria in 2011 and more people resisted the authoritative forces of President Bashar al-Assad, the Turkish government grew to support the opposition. The researchers here chose newspapers, *Cumhuriyet*, *Yeni Safak*, and *Hurriyet* whose political views were opposition, pro-government, and mainstream, respectively. The top three keywords they searched and found in these papers were *Syrian*, *Ezidi*, and *Kobani*.

With regard to the Ezidi refugees, Yaylaci and Karakus (2015) found that *Yeni Safak*, as the pro-government paper, criticized opposition groups and showed no evidence of the violence and hardships the Ezidi people faced from the government. The *Cumhuriyet* and *Hurriyet* papers, on the other hand, depicted many of the disturbing realities of the Ezidi people through images of and descriptions of sufferings. When it came to portrayals of Syrians, *Yeni Safak* used refugees as a way to show how "generous" (p. 245) the government had been and how opposition groups paid no attention to the Syrians. *Cumhuriyet* used the Syrians to criticize the government and *Hurriyet* stayed objective to both sides, but criticized the U.S. Lastly, with the Kobani, once again *Yeni Safak* criticized opposition groups such as the Democratic Union Party (PYD). *Cumhuriyet* attacked the government on its policies, discrimination, and lack of humanitarianism. *Hurriyet* did the same; it indirectly "voiced the government's criticism to Kurdish opposition" (p. 247). They made very apparent the information they want their readers to receive.

In the *Cumhuriyet* papers violence towards the Ezidi people was clearly represented, along with the abuses and massacres committed by ISIS. Common themes in these papers included the categories of "Escape/Be besieged/Struggle for life, Cry for help/Cry for solidarity, and Political criticism/analysis" (p. 242). Those found in *Hurriyet* papers appeared to have similar overtones, with categories, "Escape/Be besieged/Struggle for life, Middle East politics, and ISIS massacre violence" (p. 242). *Yeni Safak* papers, on the other hand, expressed no struggles of the Ezidi people, none of the violence they faced or any other hardships they experienced.

The concept presented here is that the newspapers are going to respond to current events by portraying them in their stories the way they want to public to understand them. The themes

of the Ezidi people in those papers were just one example, but Yaylaci and Karakus also found that, as expected, the newspapers' stories corresponded with their attitudes toward Syrians and Kobani as well. It is important to recognize this tendency because if certain news sources reflect their political opinions in their articles, through their treatment of refugees, for example, then the individuals consuming this media only receive one side of the story and are likely going to be influenced by it. Media has become a powerful tool in manipulating the public. By setting a political agenda, they guide the thoughts and opinions of their audience.

Theoretical Framework

Once much of the existing research on these topics has been considered, it is critical to examine the ways information circulated through the media affect the humans who consume it. By looking at the theory of social constructionism, methods by which individuals process information and turn it into beliefs can be better understood. Surette (2007) introduced the concepts of experienced reality, symbolic reality, and socially constructed reality. The first is categorized by the occurrences in one's life, or anything that has happened to an individual. It allows them to believe what they directly experienced. The second, by things one believes have happened because he or she received that information secondhand, through other people, institutions, or the media. The third, socially constructed reality is a little more complex.

Surette (2007) explained how socially constructed reality combines both experienced and symbolic reality. It differs from person to person because we all experience different events and we choose to accept different information from our symbolic realities. Groups of people that are constantly together then tend to have similar socially constructed realities due to their interactions with one another and generally similar life experiences. This differs from symbolic reality because symbolic reality solely comes from information we are told. Symbolic reality

excludes our own direct experiences, but is the reason we believe what we read in textbooks or what we see on television. Much of the symbolic realities people today are confronted with come from the media. Because of this, the media has a direct impact on socially constructed reality.

The media's role in social construction is to offer competing constructions and potential social remedies and then give legitimacy to those that are covered more frequently. This is a continuous process and from it comes a "dominant social construction of the world" (p. 36). Surette used crime as an example; two competing constructions of crime were that "crime is out of control" and "society is safe" (p. 35). The media has the power then to support either one construction or the other, and over time one becomes the prevailingly understood perception of crime. This process transpires especially with dramatic news or controversial issues, so it is no surprise that refugees, too, fall subject to this.

From the literature mentioned above with regard to media framing, it is clear that framing plays a large role in shaping constructions of reality. To reiterate, Surette suggested frames are used to help media consumers organize world events, which facilitates their decisions on how to react to those events. He further expanded on types of framing, but what is important to recognize is as follows. Instead of receiving unbiased information and figuring out what to do with it individually, the media assists by removing that entire thought process. It gives us what it wants us to believe is significant, and all we are left to do is decide which social construction seems the most legitimate. This becomes problematic when the information we receive is wrong and clearly political.

From these previous studies we can gather that to their dismay, refugees are often represented negatively in the media, and the public comes to recognize this dominant social construction of them. It is critical to examine how this occurs to show others that the information

they receive from mainstream news media cannot always be trusted, and to encourage them to seek out more than just one source of information. My research question looks more specifically at the current Syrian refugee crisis. Being that it has been covered in the news fairly recently, not much research has been done to explore what the actual coverage looks like. I will analyze articles from both CNN and FOX news stations on particular events that have occurred in the past few years in reference to the recent influx of refugees in the United States. I want to use this research to show patterns that are present between conflicting news sources that point to how news is not always consistent.

Methodology

Before moving to my results, some concepts need to be expressed clearly. This study is a content analysis; Schutt (2006) used Neuendorf and Weber's definitions to explain that it is "'the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics'," with the goal of "develop[ing] inferences from text" (p. 428). My study though, will take on a qualitative property, because the main search in these articles will be for overall themes and biases, rather than specific quantitative data. I will also use the term "refugee" to describe the individuals represented in my sample. The UN Refugee Agency defines "refugee" as:

> Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.

Sample

The sampling strategy used was purposive, since I needed to locate articles specifically related to the refugee crisis. Two websites, Foxnews.com and CNN.com were consulted to find articles for inclusion in the study. I chose these sources because they are typically known to have opposing viewpoints on world events, and I wanted to identify those differences in their articles to point to the presence of media frames. The term "Syrian refugee" was used to define the search; because Fox had far less articles on the subject than CNN, I started with Fox articles and used those to match related CNN articles. The number of articles published within each year too influenced how many articles I chose between 2014 and 2016. For example, there were more stories in 2015 covering the refugee crisis than in other years, so there are more articles in my study from that year. I also did not want to begin with articles from the initial events in 2011; I

wanted to allow time for each news source to have already reported events concerning Syrian refugees.

Comparing articles that described similar events was important too. Part of the study is to discern whether or not the two sources would use different language regarding the same topics. I looked additionally for articles reporting on events that directly impacted the US and those that had no connection to the US. I thought this might affect the overall language and tone of the articles.

I started with thirty-three Fox articles, and then eliminated ones I could not match with corresponding CNN articles. After finding between four and ten articles from both CNN and Fox for each year, I narrowed them down based on a few factors. As mentioned previously, I matched articles based on similar topics and date. The lengths of the articles were significant as well; I wanted to be able to analyze ones that had more content. I also eliminated from my study articles that were transcripts from TV reports, as I wanted to keep them consistent. Once this was complete, my selection came down to two articles from 2014, three from 2015, and two from 2016 for both CNN and Fox, constituting a total of fourteen articles for analysis.

Analysis

In terms of the analysis, the articles were examined three ways: tone; viewpoint; and rhetoric. I looked at first the overall tone of the article. It could either be positive, negative, or neutral. Then I coded what viewpoints were represented. If there were direct quotes, were they only from one perspective or were two opposing sides' ideas present? Or perhaps one viewpoint was privileged more than the other. The final component to the analysis dealt with the author's rhetoric: what kind of language was used to describe refugees or a government's decisions on how to act after an event? I searched for clear differences in rhetoric between the news sources.

After successfully examining the material, comparisons can be made in relation to previous studies and other literature with similar questions. Conclusions, too, will be drawn with regard to the impact the results have on news media consumers. The theoretical framework explained previously will guide these discussions; I will focus on how my findings point to evidence of socially constructed reality.

Analysis

In this section I will be exploring common themes that emerged while examining the articles chosen from Fox News and CNN. The articles were compared by the three aforementioned factors (overall tone, represented viewpoints, author's rhetoric), which were collected to identify themes. Although I went in with those factors in mind, the themes I selected appeared to be most important. My analysis here will be arranged according to news source first, and then they will be compared directly with one another towards the end.

<u>Fox News</u>

In its reports related to refugees, Fox tended to introduce the specific topic of the article, provide conflicting viewpoints, and close by privileging a perspective they wanted to endorse. For example, in the November 2015 article "Syrian Refugee Screening Process Reveals Progress and Pitfalls," Cody Derespina explained that the first step of the refugee vetting process involves biometric screening where specific background information is investigated and confirmed. He then offered other experts' suppositions that refugees could forge documents and informed that the process is also complicated by the fact that U.S. officials have no previous record of any of these applicants. He then explained the interview portion, where refugees are asked specific questions with answers that must be consistent with real events. The interviewers are well trained and look for signals of lying. Here it seems confidence was revealed towards the screening process.

Conversely, the author continued by offering an opposing viewpoint; he quoted Mark Krikorian, the Executive Director for the Center for Immigration Studies, with "interviewers aren't mind readers and a talented liar can beat the most earnest agent" (Derespina, 2015). It was evident that he was skeptical about the whole process. Derespina continued to use Krikorian's

position on the topic throughout the article; he closed by referencing Krikorian's doubts that the process will be able to keep up with the influx of refugees. He believes that without much information on the migrants to begin with, ensuring they pose no risk is unlikely. Fox has claimed to the public that as a news source it is "fair and balanced," which could be supported by the fact that statements of confidence in the screening process were mentioned. However, because the author pushed mostly Krikorian's adversarial position, it can be said that the article had a negative overall tone toward refugees. Although sharing the points of those who felt confident in the screening process, ultimately he showed he disagreed with these remarks.

Ethnocentric Focus

Another aspect of most of the Fox articles examined was that they tended to elevate both the U.S. and Republican viewpoints. While some articles shared both takes on an issue, comments made about the U.S. and Republican viewpoints were always described more positively than other countries or democratic ideals. In an article reporting the murder of Peter Kassig, an American providing humanitarian aid in Syria, Republican and now Vice President Mike Pence was referenced expressing that Kassig was "inspiring because of his compassion and courage" (Herridge, 2014). The article also included multiple times that Kassig had converted to Islam while he was abroad, perhaps trying to show the lengths he would go for the people there.

The same way Kassig's contributions abroad were highlighted, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew were commended in an article that reported Francis' trip to Turkey. The two religious leaders came together to offer peace to the Middle East, and the article shared purely positive statements released by them. It also mentioned that their messages were received with gratitude, while leaving out any negative responses there could have been. At the end of the article, the Vatican Spokesman, Reverend Federico Lombardi's thoughts were

revealed; he "acknowledged the novelty in Francis' message," and that the two leaders are "'pushing with incredible strength toward union' through their frequent and warm personal contacts" ("Pope, Patriarch," 2014). Being a representative from the Catholic Church he likely supports Pope Francis, so it is no surprise he felt this way.

Keeping consistent with Fox's focus on the U.S., their political affiliation was also represented fairly well. The article, "Several Governors Refuse to Relocate Syrian Refugees after Paris Attacks," exposed the feelings of many Republican governors who recently stated they did not want to accept any refugees. Their statements occurred soon after the attacks in Paris, where one of the perpetrators passed through Europe's immigration system. Republican governors of Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, and Louisiana all refused to house refugees. Interestingly, Michigan too announced it was not accepting refugees, but did so in a respectful way; the governor instructed the public that the attacks should not be used to generalize people from the Middle East, and the article did include this, but also that at the moment Michigan's safety should be the priority. Voices of Democratic governors on the subject were not included. By uncovering only one side of the situation, Fox indicated that it probably agrees with those Republican states.

Each of these instances exemplifies ways Fox News has chosen to represent events pertaining to refugees. Although some articles briefly mention an alternative perspective, the majority of voices represented are Republicans or other government officials. There are no remarks made that offer suggestions from a refugee's standpoint or any other international actors. Rather than investigating the actual issues at hand, the questions regarding governmental decisions are only presented in reference to how they affect the U.S. and Republican officials, demonstrating Fox News' ethnocentric concentration.

Inclusion of Select Information

Another aspect of many of the Fox articles was that the author chose to include specific information or made choices about the writing that may not have been necessary to achieve his or her point. Each of these tactics could subliminally make an impression on the reader and cause him or her to lean a certain way about the event being described even when it seems the article is generally neutral. One piece that demonstrated this was Fox's, "Amid, 'Disaster of Biblical Proportions,' Administration Reportedly to Accept 5,000." The article explained the urgency for managing the rush of refugees fleeing Syria and that the U.S. had goals of accepting 5,000. The article was successful in expressing multiple viewpoints. The Director of National Intelligence's concerns about screening processes were disclosed, Republican John McCain's recommendation that the U.S. "do something meaningful about it" (reality of the refugee crisis) was shared, along with Democrat Hillary Clinton's message to "call for an 'emergency global gathering' to pledge aid money and to accept some of the refugees" ("Amid, 'Disaster," 2015). At this point in the article because several voices were expressed, the reader is left with an illusion of neutrality.

It appears from these excerpts that the article is relatively unbiased, however it included in the middle of the story an interesting fact. "The top three groups of people resettled by the U.S. are Burmese, Iraqis, and Somalis" ("Amid, 'Disaster," 2015). This caused me to question what point the author was trying to make in incorporating the statement. Is there some kind of significance in the type of people being resettled by the U.S.? Does the applicant's nationality play a large role in whether or not he or she is admitted to the U.S.? Or does the author want the readers to receive some kind of message from this? This statement could have been eliminated from the article without changing the overall content. It did not support the main goals of the article, to share concerns about increasing the number of refugees accepted to the U.S., so perhaps it had another purpose.

Another article that included something similar was Fox's, "Obama's Guest List for State of the Union Includes Syrian Refugee, Former Illegal Immigrant." The article, again very neutral, simply listed individuals who were invited to Obama's State of the Union Address. The focus here though is that the first individuals represented in the article are a Syrian refugee, a former illegal immigrant, and the plaintiff involved in the case legalizing gay marriage. Even in the title of the article two of those three are named. Why did the author choose to list these individuals first? Perhaps they were the most controversial, or they are the ones the author wanted the readers to focus on. Regardless, Fox had a choice in how to list the invitees; it seems that they are the most concerned with these particular guests. Among the articles examined, the above themes provide a basic understanding of how Fox's authors choose to write their stories, and with which intentions in mind.

The decisions on the part of Fox point directly to the presence of Melkote's (2009) definition of agenda setting. "The news media are influential in setting the public agenda, and their coverage of the day's events aids the cognitive mindset of the public in terms of ranking the most important news makers and issues" (p. 548). By selecting specific information to include in their articles, Fox plays a part in influencing what the public deems to be important information. Through this information Fox does not necessarily suggest how to think about an event, but it is able to manipulate what we think about as media consumers. Through the examples listed above, Fox has confirmed to its audience that we should pay attention to the top ethnicities of people resettled by the U.S. and the individuals the Obamas have chosen to sit at their State of the Union Address, as if they make some kind of difference.

CNN

The articles CNN produced, too, revealed some commonalities. They were much more neutral than the Fox articles, making sure to include all kinds of perspectives on the main topic. CNN was broader in the sources it used to report an event; many international sources and non-governmental organizations were consulted to provide an array of different opinions, rather than the strictly government representatives and "experts" Fox used. But it was also evident that CNN has specific attitudes toward the refugees from Syria. In the article, "Migrant Crisis: Rights Groups Slam EU-Turkey Refugee Swap Proposal," an agreement Turkey made with the EU was explained. Turkey would take back one refugee who fled to Europe for every one that was resettled in Europe.

The article first shared the UN Refugee Agency's perspective that this plan is "'not consistent with European law' or 'international law'" (Hume, 2016). The author then went on to defend the plan by expressing views from the European Council and other EU heads of government. "'The days of irregular migration to the European Union are over,'" and "'bold moves were needed' to break the business model of smugglers, highlighting the importance of a NATO anti-trafficking mission," (Hume, 2016). Although both viewpoints were disclosed, the main objective of the paper was to highlight humanitarian concerns about the plan.

Comments from the UN Refugee Agency, Amnesty International, International Rescue Committee, and Doctors Without Borders all contributed to the final take the article chose to leave the readers with. In discussing the closing of the route through the Balkans, Doctors Without Borders' information that migrants had been stuck at the border of Greece and Macedonia was exposed. Amnesty International called the agreement "'dangerously dehumanizing'" and said that "'it offers no sustainable long-term solution to the ongoing humanitarian crisis'" (Hume, 2016). The International Rescue Committee was concerned about

not having alternative routes for migrants to find safety, leaving with the comment that only smugglers will be successful from this arrangement (Hume, 2016). Although part of the article was spent defending the EU-Turkey plan and explaining why some believe it is necessary, CNN made it known through the perspectives it chose to include that it agrees with those; the agreement will do more harm than good.

Isolation of Republican Viewpoints

In discussing such controversial news, a pattern emerged in the articles that CNN tends to isolate Republican stances specifically. The article, "How Do Syrian Refugees Get into the U.S.? Explaining the Process," showed one way they do this. It mainly answered some frequently asked questions regarding the refugee screening process for being allowed entry to the U.S. It seems though in the beginning, that the purpose of the article was to address the fact that many Republicans are against the admittance of refugees. It wanted to ensure them that the process is as extensive as it can be, and that there is an obligation to assist the victims of the crisis.

The article opened by voicing that in light of the Paris attacks, "Republicans on and off the campaign trail are pressing President Barack Obama not to accept the displaced people. Many Republican governors, meanwhile, have said they would not allow Syrian refugees into their states" (Koran, 2015). The article then explained the process, presented challenges, and gave information about the refugees such as how many and where in the U.S. they are. In returning to the discrepancy between state officials (governors) and the federal government's authority, the article made it clear to Republicans that the decision to accept refugees is ultimately up to the federal government. Rather than being simply informative, the motive of the article was to address Republican statements against refugees.

This pattern was also present in the article, "More Than Half the Nation's Governors Say Syrian Refugees Not Welcome." The point of the report was to expose the feelings of the majority of the U.S. governors that after the Paris attacks, many of whom grew skeptical and refused to permit refugees in their states. Once again, in opening the article, the author chose to recognize that "among these 31 states, all but one have Republican governors" (Brumfield & Fantz, 2015). In moving forward, the author cited the Council on American-Islamic Relations in condemning these governors. "'Governors who reject those fleeing war and persecution abandon our ideals and instead project our fears to the world'" (Brumfield & Fantz, 2015). It is clear that CNN has a certain attitude toward Republican viewpoints.

Defending Refugees

In following the above theme, being that Republicans are against welcoming migrants seeking safety, it is no surprise that a theme of defending those refugees surfaced in CNN's stories. While Fox's article on the acceptance of a greater number of refugees expressed mainly what the U.S. has already contributed in terms of foreign aid CNN's focused more on increasing the amount of aid the U.S. provides in the future. In "U.S. to Take At Least 10,000 More Syrian Refugees," CNN revealed the pressures the government has been under to take in more migrants. Democrat Nancy Pelosi's views were initially stated, "'5,000 is far too low a figure,'" (Acosta, Koran, Labott, & Walsh, 2015). The article then discussed how many refugees would be an appropriate amount to welcome and disclosed that the vetting process has been a problem in the past. The main conversation, however, focused on raising the quota in the following years, an indication that CNN supports that idea.

Koran's article mentioned previously can also be used to back the notion that CNN defends refugees. She exposed a great deal of information regarding the process for entering the

U.S., while pointing out that many Republicans were against taking refugees. After doing so though, she provided the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' definition of refugee, a term that undoubtedly describes many of the individuals seeking protection in the U.S. She continued by presenting the challenges associated with approving refugees and giving further information about where they would reside and how many the government is currently discussing admitting.

However, in returning to her early observation that many Republicans refuse to welcome refugees, she cited an official who made reference to the U.S. Constitution in their defense. She questioned governors' legal authority to make judgments on the acceptance of refugees and then added a senior administration official's words, "'this is a federal program carried out under the authority of federal law, and refugees arriving in the U.S. are protected by the Constitution and federal law'" (Koran, 2015). In response to the inquiry about whether or not governors are allowed to stop admitting Syrian refugees, Koran quickly shut down the possibility. She did acknowledge that "state agencies have authority to make the process of accepting refugees much more difficult by cutting state and local funding" (Koran, 2015), but it is obvious that by using the Constitution Koran and CNN were defending refugees.

I was surprised to see that both Fox and CNN generally did offer multiple viewpoints on these controversial topics. However, both of them did indicate, in different ways, that they had certain stances on issues regarding the Syrian refugee crisis that they wanted to portray to their audiences. Fox is, for the most part, more skeptical about the responsibility of the U.S. to address the flow of refugees and the conflict in the Middle East. CNN, on the other hand, tends to be more likely to consider the possibilities associated with the U.S. responding to the crisis. These

attitudes are reflected in their writing and play a role in the messages readers receive when seeking news. The following discussion will expand more on this concept.

Political Agendas

It is clear through the articles examined that both Fox and CNN politicized the events being reported. Fox was more likely to share perspectives indicative of its own party and use language that showed negativity towards refugees. CNN, too, showed signs of politicization, but did so differently. Although CNN also chose to support one perspective, it included voices representative of the international community and non-governmental organizations. When one article openly discussed an event pertaining to Republicans, CNN directly challenged them by offering suggestions from a more Democratic standpoint. Fox's article reporting the same event mostly provided rationale for the Republican stance, suggesting they were reasonable in feeling the way they did towards accepting more refugees.

Because each of these news sources has a particular manner for reporting the same events, they set the agenda for their consumers. The way they do this is by politicizing the issues. CNN was more likely to mention concerns for the refugees or question the cause for the crisis, but both Fox and CNN mainly had their audiences in mind when composing their stories. Fox did so by using Republican voices that shared the potential negative impact Syrian refugees would have on Americans while leaving out alternative perspectives, and CNN did so by challenging Republican claims through the opinions of international organizations in defense of the refugees.

Discussion

From the evidence gathered, a few inferences can be made. Both Fox News and CNN framed their articles in ways that would attract the most attention. The media frames present were primarily political, setting the agenda for their particular audiences. Although Fox claims to be "fair and balanced" its articles catered mostly to Republican consumers. The authors politicized the events they reported on by choosing Republican perspectives to dominate the voices represented and questioning mainly what effects the refugees would have on American citizens. CNN, on the other hand, included a wider variety of voices in their articles, but they too were politicized. They did so by directly challenging Republicans and choosing to defend refugees. Although CNN appeared more neutral toward the issue, this source also set a political agenda for their audience.

Complimenting these news sources' focus on politics, it was interesting to see that neither of them examined the crisis itself. They did not examine or discuss root causes, or offer suggestions on how to minimize the consequences this conflict has already had on other countries or the international community. CNN included more international concerns, however, the motives behind it were to appeal to its consumers rather than to alleviate the problems. Any structural issues within Syria were overlooked and it is possible there was other important information not brought to the public's attention. Because of this, those who seek news about Syrian refugees from either of these sources are limited by the information they receive.

When the media can set the agenda for its consumers, it tells them what to think about. People rely on these sources for their news and believe it is the most significant information there is. After all, if an event were so important, why wouldn't news media cover it? This is how media consumers can be manipulated. The media has gained the power to control its consumers

by bringing what they consider "news" to their attention. From my analysis it is apparent that Fox and CNN set their agenda based on their specific political angle: Republican v. Democrat. Consumers' political opinions towards refugees become further enforced by the positions represented in their respective news sources; an echo chamber is created because individuals seek sources that align with their beliefs. By reading them, they reconfirm what they already believe and no opposing information is offered. This becomes a problem when this is the only source of news they turn to when seeking information.

The purpose of reporting news today has transformed from being to objectively inform the public about what is occurring around the world to entertaining consumers for business. Both Fox and CNN are for-profit news stations, so one of their main goals includes generating a profit. They do so by appealing to their audiences and clearly adding an entertainment aspect to their news. If news consisted of solely objective, unbiased information it would not be as interesting. When consumers choose a favorite though, they become negatively influenced by that source more than they expect. A 2012 Business Insider article revealed a survey consisting of both domestic and international questions completed by Farleigh Dickenson University (2012) that reinforced this claim and can be used to support my findings. Responses from nearly 2,000 random nationwide participants revealed that among news sources, CNN, Daily Show, Fox News, MSNBC, No News, NPR, Sunday Show, and Talk Radio, the least informative were Fox, MSNBC, and CNN. It was also surprising to see that those who preferred Fox, specifically, were actually less informed than people who do not watch any news at all. These individuals' knowledge has become filtered through one lens, one that has been made more political than anything else.

It is true that people also engage in confirmation bias, choosing sources that represent beliefs they already hold without seeking evidence to the contrary. However, media consumers' opinions about refugees, in this case, become shaped by the biases present in the news source they depend on. The concept of socially constructed reality is exemplified here. Surette (2007) described this notion as a combination of both our experienced reality and our symbolic reality, which comes from the information we receive secondhand. The media's role in shaping our socially constructed reality has become increasingly influential. Because we typically have no direct relation with refugees, we cannot turn to experienced reality for our thoughts on them. We must rely on any socially constructed reality we have. In terms of gathering information on refugees, the media has become the primary outlet for most Americans.

Fox and CNN are examples of how the media offers competing arguments towards a topic, here refugees, and over time one becomes the dominating view. The more a topic is covered, the more important it seems to the public; this works the same with the media frames chosen. The public learns to believe the dominating standpoint on refugees, and it is supported by the feelings of the perspectives conveyed in the articles. Unfortunately, the events these sources choose to report on do not concern themselves with the larger issue itself. For example, the article regarding the Obama's guest list for the State of the Union Address had little to do with refugees. Why include such a story? Their focus is political. They distract us from focusing our attention to the questions we should be concerning ourselves with, such as what government policies we have and what we could change to improve the situation. Their followers do not receive enough information from them to make any informed decisions about the crisis, and we go on to believe what we are told.

Conclusion

Overall, the way consumers receive news media has changed with the introduction of a more technological and globalized society. We have moved from a time of receiving news solely from a few main sources and newspapers to this "post-broadcast era" where we can seek specific cable news networks and articles from the Internet. The way news is presented has changed and it has altered the way we consume news. With this, credibility is lost because there are more unreliable sources out there so consumers need to be more purposeful when seeking valid news.

Unfortunately, as my research has identified, negative biases exist and refugees often fall subject to them. Consequently and because of the theory of social constructionism, the public subconsciously attributes those negative frames to refugees. By analyzing two distinct news sources I have pointed out a few of the ways the media can change information to fit its alternative motives, such as setting a political agenda and entertaining their audiences. If media consumers knew this information they would be more critical when reading articles or watching the news they see on television. It is important to question the reliability of information today, as misleading news can travel so easily. I hope this research can be used for citizens to make better-educated decisions when discussing refugees.

My suggestions for further research include examining the particular implications that relying on one source of news has on an individual's beliefs and the beliefs of a group. I would also consider looking at the relationship between individuals' political views and their sources of news. This could be done through a series of interview questions regarding how they get their information and what their opinions are on a number of controversial global topics. These are only suggestions, but my research might be able to guide future questions like these.

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