

COMEBACK COVERAGE: THEMATIC CONTENT IN THE NEWS MEDIA'S REPORTING  
ON DONALD TRUMP'S ATTACKS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is informed by gatekeeping and frame-building theories. It uses straightforward textual analysis to determine what forms of thematic content are repeated in coverage from The New York Times, The Washington Post, and CNN of President Donald Trump's attacks on the outlets. The thesis applies the textual analysis of 24 stories responding to Trump's attacks — eight CNN stories, eight Washington Post stories, and eight New York Times stories. The findings of this research show a multitude of reportorial strategies in covering Trump's hostile rhetoric toward the news media. This includes various types of repeated tones and narratives used throughout the 24 artifacts. The research also shows that neither The Times, The Post, nor CNN knows how, exactly, to cover Trump's combative relationship with the news media.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Donald Trump often makes news for hating the news media. He's called the press "the enemy of the American people" (Grynbaum, 2017). When delivering the commencement address at the Coast Guard Academy, Trump accepted an honorary sword, and laughed when the man handing it to him said he could use it on the media. News outlets and their reporters have been backed into corners. They cannot offer full-throated defenses of themselves, for that would come off as biased (although sometimes they do this anyway). But they also cannot look cowed in the face of someone they are supposed to cover fearlessly. So, do journalists and news media outlets simply accept the current paradigm between Trump and themselves? What can they do as Trump disparages their integrity? Most importantly, are there effective ways to tell the story of Trump's prolonged battle with the press?

In press conferences, campaign appearances and on his Twitter feed, some of Trump's favorite media targets are CNN, The Washington Post, and The New York Times. This thesis sought to determine the different types of themes and tones these publications used when covering a Trump attack on its namesake and, at times, its competitors. If Trump calls an individual journalist or organization "fake news" or "failing," the targets he was referring to usually cover it. That coverage can often be similar in structure and sourcing, but it can vary deeply in terms of tone or theme (and vice versa). This raises a number of questions, such as, what does that coverage look like? And does it change based on the type of attack?

This thesis uses typology and historical context to determine different types of tones and themes in the texts. Its theoretical framework is frame-building informed by gatekeeping and news management. The typology of different Trump attacks on the media helped determine

whether tone, theme, and other factors in coverage changed based on the type of attack, including (1) “false” or “inaccurate” and (2) “fake news,” among others. These three sections account for many buzzwords and criticisms, and this typology helped answer whether the types of attacks or themes had an effect on how they were covered. The use of historical context is meant to show that Trump’s antagonistic relationship with the news media does not occur in a vacuum.

Rather than interviewing producers of news content, who have a definite stake in this discussion, the researcher’s method was analyzing texts, which is useful in interpreting thematic content when repeated over a period of time. Frame-building, in this thesis, is the way The New York Times, the Washington Post, and CNN use symbols to create meaning (the basic definition of framing), but more specifically the tone, phrasing, sources, leads, kickers (endings), and headlines the outlets use to convey a message, and, usually, to defend themselves. Most of the time this is implicit, although there are instances where an article leans toward being an outright defense of a specific news outlet or reporter and a direct repudiation of Trump’s attacks. Again, consequential information is most often found in the lead, the headline, the structure of the story, the story’s diction and the story’s kicker, but within the content of the story the focus will be on tone as well, which is often comprised of phrasing as well as what information is included in a story and what is not (Boydston et al, *Identifying Media Frames and Frame Dynamics Within and Across Policy Issues*, p. 5). That said, this thesis works with a loose definition of framing that leans more toward an analysis of thematic content. Rather than identifying and explicating specific frames, this thesis highlights consequential aspects of the thematic content within the texts analyzed.

There does not seem to be a study of this kind beyond Juliane Lischka's (2017) compelling critical discourse analysis examining New York Times' stories about being called "fake news." Lischka looked at 16 tweets relating to The Times. This thesis is more expansive and incorporates dozens of Trump statements as well as textual analyses of 24 individual articles. While this thesis is a part of filling a theoretical knowledge gap on this subject, it will also use framing/gatekeeping/news management to look at "fake news" in a way that has not been done before. Fake news is real — false information and yellow journalism masquerading as fact — but Trump has coopted it and turned it into a synonym for the "liberal media" and any reporting about him or his allies he does not like.

The specific goal in this thesis is not to define "fake news." When surveying the scholarly articles similar in content and method, this thesis occupies a relatively new space. But the overall thrust of the work also tangentially places it in what has almost become a cottage industry for political science and journalism researchers: Trump, the press, and what has evolved into a slur to the press, "fake news." It is important to talk about this issue in a scholarly way rather than a partisan one. On a practical level, if more work like this is done, news media outlets can ideally develop a baseline for covering attacks on them, and can choose the most ethical and effective ways of doing so. The news media has been in crisis mode since Trump and other conservatives have made it their business to delegitimize it, but the rise of Trump has coincided with economic prosperity at The Times, The Post, and CNN (Thompson, 2017). This thesis explores how prominent news outlets respond to these attacks, and professional journalists and editors can draw conclusions about what works and what does not in the way The Times, CNN and The Post write about the reputations and work of their own publications coming under fire from Trump.



## Theory

The main theories guiding the research for this thesis are broadly defined gatekeeping and frame-building. While there is theoretical thinking behind textual analysis, typology, and Trump's treatment of the media, these will mostly be addressed in other sections. In this specific instance, applying gatekeeping theory to the artifacts analyzed made the most sense in an attempt to answer the research questions.

With gatekeeping, the researcher wants to figure out why news turns out the way it does. Shoemaker & Vos (2009) define gatekeeping as "an activity performed by a communication organization and its representatives." More specifically:

"Gatekeeping is the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day, and it is the center of the media's role in modern public life. People rely on mediators to transform information about billions of events into a manageable subset of media messages." (p. 1)

The hope is that gatekeeping can account for how these attacks are depicted. Gatekeeping recognizes that there are people outside of the reporter trying to shape the news. For this research in particular, gatekeeping theory will get at how frames are built in the first place. Really what gatekeeping is trying to explain is framing. Shoemaker & Vos (2009) contend that the media is the middleman between source and audience, and "the version of reality as processed by sources is extremely influential in determining what comes to the attention of the media" (p. 84-85). In the current context, that means two things: 1) Trump is a major source, so the media will not ignore him when he criticizes them and 2) In a sense, he is a gatekeeper in deciding who gets access. Shoemaker & Vos (2009) go on to say that more powerful sources have increased media

access and, “therefore, more opportunity to insert messages into media channels” (p. 85). The circumstances of production can turn out to be as important as what is produced. And Trump, as several of the articles analyzed mention, may be manipulating the press into covering themselves as a distraction from other issues.

In turn the concept of “news management,” which refers to the ways powerful people and institutions try to get the press to cover something they want covered in the manner they want it discussed, will become important. For example, a possible conclusion could be drawn from these CNN, Times, and Post artifacts that the press is more discerning when covering Democrats because news outlets are concerned with accusations of liberal bias from Republicans. It is dangerous when this sort of reaction from the news media affects coverage, and of course this is directly correlated with frame-building, and comparative textual analysis is capable of highlighting specific forms of repeated thematic content.

Michael Schudson notes in “Discovering The News: A Social History of American Newspapers” (1978) that the government will make a concerted effort to control, or manage, “the news in an organized, self-conscious fashion” (p. 166). Furthermore, and especially important for this thesis, is when “the continuing story in the press” is “the story of the press itself in its efforts to gather news” (p. 175). Trump’s aggressive handling of the press, while a risk, has paid off in that when the press is reporting on itself, objectivity becomes, at least to an outside observer, impossible to practice. Press conferences and tweets are two ways Trump and his team have sought to manage news. Calculated outbursts like Trump’s on CNN’s Jim Acosta, and calling CNN “fake news” help control how news media may cover a Trump attack, or at least distract outlets from covering something they might otherwise spend more airtime and ink on.

Shoemaker and Vos (2009) note that “media content is affected directly (through the publication of press releases) and indirectly (by calling the media’s attention to the problem” (p. 37). When Trump criticizes a newspaper or news station via his Twitter account or from behind a podium, he is effectively directing attention to this matter rather than policy issues or scandals. To put it succinctly, news management is when “government officials decide which information is doled out to the news media and what is not” (p. 38).

Before exploring the data for consequential thematic content within the reporting on Trump’s attacks on the news media, it is important to understand why he would have a vested interest in its reporting on his contentious relationship with them in the first place. Schudson (1978) turns to historical examples to explain how the news is shaped by public relations officials (p. 144). His analysis of how the news media responds to news management is necessary to this thesis. He describes the dawn of interpretive reporting meant to contextualize claims and press releases (p. 146). In this development is the intersection of gatekeeping, framing, and news management. The news media has the responsibility of mediating information from its source (gatekeeping). In turn, the government, or in this case, Trump, seeks to send an undiluted message, or at least one that will ultimately work to his advantage (news management). Then, the news media frames his message how they see fit (framing). Probing the text for similar or disparate types of thematic content with this theoretical framework in mind proved fruitful. The Times, CNN, and The Post all sought to re-situate, usually through contextualization, Trump’s critical comments about the news media in a way that discredited his statements while defending the outlets’ integrity.

Trump's "fake news"-driven war on the news media is so pronounced that articles focusing on legal interpretation are being written to defend journalists from legal action from a sitting president:

"...Donald Trump made an interesting promise: 'If I win...I'm going to open up the libel laws so when they write purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money.' President Trump's comments betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding of defamation law" (Zaharoff, 2017, p. 48).

A conversation about libel is inherently one about truth. Erving Goffman is often credited as the founder of framing theory. In 1974, he printed "Frame Analysis, An Essay on the Organization of Experience." He looked at framing as it is often thought of — via agenda-setting — but he was laser-focused on finding different recurring frameworks in which media makes meaning (Goffman, 1974). Stephen Reese (2009), in his discussion of framing within the War on Terror, admired framing theory for its versatility, noting its general usefulness. He defines framing as "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (p. 1). This thesis concerns journalistic framing, and pays close attention to how "frames accomplish ... results" (p. 1). Naturally, gatekeeping is a major part of defining how frames are built. For this thesis in particular, the different types of repeated thematic content and tone identified will often seek to promote a specific agenda, whether a news outlet seeks to protect its integrity, impugn Trump, take a neutral line, etc. In searching for repeated thematic content, Reese also stipulates several questions that helped inform this research in relation to framing:

“Where does the frame reside (in text, culture, or the cognitions of the perceiver)? How does one convincingly establish that a frame exists...? Is framing a subset of agenda-setting or vice versa? Where do topics and themes leave off and frames begin? What is the unit of analysis — that is, what is to be counted or examined?” (2009, p. 1).

These questions are included almost in full because they were exactly what had to be kept in mind during the research. The goal is to be as certain as possible when highlighting a type of repeated thematic content in order to account for and control my distaste for Trump and his politics. One factor that contributed to this certainty was a fair accounting of the information these news outlets include — or did not include — in their news stories. Boydston et al. (2013) writes that framing is the act of “portraying an issue from one perspective to the necessary exclusion of alternative perspectives” (p. 1). Part of constructing a theoretically sound thesis was combining the work of scholars into an applicable definition of framing.

Reese’s (2009) contextualizing of framing theory helped the research and spoke to formulating the research questions. He brings up “what” framing versus “how” framing. The “what” wants mostly to find frames and break them down; the how, as Reese puts it, suggests “frames are situated in competitive social and political environments; frames are constructed and promoted to achieve some predetermined outcome. In these environments, elites compete against elites” (p. 3). This can be more challenging, as it is more subjective, but it can also be more rewarding, specifically in this case, where the whole concept for this thesis is one founded on conflict between Trump and major news media outlets.

Cappella and Jamieson (1996) also do great work with framing. Their conclusions still resonate today, as can be seen in this excerpt where they quote Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein:

“Public confidence in Congress, the government, and social institutions has reached new lows. Healthy skepticism may have given way to corrosive cynicism. Some media watchers and critics blame the media for their preoccupation with the game and strategy of politics rather than social problems and their solution” (p. 72).

This is the same cynicism Trump has seized on, but, as Cappella & Jamieson posit, the news media has also played a role in developing public cynicism. With news media today increasingly concerned about how they appear to the general public — whether it is regarding accuracy or ethics — in large part because of Trump’s influence and rallying call of “fake news,” the idea of responding to low public trust in the news by adhering to issue-based stories rather than horserace reporting driven by political strategy is an appealing one. Cappella & Jamieson specifically highlight the “Strategy Frame,” which they write has become the “dominant mode” of political news coverage (p. 75). This type of frame, along with parallels between public trust in the press and the president that show up even though this was written over 20 years ago, heavily informed the research.

A major framing tip is what journalists/news media outlets leave out of stories (Coleman et al., 2011). Coleman et al.’s article points out four specific functions of framing, much like Reese’s (2009) questions (quoting Entman) to keep in mind: “to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies” (p. 942). With this work, defining problems and making moral judgments was more prevalent than diagnosing causes and

suggesting remedies, simply because news media outlets took pains to make sure they were not being overtly biased, and with any qualitative research, it is extremely difficult to identify intent. Only two stories both call Trump's attacks on the press a problem and suggest a solution, likely because this is too blatantly anti-Trump and too combative. Many of the articles analyzed are meant to show journalists as professional people simply doing their jobs. Coleman et al. (2011) narrowed this thesis's view of Trump's attacks on the news media and the news media's response to these attacks with "episodic" versus "thematic" framing, defined by Coleman et. al (and informed by Entman) as, for thematic framing, "associated with increased societal attributions" and for episodic, "related to increased attributions of individualistic causal responsibility as well as punitive treatment." (p. 943) CNN, The Post, and The Times sometimes had a more episodic — as in Trump is almost solely to blame — framing of the criticisms he leveled; the news outlets also sometimes had a more "thematic" framing that understood Trump is not alone in his animosity toward the press and that many people share his views. The coverage varied depending on the context of the attack.

One must be cognizant of the history of framing when identifying different frameworks and keeping track of meaning-making. Reese's (2009) article was essential to efforts toward creating viable research questions, staying as objective as possible, keeping track of what frames accomplish and, of course, defining frame-building within the confines of the thesis. Cappella & Jamieson (1996) ensured awareness of the context of Trump and the news media's tense relationship. Coleman et al. (2011) made certain of the inclusion of different types of framing while maintaining a lookout for moral judgments. And Shoemaker & Vos (2009) aided in understanding how thematic content can be borne from gatekeeping processes.

## **Key concepts**

This thesis concerns itself with Trump's incessant war on the news media, "fake news," "alternative facts," and the standing/reactions of The New York Times, The Washington Post, and CNN. The premium placed on profit-chasing and a lack of public trust in news media is a toxic combination resulting in severe insecurity in news media circles, conscious or unconscious. This thesis contends that this insecurity affects reporting and bleeds into stories from the outlets analyzed. Victor Pickard (2016) notes the creation of a false equivalence in news coverage due to excitement over Trump's mastery of spectacle. The concepts of gatekeeping and frame-building often overlap. In doing so, paradoxes arise. Yes, Trump "abused reporters at his campaign events... feuded with journalists deemed unsympathetic toward his candidacy, and he gave special access to those in the news media who were more compliant. He even threatened to change libel laws when he became president." And yet, "Trump was also a financial boon for major media outlets" (p. 1). The news media, particularly CNN, was at times especially cautious in its coverage of Trump's attacks on them, possibly because of monetary and access concerns. Hall, Goldstein, & Ingram (2016) go even further than Pickard, arguing that the news media helped create the Trump phenomenon due to its recognition of his entertainment value. In other words, he used the power of spectacle to gain in popularity.

Furthermore, Trump is skillful when it comes to controlling the news media. As Wells et al. (2016) write, Trump was able to dictate news media coverage of him because he has had decades of practice in doing just that. Social media, particularly Twitter, was an important factor in Trump's appeals for attention — and the press covered whatever he had to say (Oates, 2016). With the type of frame-building this thesis is working with, all of this information — about



spectacle, Trump's news media machinations, and capitalistic news media — have an effect on how the news media responds to specific attacks on their worth. It is a perplexing truth that, “Despite Trump's adversarial relationship with the media, he needs them, and they need him,” as Porismita Borah (2017) posits.

Trump dominated the unpaid media market, whether it was his Twitter account or his many call-in interviews to news media outlets (Francia, 2017). The entire inspiration for this thesis is Trump's hostility toward the news media. Douglas Kellner (2018) tells it: “Trump's media bashing and daily attacks via his campaign rallies, Twitter feeds and off-the-cuff remarks have been a defining feature of both Trump's presidential campaign and the first 200 days of his presidency” (p. 1). This source is particularly useful because it highlights specific clashes between the news media and Trump. There's the Sean Spicer inauguration crowd-size debacle, the alternative facts exchange between Chuck Todd and Kellyanne Conway, and Trump's failure to condemn white supremacists after the white pride parade and violence in Charlottesville, Virginia. But Kellner does not stop here. He makes specific comparisons to historical figures, in his case, Joseph Stalin: “Trump's Twitter war against the media presented them in one tirade as the enemy of the American people, a phrase that comrade Stalin used to use against bourgeois media, a phrase resurrected by comrade Trump that puts him in the Stalinist anti-media camp” (p. 17). This historical perspective is an important one, and one that must be used in research for the thesis. It is also one that news media outlets such as The Times use when covering the Trump-news media phenomenon.

What Trump is doing, and how the news media responds, is not occurring without precedence. Essential to answering the first research question are Edwin Bayley's (2014) “Joe

McCarthy and the Press” as well as the book “Dark Days in the Newsroom: McCarthyism Aimed at the Press.” (Aldwood, 2007) These works, and others like them, about past leaders who quarreled with and attempted to manipulate the press, were useful. In comparing historical figures’ relationships with the press to Trump’s, connections between the various ways both entities assail specific publications and the news media writ large arose.

Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, infamous news media abusers, are also necessary comparisons to make to Trump. “The Press as Opinion Resource During the 1968 Presidential Campaign,” (1971) “Our Worst Enemy Seems to Be the Press,” (2010) and “Richard Nixon, Watergate, and the Press,” (2003) by Doris Graber, Chester Each, and Louis Liebovich, respectively, help achieve a healthy historical comparison. Simon Kaye and Clayton Chin (2017) call Trump’s lying “surprisingly effective” (p. 1). It is no surprise, then, that the news media has been ineffective in offsetting these “blatant non-truths” (p. 1). This is why context in this thesis is so important — it is not all the news media’s fault. There have been massive and vociferous fact-checking operations undertaken to no avail. Actually, fact-checking has made very little difference in whether Trump can capitalize off of the false narratives he creates (Nyhan, Porter, Reifler, & Wood, 2017).

One thesis, while not as vigorous as Lischka’s research paper, is comparable to this thesis. It argues that “newspapers rely heavily on the presentation of facts, using credible sources and objective reporting to build their truth discourse” (Große, 2017, p. 10). In responding to Trump’s lies, news media outlets double down on what is traditionally seen as high-quality journalism. Große goes deeper, writing that the press, when responding to Trump’s attacks, is more concerned with possible hits to its prestige than making certain the public knows the truth:

“the newspapers’ defense as a political actor is more pronounced than its ability to reestablish truth, which is expected to be a consequence of political attacks by Trump” (p. 18). What makes this piece critical to the work in this thesis is also its sourcing, which includes numerous Times and Post articles covering Trump’s attacks on their reporters and brands. Große concludes that building a truth discourse is tricky when a news media outlet is simultaneously trying to defend itself.

Lischka’s (2017) study analyzes the same content as this thesis: the way in which The Times counters claims of fake news from Trump. She also looks to contextualize Trump’s behavior toward the press, but instead of historical examples, she brings in more modern instances and political figures. Hers is situated in the first 70 days of Trump’s presidency; this thesis examines his relationship with the press over a longer period. Hers is broader only in that it provides further context of the actualization of the press into an institution also known as The Fourth Estate. What is most impressive regarding Lischka’s method is that she has zeroed in on 16 tweets from Trump regarding The Times, whereas this thesis, while certainly including Twitter in its research, considers other avenues of Trump’s attacks on the press (speeches, etc.) in order to have enough material to scrutinize three separate news outlets. Another reason for this wider window of time and broader look at content is that this thesis intends to be a survey of how prominent news media outlets cover Trump’s attacks on them. Stumbling across her study provided a source akin to this thesis to refer back and compare to.

Then there are the sources that relate directly, rather than cumulatively or tangentially, to this thesis’s research questions and the theoretical contributions. One is George Kassimeris’s (2017) “What does Trump’s war on the media mean for the future of political journalism?” He

does not so much answer his question as he details the motivations behind Trump's attacks on the news media: "For Trump and his strategists, having come out of the election campaign media onslaught both alive and victorious, their only option is to keep the upper hand and continue to raise doubts about the media's motivation, veracity and wisdom" (Kassimeris). He is correct: The onslaught has been ongoing over a span of several years, and any hint Trump might ease up on his criticism has been promptly followed by his returning to complaining about how he has been reported on. The question Kassimeris raises in his title is one this thesis concerns itself with, and the half-answer he proposes helps explain why any of this is happening in the first place.

Finally, this thesis breaks down 24 stories — eight each from CNN, The Times, and The Post — that feature the news media outlets defending themselves (and other victims in the press) from Trump's attacks. These stories represent the confluence of gatekeeping and frame-building theory as well as the key terms of this thesis. They also serve to answer the research questions. They cover a range of topics: Many focus on responding to statements of Trump critical of a specific article, but some cover Trump's general attacks on the news media, others cover specific altercations at press conferences, and still others cover anti-news media events orchestrated by Trump. All 24 stories were chosen after an exhaustive search of each of the three news media outlets' websites.

**Research questions:**

RQ1: What are the different kinds of attacks by Trump on the press?

RQ2(A): How do news media outlets use tone in responding to Trump's attacks on them in their own reporting?

RQ 2(B): What forms of thematic content are repeated?

## **Chapter 2: Methods**

The research questions were answered with a combination of three methodological strategies. Chief among them is textual analysis, specifically of stories from The Times, CNN, and The Post, as these news outlets have been Trump's most frequent and high-profile targets. The first question is answered through the inclusion of Trump tweets and statements. The second is what the entirety of the textual analysis concerns itself with. And the third is answered through coding after analyzing the text. The second methodological strategy is typology, an analytical technique of coding information into consequential categories, which worked specifically to answer the first and third questions. It allows for better identifying repeated thematic content. Coding was done through this typology — marking eight instances each of CNN, The Times, and The Post mentioning Trump's attacks on them — and through analyzing the section the story is in, the date it was published, the phrasing it uses, its lead, its headline, its sourcing, and its kicker. Story structure is discussed explicitly in answer to the research questions and was not a part of data coding. Finally, this thesis is informed by scholarly articles establishing theoretical framework and offering context regarding Trump's relationship with the news media.

### **Textual analysis**

The main method of this thesis involves analyzing the texts of articles published by outlets Trump has attacked, although there are several stories that cover Trump's attacks on different outlets as well. This is an attempt to detect thematic content, preferably repeated, in how CNN, The Times, and The Post covers/responds to Trump's direct attacks. McKee's (2003) general definition of textual analysis goes a long way in describing why, exactly, textual analysis is the proper direction to take in this research:

“Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology... for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live” (p. 1).

How do the three outlets situate themselves in the world of political journalism? Do they feel threatened by Trump’s attacks? Is there a different reaction? And, most importantly, how does it seep into the stories they write; what patterns come of it?

What is truly informative from McKee (2003) is his classification of “realists,” “structuralists,” and “post-structuralists.” The researcher began as a realist, someone who believes in looking at how accurately texts tell the truth about reality. The researcher once thought most times, especially in American news stories, there are not multiple realities, and there really is only one set of facts (McKee, 2003). But, in asking how Trump and journalists are making sense of things, and not if the content is the right or wrong way to show “reality,” the researcher had to employ a more nuanced view in this thesis. For example, one CNN story analyzed was slanted, but it was not off-base; a lot of what it did was simply quote Trump. Fürsich (2009) believes that interviewing journalists can result in “narrowing the range of possible readings a researcher may see in her/his material” (p. 244). She writes that one of the best aspects of textual analysis is, in fact, its ability to “evaluate media content... beyond the intentions of the actual producers” (p. 244). Studying the text for its own sake “has the goal to explain which cultural sensibilities prevail that allow for such a text at this specific point in time,” which is exactly what this thesis seeks to do: study a recurring political phenomenon — a public official antagonistic toward the press — at this specific moment in time (p. 247).

The consideration of “the circumstances of production” when analyzing a text is necessary here — in the case of CNN, The Times, and The Post, writing a meta story about Trump attacking the journalists’ outlet personally, as well as their chosen profession. Since Fürsich (2009) says that interviewing journalists is a good way to investigate production processes, this raised a few questions that needed answering about this thesis’s textual analysis. It is clear that speaking with journalists would have muddied the textual analyses because talking to a journalist would not answer any of the research questions, and because news media outlets have their own agendas anyway. And, to stay with Fürsich (2009), there is a reason text-only “textual analysis has become a favored method for many cultural scholars who are interested in investigating media content” (p. 239). Her central argument:

“media texts present a distinctive discursive moment between encoding and decoding that justifies special scholarly engagement. The narrative character of media content, its potential as a site of ideological negotiation and its impact as mediated ‘reality’ necessitates interpretation in its own right” (p. 238).

This goes along with the goal of isolating textual analysis as a method — it is able to say more about how journalists are reacting to Trump than if the researcher were to blur his vision and involve audience reaction and the path to production in the research.

McKee (2003) also makes clear that textual analysis is more helpful in certain research situations than others because, “In the methodology of large-scale surveys, processed as numbers... a (person) becomes, perhaps, 0.1 percent of the people” involved in a study, meaning that while other research methods may be able to determine effect or be more statistically precise, in textual analysis, the distinctiveness of different situations can shine through instead of

being glossed over as a tiny part of a much larger whole (p. 3). In textual analysis, artifacts are given more weight, their existence tells a story, and in this case, that story is how journalists and news outlets make sense of a world in which they are under fire from the president. The Trump-news media dynamic is fraught with various arguments over objectivity, positive and negative coverage, and other concerns. This made textual analysis ideal for the research undertaken. Again, Fürsich (2009) was able to emphasize the separation between standalone textual analysis and a more varied and multilayered integration of methods that look at production, content, and reception, among other factors (p. 238). Fürsich acts as this thesis's guide and analytical compass, as she explicitly states what, in her mind, a successful text-only analysis should achieve: "...the textual analyst needs to establish the ideological potential of the text between production and consumption. The question is not how accurately does the text reflect reality but what version of reality is normalized..." (p. 249) This way of thinking takes the pressure off this thesis to identify explicit framing and intent, instead allowing the researcher to discover different types of content patterns while ascribing, not intent, but the cross section between intent and effect.

### **Sampling strategy and coding procedures**

In this thesis are 24 artifacts: eight articles from CNN, eight from The Times, and eight from The Post. This number is because this study is an illustrative one, not exhaustive, meaning the number of artifacts per news source should be strong but manageable. In order to ensure there were not any articles chosen merely because they confirmed the researcher's preconceived notions, each article was chosen at random during searches of the three publication's websites with keywords including "Trump," "free press," "fake news," and "attacks." The only real



criterion was that the article had to conform to the topic of this thesis. The whole of each story was subject to textual analysis. In “The Interdisciplinary Study of News as Discourse,” (1988) Van Dijk gives a good idea of what it takes to properly identify patterns, including the headline and lead paragraph, an “analysis of the ‘unsaid,’” implication (entailments, presuppositions, suggestion, and association) and a hierarchical story structure. This hierarchical scheme gives a sense of what the story is emphasizing as important, and it consists of “such conventional categories as headline, lead (together forming the summary), main events, context, history (together forming the background category)” (p. 114). Van Dijk also notes that the choice of sources can show bias (p. 116). Although the lead and conclusion were especially important parts, each story had particular sections that lent itself more to the research for this thesis. The time period ranged from when Trump had just recently begun his tenure as president (2016) to the present day (2019). 2018 was a particularly fruitful period for a number of artifacts.

Here is an example of my coding procedure:

Tone	Critical, suggestive, faux-objective
Kicker	Law enforcement officials said Thursday they tracked down another suspicious package sent to former Vice President Joe Biden.
Section	Politics
Date	10/25/18
Lead	President Donald Trump returned on Thursday to blaming the media for much of the "anger" in society, a day after CNN and Democrats were the targets of explosive devices.
Headline	Trump claims media to blame for 'anger' after bombs sent to CNN, Dems
Sourcing	CIA Director John Brennan, Trump, Republican Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Sarah Sanders

### **Important Phrasing**

“the President has often derided the media as ‘fake news,’ even labeling reporters the ‘enemy of the people,’ Thursday's tweet is especially striking” “Your inflammatory rhetoric, insults, lies, (and) encouragement of physical violence are disgraceful,’ Brennan wrote on Twitter to the President. ‘Clean up your act....try to act Presidential. The American people deserve much better.” “the president’s critics ‘will not be intimidated into silence.’” “We need to stop with all this nonsense language about the press is the enemy of the people.” “he needs to affirm again that we condemn all political terrorism in America,” “She deflected when asked whether the President bears any responsibility for the heated political rhetoric.” “As Trump was tweeting, New York authorities were removing a suspicious package addressed to actor — and frequent Trump critic — Robert De Niro.” “In the initial aftermath of the bomb discoveries Wednesday, Trump offered a more conventional presidential message of unity.” “Trump also began an evening rally in Wisconsin by voicing his desire for ‘all sides to come together in peace and harmony.’” “But he also pointed the finger at the media, saying that the press has a ‘responsibility’ to foster civility.”

### **Trump Statements**

"A very big part of the Anger we see today in our society is caused by the purposely false and inaccurate reporting of the Mainstream Media that I refer to as Fake News," Trump tweeted. "It has gotten so bad and hateful that it is beyond description." "Mainstream Media must clean up its act, FAST!" he continued.

Trump also began an evening rally in Wisconsin by voicing his desire for "all sides to come together in peace and harmony." But he also pointed the finger at the media, saying that the press has a "responsibility" to foster civility.

"The media also has a responsibility to set a civil tone and to stop the endless hostility and constant negative and oftentimes false attacks and stories. Have to do it," he said at the rally.

Three stories exemplify what this thesis looked for in the textual analyses. A Times article from Dec. 11, 2017, titled “Trump Escalates His Criticism of the News Media, Fueling National Debate” (Baker & Ember) reads: “Mr. Trump turned his attention on Monday to The New York Times, disputing an article describing his television habits,” which sounds sarcastic. A CNN article from Feb. 11, 2017 titled “Trump attacks media in lengthy, combative press

conference” (Byers) includes a section saying Trump “claimed he no longer watches CNN, but complained about what he sees when he watches the network,” which paints Trump as a hypocrite and uses partial quotes to delegitimize what he is saying. A Post story’s headline from Jan. 18, 2018 reads “Trump opens all the envelopes himself at first ‘Fake News Awards’” (Farhi). The Post writes: “Trump's efforts to call out ‘dishonest’ reporting carries its own heavy irony, of course. Trump himself has had a lifelong love affair with exaggeration and hyperbole, and a sometimes hostile relationship with facts,” which sounds defensive, critical, and again depicts Trump as a hypocrite. What all three articles have in common, and what they show about the other 21 articles, is that they explicitly mention Trump’s attacks on their namesake outlets, and thematic content comes out in leads, headlines, story structure, and diction, among other factors.

### **Typology**

Typology is an analytical technique of coding information into consequential categories. This is shown in the data coding and in the first section of the body of this thesis — it is not as specifically and explicitly a “method” as the rest of the methodological work. This thesis organized Trump’s attacks on the news media into different categories for organizational purposes, but also to see if a certain type of attack elicited a certain type of thematic content or tone from the news media outlets studied. Oftentimes, it seemed to do so. Sources like the LA Times’ ongoing list of Trump tweets (including the context surrounding them) were beneficial (LA Times, 2017), but it was really the textual analysis, and what quotes from Trump each story chose to include, that determined the tweets and statements analyzed.

## Chapter 3: Findings

### **RQ1: What are the different kinds of attacks by Trump on the press?**

Trump adheres to a bevy of buzzwords and phrases when attacking the news media. His most prominent modes of attack, of which there are five, include focusing on possible financial insecurities among CNN, The Times, and The Post as well as calling the news media “fake news,” “crazed lunatics” (or generally painting them as hostile actors out to get him), “dishonest” or “inaccurate,” and “the enemy of the people.” Other attacks used less frequently out of the 24 stories analyzed for this thesis include Trump saying that the news media “speaks not for the people, but for special interests” and critiquing the news media for supposed corruption (Grynbaum, 2017).

#### **“Fake news”**

“Fake news,” the now-infamous slur Trump has deployed against the news media, is, at least in these 24 artifacts, his favorite moniker for news media he goes after. It is simple and memorable and apparently gets under the skin of such outlets as The Times, The Post and CNN. Out of those 18 stories, the corresponding tones from CNN, The Times and The Post used most often were “critical” (12 times), “warning” (six times), “faux-objective” (five times), “concerned” (four times), “defensive” (four times), “humorous” (four times), and “ridiculing” (four times). The researcher must note that these are simply correlations between tones and types of attack, and that there could be alternate explanations as to why these news outlets often used a “critical” tone when covering a story where Trump is quoted as calling one news outlet or the news media writ large “fake news.” For example, many stories reckon with an array of types of Trump attacks — rarely is it solely him calling the news media fake news. So of

course, it is possible that a “critical” tone could be coming from another aspect of these run-ins with Trump. It is also worth mentioning that “critical” is, overall, the most used tone found in the 24 artifacts.

### **“Enemy of the people”**

“The enemy of the people” phrase referring to the news media has been used by Trump many times. The idea of the news media as “the enemy of the people” is understandably upsetting to those at The Times, The Post and CNN. For The Post, if this phrase is used by the president regarding the press, it is going to cover it, or at least use it in a headline. Enter “Trump renews attacks on media as ‘the true Enemy of the People,’” a story about Trump’s “latest invective on Twitter.” (Wagner, 2018) The terms “invective” and “broadside” are used by all three outlets repeatedly — very specific words that imply abusive behavior.

Six stories explicitly covered Trump in real time when he used this phrase. But 11 total stories quote the phrase from Trump, oftentimes to make a point about his rhetoric. In stories covering Trump’s use of the phrase in real time, it was often used in either the lead, the headline or both. CNN, The Times and The Post openly criticized Trump for his use of the phrase. They also took stock of the overall effect of Trump’s anti-journalism rhetoric.

As has been the case due to the overall frequency of the “critical” tone, it was used the most in stories that mentioned “enemy of the people” phrasing — a total of seven times. “Defensive” and “warning” tones were each used four times. “Bold” and “suggestive” tones were each used three times. “Ridiculing,” “weary,” and “concerned” tones were all used two times. And then “defiant,” “disparaging,” “repudiating,” “high-minded,” “sanctimonious,” “cheeky,” “sweeping,” and “dismissive” were each used once. It seems “enemy of the people”

and broad financial criticisms are the two types of Trump attacks that triggered the strongest responses from The Times, The Post and CNN.

### **“Dishonest” or “inaccurate”**

The third-most-used Trump attack on the news media within the 24 artifacts is when Trump called the news media, or CNN, The Post or The Times in particular, “dishonest,” “inaccurate” or some variant of the two. All three news outlets take the accusation of inaccurate reporting seriously. 10 of the 24 stories quoted Trump saying the news media was dishonest or that their reporting was inaccurate. Trump might also say that coverage of him has been “bad” or “unfair” (Grynbaum, 2019). Another version would be his label of a “false story” (Baker & Ember, 2017) or “purposely false” (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018). Many of the full statements from Trump on this point prescribe nefarious motives as to why the “totally dishonest” (Wagner, 2019) news media offered “inaccurate, and even fraudulent reporting” on Trump (Wagner, 2018). This type of attack was most often associated directly with a specific story. It seemed as if CNN, The Times and The Post saw it as a challenge to their reporting, so they promptly defended their reporting. But before discussing the correlation, it is important to note that many stories dealt with multiple Trump attacks, so one story with corresponding tones to “fake news” attacks could have the same tones for “dishonest” and “inaccurate” attacks, for example.

The most common tones in stories that cover Trump attacks where he labels the reporting of the news media as dishonest or inaccurate were “critical” (six times) and “warning” (four times). A “concerned” tone was used three times, “sweeping” and “faux-objective” tones were used twice and “sanctimonious,” “high-minded,” “repudiating,” “defensive,” “explosive,” “humorous,” “disparaging,” “disapproving” “ridiculing,” “weary,” and “suggestive” tones were

all used once. When covering/responding to Trump's most confrontational and discrediting attacks — ones on the very accuracy of their journalism — the strategies of The Post, The Times and CNN ran the gamut.

### **Finances**

Tied for Trump's fourth-most used attack type within the articles analyzed involved his highlighting (or mockery) of the financial situations of The Times, The Post and CNN. He went after "lowly rated CNN," (Rutenberg, 2018) "The Failing New York Times," and the "Amazon Washington Post" (Ember, 2018). He was quoted adopting this tactic in eight of the 24 articles. Each of the three outlets rebut Trump's characterizations in their stories: CNN and The Times write that they have had their highest ratings/most readers in years, and The Post notes that Amazon has nothing to do with their editorial process. That does not stop Trump from taking advantage of (the largely true) narrative that journalism as an industry is struggling financially.

From the stories with this sort of quote from Trump, five used "critical" tones. A "defensive" tone was used three times, and "defending" and "suggestive" tones were used in two stories each. The other tones used were "dismissive," "weary," "defeatist," "cheeky," "defiant," "humorous," "sweeping," "explosive," "corrective," "bold," "straightforward," "proud," and "repudiating." If there was one major similarity in how CNN, The Times and The Post wrote about Trump in these situations, it would be in how the coverage was sharp and lacking subtlety. Trump does not use this type of attack as often as "fake news" or "inaccurate," but when he does, he elicits strong reactions from The Times, The Post and CNN, even if the tones slightly differ.

### **Hostile actors**

Trump painted the news media as hostile actors out to get him in eight out of the 24 articles. For example, Trump said that it does not matter when the news media criticizes him, but “when I criticize them they go wild and scream, ‘it’s just not Presidential!’” (Rutenberg, 2018). In another article, he is quoted as saying “the press honestly is out of control” (Byers, 2017). He calls the media “hostile” multiple times within these 24 artifacts, such as when he says “The media also has a responsibility to set a civil tone and to stop the endless hostility...” (Stracqualursi & Stark, 2018) He even goes as far as to call news outlets “crazed lunatics” (Wagner, 2019). It is again a tactic to discredit the news media. By treating them as hostile actors, Trump is able to claim victimhood. CNN, The Times, and The Post respond by attempting to turn the tables: Trump is the one with a dog in this fight. We’re just doing our jobs.

Seven of the eight stories used tones critical of Trump. The one story that did not exhibited “defensive,” “defiant,” and “bold” tones, so not necessarily critical of Trump, but also not cowed by him. The high number of stories with a “defensive” tone (three times) in a smaller sample size could be because of how blatant these attacks by Trump on the media are. He talks about them as if they are animals — “out of control,” “wild and crazy,” “crazed lunatics,” and “endless hostility” stand out as examples. Being defensive is a natural reaction to that. “Weary,” “suggestive,” “faux-objective,” “bold,” and “warning” tones are each used two times. These tones are not identified often, so it is significant for them to have been used more than once. But these tones correspond with themes that echo throughout the artifacts: CNN, The Times, and The Post are weary of such withering attacks. They use suggestion to respond to Trump when he is overtly critical of them. They employ faux-objectivity to protect against accusations of bias, an easy trap to fall into when covering such personal attacks. And they are bold in their warnings to



readers about the impact Trump's anti-journalism statements could have on the free press and the First Amendment. Finally, "dismissive," "defeatist," "cheeky," "concerned," "high-minded," "repudiating," "disparaging," "straightforward," "proud," "sweeping," "ridiculing," and "defiant" tones were each used once. When responding to Trump's attacks discrediting them as hostile, CNN, The Times and The Post seem split between going straightforward or suggestive.

### **Corruption and special interests**

Other, less-used forms of Trump's attacks on the news media include the corruption angle identified in four of Trump's quotes. This is a loose term meant to encompass Trump's accusations of the news media that they are not playing by the rules. One example is the most explicit: "Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?" (Bump, 2018). Another, resides in the same vein: "How does the press get this information that's classified? ... It's an illegal process and the press should be ashamed of themselves." (Byers, 2017). The other two statements tell reporters and news organizations to follow the rules, or else, for example, "we'll throw him out or we'll stop the news conference." (Stelter & Shortell, 2018) This mode of attack forces the news media to respond — when the President of the United States says you are breaking the law, you cannot sit silent, although the researcher does not know this for sure because it has not yet happened to him.

Before continuing, it should be mentioned that all four stories with this type of Trump quote were published by CNN. The network used a "critical" tone in all four stories. "Bold" was used twice, as was "ridiculing." "Suggestive," "proud," "triumphant," "high-minded," "mocking," "faux-objective," "analytical," "warning," and "concerned" tones were each used once. This batch of tones is more aggressive than some of the others with tones like "proud,"

“triumphant,” “high-minded,” “mocking,” “analytical,” “bold,” and “ridiculing.” CNN tries to establish that Trump is wrong about all of these claims, and, perhaps more importantly, he does not know what he is talking about.

Trump twice alleges that the news media “speaks not for the people, but for special interests” (Grynbaum, 2017). The Times covered the accusation with “warning,” “concerned” and “sharp” tones while CNN covered it with “ridiculing,” “critical” and “faux-objective tones. There were also three other types of Trump attacks, each only used once: His claim that The Times “never recovered from [their] bad election call” (Sullivan, 2018), his claim that the public “doesn’t believe you people [the news media] anymore” (Grynbaum, 2017), and his personal attack on CNN reporter Jim Acosta, calling him a “very rude” person (Stelter, 2018).

**RQ2(A): How do news media outlets use tone in responding to Trump’s attacks on them in their own reporting?**

CNN, The Times and The Post all responded to Trump’s attacks on them and the news media through a wide variety of repeated tones. Jenkins & Vos define “voice” in journalism, which is closely related to tone, as “the way a journalist or journalists write give us a sense of their outlook, and in some cases, their news organization’s outlook, on the world” (Journalistic Voice as a Gatekeeping Force, p. 1). The 20 tones used most frequently by the three news media outlets (the outlets would have several of these tones per story) were, in no particular order: “ridiculing,” “critical,” “faux-objective,” “warning,” “concerned,” “suggestive,” “dismissive,” “weary,” “defeatist,” “cheeky,” “defensive,” “defiant,” “humorous,” “defending,” “high-minded,” “repudiating,” “sweeping,” “sarcastic,” “bold,” and “mocking.” Every artifact analyzed was critical of Trump in some way, whether it was because his behavior was not presidential or because of his combative approach to the news media.

“Warning” and “concerned” usually went together — many stories warned readers about Trump’s detrimental treatment of the free press and expressed concern about the effects it might have at home and abroad. “Repudiating,” “ridiculing,” “mocking,” and “sarcastic” stories were usually bold in nature and took a step above “humorous,” “suggestive,” and “cheeky.” These stories were direct in what they wanted the reader to know, which was that they are not fake news, and Trump is in the wrong. “Defiant,” “high-minded,” and “sweeping” stories would often focus on the wide-ranging impact of Trump’s war on the news media. These artifacts championed the First Amendment and regarded the notion of the free press as sacred. The distinction between “defensive” and “defending” tones lies in the subject of the stories. If an

outlet wrote about itself, it was “defensive.” If it wrote about Trump’s treatment of other news media outlets, it played the role of defender, hence “defending.”

These tones demand definition as well as specific examples. Each tone was chosen from the careful textual analysis of 24 artifacts — eight from The Times, eight from The Post and eight from CNN. The researcher took the story’s kicker, section, date (context), lead, headline, sourcing, statements from Trump, and important phrasing under consideration when picking a tone. The definition of the word also had to match the evidence. For example, the definition of “cheeky,” according to Merriam-Webster, is “boldly rude, impudent, or disrespectful in usually a playful or appealing way.” A Times story titled “Trump’s attacks on the news media are working” (2018) begins short and dismissive: “He was at it again,” the first paragraph reads. “At 3:14 a.m. on Friday, President Trump was awake and tweeting.” (Rutenberg) While saying he was “at it again” is a commentary on Trump’s incessant tweeting about the news media, the second paragraph is its own sort of commentary. This becomes obvious when considering the juxtaposition of “President Trump” and his being “awake and tweeting” at 3 in the morning — the former is a powerful title, the latter something heartbroken high school students do (Rutenberg). The article goes on to use ironic juxtaposition, saying Trump “tapped that one out” (the tweet) “as federal authorities were investigating the 12 pipe bombs mailed to the billionaire George Soros, Democratic politicians, Robert De Niro and CNN.” (Rutenberg) The tweet was meant to attack CNN and the news media, a seemingly outrageous concept as the network was one of the targets of the violent attack.

It is apparent, then, that tone can have a major impact on what a story looks like. The researcher highlighted “cheeky” as the initial example of tone because it was not used often, but

when it was, it was pronounced. A “critical” tone was the most prevalent tone of all. Critical is defined as “expressing adverse or disapproving comments or judgments,” which CNN, The Times, and The Post did in a variety of ways, whether it was critiquing Trump’s decision-making, or his behavior, or his attacks on the news media.

## **Critical**

It can be difficult to single out when The Times, CNN, or The Post use a “critical” tone when covering the president’s attacks on them because so many of the lesser-used tones fall under the umbrella of “critical”: “Ridicule,” “warning,” “concerned,” “suggestive,” “dismissive,” “weary,” “defeatist,” “cheeky,” “sarcastic,” “mocking,” and “repudiating,” among others, can all also be interpreted as “critical” tones. With this in mind, the researcher gathered multiple examples from the 24 artifacts that speak to a “critical” tone in a broad sense. A New York Times story, “Trump Calls the News Media the ‘Enemy of the People,’” contextualizes Trump’s problems with the media in biting terms: “Even by the standards of a president who routinely castigates journalists...Mr. Trump’s tweet was a striking escalation in his attacks.” (Grynbaum, 2017) The word “castigates” implies that Trump is being too harsh on the media, and that he does so routinely. This example could also fit in with the repeated theme of calling Trump’s behavior “abnormal” or “extraordinary,” which is a critique in itself.

Another Times story, “Trump Attacks ‘Failing New York Times’ Over Tax Scheme Reporting,” notes that Trump has not released his tax returns, “a common practice by every president and most presidential candidates dating back decades.” (Sullivan, 2018) The Times makes the point that this is reason enough to investigate his “personal finances” and “business practices.” (Sullivan) Already it is apparent that criticisms from The Times, CNN and The Post

come in many forms. The story then re-litigates the reporting that Trump questioned, poking holes in his tweet about how the Times made a mistake in using “Time vs. Money” to track his finances and bringing back another part of the story that Trump had neglected to mention in his tweet, as The Times report “also showed how Mr. Trump and his family took part in fraudulent schemes ... Mr. Trump and his siblings set up fake corporations to disguise millions of dollars’ worth of gifts from their parents, in order to evade taxes.” (Sullivan) The Times essentially accuses Trump of white-collar crimes, but it is based on its long reporting process, so it is shielded from accusations of bias. There is no need for any literary flourish to make the point. Stories that hearken back to reporting Trump is not fond of are necessarily critical because when they are explaining the story in question, it is always unflattering to Trump.

The tone of one Times story is far more pronounced than others that are the sort of archetype of how The Times covers Trump vs. the news media/their own outlet. Following a derogatory tweet from Trump, The Times writes: “So began Day 645 of a presidency that has made denigrating the news media one of its identifying features.” (Rutenberg, 2018) This sounds as if The Times is weary from Trump’s attacks but also critical of them. This will continue throughout the rest of the story. And The Times is especially tired of said attacks because “despite the many examples of powerful reporting on his presidency,” Trump’s rhetoric is working to his advantage (Rutenberg). The analytical reporting The Times provides here is the kind that Trump seems to particularly dislike.

A further example of how a critical tone can be found in many of the themes of the 24 artifacts is one from “Trump Discusses Claims of ‘Fake News,’ and Their Impact, With New York Times Publisher” (Grynbaum, 2019). The story offers this almost-editorial aside: “What

Mr. Trump considers fair, however, is almost always in line with what he considers flattering.” (Grynbaum) This idea that Trump’s attacks are usually borne from stories he sees that he does not like is another inherently critical one that depicts Trump as thin-skinned and authoritarian. To the point of the authoritarian critique (a repeated theme to be discussed more in-depth later in this thesis), “Trump Attacks The Times, in a Week of Unease for the American Press” couches its reporting on a Trump statement in the idea that his confrontations with the news media are harmful to news media in larger ways (Grynbaum & Sullivan, 2019). The top of the story reads as a sprawling indictment of Trump on this issue with nods to historical trends and current context. The story closes with an almost off-topic declaration that Trump “was wrong in suggesting that the Times reporters who chronicled his attempts to meddle in investigations had failed to reach out for comment.” (Grynbaum & Sullivan) The “critical” tone is hiding in almost every piece of repeated thematic content. It is the most pervasive of the tones because it can be applied to so many of the strategies from The Times, The Post, and CNN, such as when the outlets push back on claims that the news media did not reach out for comment on stories Trump does not like.

Yet another form of repeated thematic content a “critical” tone lends itself to is when CNN, The Times and The Post use outside sources to criticize Trump, in turn bolstering the narrative. The lead of “Not the ‘enemy of the people’: 70 news organizations will blast Trump’s attack on the media” is an excellent exercise in getting someone else to say something for you: “For most of the past 19 months, President Trump’s war of words with American news organizations has been more of a one-sided barrage — at least according to the Boston Globe’s editorial board.” (Wootson Jr., 2018) While this story is ostensibly about the decision of The

Boston Globe and many other newspapers to run editorials defending the free press and condemning Trump's attacks on them, it is actually much less about this action by numerous Editorial Boards. Instead, The Post uses this newsworthy item to litigate Trump's back-and-forth with the news media and, mostly, to denounce him.

“‘Crazed lunatic’: Trump again attacks the news media as ‘the enemy of the people’” also features a “critical” tone. Trump brought up a Times story saying that Trump's national security adviser disagreed with Trump and was actively working against him (Wagner, 2019). The article gets somewhat off topic as it doubles down on writing about Trump and his adviser John Bolton and their plans for troops in Syria, which “prompted widespread criticism from members of Congress, including Republicans.” (Wagner) The first mention of The Post in the story comes the sentence after: “Other news outlets, including The Washington Post, also reported on Bolton's comments Sunday.” At this point, the article rehashes Trump's failings, contextualizes his frustration with the news media and promotes a Post story. The last three paragraphs of the story are set up with, “In earlier tweets Monday, Trump asserted, without citing any specifics, that the ‘Fake News’ knowingly lies and makes up sources to make him look bad.” (Wagner) The “without citing any specifics” is as far as The Post goes to refute Trump's quotes. As can be seen here, The Post is willing to criticize Trump for more than just his anti-media animus. His decisions as president are fair game.

“Trump accuses Amazon of ‘Post Office scam,’ falsely says The Post is company's lobbyist” is thick with knocks against Trump and defenses of The Post. It notes that Trump's tweets were “sent during his drive from his Mar-a-Lago estate to the nearby Trump International Golf Club...” (Rucker, 2018) This in itself seems to be a derogatory detail. The end of the story



elaborates on the fact that “White House officials have struggled to back up Trump’s theories” about Amazon (Rucker). The article also gets into the effect Trump’s words, “irrespective of their factual accuracy,” can have on Amazon’s stock (Rucker). In a short span, then, The Post criticizes Trump for his lifestyle and for his tendency toward falsehoods.

CNN, more so than The Times or The Post, is directly critical of Trump. “White House backs down from legal fight, restores Jim Acosta's press pass” quotes CNN saying it dropped the lawsuit against the White House because of the restored press pass (Stelter & Shortell, 2018). Then, the article takes aim at the White House’s posturing during this battle, describing its announcement of the restored press pass as “an abrupt shift from the administration’s earlier positions.” (Stelter & Shortell) CNN and the White House framed what happened with Acosta in very different ways — the White House contended that Acosta assaulted a White House intern when she tried to take his microphone — but for CNN, taking the press pass away was an “unprecedented step” resulting from a “contentious exchange.” (Stelter & Shortell) This goes back to the gatekeeping theory Shoemaker & Vos (2009) pushed in relation to frame-building: The press can depict something how it would like it depicted after gathering the proper information. Later, in response to the new “rules” for the White House Press Corps Press Secretary Sarah Sanders and Trump championed, the story reads, “The White House press corps, however, has not agreed to any new set of rules governing presidential press conferences. And Trump rarely holds press conferences anyway.” (Stelter & Shortell) The last sentence is a common dig at Trump and really any president who holds infrequent press conferences. Journalists interpret this behavior as fear, and CNN interpreted this as worthy of criticism.

“An aggrieved Trump digs in after pipe bomb scares” contains the most explicit critical tone of the 24 artifacts. CNN’s story immediately sets about creating a narrative that Trump should be cooling off his tone and claiming some responsibility for the bomb threats leveled at targets who often criticize Trump:

“Rather than cooling off his tone, he is digging in...Trump has no plans to claim any personal responsibility that he has contributed to the divisive climate surrounding the attempted attacks...And his advisers have no plans to urge him to dial back his attacks on the media, a senior White House official said.” (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018)

The way CNN has structured this article, Trump is at least partially to blame for the planned attacks, and yet, Trump is laying the blame at the feet of the news media.

CNN becomes more up front about this in the next paragraph. Trump changes his tune from condemning the attempted bombings and calling for more civility to later “directly” blaming “the mainstream news organizations for ‘the anger we see today in our society,’ falsely accusing news outlets of publishing ‘purposely false and inaccurate reporting.’” (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018) “Falsely accusing” is enough of a response for CNN to this specific form of Trump criticism. The story moves to criticizing Trump because he had “neither named the targets...in public nor has he reached out privately to offer reassurance or provide updates on the investigation, officials said, a move that has raised the eyebrows of leaders from both parties.” (Zeleny & Diamond) This could be a picture of Trump’s presidential incompetence or one of his own personal callousness. Nevertheless, this detail is unflattering. But the story goes further: “Twelve days before the midterm elections, Trump has also not seized on the incidents as a presidential moment, as others before him may have done, where Americans could see their

president leading a nation through a time of challenge.” (Zeleny & Diamond) CNN doubles down on the un-presidential criticism, which may be more prudent, because anything further about how callous Trump was when handling this situation could look biased and like sour grapes.

A final example of a “critical” tone within the 24 artifacts can be found in “White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta’s pass after contentious news conference” (Stelter, 2018). The article quotes “media critics and Democrats” taking issue with what the White House did (Stelter). The main thrust of what these sources say is that Trump used this press conference to distract the media from a successful midterm election for Democrats (Stelter). It is no mistake that a related link placed in the center of this section reads, “Trump’s media bashing is a big part of his midterm election message.” Again, many of these examples overlap as examples of repeated thematic content.

### **Warning/Concerned**

Nine of the 24 stories analyzed employ “warning” or “concerned” tones (three of these stories use a “warning” tone without a “concerned” tone). Most often, these tones came from Times stories. Warning is defined as “a statement or event that indicates a possible or impending danger, problem, or other unpleasant situation.” In this case, the outlets are warning readers about the effects of Trump’s anti-media rhetoric. They are also concerned — “worried, troubled, or anxious” — about the possibilities they warn of.

In the CNN story “White House says there are new ‘rules’ for reporters, but press members haven’t agreed to them,” both “warning” and “concerned” tones are used (Stelter, 2018). The story includes a reckoning with the new “rules” for reporters at White House press

conferences — “Sounds serious! But is it?” (Stelter) The answer is not really, according to the article, because the press corps did not agree with these “rules” (“rules” has quotes around it in this story as well). But maybe, the story continues, this is beside the point: “Maybe the White House is just trying to save face after an embarrassing loss to CNN. Maybe no one will remember this skirmish in a few weeks.” (Stelter) The writer is saying these threats should not be lent any credence, and yet, if they were to be serious, they “could have a chilling effect on the press.” The article then takes a tour through conservative news media and notes how gleeful the outlets were with Trump’s attacks on Acosta and CNN in this case before pivoting to national news media figures from the LA Times, The Post and The Atlantic, all of whom express concern about Trump’s treatment of the press and the CNN situation (Stelter, 2018). These prognosticators warn about the chilling effect, that “they’re creating rules that are very easy to break and are likely to go unenforced until the government decides they want to make an example of somebody,” as well as First Amendment concerns (Stelter). “Warning” and “concerned” tones allow the news media to claim a moral high ground, which can sometimes coincide with a “high-minded” tone, which will be discussed later.

“White House backs down from legal fight, restores Jim Acosta's press pass” pairs a “warning” tone with a “high-minded” tone (Stelter & Shortell, 2018). “High-minded” means “having strong moral principles.” The story warns readers about how the news media is now officially battling Trump in court. But the organization is not intimidated: “Lawyers for Acosta and CNN did respond, forcefully, in a letter and in a court filing.” (Stelter & Shortell) CNN, like some of the Times and Post articles, can get high-minded and bold in its response to Trump. Here

is no different. CNN seems to take its role as upholders of the free press seriously. This idea of a strong free press is at the core of “warning,” “concerned,” and “high-minded” tones.

“Not the ‘enemy of the people’: 70 news organizations will blast Trump’s attack on the media” also uses both “high-minded” and “warning” tones (Wootson Jr., 2018). The story then includes an extended quote from Trump of him lambasting the news media before getting back to the supposed point of the story — those 70 editorial boards fighting back (Wootson Jr.). Those editorial boards are going to respond to Trump’s attacks “with the best weapon they have: their collective voice.” (Wootson Jr.) This wording is especially high-minded and almost noble. It seeks to depict the decision to come out against Trump’s anti-media rhetoric, and the press in general, as a part of a struggle against a greater source of power. On the whole, this story looks to imply that Trump is setting — or following — a dangerous precedent without outright saying it.

The final story that uses a “warning” tone without a “concerned” one is “Trump renews attacks on media as ‘the true Enemy of the People’” (Wagner, 2018). This story introduced an interesting concept in the middle of the text: a related video. While The Times and CNN of course had related videos in their stories, those videos were not nearly as disparaging toward Trump. The video for this story is called “Leaders who’ve called the press ‘enemies of the people,’” and it named Hugo Chavez, Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin — not exactly the company Trump wants to keep (Wagner). The video says they tried to or did destroy public ownership in news media, and that they used this sort of language against politicians, political actors or artists who disagreed with or disparaged them. This is one way to ground a narrative where the writer does not have to do the heavy lifting. A “warning” tone can take the form of

another form of repeated thematic content while falling square under the “critical” tone umbrella as well: negative historical comparisons of Trump’s relationship with the press.

“Trump Hands Out ‘Fake News Awards,’ Sans the Red Carpet” sees the “warning” and “concerned” tones together again (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum, 2018). The Times, like The Post, describes the “Fake News Awards” as disorganized and “an anti-media project that had alarmed advocates of press freedom and heartened his political base.” (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum) This story is a bit more serious than The Post’s version, which is written with more voice. The Times brings up Kathleen Culver, the director of the Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to legitimize its narrative that the president will turn mistakes from news outlets into ammunition to attack them (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum). The article also attempts to get at the larger point and does not stay mired in a petty defense of its own integrity: The “Fake News Awards” was “perhaps less notable than its premise: a sitting president using his bully pulpit for a semi-formalized attack on the free press.” (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum) “Warning” and “concerned” tones often go along with big-picture thinking about the safety of the free press writ large.

“Trump Escalates His Criticism of the News Media, Fueling National Debate” utilizes “concerned” and “warning” tones interchangeably (Baker & Ember, 2017). The article reiterates Trump’s past attacks on the news media, including “the enemy of the American people” line that news outlets often bring up (Baker & Ember). Akin to other Times stories analyzed in this thesis, the article brings up possible ways Trump could “go beyond name calling,” like if he were to go to court against a news outlet or revoke a broadcasting license (Baker & Ember). A source from the Poynter Institute reinforces the Times’ thinking. The source also makes more than a reference

to the motivation of Trump's attacks: "It is a common thing in the authoritarian playbook to discredit the media so that they are the only source that can be trusted." (Baker & Ember) Not enough stories get to the core of what Trump is seeking when he goes after these news outlets. It is an opportunity to do more than just defend your news outlet, but also to call into question why you are being attacked in the first place.

The latter part of the story discusses the impact of Trump's attacks on the news media. It includes a statement from CNN "likening Mr. Trump to a bully," a line of thinking that shows up in Times, Post and CNN reporting, not just in statements from their PR teams (Baker & Ember, 2017). This statement from CNN sets up the entire final section, which asks the question of whether journalism outlets should band together and come up with a coordinated response to Trump in their reporting, a similar question to the ones asked in this thesis (Baker & Ember). This fascinating quote from the story expresses the importance of such a venture:

"While previous presidents criticized the news media, analysts said that Mr. Trump's attacks strike at the fundamental notion of truth in a way that can make the customary response of news organizations standing by their articles feel insufficient. It is not just the facts he is calling into question, but the very institution of journalism, which some believe demands a more vigorous reply from the mainstream media." (Baker & Ember)

This grandiose statement appeals to pathos in the battle of Trump versus the news media. The reporter then polls The Post (Managing Editor), The New York Times (Executive Editor), and The Los Angeles Times (Washington Bureau Chief) on what they think about how the news media can respond (Baker & Ember). They disagree: Dean Baquet of The Times thinks that news outlets should somehow come together because they are facing a threat they have not really seen

in America before (Baker & Ember). But David Lauter of The LA Times and Cameron Barr of The Post are both wary of the idea of news outlets coming together against the president, thinking it would be dangerous, in part because, as Lauter says, “I think there’s also always concern about making it seem like you’re creating an institutional fight rather than just reporting the news.” (Baker & Ember) These editors effectively lay out the questions this thesis hypothesized news outlets ask when they report on Trump’s attacks. It is refreshing to plainly see their thinking about how this sort of reporting should go. All three recognize Trump’s attacks on the news media as a problem but disagree on how to respond to it. That is exactly why this thesis is being written, to discern how different targets of Trump are distinct and similar in their responses to Trump and to hopefully figure out a better way forward than the haphazard responses of disparate news media organizations.

“Trump Attacks The Times, in a Week of Unease for the American Press” has all three “high-minded,” “concerned,” and “warning” tones (Grynbaum & Sullivan, 2019). The article delves into Publisher Arthur Sulzberger and how he asked Trump not to use the “enemy of the people” phrase specifically (Grynbaum & Sullivan). It doubles down on the main thrust of the aforementioned Sulzberger vs. Trump story: Sulzberger pleading with Trump to see his global impact on journalism and Trump complaining about the news media’s coverage (Grynbaum & Sullivan). The story comes back to, and provides more detail about, the Times journalist detained and deported from Egypt as a way of reinforcing the narrative the story had set up about Trump’s influence on news media globally (Grynbaum & Sullivan). The Times is saying that Trump’s words are not merely tweets — they may have emboldened Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to argue “that public figures ought to enjoy more leeway to sue publications whose



coverage they deem unflattering or unfair.” (Grynbaum & Sullivan) Adding to the interplay between The Post and The Times, the story also brings up Trump’s “anti-newspaper animus” toward The Post in publicly supporting a libel lawsuit against them (Grynbaum & Sullivan).

“Trump Discusses Claims of ‘Fake News,’ and Their Impact, With New York Times Publisher” rehashes the last meeting between Trump and Sulzberger, which ended in a public war of words, before saying: “On Thursday, the publisher urged Mr. Trump to reconsider his denigration of the press.” (Grynbaum, 2019) In this statement, there is no middle ground. This story exhibits concern for Trump’s behavior as well as an implicit warning. The final story including “concerned” and “warning” tones is also from The Times: “Trump Calls the News Media the ‘Enemy of the American People’” (Grynbaum, 2017). The “enemy of the people” line repeatedly leads to “high-minded,” “critical,” and “warning” tones due to Trump’s ratcheting up of his rhetoric.

## **Humorous**

“Humorous” is another umbrella tone that encompasses “mocking,” “ridiculing,” “suggestive,” and “cheeky” tones. All of these tones have one main characteristic in common: They seek to make a point without being overt.

### **Definitions:**

**Humorous** — Possessing, indicating, or expressive of an ability to be funny or to be amused by things that are funny.

**Mocking** — To treat with contempt or ridicule.

**Ridiculing** — To make fun of.

**Suggestive** — Stirring mental associations.

**Sarcastic** — A sharp and often satirical or ironic utterance designed to cut or give pain.

The researcher has already defined “cheeky.” When CNN, The Times and The Post use these tones, they come off as the elitist, even liberal institutions Trump claims they are. If done subtly enough, though, these tones could be useful in deflecting Trump’s criticisms.

The Post's "Trump opens all the envelopes himself at first 'Fake News Awards'" is a case in point for humorous tones, including "cheeky," "humorous," "sarcasm" and "ridiculing." (Farhi, 2018) The lead begins: "There was no red carpet, no envelopes, and no happy winners. But the first fake-news awards did have one celebrity, who picked all the recipients and announced them himself on Wednesday. Or at least he tried to." (Farhi) The writer is comparing Trump's fake news awards to an award show like the Oscars while making fun of Trump for the technical difficulties experienced while trying to put the awards on. The next section continues the ridiculing tone:

"President Trump handed out what he modestly called the 'Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards' Wednesday night in an unceremonious ceremony held somewhere on the Internet. Befitting the bitter and mocking tone of the occasion, the Republican National Committee website Trump linked to on Twitter to announce the awards, GOP.com, promptly froze and spat back an error message. 'The site is temporarily offline, we are working to bring it back up. Please try again later,' it read." (Farhi)

The "bitter and mocking" tone of Trump's event seems to have been enough justification for The Post to respond in kind. While "Trump claims media to blame for 'anger' after bombs sent to CNN, Dems" is not as humorous as The Post story about the fake news awards, a "suggestive" tone is closely associated with a "humorous" one, since humor also makes comparisons and implies certain narratives (Stracqualursi & Stark, 2018). The story makes the point that everyone targeted with the bombs were "vocal critics" of Trump (Stracqualursi & Stark). In doing so, the story criticizes Trump's handling of the aftermath of the attempted bombings, especially his victim-blaming. It also insinuates that the attempted bombings were done by someone who supports Trump, and that, actually, he should take at least some blame for what happened.

“Narrowing down Trump’s designation of the ‘enemies of the people,’” from The Post, also uses a “suggestive” tone and complements it with a “ridiculing” one (Bump, 2018). The suggestive tone is prevalent in how this story covers the mail-bombing suspect, implying it is Trump’s rhetoric that inspired him (Bump). The final paragraph is an extended quote from Sarah Sanders defending Trump and saying that “90 percent of the coverage of everything the president does is negative,” setting up a kicker meant to both eviscerate and ridicule Sanders’ take: “Trump did not win a majority of the vote in the presidential election, contrary to Sanders’s assertion. But we’re guessing she’ll be spared the ‘fake news’ designation.” (Bump, 2018) This sentence, haughty, humorous, jealous, and pedantic at once, is not only a way of shooting back at Trump in print. It is hammering home the idea that Trump and his administration are hypocrites, because they say untrue things all the time and constantly harangue the press for stories that are true. The “hypocritical” theme is repeated throughout the artifacts, and it can go together with “ridiculing” and “critical” tones.

One Times story, “To Trump, It’s the ‘Amazon Washington Post.’ To Its Editor, That’s Baloney,” goes with an overall “humorous” tone (Ember, 2018). The lead of this piece makes use of a common theme in these stories: describing Trump as ignorant or a liar and lobbing humorous yet dark comments about his Twitter activity: “Amazon does not own The Washington Post. President Trump, however — impervious to certain facts and armed with a Twitter account — has tried hard to convince the public otherwise.” (Ember) The researcher must make clear once again that these different tones are meant to make a point, as can be seen here; the humor is used to say that Trump lies and uses his Twitter account as a weapon, even as a bully pulpit. Such themes will be discussed further in answer to the third research question.

The Times uses humor again to needle the president in a different story, this time noting that after Sarah Sanders accused the journalists in the White House briefing room of purposefully spreading misinformation, one reporter responded: “Are you speaking about the president?” Which was, per the Times, “asked in light of Mr. Trump’s own history of making claims that have not been validated and have been continually denied,” a direct shot at a president who had been taking direct shots of his own at the news media and The Times since his campaign for president began (Baker & Ember, 2017).

One of the best examples of humor in the 24 artifacts comes from a Times story titled “Trump Hands Out ‘Fake News Awards,’ Sans the Red Carpet” (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum, 2018). The Times switches between “humorous,” “sarcastic,” “ironic,” and “ridiculing” tones throughout the piece. Beyond the headline needling Trump for his event lacking pomp and circumstance, the lead also does not shy away from sarcasm and irony — it reminds the reader that Trump “gleefully” claimed former President Barack Obama was not a U.S. citizen, he “long insisted” the Central Park Five were guilty “despite exonerating proof,” and the story brings up Trump’s baseless allegation that “millions of illegal ballots cost him the popular vote,” the second time this specific misleading Trump statement is brought up by The Times (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum). This is all to set up the biting and mocking final line of the lead: This man, who has said all these outlandish things, “wanted to have a word with the American public about accuracy in reporting.” (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum) It is possible that The Times, like The Post, thinks this ridicule is warranted given the manner in which Trump announced and endeavored to execute the “Fake News Awards.”

**Defensive, defiant and defending**

The Times, CNN and The Post would sometimes come off as defensive in the tone of their stories. This is a natural progression from being publicly denigrated, but it is also a difficult position for these outlets to put themselves in — having to defend themselves instead of reporting on issues. Sometimes, this defensive (defined as “devoted to resisting or preventing aggression or attack”) tone could become defiant, defined as “full of or showing a disposition to challenge, resist, or fight.” This is simply a level higher from a “defensive” tone: The three news outlets would cross over to a “defiant” tone when Trump’s attacks were too egregious or too personal. A “defending” tone, defined as “to maintain or support in the face of argument or hostile criticism,” was used when CNN, The Times, or The Post sought to defend an outlet other than theirs from Trump’s attacks.

A “defensive” tone was identified in eight artifacts, “defiant” in three, and “defending” in three. CNN adopted “defiant” and “defensive” tones together twice. One story titled “Attorney for Michael Cohen keeps changing his story on Trump Tower meeting” is unlike any other story analyzed in this thesis (Sciutto & Bernstein, 2018). After being called out by Trump for inaccurate reporting, CNN had to scramble and defend itself. Trump’s tweet reads:

“Michaels [sic] Cohen’s attorney clarified the record, saying his client does not know if President Trump knew about the Trump Tower meeting (out of which came nothing!). The answer is that I did NOT know about the meeting. Just another phony story by the Fake News Media!” (Sciutto & Bernstein)

CNN’s version of events differs from Trump’s, as evidenced by the headline for this story, which makes the situation sound suspicious with the “changing his story” language.

The article quotes Davis saying he is not certain, as he had been for a July 26 story, that Trump was aware of a meeting in Trump Tower about “the Russians’ offer to share dirt on Hillary Clinton” led by Trump’s son, Donald Trump Jr. (Sciutto & Bernstein, 2018) Still, “CNN stands by its story,” the article reads before segueing into a quote from a CNN spokesperson saying the network is “confident in our reporting” (Sciutto & Bernstein). Quotes from spokespeople of the same company doing the reporting often indicates a “defensive” tone. Not only does CNN stand by its story, it notes that “CNN was first to report” on Trump’s knowledge of this meeting (Sciutto & Bernstein). The story includes a link to that article. CNN is willing to re-report the story because of Trump’s tweet. And, as the story gets into later, CNN stands by its story because Davis was not the only source telling the news outlet that Trump had knowledge of this meeting.

And while Trump claimed exoneration because of Davis’s new statement, CNN doubled down on its original reporting. But it also covered its bases. This story notes that CNN “did not report whether Trump knew about the meeting before it happened — only that Cohen was making that claim while hoping for a deal from prosecutors.” (Sciutto & Bernstein, 2018) The story also says that CNN, in the original story, made sure to report that Cohen did not have corroborating evidence of this claim. And even with all that, “For more than three weeks, Davis did not raise any issues to CNN about its reporting.” (Sciutto & Bernstein) CNN is shifting any blame from its reporting process onto the source. It is trying to assure people that it is not “fake news,” that the journalists were doing their job, and it is not their fault if someone gives them bad information since they were just reporting on what prominent sources said.

The story is interrupted by a related story that readers can click on with the title “CNN investigates Trump’s Russia ties.” Then, the article delves into the different versions of this story Cohen and his attorney have told (Sciutto & Bernstein, 2018). CNN is not apologizing for what happened, but it is showing due diligence by profiling all of Davis’s statements on this matter. The story also looks at other claims Davis has made and reneged on during the past week (Sciutto & Bernstein). But then, once the Davis stuff was cleared up and CNN defended its name, the narrative shifts its attention to Trump’s relationship with Russia, “a focal point of Mueller’s investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.” (Sciutto & Bernstein)

The conclusion of the story says Trump was angry about the story and denied it, which is strange, because that kind of information is usually in the top portion of these types of stories. It is possible that CNN did not want readers to think Trump’s tweet was the reason the story was written. The story did not even embed the tweet or directly quote Trump, it just linked to the tweet (Sciutto & Bernstein, 2018). Ultimately, this story is one more in a number of stories confronting Trump about his gripes with an outlet’s reporting. CNN boldly stood by the original story.

The other defensive/defiant CNN story is titled “White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta’s pass after contentious news conference” (Stelter, 2018). The story does not mince words about the administration taking this action. It says Sarah Sanders “lied,” and in a statement from CNN, “She provided fraudulent accusations and cited an incident that never happened. This unprecedented decision is a threat to our democracy and the country deserves better. Jim Acosta has our full support.” (Stelter) It is not the first time a news outlet has had to stand by its reporting and offer support for the attacked journalist. And after only partially quoting the White

House's statement, the story includes the full CNN statement and tweets from Acosta regarding what happened (Stelter). A quote from Sarah Sanders saying "We will ... never tolerate a reporter placing his hands on a young woman just trying to do her job as a White House intern" serves to set up a CNN producer responding to Sanders on Twitter by saying her statement was a "lie" and defending Acosta, saying he "never once touched her." (Stelter) CNN also quotes Acosta calling what Sanders said a "lie." (Stelter) The debate about what transpired at the press conference and whether Acosta touched the intern turned so sour that CNN abandoned the usual "misleading" or "untruthful" descriptors for the White House's words in favor of calling them outright lies.

The third and final instance of a "defiant" tone was in The Times' story, "Trump Attacks 'Failing New York Times' Over Tax Scheme Reporting" (Sullivan, 2018). Like the other two times a "defiant" tone was used, it is paired with a "defensive" one. The story involves coverage of Trump's direct affront to The Times, as he questions its reporting of a specific story. Trump's tweet follows this first section:

"The Failing New York Times did something I have never seen done before. They used the concept of 'time value of money' in doing a very old, boring and often told hit piece on me. Added up, this means that 97% of their stories on me are bad. Never recovered from bad election call!" (Sullivan)

Both The Times and Trump have squabbled over how the newspaper covered the 2016 presidential election. It is possible that with Trump attacking them on three fronts — the "failing" moniker, the questioning of its reporting on his taxes and the mention of its



controversial election coverage — The Times was driven to write the article in the first place and to be defiant in its response.

The next paragraph is where the story gets interesting. The Times simply restates/ summarizes what it wrote about in the report in question and links to the story again. It also asserts that “Mr. Trump did not offer an outright denial of the facts in the report” before listing these facts:

“...such as that the money he made during his decades in real estate came from tax schemes of dubious legality, the existence of records of deception in documenting the family’s financial assets, and that the beginning of the president’s so-called self-made fortune dates back to his toddler years when, by the time he was 3 years old, Mr. Trump earned \$200,000 a year in today’s dollars from his father.” (Sullivan, 2018)

The last line of the story is in reference to the story Trump attacked: “It is accurate and fair and we stand behind it.” Trump has regularly forced news media outlets, like The Times, CNN, and The Post to quote a spokesperson from their own company saying they stand by or behind a story.

In the few artifacts analyzed for this thesis that did not deal directly with The Times, The Post or CNN, but instead saw these outlets writing about one another, a “defending” tone was used. In one story, for example, CNN defends The New York Times, saying that it did, in fact, reach out to Trump for comment on stories when he claimed the newspaper did not (Byers, 2017). Another story sees The Times defending The Post. Much of the story reports out The Post’s actual relationship with Bezos and Amazon, which is almost no relationship at all, according to the story, besides Bezos’ occasional congratulatory visits to the newsroom (Ember,

2018). Post Executive Editor Martin Baron vehemently denies that Jeff Bezos has any voice in editorial coverage (Ember). Just like in the Arthur Sulzberger vs. Trump story, this article paints Baron as a voice of reason and Trump as a bully: “On Monday, Mr. Baron said The Post was not cowed by Mr. Trump’s invectives.” (Ember) Baron is the steadfast editor-in-chief, Trump the abusive and powerful opponent, and Baron will continue to “cover him the way that we feel any president should be covered.” (Ember)

The Post’s “Donald Trump keeps up media attacks with misleading tweets about New York Times” is another illustrative example (Borchers, 2016). Akin to The Times story refuting Trump’s linking of The Post and Amazon, The Post comes to its competitor’s defense in “Donald Trump keeps up media attacks with misleading tweets about New York Times.” (Borchers, 2016) The story adds nuance and sometimes outright denies Trump’s claims about The Times. Trump’s tweets are embedded after the lead — one says The Times is losing subscribers, the other says The Times “apologized” to subscribers for its coverage of Trump in the 2016 election (Borchers, 2016). The Post then immediately deploys hard reporting and cold logic to prove Trump wrong — actually, the paper has gained in subscribers over the past few years (Borchers). Also: “The president-elect's interpretation of a letter to subscribers as an apology for bad coverage is a stretch.” (Borchers) After showing Trump to be wrong, this story then parses the words of this letter from The Times in order to prove Trump wrong again (Borchers).

The story also shows that a number of conservative publications agree with Trump’s takes, “Yet Sulzberger’s full letter makes clear that he was simply renewing a promise that he believes the Times fulfilled during the campaign.” (Borchers, 2016) The story ends with quotes from Arthur Sulzberger urging people to trust The Times (Borchers). The article is a vehement

defense of The Times, but unlike Times stories of the same ilk, this story does not attempt to draw a larger comparison, nor does it mention The Post itself.

“To Trump, It’s the ‘Amazon Washington Post.’ To Its Editor, That’s Baloney” is The Times story that defends The Post by providing context to Trump’s tweet calling the newspaper the “Amazon Washington Post” and working to show this is not factual (Ember, 2018). The story says Trump has connected Amazon to The Post on Twitter 12 times and asserts the connection he is drawing is inaccurate (Ember). Next, the story embeds Trump’s tweets before including quotes from Baron, who claims Trump’s assertion is “completely made up” (Ember).

The Times defends The Post toward the end of the story as well, noting that Bezos publicly said The Post “should cover him as they would any other business executive.” (Ember, 2018) And yet, with no explicit mention of The Times in relation to Trump’s attacks, only of CNN, NBC and The Post, The Paper of Record seems to be situating itself outside of the fray, knowing well that it will be in it again some day.

The last of the three stories to use a “defending” tone is “Trump opens all the envelopes himself at first ‘Fake News Awards,’” which also uses a “defensive” tone (Farhi, 2018). After finishing discussing the technical difficulties Trump had to deal with, the writer called Trump’s event “score-settling and shaming of the media” and proceeded to defend outlets named by Trump in his awards (Farhi). The writer at first talks about CNN and The Times before later coming to Trump’s thoughts on The Post (Farhi). After discussing some of the awards Trump gave out to other news media outlets, the story at last comes to The Post itself (Farhi). Despite the fact that Post journalist David Weigel apologized for a misleading photo, “contrition scores few points in Trump’s media criticism playbook.” (Farhi)

While four other stories use “defensive” tones, the researcher looks to one illuminating artifact in particular. In what was its own genre of story, The Post’s “Trump accuses Amazon of ‘Post Office scam,’ falsely says The Post is company’s lobbyist” is in fact distinct from The Times story and Post story analyzed earlier (Rucker, 2018). The lead is similar to The Post’s other story on this topic in that it directly says that Trump was “falsely stating that The Washington Post operates as a lobbyist for Amazon.” (Rucker) Not only, then, has Trump called The Post’s reporting into question. He has also questioned its independence. These are two aspects of journalism that, when struck upon, few self-respecting news media outlets can resist defending themselves.

After a link to The Post’s fact-checker with the headline, “Trump’s bundle of faulty claims about Amazon’s cost to taxpayers,” the writer makes clear that “The Post is personally owned by Jeffrey P. Bezos, the founder and chief executive of Amazon, and operates independently of Amazon.” (Rucker, 2018) How many times does The Post have to deny this lie from Trump? And is he winning the battle because he forces them to spend so much ink defending themselves rather than on real stories?

## **RQ2(B): What forms of thematic content are repeated?**

Multiple forms of repeated thematic content emerged as the researcher conducted the textual analyses. The Times, CNN and The Post all attempted to emphasize how abnormal Trump's behavior was. Usually this had to do with his treatment of the news media, but his general demeanor and decision-making were also deemed abnormal by the three outlets.

Trump the hypocrite was another popular form of repeated thematic content. The Times, CNN and The Post would, in relation to Trump's statements regarding the news media, show him to be a hypocrite, whether it was because he lied and then called the press liars, or because he would say he loved the news media and then in the same breath attack it. This pattern was consistent with another theme: that of Trump's waffling on his feelings about the news media.

Another theme all three news outlets returned to was Trump's perceived motivation for his attacks: coverage he saw as unfavorable. The Times, CNN and The Post would show how he reacted to past reporting and would call him out for going after the press when they reported something about him he found unflattering. This theme sometimes coincided with that of Trump as the authoritarian/dictator, a theme expressed in a variety of ways and not just through exposition. The three news outlets would criticize Trump for his despotic treatment of the media through historical comparisons and selective sourcing, two other repeated themes found through textual analysis.

As the researcher mentioned when discussing the "defensive" tone, CNN, The Times and The Post would sometimes quote a spokesperson or a higher-up at their organization saying the news outlet stood by its reporting after an attack from Trump. Loosely related to this type of

thematic content is when The Times, The Post or CNN would say something along the lines of “critics say” without actually quoting anyone when trying to push a narrative about Trump.

Other forms of repeated thematic content include partial quotes that the news outlets used to discredit Trump, painting Trump as ignorant or a liar, depicting Trump as unpresidential, and playing with structure to in order to defend themselves or criticize Trump.

### **Extraordinary/abnormal**

Since this thesis essentially functions as an analysis of news outlets writing about themselves in response to a powerful politician, “Trump Discusses Claims of ‘Fake News,’ and Their Impact, With New York Times Publisher” is a case in point (Grynbaum, 2019). It is not standard operating procedure in the U.S. for a news outlet’s publisher to have to speak with the president about his attacks on the outlet and the news media at large, let alone to report on it after the fact. The Times recognizes this. Following a quote from Trump, the story calls Arthur Sulzberger’s meeting with Trump an “unusual arrangement.” (Grynbaum) Another story from The Times also pushes this narrative. “Trump Calls the News Media the Enemy of the People” exemplifies much of The Times’ coverage of Trump’s verbal onslaught against the news media (Grynbaum, 2017). The lead emphasizes the abnormal nature of Trump’s presidency and relationship with the news media by writing that his tweet calling the news media “the enemy of the American people” was an “extraordinary rebuke of the nation’s press.” (Grynbaum) The article then goes on to contextualize Trump’s problems with the news media in biting terms: “Even by the standards of a president who routinely castigates journalists...Mr. Trump’s tweet was a striking escalation in his attacks.” (Grynbaum)

Both of these stories are perfect examples of how The Times tries to tell its readers that Trump's actions and rhetoric as president are not normal. In the second story discussed in the above paragraph, The Times quotes Trump heavily toward the end of the article, but he is interrupted by an aside highlighting the import of Trump's words and perhaps providing a thesis statement for why the article was written in the first place: "Still, the notion of the news media as an enemy of the public — especially when voiced by a sitting president — went a step beyond Mr. Trump's usual rhetorical turns." (Grynbaum, 2017)

A Post story mentioned earlier, "Donald Trump keeps up media attacks with misleading tweets about New York Times," makes clear how extraordinary it is for one news media company to be defending another, especially in the case of The Post and The Times (Borchers, 2016). Another, "Trump opens all the envelopes himself at first 'Fake News Awards'" makes a similar point to the one The Times made in their story about the "Fake News Awards": It is unusual for a president to be using the power of their office to attack the news media (Farhi, 2018). The Times, though, is more straightforward in its analysis. As mentioned earlier when discussing "warning" and "concerned" tones, The "Fake News Awards" was "perhaps less notable than its premise: a sitting president using his bully pulpit for a semi-formalized attack on the free press." (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum, 2018) But these are only two instances in which The Post points to how unusual Trump's presidency and treatment of the press has been. In comparison to The Times and CNN, The Post seems to have accepted the difficult dynamic Trump has helped create since his campaign.

More than half of the CNN stories analyzed for this thesis utilize the theme of Trump's extraordinary behavior. "Trump claims media to blame for 'anger' after bombs sent to CNN,

Dems” contextualizes Trump’s attacks on the news media before saying, but this time, it is different (and worse): “Thursday’s tweet is especially striking in the wake of potential attacks on a major media outlet and political figures who have criticized him.” (Stracqualursi & Stark, 2018) This is the core rationalization for writing behind a majority of the articles analyzed. Another story from CNN, “Trump attacks media in lengthy, combative press conference” highlights the theme of abnormality with a related link bearing the headline: “An amazing moment in history: Donald Trump’s press conference.” (Byers, 2017) The story the CNN article in question links to attempts to read into Trump’s motives and behavior rather than just reporting it out. It also consistently mentions how “extraordinary,” to use the phrasing of the news media outlets, his behavior toward the press has been (Byers).

One CNN story again underscores the abnormal theme, but this time in reference to White House Press Corps norms. “White House backs down from legal fight, restores Jim Acosta's press pass” features reporting about how the White House is looking to change protocol (Stelter & Shortell, 2018). One of the new rules the White House was hoping to instill says reporters can only ask one question (without follow-ups). But CNN says, “In practice, many reporters asked follow-up questions at the November 7 press conference. And that’s not going to change any time soon.” (Stelter & Shortell) It is possible that this boldness in the article’s assertion that this is not going to change comes from recently winning the lawsuit the article is about. CNN contends that the rules, albeit with the qualification “it remains to be seen,” are “just cover for the administration’s loss to CNN in court.” (Stelter & Shortell) CNN is more general in its nod to the abnormal theme in “White House says there are new ‘rules’ for reporters, but press members haven’t agreed to them,” but, as can be seen from the headline, the subject matter is



similar to the article mentioned earlier in this paragraph (Stelter, 2018). The lead of the story notes that “White House backs down from legal fight, restores Jim Acosta’s press pass” rewrote its headline multiple times, and was originally “CNN asks for emergency hearing after Trump threatens to revoke Jim Acosta’s credentials again.” It is a simple reiteration of CNN’s legal win (Stelter). And then: “Yes, things are back to normal now, to the extent anything is Normal in the Trump White House.” (Stelter) CNN once again takes pains not to normalize Trump’s behavior.

The Times does the same in “Trump Attacks The Times, in a Week of Unease for the American Press,” one of the most overt examples of the trend of news outlets covering Trump’s commentary on their stories (Grynbaum & Sullivan, 2019). The lead contextualizes with its scornful first phrase, “Even by his standards,” then reads, “President Trump’s biting attacks on the press this week stand out.” (Grynbaum & Sullivan) The second paragraph recounts when Trump went after The Post, NBC and The Times, “calling the newspaper ‘a true ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE!’” (Grynbaum & Sullivan) The Times takes the abnormal theme a step further. Rather than simply calling Trump’s attacks abnormal, the story basically does it twice, noting that Trump’s standard behavior is not normal and, even with that, this time, his attacks constitute a special circumstance.

Several more CNN stories resist normalizing Trump’s behavior. “Trump Escalates His Criticism of the News Media, Fueling National Debate” wonders whether news media outlets should unite or come up with a cohesive strategy in calling out or reporting on Trump’s attacks (Baker & Ember, 2017). Extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary measures, after all. CNN devoted extensive coverage to some of Trump’s dust-ups with them — in this thesis are multiple stories about the bomb scares, for example. But more words were spent on the Acosta

controversy than any one topic from any one news media outlet in this thesis. The first of the trio of stories published about him is “White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta’s pass after contentious news conference” (Stelter, 2018) It is the longest out of every CNN story analyzed, with every detail from the press conference turned over and discussed. The lead begins: “In a stunning break with protocol, the White House said Wednesday night that it’s suspending the press pass of CNN’s Jim Acosta ‘until further notice.’” (Stelter) The “extraordinary” theme is going to be doing a lot of the heavy lifting for this story. The story later quotes the Times’ chief White House correspondent Peter Baker further emphasizing the extraordinary nature of events: ““Other presidents did not fear tough questioning.”” (Stelter) CNN obviously views the situation as untenable, and the story goes on to quote an editor at The Times and a statement from the White House Correspondents’ Association saying revoking Acosta’s press pass is “unacceptable.” (Stelter) As the article continues to chronicle the exchange between Trump and Acosta, the headline for a related link cuts in reading, “64 truly remarkable lines from Donald Trump’s otherworldly post-election news conference.”

### **Trump the hypocrite, Trump the liar, Trump the ignorant**

CNN, The Post, and The Times repeatedly depicted Trump as ignorant, a hypocrite and a liar, sometimes in the same paragraph. The news outlets would often do this by quoting people who said as much, or through the use of the enigmatic “critics say,” so some examples of this will not be discussed until later in this section.

One enlightening example from The Post, “Trump opens all the envelopes himself at first ‘Fake News Awards,’” asserts Trump is a hypocrite *because* of his lies (Farhi, 2018). The article posits that Trump is a hypocrite because he lies consistently and yet calls out the news media as

consistently. “Trump's efforts to call out ‘dishonest’ reporting carries its own heavy irony, of course. Trump himself has had a lifelong love affair with exaggeration and hyperbole, and a sometimes hostile relationship with facts.” (Farhi) The final three paragraphs detail numerous Trump lies, or “dubious statements,” including his claim that President Obama was not a U.S. citizen, or that as “a real estate developer, he regularly inflated the number of floors in his buildings,” or that The Post’s fact-checker “has tallied more than 2,000 false or misleading claims by Trump after less than a year in office... This has led to suggestions that the president was surely qualified to recognize false reporting.” (Farhi) This “has led to suggestions” line is clearly facetious and coming from the writer, but it bears certain similarities to how writers of other Post, Times and CNN stories on this topic have resorted to unnamed “sources” or “critics” to back up a narrative the outlets are trying to create. The “Fake News Awards” barely takes up half the story — most of the piece focuses on Trump’s lies, opportunities to plug old Post reporting, and dry/sarcastic writing driving home the point of how hypocritical and absurd this situation is (Farhi, 2018).

A CNN story, “Trump attacks media in lengthy, combative press conference,” also has this dual theme of lying/hypocrisy (Byers, 2017). The article works to make Trump look like a hypocrite because he lies while calling journalists liars (the same idea the above Post story harps on). One passage is singularly important because the question CNN poses presupposes an answer, and his answer is nonsensical, basically amounting to, “Because I said so”:

“At one point, Trump was asked how the stories he condemned as ‘fake news’ could in fact be fake if they were based on leaks he was slamming as illegal.

“‘Well the leaks are real,’ he said. ‘You’re the one that wrote about them and reported them, I mean the leaks are real. You know what they said, you saw it and the leaks are absolutely real. The news is fake because so much of the news is fake.’” (Byers)

CNN writes that Trump “wanted to ‘turn in CNN for not doing a good job,’” and that its reporting “‘is fake,’” per Trump (Byers). The story also says Trump stated he does not watch CNN anymore, even though he “complained about what he sees when he watches the network.” (Byers) This is the hypocrite angle at work again. It also falls in line with the trend of the Times, Post, and CNN showing Trump contradicting himself.

The Times joined The Post and CNN in pointing out the hypocrisy in Trump savaging reporting errors from news outlets that then correct their errors and sometimes further punish reporters when “Mr. Trump has never backed down, for instance, from unsubstantiated claims that President Barack Obama wiretapped Trump Tower or that millions of illegal immigrants cast votes last year, swinging the popular tally against him.” (Baker & Ember, 2017) This sentence includes links to Times stories about the phenomena. This is also noteworthy because when The Post, The Times, and CNN look to discredit Trump, they often note the same misleading statements he has made in the past. The Times then offers further examples of trump’s unverified statements, noting, “Mr. Trump issued no correction.” (Baker & Ember) The Times here is doing the same thing The Post did in its fake news awards story and what CNN did in the combative press conference story, showing why he is a hypocrite and specifically referencing his lies or untruths. The story is saying, how can he say this about the news media when his sins are far greater and more insidious?

The Post elaborates on the thought that Trump is a hypocrite because he calls the news media out for lying when he is a liar himself, with a small wrinkle. Instead of saying the news media is lying in this case, Trump blames it for developing a harsh national dialogue. It does this via the same methods mentioned before: using the voices of others and attempting to draw out Trump's hypocrisy. How can Trump blame the news media for rancorous dialogue when he "labeled the news media 'the enemy of the American people' a month after taking the oath of office" (Wootson Jr., 2018)? To make matters worse, "a CNN analysis concluded, he used the word 'fake' ...more than 400 times. He once fumed, the New York Times reported, because a TV on Air Force One was turned to CNN." (Wootson Jr.) Another Post article analyzed is thick with knocks against Trump and defenses of The Post. It notes that Trump's tweets were "sent during his drive from his Mar-a-Lago estate to the nearby Trump International Golf Club..." (Rucker, 2018) This in itself seems to be a derogatory detail, but when followed by "the president argued that Amazon costs the U.S. Postal Service billions of dollars in potential revenue," the true criticism becomes clear: Trump is a hypocrite (Rucker). The American taxpayer is subsidizing his vacations — how can he comment on what Amazon does?

One CNN story touches on how Trump contradicts himself when discussing his attitude toward the news media: "Trump's treatment of the press varied from one minute to the next. As at prior news conferences, he showed contempt for reporters one minute...then suggested he was enjoying the back and forth." (Stelter, 2018) This is when the article pivots from focusing solely on Acosta to looking at other aspects of the press conference, like when Trump said offensive, rude and angry things at Asian and black reporters. The article also highlights the frustrated social media reaction to how Trump treated reporters during the press conference (Stelter). But

CNN depicts Trump as a hypocrite in a number of ways. Like the other story on the attempted bombing, CNN gives credit to Trump for “a more conventional presidential message of unity” in “the initial aftermath of the bomb discoveries.” (Stracqualursi & Stark, 2018) But: “he also pointed the finger at the media, saying that the press has a ‘responsibility’ to foster civility.” (Stracqualursi & Stark) This is again an inclusion of the hypocritical nature of Trump’s stance on the press.

A different technique the three outlets used when pushing the narratives that Trump is a hypocrite, a liar, or ignorant is partial quotes. It is used when the outlet seeks to denigrate what the subject has to say. The Times writes that Trump “deemed” the news media “‘important’ and ‘beautiful,’ but also ‘so bad’ and ‘unfair’ — Mr. Trump called himself ‘a victim’ of unfair coverage and declined to accept responsibility for a rise in threats against journalists since he took office.” (Grynbaum, 2019) These partial quotes make Trump seem either indecisive, hypocritical, or ignorant. “Trump attacks media in lengthy, combative press conference” from CNN also uses partial quotes that make Trump seem hypocritical when discussing what he thinks of the news media and CNN (Byers, 2017).

In The Times’ “Trump Discusses Claims of ‘Fake News,’ and Their Impact, With New York Times Publisher,” the article attempts to show Trump in a contradictory and unflattering light: contradictory in that he constantly contradicted himself during his conversation with Publisher Arthur Sulzberger, unflattering in that, the story argues, he cares not for the ramifications of his actions (Grynbaum, 2019). In Trump’s many contradictions lie the depiction of him as ignorant, a liar, or a hypocrite. The Times clearly makes the point that Trump will continue to bash the news media unless he likes its coverage of him. For example, at one point

the article concludes that while Trump at times recognized the negative impact of how his words have been adopted by foreign leaders to persecute and delegitimize journalists, “in a common pattern whenever the president speaks about the press, Mr. Trump quickly refocused on his personal grievances” specifically regarding coverage of himself (Grynbaum). Throughout the story, any glimmer of hope Trump might inspire about his treatment of journalists going forward is immediately dashed by a glimpse of his narcissism. And that is how The Times discusses Trump’s issues with his portrayal by the news media: not by lending any credence to them, but by portraying him as self-obsessed.

One Times story describes Trump as “impervious to certain facts” (Ember, 2018). A Post story, in an attempt to disprove Trump’s claims, reads: “Trump has previously said that Amazon costs The Postal Service billions of dollars in potential revenue, even though officials have explained to him that Amazon’s contracts with The Postal Service are profitable for the agency.” (Wagner, 2018) This can be seen as patronizing, as in Trump is so ignorant that officials have to explain how certain things work. The suggestion is perhaps even worse: If he already knew this was not true, why is he making the claim again? On the other hand, how are news outlets to reestablish truth in any way other than establishing truth? The line between being ignorant and being a liar is a thin one, and the three news outlets go back and forth between the two when writing about Trump.

The Post returns to “officials have explained to him” in “Trump accuses Amazon of ‘Post Office scam,’ falsely says The Post is company’s lobbyist”: “Trump has repeatedly advanced this theory, even though officials have explained to him that Amazon’s contracts with The Postal Service are profitable for the agency.” (Rucker, 2018) This Post phrasing, used multiple times,

makes Trump seem incompetent/ignorant while also exposing his personal dislike for Bezos and Amazon and The Post. The suggestion is that this is where his assaults are truly stemming from, not from some principled moral high ground. The end of the story elaborates on the fact that “White House officials have struggled to back up Trump’s theories” about Amazon (Rucker). The article also gets into the effect Trump’s words, “irrespective of their factual accuracy,” can have on Amazon’s stock (Rucker).

Saying Trump “lies” is consistent with a “bold” or a “defiant” tone. As mentioned earlier, one CNN story, “White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta's pass after contentious news conference,” quotes two of its employees saying the White House lied. In this case, CNN has abandoned the high ground of the objective journalist that mainstream news media outlets cling to, taking great pains not to call anything a “lie,” to write what is at its core a screed against the White House for how it reacted to Acosta’s performance at the press conference.

### **Unflattering stories are fake — Trump the authoritarian**

The idea that Trump thinks all unflattering stories about him are fake goes along with the idea that he is authoritarian or dictatorial in his treatment of the news media. One CNN story nods to the authoritarian theme, writing that the White House punished reporter Jim Acosta for doing his job as a journalist — CNN claimed the White House was not justified in taking away his press pass, and that it was a result of “asking multiple questions at a post-midterms news conference,” which is surely not an offense worthy of removing his press pass (Stelter, 2018). There is plenty content in this article about the First Amendment ramifications of this. But not only was Acosta punished, he was personally attacked: “Trump insulted Acosta and called him a ‘terrible’ person.” (Stelter) That is the language and behavior of a dictator. It is that kind of



language and behavior that The Times criticizes in “Trump Escalates His Criticism of the News Media, Fueling National Debate,” mentioned earlier as a story pertaining to “warning” and “concerned” tones (Baker & Ember, 2017). This story focuses on how Trump increased his aggressiveness against the news media because of a “string of mistaken reports,” according to the lead. It is a sweeping story that asserts Trump believes “he is being persecuted by a left-leaning establishment out to bring him down... fueling a national debate over truth, accountability and the free press.” (Baker & Ember) This story shows how Trump’s authoritarian attitude toward the nation’s news media is fueled by his assertion that any story he does not like is fake. The Times is just one of the many targets Trump chooses, and this story refers to “a series of broadsides” against ABC News, CNN, and The Post (Baker & Ember). The Times argues that these attacks are indicative of a larger trend or “a concerted campaign to discredit independent journalism.” (Baker & Ember) Therefore, this story is not meant only to defend The Times or its publisher, but American journalism as a whole.

CNN’s “White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta's pass after contentious news conference” continues a CNN-specific theme of characterizing press conferences differently than how the president or the White House characterizes them, trying to highlight Trump’s apparent misunderstanding of the role of the free press (Stelter, 2018). In this case, the theme takes the form of the statement that “Trump...called reporters ‘rude for asking questions’” (Stelter). He has kept up “his years-long campaign against the people who cover him.” (Stelter) Anything from Trump or Sanders disparaging the news media is expectedly followed by someone pushing back. In this case, that someone is CNN, as it includes more of the network’s statement, which calls Trump’s “ongoing attacks on the press...not only dangerous” but “disturbingly un-

American.” (Stelter) The statement also adds that “President Trump has made it clear he does not respect a free press” (Stelter). CNN is quoting itself putting itself at odds with Trump, yet ostensibly trying to remain neutral. In a set of 24 articles that vary from outright defenses and borderline attacks to subtle insinuations and almost-fair accounts, this article is firmly in the former category.

The Times hammers home the authoritarian angle in “Trump Attacks The Times, in a Week of Unease for the American Press,” covering how the newspaper’s publisher begged Trump to recognize the negative effects of his rhetoric and pointing to a recent Supreme Court opinion written echoing Trump’s rhetoric (Grynbaum & Sullivan, 2019). The Times pushes the narrative that Trump’s attacks on the press have international ramifications, referring to a Times journalist who was detained and deported by Egyptian authorities (Grynbaum & Sullivan). It is worth repeating that The Times believes Trump is harming the “once-sacrosanct American notion” of “freedom of the press.” (Grynbaum & Sullivan) Another Times story also mentions that Trump’s attacks have lent themselves to helping authoritarian leaders in other nations before leading into a section about Trump and Arthur Sulzberger’s personal relationship: “It was not the first time the two men had debated Mr. Trump’s remarks concerning the press.” (Grynbaum, 2019) This story now has to toe the line between defending the paper’s publisher and reporting objectively on Trump. The article is decidedly on the side of Sulzberger. Trump is cast as the temperamental child who must be talked down by the eminently reasonable Sulzberger. And “once again” Trump resorted to complaining about his depiction in the press (Grynbaum).

Returning to CNN and the story about restoring Acosta’s press pass, the article quotes a White House statement: “Should you refuse to follow these rules in the future, we will take

action in accordance with the rules set forth above. The President is aware of this decision and concurs.” (Stelter & Shortell, 2018) The story frames this quote as a “general threat to take action against reporters who flout new ‘rules.’” (Stelter & Shortell) “General threat” implies that the court win does not matter; the White House will continue to behave as they have. To flout is to defy, and CNN seems to be saying that the White House is authoritarian when it comes to the news media. Why would a “free” press need to defy anything?

The Post story “‘Crazed lunatics’: Trump again attacks the news media as ‘the enemy of the people’” has a remarkably similar headline to another headline The Post did, this time emphasizing the “again” and “enemy of the people” parts of what Trump said (Wagner, 2019). The fact that his attacks do not stop, and the phrasing “enemy of the people,” always seem to be what news outlets want to hone in on. The lead, for example, called “enemy of the people” a “derogatory term” and said that Trump “launched a fresh attack” against the news media (Wagner). The lead sounds almost as if The Post is tired of and even hurt by Trump’s ongoing rhetoric. The story ends by quoting Trump again calling the news media “the enemy of the people” as well as “the opposition party.” There is something powerful about not adding any analysis or extra reporting and ending a story on a starkly anti-news media Trump quote. When his words are re-situated away from a microphone or Twitter, they look different, even autocratic. Perhaps this is what The Post is hoping readers will see. A different Post story filled with humor and scorn for Trump takes a moment to get high-minded, painting Trump as authoritarian: “the more disturbing element was the spectacle of a sitting president orchestrating another attack on the news media.” (Farhi, 2018).

Two CNN stories examine press corps decorum. One features journalists disputing Trump's treatment of White House reporters (Stelter & Shortell, 2018). CNN assumes that because revoking Acosta's press pass was a "preliminary decision," according to the White House, that this "indicated that the White House could take further action against Acosta" (Stelter & Shortell). But it could also mean that the White House could change their mind and give him the press pass back. The other CNN story discussing this topic offers three ultimate takeaways: That Trump does not usually hold press conferences, "Trump and co. want to provoke fights with the media, but they don't want to lose in court again" and, ultimately, "Something much, much bigger is going on. It's Trump's assault on the truth. Trying to blacklist Acosta is just one small part of that." (Stelter, 2018)

A CNN story analyzed for this thesis has an incredulous headline about all the times Trump has used the term "fake" with regards to "fake news," "fake polls," "fake stories" and "fake media" (Stelter, 2018). The lead notes that Trump has done this more than 400 times since his inauguration. "Over and over again, he has told the United States not to trust what reporters say. His allies have done the same thing. This repetition — constantly labeling real news as 'fake' — is what has made the slur so powerful." (Stelter) The author builds a contrast between how CNN views this phenomenon and Trump's outlook. It is important to the network, so much so that it considers "fake news" a "slur" and it asserts its reporting is "real news." The real concern of this story is the repetition of "fake," an authoritarian tactic to discredit the news media.

A more specific tactic of portraying Trump as authoritarian in his interactions with the press is by offering historical perspective or comparisons. As discussed earlier, one Post story

includes a related video comparing Trump to such leaders as Hugo Chavez, Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, noting that they used similar rhetoric and listing further steps they took against the media (Wagner, 2018). Another Post story includes a photo caption that sets the tone for the rest of the article: “President Trump is not the first leader to label journalists as ‘enemies of the people’ and creators of ‘fake news.’” (Wootson Jr., 2018) It is the same line of thinking as the video embedded in the article discussed above, immediately moving readers to include Trump with the likes of Stalin and other dictators. In fact, in most of its reporting on Trump and the news media, The Post is intent on making historical comparisons.

The Times also points to “historians” who have noticed “similarities between Mr. Trump and Richard M. Nixon, who in 1972 told his national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, ‘The press is the enemy.’” (Grynbaum, 2017) Of course, comparisons to the disgraced former president are inherently unflattering. And throughout the textual analyses in this thesis, the tactic of pointing to “historians” or some other vague authority to criticize Trump’s relationship with the free press, be it historical or otherwise, is a common one. Still, The Times is not exactly wrong: In reading Pach (2010) and Liebovich (2003), much of the rhetoric Trump has employed against the press could be directly lifted from Nixon and his administration’s phrasing, including, importantly, painting the press as the “enemy.”

One Times story in particular — “Trump’s Attacks on the News Media are Working” — is fascinating because it asks the same questions that this thesis does (Rutenberg, 2018). For example: How can reporters avoid seeming like they’re out to get Trump? “By engaging with his ceaseless attacks and baseless claims, are journalists falling into a trap?” (Rutenberg) And “how long will it take the news media to come up with a more effective way to counter the litany of

baseless claims washing through the news cycle?” (Rutenberg) The story’s kicker is as defeatist as the rest of the text, and cheekier than almost anything The Times had to say about Trump in the articles analyzed, again showing how tone and repeated thematic content overlap: “At this rate, a solution may come sometime in Mr. Trump’s third term.” It is a heady last line that pays homage both to the historical comparisons to Trump earlier in the story — which depicted him as something of a despot in his dealings with the press — and to the fretting tone of the article that asks in a roundabout way, what can be done amongst the news media to combat Trump’s attacks on the press?

Time and time again, all three news outlets come back to the narrative that Trump is attacking them because he does not like their coverage of him and his presidency. If it does not cast Trump in a flattering light, the story is fake or inconsequential. Take a Times story that suggests (after calling the president’s assaults “broadships,” a word repeated in similar stories by CNN and The Post) that these attacks from Trump on The Post evoking Amazon usually come after The Post reports a story on him he does not like, according to “people close to the president” (Ember, 2018). The story also cites a past example of this theory, but not before recognizing that it was when The Post “followed up on a story broken by The New York Times” (Ember), somewhat bragging about the fact that they beat The Post to the story. This is a repeated theme in not only The Times but CNN and Post stories: If the reporting is unflattering to Trump, he considers it unfair and a good enough reason to lash out against the press.

In “Trump averages a ‘fake’ insult every day. Really. We counted.” from CNN, the story discusses how Trump transformed the term “fake news” from stories spread by faux publications to stories he does not like from mainstream news media outlets (Stelter, 2018). And his rhetoric

is not empty, according to the article (Stelter). It cites “press advocacy groups” battling against Trump’s framing as well as “Republican critics of the president,” Senators Jeff Flake and John McCain (Stelter). It also points to a study that found “forty percent of Republicans say accurate news stories that cast a politician or political group in a negative light should ‘always’ be considered fake news.” (Stelter) Many of the articles analyzed in this thesis try to impress upon the reader that Trump’s anti-news media posturing is more than just that, and that there is cause for concern. “Past presidents from both parties have complained about biased and slanted stories. But with the word ‘fake,’ Trump has gone much further, asserting that journalists make up stories and implying that citizens can’t believe anything they read.” (Stelter) Whenever The Times, CNN, and The Post have brought up historical comparisons, it has been to chide Trump. Furthermore, it is often to show the extraordinary circumstances of the Trump-news media relationship these articles hint at.

It is not a stretch to say that The Times, which Trump, a Queens native, called “my newspaper,” engages in psychological warfare with him (Grynbaum, 2019). They report on his shady finances (which is merely reporting, not psychological warfare), a sore spot for the businessman, and he calls them out for their 2016 election coverage, a sore spot for the Grey Lady. Trump hit on The Times’ insecurities regarding its election reporting when he responded to a Times story about his tax schemes. He took it as a personal affront, as his entire legacy is predicated on being a great and self-made businessman. The coverage from The Times about his lashing out, “Trump Attacks ‘Failing New York Times’ Over Tax Scheme Reporting,” features a plausible attempt to show fairness. The story embeds a video of Sarah Sanders speaking on its reporting and saying she would not go through every line of a “very boring 14,000-word story.”

Then again, this could also show how the Trump administration has deflected on this issue and avoided denying the facts The Times reported. In fact, according to Sanders, the White House did not even read the story. It denied it only because it knew it was not positive coverage of Trump.

The Times can be explicit when building this narrative as well, even in the very same story: “What Mr. Trump considers fair, however, is almost always in line with what he considers flattering.” (Grynbaum, 2019) This story shows Arthur Sulzberger promising Trump that The Times will be tough, aggressive, and fair in future reporting, which leads to Trump “reminiscing” on his “unlikely political rise” (Grynbaum). The story ends with a quote from Trump that needs no context or editorial asides from the author: “I came from Jamaica, Queens, Jamaica Estates, and I became president of the United States... I’m sort of entitled to a great story — just one — from my newspaper.” (Grynbaum) It is a brilliant and reportorial way to conclude a piece that resembled psychological warfare. The quote backs up the analysis in the article that Trump feels entitled to flattering coverage, that he does not understand how the free press works. The reader comes away with the idea that Trump believes the press should be a PR firm (an idea further backed up with the inclusion of a Trump quote earlier in the story talking about how well Fox News has treated him) (Grynbaum). In a way, too, the story suggests that while Trump is desperate for the respect of The Times, it will continue to withhold that respect. If viewing Trump’s ongoing relationship with the press as a war, this quote goes to exemplify that The Times won this battle.

A Post story is more consistently explicit in its narrative-building. “Narrowing down Trump’s designation of the ‘enemies of the people’” closes with a strong repudiation of Trump’s



attitude toward the news media and his tendency to lash out because of reporting he does not like:

“Negative coverage of Trump is fake coverage of Trump. And, because fake coverage of Trump means that the reporter is an enemy of the people, those who cover Trump negatively are enemies of the people. That is the simplest and clearest description of what Trump is getting at, which his supporters — including the mail-bomb suspect — clearly understand.” (Bump, 2018)

Almost every article in this thesis is trying to access this point in some way, but perhaps to try to be objective, it is nearly never as clear as it is here from The Post. According to The Post, stories that Trump does not like are inherently false if they do not praise him. The above quote dovetails perfectly with painting Trump as authoritarian.

The Post is also completely clear about what it thinks are Trump’s motivations in lambasting the news media. In one story, the author writes that “Trump is typically motivated to lash out at Amazon because of The Post’s coverage of him, officials have said.” (Rucker, 2018) Here are several elements considered repeatedly in this thesis — a news outlet covers a story, Trump gets upset about it and lashes out, then the news outlet has to defend itself. The “officials have said” line, while it may be true, acts as a buffer between hard news and opinion. The Post then gets into the story that likely triggered Trump’s outburst:

“...an exhaustive account of the Trump Organization’s finances being ‘under unprecedented assault’ because of three different legal inquiries special counsel Robert S. Mueller III’s Russia investigation; a \$130,000 payment allegedly to secure the silence of adult-film actress Stormy Daniels over a sexual encounter she says she had with Trump;

and lawsuits alleging that Trump is improperly accepting gifts, or ‘emoluments,’ from foreign or state governments through his businesses.” (Rucker)

The Post, CNN, and The Times are good at rehashing their work once Trump brings it up. His rhetoric often allows them to spotlight their original reporting. Not only does The Post link to its story here, it also includes it as a featured story in the middle of the text for the reader to jump to (Rucker). The most devastating line of this Post story reads: “Trump is known to react especially sensitively to news stories about his personal and business affairs.” (Rucker) Trump often projects a hyper-masculine image of himself — “sensitive” cannot be a good word in his lexicon. Again, the writer takes liberties with “is known,” and it is worth noting that this is the second time The Post has made this claim, only paragraphs apart, except the second time, this idea is repeated with stronger language (Rucker).

A CNN story follows certain stories from The Times and The Post by writing that Trump “suggested that he would like a better relationship with the press,” and yet, “he could not do so so long as the coverage was ‘fake.’” (Byers, 2017) Rather than clarifying that Trump does not care about a good relationship, he just wants positive coverage, as Times and Post stories have done, CNN ends the story with a long quote about how the press ought to be “ashamed of themselves.” (Byers) But perhaps that is the comment — immediately after writing that Trump said he wants a better relationship with the press, we see him denigrating them and calling them lawbreakers for publishing classified information. It is maybe an example of another smooth setup, of course under the guise of objectivity.

The Post will guess at which story brought Trump to criticize them if it is not clear, as the paper does in “‘Crazed lunatics’: Trump again attacks the news media as ‘the enemy of the

people” (Wagner, 2019). In “Narrowing down Trump’s designation of the ‘enemies of the people,’” after saying that Trump has been vague on which outlets he considers “enemies of the people,” The Post’s article reads:

“The backtrack seems to be of the having-his-cake-and-eating-it-too variety. Trump wants his supporters to continue to dismiss media that report on him critically, but he hopes to avoid criticism for using Soviet-style language about the free press.” (Bump, 2018)

This is another sound example of where Trump’s authoritarian tendencies stem from. The Post is positing that Trump does not want to be seen as an autocratic leader, but he continues to use the language of autocratic leaders. This consistent theme on Trump’s waffling on whether he hates the news media is made more potent here by The Post offering a motive for his behavior.

### **Unpresidential**

Another repeated theme from within the 24 artifacts is the idea, or criticism, that Trump is unpresidential in his comportment with the media. CNN in particular seeks to make this point. When referring to the attempted bombings, a CNN story reads: “Twelve days before the midterm elections, Trump has also not seized on the incidents as a presidential moment, as others before him may have done, where Americans could see their president leading a nation through a time of challenge.” (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018) Merriam-Webster defines “presidential” as “of, relating to, or befitting a president or a president's authority.” CNN takes Trump to task for his dealing with the attempted bombings and his subsequent victim-blaming of the news media. CNN does give credit to Trump for “a more conventional presidential message of unity” in “the initial aftermath of the bomb discoveries” as mentioned earlier in this section (Stracqualursi &

Stark, 2018). Yet he then says “the press has a ‘responsibility’ to foster civility.” (Stracqualursi & Stark) CNN did not approve of this addendum. The story suggests the bomber was a Trump supporter, and Trump’s continued anti-news media rhetoric is not the behavior of a sitting president.

The Post also portrayed Trump as unpresidential. In this instance, they did so by comparing his tenure as president to his presidential campaign. The lead of “Donald Trump keeps up media attacks with misleading tweets about New York Times” emphasizes the non-presidential (as was the prevailing narrative during the campaign) nature of Trump — he did not suddenly become more presidential when he was elected: “President-elect Donald Trump sounded very much like presidential candidate Donald Trump on Sunday morning in a pair of misleading tweets about the New York Times.” (Borchers, 2016)

But again, it is CNN that most often goes after Trump for being unpresidential. The attempted bombing of CNN (among other targets) in 2018 is another well-tread topic within the framework of the news media defending itself against Trump with their reporting. Coverage from The Times differs from that of CNN on the issue in part because this is so personal for CNN. So, “An aggrieved Trump digs in after pipe bomb scares” is a story that takes aim at Trump’s reaction following the threats (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018). The lead reads: “... Trump believes he is being unfairly linked to the pipe bombs delivered to frequent targets of his acrimonious rhetoric and has watched with disdain as the national conversation has shifted to his role in shaping the divisive political environment.” (Zeleny & Diamond) CNN does not seem to think he is being unfairly linked. After saying that he feels this way, the story notes that the bombs were sent to people and organizations Trump “targets” frequently (Zeleny & Diamond). This lead

also paints him as almost a petulant, powerless child — so not exactly presidential — as he “watches with disdain” at the developing national conversation.

CNN gives credit to Trump for showing “some restraint” at a campaign rally, where he did not go after Clinton and “refrained from some of his most fiery lines...on the media.” (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018) But of course, “by Thursday morning, Trump was back to stirring his base against the press.” (Zeleny & Diamond) This story is about Trump’s reaction to the bomb scares, of which CNN is disapproving of. Rather than taking responsibility or dialing down the rhetoric, he has scapegoated the press and he has not dealt with the situation in a presidential manner. And rather than listening to the criticism CNN brings up, “Trump plans to continue blaming the media for the current political environment and believes his supporters will agree with him.” (Zeleny & Diamond) White House officials stand with Trump on his aggressive tweeting and high-intensity rhetoric, according to several sources CNN mentioned from within the White House (Zeleny & Diamond).

The other story CNN wrote about the attempted bombings really honed in on the victim-blaming theme. The lead, for example, reads, “President Donald Trump returned on Thursday to blaming the media for much of the ‘anger’ in society, a day after CNN and Democrats were the targets of explosive devices.” (Stracqualursi & Stark, 2018) Both the headline and the lead make the point of Trump blaming victims of the attempted bombings for their misfortune (which, in effect, is akin to saying they deserved it). Once again, this is clearly not presidential conduct.

## **Structure**

Structure is a massively important, if subtle, way for CNN, The Times and The Post to make their points. Where information is included in a story can give clue to how significant a

news media outlet thinks that information is. Information that is not included in the text can also have an effect on structure.

One CNN story about a press conference that caused a media circus due to Trump's treatment of reporter Jim Acosta and Acosta's refusal to give up the microphone did not actually address the incident until the latter half of the story. At last, the story gets to the part that the controversy emanated from, when a "White House staffer hurried over to grab the mic and carry it to the next reporter." (Stelter, 2018) CNN says Acosta tried to ask another question and to reason with Trump, all the while holding on to the microphone as a staffer tried to take it away. Then she simply "looked toward Trump, then ducked out of camera view." (Stelter) The section is again interrupted by a related link, this time titled "How Trump conned the media, according to Jon Stewart." Even after Acosta gave up the microphone, Trump took more time to go after him. This is when he called Acosta "a rude, terrible person." (Stelter) Trump interrupts questions from other reporters to continue going after Acosta. Acosta tries to ask a question about Trump's anti-media rhetoric, and he simply calls CNN fake news again (Stelter). It is a wonder that this part was not nearer the top of the story.

Stray examples of the substance of structure popped up throughout the textual analysis. Structure alone rarely makes for repeated thematic content, but it aids in creating a narrative. In "Trump attacks the media in lengthy, combative press conference," the story mentions Trump wishes he had a more amicable relationship with the news media before immediately diving into one of his diatribes against the news media, making him come off as hypocritical (Byers, 2017). That story flips this structure when, right after CNN points out that Trump had made untrue and misleading statements, the story quotes Trump saying: "I've never seen more dishonest media

than, frankly, the political media.” (Byers) How can the reader trust Trump over CNN on this point when the outlet pointed out he had been lying beforehand?

Throughout the 24 artifacts, Trump’s tweets or statements in question are included at the top of the story. And often, like in this example from The Post, they are rebutted with haste: “Despite his calls for unity, Trump has continued to target his adversaries on Twitter and in public comments after pipe bombs were sent to prominent Democrats, and a gunman massacred Jewish worshipers Saturday at a Pittsburgh synagogue.” (Wagner, 2018) This structure is repeated by The Times, CNN, and The Post — they occasionally include quotes from conservative sources who agree with Trump, and they always include quotes from Trump, but often this is set up for the reporter to explain why the above quote is wrong. For example, CNN employs this tactic of quoting Trump or an ally to set up a takedown in “Narrowing down Trump’s designation of the ‘enemies of the people’” (Bump, 2018). After quoting Sarah Sanders, the article reads, “Trump did not win a majority of the vote in the presidential election, contrary to Sanders’s assertion. But we’re guessing she’ll be spared the ‘fake news’ designation.” (Bump)

Structure can call the objectivity of the news outlet into question. “Trump renews attacks on media as ‘the true Enemy of the People’” portends a softer ending than others by The Post with a tweet from Trump about the news media’s “fake and dishonest reporting” and then a quote from Mitch McConnell saying both sides (liberals and conservatives) are to blame for the harsh discourse pulsing through the country at the moment (Wagner, 2018). This sort of “both sides” point of view when it comes to Trump’s rhetoric is not used anywhere else by The Post, perhaps because this is the only story out of the eight that does not mention The Post by name. And in this situation it rings hollow since the entirety of the story focuses on *Trump’s* harsh discourse.

CNN published a story with a similar ending. After bringing up the bad and the ugly of a press conference and after defending Acosta and CNN's integrity, the story ends with the full statement from the White House on the matter (Stelter, 2018). But following the rest of the reporting CNN did on this incident, the statement reads — and perhaps is supposed to read — as one big lie. Another CNN story wrote that Trump has kept a “close eye on the investigation into the attempted pipe bombs” according to White House officials (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018). This is actually not in conflict with what the story says earlier about how Trump has not publicly named or privately reached out to targets with updates on the investigation. But as the only positive piece of information about Trump in the article, it is worth mentioning that it is not brought up until the second-to-last paragraph.

In looking for repeated thematic content within stories from The Post, The Times, and CNN, The Times has been the most consistent in how they cover Trump's words against the press in structure, diction, sourcing, and theme. An average structure includes a lead focusing on the oft-used theme of the extraordinary nature of Trump's assaults on the news media, a quote of Trump, and then usually the tweet where it came from embedded below, sourcing that backs up The Times' thinking around Trump's atypical, damaging, and authoritarian relationship with the news media, and then the latter portion of the article gives light to more of Trump's or his supporters' thinking before closing with either a quote from Trump or a sharp conclusion summing up the narrative push of the story.

In stories that are not specifically about the news media outlet in question but about Trump's general attacks on the free press, the story usually gets to their own news media outlet's relationship with Trump toward the end of the story. One example is a Times story where



material about ABC News, CNN, The Post, and NBC abounds, but it is not until the reader gets deep into the story that they see anything about The Times or anything that might back up what Trump is tweeting about the news media (Baker & Ember, 2017). Another example can be found in an article from The Post, which features a look at a testy exchange between CNN's Jim Acosta and White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders (Bump, 2018). It contradicts, with a quote from Trump singling out specific news media outlets, Sanders' answers to Acosta as "obviously untrue," and it reports that "Trump has referred to 'fake news' on Twitter nearly 300 times, about once every other day," all before writing, "The Post is relatively low on the list of outlets that have been targeted." (Bump) This is meant to set up the next sentence, one that implies Trump's rhetoric is to blame for CNN's bomb scare: "At the top is CNN, Trump's frequent target and the only news outlet targeted by the mail bomber." (Bump) The story's structure, replete with embedded tweets, a late-story mention of the news media outlet publishing the story, context about Trump's attacks on the press, and quotes from Trump and Trump allies that serve to immediately get struck down, is right in line with other stories on the subject (Bump).

Another story about how Acosta and Trump stole the show together at a separate press conference than the one mentioned above also sees CNN waiting until the latter part of the story to report on their own outlet. It is expected, after looking at so many stories, for CNN, The Post, or The Times to only mention themselves after the first half of a story if it is about Trump's overall battle with the news media. When CNN is the star of the show, though, it is surprising that the outlet would wait so long to bring itself up. Nevertheless, the article finally arrives at the duel between Jim Acosta and Trump (of which there are many, CNN writing about them all) (Byers, 2017).

Gaining that badge of honor of a presidential critique when a certain story gets under Trump's skin is important to all three outlets. And the way they trumpet it is usually the same: an oblique reference to Trump being angry with the outlet, a guess as to what he is so mad about, then plugging its original reporting, which, the outlet says, even if it is not clear, is why Trump is upset. This is The Post's version:

“It's not clear what Trump meant by ‘gone crazy against me,’ though he was critical in a separate tweet Monday of media coverage of his efforts to rid North Korea of nuclear weapons. The Post reported over the weekend that Trump has privately fumed about a lack of progress even as he has publicly touted his administration's efforts.” (Wagner, 2018)

This type of understated writing — closely resembling reporting — is a bit of a counterattack on Trump without purporting to be. Not only does it trivialize and contextualize Trump's attacks against the outlet, it also promotes the story that Trump does not like.

### **“Critics say” and sourcing**

CNN, The Post, and The Times all have an array of phrasings to nod to public opinion when looking to promote a narrative. One Post story is a prime example. The Post attempts to, The Times and CNN often do as well, point out the hypocrisy of Trump's rhetoric. He criticizes the news media for causing anger amongst Americans all the while facing “calls to tone down his public statements amid criticism that his attacks on political rivals and the media bear some culpability for the current climate.” (Wagner, 2018) Time and time again, all three outlets attribute a general feeling about Trump to push a narrative, whether it is “critics argue,” “facing calls,” “amid criticism,” or some other turn of phrase. A CNN story uses the term “media critics

and Democrats” who took issue with the actions of the White House (Stelter, 2018). A Post story writes Trump “is known” for his strong reactions “to news stories about his personal and business affairs (Rucker, 2018). Another Post story wrote that a Trump decision “prompted widespread criticism from members of Congress, including Republicans.” One CNN story turns to “elected officials” and “political commentators” who “have increasingly argued that Trump’s caustic rhetoric has coarsened political discourse in America, pointing to Trump’s frequent demonizing of his political opponents.” (Zeleny & Diamond, 2018) No one specific is quoted, but the reader is reminded of examples — how Democrats who did not want to vote for Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation to the Supreme Court were called “evil,” and how Trump has “labeled the media ‘the enemy of the people,’ making CNN — which received one of the pipe bombs — his foremost target.” (Zeleny & Diamond) Yet another CNN story says that “some observers” thought Trump was trying to distract the media from a quality election cycle for Democrats (Stelter & Shortell, 2018).

When it comes time to actually quote sources, though, CNN, The Post, and The Times choose people who can support their narrative. Oftentimes, this means quoting people who work for the outlet, whether it is an editor, a spokesperson, or someone else. A Post story, “Trump levels false attacks against The Post and Amazon in a pair of tweets” quotes its executive editor and its publisher in defending itself from Trump (Wagner, 2018). The fundamental issue here is that when news media outlets are forced to defend themselves, they do not come from a position of reliability. They are reporting on themselves, which automatically makes them biased, whether or not that is truly the case. This trend of having to quote higher-ups at their own news media company does not bode well for The Times, The Post, or CNN.

The sources (aside from Trump) used most often by The Times, The Post, and CNN are journalists, pundits, news media experts (usually professors), editors/representatives of journalistic organizations, First Amendment advocates, White House officials, and politicians. Oftentimes, these politicians are Republicans who disagree with Trump's disparaging comments on the press, like in CNN's "Trump claims media to blame for 'anger' after bombs sent to CNN, Dems" (Stracqualursi & Stark, 2018). The article quotes two people — a Republican Senator and former CIA Director John Brennan — who rebuke Trump's attacks on the press before moving to Sarah Sanders' defense of the president (Stracqualursi & Stark). CNN, The Times, and The Post will at times try to include quotes from people who are not Democrats to legitimize their criticism of the president. These quotes are usually left alone to do the talking for themselves, but if a quote is included that attempts to puncture the narrative CNN is driving at, it will treat it with an aside: "[Sanders] deflected when asked whether the President bears any responsibility for the heated political rhetoric," for example (Stracqualursi & Stark). A Post story includes "fierce rebukes" from a Democratic Senator and from someone closer to Trump, "David Lapan, a retired Marine colonel who was press secretary at the Department of Homeland Security while it was led by John F. Kelly, now Trump's chief of staff." (Wagner, 2018)

In one Times story, the first source quoted is Carl Bernstein, the legendary Washington Post reporter who helped bring down President Richard Nixon with his work revealing the Watergate scandal (Grynbaum, 2017). And to the point of news media experts/First Amendment advocates, The Times quoted Indira Lakshmanan, who holds the Newmark chair in journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute, in two separate stories (Baker & Ember, 2017) (Ember, 2018). Each of these types of sources contribute to protecting the free press and warning readers about

Trump's attacks on it. Republicans who speak out against Trump's anti-news media rhetoric are also valuable as they back up the narratives of the news outlets even though they are a part of the same political party as Trump.

Kathleen Culver, the director of the Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is one such media expert who is quoted in agreement with a Times story suggesting Trump will turn any errors news media outlets make against them (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum, 2018). CNN quotes New York Times' Chief White House Correspondent Peter Baker criticizing Trump for fearing questioning and a CNN commentator saying, "I think this has been a significant victory for CNN and for the country." (Stelter, 2018). In just one story, The Times includes a fact-checker at The Post, a Northwestern professor, a Harvard professor, and a Columbia University professor/New Yorker writer (Rutenberg, 2018). The only people on Trump's side who are quoted are Anthony Scaramucci, Trump's former communications director, who was fired after 10 days on the job, and a representative from the American Enterprise Institute (Rutenberg). The story immediately pushes back on what the source from the AEI had to say.

"'Not the enemy of the people': 70 news organizations will blast Trump's attack on the media" (Wootson Jr., 2018) from The Post is reminiscent of a couple Times stories discussed earlier — it reads as a survey on the fraught relationship between Trump and the news media, and it includes quotes from people in positions of authority at The Times, The Post, and CNN discussing how they have covered Trump and will going forward. Beyond thoughts from the executive editor of The Post, this story also samples insight from a media professor, a Post columnist backing up the idea that, "Others have argued that there's a moral imperative to speak

up because Trump’s rhetoric can result in more than words being hurled toward journalists,” a conservative Times columnist who chided Trump for his anti-press antics, and the Editorial Board editor for The Post (Wootson Jr., 2018). The Post comes off as looking rather even-keeled, as its Editorial Board did not participate in The Globe’s crusade, and the article leaves it to others — namely, columnists outside of The Post and news media experts — to be exude a more militant attitude toward Trump.

A Times story writes that while Trump’s tweets demanded The Post register as a lobbyist for Amazon, his “tweeted criticisms...may not have much bite,” as a White House spokeswoman said they were not going to take action (Ember, 2018). Then the story pivots to the big picture, arguing that Trump and leaders like him could use newspaper ownership by highly visible businesspeople “for future lines of attack” against the news media (Ember). An official from the Poynter Institute seconds that sentiment. This section of the story speaks to the typology aspect of this thesis and takes a broader analytical look at Trump’s strategy and purpose in attacking the news media, a theme often glossed over or simply alluded to in other stories.

### **Just doing our jobs, and standing by the story**

Trump repeatedly forced news outlets to stand by their stories. This could mean quoting a spokesperson literally saying The Times, The Post, or CNN stands by the story, or it could be showing the work put into the story in the first place. In turn, all three news outlets had to remind readers that journalists were merely doing their jobs, and that they are not out to get Trump.

A Times story describes The Times’ investigation into Trump’s finances as one lasting 18 months and “based on reams of records and documents about the Trump family empire...”

(Sullivan, 2018) This method of showing your work has been used by The Post, CNN, and The Times repeatedly. It is a common way of trying to establish journalistic integrity and trustworthiness. The conclusion of the story quotes a Times spokeswoman noting the length of the investigation and the number of records reporters sifted through, again trying to show the newspaper's work and prove it is worthy of trust. The last line is in reference to the story Trump attacked: "It is accurate and fair and we stand behind it." (Sullivan) Trump has regularly forced news media outlets, like The Times, CNN, and The Post, to quote a spokesperson from their own company saying they stand by or behind a story. That is the exact context for CNN's "White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta's pass after contentious news conference," where the article quotes a CNN statement saying "Jim Acosta has our full support." (Stelter, 2018)

The Times shows its work more so than The Post or CNN. One story discusses Trump's disagreement with "an article describing his television habits" published by The Times (Baker & Ember, 2017). The Times adheres to its standard — quoting a spokeswoman for the newspaper that says the paper "stands by" its reporting and showing its work, this time "sourced from interviews with 60 advisers, associates, friends and members of Congress, including many who interact with President Trump every day." (Baker & Ember) In a different Times story, Trump is quoted as saying: "The New York Times reporting is false." (Grynbaum & Sullivan, 2019) The article plugs a recent report from The Times ("Although the president did not cite a specific article") about how Trump has looked to "undermine federal investigations against him." (Grynbaum & Sullivan) Just before this story was published, The Times said the article was well-reported with multiple interviews and confidential documents (Grynbaum & Sullivan).

A Post story quotes its publisher and executive editor “directly refuting the idea that The Post is a lobbyist for Amazon” (Wagner, 2018). Both the publisher and executive editor said that The Post is an independent operation, and, according to the publisher, “It is preposterous and disingenuous to suggest that The Post is used to advance Jeff’s [Bezos] other commercial interests.” (Wagner) The final few paragraphs are spent proving The Post’s profitability (Wagner).

Given the many different ways The Times, The Post, and CNN try to discredit Trump, the “just doing our job” defense for when Trump attacks the three outlets is a loaded one. A Washington Post story embodies those layers. The story tackles the same question that this thesis looks at closely: “how the media should view and respond to the president’s splenetic attacks on the press — or whether the media should do anything at all.” (Wootson Jr., 2018) The Post’s answer is inconclusive. The article brings up The Post deep into the text with a section using quotes from Martin Baron, the paper’s executive editor, saying that the news media is not at war with Trump: “We’re doing our jobs.” (Wootson Jr.) Baron, and the article, reframe the narrative from being a back-and-forth between Trump to Trump basically inventing that back-and-forth. The press is simply playing its role, whatever Trump says about them is outside of its control. This is a strange balance between objectivity and laying the blame for bad blood between the press and Trump at the president’s feet. The Post is claiming objectivity because they are merely doing their job, but because they are only doing their job, Trump is at fault for the combative nature of his relationship with the news media.

CNN also exercises the “doing our jobs” theme. One article leads the reader through what happened before Jim Acosta got his press pass back (Stelter & Shortell, 2018). While Sarah



Sanders said Acosta “failed to abide” by “basic, widely understood practices,” CNN said Acosta “asked multiple follow-up questions and didn't give up the microphone right away.” (Stelter & Shortell) This is a relatively direct contradiction of the White House’s account of the event. CNN frames it as the White House getting mad at Acosta for merely doing his job. In this same paragraph, CNN was also able to link to its own story about how a “federal judge sided with CNN...thereby forcing the White House to restore his press pass” (Stelter & Shortell). Again, the article is almost happy that CNN has a little power. The network may not have the bully pulpit, but this time the law is on its side. The end of the story quotes Trump — “Trump seemed to shrug off last week’s loss in court, telling Fox’s Chris Wallace in an interview... ‘If he misbehaves,’ Trump said, apparently referring to Acosta, ‘we’ll throw him out or we’ll stop the news conference’” — then uses an Acosta quote for the kicker; “Let’s get back to work.” (Stelter & Shortell, 2018) Even though this article has CNN posing as the powerful figure and at times acting the bully, the last two paragraphs of the story remind the reader who the real bully is and who the underdog is.

The Times also takes part in developing this theme, writing the “tension erupted... when Sarah Huckabee Sanders... engaged in a testy exchange with reporters” about how “bias in news reports has gotten ‘out of control’ ... dismissing journalists who attributed recent errors to honest mistakes that were corrected.” (Baker & Ember, 2017) Reporters constantly face the firing line of Sanders or Trump, but The Times is trying to say it is staffed by humans who mess up from time to time.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

This thesis was written in order to pose questions about press coverage of Trump, who is hostile to the press, and to display findings from textual analyses that can contribute to theories and future studies about this topic. The researcher's primary goal was to explore the efficacy of how news organizations defended themselves in print from a powerful leader who has consistently denigrated the press.

There was no shortage of repeated thematic content. One tactic often employed by The Times, The Post, and CNN was to emphasize how extraordinary/abnormal Trump's treatment of the news media has been. The Times, CNN and The Post each had multiple articles that tried to show how, for example, "President Trump's biting attacks on the press this week stand out." (Grynbaum & Sullivan, 2019) Each outlet is attempting to remind readers that his attacks are not normal. In essence, these outlets are saying that it is not the news media that has changed, it is the President of the United States.

Another strategic aspect of stories from all three outlets analyzed was the move of painting Trump as a hypocrite, specifically with regards to his attitude toward the news media. The Times, CNN, and The Post noted that, at times, Trump was "seemingly relishing the confrontation" in his mix-ups with the news media (Stelter, 2018). Or, even more appropriately, he would go back and forth between expressing support and admiration for the news media and attacking it. Of course, he was usually attacking it, but whenever he offered kind words about the press, CNN, The Times, and The Post highlighted it, usually accompanied by a subsequent quote where he directly contradicts what he just said. This theme is repeated mostly when CNN, The Post, and The Times write that Trump always comes back to the relatively narcissistic view that

he does not like how he is being covered in the press, which is reason enough to attack the American news media as a whole. Trump as the hypocrite goes hand in hand with some of the more intentional structures of articles from The Post, The Times, and CNN. One Post story concludes with a long quote of Trump disparaging the press (Byers, 2017). Immediately before this quote is a paragraph referencing Trump saying he wished he had a better relationship with the press. His contradictions of himself when speaking about the news media are akin to him discrediting himself when speaking about the news media.

Yet another theme/tone each of the outlets used was displaying concern, fretting or issuing readers a warning about Trump's devaluing and discrediting of the free press. These tones/themes were found prominently in the sourcing — First Amendment advocates, university journalism and media professors, and the White House Press Correspondents Association, for example. This sort of writing is always preceded or followed by a high-minded tone invoking a noble struggle against the powers that be. But, whether it is a CNN story saying Acosta is ready to get back to work (Stelter & Shortell, 2018), a Times story detailing its deep investigative dive into Trump's family finances (Rucker, 2018), or a Post story referencing the paper's executive editor's position of "we're just doing our jobs," all three outlets hedge their bets, likely in order to avoid coming off as too liberal (Wootson Jr., 2018). Each news organization positioned itself as both objective, shoe-leather journalists who simply want the truth and town criers out to alert the masses to Trump's assault on the "once-sacrosanct American notion" of "freedom of the press." (Grynbaum & Sullivan, 2019)

In fact, there were more similarities than differences among the three outlets in how they approached reporting on themselves and their craft. Each outlet repeatedly quoted representatives

of their outfits — be it an editor, a publisher, or a spokesperson — saying that the organization stood by the reporting of stories Trump challenged. This was perhaps the most unified stance out of the three outlets, that standard “[CNN/The Post/The Times] stands by its reporting” line. The central problem of this thesis is how to remain credible while quoting yourself. Something else that, while true, may not have painted the publications in the best light was their collective comparisons of Trump to disgraced leaders of the past like Stalin or Nixon. All three outlets were quick to note that Trump has a pattern of stirring up anger toward the press when an outlet publishes a story he finds unflattering. And all three outlets used the term “enemy of the people” in the headlines and the bodies of their stories. That phrase was a more telling factor in whether CNN, The Post or The Times would cover a story than the words “fake news.”

CNN, The Post, and The Times all had critical differences in how they covered Trump’s attacks on the media, though. The Times viewed Trump’s hostility to the news media through a much wider lens. Its stories had big-picture thinking about the ramifications of Trump’s attacks on the news media as well as his motives for attacking the press. CNN and Post stories would allude to these ideas, but The Times dedicated a portion of almost each article to them. The Post was the most bold, direct, and mocking of the three outlets. It consistently called out Trump’s false statements, and it was not shy about speaking about Trump’s habits with the news media. For example: “Trump is known to react especially sensitively to news stories about his personal and business affairs.” (Rucker, 2018). CNN mostly oscillated between “defensive,” “bold,” and “high-minded.” This could be a function of the fact that these stories were explicitly about battles with Trump, both in the briefing room and the courtroom, and because Trump, as noted by both The Times and The Post, targets CNN more than any other outlet.

## Conclusion

This thesis asked three questions: What are the different kinds of attacks by Trump on the press? How do news media outlets use tone in responding to Trump's attacks on them in their own reporting? What forms of thematic content are repeated? Trump's attacks can be personal, like calling someone stupid, but they usually focus on accuracy of reporting, "fake news," the finances of the outlets in question, and his feeling that the press is hostile, dishonest, and treats him unfairly. The news media employed a variety of tactics and tones to defend themselves from Trump's attacks and to discredit him in the process. But the looming question this thesis cannot answer, and hesitates to ask, is: What actually works?

Background, scholarly research on gatekeeping and frame-building theory and the Trump phenomenon (and situating it in historical terms) was helpful. Capella & Jamieson, Coleman et. al, Reese, and others, all of which were already highlighted in the literature review, served to guide the search for different types of thematic content and to determine what the news media has done in responding to these attacks. This thesis exists within the genre of textual analysis. Its methods are not new, but its subject is. Very little scholarly research takes an analytical look at the specific idea of how the news media responds to political attacks in its coverage. The goal is for there to be some practical application in determining different strategies, and for readers to decide through that practice which strategies are effective and which are not. Much of the work the researcher studied for this thesis discussed hostility toward the free press from the point of view of the oppressor or authoritarian rather than discerning reactions in the news media said leader excoriates. This thesis offers an alternate perspective.

It would be remiss to pretend the Trump/news media relationship is one existing by itself. The back and forth between Nixon/Agnew and the news media during the Watergate era was especially insightful into what Trump is doing today, as Agnew was a fierce opponent of the press, and the administration was dealing with scandal. Edward Murrow versus Joseph McCarthy provides another case study. McCarthy in particular was adept at manipulating the news media and might just be the closest comparison to Trump in that department. The five scholarly, historical sources used in the research for this thesis informed the researcher's analysis.

Each news outlet analyzed had go-to tones and forms of thematic content they used in covering Trump's attacks on them. It would be bad practice to pretend like every single story about Trump's attacks had an obvious tilt. Oftentimes, editors and writers strive to have no frame at all; even more often, a story will contain multiple tones and themes without a unifying concept. And yet, striving for no frame at all is a frame in and of itself. Cries of "enemy of the people" and "fake news" strike an especially sensitive chord with the news outlets analyzed — they would get defensive and even concerned, often citing "First Amendment advocates," for example. Trump can win that battle, because the reporting he called inaccurate is lost in the fray of the news outlet trying to reestablish itself as a truth-teller. And yet, as one Times article posits (Grynbaum, 2019), it is possible that even having a battle at all is a "win" for Trump, because if a news outlet is drawn into such a contest or back-and-forth, it inherently sacrifices its credibility.

### **Critical self-reflection**

Not conducting interviews may have been a limitation for the research, but as explained earlier, it made sense so as to keep the analysis clear. The main issue I am concerned with as a researcher is how much my bias against Trump limited me in this procedure. Recognizing ethical

issues and my own reflexivity and credibility is important to the effectiveness of this thesis. As a journalist playing researcher, and more importantly, a researcher examining journalism, I am naturally biased toward the journalist and the journalistic organization. Additionally, I have developed a distaste for President Trump, which is partly based on his demonization of the press but also on his attitude and actions toward Muslims, people of color and other marginalized groups. There was almost no impartial way for me to write this thesis. That said, there are contextual factors in my research that shielded my bias and yielded objective results and analysis. For one, my main objective in this thesis is to evaluate how journalistic organizations cover attacks on themselves. Since I am doing comparative textual analysis, I am naturally being critical of the news and reportage rather than the president, meaning the only negative view of mine of Trump in play here is his view toward the news media. In short, my critical lens is aimed at the reporting of high-profile news organizations, not the president, and I am plainly critical of how the news media has gone about reporting on this phenomenon in the textual analyses and in the conclusion. Trump's only involvement with the study is what he said about the three news media outlets being utilized in the thesis, meaning there is no impetus to pass judgment on Trump himself — the only requirement is to quote him.

The research itself deserves reflection as well. One of the shortcomings of this thesis is that it identifies The Times, The Post, and CNN as singular entities without accounting for the agendas or idiosyncrasies of different writers. There were multiple stories from the same writer on all three of the batches of textual analysis. One way to account for this would have been to make sure that each artifact was written by a different author so as to be truly random. This would be difficult, since reporting on the news media itself is often a beat writers are assigned to.

## **Call for further research**

Future studies should absolutely look into this issue, but they should use different methods. A quantitative study might poll editors across the country on how they respond to Trump attacking them. A qualitative study might conduct reader focus groups where the people in the room are questioned about what works and what does not in news media coverage responding to Trump — leave it to readers to answer what is in fact effective about how a news organization reestablishes integrity and protects itself from hostile leaders. And despite what was written earlier, it is entirely possible that a series of interviews with the writers of these stories could uncover valuable information. If similar studies are undertaken, the researcher hopes one or more track the news media over time to see if their reporting on Trump changed. This thesis does not analyze any stories that respond to Trump's attacks on the news media during his campaign. The difference between how the news media responded to Trump's attacks on them when he was running versus when he was president could be illuminating. Furthermore, a more robust historical comparison of how news media outlets covered someone like McCarthy or Nixon versus how Trump is covered now could be fascinating; a deeper analysis of the news media's strategies in covering a McCarthy could provide lessons applicable to today. Hopefully, a series of studies in this vein can help the news media be better prepared for an antagonist with a dictatorial streak such as Trump.

## **Researcher theories**

While many of the stories shared similarities, this thesis told the researcher the overarching truth of the matter — the news media has no collective voice or effective plan in place to deal with Trump. News media outlets are dealing with his rhetoric individually, and in



even just eight-story batches the reader can see varying techniques from the very same source. This is understandable, as the news media market, even at elite institutions like The Times, The Post, and CNN, is fragmented. The Trump phenomenon — specifically his relationship with the press — remains unsolved. That said, a lackluster response to the president's broadsides is in no way due to a lack of trying. The Post, The Times, and CNN produce a plethora of content on Trump's attacks on their namesakes their peers. And, it is apparent after reading these 24 stories through, that these outlets will not accept Trump's disrespect toward them easily. Whether through implication, suggestion, or outright repudiation, CNN, The Times, and The Post have attempted to place themselves in the role of truth-teller, with Trump as their foil. Only time, a visionary, or an alternate method will truly tell what works.

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## Index

### 1. NYT: Trump Calls the News Media the ‘Enemy of the American People

<b>Tone</b>	Warning, Concerned, Sharp
<b>Kicker</b>	“The public doesn’t believe you people anymore,” Mr. Trump added. “Now, maybe I had something to do with that. I don’t know. But they don’t believe you.”
<b>Section</b>	Media
<b>Date</b>	2/17/17
<b>Lead</b>	President Trump, in an extraordinary rebuke of the nation’s press organizations, wrote on Twitter on Friday that the nation’s news media “is the enemy of the American people.”
<b>Headline</b>	Trump Calls the News Media the ‘Enemy of the American People’
<b>Sourcing</b>	Carl Bernstein, Donald Trump

#### Important Phrasing

“routinely castigates,” “striking escalation,” “the language of autocrats,” “minimize dissent,” “authoritarian attitude,” “the role of the free press,” “the press is the enemy,” “insidious and dangerous,” “trying to divide the country,” “the conduct of the president,” “elitist news media,” “lost its credibility,” “distaste for journalists,” “populist terms,” “they don’t believe you” “shortly after arriving at his Mar-a-Lago home in Palm Beach, Fla.,” “Oh boy,” “extraordinary rebuke”

#### Trump Statements

(Tweet) “The FAKE NEWS media (failing nytimes CNN NBCNews and many more) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American people. SICK!”

(Statement) “much of the media in Washington, D.C., along with New York, Los Angeles in particular, speaks not for the people, but for the special interests.”

(Statement) “The public doesn’t believe you people anymore,” Mr. Trump added. “Now, maybe I had something to do with that. I don’t know. But they don’t believe you.”



## 2. NYT: Trump’s Attacks on the News Media Are Working

<b>Tone</b>	Defensive, defiant, critical
<b>Kicker</b>	The Times defended the reporting and findings in the article. “This is a powerful piece of investigative journalism, the result of 18 months of inquiry and a review of over 100,000 pages of records,” said Eileen Murphy, a New York Times spokeswoman. “It is accurate and fair and we stand behind it.”
<b>Section</b>	Mediator
<b>Date</b>	10/29/18
<b>Lead</b>	President Trump on Wednesday criticized a New York Times investigation into his and his family’s use of dubious tax schemes over the years and the origins of his own wealth, calling the article an “old, boring and often told hit piece.”
<b>Headline</b>	Trump Attacks ‘Failing New York Times’ Over Tax Scheme Reporting
<b>Sourcing</b>	Trump, A lawyer for Mr. Trump, Charles J. Harder, Eileen Murphy, a New York Times spokeswoman

### Trump Statements

(Tweet) “Funny how lowly rated CNN, and others, can criticize me at will, even blaming me for the current spate of Bombs and ridiculously comparing this to September 11th and the Oklahoma City bombing,” he wrote, “yet when I criticize them they go wild and scream, ‘it’s just not Presidential!’”

### Important Phrasing

“He was at it again.” “tapped this one out,” “lowly rated CNN,” “Mr. Trump’s tweet was national news” “denigrating the news media” “mocking and insulting penned-in reporters on the campaign trail” “going after journalists” “By referring to likely domestic terrorism as “this ‘Bomb’ stuff” “anti-media strategy” “Then came the “fake news,” “enemy of the people” negative branding campaign against those who would hold him to account.” “I do it to discredit you all and demean you all,” “fear and falsehoods” as an election strategy, as The Washington Post put it last week” “awash in more misleading or flatly wrong assertions than reporters can keep up with.” “partisan smears” “frequent targets of the president’s disdain” “debunked his claims” “good-faith efforts, however, seem increasingly ineffectual” “never-ending reality show” “his ceaseless attacks and baseless claims” journalists may give the impression to Mr. Trump’s supporters and even some undecided voters that they are out to get him. journalists should ignore Mr. Trump’s tactic of using false narratives to divert their attention away from real crises, he said. But how long will it take the news media to come up with a more effective way to counter the litany of baseless claims washing through the news cycle? At this rate, a solution may come sometime in Mr. Trump’s third term.

### 3. NYT: Trump Attacks ‘Failing New York Times’ Over Tax Scheme Reporting

<b>Tone</b>	Defensive, defiant, critical
<b>Kicker</b>	The Times defended the reporting and findings in the article. “This is a powerful piece of investigative journalism, the result of 18 months of inquiry and a review of over 100,000 pages of records,” said Eileen Murphy, a New York Times spokeswoman. “It is accurate and fair and we stand behind it.”
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<b>Lead</b>	President Trump on Wednesday criticized a New York Times investigation into his and his family’s use of dubious tax schemes over the years and the origins of his own wealth, calling the article an “old, boring and often told hit piece.”
<b>Headline</b>	Trump Attacks ‘Failing New York Times’ Over Tax Scheme Reporting
<b>Sourcing</b>	Trump, A lawyer for Mr. Trump, Charles J. Harder, Eileen Murphy, a New York Times spokeswoman

**Trump Statements**

(Tweet) “The Failing New York Times did something I have never seen done before. They used the concept of ‘time value of money’ in doing a very old, boring and often told hit piece on me. Added up, this means that 97% of their stories on me are bad. Never recovered from bad election call!”

**Important Phrasing**

“President Trump on Wednesday criticized a New York Times investigation into his and his family’s use of dubious tax schemes,” “The Failing New York Times,” “Never recovered from bad election call!” “Referring to The Times as the ‘Failing New York Times,’ Mr. Trump did not offer an outright denial of the facts in the report, such as that the money he made during his decades in real estate came from tax schemes of dubious legality, the existence of records of deception in documenting the family’s financial assets, and that the beginning of the president’s so-called self-made fortune dates back to his toddler years when, by the time he was 3 years old, Mr. Trump earned \$200,000 a year in today’s dollars from his father.” “Mr. Trump has consistently refused to release his tax returns — although making returns public

#### 4. Trump Discusses Claims of ‘Fake News,’ and Their Impact, With New York Times Publisher

Tone	Warning, concerned, critical, sanctimonious
Kicker	“I came from Jamaica, Queens, Jamaica Estates, and I became president of the United States...I’m sort of entitled to a great story — just one — from my newspaper.”
Section	Business
Date	2/1/19
Lead	President Trump takes credit for popularizing the term “fake news.”  But the consequences? Not his concern.
Headline	Trump Discusses Claims of ‘Fake News,’ and Their Impact, With New York Times Publisher
Sourcing	Trump, Maggie Haberman, Times reporter, Sulzberger, Times publisher

#### Trump Statements

“I do notice that people are declaring more and more fake news, where they go, ‘Fake news!’” the president said during an Oval Office interview with The New York Times. “I even see it in other countries. I don’t necessarily attribute that to me. I think I can attribute the term to me. I think I was the one that started using it, I would say. I do think it’s very bad for a country when the news is not accurately portrayed,” he said. “I really do. And I do believe I’m a victim of that, honestly.”

“And I think I am, too,” Mr. Trump interjected. “I want to be. I want to be.” He quickly added: “I guess the one thing I do feel, because you look at network coverage, it’s so bad.” Mr. Trump said on Twitter that he and Mr. Sulzberger had discussed “the vast amounts of Fake News being put out by the media & how that Fake News has morphed into phrase, ‘Enemy of the People.’ Sad!”

“I don’t mind a bad story if it’s true, I really don’t,” the president said. “You know, we’re all, like, big people. We understand what’s happening. I’ve had bad stories, very bad stories where I thought it was true and I would never complain. But when you get really bad stories, where it’s not true, then you sort of say, ‘That’s unfair.’”

Mr. Trump replied that it “describes and should describe accurately what’s going on anywhere it’s covering, whether it’s a nation or a state or a game or whatever.”

“And if it describes it accurately and fairly,” he added, “it’s a very, very important and beautiful thing.”

### Important Phrasing

“In lengthy and at times contradictory remarks,” “the news media — which he deemed ‘important’ and ‘beautiful,’ but also ‘so bad’ and ‘unfair’ — Mr. Trump called himself ‘a victim’ of unfair coverage and declined to accept responsibility for a rise in threats against journalists since he took office.” “In an unusual arrangement,” “his attacks on the press,” “Mr. Sulzberger said foreign leaders were increasingly using the term ‘fake news’ to justify suppressing independent scrutiny,” “In a common pattern whenever the president speaks about the press, Mr. Trump quickly refocused on his personal grievances.” “Mr. Trump’s attacks on American news organizations have been cited by press advocates for emboldening foreign autocrats who censor, threaten, jail and assault journalists in their countries.” “It was not the first time that the two men had debated Mr. Trump’s remarks concerning the press.” “That same day, the publisher released a statement saying that the president had misrepresented their exchange. He called Mr. Trump’s attacks on journalism ‘dangerous and harmful to our country.’” “The publisher urged Mr. Trump to reconsider his denigration of the press.” “treating you unfairly,” “report the truth,” “I understand that,” Mr. Trump replied before pivoting, once again, to complaints about how he has been covered.” “Mr. Trump has spent decades cajoling and needling the journalists who cover him. In the interview, he sidestepped the notion that his ascent to the world’s most powerful pulpit had made his criticisms far more consequential than they were when he was a real estate developer and reality-television star.” “What Mr. Trump considers fair, however, is almost always in line with what he considers flattering.” “When Mr. Sulzberger noted that all presidents had complained about how they were depicted by the news media — ‘tough coverage is part of occupying the most powerful seat on Earth,’ the publisher said — Mr. Trump replied: ‘But I think I get it really bad. I mean, let’s face it, this is at a level that nobody’s ever had before.’” “The president said Fox News ‘treats me very well’ and praised local television as ‘so great to me,’ but called NBC ‘terrible’ and asserted that The Times ‘treats me so unbelievably terribly.’” “Mr. Sulzberger told Mr. Trump that his paper’s responsibility was ‘to cover people and institutions of power, toughly, aggressively.’” “‘It’s never fun to be on the other side of that,’ Mr. Sulzberger added. ‘You have my commitment that as we do that toughly and aggressively, we will also do it fairly.’” “‘I appreciate that,’ the president replied, before reminiscing about the highlights of his unlikely political rise.” “‘I ran, I won, and I’m really doing a good job,’ Mr. Trump said, lamenting that his surprise victory did not receive the praise he thought it deserved — particularly from The Times, a publication that has loomed throughout his life as representing the establishment whose respect he has long sought.” “‘I came from Jamaica, Queens, Jamaica Estates, and I became president of the United States,’ Mr. Trump said. ‘I’m sort of entitled to a great story — just one — from my newspaper.’”

## 5. NYT: To Trump, It's the 'Amazon Washington Post.' To Its Editor, That's Baloney

Tone	Humorous, defending, critical
Kicker	"Sinclair is far superior to CNN and even more Fake NBC, which is a total joke."
Section	Business
Date	4/2/18
Lead	Amazon does not own The Washington Post. President Trump, however — impervious to certain facts and armed with a Twitter account — has tried hard to convince the public otherwise.
Headline	To Trump, It's the 'Amazon Washington Post.' To Its Editor, That's Baloney
Sourcing	Trump, Martin Baron, EIC of the Post, Indira Lakshmanan, the Newmark chair in journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute, a center for media studies.

### Important Phrasing

“impervious to certain facts and armed with a Twitter account” “the president has called the newspaper the ‘Amazon Washington Post.’ He has also accused it of being used as a ‘scam’ to keep Amazon’s taxes low. And on Twitter over the weekend, he escalated his attack, declaring the ‘Fake Washington Post’ a ‘lobbyist’ for Amazon and demanding that it ‘REGISTER.’” “Under his ownership, the paper has flourished.” “vulnerable to the president’s attacks.” “the president’s broadsides” “People close to the president have said critical articles in The Post often trigger his public musings about Amazon.” “It’s completely made up.” “after The Post followed up on a story broken by The New York Times that Mr. Trump’s lawyer had raised the prospect of offering pardons to two of Mr. Trump’s former top advisers, Michael Flynn and Paul J. Manafort, Mr. Trump fired off a tweet saying that Amazon did not pay enough taxes and was ‘putting many thousands of retailers out of business.’ It is not clear which article, if any, set off Mr. Trump’s Saturday morning barrage against Amazon and The Post.” “Mr. Trump’s tweeted criticisms of Mr. Bezos, Amazon and The Post may not have much bite.” “could provide a template for future lines of attack against individuals and companies with ties to news organizations whose coverage he does not like.” ““Do I think it’s a bad thing that the president is attacking a news outlet, period? Yes,”” “The Post was not cowed by Mr. Trump’s invectives. ‘We cover him the way that we feel any president should be covered,’” “I can’t say more emphatically he’s never suggested a story to anybody here, he’s never critiqued a story, he’s never suppressed a story,’ the editor said. ‘If he had been involved in our news coverage, you can be sure that you would have heard about it by now,’ Mr. Baron added. ‘It hasn’t happened. Period.’” “By Monday morning, it seemed that Mr. Trump had found a new target.” ““So funny to watch Fake News Networks, among the most dishonest groups of people I have ever dealt with, criticize Sinclair Broadcasting for being biased,’ the president tweeted, responding to negative reports over the weekend about the Sinclair Broadcast Group. ‘Sinclair is far superior to CNN and even more Fake NBC, which is a total joke.’”

### **Trump Statements**

(Tweet) “So funny to watch Fake News Networks, among the most dishonest groups of people I have ever dealt with, criticize Sinclair Broadcasting for being biased,” the president tweeted, responding to negative reports over the weekend about the Sinclair Broadcast Group. “Sinclair is far superior to CNN and even more Fake NBC, which is a total joke.”

On more than one occasion, the president has called the newspaper the “Amazon Washington Post.” He has also accused it of being used as a “scam” to keep Amazon’s taxes low. And on Twitter over the weekend, he escalated his attack, declaring the “Fake Washington Post” a “lobbyist” for Amazon and demanding that it “REGISTER.”

## 6. NYT: Trump Attacks The Times, in a Week of Unease for the American Press

Tone	Warning, concerned, high-minded, critical, repudiating, defensive
Kicker	And he was wrong in suggesting that the Times reporters who chronicled his attempts to meddle in investigations had failed to reach out for comment.  A Times reporter contacted the White House about the article on Friday, days before it was published. The paper continued to press for comment over the following days, including on the day that the article was posted online.
Section	Politics
Date	2/20/19
Lead	Even by his standards, President Trump's biting attacks on the press this week stand out.
Headline	Trump Attacks The Times, in a Week of Unease for the American Press
Sourcing	Trump, The Times, Sulzberger

### Trump Statements

(Tweet) "The New York Times reporting is false. They are a true ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE!"

(Tweet) "The Press has never been more dishonest than it is today. Stories are written that have absolutely no basis in fact. The writers don't even call asking for verification. They are totally out of control." He went on to write, "The New York Times reporting is false."

### Important Phrasing

“He has praised a libel lawsuit against The Washington Post, called for 'retribution' against NBC for satirizing him on 'Saturday Night Live' and, on Wednesday, issued his sharpest words yet against The New York Times, calling the newspaper 'a true ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE!'” “First Amendment scholars were taken aback” “peel back longstanding libel protections for American news outlets. And a global crackdown against journalists continues apace” “a rough few days for freedom of the press, a once-sacrosanct American notion that has been under sustained assault since Mr. Trump made fiery denunciations of journalists — and the rallying cry 'Fake news!' — into hallmarks of his campaign and presidency.” “Although the president did not cite a specific article, The Times published an investigative report on Tuesday describing how Mr. Trump had worked to influence and undermine federal investigations involving him” “The Times on Wednesday defended the article as 'rigorously reported,'” “Mr. Trump's use of the phrase 'enemy of the people' — which he has frequently deployed against a group of mainstream news outlets, but rarely against The Times individually — also carried unusual weight because of a series of recent conversations between himself and A. G. Sulzberger, The Times's publisher.” “autocrats and other world leaders are emboldened by Mr. Trump's anti-press statements to crack down, sometimes violently, on independent journalists,” “he went on to complain at length about what he perceives as unfairly critical coverage of him,” “President Trump is retreating from a distinctly American principle,' Mr. Sulzberger said. 'It's a principle that previous occupants of the Oval Office fiercely defended regardless of their politics,'” “A longtime correspondent for the paper, David D. Kirkpatrick, was held without food or water for hours by Egyptian officials after he arrived in Cairo on Monday. He was eventually denied entry and forced to board a return flight to London.” “On the domestic front, American press advocates were alarmed” “His words were reminiscent of a memorable Trump campaign pledge — to 'open up the libel laws' — and came a few weeks after the president met with the justice's wife," “his anti-newspaper animus” “Mr. Trump has periodically returned to the expression 'enemy of the people' during moments of intense criticism.” “And he was wrong in suggesting that the Times reporters who chronicled his attempts to meddle in investigations had failed to reach out for comment.” “A Times reporter contacted the White House about the article on Friday, days before it was published. The paper continued to press for comment over the following days, including on the day that the article was posted online.”



## 7. NYT: Trump Escalates His Criticism of the News Media, Fueling National Debate

Tone	Warning, concern, some humor, sweeping, sweeping, explosive
Kicker	Cameron Barr, a managing editor at The Post, said competition is “in the DNA” of news organizations. “I’m a little wary of suggestions that somehow journalistic institutions should be banding together against the chief executive,” he said. “I think that quickly ends up in an uncomfortable place, to say the least.”
Section	Politics
Date	12/11/17
Lead	President Trump has escalated his fiery attacks on the news media, seizing on a recent string of mistaken reports to bolster his case that he is being persecuted by a left-leaning establishment out to bring him down and fueling a national debate over truth, accountability and a free press.
Headline	Trump Escalates His Criticism of the News Media, Fueling National Debate
Sourcing	Sarah Sanders, Trump, Indira Lakshmanan, holds the Newmark chair in journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute, John Nolte of Breitbart News, Danielle Rhoades Ha, a spokeswoman for The Times, CNN, Dean Baquet, Times Executive Editor, Cameron Barr, a managing editor at The Post, David Lauter, the Washington bureau chief for The Los Angeles Times.

### Trump Statements

(Tweet) “Another false story, this time in the Failing @nytimes, that I watch 4-8 hours of television a day,” he wrote. “Wrong! Also, I seldom, if ever, watch CNN or MSNBC, both of which I consider Fake News. I never watch Don Lemon, who I once called the ‘dumbest man on television!’ Bad Reporting.”

### **Important Phrasing**

“Escalates,” “Escalated” “Criticism of the News Media” “fueling a national debate” “fueling national debate” “a free press” “In a series of broadsides reflecting his own profound grievances while also resonating with his populist conservative base, Mr. Trump castigated ABC News for a ‘horrendously inaccurate and dishonest report,’ declared that CNN’s slogan should be ‘THE LEAST TRUSTED NAME IN NEWS’ and insisted that a Washington Post reporter ‘should be fired.’” “Mr. Trump has proved to be the most vocal and visceral news media critic in the Oval Office in at least a generation. In recent days, news outlets have provided him ammunition with reporting errors. But the barrage has deepened concern among media executives about what they see as a concerted campaign to discredit independent journalism.” “engaged in a testy exchange with reporters” “The tension erupted Monday in the White House briefing room” “‘Are you speaking about the president?’ one reporter asked in light of Mr. Trump’s own history of making claims that have not been validated and have been continually denied.” “‘I’m a little wary of suggestions that somehow journalistic institutions should be banding together against the chief executive,’” “But a common response seems unlikely. “‘Journalistic organizations are by nature competitive, and it’s sort of hard for them to unite that way,’” “‘And I think maybe we should be thinking about ways to push back not just on behalf of our particular institutions but to push back on behalf of journalism itself.’”

## 8. NYT: Trump Hands Out ‘Fake News Awards,’ Sans the Red Carpet

Tone	Humorous, sarcastic, ironic, ridiculing, warning, concerned
Kicker	“Fire and Fury” did not come out until Jan. 5, so perhaps the author will receive a prominent mention next January, if the president sees fit to give out the 2018 Fake News Awards.
Section	Business/Media
Date	1/17/18
Lead	President Trump — who gleefully questioned President Barack Obama’s birthplace for years without evidence, long insisted on the guilt of the Central Park Five despite exonerating proof and claimed that millions of illegal ballots cost him the popular vote in 2016 — wanted to have a word with the American public about accuracy in reporting.
Headline	Trump Hands Out ‘Fake News Awards,’ Sans the Red Carpet
Sourcing	Paul Krugman, Times columnist, Trump, Kathleen Culver, the director of the Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Trump Statements:** No Direct Quotes

### **Important Phrasing**

“after weeks of shifting deadlines, and cryptic clues, Mr. Trump released his long-promised ‘Fake News Awards,’ an anti-media project that had alarmed advocates of press freedom and heartened his political base.” “The message linked, at first, to a malfunctioning page on GOP.com, the Republican National Committee website. An error screen read: ‘The site is temporarily offline, we are working to bring it back up. Please try back later.’” “When the page came back online less than an hour later, it resembled a Republican Party news release.” “The ‘winners’ were CNN, mentioned four times; The New York Times, with two mentions; and ABC, The Washington Post, Time and Newsweek, with one mention apiece.” “Mr. Trump’s examples of grievances came as no surprise to anyone who has read his complaints about the media on Twitter.” “The first item on the list referred not to a news article but to a short opinion piece,” “What Mr. Krugman actually wrote was this,” “the president was likely to use the mistake as ammunition against his political opponents — an observation that seemed borne out by the ‘Fake News Awards.’” “David Weigel, who had posted the photo in question on his Twitter account before quickly deleting it. The Post itself did not publish the photo or a report on the size of the crowd at the Trump event. The ‘Fake News Awards’ entry, however, conflated a reporter’s tweet with the publication itself. It also omitted the fact that Mr. Weigel deleted his tweet and apologized for it when it was pointed out to him that it was misleading.” “The content of the 11-point list was perhaps less notable than its premise: a sitting president using his bully pulpit for a semi-formalized attack on the free press.” “The technical anticlimax seemed a fitting end to a peculiar saga that began in November when Mr. Trump floated the bestowing of a ‘FAKE NEWS TROPHY.’” “the most corrupt & biased of the Mainstream Media.”

**9. Post: Trump renews attacks on media as ‘the true Enemy of the People’**

Tone	Critical, disparaging, warning
Kicker	“Fire and Fury” did not come out until Jan. 5, so perhaps the author will receive a prominent mention next January, if the president sees fit to give out the 2018 Fake News Awards.
Section	Politics
Date	10/29/18
Lead	President Trump lashed out anew Monday at the news media, calling it “the true Enemy of the People,” and he again blamed what he called “fraudulent” reporting for anger that has led to a spate of recent violence in the country.
Headline	Trump renews attacks on media as ‘the true Enemy of the People’
Sourcing	Trump, Dem. Senator Chris Murphy, David Lapan, a retired Marine colonel who was press secretary at the Department of Homeland Security while it was led by John F. Kelly, now Trump’s chief of staff, Sarah Sanders, Rep. Sen. Mitch McConnell

**Important Phrasing**

“President Trump lashed out,” “the true Enemy of the People,” “fraudulent” reporting,” “a spate of recent violence,” “The president’s latest invective on Twitter,” “he faces calls to tone down his public statements amid criticism that his attacks on political rivals and the media bear some culpability for the current climate.” “There is great anger in our Country,” “caused in part by inaccurate, and even fraudulent, reporting of the news. The Fake News Media, the true Enemy of the People, must stop the open & obvious hostility & report the news accurately & fairly.” “calls for unity,” “Trump has continued to target his adversaries on Twitter,” “Fake & Dishonest reporting”

**Trump Statements**

(Tweet) “There is great anger in our Country caused in part by inaccurate, and even fraudulent, reporting of the news. The Fake News Media, the true Enemy of the People, must stop the open & obvious hostility & report the news accurately & fairly. That will do much to put out the flame....of Anger and Outrage and we will then be able to bring all sides together in Peace and Harmony. Fake News Must End!”

**10. Post: Not the ‘enemy of the people’: 70 news organizations will blast Trump’s attack on the media**

Tone	Bold, straightforward, proud, defensive, critical
Kicker	Sarah Isgur Flores, a Justice Department spokeswoman, said it is not department practice to “confirm or deny the existence of investigations or discuss potential investigations.”  A spokesman for Amazon declined a to comment on Trump’s tweets.
Section	Politics
Date	7/23/18
Lead	President Trump on Monday used his Twitter account to make false and misleading attacks against The Washington Post and Amazon, the behemoth online retailer whose founder owns The Post.
Headline	Trump levels false attacks against The Post and Amazon in a pair of tweets
Sourcing	Trump, Post publisher Frederick J. Ryan Jr., Post Executive Editor Martin Baron, Sarah Isgur Flores, a Justice Department spokeswoman

**Trump Statements:**

Only partial quotes about fake news and repeated references to his calling the news media the enemy of the people.

**Important Phrasing:**

“President Trump’s war of words with American news organizations,” “a one-sided barrage,” “President Trump is not the first leader to label journalists as ‘enemies of the people’ and creators of ‘fake news.’” “Trump labeled the news media ‘the enemy of the American people,’” “he used the word ‘fake’ — as in ‘fake news,’ ‘fake stories,’ ‘fake media’ or ‘fake polls’ — more than 400 times,” “He once fumed, the New York Times reported, because a TV on Air Force One was tuned to CNN.” “Trump told his audience that the media was ‘fake, fake disgusting news.’” “express their disdain for the president’s rhetoric” “the best weapon they have: their collective voice,” “a debate about how the media should view and respond to the president’s splenetic attacks on the press” “responded directly to Trump’s attacks,” ““we’re not at war with the administration; we’re at work.” “aggressive reporting,” “there is war on the press being conducted by the President of the United States and his supporters.” “imperative to state what is true,” “moral imperative to speak up,” “words being hurled toward journalists,” “described Trump’s anti-media words as ‘incitement,’” ““threatening voicemail” “the killing of five people,” “Trump’s attacks on news organizations”

**11. Post: Donald Trump keeps up media attacks with misleading tweets about New York Times**

<b>Tone</b>	Defending, corrective
<b>Kicker</b>	“We believe we reported on both candidates fairly during the presidential campaign,” he wrote. “You can rely on the New York Times to bring the same level of fairness, the same level of scrutiny, the same independence to our coverage of the new president and his team.”
<b>Section</b>	Arts & Entertainment
<b>Date</b>	11/13/16
<b>Lead</b>	President-elect Donald Trump sounded very much like presidential candidate Donald Trump on Sunday morning in a pair of misleading tweets about the New York Times.
<b>Headline</b>	Donald Trump keeps up media attacks with misleading tweets about New York Times
<b>Sourcing</b>	Trump, Suzlberger, Michael Goodwin of the New York Post

**Important Phrasing**

“media attacks,” “misleading tweets,” “President-elect Donald Trump sounded very much like presidential candidate Donald Trump,” “misleading tweets” (repeated in lede and headline), “very poor and highly inaccurate coverage,” “bad coverage of me,” “Trump’s suggestion that the Times is bleeding readers because of ‘very poor and highly inaccurate coverage’ does not square with the numbers.” “The president-elect’s interpretation of a letter to subscribers as an apology for bad coverage is a stretch.” “Donald Trump’s sheer unconventionality” “Trump’s tweet mirrored coverage of the letter in some conservative media outlets,” ““Had the paper actually been fair to both candidates, it wouldn’t need to rededicate itself to honest reporting,” “he was simply renewing a promise that he believes the Times fulfilled,” ““We believe we reported on both candidates fairly during the presidential campaign,” ““You can rely on the New York Times,” “fairness,” “scrutiny,” “independence.”

**Trump Statements**

(Tweet) “The NYT is losing thousands of subscribers because of their very poor and highly inaccurate coverage of the ‘Trump phenomena’”  
 (Tweet) “The NYT sent a letter to their subscribers apologizing for their BAD coverage of me. I wonder if it will change - doubt it?”

## 12. Post: Trump levels false attacks against The Post and Amazon in a pair of tweets

Tone	Bold, straightforward, proud, defensive, critical
Kicker	Sarah Isgur Flores, a Justice Department spokeswoman, said it is not department practice to “confirm or deny the existence of investigations or discuss potential investigations.”  A spokesman for Amazon declined a to comment on Trump’s tweets.
Section	Politics
Date	7/23/18
Lead	President Trump on Monday used his Twitter account to make false and misleading attacks against The Washington Post and Amazon, the behemoth online retailer whose founder owns The Post.
Headline	Trump levels false attacks against The Post and Amazon in a pair of tweets
Sourcing	Trump, Post publisher Frederick J. Ryan Jr., Post Executive Editor Martin Baron, Sarah Isgur Flores, a Justice Department spokeswoman

### Important Phrasing:

“false and misleading attacks,” “levels false attacks,” “the president was apparently referring to,” “The Post and Amazon are independently operated.” “It’s not clear what Trump meant by ‘gone crazy against me,’” “Trump has privately fumed,” “Trump has made the false claim about The Post serving as a lobbyist for Amazon multiple times.” ““The Washington Post operates with complete independence in making all news and editorial decisions. We alone decide what to publish. It is preposterous and disingenuous to suggest that The Post is used to advance Jeff’s other commercial interests.” “Post editors have also rejected Trump’s accusation that The Post has supported Amazon’s interests.” ““The reality is he didn’t present any evidence that we were lobbying for Amazon,” ““The reason is because there is no evidence.” “Contrary to Trump’s assertion, Ryan has also said that The Post is positioned for ‘continued profitability.’” “It was not clear what potential antitrust claims Trump was referencing in his second tweet.”

### Trump Statements

(Tweet) “The Amazon Washington Post has gone crazy against me ever since they lost the Internet Tax Case in the U.S. Supreme Court two months ago. Next up is the U.S. Post Office which they use, at a fraction of real cost, as their “delivery boy” for a BIG percentage of their packages....”



### 13. Post: ‘Crazed lunatic’: Trump again attacks the news media as ‘the enemy of the people’

Tone	Sweeping, weary, critical
Kicker	Trump has described the news media as the “enemy of the people” in 18 tweets since June. He has said about 80 percent of the media falls into that category.
Section	Politics
Date	1/7/19
Lead	President Trump on Monday used his Twitter account to make false and misleading attacks against The Washington Post and Amazon, the behemoth online retailer whose founder owns The Post.
Headline	‘Crazed lunatics’: Trump again attacks the news media as ‘the enemy of the people’
Sourcing	Trump

#### Important Phrasing

“launched a fresh attack Monday on the news media,” “crazed lunatics,” “again attacks the news media” “the enemy of the people,” “It was not clear what provoked Trump’s broadside,” “Trump was back on Twitter” “Trump claimed,” “In earlier tweets Monday, Trump asserted, without citing any specifics, that the ‘Fake News’ knowingly lies and makes up sources to make him look bad.” ”Trump has described the news media as the ‘enemy of the people’ in 18 tweets since June.”

#### Trump Statements

(Tweet) “With all of the success that our Country is having, including the just released jobs numbers which are off the charts, the Fake News & totally dishonest Media concerning me and my presidency has never been worse,” Trump said in the first of the tweets. “Many have become crazed lunatics who have given up on the TRUTH!”

**14. Post: Trump accuses Amazon of ‘Post Office scam,’ falsely says The Post is company’s lobbyist**

<b>Tone</b>	Defensive, repudiating, critical, suggestive,
<b>Kicker</b>	White House officials have struggled to back up Trump’s theories about the retailer. Trump’s attacks, irrespective of their factual accuracy, could hurt public confidence in the company. After Axios reported Wednesday that Trump was “obsessed” with Amazon, the company’s shares fell more than 4 percent. They continued their decline Thursday, when Trump tweeted, falling more than 3.8 percent in morning trading.  The share price recovered once Walters said there were “no actions at this time,” and it was up 1.1 percent for the day by the close of trading.
<b>Section</b>	Politics
<b>Date</b>	3/31/18
<b>Lead</b>	President Trump escalated his assault on Amazon.com on Saturday, accusing the online retail giant of a “Post Office scam” and falsely stating that The Washington Post operates as a lobbyist for Amazon.
<b>Headline</b>	Trump accuses Amazon of ‘Post Office scam,’ falsely says The Post is company’s lobbyist
<b>Sourcing</b>	Trump, Deputy White House Press Secretary Lindsay Walters

**Trump Statements**

(Tweet) “While we are on the subject, it is reported that the U.S. Post Office will lose \$1.50 on average for each package it delivers for Amazon. That amounts to Billions of Dollars. The Failing N.Y. Times reports that ‘the size of the company’s lobbying staff has ballooned,’ and that...does not include the Fake Washington Post, which is used as a ‘lobbyist’ and should so REGISTER. If the P.O. ‘increased its parcel rates, Amazon’s shipping costs would rise by \$2.6 Billion.’ This Post Office scam must stop. Amazon must pay real costs (and taxes) now!”

(Tweet) “they pay little or no taxes to state & local governments, use our Postal System as their Delivery Boy (causing tremendous loss to the U.S.), and are putting many thousands of retailers out of business!”

### **Important Phrasing**

“escalated his assault,” “falsely stating,” “falsely says,” “Trump accuses,” “accusing the online retail giant,” “In a pair of morning tweets sent during his drive from his Mar-a-Lago estate to the nearby Trump International Golf Club,” “Trump has repeatedly advanced this theory, even though officials have explained to him that Amazon’s contracts with the Postal Service are profitable for the agency.” “The president also incorrectly conflated Amazon with The Post and made clear that his attacks on the retailer were inspired by his disdain for the newspaper’s coverage. He labeled the newspaper ‘the Fake Washington Post’” “Trump is typically motivated to lash out at Amazon because of The Post’s coverage of him, officials have said.” “a negative story in The Post is almost always the catalyst for one of his Amazon rants.” “The Post on Friday afternoon published online an exhaustive account of the Trump Organization’s finances being ‘under unprecedented assault’ because of three different legal inquiries” “Trump is known to react especially sensitively to news stories about his personal and business affairs.” “Saturday morning marked the second time in three days that Trump attacked Amazon,” “Beyond Trump’s use of his bully pulpit to attack Amazon,” “White House officials have struggled to back up Trump’s theories about the retailer.” “Trump’s attacks, irrespective of their factual accuracy, could hurt public confidence in the company.”

## 15. Post: Narrowing down Trump’s designation of the ‘enemies of the people’

Tone	Critical, suggestive, defensive, bold, ridiculing
Kicker	Trump did not win a majority of the vote in the presidential election, contrary to Sanders’s assertion. But we’re guessing she’ll be spared the “fake news” designation.
Section	Politics
Date	10/30/18
Lead	For someone so eager to embrace inflammatory rhetoric, President Trump has twice gotten a bit squeamish about one of his more notorious designations.
Headline	Narrowing down Trump’s designation of the ‘enemies of the people’
Sourcing	Trump, CNN Reporter Jim Acosta, Sarah Sanders

### Trump Statements

(Tweet) “CNN and others in the Fake News Business keep purposely and inaccurately reporting that I said the ‘Media is the Enemy of the People,’ ” Trump tweeted Monday. “Wrong! I said that the ‘Fake News (Media) is the Enemy of the People,’ a very big difference.”

(Statement) “I was in the headline of The Washington Post, my name associated with this crazy bomber. ‘Trump bomber’ or something. But I was in the headline . . . when they got him. They didn’t say — bomber found — they talked about Trump in the headline,” Trump told Ingraham. “It’s — when I say ‘enemy of the people,’ I’m talking about the fake news, and it is fake.”

(Tweet) “The Fake News is working overtime. Just reported that, despite the tremendous success we are having with the economy & all things else, 91% of the Network News about me is negative (Fake). Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?”

### **Important Phrasing**

“Shortly after he first pronounced the media the ‘enemy of the people’ last year, and then on Monday after he repeated that assertion, Trump tried to suggest that the descriptor was less sweeping than had been interpreted.” “The backtrack seems to be of the having-his-cake-and-eating-it-too variety. Trump wants his supporters to continue to dismiss media that report on him critically, but he hopes to avoid criticism for using Soviet-style language about the free press.” “Sanders’s responses and Trump’s tweet are obviously untrue.” “Trump has referred to ‘fake news’ on Twitter nearly 300 times, about once every other day. The Post is relatively low on the list of the outlets that have been targeted. At the top is CNN, Trump’s frequent target and the only news outlet targeted by the mail bomber.” “‘Mainstream’ would seem to include Fox News, which regularly wins in the ratings, but it gets a carve-out, apparently.” “Sanders blamed the media for the toxic political culture.” “Fox News has never been identified as fake news by Trump.” “Trump put a number on it: About 80 percent of the media is ‘fake news.’ Last month, he called all the ‘mainstream media’ ‘the Fake News Media’ and, therefore, the enemy of the American people.” “Negative coverage of Trump is fake coverage of Trump. And, because fake coverage of Trump means that the reporter is an enemy of the people, those who cover Trump negatively are enemies of the people. That is the simplest and clearest description of what Trump is getting at, which his supporters — including the mail-bomb suspect — clearly understand.”

**16. Post: Trump opens all the envelopes himself at first ‘Fake News Awards’**

Tone	Cheeky, humorous, ridiculing, defensive, critical, sarcasm, defending,
Kicker	As president, Trump may have set records for the number of dubious statements. The Washington Post's Fact Checker — which was somehow passed over for recognition by Trump on Wednesday — has tallied more than 2,000 false or misleading claims by Trump after less than a year in office, or an average of more than five questionable statements per day. This has led to suggestions that the president was surely qualified to recognize false reporting.
Section	Style
Date	1/18/18
Lead	There was no red carpet, no envelopes, and no happy winners. But the first fake-news awards did have one celebrity, who picked all the recipients and announced them himself on Wednesday. Or at least he tried to.
Headline	Trump opens all the envelopes himself at first ‘Fake News Awards’
Sourcing	Trump (it was coverage of the event and refrained from quoting him directly)

**Trump Statements:** Not quoted directly

### Important Phrasing

“President Trump handed out what he modestly called the ‘Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards’” “an unceremonious ceremony held somewhere on the Internet. Befitting the bitter and mocking tone of the occasion, the Republican National Committee website Trump linked to on Twitter to announce the awards, GOP.com, promptly froze and spat back an error message.” “When the website finally gurgled back to life an hour or so later, Trump's score-settling and shaming of the media began, echoing the score-settling and shaming of the media that Trump dishes out most mornings on Twitter.” “the enemy of the American People” “CNN was cited four times; the New York Times twice.” “The rest of the list was filled out with Trump's accomplishments, giving the whole exercise a self-congratulatory air.” “Late-night comics have mocked the cyber-ceremony for several weeks” “the more disturbing element was the spectacle of a sitting president orchestrating another attack on the news media, a facet of Trump that delights his base but has unsettled even members of his party, such as Arizona Sen. John McCain.” “Weigel deleted the tweet shortly after he learned that the photos he saw were taken some time before the rally began; he also apologized for his inaccuracy. No matter. Shorting a crowd count is apparently blasphemy in Trump's mind, and Weigel was taken to the woodshed.” “‘Washington Post FALSELY reported the President's massive sold-out rally in Pensacola, Florida was empty,’ shrieked the awards page.” “Trump's efforts to call out ‘dishonest’ reporting carries its own heavy irony, of course. Trump himself has had a lifelong love affair with exaggeration and hyperbole, and a sometimes hostile relationship with facts.” “As a real estate developer, he regularly inflated the number of floors in his buildings to make them seem larger and more impressive, and he occasionally posed as someone he wasn't to plant flattering stories about himself in the New York media. Before announcing his candidacy for office, Trump waged a long campaign calling into question President Barack Obama's birthplace, despite evidence that he was wrong. As president, Trump may have set records for the number of dubious statements. The Washington Post's Fact Checker — which was somehow passed over for recognition by Trump on Wednesday — has tallied more than 2,000 false or misleading claims by Trump after less than a year in office, or an average of more than five questionable statements per day. This has led to suggestions that the president was surely qualified to recognize false reporting.”

## 17. CNN: Trump attacks media in lengthy, combative press conference

Tone	Ridicule, critical, faux-objective
Kicker	"How does the press get this information that's classified? How do they do it?" he asked. "[I]t's an illegal process and the press should be ashamed of themselves. But more importantly, the people that gave out the information to the press should be ashamed of themselves, really ashamed."
Section	Media
Date	2/6/17
Lead	President Donald Trump made his most extensive attack on the media since taking office Thursday while seeking to defend his administration from critical coverage.
Headline	Trump attacks media in lengthy, combative press conference
Sourcing	A senior administration official, Trump

### Important Phrasing

“Extensive attack,” “critical coverage,” “combative press conference,” “In a press conference that lasted more than an hour, Trump repeatedly accused journalists of being hostile and dishonest in their reporting” “Trump walked into the Oval Office Thursday morning and told his top aides: ‘Let's do a press conference today.’” “During his remarks, Trump made several statements about the media that were either untrue or misleading. He claimed reporters at The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal did not reach out to him before writing certain stories. Both stories he cited note that the reporters tried to get comment from the White House.” “fake news” “repeatedly said the New York Times was ‘failing.’” “At one point, Trump was asked how the stories he condemned as ‘fake news’ could in fact be fake if they were based on leaks he was slamming as illegal.” “A lengthy exchange with CNN’s Jim Acosta,” “He also claimed he no longer watches CNN, but complained about what he sees when he watches the network.” “He then went on to promote one news show -- ‘Fox & Friends,’” “Trump specifically attacked leaks to the press” “The president had been criticized recently for ignoring questioners from the mainstream media” “At one point, Trump even suggested that he would like to have a better relationship with the press, but said he could not do so so long as the coverage was ‘fake.’”



## Trump Statements

1. "The press has become so dishonest that if we don't talk about, we are doing a tremendous disservice to the American people. Tremendous disservice," Trump said. "We have to talk to find out what's going on, because the press honestly is out of control. The level of dishonesty is out of control."
2. "I turn on the T.V., open the newspapers and I see stories of chaos. Chaos," he said. "Yet it is the exact opposite. This administration is running like a fine-tuned machine, despite the fact that I can't get my cabinet approved."
3. "Russia is fake news," the president said. He went on to say "I've never seen more dishonest media than, frankly, the political media."
4. "Well the leaks are real," he said. "You're the one that wrote about them and reported them, I mean the leaks are real. You know what they said, you saw it and the leaks are absolutely real. The news is fake because so much of the news is fake."
5. Trump also complained about the tone of the media's coverage: "The tone is such hatred," he told Acosta. "I'm really not a bad person, by the way. No, but the tone is such -- I do get good ratings; you have to admit that. The tone is such hatred."
6. "I have to say, "Fox & Friends" in the morning, they're very honorable people," he said. "They're very -- not because they're good, because they hit me also when I do something wrong. But they have the most honest morning show. That's all I can say. It's the most honest."
7. "Unfortunately, much of the media in Washington, D.C., along with New York, Los Angeles in particular, speaks not for the people, but for the special interests and for those profiting off a very, very obviously broken system," Trump said.
8. "I can handle a bad story better than anybody, as long as it's true," the president said. "But I'm not OK when it's fake."
9. "How does the press get this information that's classified? How do they do it?" he asked. "[I]t's an illegal process and the press should be ashamed of themselves. But more importantly, the people that gave out the information to the press should be ashamed of themselves, really ashamed."

## 18. CNN: White House backs down from legal fight, restores Jim Acosta's press pass

Tone	Proud, triumphant, critical, high-minded, bold, mocking
Kicker	Acosta, for his part, thanked his supporters on Monday. "Lets get back to work," he tweeted.
Section	Business/Media
Date	11/19/18
Lead	The White House on Monday said that CNN correspondent Jim Acosta's press pass has been "restored," bowing to days of pressure and a federal lawsuit against the administration.
Headline	White House backs down from legal fight, restores Jim Acosta's press pass
Sourcing	Shine, Sanders, The White House Correspondents' Association, Trump, Acosta

### Trump Statements:

"If he misbehaves," Trump said, apparently referring to Acosta, "we'll throw him out or we'll stop the news conference."

### Important Phrasing

“The White House on Monday said that CNN correspondent Jim Acosta's press pass has been ‘restored,’ bowing to days of pressure and a federal lawsuit against the administration.” “The Trump administration took the unprecedented step of suspending Acosta's access to the White House after he had a contentious exchange with President Trump at a press conference.” “a federal judge sided with CNN” “cited Acosta's conduct at the November 7 press conference, where he asked multiple follow-up questions and didn't give up the microphone right away.” “You failed to abide’ by ‘basic, widely understood practices,’ the letter to Acosta claimed.” “Many journalists have challenged the administration's actions, pointing out that aggressive questioning is a tradition that dates back decades. But Trump appeared eager to advance an argument about White House press corps ‘decorum,’ no matter how hypocritical.” “Lawyers for Acosta and CNN did respond, forcefully, in a letter and in a court filing.” “The new Monday afternoon letter from Sanders and Shine included no expiration date, though it did contain the general threat to take action against reporters who flouts new ‘rules.’” “The White House press corps, however, has not agreed to any new set of rules governing presidential press conferences. And Trump rarely holds press conferences anyway.” “The letter asserts that reporters may ask ‘a single question’ at a press conference. Follow-ups will only be permitted ‘at the discretion of the President or other White House officials.’ And reporters must ‘physically surrender’ the microphone, when directed.” “Tensions remain high, with the White House rarely holding press briefings and Trump regularly lashing out at the media. Some observers wondered if he picked the fight with CNN and Acosta to distract the media from the Democrats' gains in the midterm elections.”

**19. CNN: White House says there are new ‘rules’ for reporters, but press members haven’t agreed to them**

Tone	Analytical, warning, concerned, critical
Kicker	Something much, much bigger is going on. It's Trump's assault on truth. Trying to blacklist Acosta is just one small part of that. Trump calls real news "fake," he calls fake news "real," he insists on being the only reliable source for his fans. This is happening every day. This is the real overarching challenge of the Trump years...
Section	Media
Date	11/20/18
Lead	This <a href="#">CNN.com story</a> was rewritten several times on Monday. The first headline was "CNN asks for emergency hearing after Trump threatens to revoke Jim Acosta's credentials again." But then the headline became "White House backs down from legal fight, restores Acosta's press pass."
Headline	White House says there are new 'rules' for reporters, but press members haven't agreed to them
Sourcing	Sanders, Shine, CNN, David Gergen, The correspondents' association, Sean Hannity, Washington Post's Erik Wemple, Lou Dobbs of Fox News, Matt Pearce of the L.A. Times, The Atlantic's Scott Nover, The Post's Glenn Kessler

**Trump Statements:** No direct quotes

### Important Phrasing

“Yes, things are back to normal now, to the extent anything is normal in the Trump White House.” “The letter from Sanders and Shine asserted that reporters may only ask ‘a single question’ at a press conference. Follow-ups will only be permitted ‘at the discretion of the President or other White House officials.’ And reporters must ‘physically surrender’ the mic when directed. Violations of ‘any’ of these rules ‘may result in suspension or revocation.’ Sounds serious! But is it?” “I think this has been a significant victory for CNN and for the country...” “For as long as there have been White House press conferences, White House reporters have asked follow-up questions. We fully expect this tradition will continue.” “But the obvious concern is that the ‘rules’ could have a chilling effect on the press.” “They lamented the fact that Trump's aides are trying to impose order on pressers when 1) Trump is the most disorderly person at pressers and 2) the events hardly ever take place, anyway...” “Shadow press secretary Sean Hannity celebrated the ‘rules’ and read all four bullet points aloud.” “This looks like they're creating rules that are very easy to break and are likely to go unenforced until the government decides they want to make an example of somebody...” “Maybe the White House is just trying to save face after an embarrassing loss to CNN.” “First Amendment Advocates” “Trump and co. want to provoke fights with the media, but they don't want to lose in court again. Will they really risk another loss by banning another reporter?” “Something much, much bigger is going on. It's Trump's assault on truth. Trying to blacklist Acosta is just one small part of that. Trump calls real news ‘fake,’ he calls fake news ‘real,’ he insists on being the only reliable source for his fans. This is happening every day. This is the real overarching challenge of the Trump years...”

## 20. CNN: An aggrieved Trump digs in after pipe bomb scares

Tone	Critical, suggestive, faux-objective, disapproving
Kicker	He has told aides that he is confident the authorities will find the suspect or suspects, but has no immediate plans to call this domestic terrorism -- pending investigation -- a White House official said.
Section	Politics
Date	10/25/18
Lead	President Donald Trump believes he is being unfairly linked to the pipe bombs delivered to frequent targets of his acrimonious rhetoric and has watched with disdain as the national conversation has shifted to his role in shaping the divisive political environment.
Headline	An aggrieved Trump digs in after pipe bomb scares
Sourcing	Trump, Trump confidante and White House officials

### Trump Statements

(Tweet) “A very big part of the Anger we see today in our society is caused by the purposely false and inaccurate reporting of the Mainstream Media that I refer to as Fake News. It has gotten so bad and hateful that it is beyond description. Mainstream Media must clean up its act, FAST!”

### Important Phrasing

“his acrimonious rhetoric” “watched with disdain,” “his role in shaping the divisive political environment,” “unfairly linked,” “Trump believes,” “aggrieved Trump,” “Rather than cooling off his tone, he is digging in, two people who spoke to him on Thursday said. Trump has no plans to claim any personal responsibility that he has contributed to the divisive climate surrounding the attempted attacks.” “The President on Wednesday condemned the attempted bombings and called for Americans to ‘unify’ and strive for civility before stressing that the media ‘has a responsibility to set a civil tone.’ But by Thursday morning, the President directly blamed the mainstream news organizations for ‘the Anger we see today in our society,’ falsely accusing news outlets of publishing ‘purposely false and inaccurate reporting.’” “Trump has neither named the targets — President Barack Obama, his 2016 opponent Hillary Clinton and others — in public nor has he reached out privately to offer reassurance or provide updates on the investigation, officials said, a move that has raised the eyebrows of leaders from both parties.” “Twelve days before the midterm elections, Trump has also not seized on the incidents as a presidential moment, as others before him may have done, where Americans could see their president leading a nation through a time of challenge.” “Trump did show some restraint during his rally on Wednesday night, avoiding any criticism of Clinton, his former rival and secretary of state, and refrained from some of his most fiery lines, including his ‘fake news’ attacks on the media. But by Thursday morning, Trump was back to stirring his base against the press.” “Elected officials and political commentators have increasingly argued that Trump’s caustic rhetoric has coarsened political discourse in America, pointing to Trump’s frequent demonizing of his political opponents.” “the President called Democrats who objected to Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation to the Supreme Court ‘evil,’ just the latest way he has demonized and vilified his political foes. And Trump has long labeled the media ‘the enemy of the people,’ making CNN — which received one of the pipe bombs — his foremost target.” “In the face of that criticism, Trump plans to continue blaming the media for the current political environment and believes his supporters will agree with him.” “Beyond the President, several of his top advisers believe he is right to blame the media and have no problem with the President calling it out.” “Trump has still kept a close eye on the investigation into the attempted pipe bombings, receiving updates on the investigation on Thursday, two White House officials said.”

## 21. CNN: Attorney for Michael Cohen keeps changing his story on Trump Tower meeting

Tone	Defensive, defiant, bold
Kicker	President Trump tweeted about Davis' changing Trump Tower story on Saturday, reiterating his own defense that he "did NOT know about the meeting."
Section	Politics
Date	8/28/18
Lead	In recent days, one of Michael Cohen's lawyers has repeatedly changed his account of what Cohen knew about President Donald Trump's involvement in a controversial meeting during the 2016 campaign.
Headline	Attorney for Michael Cohen keeps changing his story on Trump Tower meeting
Sourcing	Lanny Davis, a CNN spokeswoman, Trump

### Trump Statements

“President Trump tweeted about Davis' changing Trump Tower story on Saturday, reiterating his own defense that he ‘did NOT know about the meeting.’”

(Tweet) “Michael Cohen’s attorney clarified the record, saying his client does not know if President Trump knew about the Trump Tower meeting (out of which came nothing!). The answer is that I did NOT know about the meeting. Just another phony story by the Fake News Media!”

### Important Phrasing

“Lanny Davis has offered many variations of his client's knowledge regarding the meeting in Trump Tower” “CNN was first to report that Cohen, Trump's longtime personal lawyer, claimed he was willing to tell special counsel Robert Mueller that then-candidate Trump knew in advance about the June 2016 meeting in Trump Tower.” “CNN said Cohen claimed he was present when Donald Trump Jr. told Trump about the Russians' offer to share dirt on Hillary Clinton, and Trump gave approval for the meeting to take place.” “The CNN story noted, based on sources, that Cohen did not have corroborating evidence to back up his claim. CNN did not report whether Trump knew about the meeting before it happened — only that Cohen was making that claim while hoping for a deal from prosecutors.” “For more than three weeks, Davis did not raise any issues to CNN about its reporting.” “The meeting at Trump Tower in June 2016 with Russians, Trump Jr., Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and then-campaign chairman Paul Manafort has become a focal point of Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.” “CNN stands by its story.” “A CNN spokeswoman said Tuesday: ‘We stand by our story, which had more than one source, and are confident in our reporting of it.’”

**22. CNN: White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta’s pass after contentious news conference**

Tone	Defensive, defiant, bold
Kicker	<p>Here is the full White House statement:</p> <p>"President Trump believes in a free press and expects and welcomes tough questions of him and his Administration. We will, however, never tolerate a reporter placing his hands on a young woman just trying to do her job as a White House intern. This conduct is absolutely unacceptable. It is also completely disrespectful to the reporter's colleagues not to allow them an opportunity to ask a question. President Trump has given the press more access than any President in history. Contrary to CNN's assertions, there is no greater demonstration of the President's support for a free press than the event he held today. Only they would attack the President for not being supportive of a free press in the midst of him taking 68 questions from 35 different reporters over the course of an hour and a half -- including several from the reporter in question. The fact that CNN is proud of the way their employee behaved is not only disgusting, it is an example of their outrageous disregard for everyone, including young women, who work in this Administration. As a result of today's incident, the White House is suspending the hard pass of the reporter involved until further notice." -- Sarah Sanders</p>
Section	Business
Date	11/7/18
Lead	In a stunning break with protocol, the White House said Wednesday night that it's suspending the press pass of CNN's Jim Acosta "until further notice."
Headline	White House pulls CNN reporter Jim Acosta's pass after contentious news conference
Sourcing	Trump, Acosta, CNN, Sanders, Peter Baker, the chief White House correspondent for The New York Times, The White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA), Elisabeth Bumiller, the Washington bureau chief for The New York Times, CNN producer Allie Malloy, former Obama aide Tommy Vietor, Yamiche Alcindor, a correspondent for PBS "NewsHour"



## Trump Statements

"That's a racist question," Trump said repeatedly in response.

"Sit down please," Trump said to her. "Sit down. I didn't call you, I didn't call you, I didn't call you."

"Should we keep this going for a little while?" he asked, one hour into the session, prompting some of the reporters to say "yes!"

When a reporter from a Japanese news outlet asked a question, Trump said, "Say hello to Shinzo," referring to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

"When you report fake news, which CNN does, a lot, you are the enemy of the people," Trump said, turning back to Alexander.

"Well I'm not a big fan of yours either, to be honest," Trump said, prompting laughs in the room.

But he turned his focus back to Acosta: "You are a very rude person, the way that you treat Sarah Huckabee Sanders is horrible. The way that you treat other people are horrible. You shouldn't treat people that way."

"I tell you what, CNN should be ashamed of itself, having you working for them." He pointed at Acosta: "You are a rude, terrible person. You shouldn't be working for CNN."

"I am not concerned about anything with the Russian investigation because it is a hoax," Trump said, "That is enough, put down the mic."

"Such a hostile media. It's so sad," he said, keeping up his years-long campaign against the people who cover him.

## Important Phrasing

“stunning break with protocol,” “Acosta, CNN's chief White House correspondent, drew the ire of President Donald Trump and his allies by asking multiple questions” “Trump insulted Acosta and called him a ‘terrible’ person.” “The revocation of his pass ‘was done in retaliation for his challenging questions at today's press conference,” “In an explanation, Press Secretary Sarah Sanders lied. She provided fraudulent accusations and cited an incident that never happened. This unprecedented decision is a threat to our democracy and the country deserves better. Jim Acosta has our full support.” “a sharp escalation of tensions between the Trump administration and CNN,” “stirred concerns,” “This is something I've never seen since I started covering the White House in 1996. Other presidents did not fear tough questioning.” “We urge the White House to immediately reverse this weak and misguided action.” “Many people on social media thanked Acosta for trying to hold the president accountable for his words and deeds.” “pro-Trump media outlets ran stories alleging that the reporter had mistreated the White House aide who tried to take a microphone away from him at the news conference.” “We will, however, never tolerate a reporter placing his hands on a young woman just trying to do her job as a White House intern.” “CNN producer Allie Malloy responded to Sanders via Twitter: ‘This is a complete lie.’ The woman grabbed Jim's arm repeatedly. He never once touched her. In fact at one point @Acosta tells her politely ‘pardon me, mam’ as she's yanking on his arm.” “Acosta also tweeted that Sanders' description of the incident was a ‘lie.’” “At the news conference, Trump snapped at the press corps, called reporters ‘rude’ for asking questions, and made baseless claims about political polling.” “keeping up his years-long campaign against the people who cover him.” “Trump's most contentious exchange was with Acosta.” “This President's ongoing attacks on the press have gone too far. They are not only dangerous, they are disturbingly un-American.” “President Trump has made it clear he does not respect a free press,” “a free press is vital to democracy” “Media critics and Democrats said Trump's combative streak — telling reporters to ‘sit down’ and insulting some of them — might be part of a strategy to deflect attention from Democratic victories in the midterms.” “seemingly relishing the confrontation.” “and the racist ad referring to them that the Trump campaign released last week.” “Trump, sarcastically, replied” “I want them to come into the country. But they have to come in legally.’ That's what the migrants are trying to do — they say they intend to seek asylum.” “Acosta tried to point out that other reporters had also asked multiple questions.” “While Alexander started to ask his question, Trump said, ‘I tell you what, CNN should be ashamed of itself, having you working for them.’” “He pointed at Acosta: ‘You are a rude, terrible person. You shouldn't be working for CNN.’” “he turned his focus back to Acosta: ‘You are a very rude person, the way that you treat Sarah Huckabee Sanders is horrible. The way that you treat other people are horrible. You shouldn't treat people that way.’” “The NBC journalist then spoke up in Acosta's defense: ‘I've traveled with him and watched him, he is a diligent reporter who busts his butt like the rest of us.’” “Well I'm not a big fan of yours either, to be honest,” “He disparages NBC almost as often as CNN.” “Social media lit up with outrage about Trump's dismissiveness. Ryan was trying to ask about voter suppression concerns. In response, Trump falsely said that CNN's polls were a form of suppression.” “Trump frequently condemns so-called ‘suppression polls,’ alluding to a conspiracy theory that claims news outlets distort polling results to discourage people from voting... despite a lack of evidence for the idea.” “Trump's treatment of the press varied from one minute to the next. As at prior news conferences, he showed contempt for reporters one minute, complaining about questioners ‘jumping out of their seats screaming questions at me,’ then suggested he was enjoying the back and forth.” “Should we keep this going for a little while?’ he asked, one hour into the session, prompting some of the reporters to say ‘yes!’” “The fact that CNN is proud of the way their employee behaved is not only disgusting, it is an example of their outrageous disregard for everyone, including young women, who work in this Administration. As a result of today's incident, the White House is suspending the hard pass of the reporter involved until further notice.”

### 23. CNN: Trump claims media to blame for ‘anger’ after bombs sent to CNN, Dems

Tone	Critical, suggestive, faux-objectivity
Kicker	Law enforcement officials said Thursday they tracked down another suspicious package sent to former Vice President Joe Biden.
Section	Politics
Date	10/25/18
Lead	President Donald Trump returned on Thursday to blaming the media for much of the "anger" in society, a day after CNN and Democrats were the targets of explosive devices.
Headline	Trump claims media to blame for 'anger' after bombs sent to CNN, Dems
Sourcing	CIA Director John Brennan, Trump, Republican Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Sarah Sanders

#### Trump Statements

"A very big part of the Anger we see today in our society is caused by the purposely false and inaccurate reporting of the Mainstream Media that I refer to as Fake News," Trump tweeted. "It has gotten so bad and hateful that it is beyond description." "Mainstream Media must clean up its act, FAST!" he continued.

Trump also began an evening rally in Wisconsin by voicing his desire for "all sides to come together in peace and harmony." But he also pointed the finger at the media, saying that the press has a "responsibility" to foster civility.

"The media also has a responsibility to set a civil tone and to stop the endless hostility and constant negative and oftentimes false attacks and stories. Have to do it," he said at the rally.

### **Important Phrasing**

“the President has often derided the media as ‘fake news,’ even labeling reporters the ‘enemy of the people,’ Thursday's tweet is especially striking” ““Your inflammatory rhetoric, insults, lies, (and) encouragement of physical violence are disgraceful,’ Brennan wrote on Twitter to the President. ‘Clean up your act...try to act Presidential. The American people deserve much better.’” “the president’s critics ‘will not be intimidated into silence.’” ““We need to stop with all this nonsense language about the press is the enemy of the people.”” “he needs to affirm again that we condemn all political terrorism in America,”” “She deflected when asked whether the President bears any responsibility for the heated political rhetoric.”” “As Trump was tweeting, New York authorities were removing a suspicious package addressed to actor — and frequent Trump critic — Robert De Niro.”” “In the initial aftermath of the bomb discoveries Wednesday, Trump offered a more conventional presidential message of unity.”” “Trump also began an evening rally in Wisconsin by voicing his desire for ‘all sides to come together in peace and harmony.’”” “But he also pointed the finger at the media, saying that the press has a ‘responsibility’ to foster civility.””

## 24. Trump averages a ‘fake’ insult every day. Really. We counted.

Tone	Critical, suggestive, faux-objectivity
Kicker	After his inauguration, he started saying that much of the national news media was "fake." It became a theme of his presidency.
Section	Business
Date	1/17/18
Lead	President Trump has used the word "fake" more than 400 times since he was inaugurated.
Headline	Trump averages a ‘fake’ insult every day. Really. We counted.
Sourcing	Trump, Flake, McCain

### Important Phrasing

“publicly assailed,” “fake news,” “fake polls,” “fake media,” “fake stories,” “Over and over again, he has told the United States not to trust what reporters say.” “constantly labeling real news as ‘fake,’” “slur,” “spread propaganda,” “‘fake news’ is now a catch-all criticism for any news that Trump doesn't like.” “among his supporters,” “two Republican critics of the president, Senators Jeff Flake and John McCain, are publicly chastising his constant use of ‘fake news.’” “a blistering floor speech,” “calls any press that doesn't suit him 'fake news,’” “He has used it like a slur, deriding individual news outlets and the news media as a whole” “with the word ‘fake,’ Trump has gone much further,” “possible collusion with Russia,” “it's almost always applied to the news media as an insult.” “redefining it to suit his purposes.”

### Trump Statements

"I've been hearing more and more about a thing called 'fake news' and they're talking about people that go and say all sorts of things," he said at a January 11, 2017 press conference.