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The Great Resignation: a content analysis of news sources' portrayals of the COVID-19 labor shortage.

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Recommended Citation

The Great Resignation among Restaurant Workers:

A Content Analysis of News Sources' Portrayals of the COVID-19 Labor Shortage

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for Graduation *summa cum laude*

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February 23, 2022

Contents

Abstract

When workers left the labor market in large numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic, proclamations of a labor shortage emerged extensively throughout the news. In this study, I analyze the coverage of the worker shortage among three news sources with different political orientations. Several themes emerged from analyzing a total of 75 articles. The findings showed that the perspective shown in the article, the cause of the labor shortage, restaurant worker portrayal, support of solutions, and opinion of the labor shortage all differed based on the political identity of the news source. This research supports previous findings that show there is a significantly smaller number of articles written about the struggles of the working class, and more articles written about the struggles of the upper class. This information contributes new information to our knowledge of common media portrayals of social and economic issues. It is concluded that while the liberal and centrist news sources did show empathy towards the worker's struggle in the labor shortage during COVID-19 and portrayed workers in a positive manner, liberal and centrist news sources rarely used a working-class perspective to look at social problems. Future research composing of a blind study with a larger sample and more expansive timeline is encouraged and further analysis is needed in looking at whom news sources tend to interview the most, as this may affect the portrayal of certain groups.

Keywords: labor shortage, news source, conservative, liberal, moderate, working class, COVID-19, perspective

Lay Summary

When you read a news article, you normally read interviews, opinions, debates, and other accounts of a story. But as news articles often only show one perspective, it can often lead to misrepresentation as another side of the story is left untold. Misrepresentations are both false and may even have consequences for the groups being discussed. Perspectives not only tell one side of a narrative, but they also push a message. These messages can support certain ideologies and values that further influence our way of thinking, our behavior, and our society.

This study is designed to find how different politically leaning news sources portray the 2021 restaurant labor shortage and the workers involved. For the methodology, I searched for articles from Fox News, USA Today, and MSNBC that were related to the lack of available workers in the restaurant industry when restaurants opened again after quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic. These articles were analyzed based on specific words and quotes and patterns emerged from each news source.

These patterns gave us many findings. It was found that news sources had different perspectives, gave different causes of the labor shortage, portrayed workers differently, gave contrasting solutions, and held separate opinions of the labor shortage. Fox News frequently blamed unemployment benefits, USA Today did not have a noticeable pattern but gave an expansive list of causes, and MSNBC tended to blame low wages. Fox News tended to portray workers negatively, USA Today gave neutral portrayals of workers, and MSNBC mostly portrayed workers in a positive manner. Fox News repeatedly supported the ending of unemployment benefits to incentivize workers to return, USA Today proposed robot and teen labor as an alternative to human labor, and MSNBC supported higher wages. The Fox News articles always gave a negative opinion of the labor shortage, while USA Today and MSNBC

mostly portrayed the shortage negatively, a few of their articles unexpectedly supported the labor shortage. Not only does this study give information about how the current COVID-19 related labor shortage and workers are portrayed, but these findings also support former research and contribute to theories on media portrayals of social class, social problems, and their connection to political ideology.

The Great Resignation among Restaurant Workers:

A Content Analysis of News Sources' Portrayals of the COVID-19 Labor Shortage

Half of all adults have worked in the restaurant industry and over 36% of Americans dine out at a restaurant or fast-food establishment daily (National Restaurant Association, 2019; Fryar et al., 2018). So when, from June 2020 to June 2021, nearly 3.8 million restaurant industry workers called it quits, a huge absence in the restaurant industry was noticed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). When people's expectations of restaurant operations returning to normal were soon let down, many were upset. News outlets proceeded to share their perspectives on the new worker shortage, often with opposing viewpoints. Even though some news sources agree with each other and share ideas on what they believe is at fault for the labor shortage, most news articles give very different opinions.

This disagreement of opinions has been primarily focused on two aspects of the labor shortage: the causes of the actual shortage of workers in restaurants and the financial crisis behind it. Existing research has revealed that after the COVID-19 lockdown, the restaurant industry workforce did not fully recover their pre-pandemic number of workers, bringing about a noticeable change. COVID-19 also caused a huge financial crisis in the United States and as a result, the CARES Act was implemented to assist both individuals and businesses. This financial assistance became a frequent topic of discussion between political parties as the conservative party opposed it and the liberal party supported it, reflecting past economic policy support and opposition tendencies for each political party. In brief, the reasons why so many restaurant workers did not return, and the United States government's choice of financial assistance have been frequently discussed.

This paper analyzes how MSNBC, USA Today, and Fox News differ in their telling of the labor shortage in the restaurant industry, where they place the blame of the shortage, and what solutions should be implemented. News sources portray events from different perspectives to appeal to their targeted audience, usually either Republicans, Democrats, or Moderates. Since liberal ideology tends to favor policies that assist those with lower incomes, it is predicted that the more liberal news source will portray restaurant workers in a favorable way while the more conservative news source will portray restaurant workers in a less favorable way, since liberal and conservative news sources are on opposite sides of the political spectrum. As there is little information on how current news portrays individuals with lower incomes, let alone restaurant workers, this study seeks to do just that. The specific question investigated will be: How do three news sources with different political orientations portray restaurant workers from January through September 2021 during a labor shortage? The overall objective of this thesis is to identify and analyze patterns in how different sources portray restaurant workers and to contribute to literatures on media portrayals of social and economic issues.

Literature Review

COVID-19 and the Restaurant Industry

The pandemic's effects led restaurants to take certain measures to prevent its spread, but political identity influenced a person's level of concern over the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic reached America in early 2020 contributing to a little over 800,000 deaths in the United States as of December 15, 2021 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). This pandemic affected the entire United States by demanding the need for increased safety protocols such as shutdowns, mask mandates, and social distancing starting in May 2020 to the current time of January 2022 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). In May 2020, over 50% of individuals did not feel safe dining out at restaurants, and as a result, many restaurants either turned towards electronic forms of interaction or shut down operations (Gursoy & Christina, 2020). However, people's attitudes about the risks of Covid-19 varied by political orientation. In 2020, those who identified as members of the Republican party were found to be the least concerned about the coronavirus, with only 35% concerned, while 68% of Democrats were concerned and 57% of Independents were concerned about the coronavirus (Malloy and Schwartz, 2020).

The pandemic also caused fluctuation in restaurant employment rates. The hospitality and service industries have previously shown vulnerability to different natural disasters, a prime example being large-scale illness (Khan et al., 2020). So, during the pandemic in 2020, the service sector experienced the largest drop in employment compared to other industries and it was found that the increasing number of COVID-19 cases directly caused the restaurant workforce to drop in numbers (Bartik et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020). After stay-at-home orders removed employees from their work environment, the accommodation and food/beverage

service sector employee number dropped from almost 14.5 million employees in January of

2020, just before the pandemic hit North America, to 7.5 million employees in April of 2020

(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Unemployment rates of workers in the restaurant

industry also hit an all-time high during this pandemic, rising from 6.2% unemployment in

January of 2020 to 35.4% in April of 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Throughout

the pandemic, the accommodation and food/beverage service sector continued to have a lower

number of employees than pre-COVID-19 but the number of workers slowly increased as

months progressed at around 11.4 million in December of 2020 to 12.7 million in June of 2021

and 13.1 million in September of 2021. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Unemployment

in the restaurant industry decreased from 16.1% unemployment in December of 2020 to 7.5% in

September 2021 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

     After lockdown, some of the employees who voluntarily left or were let go did not return

(Society for Human Resource Management, 2021). In March of 2021, there were 8.1 million job

openings in the accommodation and food/beverage service industry, a 600,000 increase from the

previous month of February (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2021). This became a major issue for

companies as 90% of foodservice organizations said it was difficult to fill positions, and 93% of

the hospitality and foodservice industry said that gaining new hires had become very difficult

(Society for Human Resource Management, 2021). In South Carolina, it was found that 75% of

restaurant operators did not rehire all their staff, but only a certain selection of employees

(Brizek et al., 2021). Some demographics, such as older workers, racial minorities, women, and

unmarried workers were less likely to be rehired (Bartik et al., 2020). These same employees

were found to be the demographics that were the most likely to lose their job before the

pandemic (Bartik et al., 2020). In short, an employee's return to restaurant work depended on a variety of factors.

Existing data suggests that employers and employees differ in their perspectives of who is contributing more towards the resulting labor shortage. According to the Worker Shortage Index (WSI), there are currently about 1.4 available workers per available job opening, while in 2012, it was 4 available workers per job opening (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2021); this shows that available workers have decreased while the number of jobs has increased. One survey reports that 73% of organizations say that there has been a noticeable decrease in applications for work, while 42% of unemployed individuals are actively looking for new jobs but haven't received job responses (Society for Human Resource Management, 2021). This survey reveals that 32% of unemployed individuals are worried about COVID-19, 30% said that the jobs available don't match their skills or interests, 28% say that they do not have access to reliable care for elderly or disabled individuals, 27% of these individuals said that the jobs pay less than what they want or less than what they were paid before COVID-19, 22-24% said that they do not have access to childcare or need to stay at home with their children, 17% report preparing for a career shift, 11% said that they are choosing to be more selective in their job choices, and 9% of the sample report that they earn more money from unemployment than from working (Society for Human Resource Management, 2021). Meanwhile, 70% of organizations claim that there is a labor shortage because workers have less need for employment due to receiving increased COVID-19 unemployment benefits (Society for Human Resource Management, 2021)—which was only noted by a quite small percentage of workers (9%) in this survey. Clearly, employers and workers have different views on causes of the worker shortage.

A restaurant worker's decision to return to their former workplace was influenced by many factors. It was found that employees who voluntarily left their job during the COVID-19 pandemic were less likely to be actively looking for a job than those who were let go by the company (Society for Human Resource Management, 2021). On the other hand, another study found that 52% of employees who lost their job in March or April reported that their employers did want to rehire them once industries opened again (Bartik et al., 2020). The study also found that the most frequently given reason for not applying for other jobs was that the former-employees expected to be rehired once COVID-19 effects diminished. Workers who believed they were likely to be rehired were 36% more likely to be rehired than those who believed they were unlikely to be rehired (Bartik et al., 2020). Some employees remained reluctant to go back but factors such as liking the manager and wage satisfaction increased the likelihood of going back to work (Bartik et al., 2020). Thus, this data suggests that workers' decision on whether to go back to their former workplaces is a complex one, not easily reduced to one factor such as receiving unemployment benefits.

COVID-19 Economic Effects Towards the Restaurant Industry and the Given Solution

Lay-offs and restaurant closures led to significant economic effects on restaurant workers (Khan et al., 2020). These economic problems led to one of the most widespread and harmful global recession ever recorded as over 90% of the countries experienced a recession (Escobari & Yeyati, 2021). One survey done in August of 2020 revealed that in the United States, 25% of adults had trouble paying bills and 33% had to use savings to pay bills (Parker et al., 2020). The United States restaurant industry was estimated to have lost approximately $240 billion dollars of revenue in 2021 (Kaufman et al., 2020). Comparing the COVID-19 recession with past recessions, researchers found the most affected workforce was those already receiving low

wages rather than the previously hit construction and manufacturing industries who receive

higher pay (Bartik et al., 2020). Employees who were placed in the lowest quintile of wages

were not only 3 times more likely than the higher wage quintiles to be laid off from March to

April of 2020, but their weekly pay also decreased 26% from April to May of 2020, while

higher-wage workers received a much lesser decrease of 10% in weekly pay (Berman, 2021). As

a lower-wage industry, the restaurant workforce received average hourly earnings of $14.28 in

January of 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The hourly wage average dropped in

April of 2020, during the introduction of the pandemic, to $13.84 (U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2021). Due to the mass labor shortage, 46% of companies increased their average pay

by 1-2$ per hour and offered sign-on bonuses (Society for Human Resource Management, 2021).

After this, the average restaurant hourly wage steadily crept up to $15.67 in June of 2021 (U.S.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In brief, wages for lower-income workers decreased during

the beginning of the pandemic when restaurants closed, but wages increased after reopening

restaurants up when there was a labor shortage in lower-wage sectors.

     To combat poverty and unemployment that would result from lockdowns and business

losses, the federal government signed into effect the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and

Economic Security Act) on March 27, 2020. The CARES Act allowed for $2 trillion dollars to be

distributed through emergency loans and funding towards small businesses, $1,200 tax rebates to

individuals and $500 for each child, diagnosis costs and treatment costs for COVID-19,

expanded unemployment benefits, and other necessities (govtrack.us). The CARES Act provided

for those who were unemployed through Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), Pandemic

Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), and Federal Pandemic Unemployment

Compensation (FPUC) (Bartik et al., 2020). The CARES Act was found to assist households by

approximately 15 weeks of resilience, meaning that it helped provide a household with about 15 extra week's worth of its average expenditure (Aylward et al, 2021).

The effectiveness of unemployment assistance is frequently debated in the United States. The positive outcomes that result from unemployment assistance consist of increased income for individuals, increased consumption of goods, and the decrease of poverty (Bartik et al., 2020). Some negative outcomes of unemployment assistance are a possible reduced incentive to work, slower rehiring, and employers claiming that those receiving unemployment are unwilling to return to work (Bartik et al., 2020). Contrary to these beliefs, one study found that workers who received unemployment benefits returned to work sooner than those who did not receive assistance (Scott, 2020). In essence, groups disagree on whether the assistance's effects would benefit both individual finances and the overall economy enough to be worth it.

Mental Health

Financial Stress and COVID-19 Fear

Financial stress has been found to lead to negative effects on one's mental health (helpguide.org). Therefore, the financial stressors caused by the pandemic can be inferred to have taken a toll on the mental health of workers (Gallo, 2015). For instance, the bottom quartile of workers has less opportunity to work at home, bringing about more risk of catching COVID-19 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Likewise, as restaurant workers must work with the public to do their job effectively, they also expose themselves to an increased risk of catching COVID-19. This increased risk of exposure may lead individuals to fear for their own health and their loved ones. One study interviewed 27 restaurant employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that there was an internal dilemma whether to choose to accept the risks from working in direct exposure to COVID-19 or to accept the risk of financial instability of job

loss (Rosemberg et al., 2021). Individuals were having trouble deciding whether to continue to

work with an increased risk of catching COVID-19 but with more money, or to stay at home,

decreasing their risk of catching COVID-19 but having to depend on federal aid to survive. This

internal conflict led many to experience mental health problems (Rosemberg et al., 2021). The

study's participants said that the pandemic made them feel "concerned, anxious, stressed, and

disappointed", and the participants also experienced feelings of uncertainty and high alert

(Rosemberg et al., 2021). Eighteen of the 27 participants were concerned about the uncertainties

of the virus while financial concerns were also prevalent (Rosemberg et al., 2021). Due to the

pandemic, their mental health was said to be troubled by thoughts of possible infection/spread,

unknown consequences of COVID-19, isolation, and work/customer demands (Rosemberg et al.,

2021). Both financial stress and concern of exposure to COVID-19 have caused low-income

workers' emotional well-being to suffer.

Restaurant Environment's Toll on Mental Health

Emotional well-being of restaurant workers has suffered because of the different factors

in the work environment. The restaurant industry remains the youngest workforce in America,

being a physically demanding field of work (Hanners & Redden, 2021). The unstable restaurant

work environment usually treats workers as disposable, leading to an incredibly high turnover

rate of around 70%-80% while the average turnover rate for other industries is approximately

25%-50% (Hanners & Redden, 2021; santorinichicago.com, 2021). This means that about 7-8

new employees that are hired each year leave and are replaced. Turnover is not only bad for the

restaurant, but it also tends to have a negative impact on the mental health of workers (Scanlan &

Still, 2019). During COVID-19, workers experienced increased anxiety because of

communication issues with employers and coworkers, understaffing, lack of resources,

unpredictability from customers, and inability to enforce COVID-19 safety policies (Rosemberg et al., 2021). One study found that low-wage workers reported having three sources of stress since the pandemic's start: an increase in their workload with fewer employees, disrespectful or unruly customers, and uncertainty about if their coworkers or customers have COVID-19 (Hammonds et al, 2020). These many factors have led the restaurant industry to be mentally damaging, but the most discussed factor was interactions with customers.

It is common knowledge that working in food service requires a great deal of interaction with customers and co-workers, all to achieve customer satisfaction (Bufquin et al., 2017). One researcher found that restaurant workers are forced to suppress feelings to follow how the company requires them to behave while on the job; she describes this process as "emotional labor" (Hochschild, 2012). This "emotional labor" leads restaurant workers to develop mental health issues as they become emotionally exhausted and stressed from having to show constant enthusiasm to customers (Wagner, 2014). The behavior of entitled customers can be illustrated by the commonly used phrase and mindset of "The customer is always right", which places customers in a king-like role, one whose demands cannot be questioned (Hanners & Redden, 2021). In this, the worker is placed into the role of a servant, serving the customer whatever they demand (Hanners & Redden, 2021). This forced subserviency of restaurant staff has enabled customers to treat workers poorly, without having any consequences for their behavior. This mindset along with new COVID-19 safety policies that workers need to enforce creates a contradictory environment where "customers are king", but workers must also follow policies that the "servant" must enforce. Workers enforcing mask policies has led many customers to respond with contempt as they expect to have their way. The mask-mandates and customer's

compliance depend on different factors, one prevalent factor being political ideology. (Fisher et al, 2020).

Ideology

Ideology is defined by the dictionary as "a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy" (Lexico, 2022). Ideologies influence how we address certain problems in society and help to interpret our social world (Jost et al., 2009). Ideologies place our values into certain categories and help us to identify with a group of people who hold similar values. These two ideologies have different ideas of what constitutes a social problem and what causes social problems (Williamson et al., 1985). Two of the main ideologies that frame the United States are conservative and liberal, both opposite sides of the political spectrum.

Conservative Ideology

Conservative ideology is an ideology that differs largely from liberalism in its main principles. Conservatives tend to believe that poverty is an individual-level problem, connecting poverty to personal attributes such as low intelligence, lack of motivation, or lack of ability to delay gratification (Williamson et al., 1985). The conservative ideology favors traditional values and individualism, which are associated with self-reliance and the absence of government interference (Hamilton, 2019). Two different types of conservative ideologies are individualist-conservatism and organic conservatism (Williamson et al., 1985). Individualistic conservatism values individual freedom, specifically freedom from government coercion or intrusion (Williamson et al., 1985). Their ideal economy is a free market with little to no social welfare programs to infringe upon the equal opportunity of success (Feldman & Zaller, 1992). Individual conservatism believes inequality is necessary for motivation for competition and that socialism is

a threat to individualism (Williamson et al., 1985). Organic conservatism, as the other type of

conservatism, holds tradition in high regard and utilizes the wisdom of the past for solving social

problems (Williamson et al., 1985). The organic conservative ideology values social order above

freedom and opposes social change, only supporting it when adapting to changing conditions

(Williamson et al., 1985). As this study frequently examines both business owners and workers,

it is also important to understand that a large majority of business owners are conservatives; one

study found that 61% of business owners identified as Republican (Makse, 2019). Regarding

policy, conservatives tend to oppose social welfare policies, defending this value by claiming

that redistribution of income causes problems such as inequality of economic opportunity and

limited rewards for hard work (Feldman & Zaller, 1992). Despite this, a small handful of

individuals identifying as conservatives believe that some people do need assistance and that the

government does have an obligation to provide welfare for some people (Feldman & Zaller,

1992). Regarding COVID-19, it has been found that conservatives are less concerned about the

effects even though the conservative party is usually more concerned with possible dangers and

physical threats (Conway et al, 2019). Conservative ideology differs from liberal ideology in

how they both view and handle economic issues and in their prioritized values.

Liberal Ideology

Liberal ideology focuses more on the inequality of economic issues than does the

conservative ideology. The liberal ideology states that poverty exists due to systemic

inequalities, such as a lack of opportunity in educational and economic institutions and the

disproportionate power held by the corporate elite (Williamson et al., 1985). Liberals value

social change, social and economic equality, and place progress as more important than tradition

(Jost et al., 2009). They also believe that the poor are at a disadvantage in economic opportunity

and promote welfare programs as a solution (Williamson et al., 1985). Specific social programs

that liberals tend to support in helping the poor consist of job programs, special education, and

financial assistance (Williamson et al., 1985). Liberals support public spending for keeping the

economy secure and able to grow, as they view this spending to further assist society (Starr,

2012). Liberals also support equalizing the distribution of income, using higher tax rates for

those with larger incomes to provide for those who make less money (Starr, 2012). In contrast to

conservatives who proclaim inequality as a necessary part of life to create motivation for upward

mobility, liberals argue that inequality is something to be reduced, but is unable to be eliminated

(Starr, 2012).

Ideologies can be seen in the messages of a narrative in media portrayals. Kendall states

that how media frames certain issues emphasizes certain ideologies, creating a narrow point of

view. These narratives are then repeated so that individuals are further drawn into this specific

ideology, ignoring other possible ways that a story could go (Kendall, 2011).

Media Portrayals

Media Portrayals of Social Class

Media representations attribute different qualities and characteristics depending on the

social class of the group described. Through a content analysis of the poor during a time of

welfare reform, three different magazines and their photographs found that there was an

overrepresentation of Black individuals portrayed as poor and an underrepresentation of white

individuals portrayed as poor (Clawson & Trice, 2000). Similarly, this study found that females

were also overrepresented as poor. These magazines also portrayed 30% of the poor as working

when in reality, 50% of those who are poor do indeed work, creating an underrepresentation of

the working poor (Clawson & Trice, 2000). This representation possibly influences readers to

believe that many poor do not work, when, a lot of them do work. Another content analysis of

three different companies' (Buick, Allstate, and DirecTV) advertisements post-recession has

similar findings of the upper-class being framed as superior to lower-class individuals as a form

of class-shaming (McAllister & Aupperle, 2017). The advertisements altogether portrayed

service workers and the poor as less attractive, less happy, uncaring, envious, blameworthy, and

incompetent. The advertisements send a message that the poor have earned their place in the

lower-class sector because of their choices in life (McAllister & Aupperle, 2017). One example

of a DirecTV advertisement in the study shows Rob Lowe as an upper-class individual who has

DirecTV. Rob Lowe also portrays individuals who don't get DirecTV as lower-class. He acts in

a few different degrading lower-class roles, but one that stands out is the "peaked in high school

restaurant worker". Rob Lowe then says, "Don't be like this me" to make fun of lower-class

workers and to entertain the rich individuals who use DirecTV (McAllister & Aupperle, 2017).

The study also showed how the magazine advertisements portray the wealthy as being victimized

by service workers (McAllister & Aupperle, 2017). Television also uses middle to upper-class

families in TV shows as the main characters while working-class individuals are often ignored

(Kellner et al., 2018). A book titled *Framing Class* gives several examples of how poverty is

framed by different sources of media. The author shows patterns in the media such as negative

stereotypes of those with lower incomes and positive stereotypes of middle/upper class

individuals in which lower income individuals are "entitled to their privileged position in the

stratification system" (Kendall, 2011). One book called *No Longer Newsworthy: How the*

Mainstream Media Abandoned the Middle Class claims that U.S. news sources have avoided

publishing stories showing the struggles of lower- and middle-class workers and have instead

focused on publishing stories that will appeal to those with greater power and influence such as

companies and advertisers (Martin, 2019). The underlying message of most media

representations creates negative and false images of the poor and positive images of the rich

(Kellner et al., 2018).

News Sources and their Portrayals of Social Problems

  Social problems are viewed and shown differently depending on the political ideology

and correlating political party. One study found that those who watch Fox news as their primary

news source were 93% likely to identify as Republican or right leaning while those who watch

MSNBC as their primary news source were 95% likely to identify as Democrat or left leaning

(Greico, 2020). One study found that conservative media sources such as Fox News were more

likely to use more outrage speech to provoke responses from the audience (Sobieraj and Berry,

2011). One comparative study found that Fox News tends to publish stories on tax reform more

than both CNN and MSNBC, whereas MSNBC was more likely to air stories on abortion

(Brydie, 2014). A content analysis took articles from Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC and found

that Fox News was the most pro-Republican and MSNBC was the most pro-Democrat (McBeth

et al., 2018). This same study also found that Fox News tended to oppose macroeconomic

policies and emphasized the costs of stimulus bills as it would harm the economy, specifically

opposing the ARRA bill that was signed by former President Obama in response to the economic

recession of 2008 (McBeth et al., 2018). This study concluded that narratives of support or

opposition for certain policies are shaped by values and beliefs more than empirical evidence

(McBeth et al, 2018). The source even goes to say, "As a society, we have perhaps reached a

point where politics and the use of media's narrative to express values and beliefs is so prevalent

that it is impossible to have a rational debate using empirical evidence about the most important

economic issues of our times" (McBeth et al, 2018). Each of these news sources tended to frame

the opposite news source and political party as the cause of social problems discussed in the

story and had very different perceptions of economic policy needed (McBeth et al., 2018).

News Sources and their Portrayals of COVID-19

These news sources also have been shown to differ in their portrayal of the severity of the

pandemic and the news sources differ in how they discuss the pandemic and its relation to certain

social institutions. One sample of over 7,000 participants found that the largest source of

information regarding COVID-19 for individuals was government websites, with 87.6% of the

sample visiting these sites. About 11.9% of this sample viewed MSNBC and 19.3% viewed Fox

News for information regarding COVID-19. The same viewers who viewed Fox News were

more likely to agree that the COVID-19 pandemic was an act of bioterrorism and to believe that

the virus' effects are exaggerated by media (Shahmir et al, 2020). Another study compared

information in MSNBC articles with information in Fox News and found that there was a strong

division between the sources' information on the pandemic, especially regarding the number of

deaths from COVID-19; Fox News gave much lower death tolls than MSNBC (Johnson, 2021).

One study found that for a 10% increase in Fox News viewership, there was also a 1.3% less

likelihood of following stay-at-home orders for quarantine of COVID-19 (Siminov et al, 2020).

One content analysis on Fox News, MSNBC, and four other sources took the news stories related

to the coronavirus and found that Fox News had the least coverage on COVID-19. Fox News

was more likely to discuss Democrats while MSNBC was more likely to discuss Republicans.

Fox News discussed the virus in terms of its' effects on business while MSNBC discussed the

virus and its' effects on individuals, hospitals, and other health facilities (Muddiman et al, 2020).

From this, Fox News was likely to minimize the severity of the pandemic and to relate it to

business, while MSNBC was more likely to discuss the pandemic and its relation to healthcare institutions.

Methods

This research was completed throughout August of 2021 to March of 2022 for an average of 1 hour each weekday and 2 hours each weekend day, for a total of a little over 250 hours. To investigate this topic, a qualitative content analysis was used to collect and analyze words, phrases, and other content from primary sources, forming the phrases into themes. I chose to do a qualitative content analysis because they are ideal for studies revolved around behavior, values, and opinions (Crosley, 2021). Content analyses allow the researcher to easily examine patterns of communication without using human subjects, which can be costly. Three news sources with different audiences were used: Fox News (right-leaning), USA Today (center), and MSNBC (left-leaning). Fox News represents the conservative news media and typically frame news stories in ways that support employers' rights and perspectives, an unregulated economy, and individual efforts (McBeth, 2018). MSNBC was used to represent more liberal news as MSNBC typically frames news stories in ways that support employees' rights and perspectives, a regulated economy, and individual rights (McBeth, 2018). USA Today, on the other hand, remains moderate to have a wider audience (Tokita, 2021; adfontesmedia.com, 2021).

In January 2020, approximately 11% of the total amount of service industry workers consisted of workers in the accommodation and food sector (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). I analyzed restaurant workers instead of low-wage workers, since they are a large portion of the service industry and play a controversial role in the labor shortage. Restaurants are not essential; restaurants are seen as a luxury and were one of the first sector to shut down, setting

the industry apart from other industries. Individuals can go without eating out, but other low-wage jobs are necessary such as grocery store workers and home health aides. While grocery stores had to remain open throughout the pandemic, restaurants were closed for a period to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This difference sets apart restaurant workers and essential workers, creating a need for research on the content about restaurant workers in a time where they are not "needed". Specifically, 25 articles were analyzed from each news source, totaling 75 news articles, transcripts, and videos that speak on the restaurant worker shortage during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. This number of articles was used as it was deemed appropriate for an undergraduate honors thesis. I used a grounded theory analytic strategy in this project, meaning that inductive reasoning was used to generate theories about this topic. Using this is advantageous because general theories formed from inductive reasoning can easily apply and relate to other studies. Phrases from these articles were first analyzed with a literal coding strategy, meaning descriptive groups of words from the articles become the literal codes (Saldaña, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). Then, I engaged in focused coding, which draws from the literal codes to create more abstract themes. Articles most relevant to my topic were selected from the search results from the times of January 2021 - September 2021 through purposive sampling. If searches yielded more than 25 articles, then purposive sampling was used with an effort to distribute the articles relatively equally over the timespan of the study. Since Fox News had a larger number of articles about the labor shortage, these articles were chosen relatively equally over the timespan, whereas MSNBC articles were chosen based on relevancy. Specific phrases used during these searches included: "restaurant worker shortage", "restaurant staff shortage", "worker shortage", "staff shortage", "labor shortage", "restaurant workers", and "restaurant shortage". I used an Excel Sheet to organize the article themes that emerged from

close readings of the articles in the sample. I use direct quotes from the articles to illustrate each theme. Following the aforementioned grounded theory analysis, I compared the data within each news source to find patterns within each news source. Then I compared the emerging patterns across the three news sources, while also looking for outliers to these patterns.

Based on past research on these news sources, I expect that restaurant workers will be framed differently in tone depending on the news source. I predict MSNBC will frame issues more from workers' points of view because liberal ideology tends to support workers' rights while Fox News will portray restaurant workers in a more negative light, placing the blame on workers for the shortage, framing issues from the employers' points of view, since conservative ideology tends to support business interests. USA Today, being the center, will be more neutral than the other two news sources. I predict that as liberals tend to blame the system for social problems, that MSNBC will blame wage inequality or lack of opportunity for the shortage of workers. On the other side of the spectrum, I predict that since more conservatives blame individuals for social problems, Fox News will blame workers for their lack of motivation or low intelligence.

Results

Perspective/Point of View

Figure 1
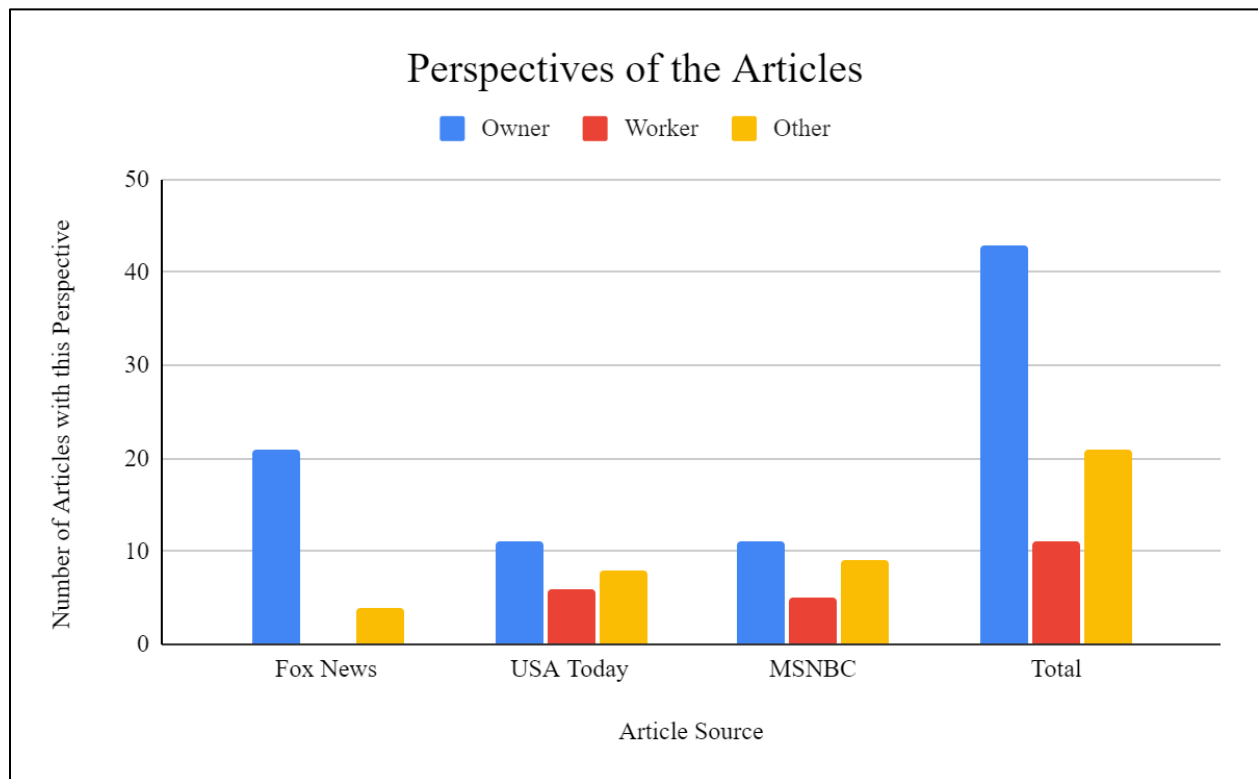
In Figure 1, I show whether business owners or employees provide the point of view/perspective in each article. Articles may do this by interviewing an individual and using their experiences as the main point of the article. Each article was placed into one perspective category depending on what perspective was shown the most throughout the article. If an article was listed in the "other" category, the article had represented an outsider's perspective by simply looking at economic data from government institutions and organizations or from a neutral perspective. Most commonly, a total of 43 out of 75 of the articles held a perspective of an

owner. Next, 21 out of 75 articles held the perspective of "other" and only 11 out of 75 articles had a worker perspective

Most of the Fox News articles showed the perspective of an owner/employer perspective with 21 out of 25 of the articles using this approach while 4 out of 25 of the articles used an outsider perspective and none of the articles used a worker's perspective. The Fox News articles looked to well-known CEOs such as Jon Taffer and even one previous CEO of McDonald's. One example of how a Fox News article gives the perspective of an owner is shown is in this quote: """ It's as bad as I've ever seen in my 17 years in New York," said Bernard Collin, a partner in the Upper East Side's Orsay, La Goulue and Bar Italia." Throughout this article, the part-owner of the business is the focus, discussing how the labor shortage has affected the business. An example of one of the Fox News articles that uses an outsider's perspective can be seen in the following quote, "Many of the commenters were divided on what the problem is". The commenters were not listed as either an employer or a worker, so the article is then decided to be in the "other" category. The evidence shows that the Fox News articles had a strong tendency to show an owner's perspective.

Meanwhile, 6 out of 25 of the USA Today articles spoke from a worker's perspective, 11 out of 25 of the articles spoke from an owner's perspective, and 8 out of 25 articles were placed in the "other" category. One worker's perspective article says, """Walker downloaded the app, took a 15-minute intro course and days later snagged a job polishing cutlery at a Michelin-star restaurant in London — for one day". This article tells how a college student was ignored when she applied to restaurant jobs, so instead she chose to pursue work through an app. USA Today did see the labor shortage explanation from the point of view of different individuals such as restaurant worker, Shanon Singer-Mann, and ex-restaurant workers, Jessica Wolfe, and Renée

Harper. Other articles focused on restaurant owners and their perspective, one article stating, ""Staffing has never been this bad in her family's four decades of operating McDonald's franchises". In short, the USA Today articles did not show any clear trend, as there was a large variation in perspective.

Surprisingly, only 5 of the 25 MSNBC articles were from the perspective of a worker, 11 out of 25 spoke from an owner's/employer's perspective, and 9 out of 25 were from an outsider's perspective. The worker's perspective can be shown in one of the articles that says, "They want the vaccine. They want shots in arms. They need those survival checks. They need the enhanced and inclusive federal unemployment checks". This quote describes how many workers feel about the COVID-19 vaccine and federal aid, listing their thoughts and needs. One of the articles showing an employer's perspective says, "We staff the restaurants the best we can right now". The MSNBC articles had a slight tendency to show the perspective of an owner or an outsider and were less likely to show the perspective of a worker. It was expected for Fox News to have mostly owner/employer perspectives but it the same was not expected for MSNBC. Despite this expectation, most of the sample's MSNBC articles are written and told from an owner's perspective.

Causes of the Labor Shortage

Figure 2

News Sources and their Portrayal of Causes of the Labor Shortage
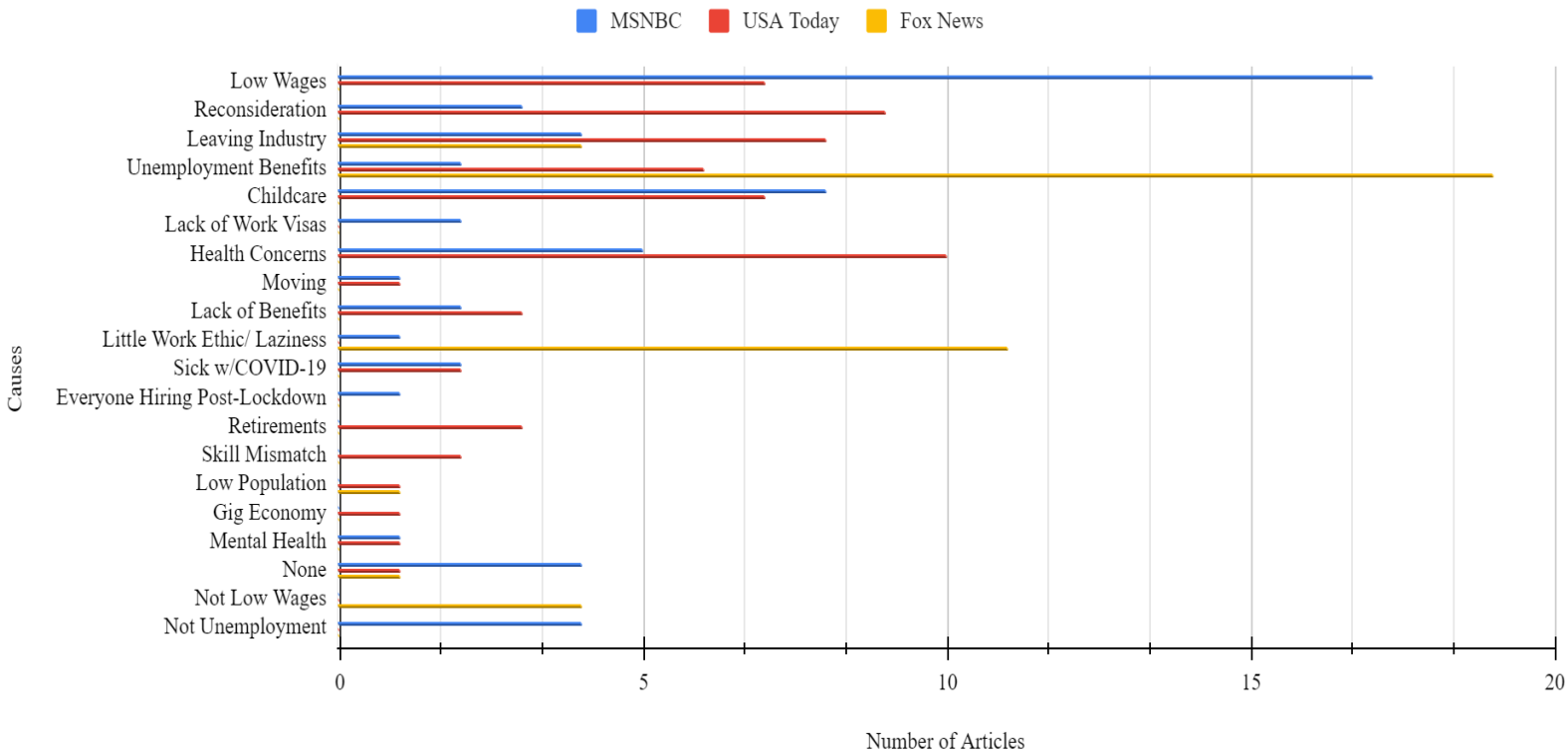

Figure 2 shows the reasons given for the labor shortage and their frequency in the news sources. Explicit reasons included: low wages, reconsideration of their current position in the restaurant industry, leaving the hospitality industry for another industry, unemployment benefits, childcare/eldercare, lack of work visas, health concerns/fear of COVID-19, moving to another physical location, lack of benefits in the restaurant industry, lack of work ethic/worker laziness, sick with COVID-19, mass-hiring, retirements, skill mismatch, lack of available workers and too many jobs, workers leaving restaurant jobs to work in the new gig economy, and an attempt to preserve mental health and avoid poor mental health due to stress of working in restaurants due

to COVID-19. There were also some articles that argued against some of these reasons, specifically arguing that low wages or unemployment was not a reason for the labor shortage. Almost each one of the articles gave a reason for the labor shortage, but 6 total did not.

The most frequent cause that MSNBC mentioned was low wages with 17 of the 25 articles. One article did this by stating, "Workers do not want to accept low-wage jobs" and "They`re sick and tired of working for wages that are totally inadequate". On the other hand, two MSNBC articles cited federal and state aid as a factor in the labor shortage by saying, "My opinion is the fact that they`re making as much money staying home on unemployment than they would at being back to work", and "People weren't coming back to work partially because unemployment pays the same number of wages instead of having to come back to work". Four out of 25 MSNBC articles claimed that unemployment benefits were not the reasons for the labor shortage as one article claimed, "they have seen virtually no uptick in applicants since the governor's announcement, which ended a $300 weekly supplement to other benefits". One frequently mentioned cause of the labor shortage was childcare with 8 out of 25 articles citing it. MSNBC also cited reconsideration, leaving the restaurant industry, lack of work Visas, health concerns, moving, lack of benefits, little work ethic, sick with COVID-19, mass-hiring, and mental health as causes of the labor shortage as these causes were mentioned 1-5 times in their 25 articles. MSNBC was the news source that did not cite a cause the most often with 4 out of 25 articles.

USA Today articles tended to claim more of a middle ground politically by citing a wide range of causes for worker shortages, including reconsideration, health concerns, childcare, low wages, unemployment benefits/federal aid, and leaving the industry as the main causes. Each of these causes were cited in around five to ten of USA Today articles. About one to four USA

Today articles blamed workers leaving the industry for another industry, lack of benefits, retirements, low population, sickness, skill mismatch, the new gig economy, and mental health. USA Today had the widest range of reasons for the labor shortage with 17 reasons each.

In contrast, nineteen of the 25 of the Fox News articles blamed the labor shortage on unemployment benefits and other federal aid. These articles used phrases such as, "An increasing number of restaurants in the U.S. are facing staffing difficulties as Americans cling to unemployment benefits," and "The major problem with getting workers todays is unemployment and this extra $300 that they've been getting for over a year now, it's just kind of insane now". This article explains that high unemployment benefit amounts equal the amount that small businesses pay employees and serve as a disincentive for potential employees to go to work. Four Fox News articles claimed that low wages were not the reason for the labor shortage as companies already paid enough as it is and that raising wages would/did not help bring in any more applications. One article illustrates this by saying, "You offer 12.50$ an hour, 401ks/retirement plans, and health benefits, and you still can't find workers?". Another article illustrated this belief by saying, "People are demanding a certain amount of money per hour that is just totally ridiculous". By saying that the wages the workers want is ridiculous, the employers and Fox News are essentially saying that businesses cannot afford that amount or that the employees' labor is not worth that amount of money. Eleven out of 25 Fox News articles cited little work ethic and laziness. The articles used phrases such as "They don't want to work", "sitting on their couch and not come back to work" and "you can't find people who want to work," to describe workers' assumed laziness and its role in the labor shortage. Although, there was one Fox News article that claimed laziness was not a reason for the shortage, stating ""It's not because people are lazy, I am not accusing anyone of being lazy. It's because people are

logical," Rubio said."" By this, the author is saying that it is not necessarily a problem of

laziness, but a problem of unemployment providing the same amount of money as working,

leading individuals to choose the less demanding option of unemployment. Fox News also used

reasons of leaving the industry for another industry, laziness, and low population in one to four

articles each. Fox News had a small range of causes that they used to cite for the labor shortage

with only 6 different causes listed in all 25 articles.

Portrayal of Workers

Figure 3
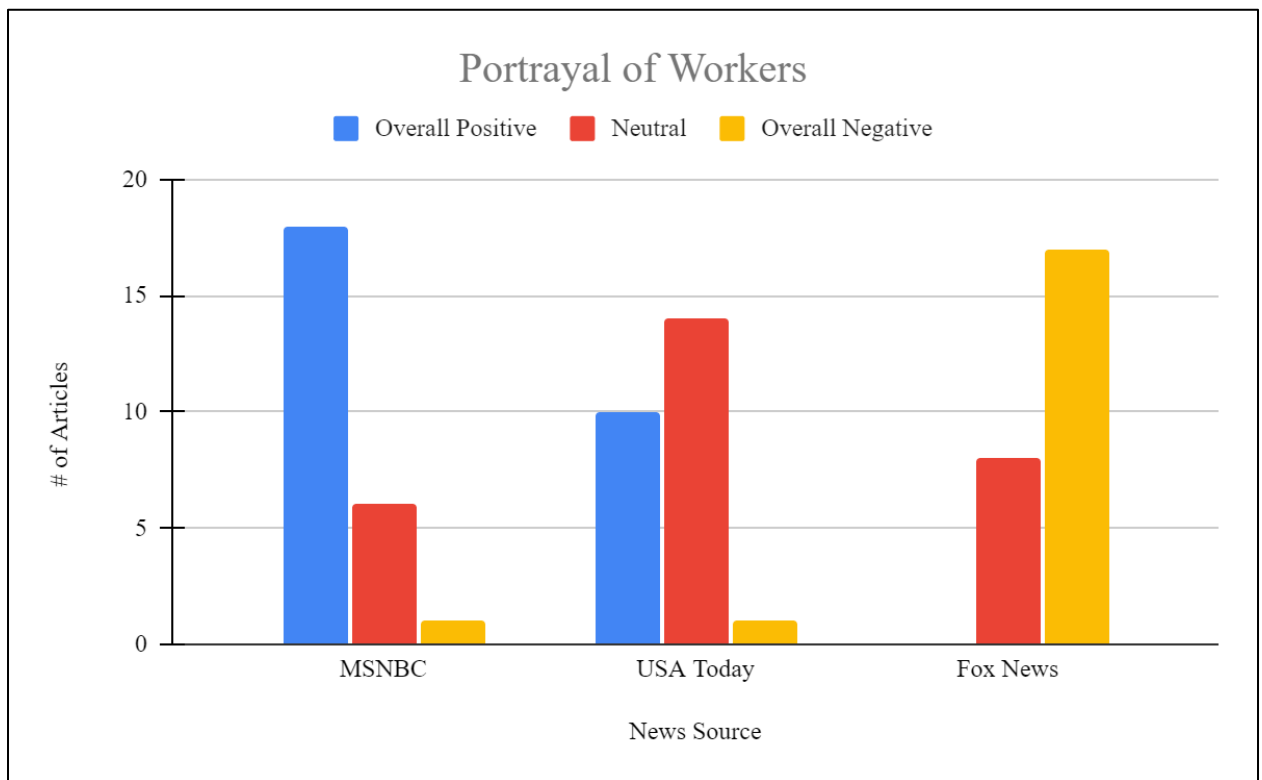
In figure 3, the portrayal of workers for each article was placed into categories of either

positive, negative, or neutral. The article's portrayal of workers tells how each news source

views a worker's role in the labor shortage. When articles place the blame of the labor shortage

on circumstances outside of worker characteristics, such as low wages, this portrayal of workers

is more positive. However, if an article portrays workers in a negative light attributing them with

poor characteristics such as laziness, it can be interpreted that the article is placing blame on

workers.

Most articles in MSNBC tended to portray workers in a positive light. Figure 3 shows

that 17 out of 25 MSNBC articles framed restaurant workers in a positive light. The articles used

phrases such as "skilled", "unemployed are willing and ready to work", "more productive",

"folks who are working hard to keep our stores and everything else open". Phrases that MSNBC

articles use to show pity for these workers are: "Some of the hardest folks hit are the restaurant

and hospitality industry" and "the restaurant industry is one of the hardest industries to work in".

These articles wrote that restaurants were dealing with a lot of negative experiences in the

pandemic such as low wages, poverty, and rude customers. They lead the reader to believe that

these experiences are what caused these individuals to leave their jobs, not character faults of the

workers. The MSNBC articles also list lack of access to childcare as a reason by describing one

worker: "She wants to be in the healthcare field. But she can`t do it unless she can find an

affordable childcare space". Outside of that, 8 of the 25 of the MSNBC articles spoke about

restaurant workers in a neutral light, neither positive nor negative about their role/experience in

the worker shortage, and one article unexpectedly spoke negatively about workers.

USA Today articles framed workers in a positive light in 10 out of 25 of the articles, in a

neutral manner in 14 out of 25 of the articles, and in a negative light in 1 out of 25 of the articles.

It was expected for most articles to portray workers in a neutral way, so this does fit with its

centrist role. Examples of their neutral portrayals include simple depictions such as" workforce",

"teen workers", "labor force" "Americans", "33.2% of teens ages 16 to 19 were in the national

workforce", and "he only has about 75 of the 100 workers he needs." In the articles that

portrayed workers in a positive way, the articles used phrases such as "dealing with enough

stress and trauma", "have the drive and work ethic", "overqualified", "fried from working so

hard during the crisis", to describe workers as either dealing with unwarranted stressors and/or

possessing positive qualities in the face of adversity. In the negative portraying USA Today

article, phrases such as "already socked way three rounds of government stimulus checks" and

"the employee didn't show up for her second day, not bothering to call or leave a message." to

describe individuals with unemployment benefits as undeserving of the monetary assistance.

This evidence shows that neutral portrayals of workers were most common in these articles,

closely followed by positive portrayals, with almost no negative portrayals.

     None of the Fox News articles spoke about workers in a positive light and eight out of 25

of the articles spoke about workers in a neutral way. Seventeen out of 25 of the articles spoke

about workers in a negative way by either attributing workers with negative qualities or by

blaming them for the labor shortage. Fox News used phrases to describe workers as lazy such as

"no one wants to work anymore", "you can't find people who want to work", "sitting on their

couch and not come back to work", and "people would rather stay home and pocket their cash".

The Fox articles also used different phrases to attribute workers with greediness such as "people

are taking advantage of the system" and "People are demanding a certain amount of money per

hour that is just totally ridiculous, or they are wanting cash". Another Fox News negative phrase

about restaurant workers is "the service is not very good because the workers know they can't be

fired…. there's no threat of being fired dangling over their head". This leads the reader to believe

that workers do not provide good service unless they are under threat of being fired if good

service is not provided to customers, further blaming the individual.

As was expected, MSNBC portrayed workers positively, USA Today was mostly neutral, and Fox News tended to portray workers in a negative manner.

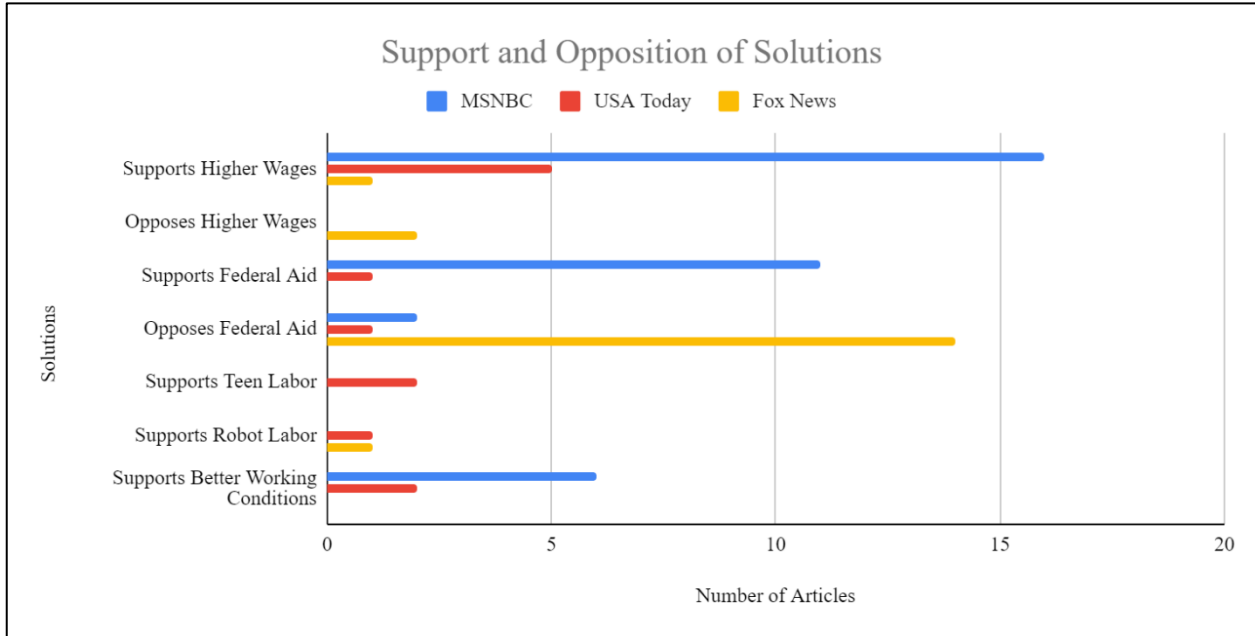**Potential Solutions in terms of Support and Opposition**

Figure 4

Figure 4 shows the different solutions to the labor shortage that the news sources proposed. By opposing something, the article states that it is either not helping the labor shortage problem or causing the labor shortage problem. In doing this, the news source either explicitly states that the elimination or removal of their object of opposition is needed or alludes to the fact that this problem should be fixed to fix the social problem of the labor shortage. In supporting something, the article states that the implementation of this would help address the problem of the labor shortage.

Sixteen out of 25 MSNBC articles supported higher wages for low-paid staff members of the hospitality industry. Some of the MSNBC articles justified the need for higher wages by saying that workers experience burnout when they have low wages and are forced to work long

hours to pay for bills and necessities, decreasing productivity. Another MSNBC article stated the

need for higher wages by pointing out that it causes other problems, the article says, "a lot of my

cooks, they couldn't afford rent anymore, they packed up and moved in with their parents". One

article explains, "The answer, then, isn't to keep wages low, depressing demand, but to raise

them so people can afford to keep buying". An article described the effectiveness of the solution

by saying, "so guess what they did…. raised their starting wage from $7.25 an hour to $15 an

hour…. we filled the 16 positions practically overnight". Eleven of the 25 MSNBC articles

supported federal aid for low-wage individuals, as it would help stimulate the economy and

provide monetary resources for accessing childcare and eldercare, allowing workers to work

again instead of caring for children or elderly family members. An article states the answer is,

"federal money to subsidize childcare so that people can go to work". Surprisingly, two out of 25

articles opposed federal aid. One did this by saying "This isn't something that you give out

stimulus checks to solve the problem". Six out of the 25 articles supported better working

conditions. One article's speaker declares, "I stand with underpaid essential employees in their

fight for fair working conditions". Overall, most MSNBC articles supported federal aid and

higher wages as solutions to the labor shortage with a few supporting better working conditions.

Since most of the USA Today articles were neutral towards workers, it was less likely

that any of their articles would support something that a liberal or conservative news source

would support as a possible solution to the labor shortage. Five out of 25 USA Today articles

supported higher wages. One supported this by saying, "What it means is businesses are going to

have to pay higher wages and that's not a bad thing". While this article did not connect higher

wages with a less of a labor shortage problem, the article did name higher wages as a positive

change. USA Today remained neutral on the use of federal funds as only one out of 25 articles

supported federal aid and only one out of 25 articles opposed federal aid. For possible solutions

to the labor shortage, one out of the 25 articles supported robot labor over human labor and said,

"robots, after all, can't get sick or spread disease. Nor do they request time off to handle

unexpected childcare emergencies". Another solution was brought up as a new younger

workforce in the form of teenagers, which two out of 25 articles mentioned. This article stated

this by quoting an owner who said, "It's a win-win scenario. It gives a young person an

opportunity to make some money, get good work experience, and it helps fill the labor gap that

we are facing". Since the labor shortage is more prominent in the lower-wage sector, USA Today

names more working teenagers as the solution. Two out of 25 articles supported better working

conditions; one article did this by saying, "The industry as a whole has always prioritized other

things over employee well-being... The restaurant industry is riddled with problems that started

long before COVID-19 was around". From this, it is understood that some USA Today articles

promote higher wages, the introduction of new labor in the form of robots and teenagers, and

better working conditions as solutions to the labor shortage problem. However, USA Today

articles showed no clear patterns in preferred solutions, as was more the case with MSNBC and

Fox News.

Fox News had 2 out of 25 articles that opposed higher wages. One article said, "We were

offering an increase of wages, health care plans, 401(k)s, but people just weren't applying and

like many in the industry, we didn't know what to do". Surprisingly, one article mentioned

higher wages as a solution by saying, "To incentivize employees to interview for jobs, some

restaurants are offering hiring pay and other perks". One of the Fox News solutions mentioned

was robot labor; the article said, "Jon Taffer believes technology will solve the worker shortage

facing the restaurant industry today" and "30% of our restaurants were closed and that's where

robotics came in. We thought of the idea of would if the servers could be more with the guests and we could take that hard part of doing the server's job and just use robotics," he explained". These quotes explicitly show the interviewee's support for new robot labor to assist in restaurants, helping the labor shortage. In terms of federal aid, Fox News opposed government assistance in 14 of the 25 Fox News articles. One article stated, "a lot of people are taking advantage of the system. It's really killing us" and "The major problem with getting workers todays is unemployment and this extra $300 that they've been getting for over a year now, it's just kind of insane". Ending unemployment benefits and other forms of assistance were introduced as a solution to the labor shortage extensively. One article reiterated this point by saying, "26 states are ending the assistance this summer, a move they contend will help businesses that are struggling to find workers". The Fox News articles mostly opposed federal aid and suggested it being ended as a solution to the labor shortage.

Opinions on the Labor Shortage

Figure 5
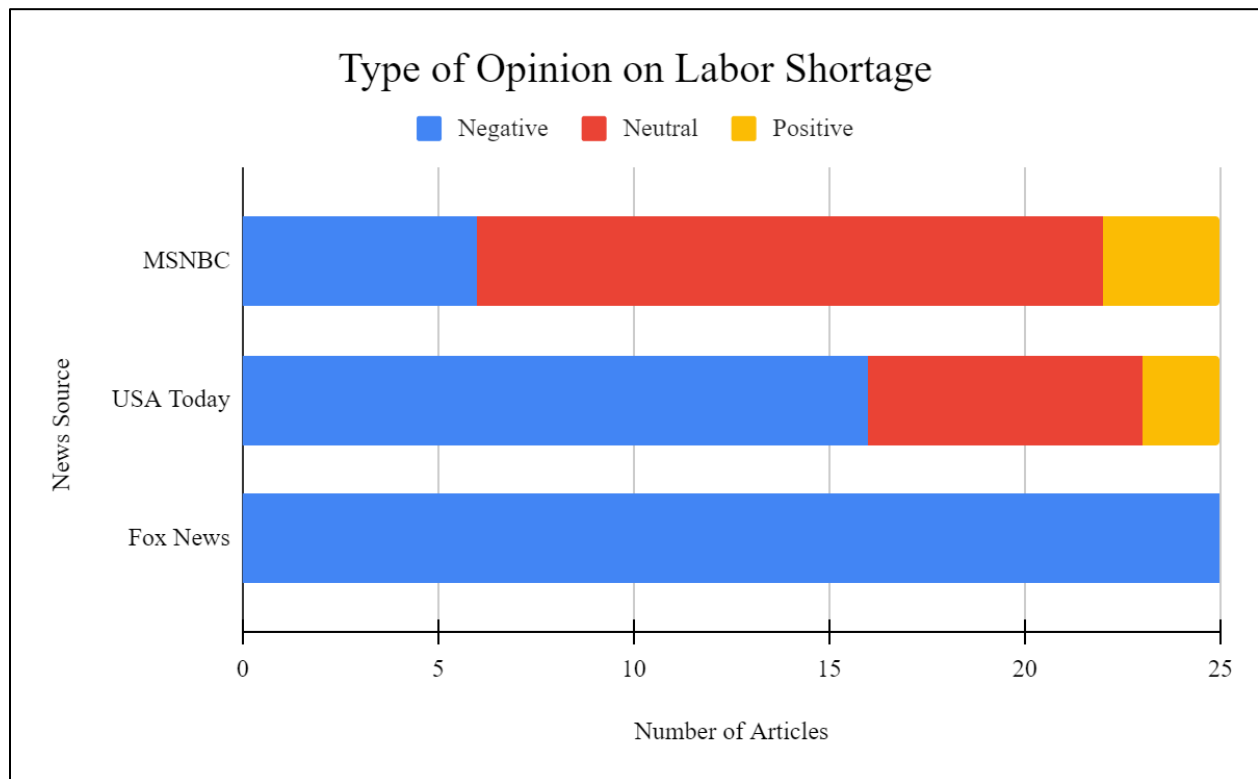
Another finding showed that despite the negative attention that the labor shortage has received, opinions of the labor shortage do differ depending on the news source. Some supported the labor shortage to further a higher cause, and some were strongly outraged by the labor shortage. All the Fox News articles spoke about the labor shortage in a negative way. Some examples of this negative outlook include: "There's a lack of labor or if the cost of labor is so high that it's prohibitive for anybody to grow" and ""The worker shortage in the restaurant industry is a "total nightmare," according to FAT Brands CEO Andy Wiederhorn".

USA Today tended to hold a negative opinion of the labor shortage with 16 out of 25 articles showing negative opinions on the labor shortage but 7 out of 25 were neutral and 2 out of 25 were positive about the labor shortage. The two positive articles described the labor shortage as a strategic withholding of labor with phrases describing workers as "extremely emboldened by

the labor shortage" and "being more selective about where they work. They're determined to find

better paying, more fulfilling jobs". These 2 USA Today articles decided to discuss the labor

shortage as a move towards the financial wellbeing of workers over their other stance of

discussing the labor shortage in a negative way.

   Most of the MSNBC articles noted the labor shortage as a neutral event in the United

States at 16 out of 25 articles and 6 out of 25 were neutral but a 3 out of 25 supported the labor

shortage as an empowering event for those who are not paid livable wages. One article describes

the large number of individuals quitting their jobs at restaurants by saying, "we are seeing a

resurgence of collective action right now". MSNBC labeled the shortage of labor in restaurants

as a form of needed protest against low wages. One example of this says, "The laborers are there,

and many of the people who are still unemployed are willing and ready to work. No, what we're

seeing is the effect of a yearslong wage shortage." Another example of this says, "but workers'

demanding appropriate pay for their labor is one change I'm very here for". Along with

protesting low wages, another MSNBC article spoke about the perceived shortage of labor as a

form of protest against poor working conditions by saying, "fighting tooth and nail against

attempts to lift up American labor". Another article says, "Why is this bad for employees to have

the upper hand. It's not bad". It was expected for MSNBC to favor better worker conditions and

higher wages more so than the other sources, but it was not expected for the shortage of labor to

be described as something besides a labor shortage.

Discussion

Regardless of the news source's political leaning, the perspective of an owner was more commonly found in this study's articles than the perspective of workers. The news articles, even those supporting workers, were not likely to seek out the opinion and understanding that workers have, despite workers being the social group discussed. This indicates that other news sources outside of the three studied here may also tend to use the perspective of an owner over the perspective of a worker. This is important as seeing only one perspective leads to only understanding one side of a larger story with multiple perspectives. Frequently showing an owner's perspective and ignoring a worker's perspective can be harmful as it may lead readers to take on cognitive biases and lead workers to have less representation in the media. This finding confirms Martin's claim that news sources have less stories about the struggles of workers and more studies that appeal to the upper class as these articles mostly showed the perspective of an owner. Even though MSNBC is said to have a liberal mindset, the news source neglected to show the perspective of workers. As owners do have more power, whether financial or work-related, this could possibly be why they were looked to for answers. It could be that owners have more influence over the restaurant industry and were able to tell their side of the story whereas a worker's lack of influence can lead to them not being able to tell their side of the story. It could also be that employers are placed into the role of seeing and controlling a large part of the restaurant industry, leading owners to have more answers than an employee without this perspective. Either way, it is clear from this study that this group of articles interviewed owners in search of answers to the labor shortage more frequently than the articles sought answers from workers.

In finding what each news source concludes is the cause of the labor shortage, the liberal news source is more likely to blame low wages since liberal ideology tends to support economic equality and more equal wage distribution. Meanwhile, the conservative news source is more likely to blame individuals choosing unemployment benefits as conservative ideology tends to oppose financial assistance as conservative news sources view assistance as causing inequality. The MSNBC articles claimed that restaurant workers do not want to work for lower wages and that most of the wages provided to these restaurant workers are not enough to provide essentials and pay for bills. By blaming low wages, one can connect low wages as a social problem caused by systematic issues such as the economic effects of outsourcing both labor and goods, declining union membership, and a low minimum wage. These issues both influence the economy and the wages that workers may receive. Meanwhile, Fox News blamed unemployment benefits for the shortage. The Fox News articles blame excess government interference for social problems, in this case, the government interference being in the economy in the form of unemployment benefits. So, whereas liberal ideologies blame government for social problems, this study shows us that the conservative news source blamed the government as well.

One can interpret that MSNBC favors the wellbeing and equality of lower-paid workers such as restaurant workers, as restaurant workers are portrayed as hardworking individuals who have been through a lot of challenges during the pandemic who deserve higher pay. Fox News articles tended to be distrustful of lower-paid individuals and portrayed these workers as deserving of their current wages, not higher wages, as higher wages were told to be unattainable as business could not make profit by providing higher wages. Expectedly, Fox News claimed there was no need to raise wages as Fox News believes that the inequality of wages is necessary to promote motivation. Conservatives tend to value self-reliance, survival without government

aid and little social welfare programs to assist individuals. Since conservatives generally oppose

redistribution of income and instead emphasize the importance of individual workers' work

ethics, it is expected and shown in the data that the Fox News articles reflected these beliefs. In

this, Fox News prioritizes the health of the overall economy and suggest the choices of workers

to receive unemployment may hurt economic growth--one of the priorities of the conservative

ideology. It is common for lower paid individuals to be portrayed as earning their place in life as

shown in previous studies, and as does Fox News. It should also be noted that this study

confirms another pattern of negative stereotypes of lower income individuals and positive

stereotypes of upper-class individuals such as restaurant owners through Fox News, adding to

Kendall's study in their book "Framing Class". This is important as it is also common for the

lower-class sector to be portrayed in television in a negative way. This research adds to it not

only by confirmation of the stereotypes, but it also adds a specific focus on restaurant workers.

The hypothesis expectation was correct in this sense, in that the left-leaning source, MSNBC,

portrayed workers on a much more positive note than the other news sources. Workers were

looked upon with more empathy in the MSNBC articles than USA Today and Fox News.

This study also confirms earlier research by McBeth showing that Fox News and

MSNBC have opposite views on economic policy. In general, it is expected for opposite political

parties and ideologies to have differing solutions that they support. Specifically, the differences

in views on economic policy revolve around Fox News' opposition of unemployment benefits

and MSNBC's support of unemployment benefits. McBeth's study also connected with this

study in that Fox News repeatedly emphasized the cost of stimulus bills, showing their

opposition to using this form of financial assistance. Similarly, the evidence from this study adds

to this finding as these Fox News articles opposed stimulus checks and other monetary

assistance. While the articles frequently showed differing levels and places of support, they rarely gave empirical evidence to back up their claims. This confirms McBeth's claim that policy support is based on ideology and values, rather than what works. Liberal ideology does tend to support social change, so it fits that the MSNBC articles would support a social change such as the labor shortage, which has put more power into workers' hands.

This information also communicates that MSNBC does not necessarily view the labor shortage as a negative event for all, but one of empowerment for workers. USA Today mostly portrayed the labor shortage as a negative event for the economy, but a few of their articles also supported this view. This positive portrayal of the labor shortage was not expected, but it does align with liberal beliefs. This study also confirmed Muddiman's findings of Fox News frequently discussing COVID-19's effects on business as Fox News was more likely to hold a negative opinion of the labor shortage since it was said to negatively impact the economy and the owners of restaurants. This study demonstrates a clear distinction in portrayal of the labor shortage for MSNBC and Fox News. This is important as this study shows little agreement between the two opposing news sources of MSNBC and Fox News, another previous finding that has been supported by this study.

Limitations and Call for Further Research

Limitations include a limited timeframe and sample size, possible intrusion of my personal bias, and potential lack of reliability. The COVID-19 pandemic is a current event with little sociological research done on it, as there has been little time to complete and publish peer-reviewed research studies. This limited time frame caused limitations in terms of how much knowledge there is on the pandemic. Also, because this restaurant worker shortage started in early 2021, no articles released prior to 2021 were used and no articles after September 2021 were used for this research; it will be finished in early 2022, and it is impossible to analyze articles not yet created. Therefore, the time constraints are a limitation as there are new articles being written every new day as the labor shortage is a continuing event. The sample size of 25 articles per news source did contain most articles about the labor shortage for these news sources at the time, but the sample size could contain more articles as the timeframe restricts the number of articles analyzed. The sample size, in comparison to other content analysis', is small, leading to a potentially less valid analysis. One limitation of this study is that content analyses often use more than three news sources, but since this is a senior honors thesis, only three were analyzed. To combat this limitation, both sides of the political news spectrum were analyzed. Another limitation is personal bias as this was not a blind study. By knowing the article's source during analysis, bias is a strong possibility as personal expectations about results can influence the data; however, I made sure to support my findings with direct quotes from articles, so readers can see how I came to the conclusions I did. The final limitation is that because I have worked on my own, I did not have another researcher to engage in intercoder reliability and test the reliability of my focused codes; however, I discussed all steps of coding with my advisor and got their input throughout my coding process.

Some ways to do differently with this study in continuing research would include a more expansive timeline, with a start at the beginning of the published reports of the labor shortage and finishing with articles from the ending of the labor shortage, which is yet to come. To combat limitations of a small sample size, more articles should be analyzed in the future for a more accurate data analysis. Regarding personal bias, a blind study would prevent bias, so this should be used in future studies. Plus, the single research student analysis could be improved with more individuals working together to complete the project. In closing, to improve on this study, one should repeat the study with a larger sample size, more expansive time frame, and a blind study, preventing the researcher from seeing which news source produced which articles, and with more researchers. If there are indeed too many low-wage jobs and too few professional jobs for college graduates, then there is a need for further knowledge on this. More research about media portrayals of the function and the growing necessity of robot labor as a solution to labor shortages in low-wage jobs is also needed. The media portrayals of the increased use of teen labor over adult labor is another trend which calls for more research as teens are at a different stage in life than adults.

Most importantly, further research should be completed in search of how media tends to interview owners more often than workers and why exactly this is. If this is researched, new knowledge will be brought to our understanding of the dynamics between restaurant workers, news sources, and society.

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