

Media Frames Reflecting Public Discourses in the Coverage of Tragic Events:
a Content Analysis of the Conflicting Frames of the MH17 Incident in Russian and
Western Media

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Abstract

The media coverage of the same tragic event (the MH17 case) was framed in conflicting ways in Russia and the West. Media frames drew on longstanding public discourses to generalize on the moral nature of the different actors that were held responsible for the incident. This study applied a content analysis to the media coverage of the MH17 incident in Dutch, Russian and U.S. newspapers. Thus, it measured to what extent media frames reflected public discourses and how these frames were built up. The results showed that Russian and Western media employed conflicting media frames and drew on public discourses that instigate moral outrage against the country that was held responsible for the incident. Whereas the U.S. most often employed a terror frame that reflected an Anti-Russian discourse, Russian media employed more often the counterframe of conspiracy that reflected an Anti-Ukrainian or Anti-Russian discourse. This study thus showed how the same tragic event was framed in different and conflicting ways in Russia and the West, and how this coverage was tainted by longstanding public discourses.

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i. Preface and Acknowledgments

When the MH17 incident took place on July 17th 2014, I was in Saint Petersburg for study purposes. I experienced this tragic event and the ensuing ‘media war’ between Russian and Western media from nearby, and it made an enormous impression on me. What I saw on Russian television differed dramatically from the way Dutch and English media portrayed the incident. Also most of the Russians I spoke to during that summer seemed to have a way different perspective on the incident: they spoke of a tragedy for ‘my country’, but were not aware that large parts of the world suspected that the Russian regime was to be held responsible for this incident. Many people told me that I should not believe this Western ‘Anti-Russian propaganda’. These experiences encouraged me to find out what was really told in both Russian and Western media. This content analysis enabled me to study the coverage of the MH17 incident in Russian and Western media systematically and objectively. This provided me with interesting insights into what was really told in both Russian and Western media.

I am very grateful to Dr. Michael Meffert for supporting me in the realization of this project. Thanks to his extensive supervision, I learned how to conduct a framing analysis that is informed by a solid theoretical framework. I am also grateful to Mr Floris Mansvelt Beck for acting as a second reader and providing me with useful comments.

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1. Introduction

Shortly after Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 (hereinafter referred to as MH17) was downed over Eastern Ukraine on July 17th 2014, different and conflicting narratives of the incident abounded in the coverage in both Russian and Western media. The U.S. newspaper *The Washington Times* reported that “initial reports indicate the Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 was shot out of the sky by a more substantial, ground-based Russian missile system” (Taylor 2014). On the same day, the Russian newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* published an article with the headline “Downing of an airliner: final conclusions without preliminary research.”¹ In this article, the newspaper reported on the “many strange coincidences that accompanied this flight – the change of the conventional route, confusion of the Ukrainian military in testimonies on the presence or absence of a BUK [missile launcher] in the hands of militias, posts at a microblog of Spanish air traffic controllers working at Borispol airport [suggesting that Ukrainian air forces shot down the plane], the striking efficiency of Ukrainian mass media that in only a few minutes after the plane had disappeared from the rader screens categorically stated that it was shot down, and much more versions [of the incident]” (Grishin 2014). The Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* published an article with the headline “Tragedy above Ukraine takes the lives of 298 people”² (Redactie & NAP 2014), focusing mainly on the tragic nature and technical details of the incident. Western and Russian media thus framed the MH17 incident in different and conflicting ways.

This study aims at analyzing how a tragic event was framed in different and conflicting ways in international media. To that end, it examined to what extent media frames drew upon longstanding public discourses that already existed long before the

¹ “Падение лайнера: окончательные выводы без предварительного расследования” (Grishin 2014).

² “Tragedie boven Oekraïne kost 298 mensen het leven” (Redactie & NAP 2014).

incident took place (Entman 1993, p. 11). These discourses were used to make sense of a tragic event for which different actors were accused and generalize on the moral nature of this actor. The actor is usually generalized to the government of one of the involved countries. Different countries held different actors responsible for bringing about the MH17 incident. This mechanism of media frames that reflect public discourses was applied in a content analysis of the coverage of the MH17 case. This content analysis was informed by framing theory. Framing was thus used as a tool to analyze the conflicting narratives of the MH17 incident in Russian and Western media.

The main point of conflict in the media coverage of the MH17 incident was that Russia and the West accused each other of downing the civilian airliner. Three countries with different interests and different reasons of involvement in the MH17 incident were therefore chosen for this content analysis: The Netherlands, Russia and the U.S. The Netherlands was involved because almost two-thirds of the victims were Dutch and moral outrage was particularly high in this country. The U.S. was involved because the U.S. government soon took a clear stance on the incident: already a few days after the incident had taken place, the U.S. State Department published a report in which it held pro-Russian separatists in the Donbass region responsible for shooting down the airliner (Westcott 2014). Furthermore, it is interesting to find out whether U.S. media use Anti-Russian rhetoric, taking into account that some Russian media often employed Anti-American rhetoric in their coverage on the incident. Russia is involved because the MH17 incident took place over a territory that is controlled by pro-Russian separatists. These separatists were allegedly supported by Russia. Furthermore, the Russian government and media disseminated significant amounts of counter-narratives on the incident (Wilder 2014).

This study aims to measure to what extent the media frames of the coverage of a tragic event (the MH17 incident) in Dutch, Russian and U.S. media reflected public discourses. Further, it aims to analyze how exactly these frames were built up. This will provide insights in how the incident was framed differently in Russian and Western media. Scholars have studied media frames since the 1970s (Cissel 2012, p. 68). The linkage between media frames and public discourses has rarely been researched, though (Entman 1991). This study aims to fill that gap by providing a theoretical framework that shows how media frames reflected public discourses in order to make sense of a tragic event. This theoretical framework was applied to a multi-language content analysis of the coverage of the same tragic event (Khakimova Storie, Madden & Liu 2014). This event was analyzed across different countries (The Netherlands, Russia and the U.S.) and languages (Dutch, English and Russian). Such a content analysis across different countries and languages is rare (e.g. Ermolaeva 2014). Furthermore, this study aims at making journalists and audiences more aware of how the coverage of a tragic event could be tainted by longstanding public discourses. This could contradict one of the most fundamental principles of the media: representing reality as objective and truthful as possible.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Tragic Event: the MH17 Case

On July 17th 2014, flight MH17 bound for Kuala Lumpur had departed from Amsterdam airport at 12:15 p.m. local time. Contact with the plane was lost over Ukrainian airspace at 2:15 p.m. By that time the plane flew at about 50 kilometers from the Russian-Ukrainian border. The plain was probably shot down. Wreckage of the plane came down near the East-Ukrainian town of Torez. None of the 183 passengers and 15 crew aboard survived. The incident dominated international media for a large part of the summer of 2014 and it caused moral outrage, particularly in The Netherlands and Malaysia. Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, said that “everybody knew someone who was on flight MH17” (NOS 2014). The narratives on the causes of the incident differed per country: whereas Western media often reported that the plane was shot down by Pro-Russian separatists backed by Russia, Russian media often came up with alternative explanations and blamed the Ukrainian military. It is important to note that at the time of writing this thesis, all (judicial) investigations into the MH17 incident were still open.

2.2 Public Discourses: Theory

This study assumes that media frames reflect public discourses. Media frames draw on longstanding public discourses to make sense of a tragic event, and to generalize on the moral nature of the actor. This actor is generalized to the government of one of the involved countries. The public discourses that media frames draw on, existed already long before the tragic event took place. A public discourse is “a particular set of ideas and symbols that are used in various public forums to construct meaning about [policy issues]” (Gamson 1992, p. 24). Entman (1991) involves public

discourses in a framing analysis of the coverage of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. These cases in which civil airliners were downed, are very similar to the MH17 incident: the governments of the actors (U.S. and the Soviet Union) were held responsible. In the analysis of these incidents, Entman adds a culture-specific element to the definition of public discourses: “a series of associated idea clusters that form a way of reasoning about a matter that is familiar to audiences from other cultural experiences” (p. 11). This definition is particularly useful to this study, which aims to analyze the media coverage of a tragic event across different countries, languages and thus cultures.

Governments and media outlets in different countries construct public discourses. Governments are the “key catalyst” behind the construction of public discourses (Entman, 1991, p. 13-14). Together with the media, governments construct and disseminate longstanding public discourses that suit their interests (Anderson 2007, Luke 2007 as cited in Thomas 2009). To that end, they disseminate their stances on policy issues by means of public addresses, official statements, etc. Relevant to this study are public discourses that contain an ethical assessment” of another country or government (Entman 1991, p. 13). This assessment is often based on condemnation or dislike of that country’s policies. As this study analyzes the media coverage of a tragic event for which different countries accuse each other, the discourses that are relevant are based on dislike of one of the involved countries (i.e. Russia, Ukraine or the U.S.). These ‘anti-discourses’ of dislike of the other country existed already long before the tragic event take place, and when the MH17 incident took place, media frames drew again on these discourses to make sense of what happened.

2.3 Public Discourses: The Case of MH17

Table 1 shows the public discourses that are relevant to the MH17 case. These include a neutral, technical discourse that is applicable to any tragic event. Next to that, three moral ‘anti-discourses’ are relevant. These discourses are specific to the MH17 case, as they are based on dislike of one of the involved countries (Russia, Ukraine or the U.S.). These ‘anti-discourses’ generalize on the moral nature of the actor. The actors that were accused of bringing about the MH17 incident were generalized to their countries or governments: for example, the Russian government was held responsible for the acts of Pro-Russian separatists or Russian soldiers, whereas the Ukrainian government was held responsible for the acts of its military.

Table 1. Definitions of Public Discourses.

Public Discourse	Definition
1. Technical	This discourse holds that the tragic event “was traceable not to moral failure but to inadequacies of technology and of humans to cope with it” (Entman 1991, p. 14). Thus, this discourse holds that the incident happened because of technical failure, and thus it does not identify an actor who is to be held responsible for the incident. It is neutral and does not generalize on the moral nature of an actor. Instead, it focuses mainly on the description of the technical details of the incident (Entman 1991, p. 15).
2. Anti-Russian	The ‘Anti-Russian’ discourse generalizes on the moral nature of the Russian government. It is based on dislike of “Russia as an increasingly authoritarian actor in international relations with burgeoning (neo) imperial ambitions” (Tsygankov & Fominykh 2010, p. 19). This discourse is expressed through stances on

themes and policy issues such as Putin’s authoritarian regime, destruction and lack of democratic freedoms, the “use of the ‘energy weapon’ as a means of political pressure and blackmail” and Russia’s aggressive Foreign Policy towards its neighbours in the Post-Soviet Space (Cartalucci 2014; Mearsheimer 2014; Tsygankov & Fominykh 2010, p. 20). The Anti-Russian discourse has started to develop in the West – particularly in Europe – in the second half of the 1990s and grew particularly strong during Putin’s second and third terms.

3. Anti-Ukrainian The ‘Anti-Ukrainian’ discourse generalizes on the moral nature of the Ukrainian government. This Anti-Ukrainian sentiment (also called Ukrainophobia or Ukrainophilia) is mainly present in Russia nowadays. This sentiment appeared before in the history of Russia-Ukraine relations. It was for example reflected in Anti-Ukrainian policies in the Soviet Union, e.g. the *Holodomor* and mass executions of Ukrainian intellectuals in the 1930s (Shkandri 2001, p. 166). Russian state media reinvigorated this anti-Ukrainian sentiment from February 2014 on, when the erstwhile President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich was ousted after popular uprisings. The revival of the Anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Russian society is apparent from a recent polling by Levada Center which has shown that 55% of the Russians relate negatively to Ukraine (2015).

4. Anti-American The ‘Anti-American’ discourse generalizes on the moral nature of the U.S. government. It is based on dislike of “America’s
-

power, its ‘arrogance,’ its success” (Berman 2004, p. 3). It “take[s] this or that policy dispute as a pretext for criticism about the United States” (Berman 2004, p. 3). The Russian variant of Anti-Americanism primarily directs this criticism at the purported aim of the U.S. and its NATO allies to undermine Russia’s power in the world through the establishment of spheres of influence in the post-Soviet Space (Mearsheimer 2014). Recent pollings have shown that 81% of the Russians relate negatively to the United States (Levada Center 2015) and that 54% perceives the U.S. as “the largest threat in the world” (Bohm 2014).

2.4 Media systems

Governments and media in different countries construct and disseminate different and sometimes conflicting public discourses. This is done by means of official statements, public addresses, etc. These governments and media outlets function within the context of different media systems. It is therefore important to be aware of the large differences between the media systems of the three countries in this study.

In the Netherlands and the U.S. - both full-fledged democracies – the media play a different role in the political process than under the ‘electoral authoritarian’ regime of Russia (Lipman & McFaul 2010; Petrone 2011, p. 167). The governments of the Netherlands and the U.S. cannot directly interfere in the news content, as none of the Dutch and U.S. media are state-owned (Bakker & Vasterman 2008, p. 148; Shah 2009). In both countries, newspapers and television channels are privately owned, though some of them receive some state funding. In the media system of the Netherlands, television “is dominated by commercial channels on the one hand and a

strong public broadcasting system on the other, although there are no national government-owned television or radio stations” (Bakker & Vasterman 2008, p. 148). Media ownership in the U.S. is more concentrated in the hands of a small amount of large businesses (Shah 2009). In Russia, television channels are state-owned and tightly controlled by the Kremlin, which is reflected in the news content (Lipman & McFaul 2010, p. 116). In Russian newspapers there is more variety in terms of loyalty: some are owned or closely related to the state, but others are liberal and independent. Russian independent newspapers reach only small audiences and have limited financial resources (Bertrand 2012).

Also the main source of news consumption for the publics in these three countries differs. The Netherlands has a relatively high readership of newspapers and magazines (Bakker & Vasterman 2008, p. 146-148). Whereas large parts of the Dutch public are still subscribed to newspapers (Bakker & Vasterman 2008, p. 146-148), newspaper readership in the U.S. is declining (Kirchhoff 2009). U.S. citizens consume news from a wide range of online sources and television channels (Kirchhoff 2009). The largest part of the Russian public is dependent on the state-controlled television channels, which are their main and only source of news.

The Netherlands and the U.S. also differ from Russia in terms of freedom of the press: whereas The Netherlands was on the 7th and the U.S. on the 46th of the World Press Freedom Index 2014, Russia scored a low 148th place (Freedom House 2014). Russia, on the one hand, has “media gatekeepers framing international news for internal audiences” (Smaele 2004, 66). U.S. media, on the other hand, reach a large public abroad thanks to the universality of the English language and globalization (Khakimova Storie, Madden & Liu 2014, p. 429). If governments have a strong influence on media, media tend to represent the interests of that government.

Governments can thus influence the media frames and public discourses that a media outlet employs. It is therefore important to be aware of the large differences between Russian and Western media systems.

2.5 Framing: Theory

This content analysis was informed by framing theory in order to analyze the conflicting narratives of the same tragic event in international media. Framing is a tool to analyze the way media present information to their audiences (Cissel 2012, p. 68). Frames encourage the reader to interpret the information in a certain way. Goffman was the first researcher to define framing as “a ‘schemata of interpretation’ that enables individuals to ‘locate, perceive, identify and label’” occurrences or life experiences (1974 as cited in Cissel 2012, p. 68). Clawson & Oxley define framing in the media as a “...process by which a communication source, such as a news organization defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy” (1997, p. 567). Entman (1991, 1993) provided a more practical definition. He explained in detail how news outlets construct a specific interpretation of the perceived reality: media highlight, downplay or ignore certain aspects in a media message. In other words, framing is a means of “sizing – magnifying or shrinking elements of the depicted reality to make them more or less salient” (Entman 1991, p. 9). Media increase the salience of certain bits of information by “making [them] more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman 1991, p. 9). Media frames “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” by elevating certain “aspects of [the] perceived reality” (Entman 1993, p. 52). Different frames make different pieces of information more or less salient.

2.6 Framing: Definition of Frame Categories

The content analysis focused on three categories of media frames that offer different, basic narratives of how a tragic event happens: as an unfortunate accident, a criminal act or a plot. Table 2 defines the basic content of the tragedy (1), terror (2) and conspiracy (3) frames.

Table 2. Definitions of Frame Categories

Media Frame	Definition
1. Tragedy	The tragedy frame ignores or obscures the question of “who did wrong” (Entman 1991, p. 13). Instead this frame focuses on “what went wrong” (Entman 1991, p. 13). It emphasizes the tragic nature of the event and categorizes it explicitly as a ‘tragedy’, ‘disaster’ or ‘catastrophe’. Contrary to the other frames, this frame does not focus on the question of who the actor was and it does not draw on a public discourse that generalizes on the moral nature of that actor.
2. Terror	The terror frame categorizes the incident as a deliberate or accidental attack and focuses on the “activity and responsibility” (Entman 1991, p. 18) of the actor. Dependent on the public discourse that is reflected in this frame, “the actor that shot down the plane” (Entman 1991, p. 20) is generalized to a certain country towards which it directs moral judgment and outrage.
3. Conspiracy	The conspiracy frame is a counter-frame to the terror frame. It offers alternative explanations (i.e. conspiracy theories) of how the tragic event happened, holding that it was plotted. These alternative explanations are opposed to the explanations offered in the terror frame. This implies that the conspiracy frame accuses different

actors than the terror frame. Further, it also generalizes on the moral nature of this actor towards which it directs moral judgment and outrage.

2.7 Framing: Frame Dimensions

Next to the above-described basic content of media frames that focus on how a tragic event happened, a frame is composed of additional frame dimensions. These frame dimensions are not integral to the above frames, but optional because the usage of frame dimensions can differ a lot per frame. These frame dimensions constitute the “bits of information” that are made more or less salient in a media frame (Entman 1993, p. 52). The salience of frame dimensions depends on how much attention a frame pays to them: a frame “call[s] attention to particular aspects of the reality described, which logically means that frames simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects (Entman 1993, p. 54). Thus, a frame emphasizes, de-emphasizes, obscures or omits a frame dimension. Furthermore, the salience of frame dimensions not merely impacts the content of a frame, but also measures the political importance of the incident (Entman 1991, p. 9). Tables 3 shows the definitions of the frame dimensions that are used to construct the media frames of a tragic event.

Table 3. Definitions of Frame Dimensions

Frame Dimension	Definition
1. Attribution of agency	This frame dimension differentiates between an active and passive “voice” in the description of agency, i.e. the “causal force [that] created the newsworthy act” (Entman 1991, p. 11-13). This dimension is relevant because different actors were held responsible for the tragic event, which means that some countries or

newspapers had an interest in obscuring the ‘agency’, i.e. the “condition” or “state of acting” (Online Dictionary, 2015). The choice of an active or passive verb can make a big difference: Russia was unwilling to support the UN resolution that guaranteed investigators “full and unrestricted access” to the crash site if the verb ‘shooting down’ was not amended to the milder verb of ‘downing’ (Strange 2014). The passive voice tends to obscure the act by describing it in terms of ‘what happened’. The active voice describes more explicitly ‘who has done it’ and thus emphasizes who “actively caused the incident” (Entman, 1991, p. 11). Thus, the active voice enlarges the frame and the passive voice shrinks it (Entman 1991, p. 9). The active voice evokes questions over agency and responsibility, whereas the passive voice obscures agency.

2. Specification of agent This frame dimension specifies the actor or ‘agent’, i.e. the “person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved” (Online Dictionary 2015). It thus ascribes agency to a certain actor that is held responsible for the tragic event. This dimension is relevant because different countries accused different actors for the tragic event that happened. The specification of the actor thus differs not merely per country and per newspaper, but also within frames. Furthermore, this dimension is

optional because not all media messages mention an actor.

3. Description of victims

This frame dimension codes the manner in which the victims were described. Inspired by Entman's analysis (1991), this dimension distinguishes 'humanizing' and 'neutral' descriptions of the victims. This dimension is relevant because "[t]he contrasting ways that victims were identified encodes and exemplifies the difference in discursive domains [i.e. public discourses]" (Entman 1991, p. 15). Humanizing descriptions make the victims more visible, as they focus "on the humanity that they shared with audience members" (Entman 1991, p. 15). This could be done by "provid[ing] imagined details of what was going on in flight," (Entman 1991, p. 17). This was for example done in the speech of the erstwhile Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans to the UN Security Council: "I [have been] thinking how horrible the final moments of their lives must have been, when they knew the plane was going down ... Did they lock hands with their loved ones, did they hold their children close to their hearts, did they look each other in the eyes, one final time, in a wordless goodbye? We will never know" (Waterfield 2014). Thus, humanizing descriptions "encourag[e] identification and empathy with the victims and moral evaluation of the incident

(Entman 1991, p. 15). Neutral descriptions minimize the role of the victims. Thus, the victims are made “less visible” and evoke no empathy from the side of the reader (Entman 1991, p. 15).

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

As explained in the literature review, this study aimed to measure to what extent media frames drew on public discourses in order to make sense of a tragic event. These public discourses generalize on the moral nature of the actor that was held responsible for the tragic event. These actors were generalized to the governments of the involved countries. This theoretical framework was applied to a content analysis of the coverage of the MH17 incident in Dutch, Russian and U.S. newspapers. These countries were involved in the incident for different reasons and accused different actors. Further, this study aimed to measure how these media frames were built up. Thus, this study aimed to show how a tragic event (the MH17 case) was framed in conflicting ways in Russian and Western media.

The reflection of public discourses in media frames was analyzed with the help of three hypotheses. These hypotheses state the expected linkages between media frames and public discourses in the coverage of the MH17 incident.

H1: The tragedy frame reflects the technical discourse.

H2: The terror frame reflects the Anti-Russian discourse.

H3: The conspiracy frame reflects the Anti-Ukrainian and Anti-American discourses.

These expected linkages between public discourses and media frames in the coverage of the MH17 incident are also shown in figure 1.

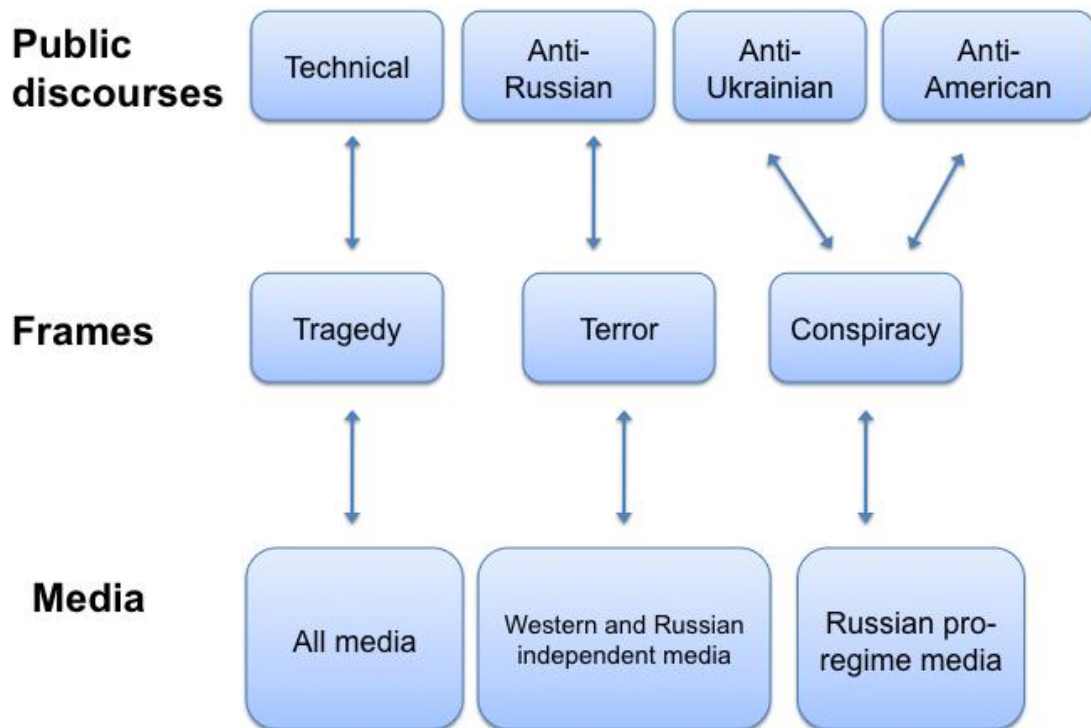


Figure 1. Schematic overview of the expected linkages between public discourses, media frames and media coverage of the MH17 incident.

4. Methodology

4.1 Method: Content Analysis

As stated above, this study aims at measuring how public discourses were reflected in the media frames of the coverage of a tragic event (the MH17 case) and how these frames were built up. This was measured in a content analysis on newspaper articles in Dutch, Russian and U.S. newspapers that mentioned the MH17 incident. Neuendorf defines the “fast-growing” method of content analysis as “a systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics.” (2002, p. 1). In practical terms, this is done through “the systematic assignment of communication content to categorize according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories ...” (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2005, p. 3). This “involves drawing representative samples of content [and] training coders to use category rules developed to measure or reflect differences in content” (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2005, p. 3). Subsequently, “[t]he collected data are ... usually analyzed to describe typical patterns or characteristics or to identify important relationships among the content qualities examined” (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2005, p. 3). As Entman explained, a “content analysis informed by a theory of framing” avoids the oft-made mistake of researchers to “... neglect to measure the salience of elements in the text, and fail to gauge the relationships of the most salient clusters of messages - the frames - to the audience’s schemata” (Entman 1993, p. 57).). Such an analysis “is essential to finding patterns, based on which scholars and researchers can methodically evaluate news media and its use of framing” (Cissel 2012, p. 70).

The patterns that this study focuses on include the relationship between public discourses and media frames, and the frame dimensions that were used to build these frames up. These categories of public discourses, media frames and frame dimensions

were qualitatively defined in the above literature review. This section describes the coding procedures of these three categories of variables: media frames, public discourses and frame dimensions. Also coded were the country and newspaper in which the newspaper article (the unit of analysis) was published.

4.2 Research Design: Selection of Media Sources

As explained before, this analysis involves Dutch, Russian and U.S. media because these countries were involved in the incident for different and sometimes conflicting reasons. In these three countries, media sources were selected that represent an as diverse as possible spectrum of political orientations. This is relevant because the political orientation of a media outlet is reflected in the media frames that it employs.

For the Dutch and U.S. newspapers, political orientation is decided according to their left or right-wing orientation. In case there were more than one newspaper that represent similar political orientations, the one with the highest reach in terms of circulation was chosen. The two U.S. newspapers *The New York Times* and *The Washington Times* were selected because they show a large difference in terms of political orientation. The former is moderate left (Democrat) and the latter is more on the right end (Republican) of the political spectrum (Groseclose & Milyo 2005, p. 1218). Also the two selected Dutch newspapers *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf* represent a wide variance of political orientations. *De Volkskrant* is center-left and publishes high-quality articles for the highly educated (Bakker & Vasterman 2008, p. 147; Rietjens et al. 2013, p. 2). *De Telegraaf* is more right-wing and sensationalist (Beus, Boerefijn & Mak 2004, p. 5; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, p. 104).

For Russian media it is harder to pin down their complex political orientations on a left-right political spectrum. This is because of “Russia’s communist inheritance,

transitional circumstances and current political development” (Evans & Whitefield 1998, p. 1024). A relatively large sample of four Russian newspapers - opposed to two Dutch and two U.S. newspapers that represent the Western media - aims to capture the complexity of political orientations in Russian media. Furthermore, Russian independent newspapers tend to publish smaller amounts of articles with more content and in-depth analyses. This is because of their limited financial means. They are only read by middle class intellectuals in the big cities and have smaller audiences (Lipman & McFaul 2010). Because of the complexity of political orientations and the limited reach of Russian independent media, four Russian newspapers were included in the sample to make it more balanced.

The sample of Russian newspapers distinguished two pro-regime papers (i.e. government-owned or closely affiliated to the government) and two independent newspapers. The political orientation of Russian newspapers is differentiated according to Schenk’s approach in her content analysis of nationalist discourse in the Stavropol conflicts of May and June 2007 (2012): based on the ownership of the newspapers she distinguished federal, corporate, liberal and nationalist newspapers. Assuming that differences in ownership of the newspapers points at different political orientations, the following four Russian newspapers were selected: the federal-owned *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the corporate/oligarch *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* and *Kommersant Daily*, and the liberal *Novaya Gazeta*. The former two are pro-regime newspapers: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is founded and owned by the government of the Russian Federation (East View Information Services as cited in Schenk 2012) and *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* is owned by Putin-loyalist Oleg Rudnov (Adelaja 2007). The editors of *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* are reportedly close to president Putin,

“accompanying him on overseas trips and, in return for such treatment, writing stories favorable to the Kremlin” (Panfilov as cited in Schenk 2012).

Next to the Russian pro-regime newspapers, two independent newspapers were included in the sample: the corporate paper *Kommersant Daily* and the liberal paper *Novaya Gazeta*. *Kommersant Daily* is owned by Alisher Usmanov, who is the head of Gazprominvestholding. He is believed to have bought this newspaper on behalf of Gazprom before the elections of 2007 and 2008. After this, the editors have expressed worries over his influence on the content of the newspaper (FAPMCRF 2007 and Humber as cited in Schenk 2012). *Kommersant Daily* is, however, still considered one of the most independent newspapers in Russia (Medetsky 2008). *Novaya Gazeta* is considered to be the most independent newspaper in Russia (Medetsky 2008). This newspaper regularly voices criticism of the government.

4.3 Research Design: Selection of Newspaper Articles

Newspaper articles were retrieved with the help of the LexisNexis database (for Dutch newspapers) and search option on the website of the newspaper itself (U.S. and Russian newspapers). The selection of articles was limited to the period from July 17th till July 23rd because very large amounts of articles were published on the topic. This period was chosen because there was much uncertainty and moral outrage during the first week after the incident. Therefore, media published large amounts of articles during this first week: over 500 in the sample of this analysis. During this period of uncertainty, lots of conflicting narratives and speculations appeared in the media. At the same time, only very little facts were available, e.g. a resolution of the UN that guaranteed investigators access to the crash site, the bodies of the victims that left Donetsk by train, etc. It is particularly interesting to study the coverage of the first

week after the tragic event because of circumstances of widespread uncertainty and moral outrage. It is important to note, though, that the incident had not a one-week news value. The MH17 incident has dominated the lives of many citizens, particularly Dutch and Malaysian, and the media coverage in the Netherlands and large parts of the world throughout the whole summer of 2014.

To retrieve newspaper articles, the search terms ‘MH17’ and/or any form of the word ‘Malaysian’³ juxtaposed with the words ‘air’, ‘airlines’, ‘Boeing’ and ‘crash’⁴ were used. Not taken into account were overview pages and summaries that contained merely visuals and videos, references to other articles and media, pages with only embedded references to Twitter posts, etc.

4.4 Research Design: Coding Procedures

The unit of analysis was each newspaper article that mentioned ‘MH17’. The variables that were coded include countries, newspapers, media frames, public discourses and the frame dimensions of which media frames were composed. This section describes how these categories were coded. For more specific coding instructions, see the codebook (Appendix I).

4.4.1 Coding Procedures: Newspapers and Countries

For each newspaper article, the newspaper and country in which it was published were coded. Countries included The Netherlands, Russia and the United States. Newspapers included *De Volkskrant*, *De Telegraaf*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Times*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, *Kommersant Daily* and *Novaya Gazeta*.

³ Russian: ‘malajzijskij’.

⁴ Russian: ‘krušenie’.

4.4.2 Coding Procedures: Media Frames

For each newspaper article, the dominant frame was coded (David, Atun, Fille & Monterola 2011, p. 336). The dominant frame was the longest frame in the article that was presented as the most salient narrative. The dominant frame is therefore not necessarily the primary frame, i.e. the frame that was first mentioned in the news article. Also the secondary frame was coded, i.e. a frame that is mentioned only later in the article. In case the secondary frame was longer than the primary frame, the secondary frame was considered more salient and therefore coded as the dominant frame. In case all the frames had the same length, the frame that was first mentioned was coded as the dominant frame.

Firstly, the ‘**tragedy**’ (1) frame was detected through the explicit usage of the words ‘tragedy’, ‘disaster’ or ‘catastrophe’. Also parts that focused merely on ‘what happened’ whereas ignoring the actor, were coded as such. Secondly, the ‘**terror**’ (2) frame was detected through a focus on the actor that has committed the (criminal) act that led to the tragic event. Thirdly, the ‘**conspiracy**’ (3) frame is a counter-frame to the terror frame. It was detected through alternative explanations of how the incident came about, for example the theory that the tragic event was plotted. Fourthly, the remainder category of ‘**other**’ (4) was coded if none of the above frames were detected. This category avoids that one of the three frames would become a too generic or default frame. If one of the three main frames would become a default frame, this would obscure subtleties in the analysis. If the default category was used in a small amount of cases, this means that the three main frames in this analysis make sense in order to analyze the conflicting framings of the MH17 incident.

4.4.3 Coding Procedures: Public Discourses

The public discourse that was reflected in the dominant frame was coded. Public discourses were recognized with the help of the definitions in the literature review.

The ‘**Anti-Russian discourse**’ (1) was recognized through statements that are clearly related to the discourse of Western dislike of Russia’s undemocratic domestic policies and aggressive (neo-)imperialist foreign policy. Anti-Russian discourse was for example detected in references to an address by the Prime Minister of Australia in which he expressed his anger over Russia’s policies: “Abbott warned that ‘the bullying of small countries by big ones, the trampling of justice and decency in the pursuit of national aggrandisement and reckless indifference to human life should have no place in our world’” (Leonard & McTague 2014).

The ‘**Anti-Ukrainian discourse**’ (2) was recognized through references to the purported bad intentions of the Ukrainian government. For example: “The Ukrainian authorities are using forgeries [of evidence] to blame the separatists for the crash of the Malaysian Boeing”.⁵

The ‘**Anti-American discourse**’ (3) was recognized through references to the purported bad intentions of the government of the U.S., for example: “It is argued that US intelligence agencies together with some Ukrainians could have deliberately brought the ill-fated airliner under the attack of a missile in order to afterwards blame the [Pro-Russian] separatists and Russia for everything”.⁶

The ‘**technical discourse**’ (4) was coded as such if it was suggested that the causes of the MH17 incident were purely technical.

⁵ “Власти Украины используют фальшивки, чтобы свалить вину за крушение малайзийского «Боинга» на ополченцев” (Brusnev 2014).

⁶ “... что американские спецслужбы на пару с украинскими могли специально подствести злополучный лайнер под удар ракеты, чтобы потом свалить все на ополченцев и Россию” (Andreyev 2014).

The ‘**default category**’ (5) was coded in case none of the above public discourses was detected in the article.

4.4.4 Coding Procedures: Frame Dimensions

As described in the literature review, the frame dimensions that were coded included the ‘**attribution of agency**’ (1), ‘**specification of the agent**’ (2) and ‘**description of the victims**’ (3). The frame dimensions that were used most often in the dominant frame were coded.

The attribution of agency was coded as ‘**active**’ or ‘**passive**’ descriptions. These were recognized on the basis of the verbs that were used to describe the incident. Firstly, the category of ‘**active**’ framing was coded when verbs were used that described how the incident was “actively caused” (Entman, 1991, p. 11). For example, the active verb ‘to shoot down’ bears a strong implication of human agency (Entman, 1991, p. 9). Also verbs or descriptions that imply agency but did not mention it explicitly were coded as active, e.g. “[t]hose who are guilty for this tragedy will be punished”⁷ and “those responsible for the airplane crash.”⁸ Thirdly, the category of ‘**passive**’ framing was coded if the incident was described in a passive voice, for example ‘[the plane] endured a crash’.⁹ If the dominant frame in a newspaper article contained both active and passive descriptions of the agency, the category with the largest amounts of verbs was chosen. If there were as much active descriptions of agency as passive, the category that was first used in the dominant frame was coded.

The specification of the agent coded the actor that was presented as the main suspect behind the tragic event in the dominant frame. Most of the time there was uncertainty and lack of evidence for stating with certainty who the agent was.

⁷ “... виновные в трагедии будут наказаны” (Diveyeva 2014).

⁸ “... de verantwoordelijken voor de vliegtuigcrash ...” (ANP 2014).

⁹ Russian: ‘потерпел крушение’.

Therefore, any potential agent that was mentioned was coded. Based on a general reading of the coverage of the MH17 incident in Russian and Western newspapers, the following agents were coded because they were mentioned most often in the overall coverage: **pro-Russian separatists**¹⁰ (1), **the Ukrainian army**¹¹ (2) or **Russian volunteers**¹² (3). It was coded as **none** (4) in case the article did not mention any (potential) agent. It was coded as **unknown** (5) if the article mentioned several potential agents and/or stated explicitly that it was (yet) unknown who is to be held responsible.

The way the victims were described was coded as **humanizing** (1) or **neutral terms** (2) or **not mentioned** (3) at all.

Firstly, descriptions of the victims in **humanizing terms** (1) were detected through extensive descriptions with “rich detail” (Entman 1991, p. 17). Humanizing terms often contain adjectives (Entman, 1991, p.17).¹³

Secondly, descriptions of the victims in **neutral terms** (2) were detected through succinct descriptions¹⁴ in “spare and plain language” (Entman, 1991, p. 17).

Thirdly, if the article did not mention the victims at all, it is coded as **not mentioned** (3).

¹⁰ Russian: ‘ополченцы’.

¹¹ Also referred to as Ukrainian soldiers, *siloviki* or the Ukrainian air forces. Russian: ‘Украинские боевики’, ‘силовики’ and ‘Военно-Воздушные Силы Украины (ВВС)’.

¹² Russian: ‘добровольцев’. Also referred to as ‘mercenaries’, i.e. “a soldier who is paid by a foreign country to fight in its army” (Online dictionary 2015).

¹³ For example ‘innocent human beings’, ‘innocent civilians’, ‘unguilty people’, ‘loved ones’, ‘the valuable lives that have been lost’ and ‘numerous human victims’.

¹⁴ Neutral terms referring to the victims include ‘travelers’, ‘civilians’, ‘passengers’, ‘victims’ (Entman 1991, p. 17), ‘those who died’, ‘298 lives’, ‘crew’, ‘people who were on the plane’ (De Volkskrant 17 July 2014), ‘bodies of those who died’ (Shkuratova 2014), and enumerations of the nationalities of the passengers that were aboard.

4.5 Research Design: Qualitative Content Analysis

The quantitative analysis measured the usage of media frames in different countries, the reflection of public discourses in these frames and the dimensions that composed these media frames. The qualitative analysis is based upon notes that were kept while coding the variables. These notes include examples of media frames that reflected public discourses, and examples of frame dimensions that were found in the sample of newspaper articles that was analyzed. These examples were integrated with the discussion of the quantitative results. This is useful, because in some cases the quantitative findings obscure how the media message was actually framed. For example, some newspaper articles referred to a certain media frame or public discourse but disproved this interpretation explicitly. In such cases, a certain media frame was detected and coded as such, but qualitative analysis has to make clear that the media message did not present this frame as the most salient explanation.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Frequency of Media Coverage on the MH17 incident

Table 4 shows the amount of coverage on MH17 by each newspaper in the first week after the incident. This is relevant because frequency “measures [the] political importance” that is addressed to the incident (Entman 1991, p. 9). Table 1 shows the frequency of the coverage on the MH17 incident per newspaper, per day and in total. These findings show dramatic differences between newspapers in the amount of coverage during the first week after the incident: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* published 53 articles on July 18th whereas *The Washington Times* and *Novaya Gazeta* published no articles at all on July 23rd. It is important to take into account that the incident took place on July 17th in the afternoon at about 13.20 GMT. This implies that the coverage on the incident could not yet appear in the morning press of that day. There were thus naturally less articles published because a significant part of the day had already passed. Apart from that, the differences in the amounts of articles that were published by different media are large, but the differences in the amount of articles published per day are small. The frequency of the coverage of the MH17 incident thus shows large differences between newspapers, but not between countries.

Table 4. Frequency of coverage on the MH17 incident per newspaper in the first week after the incident.

Days/newspapers		July 17 th	July 18 th	July 19 th	July 20 th	July 21 st	July 22 nd	July 23 rd	Total
NL	De Volkskrant	14	18	12	6	23	15	15	103
	De Telegraaf	2	8	2	5	3	11	6	37
US	The New York Times	11	23	14	13	18	15	20	114
	The Washington Times	5	8	1	2	6	3	0	25
Russian	Rossiyskaya Gazeta	10	53	21	10	28	22	18	162
	Komsomol'skaya Pravda	9	24	10	13	14	15	5	90
	Kommersant Daily	1	2	2	1	2	3	2	13
	Novaya Gazeta	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	6
Total		52	137	63	50	96	86	66	550

5.2 Usage of Media Frames in Newspapers and Countries

Table 5 shows the usage of media frame per country and per newspaper. Dutch and Russian newspapers employed the tragedy frame most often, whereas the U.S. newspapers employed this frame rarely (14.9% in *The New York Times* 8.0% in *The Washington Times*). The U.S. newspapers employed the terror frame significantly more often than other newspapers (73.7% in *The New York Times* and 84.0% in *The Washington Times*). The conspiracy frame was only employed relatively often by the Russian pro-regime newspapers (20.0% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and 6.2% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*). The Western and Russian independent newspapers employed the conspiracy frame very rarely (1.0% in *De Volkskrant* and 4.0% in *The Washington Times*) or not at all (*De Telegraaf*, *The New York Times*, *Kommersant Daily* and *Novaya Gazeta*). The default category ('none') was detected in low to moderate proportions. It was used more often than the conspiracy frame, but much less than the tragedy and terror frames. This means that the frames in this study were useful to study the conflicting narratives of the MH17 incident.

Also within countries, the usage of frames differed per newspaper. De Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* employed the terror frame almost twice as often (30.7%) as *De Telegraaf* (16.2%). The Russian independent newspaper *Kommersant* employed the terror frame more often than *Novaya Gazeta*. The Russian pro-regime newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* employed the conspiracy frame more often (20.0%) than the government-owned *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (6.2%). These differences between newspapers are not extremely large.

All in all, frame usage differed significantly per country: Dutch and Russian independent newspapers employed the tragedy frame most often, U.S. newspapers employed the terror frame most often and Russian pro-regime media (particularly

Komsomol'skaya Pravda) employed the conspiracy frame most often. The conflicting coverage of the MH17 is particularly reflected in the usage of the terror frame U.S. and newspapers on the one hand, and the usage of the conspiracy frame by the Russian pro-regime newspapers on the other.

Table 5. Distribution of media frames per country and per newspaper.¹⁵

Frames / newspapers	Tragedy	Terror	Conspiracy	None (=default)
The Netherlands <i>De Volkskrant</i>	55 (54.5%)	31 (30.7%)	1 (1.0%)	14 (13.9%)
<i>De Telegraaf</i>	26 (70.3%)	6 (16.2%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (13.5%)
United States <i>The New York Times</i>	17 (14.9%)	84 (73.7%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (9.0%)
<i>The Washington Times</i>	2 (8.0%)	21 (84.0%)	1 (4.0%)	1 (4.0%)
Russia <i>Rossiiskaya Gazeta</i>	87 (53.7%)	22 (13.6%)	10 (6.2%)	43 (26.5%)
<i>Komsomol'skaya Pravda</i>	36 (40.0%)	24 (26.7%)	18 (20.0%)	12 (13.3%)
<i>Kommersant</i>	7 (53.8%)	4 (30.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (15.4%)
<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>	4 (66.7%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (16.7%)
Total	234 (42.7%)	193 (35.2%)	30 (5.5%)	91 (16.6%)

¹⁵ Table 5 reports the distribution of media frames per country and per newspaper in absolute numbers and percentages (of the total amount of usage of the tragedy, terror, conspiracy and none category taken together). The frame that was most often used by a newspaper is marked in bold.

5.3 Linkage of Public Discourses and Media Frames

With the help of three hypotheses, this study measured to what extent media frames reflect public discourses that generalize on the moral nature of the actor. Table 6 shows the reflection of public discourses per media frame. The largest proportion of each media frame did not reflect any of the identified discourses. The public discourses that were identified in this study, though, showed also reasonable

Table 6. Reflection of public discourses in media frames.¹⁶

	Tragedy	Terror	Conspiracy	None (=default)
Public discourse				
<i>Technical</i>	27 (11.3%)	8 (4.0%)	2 (6.3%)	9 (9.3%)
<i>Anti-Russian</i>	17 (7.1%)	61 (30.3%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (1.0%)
<i>Anti-Ukrainian</i>	13 (5.4%)	14 (7.0%)	3 (9.4%)	7 (7.2%)
<i>Anti-American</i>	12 (5.0%)	19 (9.5%)	9 (28.1%)	4 (4.1%)
<i>None</i>	171 (71.3%)	99 (49.3%)	17 (53.1%)	76 (78.4%)

proportions of linkage with each of the media frames.

5.3.1 Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 measured the reflection of the technical discourse in the tragedy frame. As shown in table 6, the technical discourse was most often reflected in the tragedy frame (11.3%). The linkage of the technical discourse with the tragedy frame differs a lot per newspaper, as shown in table 4. Two of the Western newspapers (*De Volkskrant*, *The New York Times*) and the Russian independent newspapers drew most often on the technical discourse when they employed the tragedy frame. Also the Russian pro-regime newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* drew relatively often on the technical discourse when it employed the tragedy frame. This linkage ranges from small proportions (8.9% in *De Volkskrant* and 9.1% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*) to

¹⁶ Table 6 reports the reflection of public discourses in each media frame in absolute numbers and percentages (of the total amount of usage of the tragedy, terror, conspiracy and none category taken together). The media frame in which a public discourse was reflected most often is marked in bold. As the media frames most often reflected none of the identified public discourses, the public discourses that were reflected second most often in the media frames are also marked in bold. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables. The highest amounts in each category are marked in bold.

moderate (23.5% in *The New York Times*) and high (42.9% in *Kommersant Daily* and 75.0% in *Novaya Gazeta*). The only newspapers in which the tragedy frame did not at all draw upon the technical discourse were *The Washington Times* and *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*.

An example of the tragedy frame that drew on a technical discourse included an article in *Novaya Gazeta* on July 18th. It opened with the sentence “Yesterday evening, Prime Minister Mark Rutte, urgently returned from Brussels, announced a day of national mourning.”¹⁷ Later in the article, the technical discourse was mentioned: “Gorter said that it may have been an accident, but not excluded technical failure of the aircraft or an external reason, not specifying what kind of. Communication with the cabin crew was lost two hours after departing at 14:15 CET. At that time, the aircraft flew over Ukraine at about 50 kilometers from the Russian border.”¹⁸

All in all, the results fully support the hypothesis: the technical discourse is reflected in the tragedy frame in small to significant proportions, with large differences between newspapers but not between countries.

¹⁷ “Накануне вечером премьер-министр Марк Рютте, срочно вернувшийся из Брюсселя, объявил национальный траур” (Mineyev 2014).

¹⁸ “Гортер сказал, что это, возможно, несчастный случай, но не исключены техническая неисправность самолета или внешняя причина... Не уточнил, какая. Связь с экипажем была потеряна через два часа после вылета: в 14:15 по средневропейскому времени. На тот момент самолет находился над Украиной примерно в 50 километрах от российской границы” (Mineyev 2014).

Table 7. Linkage of technical discourse with media frames.¹⁹

Frames / newspapers		Tragedy	Terror	Conspiracy
The Netherlands	<i>De Volkskrant</i>	5 (8.9%)	2 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>De Telegraaf</i>	4 (15.4%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
United States	<i>The New York Times</i>	4 (23.5%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>The Washington Times</i>	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Russia	<i>Rossiiskaya Gazeta</i>	8 (9.0%)	1 (4.0%)	1 (9.1%)
	<i>Komsomol'skaya Pravda</i>	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.0%)	1 (5.3%)
	<i>Kommersant Daily</i>	3 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	(0.0%)
	<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>	3 (75.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

5.3.2 Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 measured the reflection of the Anti-Russian discourse in the terror frame. As shown in table 6, the Anti-Russian discourse was most often reflected in the terror frame (30.3%). This was the strongest linkage between a media frame and public discourse of all the variables in this analysis. As shown in table 7, all the Dutch, U.S. and Russian independent newspapers that employed the terror frame, drew on the Anti-Russian discourse in moderate to high proportions. Russian pro-regime newspapers that used the terror frame drew rarely or not at all on the Anti-Russian discourse (8.0% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and 0.0% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*).

¹⁹ Table 7 reports the reflection of the Anti-American discourse in each media frame in absolute numbers and percentages (from the total amount of public discourses that were linked to this frame). The media frames that reflected the technical discourse most often are marked in bold for each newspaper. These data were derived from tables 12, 13 and 14 (Appendix II). See tables 12, 13 and 14 for more information on how these numbers were collected and calculated. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables. The highest amounts in each category are marked in bold.

Table 8. Linkage of Anti-Russian discourse with media frames.²⁰

Frames / newspapers		Tragedy	Terror	Conspiracy
The Netherlands	<i>De Volkskrant</i>	11 (19.6%)	15 (48.4%)	1 (100.0%)
	<i>De Telegraaf</i>	2 (7.7%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
United States	<i>The New York Times</i>	1 (5.9%)	33 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>The Washington Times</i>	0 (0.0%)	8 (38.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Russia	<i>Rossiiskaya Gazeta</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>Komsomol'skaya Pravda</i>	2 (5.1%)	2 (8.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>Kommersant Daily</i>	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>	1 (25.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)

As shown in table 8, there were large differences between newspapers in the extent to which the Anti-American discourse was reflected in the terror frame. In the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* it was much higher (48.8%) than in *De Telegraaf* (16.7%). The U.S. newspapers not merely employed the terror frame very often, but also drew upon the Anti-Russian discourse relatively often (37.5% in *The New York Times* and 38.1% in *The Washington Times*). In the Russian independent newspaper the terror frame reflected the Anti-Russian discourse in moderate (25.0% in *Kommersant*) to very high amounts (100.0% in *Novaya Gazeta*). It is no surprise that Russian pro-regime newspapers rarely (8.0% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*) or not at all (*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*) employed the terror frame that reflected the Anti-Russian discourse.

Qualitative analysis shows that the few cases in which the Russian pro-regime newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* drew on the Anti-Russian discourse, it explicitly disapproved of this framing. This was for example done in an article in which the British prime minister was quoted. He stated that the MH17 incident “is a direct result of Russia’s destabilisation of the situation in an independent country. We have to make absolutely clear that, if this intervention will continue,

²⁰ Table 8 reports the reflection of the Anti-Russian discourse in each media frame in absolute numbers and percentages (from the total amount of usage of all the public discourses in this study). The media frames that reflected the Anti-Russian discourse most often are marked in bold for each newspaper. These data were derived from tables 12, 13 and 14 (Appendix II). See tables 12, 13 and 14 for more information on how these numbers were collected and calculated. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables. The highest amounts in each category are marked in bold.

consequences will follow quickly. It should be made clear that the West will act, wrote Cameron in his column in the *Sunday Times*. At the same time, the British Prime Minister, for some reason, did not have the slightest suspicion about the involvement of the armed forces of Ukraine in the [MH17] incident, which has happened before with a Russian plane.”²¹ Here, the newspaper refers to the shooting down of the Siberian Airlines flight 1812 by the Ukrainian military in May 2004 (Aris 2001). After having mentioned the view of the British government, the article in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* clearly takes a stance against this framing in the British newspaper *Sunday Times*: “The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs earlier expressed dissatisfaction over the fact that some countries allow themselves to make premature conclusions about the causes of the disaster, thus putting pressure on the investigation.”²² Qualitative content analysis has thus shown that in some cases the Russian pro-regime paper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* employed the terror frame that draws upon the Anti-Russian discourse, it did not frame the MH17 incident as such. It is not surprising that the Russian pro-regime media rarely or not employed the terror frame that draws upon the Anti-Russian discourse; this would be against the interests of the Russian government to which these media outlets are closely related.

All in all, the results fully support the hypothesis: the Anti-Russian discourse is reflected in the terror frame. This was often the case in Dutch, U.S. and Russian

²¹ “... это прямой результат дестабилизации Россией ситуации в независимой стране. Мы должны абсолютно четко дать понять, что если это вмешательство будет продолжаться, то последствия не заставят себя долго ждать. Должно быть понятно, что Запад будет действовать, - написал Кэмерон в своей колонке в газете *Sunday Times*. При этом ни малейших подозрений насчет причастности к инциденту вооруженных сил Украины, уже сбивавших в прошлом российский пассажирский самолет у британского премьера отчего-то не возникло” (Gorelova & Novikova 2014).

²² “МИД России ранее выразил недовольство по поводу того, что некоторые страны позволяют себе делать преждевременные выводы о причинах катастрофы, тем самым оказывая давление на ход расследования” (Gorelova & Novikova 2014).

independent media, and rarely or not in Russian pro-regime media. The results thus show a conflict between the Western and Russian independent media on the one hand and the Russian pro-regime media on the other: Western and Russian independent media drew often upon an Anti-Russian discourse to generalize on the moral nature of the actor that they hold responsible, whereas Russian pro-regime media rarely used this framing or disapproved of it.

5.3.3 Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 measured the reflection of the Anti-Ukrainian and Anti-American discourses in the conspiracy frame. Table 5 shows that the Anti-Ukrainian discourse was not often employed and that it was overall most often reflected in the conspiracy frame (9.4%). The Anti-American discourse was of all the public discourses in this analysis most often reflected in the conspiracy frame (28.1%).

As shown in tables 6 and 7, the reflection of the Anti-Ukrainian and Anti-American discourses in the conspiracy frame shows large differences between countries. The Anti-Ukrainian discourse was reflected in the conspiracy frame in low to moderate proportions in the Russian pro-regime newspapers (18.2% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and 5.3% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*). Also the Anti-American discourse was reflected in low to high proportions in the Russian pro-regime newspapers (9.1% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and 42.1% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*). The Anti-Ukrainian and Anti-American discourses were never reflected in the conspiracy frame in Dutch, U.S. and Russian independent newspapers.

The usage of the conspiracy frame that reflected the Anti-Ukrainian or Anti-American discourse differed a lot per newspaper. Whereas *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* drew more often on the Anti-Ukrainian discourse (18.2%), *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* drew more often on the Anti-American discourse (42.1%). The reason for this might be that

Rossiyskaya Gazeta is government-owned and does not want to express Anti-Americanism as if it were a government stance. An example of Anti-Ukrainian discourse in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* includes an article in which a Ukrainian conspiracy theory was contemptuously assessed. The article describes how Ukrainians claim that they overheard Cossacks discussing plans to bring down the plane: “After the version with the air traffic controller in Luhansk by ‘experts’ from Kiev, anything could be expected. It is only unclear why exactly the Cossacks are so disturbing – this reminds of the reaction of Europe in 1812-1813, but very strange to hear this from representatives of a country that is nowadays even associated with the EU, but still considering itself the successor of the Zaporizhian Sich [i.e. a union of the Cossacks in the 16th till 18th century].”²³ Also *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* drew on the Anti-Ukrainian discourse, for example by starting an article with the sentence “The Ukrainian authorities are using forgeries to blame the [pro-Russian] separatists for the collapse of the Malaysian ‘Boeing’.”²⁴ In another news article, the same paper further elaborates on the likeliness that the Ukrainian military was the actor behind the MH17 incident: “... taking into account that the Ukrainian propaganda constantly stirred up the flames of an imminent Russian ‘invasion’ by land or by air, it can not be excluded that Ukrainian PVO’ers [i.e. air forces] by accident fired at the Malaysian ‘Boeing’, taking its spot on the radar screen for a Russian plane.”²⁵

²³ “После версии с кондиционером в Луганске от киевских ‘специалистов’ можно ожидать чего угодно. Неясно лишь, почему так страшны именно казаки - это напоминает реакцию Европы в 1812-1813 годах, но крайне странно слышать от представителей страны, хоть и ассоциированной сегодня с Евросоюзом, но все же считавшей себя наследницей Запорожской сечи” (Mel’nikov 2014).

²⁴ “Власти Украины используют фальшивки, чтобы свалить вину за крушение малайзийского «Боинга» на ополченцев” (Brusnev 2014).

²⁵ “А если учитывать, что украинская пропаганда постоянно нагнетала страсти о

Komsomol'skaya Pravda drew most often upon the Anti-American discourse. One article stated for example that “[t]he head of the US Center for Citizen Initiatives thinks that the United States bring misfortune to the ordinary people wherever they are defending democracy ...”²⁶ Another articles shows an interview with a Russian aviation expert. On the question why Obama and Kerry keep stating that the missile that downed MH17 was shot from separatist controlled territory, he answered: “they are doing this in order to put psychological pressure on the members of the investigation commission.”²⁷

Western and Russian independent newspapers employed the conspiracy frame only very rarely, but most often not at all. Only *De Volkskrant* and *The Washington Times* both used it once. The article in *De Volkskrant* only enumerates conspiracy theories that appeared in Russian media. It further suggests that these theories are made up, unlikely and probably false. They are called “wild theories” (Lanting 2014): “[p]articularly Russian twitterers are pulling out all stops in order to exculpate the pro-Russian separatists.”²⁸ If the conspiracy frame is used in Western media, it is usually framed as Russian delusions to free the pro-Russian separatists backed by Russia from blame.

The Anti-Ukrainian discourse appeared once in *The Washington Times*, though qualitative analysis shows that the newspaper did not frame the incident as such. It merely described the Russian perspective on the incident through Putin’s reaction to the circumstances at the crash site and his explanation of the incident: “Mr.

скором «вторжении» России по суше и воздуху, то нельзя исключать, что украинские пэвэошники по ошибке пальнули по малайзийскому «Боингу», приняв его отметку на экране радара за российский самолет” (Baranets 2014).

²⁶ “Руководитель американского Центра гражданских инициатив считает, что США приносят несчастье простым людям всюду, где они защищают демократию...” (Tennison 2014).

²⁷ “... они делают это для того, чтобы оказывать психологическое давление на участников комиссии по расследованию” (Baranets 2014).

²⁸ “Vooral Russische twitteraars en sites halen alles uit de kast om de pro-Russische rebellen vrij te pleiten” (Lanting 2014).

Putin asserted that Ukrainian troops attacked separatist units near Donetsk almost at the same time the pro-Russia forces were handing over the black boxes from the MH17 crash to international investigators. ‘Tanks broke through to the railway station,’ Mr. Putin said at a Russian Security Council session Tuesday. ‘It was shelled. The international experts there could not even look out of the windows’” (Boyer 2014).

All in all the results partly support the hypothesis that the Anti-Ukrainian and Anti-American discourses were reflected in the conspiracy frame: this was only the case in Russian pro-regime newspapers. The results thus show how the coverage in Russian and Western newspapers conflicted: the Russian pro-regime newspapers on the one hand employed the conspiracy frame more often than Western and Russian independent newspapers on the other. Furthermore, the Russian pro-regime newspapers drew significantly more often on the Anti-Ukrainian and Anti-Russian discourse. Western media rarely or not drew on the Anti-Ukrainian or Anti-Russian discourse.

Table 9. Linkage of Anti-Ukrainian discourse with media frames.²⁹

Frames / newspapers	Tragedy	Terror	Conspiracy
The Netherlands <i>De Volkskrant</i>	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Netherlands <i>De Telegraaf</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
United States <i>The New York Times</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
United States <i>The Washington Times</i>	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Russia <i>Rossiiskaya Gazeta</i>	7 (7.9%)	3 (12.0%)	2 (18.2%)

²⁹ Table 9 reports the reflection of the Anti-Ukrainian discourse in each media frame in absolute numbers and percentages (from the total amount of usage of all the public discourses in this study). The media frames that reflected the Anti-Ukrainian discourse most often are marked in bold for each newspaper. See tables 12, 13 and 14 (Appendix II) for more information on how these numbers were collected and calculated. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables. The highest amounts in each category are marked in bold.

<i>Komsomol'skaya Pravda</i>	5 (12.8%)	6 (24.0%)	1 (5.3%)
<i>Kommersant</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Table 10. Linkage of Anti-American discourse with media frames.³⁰

Frames / newspapers		Tragedy	Terror	Conspiracy
The	<i>De Volkskrant</i>	1 (1.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Netherlands	<i>De Telegraaf</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
United States	<i>The New York Times</i>	0 (0.0%)	4 (4.5%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>The Washington Times</i>	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Russia	<i>Rossiiskaya Gazeta</i>	5 (5.6%)	8 (32.0%)	1 (9.1%)
	<i>Komsomol'skaya Pravda</i>	6 (15.4%)	6 (24.0%)	8 (42.1%)
	<i>Kommersant</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	<i>Novaya Gazeta</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

5.4 Frame constructions

The second research question measured how the media frames of the coverage of the MH17 incident in Dutch, U.S. and Russian newspapers were built up. Frame constructions rarely differed per country or newspaper, as clear from tables 12, 13 and 14 (Appendix II). The only frame dimension that differed a lot per newspaper is the specification of agency. The final frame constructions are therefore based on the overall results of the distribution of frame dimensions and did not take into account the small differences in frame composition between countries and newspapers. Table 11 and figure 2 show the frame dimensions per frame. The following descriptions of frame constructions are based on the frame dimensions that were used relatively most often in each frame. The frame compositions of the three main frames of the MH17 incident are also shown in figure 2.

³⁰ Table 10 reports the reflection of the Anti-American discourse in each media frame in absolute numbers and percentages (from the total amount of usage of all the public discourses in this study). The media frames that reflected the Anti-American discourse most often are marked in bold for each newspaper. See tables 12, 13 and 14 (Appendix II) for more information on how these numbers were collected and calculated. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables. The highest amounts in each category are marked in bold.

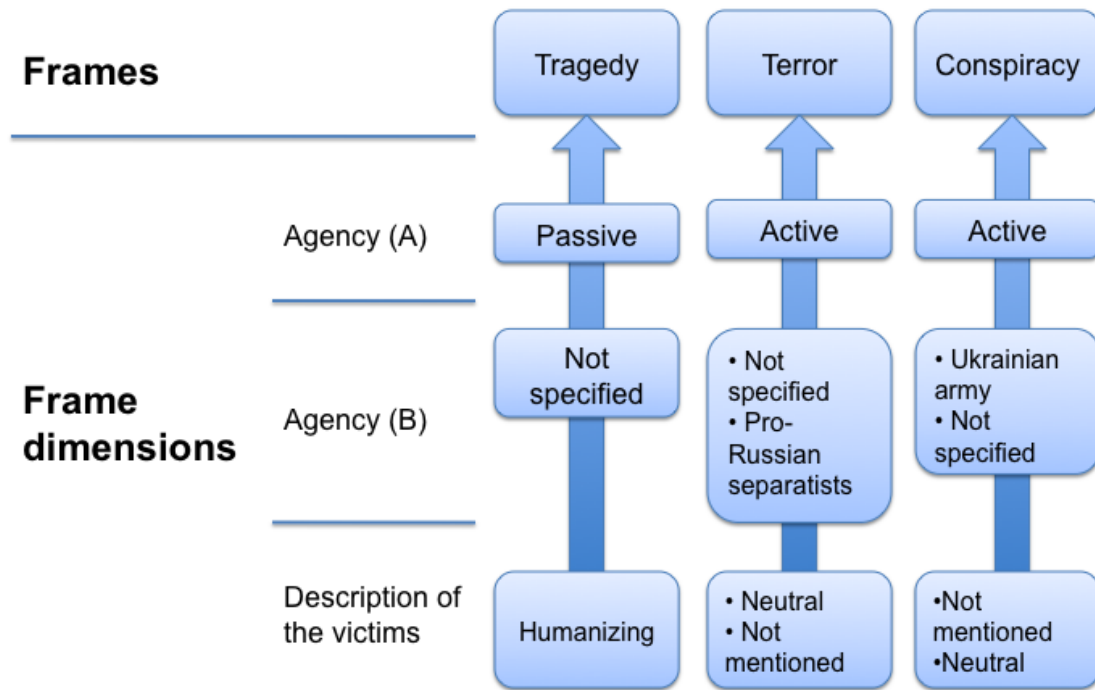


Figure 2. Schematic overview of the frame dimensions that compose the three main media frames.

Table 11. Overview of the distribution of frame dimensions per frame category.³¹

	Tragedy	Terror	Conspiracy	None (=default)
Agency (A)				
- Active	77 (32.8%)	187 (95.4%)	22 (73.3%)	12 (13.2%)
- Passive	158 (67.2%)	9 (4.6%)	8 (26.7%)	79 (86.8%)
Agency (B)				
- Pro-Russian separatists	22 (9.2%)	80 (37.2%)	3 (9.7%)	2 (2.1%)
- Ukrainian army	13 (5.4%)	30 (14.0%)	16 (51.6%)	4 (4.3%)
- Russians	0 (0.0%)	15 (7.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)
- Not mentioned	200 (83.7%)	86 (40.0%)	11 (35.5%)	86 (91.5%)
- Unknown	4 (1.7%)	4 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
- Other	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.2%)	1 (1.1%)
Victims				
- Humanizing	51 (21.8%)	25 (13%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (14.3%)
- Neutral	140 (59.8%)	102 (52.8%)	13 (43.3%)	56 (61.5%)
- Not mentioned	43 (18.4%)	66 (34.2%)	17 (56.7%)	22 (24.2%)

Firstly, in the **tragedy frame (a)** the attribution of agency was described in a passive voice (67.2%). The agent was not specified in most cases (83.7%). This is logical because this frame does not focus on agency. The victims were described in humanizing terms (59.8%).

³¹ Table 11 reports the counts and percentages of each frame dimension in each frame. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables. The highest amounts in each category are marked in bold.

Secondly, in the **terror frame (b)** the attribution of agency was described in an active voice (95.4%). The victims were described in neutral terms (52.8%) or not mentioned at all (34.2%). Western and Russian independent media most often ascribed agency to the Pro-Russian separatists (53.1% in *De Volkskrant*, 42.9% in *De Telegraaf*, 50.0% in *The Washington Times*, 80.0% in *Kommersant Daily* and 100.0% in *Novaya Gazeta*). Russian pro-regime media most often ascribed agency to the Ukrainian army (45.2% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*). One U.S. and one Russian pro-regime newspaper often not mentioned an agent at all (55.7% in *The New York Times* and 37.0% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*). Probably, *Rossisyakaya Gazeta* is more careful with the identification of the actor because this newspaper is government-owned.

It is surprising that Russian pro-regime newspapers in some cases mentioned Pro-Russian separatists as the actor (11.1% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and 25.8% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, as shown in table 13). This would be against the interests of the Russian government to which they are closely related. Qualitative analysis shows that in some cases the actor was coded as Pro-Russian separatists, but that the newspaper merely mentioned this actor in order to negate this explanation. For example in an article in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* on July 20th it is explained that the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott stated that Moscow is to be held responsible for the incident. After that, it is described how the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Vitali Yarema, has stated that “the separatists of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics do not have Ukrainian missile systems [of the type] ‘BUK’ and ‘S-300’”³². Thus, the ascription of agency to Pro-Russian separatists was negated. In another article in

³² “У ополченцев самопровозглашенных Донецкой и Луганской народных республик нет украинских ракетных комплексов «Бук» и С-300” (Bas 2014).

Komsomol'skaya Pravda it is argued that the ascription of agency to Russian volunteers is an “idiotic (i.e. Poroshenkian) version”³³ of the incident that should not be taken seriously, as well as headlines in English newspapers such as ‘Putin killed 300 people’³⁴. Also *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* disapproved the narratives of the Western media: “What could the U.S. media not pay attention to, which even before the address of the President of the USA with reference to local experts, started voicing assumptions that the Russian military may have been involved in the collapse of the Malaysian Boeing.”³⁵

Thirdly, in the **conspiracy frame (c)** the attribution of agency was described in an active voice (73.3%). Western media ascribed agency most often to Pro-Russian separatists (100.0% in *De Volkskrant* and 50.0% in *The Washington Times*). The U.S. newspaper *The Washington Times* ascribed agency once to the Ukrainian army. Russian pro-regime media accused the Ukrainian army more often (50.0% in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and 55.6% in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*). The victims were described in neutral terms (61.5%) or not mentioned at all (24.2%). Neutral descriptions of the victims were used a lot by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. This newspaper often included a few neutral, summarizing sentences at the end of each article: “[w]e recall that the airliner of ‘Malaysian airlines’ flying from Amsterdam fell over the

³³ “В противоположном лагере вижу поэта Бахыта Кенжеева, который пишет, что никаких идиотических (т. е. не порошковских) версий он воспринимать всерьёз не будет ...” (Prilepin 2014).

³⁴ “... сегодня сразу десять журналов только в Англии вышло с заголовками “Путин убил триста человек...” - это ж цивилизация, свобода, презумпция невиновности и всё, что мы так любим; это тебе не фейки по Первому каналу” (Prilepin 2014).

³⁵ “На что не могли не обратить внимание американские СМИ, которые еще до речи президента США со ссылкой на местных экспертов начали озвучивать предположения о том, что к гибели малазийского Boeing, возможно, причастны российские военные” (Fedyakina 2014).

territory of the Donetsk region, carrying 280 passengers and 15 crew members. None of those aboard survived.”³⁶

The main conflict between Russian and Western media was about the actor of the MH17 incident. In both the terror frame and the conspiracy frame, Western and Russian independent media ascribed agency more often to Pro-Russian separatists or Russian soldiers, whereas Russian pro-regime media ascribed agency more often to the Ukrainian military.

³⁶ “Напомним, что летевший из Амстердама лайнер ‘Малайзийских авиалиний’ упал на территории Донецкой области, имея на борту 280 пассажиров и 15 членов экипажа. Никто из бывших на борту людей не выжил” (Rossiyskaya Gazeta 17 July 2014).

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the conflicting narratives in the coverage of the MH17 incident in Russian and Western media. To that end, a content analysis was conducted on newspaper articles in Dutch, Russian and U.S. newspapers. This study aimed to measure to what extent the media frames in these three countries drew on public discourses, and how these media frame were built up.

Firstly, this study has shown that media in Russia and the West employed conflicting frames in the coverage of the same tragic event: U.S. media employed the terror most often whereas Russian pro-regime media employed the counterframe of conspiracy relatively most often. All the countries in the analysis employed the tragedy frame a lot, though the U.S. employed it significantly less often. Secondly, the analysis supported the hypotheses which expected that the media frames of the MH17 incident drew on longstanding public discourses that generalize on the moral nature of the actor (i.e. the government of one of the involved countries). The first hypothesis, which states that the tragedy frame reflects the technical discourse, was fully supported: this was the case for all the countries and newspapers in the sample. The second hypothesis, which states that the terror frame reflects the Anti-Russian discourse more often, was fully supported. This was particularly the case in Western and Russian independent newspapers and less often in Russian pro-regime media. The third hypothesis, which states that the conspiracy frame reflects the Anti-Ukrainian and Anti-American discourses more often, was partly supported by the results: this was only the case in Russian pro-regime media. Thirdly, it was shown that the media frames of the MH17 incident were built up as follows: the tragedy frame often described the event in a passive voice and contained humanizing descriptions of

the victims. The terror and conspiracy frames described the event in an active voice and focused on the actor. Fourthly, the qualitative analysis has shown that media sometimes described media frames that were used in other countries in order to disprove them. Thus, Western media often refuted the narratives in Russian pro-regime media. Likewise, Russian pro-regime media refuted the narratives that were shown in Western media. All in all, these results have shown that Western and Russian independent media on the one hand, and Russian pro-regime media on the other, framed the MH17 incident in different and conflicting ways. This conflict was reflected in the usage of media frames, the public discourses that these frames drew upon, and the actors that were identified in these frames.

Though the findings of this study have shown that public discourses and media frames may be linked, a theoretical linkage as such is understudied. Regarding the research design of this analysis, it has to be taken into account that this analysis focused only on a small period. There were no data of the total amount of newspaper articles that these media published. These data would enable to say more about the importance these media addressed to the incident and the strategy they might have followed in their coverage of the incident. Further, this research was limited to newspaper coverage. Future research may take into account other influential media as well, in particular television. Lastly, a tragic event such as the MH17 incident is a “complicated event... open to varying interpretations” (Entman 1991, p. 9). Therefore, different interpretations, particularly regarding the technical details of the event, were to a certain extent inevitable.

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8. Appendix I: Codebook

The following variables have been coded and collected in an excel matrix as follows.

8.1 Formal Characteristics

The unit of analysis is each newspaper article that mentioned MH17. The formal characteristics include an identification code for each newspaper article, the date of publication, the header or title and the hyperlink through which the article could be retrieved.

Identification code of news article. In the format year/month/day/abbreviation of newspaper/number of article (e.g. 2015/03/15/VK/1).

Date. The date on which the article was published. In the following format: DD-MM-YYYY.

Headline. The headline of the article.

URL. Hyperlink through which the online article could be retrieved.

8.2 Variables

Country. Choose one of the following countries.

1 = The Netherlands;

2 = United States;

3 = Russia.

Newspaper. Choose one of the following newspapers names.

- 1 = De Volkskrant;
- 2 = De Telegraaf;
- 3 = The New York Times;
- 4 = The Washington Times;
- 5 = Rossiyskaya gazeta;
- 6 = Komsomol'skaya Pravda;
- 7 = Kommersant;
- 8 = Novaya gazeta.

Dominant frame. Choose the frame that was the longest (in terms of length) and thus presented as the most salient.

- 1 = Tragedy³⁷;
- 2 = Terror³⁸;
- 3 = Conspiracy;³⁹
- 4 = Other.⁴⁰

Secondary frames. Choose the other frames that were mentioned in the article.

- 1 = Tragedy;
- 2 = Terror;
- 3 = Conspiracy.

³⁷ Coded as such if the incident is explicitly referred to as a 'tragedy', 'disaster' or 'catastrophe'.

³⁸ Coded as such if the shooting down of the plane, either deliberately or accidentally, is presented as the main reason for the taking place of the incident. This frame could be identified through active framing of the attribution of agency

³⁹ Coded as such if conspiracy theories or alternative explanations (other than the narrative that the plane was shot down from the conflict zone in the Donbass region) are offered.

⁴⁰ Coded as such none if the identified frames is detected.

Public discourse. Choose the public discourse that is reflected in the primary frame.

- 1 = Anti-Russian discourse;
- 2 = Anti-American discourse;
- 3 = Anti-Ukrainian discourse;
- 4 = Technical discourse
- 5 = None⁴¹.

Attribution of agency. Is agency described in active or passive terms? In case the article contains both active and passive framing, the primary one (mentioned first) was chosen.

- 1 = Active;⁴²
- 2 = Passive.⁴³

Specificatoin of agency. Specification of the agent. More than one agent may be coded.

- 1 = Pro-Russian separatists;
- 2 = Ukrainian army;⁴⁴
- 3 = Russian soldiers;⁴⁵
- 4 = None;⁴⁶

⁴¹ None of the identified public discourses was referred to.

⁴² Actively: ‘who did wrong’, verbs such as ‘shot down’, ‘downed’, ‘was brought down’ or labels such as ‘attack’. Or verbs and descriptions that imply agency, such as “those who are guilty for this tragedy will be punished” (Diveyeva 2014).

⁴³ Passively: passive voice, focusing on ‘what went wrong’ through verbs such as ‘crashed’, ‘fell out of the sky’, ‘went down’, ‘was lost’, ‘crashed’⁴³, ‘fell [out of the sky]’⁴³, ‘endured a crash’⁴³, ‘was lost’, ‘went down’, ‘occurence’⁴³, ‘went missing’⁴³.

⁴⁴ This category includes descriptions such as ‘Ukrainian fighters’, Ukrainian VVS [= air forces]’, ‘Ukrainian *siloviki*’, etc.

⁴⁵ Also referred to as ‘volunteers’.

5 = Unknown.⁴⁷

Identification with the victims. In what kind of terms are they described?

1 = Humanizing terms⁴⁸;

2 = Neutral terms⁴⁹;

3 = Not mentioned at all.

⁴⁶ The article does not specify a (potential) agent.

⁴⁷ Different potential agents are mentioned, but the article explicitly states that it is not clear which of the mentioned agent has (most likely) done it.

⁴⁸ Coverage contains “rich detail” (Entman, 1991, p. 17) as to evoke empathy and identification with the victims, mostly accomplished through the usage of adjectives, e.g. ‘loved ones’, ‘innocent human beings’, ‘innocent civilians’, ‘unguilty people’ (Entman, 1991, p. 17).

⁴⁹ Victims are made “less visible” in the coverage, discouraging empathy, which is accomplished through references to the victims such as ‘passengers’, ‘victims’, ‘298 lives’, ‘the cabin crew’, ‘people who were on the plane’, etc.

9. Appendix II: Tables of frame construction per newspaper

Tabel 12. Distribution of frame dimensions within tragedy frame.⁵⁰

Country	Newspaper	Agency								Victims			Public discourses				None
		Active	Passive	Pro-Russian separatists	Ukrainian army	Russians	Not mentioned	Unknown	Other	Humanizing	Neutral	Not mentioned	Technical	Anti-Russian	Anti-Ukrainian	Anti-American	
NL	De Volkskrant	22 (40.0%)	33 (60.0%)	9 (15.8%)	1 (1.8%)	2 (3.5%)	44 (77.2%)	1 (1.8%)	0 (0.0%)	17 (30.9%)	28 (50.9%)	10 (18.2%)	5 (8.9%)	11 (19.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.8%)	39 (69.6%)
	De Telegraaf	5 (19.2%)	21 (80.0%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	25 (96.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (30.8%)	15 (57.7%)	3 (11.5%)	4 (15.4%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (76.9%)
US	The New York Times	13 (76.5%)	4 (23.5%)	4 (23.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (76.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (35.3%)	11 (64.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (23.5%)	1 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (70.6%)
	The Washington Times	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)
Russian	Rossiyskaya Gazeta	18 (20.5%)	70 (79.5%)	2 (20.0%)	7 (70.0%)	1 (1.0%)	77 (98.7%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (6.9%)	59 (67.8%)	22 (25.3%)	8 (9.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (7.9%)	5 (5.6%)	69 (77.5%)
	Komsomol'skaya Pravda	15(41.7%)	21 (58.3%)	6 (50.0%)	5 (41.7%)	1 (8.3%)	26 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (27.8%)	18 (50.0%)	8 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.1%)	5 (12.8%)	6 (15.4%)	26 (66.7%)
	Kommersant	1 (14.3%)	6 (85.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (57.1%)
	Novaya Gazeta	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (25.0%)	3 (75.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (75.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

⁵⁰ Table 12 reports the reflection of public discourses and the use of the frame dimensions 'attribution of agency', 'specification of agency' and 'descriptions of the victims' in the tragedy frame per country and per newspaper. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables.

Table 13. Distribution of framing dimensions within terror frame.⁵¹

Dimensions / newspapers		Agency		Specification of agency					Victims			Public discourse					
		Active	Passive	Pro-Russian separatists	Ukrainian army	Russians	Not mentioned	Unknown	Other	Humanizing	Neutral	Not mentioned	Technical	Anti-Russian	Anti-Ukrainian	Anti-American	None
NL	De Volkskrant	30 (96.8%)	1 (3.2%)	17 (53.1%)	1 (3.1%)	2 (6.3%)	12 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (22.6%)	8 (25.8%)	16 (51.6%)	2 (6.5%)	15 (48.4%)	2 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (38.7%)
	De Telegraaf	6 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (42.9%)	1 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (42.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (66.7%)
US	The New York Times	84 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	32 (36.4%)	4 (4.5%)	2 (2.3%)	49 (55.7%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (11.9%)	54 (64.3%)	20 (23.8%)	1 (1.1%)	33 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (4.5%)	50 (56.8%)
	The Washington Times	21 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (50.0%)	1 (4.2%)	2 (8.3%)	7 (29.2%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (23.8%)	11 (52.4%)	5 (23.8%)	1 (4.8%)	8 (38.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	11 (52.4%)
Russia	Rossiyskaya Gazeta	19 (82.6%)	4 (17.4%)	3 (11.1%)	8 (29.6%)	5 (18.5%)	10 (37.0%)	1 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.5%)	11 (50.0%)	10 (45.5%)	1 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (12.0%)	8 (32.0%)	13 (52.0%)
	Komsomol'skaya Pravda	22 (84.6%)	4 (15.4%)	8 (25.8%)	14 (45.2%)	4 (12.9%)	5 (16.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.2%)	14 (58.3%)	9 (37.5%)	2 (8.0%)	2 (8.0%)	6 (24.0%)	6 (24.0%)	9 (36.0%)
	Kommersant	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (80.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	1 (25.0%)	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (75.0%)
	Novaya Gazeta	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

⁵¹ Table 13 reports the reflection of public discourses and the use of the frame dimensions 'attribution of agency', 'specification of agency' and 'descriptions of the victims' in the terror frame per country and per newspaper. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables.

Table 14. Distribution of framing dimensions within conspiracy frame.⁵²

Dimensions / newspapers		Agency		Specification of Agency						Victims			Public discourse				
		Active	Passive	Pro-Russian separatists	Ukrainian army	Russians	Not mentioned	Unknown	Other	Humanizing	Neutral	Not mentioned	Technical	Anti-Russian	Anti-Ukrainian	Anti-American	None
NL	De Volkskrant	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	
	De Telegraaf	[REDACTED]															
US	The New York Times	[REDACTED]															
	The Washington Times	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)
Russia	Rossiyskaya Gazeta	7 (70.0%)	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	5 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (50.0%)	5 (50.0%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	7 (63.6%)
	Komsomol'skaya Pravda	13 (72.2%)	5 (27.8%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (55.6%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (38.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.6%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (38.9%)	11 (61.1%)	1 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.3%)	8 (42.1%)	9 (47.4%)
	Kommersant	[REDACTED]															
	Novaya Gazeta	[REDACTED]															

⁵² Table 14 reports the reflection of public discourses and the use of the frame dimensions 'attribution of agency', 'specification of agency' and 'descriptions of the victims' in the conspiracy frame per country and per newspaper. The absolute numbers constitute the amount of times the variable was coded in the quantitative analysis. The percentages are calculated with the help of the total amount of codings within each category of variables.