

Episodic and thematic framing of the refugee crisis in 2015

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Abstract

This research focuses on two types of framing in three Dutch newspapers of the refugee crisis in 2015. Next to the focus on framing there will also be a focus on the tone of the articles within a certain frame. First the episodic frame and thematic frame will be explained and how these frames can be used to portray the refugee crisis. Furthermore, it will be specified how the tone of an article can be identified. Afterwards the Dutch media system and the case of the refugee crisis will be described. Second, the newspapers de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad and de Telegraaf are used to study framing and the differences expected between these newspapers will be stated. Third, through a content analysis 240 articles were analysed. From the data will be shown that the thematic frame was used more in the three newspapers than the episodic frame. Also there was a difference in tone of the articles for the three newspapers. The popular newspaper de Telegraaf framed the refugee crisis more in a negative tone in comparison to de Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad. In conclusion, it is suggested that there was no significant difference in framing of the refugee crisis in 2015 between the three Dutch newspapers.

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Introduction

“In Geldermalsen the council room was evacuated due to a violent protest against the opening of a centre for asylum seekers. Dozens of rioters had broken through the gates outside the town hall. They screamed slogans and threw fireworks, stones and cans at the police. The meeting will not be resumed tonight. On the square before the town hall is still a grim atmosphere” (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting, 2015).

This quote was part of a news article from the Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS) in 2015. The way this issue is presented has to do with framing. Through framing information is packaged in a certain way for the public the media aims to inform about an issue (Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 56). The media cannot just reflect reality, they rather filter and shape it. Media coverage on an issue can therefore not really be objective. Through this framing process many different stories can be told about a same event or issue (Gamson, 1989: 158). According to Hallahan (1999) there are at least seven models of framing that can be used to study issues in public relations: framing of situations, choices, attributes, issues, actions, news and responsibility. The focus in this research is on the model of responsibility that is established by episodic and thematic drawn from the research of Iyengar (1991). Framing can either take the form of an episodic frame or a thematic frame (Iyengar and Simon, 1993: 369). An episodic frame is identified when an article portrays public issues as a specific event. For example the quote above is a specific event and therefore has an episodic frame. On the other hand, a thematic frame is identified when an article portrays public issues in a general context (Iyengar and Simon, 1993: 369). The difference of these two frames is with their emphasis on a different aspect of an issue. The episodic frame is more specific and the thematic frame more general. According to Iyengar and Simon (1993: 379) these frames matter politically because the way an issue is framed by the newspapers can have influence on the attribution of responsibility for the issue. This attribution of responsibility can eventually influence public opinion and also support for policy that addresses an issue. Therefore it is important to look at these kinds of framing because of their political implications. Episodic and thematic framing can have influence on public opinion and public opinion can have influence on policy-making processes. Episodic frames can lead to a decline in support for government programs that should address an issue and thematic frames can lead to greater support for government programs to solve an issue (Gross, 2008: 173).

Much research has been done on framing issues in America (e.g. Iyengar, 1990, 1991; Barnes, 2008). Therefore this research will focus on a case in the Netherlands and how the episodic and thematic frames apply in Dutch newspapers. To study the difference in framing the case of the refugee crisis in 2015 will be used. The Netherlands has a history with an immigration debate, which makes the refugee crisis together with the new influx of immigrants an interesting case to study the framing of the issue in the Dutch media. The whole concept of multiculturalism and immigration in the Netherlands remains a highly important topic. Many municipalities had to offer shelter to deal with the amount of refugees, which sometimes encountered resistance from Dutch citizens as shown from the quote above (NOS, 2016). In November 2015, Eurobarometer research published that 56 per cent of the Dutch population thought immigration was the most important issue facing the Netherlands (European Commission, 2015).

The relevance of this research is to see which frames are used in the Dutch media on a humanitarian crisis like the refugee crisis. Next to the frames possible influence on public opinion and support for government policy, the use of these frames can also lead to the development of a negative image of refugees as helpless victims dependent on the state. People have a need to attribute responsibility and this has lead “to an emphasis on victimization in modern society” (Hallahan, 1999: 221). This can be specifically strong within a negative tone in an article. Therefore there will also be a focus on the tone of the article. The image of helpless victims can lead to negative associations with the word refugee. A potential danger can therefore be that the incoming refugees will be burden on the Dutch society (Ghorashi, 2005: 185). Because war refugees from Syria have been subject to violence it can be easy for the media to develop the image of helpless victims (Ghorashi, 2005: 186). The creation of this image can lead to changes in public opinion that could influence refugee policies.

To study the difference in framing three national Dutch newspapers were chosen to represent the media in this research. Through a content analysis of these newspapers the case of the refugee crisis will be studied. These newspapers will be *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Telegraaf*. These newspapers were chosen because they have the highest circulation in the Netherlands and because of an expected difference in reporting about an issue (Nationaal Onderzoek Multimedia, 2017). The newspapers *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant* will represent the quality newspapers and *de Telegraaf* will represent a popular newspaper (Bakker and Scholten, 1997: 14). There is an expectation that a popular newspaper might use more episodic frames and quality newspapers more thematic frames. The

distinction for these newspapers is therefore within the idea that there is an expected difference in coverage of the refugee crisis. Furthermore this is relevant because there is also a difference expected for the combination of frame and tone. *De Telegraaf* is expected as a popular newspaper to have a more negative tone within both frames.

With these three newspapers the event of the refugee crisis in 2015 will be studied and how they framed this issue. The scientific relevance is therefore within the appliance of framing to the Dutch case of the refugee crisis. I will investigate the expectation that a popular newspaper uses more episodic frames whereas quality newspapers use more thematic frames for the issue of the refugee crisis in 2015. The articles will be coded along the episodic and/or thematic frame and the tone of the article on the refugee crisis. In the end conclusions will be drawn from the results and which frame and tone was the dominant one within the refugee crisis for each newspaper.

Literature review

A lot of research has been done on framing and many different definitions are given to define framing (e.g., Cacciatore, Scheufele, Iyengar, 2016; Gross, 2008; Hallahan, 1999). A general definition for framing is the definition of Entman. Entman (1993: 52) states that: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. The purpose of frames is to select and highlight elements that construct an argument about problems and their causations (Entman, 1993: 52- 53). Furthermore, the central idea of an issue and/or crisis is the frame. The frame makes it possible to make sense of the issue (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989: 3). Frames can be built around a particular value and therefore do not work on every issue (Chong and Drunckman, 2007: 116). For example a security frame will most likely be the strongest frame when terrorism is concerned. As Chong and Drunckman (2007: 116) specify: “The same frame is not necessarily judged applicable across issues and contexts.”

The way the concept of framing is used in this research can be traced back to the psychology research of Kahneman and Tversky. To give an example about their research but now related to the refugee crisis the experiment could be about sixty people that want to go to the Netherlands for asylum. The goal of the experiment is to see how people would respond to the presentation of information. The choice in words could be either 1) twenty people make it to the Netherlands. Or 2) forty people will die during the journey. The research of

Kahnemann and Tversky pointed out that people make different choices depending on the choice of words even though the choices were identical. People will be more likely to choose for option one in terms of potential gains instead of option two that is about potential loss. In this way, Kahneman and Tversky manipulated how information was presented (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 10). This kind of framing is known as equivalence frame. However, the focus of this research will be on emphasis framing, which is when the content of information is manipulated. This means that information is manipulated to the extent to what an audience receives rather than just how the information is presented (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 10). The manipulation of the content of information is different for thematic framing and episodic framing. As mentioned before the thematic frame puts the issue in a general context whereas the episodic frame is about a specific event (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 10).

Why framing matters

As was mentioned in the introduction, the way a crisis is framed by the media can have influence on government policies and on public opinion (Bullock, Wyche and Williams, 2001: 229). The way an issue is framed and the media coverage that comes with it has become increasingly important to gain political attention for political action. The effect media coverage can have on political action is known as the CNN-effect. When a humanitarian crisis is massively covered it is assumed to lead to increased allocations of emergency funds. In this way humanitarian needs are believed to be better met (Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen, 2003: 109 – 110). So media coverage is expected to drive government intervention during a crisis like the refugee crisis (Robinson, 2001: 524). When there is high media coverage it shows that the crisis is important and a rapid response is essential (Van Belle, 2003: 266). In the framing process particular aspects about the reality are highlighted and can eventually influence public opinion (Entman, 1993: 57). In order to create a public opinion for action the emergency situation has to be framed in the right way (Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen, 2003: 112). The influence of the media on public opinion can therefore be significant since the media can partly decide which frame is used (Iyengar, 1990: 21). The media can choose to report about a specific event or also report background information about the issue.

Why framing matters gives a general idea about the implications of using frames. After these general considerations, the focus will now be on the specific frames used in this research, the episodic frame and the thematic frame.

Episodic frame and thematic frame

Within the general label of emphasis framing the two frames described by Iyengar are used: the episodic frame and the thematic frame (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 10). The episodic frame is identified when the articles are personal and victim focused (Barnes, Hanson, Novilla, Meacham, McIntyre and Erickson, 2008: 608) and is about a specific event or case (Iyengar, 1991: 2). The episodic frame is especially visually appealing (Iyengar and Simon, 1993: 369). The thematic frame is about the articles that discuss broad problems and are policy oriented (Barnes et al., 2008: 608). This frame usually gives more background information (Iyengar and Simon, 1993: 369). The thematic frame places a political issue or event in a general context (Iyengar, 1991: 2). Few articles exclusively use an episodic or a thematic frame, but most of the time one of the two frames will be predominant (Iyengar, 1991: 14). When an article overall emphasises a specific event or a person/victim more than the broad problems the article can be considered to have an episodic frame. When an article starts off with a specific event to address the bigger picture than the article can be considered to have a thematic frame. The essential difference between these two frames is that episodic framing is about a concrete event or person/victim focused that illustrates an issue whereas thematic framing is about collective or general evidence (Iyengar, 1991: 14).

According to Iyengar and Simon (1993: 379) these frames matter politically because the way newspapers frame an issue can have influence on the attribution of responsibility for the issue. “Individuals tend to simplify political issues by reducing them to questions of responsibility, and their opinions on issues flow from their answers to these questions” (Iyengar, 1991: 8). When a thematic frame is used responsibility for national problems is assigned to general societal factors. For example responsibility can be attributed to government officials because of inaction to deal proportionally with the refugee crisis. So public officials can be hold responsible but can also lead people “to offer greater support for government programs to solve political problems” (Gross, 2008: 173). With the use of an episodic frame viewers are less likely to hold public officials accountable for an issue (Iyengar, 1991: 2). For example with an episodic frame responsibility by the public can be attributed to the human traffickers that put refugees in fragile boats that have a high chance of sinking. With episodic framing the public attributes the responsibility for national problems to actions of particular individuals or groups. This can lead to a decline in support for government programs that should address the problem (Gross, 2008: 173). The episodic frame can be more appealing to readers because as pointed out by Hallahan (1999: 221): “Audiences

are believed to be more interested in people and more responsive to portrayals involving concrete events and actions (episodes).”

Episodic or thematic framing on the refugee crisis can therefore have an effect on where the public addresses the responsibility of the crisis. Furthermore media coverage on an issue can determine the political agenda. When the refugee crisis is repeated over and over again in episodic or thematic frame, it becomes a priority of the readers (Iyengar, 1991: 2).

Tone of the article

Another aspect that can be found in articles is the tone. The use of certain words is also part of the framing process. When choosing certain words labelling and categorization occurs. The event is interpreted by the writer of the article that will result in the categorization along a same general category (Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 62). For example the use of the words *allochtoon* and *autochtoon* can have different effect than when you describe it as someone with a migration background (*allochtoon; inwoners met een migratieachtergrond*) and someone with a Dutch background (*autochtoon; inwoners met een Nederlandse achtergrond*) (NOS, 2016). A news article can therefore have a negative or a positive tone towards the issue, in this case the refugee crisis (Barnes et al., 2008: 605). Articles are considered to have a negative tone when the newspaper is critical about the refugee crisis. This means that only complaints about the refugee crisis are made without addressing a solution. Especially when only the problems that come from the migration influx are discussed, for example when a claim by local Dutch people is made that refugees get more help with searching for a job than the people that are already jobless for a long time. An article is neutral when no clear tone can be identified or in case of an interview with either an expert in a field that has to do with the refugee crisis or with refugees themselves. A positive tone in an article will occur when there is spoken of the emancipation of the refugees, for example local people that offer help to the refugees. Or when the article emphasis that more help is needed to deal with the crisis for example by making more money available to deal with the refugee crisis.

From the research of Barnes et al. (2008) the link from frame to the tone of the article was made. Their research was about Hurricane Katrina where the most negative tone was found in articles that were critical to government spending and emphasised that a greater response was needed to deal with the hurricane. This shows a reference to the thematic frame and could have lead to greater support for government policy.

After the discussion of the two variables frame and tone, the focus will now be on the Dutch media system and the case of the refugee crisis.

Dutch media system

A general consideration about newspapers is that since newspapers are not bound to reports on the scene, they can also report about more in depth analysis of an issue (Iyengar, 1991: 14). However, different newspapers put their emphasis on different aspects. The national newspapers *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant* are known as the two quality newspapers and *de Telegraaf* as a popular newspaper (Bakker and Scholten, 1997: 14). *De Telegraaf* is known for bringing news that is close to the people and will therefore also shed a different light on the refugee crisis. This difference in quality is because there is a difference in political information versus amusement within the newspaper (Bakker and Scholten, 1997: 14). According to this characteristic *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* have relatively much political information and less amusement and *de Telegraaf* has more amusement and less political information. The most important distinction between these three newspapers is that *de Telegraaf* has a more cross section of the Dutch population and in *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* more higher education classes are represented (Bakker and Scholten, 1997: 14). This leads to the expectation that there will be difference in reporting about an issue.

The case of the refugee crisis

To study the use of episodic and thematic framing in the Netherlands the refugee crisis will be used. In 2015, over a million migrants and refugees came to Europe. The biggest driver behind the migration influx was the conflict in Syria. Other factors were violence in Afghanistan, Eritrea and Iraq but also poverty in Kosovo (BBC, 2016). Over the time period of 2015 many people crossed the Mediterranean Sea and many did not survive this crossing (NOS, 2016). Because of the many deaths within the refugee crisis it was also a humanitarian crisis. One of the many examples of the humanitarian face of the refugee crisis was in September 2015 when a photo of a little boy that washed up on the beach was all over the news (NOS, 2015). The concept of the refugee crisis owes its name to the people that fled for war and prosecution. This has become a crisis because the European countries were not prepared to deal with this high increase in refugees (Heck and Leijendekker, 2015). In 2015 around forty-three thousand incoming refugees were registered. This was twice as many as in 2014 when the number was around twenty-one thousand refugees. On top of that there were family members that came later. In 2014 this number was around five thousand people and in 2015 around thirteen thousand people (CBS, 2016). In 2016 this number declined again to around eighteen thousand incoming refugees with around twelve thousand family members that followed (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2017). According to these numbers the refugee

crisis was at its height in 2015. From then onwards the Dutch government made an extra 260 million euro available for education, employment and basic services to deal with this high increase of refugees (Rijksoverheid, 2017).

With the tensions in the world around religious terrorism, the refugee crisis elicited some resistance in the Netherlands (NOS, 2016). From *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* research it was stated that in October 2015 the theme of immigration due to the refugee crisis was the biggest factor in the public opinion. The answer to the question what people were worried about most, 65 per cent spontaneously named immigration and integration (Dekker and Den Ridder, 2016).

The Netherlands has a history with the framing of an immigration debate. For years the Netherlands portrayed itself as a multicultural society. But with the murders of politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and film director Theo van Gogh in 2004, the debate around immigrants hardened. Especially Pim Fortuyn called for a ban on immigration and an aggressive policy on minorities (Carle, 2006: 68). Pim Fortuyn found support with the Dutch citizens for his hard views on immigrants when it was published that eighty per cent of the inhabitants thought that the Netherlands was too tolerant towards ethnic minorities (Carle, 2006: 68). This has led to a change in tone and focus of the immigration debate in the Netherlands.

The media plays an important role in bringing this message to the public. A complex problem like the refugee crisis is always subject to alternative interpretation. Through the different frames the newspapers use, there are also different suggestions of how the event should be understood (Berinsky and Kinder, 2006: 641). Because there are many different aspects to the refugee crisis it makes it an interesting case for a framing analysis.

Expectations

Based on this review there are the following three expectations.

For the variable frame there is an expected difference in the focus of the newspapers and this leads to hypothesis one that *de Telegraaf* as a popular newspaper will frame the refugee crisis in an episodic frame. A possibility for people to consider reading an article, it could have been made more catching with emotionally appealing photos and intriguing headlines. These are characteristics that can be found by the popular newspaper *de Telegraaf* that can make it possible that *de Telegraaf* would report more in episodic frames. With an episodic frame the focus is on a specific event or person/victim and can draw more attention from readers, and can be seen as amusement reporting.

For the variable tone there are two expectations. Because *de Telegraaf* is known for more amusement reporting and not much of political in depth information it is expected for the tone in articles that *de Telegraaf* will have a more negative tone in the episodic frame and the thematic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. Within the refugee crisis this would mean for the episodic frame that refugees would be portrayed as helpless. For the thematic frame this would mean that government policy and spending are critically assessed and have not been enough to fight the crisis in a proportionate manner to keep refugees out of the Netherlands. This leads to hypotheses two and three. Hypothesis two: Articles in *de Telegraaf* will have a more negative tone in the episodic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. And hypothesis three: Articles in *de Telegraaf* will have a more negative tone in the thematic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*.

Method

Newspaper selection

Articles were selected from three national Dutch newspapers: *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Telegraaf*. These newspapers were chosen because they have the highest circulation and because of their difference in content and quality. In 2016 the total circulation of *de Telegraaf* was 426.827, for *de Volkskrant* 258.415 and for *NRC Handelsblad* 145.339. These numbers do not tell everything since these three newspapers can also be found on the Internet. For *de Telegraaf* the total digital circulation was 239.752, for *de Volkskrant* 90.395 and for *NRC Handelsblad* 66.577 (Nationaal Onderzoek Multimedia, 2017). As seen from these numbers, *de Telegraaf* has by far the biggest circulation and will reach the most readers. Two quality newspapers were chosen instead of one to match the circulation of *de Telegraaf*. Together *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* have around the same circulation as *de Telegraaf*. Because only three newspapers are analysed there are implications for generalizability. The results about framing cannot be generalized to all the Dutch newspapers. However through the chosen newspapers, the goal was to represent the Dutch newspapers as good as possible.

Data retrieval and coding categories

A content analysis is used to study the research question in order to analyse the articles of the newspapers in line with certain categories (Bryman, 2012: 289). It is used to identify thematic or episodic framing and a negative, neutral or positive tone in Dutch newspapers on the

refugee crisis. The advantage of using a content analysis is the transparency of the research that is secured through the coding scheme (Bryman, 2012: 304). The newspaper articles were retrieved from the Lexis Nexis database. The study of media frames was in the Netherlands within the time frame of the refugee crisis in 2015. The year 2015 was chosen because this was when the refugee crisis was at its height. The unit of analysis for this research is an article from the three newspapers (*de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Telegraaf*). Articles that named “refugee crisis” (*vluchtelingencrisis*), “refugees” (*vluchtelingen*) and “refugee” (*vluchteling*) in the heading of the article were studied in this research in order to exclude articles that make a minimal reference to the refugee crisis. However this will add in different topics on the refugee crisis and will allow for a broad discussion of the refugee crisis. To further narrow down the number of articles a threshold of 400 words was set to capture a more in-depth discussion of the issue.

Using Lexis Nexis, 240 articles were gathered: 10 (4,2%) for “refugee crisis” (*vluchtelingencrisis*) (*de Volkskrant* 5, *NRC Handelsblad* 3 and *de Telegraaf* 2), 184 (76,6 %) for “refugees” (*vluchtelingen*) (*de Volkskrant* 57, *NRC Handelsblad* 73 and *de Telegraaf* 54) and 46 (19,2%) for “refugee” (*vluchteling*) (*de Volkskrant* 21, *NRC Handelsblad* 19 and *de Telegraaf* 6). Because of the difference in the number of articles, the results will be given in percentages to draw comparisons and conclusions from the data. When an article was found that did not refer to refugee crisis around Europe and the Netherlands, but to other parts of the world, the article was excluded.

With this content analysis framing will be used as a tool to study the media contents on the refugee crisis (de Vreese, 2005: 51 - 52). Each article was coded by newspaper name, date, title, length, frame and finally the tone of the article. The code of frame includes the episodic frame and/or the thematic frame. The frame in the articles will be studied on whether it uses primarily an episodic or primarily a thematic frame. An example for an episodic frame in *de Volkskrant*:

Whilst again two boats with refugees on the Mediterranean Sea encountered problems, it appeared Monday that possibly more than 700 people have perished on the Sunday morning boat raid. According to a survivor from Bangladesh there were 950 refugees on board, including 250 women and 50 children. (Venema, 2015)

An example that illustrates the thematic frame is from *de Telegraaf*:

Tomorrow the European Commission is coming with its controversial plan to better distribute the flow of migrants across the 28 EU member states. They also seek

support from the United Nations to get a mandate to destroy ships by military means that can be used for human trafficking. (*de Telegraaf*, 2015)

The values for an episodic frame were code 1 for an episodic frame and 0 otherwise. The same values apply for a thematic frame; 1 for a thematic frame and 0 otherwise. Both frames were coded independently so when an article equally portrays an episodic frame and a thematic frame, the article was coded to have both frames and scored both 1 for an episodic frame and 1 for a thematic frame.

The overall tone of the article will be coded to be negative, neutral or positive. An example for negative tone in *de Telegraaf*:

Dutch carriers are hopeless now that workers of the ferry company MyFerryLink have blocked the port of Calais and the Channel Tunnel. Hundreds of trucks stand still and are stormed by refugees who take the opportunity to hide in the trucks. It is a drama. (Termaat, 2015)

An example that illustrates a positive tone in *NRC Handelsblad*:

Luckily, there are many volunteers who provide help and assistance in many areas, ranging from food and clothing to sports and games. One of the areas in which volunteers want to provide assistance is education in the Dutch language. Controlling, even rudimentary, the language of the country where you stay is of great importance. (Fernhout, Groenendijk, Kortmann, Kortmann, 2015)

The values of this variable will be 1 for a negative tone, 2 for a neutral tone and 3 for a positive tone. With the corresponding coding schedule and coding manual (Appendix) the articles will be coded. From the expected data can be shown which newspaper used which frame and how often this framed was used.

Results

The Lexis Nexis database was used to search for articles for the issue of the refugee crisis in 2015. A total of 240 articles from three Dutch newspapers (34,6% from *de Volkskrant*, 39,6% from *NRC Handelsblad* and 25,8% from *de Telegraaf*) were analysed in order to answer the expectation that a popular newspaper uses more episodic frames whereas quality newspapers uses more thematic frames for the issue of the refugee crisis in 2015.

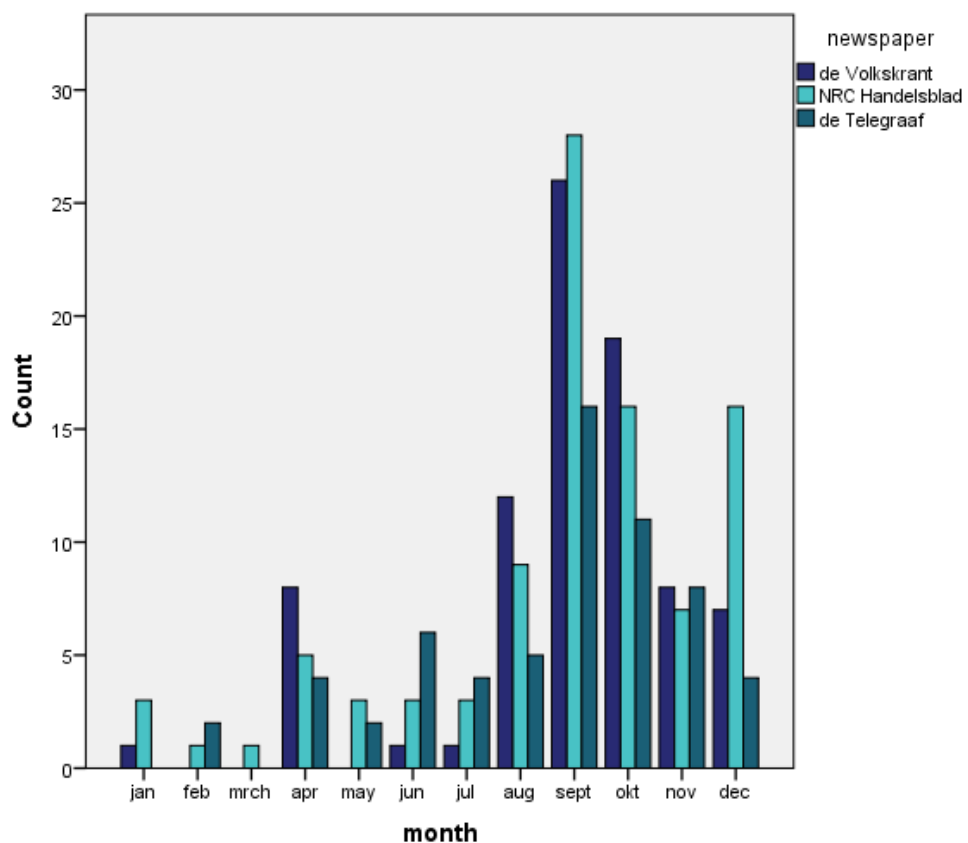
Throughout the year there was a difference in the amount of articles. This can be seen in graph 1 that shows the amount of articles per month for each newspaper. During the time period of 2015 the graph shows certain peaks. For the first peak in April, it was about the

increasing numbers of drowning refugees in the Mediterranean Sea and included calls for action. This was the main reason why certain peaks occurred over the timeline of 2015.

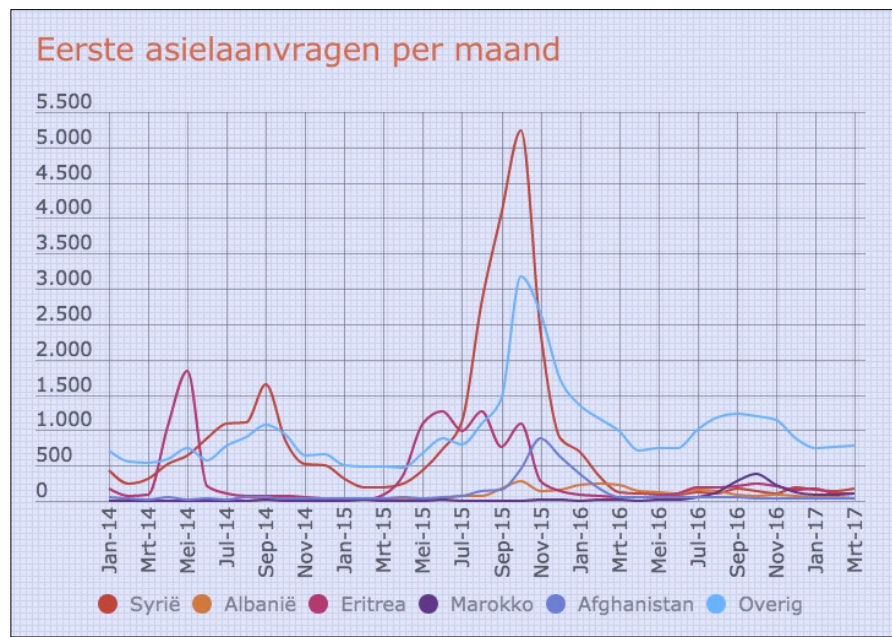
In course of the year 2015 more and more refugees drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. As the numbers of deaths increased the urgency of the problem was no longer avoidable and this could have lead to an increased coverage of the refugee crisis. For example in September the most articles were published for every newspaper. At the beginning of this month a photo of the Syrian boy washed up on a Turkish beach gave the crisis a humanitarian face. This photo provided an idea to what to think off when the refugee crisis was discussed.

The increase in coverage can also be linked to the increases in refugee applicants from April onwards as seen from graph 2. Not only did more and more refugees drown trying to reach Europe, there was also a high increase in refugee applicants in the Netherlands.

Graph 1 Amount of Articles per Newspaper



Graph 2 First time Applicant per Month



Source: VluchtelingenWerk, 2017

After this general timeline, the results to the three hypotheses will now be discussed.

Episodic and thematic framing by newspaper

The first hypothesis was that *de Telegraaf* as a popular newspaper would frame the refugee crisis in an episodic frame. When the Dutch newspapers reported about the refugee crisis, the three newspapers all framed the refugee crisis more in a thematic frame (*de Volkskrant* 61,4%, *NRC Handelsblad* 57,9% and *de Telegraaf* 54,8%) than in an episodic frame (*de Volkskrant* 43,4%, *NRC Handelsblad* 53,7% and *de Telegraaf* 53,2%), as shown in table 1. However *de Telegraaf* did frame the refugee crisis relatively more in an episodic frame than in a thematic frame in comparison to *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. The thematic frame was only relatively slightly more used (54,8%) than the episodic frame (53,2%) in *de Telegraaf*. Also in September when the most articles about the refugee crisis were published in *de Telegraaf* (25,8%) the thematic frame (62,5%) was still dominant over the episodic frame (43,8%).

For both the episodic frame ($\chi^2 = 2.232$, $p .45$) and the thematic frame ($\chi^2 = 0.650$, $p .45$) there is no statistical significant relation. This means that hypothesis one is not confirmed. Although the observed pattern is in the expected direction, the differences are so small that it is not statically significant.

Table 1: Frequency of Frame by Newspaper¹

	Episodic Frame	Thematic Frame	N
<i>de Volkskrant</i>	43,4%	61,4%	87
<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	53,7%	57,9%	106
<i>de Telegraaf</i>	53,2%	54,8%	67

¹ Cell percentages indicate frame occurrence within a newspaper. Because both frames can occur together, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Tone of the articles by newspaper

For the tone of the article there were two hypotheses. Firstly that the articles in *de Telegraaf* would have a more negative tone in the episodic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. In general the tone of the articles in the three newspapers overall was positive. However, as seen from table 2, *de Telegraaf* (45,2%) has relatively more articles with a negative tone than *NRC Handelsblad* (18,9%) and *de Volkskrant* (15,7%). In general there is a statistical relationship between newspaper and tone ($\chi^2 = 24.156$, $p < .001$). To study this further, the tone of the article was split into the episodic and the thematic frame.

Table 2: Frequency of Tone in Newspaper

	Negative Tone	Neutral Tone	Positive Tone	N
<i>de Volkskrant</i>	15,7%	14,5%	69,9%	83
<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	18,9%	24,2%	56,8%	95
<i>de Telegraaf</i>	45,2%	8,1%	46,8%	62

Even in an episodic frame, the positive tone is dominant in all the newspapers, as seen in table 3. However *de Telegraaf* (39,4%) does relatively have a negative tone more often than the *NRC Handelsblad* (31,4%) and *de Volkskrant* (19,4%). Since the difference is small, the results are not significant ($\chi^2 = 4.84$, $p .45$). Hypothesis two is therefore not supported.

Table 3: Frequency of Tone in Newspaper in Episodic Frame

	Negative Tone	Neutral Tone	Positive Tone	N
<i>de Volkskrant</i>	19,4%	19,4%	61,1%	36
<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	31,4%	13,7%	54,9%	51
<i>de Telegraaf</i>	39,4%	6,1%	54,5%	33

Secondly, the other expectation about tone was that articles in *de Telegraaf* would have a more negative tone in the thematic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. Within the thematic frame *de Telegraaf* has the most articles with a negative tone and now also exceeds the articles in a positive tone. For the thematic frame there is observed pattern in the expected difference with a statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 38.701$, $p < .001$). *De Telegraaf* clearly has relatively more articles in a negative tone (55,9%) than *NRC Handelsblad* (9,1%) and *de Volkskrant* (11,8%) as seen from table 4.

Table 4: Frequency of Tone in Newspaper in Thematic Frame

	Negative Tone	Neutral Tone	Positive Tone	N
<i>de Volkskrant</i>	11,8%	9,8%	78,4%	51
<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	9,1%	29,1%	61,8%	55
<i>de Telegraaf</i>	55,9%	8,8%	35,3%	34

Overall, there was no statistically significant relationship for the expected relationship between the popular newspaper *de Telegraaf* and episodic framing. Therefore hypothesis two is not supported. For hypothesis three that articles in *de Telegraaf* would have a more negative tone in a thematic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant* there was a statically significant relation in the expected direction.

Discussion

For the 240 articles analysed, the difference in framing between the popular newspaper *de Telegraaf* and quality newspapers *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* was not significant. Thereby hypothesis one that stated that *de Telegraaf* as a popular newspaper will frame the refugee crisis in an episodic frame was not confirmed. If the episodic frame was indeed used more than the thematic frame, the depicting of the recurring issue of the refugee crisis throughout the year 2015 as several specific events could have undermined the bigger picture and the process of generalisation (Iyengar, 1991: 136). The political implication of using an episodic frame can therefore be that Dutch citizens can tend to see political problems as concrete and specific rather than abstract and general. Furthermore the focus can come on individual group characteristics rather than on structural forces like social, historical or political (Iyengar, 1991: 137). This could have led to a decline in support for government policy.

However, from the results it appeared that every newspaper framed the refugee crisis more in a thematic frame. *De Telegraaf* has the highest circulation and can therefore reach the most readers. This means that overall there would be a more detailed knowledge about the refugee crisis with their readers because of the thematic frame that was used. As Iyengar suggested, this could also have influence on the way the public attributes responsibility of the issue. With the overall use of the thematic frame responsibility for the refugee crisis could be attributed to public officials and could either lead to more support for government programs to address the refugee crisis or it can make public officials unpopular due to inaction. That the thematic frame was used more often than the episodic frame can be in line with the function of the media to critically watch politicians. If Dutch citizens would no longer attribute responsibility to public officials due to most exposure to episodic framing, the incentive to address difficult issues like the refugee crisis, will cease for public officials (Iyengar, 1991: 141).

Furthermore it was also investigated if there was a difference in tone in the articles for the newspapers. It was expected that articles in *de Telegraaf* would have a more negative tone in the episodic frame and thematic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. In general there was a statistical significant relationship between the variables tone and newspaper. However, overall the tone in the newspapers was positive. Zooming in on the negative tone, there was a difference between the episodic frame and thematic frame. The episodic frame had a more positive tone and the thematic frame had a more negative tone. These results confirmed hypothesis three that articles in *de Telegraaf* would have a more negative tone in the thematic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. However, hypothesis two was not confirmed that articles in *de Telegraaf* would have a more negative tone in the episodic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. So the readers of *de Telegraaf* would read more articles in a thematic frame, but also with a more negative tone than in *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*. The broader implication of this negative tone in the thematic frame in *de Telegraaf* of the refugee crisis could be a negative image of refugees among their readers. However most of the time there was a general context in the articles with a positive tone in the three newspapers.

The purpose of this research was to understand how newspapers would differ on how they report and frame an issue, with the refugee crisis in 2015 as case for this study. Newspapers remain an important source of information, digital and printed, about issues. The results from this research could mean that the framing and tone of *de Telegraaf* could

eventually influence opinions of the public about the refugee crisis and more support for policies to keep refugees from coming to the Netherlands.

Limitations

The findings are limited in the way that the articles that were reviewed included only three newspapers. A more broad perspective could be given through also studying television and social media, like the evening news. Also Lexis Nexis only gives the text of an article, but not photos that could also have been part of an article. Episodic frames could be even stronger when a visually appealing photo was given with the text. On top of that, the “refugee crisis” or “refugees” or “refugee” did not have to be mentioned in the headline to have the issue at the core of the article.

Another limitation is that the coding of the variable tone is dependent on each article and its frame. The variable tone is therefore open to interpretation. For example, negativity can mean several things: a negative portrayal of immigrants and the crisis as a bad thing or a portrayal of what the government did and that they did not do enough to help the refugees that needed help. In this research a negative tone in an episodic frame was most likely the portrayal of refugees in a bad light. Within a thematic frame it was more about the critical evaluation of government policy to deal with the refugee crisis. For the positive tone in an episodic frame it would have been about the portrayal of refugees in a positive light. Within the thematic frame it would be about solution by the government and their will to do something about the refugee crisis.

Finally, what should be kept in mind is that the effects of framing were not studied; further studies can examine the effects of the use of episodic and thematic framing on for example public opinion or government policies.

Conclusion

The focus of this research was to study framing within the three main newspapers in the Netherlands. There was an expected difference between a popular newspaper and quality newspapers in framing of an issue. This was because there should be a difference in the amount of amusement versus political information. To study the difference in framing the case of the refugee crisis in 2015 was used with the expectation that a popular newspaper uses more episodic frames whereas quality newspapers use more thematic frames for the issue of the refugee crisis in 2015. The focus of this research was on emphasis framing, which is when

the content of information is manipulated. Not every frame works on every issue and therefore the episodic and thematic framing according to Iyengar's work were chosen. For a thematic frame the manipulation of context was to put the issue in a general context whereas an episodic frame manipulates the information to a specific event. These kinds of framing can have influence on the way the public assigns responsibility of a certain issue and their support for government policies.

Through the two quality newspapers *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* and the popular newspaper *de Telegraaf* the issue of the refugee crisis in 2015 was studied. This year showed a peak in incoming refugees in comparison to the year before and after. Along the episodic and thematic frame of Iyengar the refugee crisis in 2015 was coded. Based on a specific event or within a general context the frame within the article could be identified. The evidence presented indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between *de Telegraaf* as popular newspaper and *NRC Handelsblad* en *de Volkskrant* as quality newspapers in framing the refugee crisis in 2015. Both hypotheses one that *De Telegraaf* as a popular newspaper will frame the refugee crisis in an episodic frame and hypothesis two that articles in *de Telegraaf* will have a more negative tone in the episodic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant* were not supported. All the studied newspapers used the thematic frame more than the episodic frame. However *de Telegraaf* was relatively closer to episodic frames than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. On top of that, *de Telegraaf* used a more negative tone in the articles than the quality newspapers. This was not significant within the episodic frame, but was indeed significant as expected in the thematic frame. Only hypothesis three that articles in *de Telegraaf* will have a more negative tone in the thematic frame than *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant* was statically significant in the expected direction. The results supported that the thematic frame has a more negative tone for *de Telegraaf*. This could have led to a negative image of refugees and support for policies to keep refugees out of the Netherlands.

The refugee crisis was primarily framed in a thematic frame and following Iyengar his theory this has the implication that people will attribute responsibility to the government. Together with a positive tone this could have lead to more support for government programs to help the refugees in the Netherlands. Otherwise a thematic frame with a negative tone could lead to more support for government programs to not let any more refugees enter the Netherlands. Despite the difference in quality of a popular newspaper or a quality newspaper, with the overall use of a thematic frame there was a nuanced coverage of the refugee crisis in the Netherlands. It is also noteworthy that the quality newspapers *de Volkskrant* and *NRC*

Handelsblad together reported almost three times more about the refugee crisis than the popular newspaper *de Telegraaf* alone although they reach approximately the same amount of readers. Through more exposure to the issue of the refugee crisis together with the use of the thematic frames and a more positive tone the support for government policies to address the refugee crisis could have increased.

For further studies, other frames and/or other newspapers could be used to study if there is a difference in framing for the newspapers in the Netherlands and their influence on public opinion and government policies.

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Appendix

Coding schedule

Newspaper	Day	Month	Year	Title	Episodic frame	Thematic frame	Tone	Length

Coding manual

Newspaper

- 1 de Volkskrant
- 2 NRC Handelsblad
- 3 de Telegraaf

Episodic Frame

- 0 No episodic frame
- 1 Episodic frame

Thematic frame

- 0 No thematic frame
- 1 Thematic frame

Tone of the article

- 1 Negative
- 2 Neutral
- 3 Positive

Length

- 1 400 – 600 words
- 2 600 – 800 words
- 3 800 – 1000 words
- 4 1000 – 1200 words
- 5 1200 – 1400 words
- 6 1400 – 1600 words
- 7 1600 - 1800 words
- 8 1800 – 2000 words
- 9 2000 words >