

Framing National and International Disasters: A Case Study of News Coverage on Post-Disaster Relief

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Abstract

This study compared news coverage of national and international disasters, Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti Earthquake, using textual analysis of The New York Times and The Washington Post. The results reveal that media framing of the historical cases developed in three stages upon the development of post-disaster relief: (1) Call for humanitarian assistance; (2) New Orleans under anarchy and hopelessness vs. Haiti under scrutiny with hope; and (3) Katrina effects. By framing the outcomes of the hurricane as the “Katrina effect,” the media used the disaster as a reference point to explain other economic and political issues. In addition, analysis of relevant statements and press releases confirmed that different social actors involved in the relief process, such as donors, facilitators, and beneficiaries, contributed to the media framing of the issue, although the facilitators were most successful in transferring their own frames to media frames. This study makes important contributions to the field as it looks beyond traditional relationships between quantitative measures of media attention and aid allocation. For governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the area of humanitarian assistance, the findings of this study will assist them in media-relations in the future.

Keywords: *Media Framing, Disaster, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Textual Analysis*

1. Introduction

On August 29, 2005, survivors of Hurricane Katrina were hoisted off rooftops in the flood-ravaged city. On January 12, 2010, Haitians were pulled out of the earthquake rubble and waste. Regardless of the cause, people in both areas lost their families, homes, businesses, and lives in the worst cases. First, it was the rescuers' hands that they had to hold on to in their efforts to survive the disaster. Then it was the humanitarian aid that provided them with food, shelter, and medical assistance to maintain their lives.

Reoccurring natural disasters around the globe have increased the importance of ensuring timely and sufficient assistance. Then what are some of the important indicators of efficient aid allocation? Although several factors are considered, including the economic need of the area (GDP) and the degree of damage, studies show that media attention is one of the most important determinants of aid allocation [1-3]. Media

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coverage influences both the selection of aid recipients and the amount of aid; while the amount of aid increases by \$600,000 with every *New York Times* article, there are increases of only \$400 per person killed [3].

The quantity of coverage, however, may not be the only factor that moves the donor's mind. Media portrayals of the disasters cannot be neglected. The aforementioned findings clearly indicate that death tolls do not have as much influence on aid allocation; it may be the devastating scenes captured by the media that form perceptions about the disaster. In this context, qualitative analysis of media coverage of the incidents becomes an important area for research in understanding the dynamics of disaster relief. What role do our media play in delivering public goods? By identifying the determinants of media responsiveness, we will be able to see how it serves the area in need of help. This is of particular importance with the ever-increasing influence of global civil society, often referred to as nongovernmental organizations advocating global values that cannot be compromised by government interests such as human rights [4]. In both cases, nongovernmental organizations played important roles in humanitarian assistance, but are they doing any good with regard to the use of the media in achieving their goals? Or is it still the governmental organizations that dominate the messages in the news arena? Framing analysis is an effective way to examine the roles of the media and relevant social actors in the broader process of humanitarian assistance.

The purpose of this study is twofold: (a) to identify media frames in disaster coverage in order to locate determinants of media responsiveness; (b) to examine the role of different social actors—both governmental and nongovernmental—as frame sponsors.

In this study, I attempt to identify the determinants of media responsiveness to disaster coverage that are less known in the area. Reports by media watchdog groups revealed that natural disasters receive far more coverage, while the worst disasters with higher death tolls, such as civil wars, are overlooked. Other than the visuals and dramatic elements, policy groups identify the reason as coming from not having anyone to “blame” without “complex roots and causes” [5]. But we do not know why some disasters receive far more coverage than others even among natural disasters, not in comparison with human-made disasters. In addition, it posits the idea of considering governmental and nongovernmental institutions as active social actors. They no longer remain as sources of the elite media but act as frame sponsors in the global networked society. With regard to the overall communication process, it is important to find out who organizes the information and who leads the discussion in comparison to traditional norms of nation-states dominating the media messages as opposed to nongovernmental organizations. Allocation of humanitarian aid often involves the political interests of nation-states, and this may be reflected in media content, which in turn may work negatively on aid decisions.

This study adds an important dimension to existing research by looking at the intersection of media and advocacy that serves the public, both at the societal and individual levels, with opportunities to make important contributions to the society as a whole. Findings of this article will benefit the media professionals by providing an opportunity to think critically about their reporting as it may be the case that they rely on limited resources when covering such unpredicted events. For governmental and nongovernmental organizations that work in the area of humanitarian assistance, the results may help them in effective media relations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Disaster in Sociology

For Carr, disasters occur when cultural protections fail to avoid catastrophe. In his view, “[s]o long as the ship rides out the storm, so long as the city resists the earth-shocks, so long as the levees hold, there is no disaster” [6]. Regardless of their intensity, natural hazards remain as catastrophes if human activities work as

protections; therefore, all disasters are human-made. This is different from the working definitions out in the field, because disasters are often typified as “natural” or “human-made” [7]. Likewise, it is a concept with no universe definition, which makes it worth explicating.

Focusing on human behavior in disaster situations, the sociology of disaster literature provides some clear definitions of disaster. Clausen and colleagues define disasters as “sudden” events that break the normal situation and trigger “radical” collective behaviors [8].

With respect to its timeline, sociologists see the event in five stages: pre-impact, impact, post-impact, recovery, and reconstruction periods [9]. Disasters suddenly occur in the impact period, breaking the normal routines of the pre-impact period. It is the last three stages when social behaviors are available for observation. During the immediate post-impact period, there are prompt responses at the local level for evacuations, followed by the recovery period when preliminary plans are made for restoration. Lastly, the reconstruction period may last for years until the community attempts to regain the appearances of the normal time.

It is during the three post-disaster stages when the media starts developing “myths” about disasters regarding post-impact social behavior [9]. Since sociologists Quarantelli and Dynes published their pioneering study, “What Disaster Strikes (It Isn’t Much Like What You’ve Heard and Read About)” in *Psychology Today*, there have been continuing efforts to examine how media representations of the disaster create myths such as panic, lawless evacuation, looting, mental shock, blame games, and irrational behavior [10-12]. Such erroneous representations of the media have greater implications than the distribution of false information to the public. Considering that the processes of disaster relief involve different social actors, such as governmental and nongovernmental organizations at the societal level and potential donors on the individual level, misleading portrayals of the disaster scenes may influence aid allocations. This leads to conceptualizing the social actors involved in disaster relief.

2.2 Social Actors in Development: Donors, Facilitators, and Beneficiaries

The conceptualization of social actors turns our attention to the much-discussed topic of subjective interpretations of actors in ancient Greek thought. In Goffman’s terms, actors are supposedly thought of as being aware of one’s role, and they act “in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” [13].

His ideas are reflected in the development literature as well. Although processes of disaster relief are addressed within the interdisciplinary boundaries of political science, risk management, and communication, the most relevant literature regarding social actors is found in the area of international development [14-16]. Considering that procedures of humanitarian assistance develop in similar patterns involving donors, facilitators, and beneficiaries, further explicating the terms based on such literature is appropriate for the study.

The terminology of the developing world attempts to place a geographic area on a continuum based on its degree of economic development [17]. They are different from developed countries in that they have incomes under \$9,636 per capita [18]. The need-based classification applies to the disaster areas, considering the economic assistance required for medical assistance and restoration of the site.

Understanding the historical evolution of development work is essential to identifying and defining the actors involved. The conceptualization of how development work should be defined and carried out has changed over decades among scholars and practitioners. Different from its top-down approach that reflects views of Western institutions, the area now places much more importance on understanding the needs of people at the local level and emphasizes participatory approaches that could possibly lead to sustainable development

[19].

The traditional classification of social actors involved in development procedures is: donors/development sponsors; facilitators; and beneficiaries. In development interventions, “public entities” such as nation-states and private institutions (donors or development sponsors) provide funds through organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, or other nongovernmental organizations (facilitators or program staff) [20]. It is the facilitator’s work to ensure flows of funds and manage on-site assistance with field projects [21, 22]. Local residents of the community benefit from these efforts, which lead to rural growth [23].

Although most of this discussion remains in the academia or at the institutional level and alternate conceptualizations haven’t been fully adopted in the field, there are evidences of how the three actors perceive the processes in different ways nowadays [24].

Ward and colleagues found different perceptions of the three: (a) donors/development sponsors see the process as an “opportunity to bridge the wide economic and social disparities”, “building and sustaining social relationships” and a process that “focuses away from the development of projects to the development of people”; (b) facilitators/program staff define it as “teaching a population to be in charge of itself”; and (c) beneficiaries refer to it as “having food sufficiency” [25]. While donors referred to the broader implications of its outcome, local people had very specific goals they wanted to reach. The three groups agreed on the importance of participatory approaches, but local residents placed more emphasis on institutional intervention. These dynamics are similar in disaster interventions; different social actors have their own ideas on how the relief work should be carried out. Although the categorization is drawn from development literature, it is appropriate for this study as they are the distinct groups involved in disaster relief with tied interests.

2.3 Comparison of News Coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti Earthquake

The two historical national and international disasters addressed in this study are appropriate for comparison largely because of the similarities we see from the two geographic areas: both New Orleans and Haiti are considered to be poor, disadvantaged, black-dominated communities with mistrust of government; over 1 million people were displaced in both areas; the disasters produced approximately 55 to 60 million cubic meters of debris; and both areas suffered from short-sighted construction [26]. They also share some history and culture, as they are places where “French and Africans met” [27]. Both regions suffered from natural disasters, 1995 flood in New Orleans and the 2004 tropical storm Jeanne in Haiti. As the only difference between the two cases is that one’s a national disaster while the other is at the international level, they provide us with an excellent opportunity to examine whether or not ethnocentrism, race, and proximity influenced the media’s responsiveness.

2.4 Perspective on Framing

In this study, two definitions of frames are drawn from previous research. First, frames are considered organizing principles that invite us to construct the meanings of disasters [28]. I focus on this particular definition in analyzing media frames. In order to identify the roles of different social actors in constructing frames, I use the cultural perspective at a later stage [29].

Reese defined frames as “*organizing principles* that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world” [28]. As a disaster is an abstract concept with no universal definition, media frames work as invitations to construct meanings cognitively and culturally. The abstract definition of a disaster as an unpredicted crisis becomes specified as a result of the media portrayal of the scene supported by numbers describing death tolls and damage. It is the media framing of the event that

organizes the information in such a way. Furthermore, as literature in the sociology of disasters suggests, it often leads to “blame games” by the media, and such frames persist both in media representations and audiences’ minds beyond the immediate events of disasters, as recent disasters remind us of the earlier ones. Frames lay the communicative ground for the routinized blame game. In particular, frames of disasters are generated in media content through symbolic expressions hidden in the texts in identifiable patterns.

Hertog and McLeod’s approach to frames as cultural structures is helpful in explaining the roles of social actors in framing the disaster in accordance with their interests. They place emphasis on the perspective that social actors work as frame sponsors in efforts to communicate effectively; in other words, frames provide the contextual basis of the issue as they assign unique roles to various individuals and groups within that context [29]. In particular, they recognize that “sources structure the discussion” and that myths construct the central narratives of frames. This echoes the literature in media representations creating disaster myths.

3. Research Questions

The sociology of disaster literature points us to certain patterns of media coverage that make distinctions between earlier and later stages of the relief. Based on Reese’s definition, I attempt to find how frames worked as organizing principles in constructing the media message over time. Therefore, the first research question is: With respect to coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti Earthquake, what are the dominant frames in the media? How do they change over time?

The answers to the question will be found in the following three steps: (a) identifying topics and main actors in each news text; (b) locating the post-impact, recovery, and reconstruction stages for each event; and (c) analyzing the way topics/actors were addressed—e.g., negatively vs. positively. A shift in frames over time will be identified by comparing dominant frames across the three stages. Headlines and excerpts from the media text will be used to present the results.

The development literature suggests that different organizations have specific goals and tasks of interest in the process of disaster relief. Using Hertog and McLeod’s approach to framing, I look at how different social actors played the role of frame sponsors. Therefore, the second research question is: What frames do donors, facilitators, and beneficiaries use? Who are the main frame sponsors in news coverage of the two disasters?

In this phase of the analysis, I will locate sources used in media texts and attempt to trace back to their original documents or official statements issued by certain organizations. If available, the media and advocacy texts will be compared to find indicators of similarities and differences between the actor and media frames to further examine whether actor frames are identified as being transferred to the media frames.

Answers to the previous questions lead to the next two research questions. Early findings will make it possible to answer the following questions: Which of those frames does the media accept or refuse to include in their coverage? Over time, what differences are found between the two disasters?

4. Methods

Among the media coverage of the two disasters and documents issued by relevant actors, this study used media text in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* because of their international and national readership. Both are influential for possible donors and related organizations. The location of the news organizations is also considered because the main actors of each case were the U.S. Government in Washington, D.C. and the United Nations in New York City, in an effort to analyze the influence of source availability.

Using the LexisNexis database, each newspaper was sampled for the first 90 days since the day of the disaster. Both news stories and commentaries were included for analysis as it is appropriate for identifying the frames of social actors. Documents issued by sources or related organizations were located and analyzed if quoted in the news content.

5. Results

LexisNexis search using Katrina and Haiti during the chosen period yielded the following numbers of articles: for Hurricane Katrina, NYT (104) and WP (75); for the Haiti earthquake, NYT (28) and WP (28). In this section, the findings of the first research question regarding dominant media frames are presented in three stages: post-impact, recovery, and reconstruction. The results of the other research questions will follow.

5.1 Post-Impact Stage: Call for Humanitarian Assistance

5.1.1 New Orleans: Consequence-Driven

There are no such answers to the cause of a disaster. The media mainly responded to the consequences of it by providing snapshots from the scene. The headlines of the news texts highlighted the devastating conditions in New Orleans. Some of the examples include: “In coastal city, ruin all around”; “Searching for the living but mostly finding the dead” (NYT); “Trying to search hoping to rescue”; “Post-Katrina conditions are overwhelming even to veteran FEMA teams”; and “Displacement of historic proportions” (WP).

The magnitude of the impact was described by comparing it with other disasters using the voices of relief experts or local residents: “. . . medical specialist Lt. Jose Arias walked into the rubble that was once this seaside community’s old-money neighborhood and declared: ‘Worse than Andrew’” [30] or “He said he habitually parked his cars in the Holiday Inn lot during the storms, because the lot was less likely to flood than the airport. But this time he said, several windows had already blown out.” [31]

5.1.2 Haiti: Sympathy-Driven

In contrast to Katrina coverage, the call for humanitarian assistance in the Haiti earthquake was sympathy-driven. The disaster was considered to add additional burdens to an already poor country, and humanitarian assistance in this case was not only related to the impact of the disaster but also relieving its economic burdens. Some of the headlines show these perceptions: “Rich nations call for Haiti debt relief” (NYT); “Building a future in Haiti”; “Haitian in U.S. illegally are given temporary reprieve”; and “Broad and lasting help for Haiti” (WP).

The Haitian case was regarded as an extraordinary calamity in a helpless country. Both outside commentators and reporters did not hesitate to adopt regretful expressions: “Those who know a little of Haiti’s history might have watched the news last night and thought, as I did for a moment: ‘An earthquake? What next? Poor Haiti is cursed’” [32] or “Tuesday’s earthquake was yet another tragedy for a country already shattered by adversity and misfortune.” [33]

5.2 Recovery Stage: Assessment

Beyond the immediate pre-impact stage, the media frames of the two cases shifted in different directions. While the focus of the previous period was to initiate relief efforts in response to sudden breaches of normal routines, assessments of relief assistance started to appear along with possible restoration plans. Turning away from mere snapshots of what *appears* to be happening, the media’s viewpoint became critical as they added some implications of the outcomes and aftermaths of the disasters. This is the stage where social behaviors

come into focus in relation to the responsibility issue. For both events, it took about one week to go beyond the initial post-impact stage and reach this point.

5.2.1 New Orleans under Anarchy and Hopelessness

Katrina was framed as an anarchical situation in two aspects. First, at the societal level, the media highly criticized the absence of government planning and aid. As indicated in the following headlines, the Bush administration was blamed for its irresponsibility and its focus on the war on terror. The headlines clearly illustrate this criticism: “A can’t-do government”; “Katrina’s assault on Washington” (NYT); and “Storm’s devastation fans antiwar flame” (WP).

The anarchy frame existed in both commentaries and news stories as there was increasing public opinion about the issue: “Why have aid and security taken so long to arrive? ... Why wasn’t more preventive action taken? ... Did the Bush administration destroy FEMA’s effectiveness? [Our current leaders] like waging war, but they don’t like providing security, rescuing those in need or spending on preventive measures” [34] or “‘From Iraq to New Orleans, fund human needs, not the war machine,’ many of the protesters shouted in Lafayette Square last night.” [35]

In addition, on an individual level, the event was anarchic due to lawlessness and violence at the disaster site. Katrina was no longer a natural disaster but something that accompanied social disaster with looting and crime. This is apparent in the headlines: “Police and Owners Begin to Challenge Looters” (NYT) and “A city of despair and lawlessness” (WP).

At one point, the occurrence of such a social disaster even appeared to prevent the initial attempts to assist the local community with relief efforts. Panic and chaotic circumstances originated by the natural disasters seemed to have created other forms of disastrous events: “Across New Orleans, the rule of law, like the city’s levees, could not hold out after Hurricane Katrina. The desperate and the opportunistic took advantage of an overwhelmed police force and helped themselves to anything that could be carried, wheeled or floated away, including food, water, shoes, television sets, sporting goods and firearms” [36] or “Things have spiraled so out of control that the city’s mayor told the Associated Press that he has ordered police officers to focus on looters and give up search-and-rescue efforts.” [37]

5.2.2 Haiti Under Scrutiny With Hope

Haiti’s misfortune turned out to be an opportunity during the previous stage. However, the media content delved into its ability to efficiently make use of the promised donations. The assessment frame provided a window to examine a possible political storm due to its infamous corruption. Amidst the outpouring of promises, the Haitian government was questioned for the potential of economic restoration and transparency as the following headlines indicate: “Building Haiti’s economy, one mango at a time” (NYT) and “Haiti and transparency” (WP). The following example further illustrates the dominant frame during this stage at the societal level: “Shattered institutions, an anemic stage, a history of graft and the sudden deluge of aid money make Haiti a perfect storm for corruption risk...” [38]

Media texts also revealed common concerns raised by ordinary people. Although the following is one of the extreme opinions expressed by a newspaper reader, it describes the underlying assumptions reflected in the media: “‘Giving money to Haiti and other third-world countries is like throwing money in the toilet’, another commenter [on my blog] said.” [39]

However, the media also framed the Haiti earthquake as an event that offered the country valuable opportunities for rebuilding. For Haiti, the disaster transformed from a devastating tragedy into a hopeful future. The media discussed the plans for “Making Haiti Whole” (NYT) as the U.N. effort would transform Haiti (WP).

5.3 Reconstruction Stage: Effects

While Katrina approached the reconstruction stage after ten days, the Haitian case was still in the recovery stage after three months without concrete plans for rebuilding. Although the facilitators were able to identify community needs, difficulties in logistics prevented them from reaching the design stage for restoration. For the Katrina case, the frame went beyond the direct impacts of the disaster to discuss broader implications of the disaster in terms of its effects on other areas.

5.3.1 Katrina Effect

Most of the news texts used the term Katrina as a common expression to indicate such a point in American history. Both commentaries and news stories had less relevance to the disaster itself; they simply pointed out the disaster in the process of explaining some other issues. One example would be: “Before Hurricane Katrina, Congressional Republicans seemed unstoppable in their drive to cut taxes...” [40] Although there were more relevant articles about the disaster itself, such as “Double Trap for Foreign Workers” (NYT) or “Houston Finds Business Boon After Katrina” (NYT), these texts were hard to find toward the end of the three-month period. The disaster appeared to be moving out of the media as it became a past event.

5.4 Frames of the Three Actors Transferred to Media Frames

The next research question addressed was what frames the three actors, donors, facilitators, and beneficiaries used and which group dominated the media frames in each disaster.

5.4.1 Donor: U.S. Government

The U.S. Government appeared as one of the main frame sponsors in the donor’s position during the immediate post-impact stage of the two disasters. It added to the frames of consequence- and sympathy-driven humanitarian assistance. With regard to the Katrina case, the U.S. Government was the main frame sponsor of the lawlessness anarchical frame in New Orleans. In relation to the efforts to rebuild Haiti, the government’s active involvement in the international discourse added to the scrutiny frame during the second stage. However, their frames were not as successfully transferred to the media frames compared to the ones of the facilitators. Although numerous statements were issued by the Government, they were left out of the media in most cases.

5.4.2 Facilitator: United Nations and Nongovernmental Organizations

The facilitators played the most active role as frame sponsors in both cases. For Hurricane Katrina, nongovernmental organizations involved in the rescue and relief efforts framed the disaster in terms of the consequences during the first stage and also contributed to the anarchy frames in the second stage. Although their frames weren’t as dominant during the following stage, they anchored the media discourse throughout the process, acting as experts in disaster relief. For the Haitian case, the United Nations incorporated the frames of the donors, which were then transferred to the media. Statements issued by the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and press releases outlining the discussion points during the donor meetings were extensively used in framing sympathy-driven humanitarian assistance and during the later discourse of Haiti under scrutiny with hope. With their expertise out in the field, nongovernmental organizations also contributed to the scrutiny frame with an even more critical voice about the unpreparedness of Haitian society to receive such generosity.

5.4.3 Beneficiaries: Local Residents

The beneficiaries had some opportunities to frame the disaster during the very early stage of the development of Hurricane Katrina. Although numerous interviews appeared in the news text in both cases, their viewpoints weren't incorporated into the media frames. Rather, they were able to add their voices to framing the disaster in terms of the consequences in the local area. Even in those cases, they were heard not because they were the beneficiaries of the relief efforts; the media paid attention to their discourse about how extraordinary the magnitude of the disaster was. In the same manner, the voices of Haitian beneficiaries were not incorporated as frames.

5.5 Frames Accepted and Refused by the Media: Bush's Jackson Square Speech

The last two questions asked which of the actor frames the media accepted or refused to include in their coverage and what differences were found between the two disasters over time. Frames that were accepted by the media were easily identified as described in the previous section. However, locating the frames that were left out of the media discourse was a difficult task. Only one example was identified by comparing the statements issued by the U.S. Government and the media coverage. The following case compares President Bush's speech in New Orleans on September 5, 2005, in order to identify his frames that were not presented in the media as frames.

During his speech in Jackson Square after Hurricane Katrina, he framed the disaster as an event that was "unprecedented" and highlighted the fact that it "was not a normal hurricane—and the normal disaster relief system was not equal to it" [41]. In response to the media criticism about the government's unpreparedness and being irresponsible, he employed the frame of being "overwhelmed in the first few days" due to the "awesome force" of the nature. First, he pointed at nature and then brought the city into the discourse: "City and parish officials in New Orleans, and state officials in Louisiana will have a large part in the engineering decisions to come... Our cities must have clear and up-to-date plans for responding to natural disasters..." [41]

A comparison of the media coverage of the speech and the document issued by the administration shows that President Bush's frames were unable to be transferred to media frames. Instead, his speech was used to support counterframes to the issue of the government's inadequate response to the incident.

6. Discussion

The media frames of Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti Earthquake shifted from humanitarian assistance to different directions; while New Orleans was under anarchy and hopeless, Haiti was under scrutiny with hope. The disaster was a given condition in both cases, but articles were framed differently once the media started assessing the progress of recovery. Furthermore, toward the end of the three-month period, the media framed the outcomes of the hurricane as the "Katrina effect," using the disaster as a reference point to explain other economic and political issues. Frames of the Haitian case during the reconstruction period could not be examined from the news coverage used in this study as its progress was relatively slow, possibly due to extended discussions regarding the government's capability to carry out the rebuilding process.

Textual analysis of the news coverage of the two disasters confirmed both the theoretical and empirical assumptions from the sociology of disaster. Social behaviors during the different phases after the disaster followed similar patterns as suggested in the literature, and accordingly, different frames appeared in media texts. During the post-impact stage, disasters were seen as sudden events breaking the normal conditions,

therefore the media framed them as a call for humanitarian assistance [8]. Such frames were an invitation to construct the meanings of a social phenomenon [28]. In an effort to specify the abstract concept of disaster, the media organized the information retrieved from the site, provided the consequences of the disaster in New Orleans, and offered sympathy toward Haitian residents. In the Haitian case, yet another disaster meant additional burden to an already disastrous situation. Beyond this stage, when preliminary plans for recovery were established, myths of disasters appeared in the frames; disaster was framed as anarchy involving blame games and looting [42]. The Haitian case was framed in a similar pattern with regard to the blames toward the incompetent government and the country as a whole; outpourings of aid were framed as the possibility of a political storm. Incorporating the myths into a master narrative of frames also resonates with Hertog and McLeod's definition of frames as cultural structures [29]. During the last stage of reconstruction, framing of Hurricane Katrina shifted to its broader effects on society as a whole. Along the way, we see how the abstract concept of disaster was specified and then became a historical symbol in American society.

Although the concept of social actors playing the role of active frame sponsors was not as apparent compared to what the development literature suggests, the three actors, donors, facilitators, and beneficiaries, contributed to generating the media frames. The facilitators, United Nations and other nongovernmental organizations were most successful in delivering their own frames to the media, while the U.S. Government and local beneficiaries were not as efficient. Although the processes of disaster relief appear to be staying with the top-down approach to development, this can be explained by the fact that disaster sites are considered to be on the lowest continuum of economic development [17]; the novel concept of participatory approach may not be applicable to such emergency situations. Another reason explaining why the beneficiaries weren't successful in transferring their frames may be because they didn't have one dominant frame; each individual or group might have been framing the disaster in their own view without having one unifying frame that resonates with the media text. However, the findings of the study contributed to further understanding the framing concept and its role in defining the roles of each group and assigning relevant sources to structure the discussion [29].

The case of the contrasting frames of media and the original speech of President Bush illustrates the fact that media is in the important position of "frame-keepers". As already discussed above, different social actors had their own frames, but some were transferred to media frames while others weren't. What makes an actor's frame acceptable for the media? Source availability didn't explain the case, because both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* adopted the United Nation's frames while resisting the Bush administration's. They were also willing to take the frames provided by nongovernmental organizations out in the field, while refusing to transfer the frames of the U.S. Government in Washington as in the case of the Jackson Square speech.

In addition to the question of the media's responsiveness to such frames, the results of this study provide a contrasting view with regard to extensive coverage of natural disasters. Although previous research identifies the reason for natural disasters receiving far more coverage compared to other man-made disasters regardless of the death tolls from the nonexistence of complex causes or someone to blame, the current study suggests that blame games are one of the apparent myths central to the frames of natural disasters. This may be explained by the unexpected nature of the disaster, as indicated in the sociology literature, or the proximity of the event. Disasters being one-time events may be another reason as incidents such as civil wars are considered to have a continuity aspect that conflicts with the newness of the news value. Research in this area needs further exploration drawing upon media sociology literature on theories of influences on media content.

7. Conclusion

This comparison of the U.S. news coverage of national and international disasters confirmed some

explanations regarding the media's responsiveness to certain disasters. At least in the U.S., regardless of the death tolls or economic situations in the region, a national disaster received far more coverage compared to one that occurred at the international level. The value of proximity led the media to respond to the disaster in relation to social and geographical distance. Based on the media frames of the earlier stage of disaster coverage, another determinant identified was the need for humanitarian assistance, whether that is consequence- or sympathy-driven. Some of the traditional determinants discussed in past research, such as poverty, race, and infrastructure, may be included as themes within each frame. By locating the media frames of disasters, we may draw further implications for the role of media coverage in disaster relief. In both cases, the initial call for humanitarian assistance frame may have drawn more support for rescue and relief. The anarchy frame of Hurricane Katrina may have had a positive influence on aid allocation as ordinary citizens and nongovernmental organizations raised their efforts to cover for the government's unpreparedness. On the other hand, Haiti faced difficulties in receiving its relief aid, although it was already promised during the time when the media used sympathy frames. This is partly due to the fact that a large amount of relief aid is not made available immediately after the promise, but such a media frame might be delaying the process to a greater extent.

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