Framing the flight MH370 mystery: A content analysis of Malaysian, Chinese, and U.S. media

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Abstract
This study analyzes frames related to the flight MH370 disappearance in Malaysian (N = 93), Chinese (N = 155), and U.S. (N = 150) newspapers. The results provide insight about media orientations in an international crisis, particularly regarding national interests and international citizenship. Attribution of responsibility is the dominant frame; secondary frames vary among conflict and human-interest frames, demonstrating that attribution of responsibility is the most important frame even with unknown controllability and ambiguous intentionality. Results also demonstrate significant differences in national interest frames and in the roles in the societal evaluation of risk. This study contextualizes the results in media systems, diplomatic relations, and cultures.

Keywords
Crisis communication, framing, international citizenship, international crisis, national interests

On 8 March 2014, about an hour after takeoff, Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 mysteriously disappeared from radar. In a news release to media after the disappearance, Malaysia Airlines confirmed the flight was carrying 239 passengers and crew from 14 different nationalities. The passengers included 154 Chinese, 50 Malaysian, seven Indonesian, six Australian, five Indian, four American,
three French, two New Zealander, two Ukrainian, two Canadian, one Russian, one Italian, one Dutch, and one Austrian (Malaysia Airlines, 2014).

In the days and weeks after the mysterious event, international media reported extensively on the missing airplane. Such coverage doubled television audiences, increased primetime ratings, and generated immense internet traffic (news.com.acu, 2014). While many speculated the plane accidentally crashed with the fuselage now resting at the bottom of the Indian Ocean, others contended hijackers hid the plane to accomplish malicious purposes at a later time or supernatural forces snatched MH370 from the sky. Whether a rogue pilot, terrorists, or mechanical failure was attributed to blame, each story was nothing more than a conjecture because technological evidence about the actual fate of the flight remains sparse.

The MH370 investigation continues as the most expensive in aviation history (Australian Transport Safety Bureau, 2016; Wardell, 2014). Inhabitants of La Reunion, a remote Indian island, discovered debris on 29 July 2015, more than a year after the plane’s disappearance. French and Malaysian authorities confirmed the debris was from MH370 (Jamieson and Ciganinero, 2015). In October 2016, authorities confirmed wing fragments, discovered in May 2016 in Mauritius and in June 2016 in Tanzania, came from MH370 (Westcott, 2016). However, the location of the fuselage and the conditions under which the plane disappeared remain a mystery that, more than three years after the event, continues to receive international media attention. For example, a British journalist released a book about MH370 in March 2016 (Quest, 2016) and an episode of the Australian edition of ‘60 Minutes’ broadcast in July 2016 with accusations that the Malaysian government concealed its knowledge of the true fate of MH370 (Vankin, 2016). Further, the mystery of the missing plane still causes emotional suffering and anxiety for the 239 passengers’ loved ones and has resulted in dozens of lawsuits (Glum, 2016).

The MH370 mystery permits a unique inquiry into media coverage of a crisis because multiple nations are involved and there is no clarity about what happened to the flight: This is a crisis without a known cause and, thus, without an individual, organization, or nation to attribute blame. Further, aviation crises are of interest because aviation is one of the technologies credited for creating a global community. According to the International Air Transport Association (2014), airlines safely transported more than 3.3 billion passengers, and, while doing so, sustained 58 million jobs and stimulated $2.4 trillion of economic output. Critical actions of large organizations, particularly aviation corporations such as Malaysia Airlines, attract global media attention and influence how the home country is perceived in other countries (Gotsi et al., 2011).

Media are a primary source of information about international events and issues, and coverage helps construct perceptions about and evaluations of unfamiliar nations, cultures, and ideologies for global audiences (Kucherenko and Christen, 2014; Orgeret, 2010). Media shape public opinions, particularly in crisis situations (Coombs, 2007; Knight, 1999). Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the manner in which media frame crises and to the relationship between national interests and media coverage of political events and wars.
(Downing, 1988; Paletz and Vinson, 1994; Zaremba, 1988), but little empirical research has been conducted to elucidate the relationships among national interests, international citizenship, and communication about international crises. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the framing of the disappearance of flight MH370 in English-language newspapers from Malaysia, China, and the United States to provide insight about media orientation in an international crisis, particularly in relation to national interests and international citizenship.

**Literature review**

**Theoretical framework**

Media frames are ‘schemata of interpretation’ (Goffman, 1974: 21). Framing analysis investigates which attributes of an event or issue are presented as important by media (McCombs et al., 1997; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Thus, framing analysis is the interpretation of a reality in a message (McCombs, 2005). Through exposure to media with manifest and latent frames, audiences construct shared expectations and values, which affect behavior (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Therefore, in a strategic attempt not unlike persuasion, the media presentation of an event or issue influences public opinion and collective behavior (Ghanem, 1997).

**National interests and media frames**

National interests relate to the political, economic, militarist, sociocultural, and security objectives of a country and comprise value choices by policymakers to minimize costs and to maximize benefits for the good of the country (Li, 2003). Journalists employ national interest frames by explicitly highlighting or making implicit assumptions about these objectives and value choices to explain an event or issue and to resonate with domestic audiences (Brewer, 2006; Novais, 2007). In this manner, media reduce the complexity of foreign cultures (Said, 1993) and impose elite-defined national interests and agendas onto international matters (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 1989; Dorogi, 2001). Although media often claim to offer a plurality of viewpoints, they are typically limited to those reflecting viewpoints from official sources (Ruigrok and Van Atteveldt, 2007) and there is a close relationship between media organizations and government agendas (Entman, 1991; Hook and Pu, 2006; Paterson, 1999). For example, national interests are prominent in U.S. media coverage of China, which commonly utilizes an anticommunist frame (Dorogi, 2001; Lee et al., 2011; Mao, 2014), whereas media about U.S.–Japan relations and U.S.–South Korea relations often employ a cooperative frame (Park, 2013).

National interests are reflected in culture and operate with the legitimacy of a country’s citizenship, government, and/or economic activities. Such legitimacy may be justified with the fabrication of political authority and the coercive control of
cultural values. Culture is the expression of the character of a group of social actors and is molded by their backgrounds, languages, and beliefs (Bereciartu, 1994). In this sense, the framing of national interests can be further examined and understood from culture, for culture provides the foundation for social actors to generate knowledge and to assign meaning to external phenomena (Hall, 1997). Media content is a direct reflection of culture (Hall, 1980) and media frames are a part of culture (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974), for they link cognition and culture (Gamson et al., 1992; Lee and Basnyat, 2013). Media producers use cultural values in content and present them to audiences (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), and culture functions to provide understanding between media producers and media consumers (Van Gorp, 2007).

Amid increased global interconnectedness from technological advancements in media and travel capabilities, national interests are often in tension with a country’s desire to be perceived as a respectable international citizen. International citizenship, also called global citizenship, lacks a singular definition but is often related to neoliberal economic policy or a sense of cosmopolitanism based on moral responsibility to the global population. Journalists can function as agents to promote various facets of international citizenship (Schattle, 2015). According to Pert (2014), international citizenship is described according to the following frames: a legal frame featuring compliance with international law, a cooperation frame featuring support for bilateral or multilateral agreements, a willingness frame featuring completion of international tasks, an ethics frame featuring good deeds outside its national boundaries, a leadership frame featuring works to raise international standards, and a global peace frame as a primary actor in global peace and stability (Pert, 2014).

**Generic roles in the societal evaluation of risk**

Palmlund (1992, 2009) identified six generic roles in societal evaluation of risk, which can be used to examine media crisis frames, especially in relation to attribution of risk concerning individuals or organizations responsible for the crisis event or responsible for managing the crisis event. According to Palmlund’s research, risk bearers are the victims of the negative consequences of the risk or perceive themselves as such. Risk bearers’ advocates speak on behalf of the risk bearers. Risk generators create and/or fabricate the risks or are at least thought to do so by others involved. Risk researchers work through various methods to determine what occurred, why and how it can be abated or mitigated. Risk arbiters work to protect risk bearers from present or future risks, while risk informers are not directly affected or involved yet provide information and commentary.

**Framing an international aviation crisis**

While framing is a factor in media coverage, it becomes even more important in crisis communication because media frames affect audience perceptions of
organizations and behavior in emergency situations (Coombs, 2007). Entman (1993) identified four basic explicit and implicit media frames in crisis situations: definition of problem, specification of causes, conveyance of moral assessments, and endorsement of remedies. Such frames manifest in media through word choice, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments, and visual images (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). More recent studies, including those conducted by crisis communication scholars with a nuanced understanding of crisis frameworks, identified five media frames commonly utilized in crises, which will be the focal point of this present analysis: attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality (An and Gower, 2009; Cho and Gower, 2006; Coombs and Holladay, 1996; Liu and Pennington-Gray, 2015; Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). In crisis situations, the morality frame situates the event within the context of moral or religious values (An and Gower, 2009; Neuman et al., 1992). The human-interest frame presents an emotional angle (An and Gower, 2009; Cho and Gower, 2006; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). The economic consequences frame reports the financial implications, either positive or negative, for individuals, groups, organizations, or countries (An and Gower, 2009; Neuman et al., 1992). The conflict frame highlights disagreements among individuals, groups, organizations, or countries (An and Gower, 2009; Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). Finally, the attribution of responsibility frame offers causes of or potential solutions (An and Gower, 2009; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000).

**Sociopolitical factors in Chinese, Malaysian, and U.S. crisis frames**

The mysterious disappearance of the MH370 flight is a crisis involving several countries and, thus, diverse national interests and ideologies: Malaysia Airlines, a corporation in which the Malaysian government holds majority ownership, operated the flight; most of the 239 passengers onboard the flight were Chinese; and Boeing, a U.S. corporation with $81 trillion annual revenue, manufactured the aircraft (Defense News, 2013). While scholars and practitioners have acknowledged media play an important role in disseminating information about crises (Coombs, 2007), Schultz et al. (2012) contend U.S. media and foreign media present unlike solutions to crises. Molleda’s research (2011) shows how media frame conflicts differently according to their geographic location in relation to the crisis location.

Moreover, countries have dissimilar journalistic standards and norms that affect how media frame crises. While objectivity is considered a universal journalistic norm, power relations within Malaysia, China, and the United States, respectively, influence media production, distribution, and consumption. Such power relations as well as Western and Asian cultural values, respectively, alter conceptualizations of objectivity and press freedom (Ramanathan, 2016). China is an especially interesting case because it is one of the few remaining communist states, and different political systems result in different media expectations (Mehra, 1993). The Chinese
media model is based on government censorship as Chinese media are state-owned extensions of the government that receive daily directives from the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (World Press Freedom Index, 2014). Economic reform has brought the expansion and diversification of Chinese media, but China still uses media to promote the government image (Zhao, 2000). Both mainstream print and broadcast as well as online media are controlled by legal restrictions, although online media expand the boundaries of permissible reporting (Hassid and Repnikova, 2016).

Media expectations are different in democratic countries than in communist countries (Mehra, 1993). Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy, and the United States is a democratic republic. While various political systems have long employed media to propagandize, spread ideology, and defend regimes, controlled communication has been an outcome of governments deemed communistic more so than of governments deemed democratic. In the case of Malaysia, however, media are censored more than media in most democracies (Freitag and Stokes, 2009). Ownership patterns and legal restrictions impact the content of mainstream media in Malaysia, whereas online media are fairly unrestricted (Brown, 2005; Jalarajan Raj and Sreekumar, 2012; Steele, 2011; Willnat and Wong, 2013). The Malaysian government uses media as instruments for national development, and, thus, Malaysian journalists generally report positively about their government (Jalarajan Raj and Sreekumar, 2012; Ramanathan, 2016). This ‘development journalism’ model (Taylor and Kent, 1999: 138) as well as Islamic cultural principles discourage journalists from divulging negative information (Steele, 2011, 2013). Unlike American journalists, Malaysian journalists often carefully ponder the consequences of their writings in accordance with Islamic social values (Steele, 2011, 2013). Malaysian journalists must practice ‘responsible journalism,’ particularly when reporting on race, religion, and politics—and some fear arrest for reporting in a manner deemed inappropriate by the government (Jalarajan Raj and Sreekumar, 2012: 25).

Free and open media have long been considered crucial to a healthy democracy. The U.S. media model, in theory, is based on diversity of viewpoints, programming, outlets, and ownership (Scherer, 2016). The concentration of U.S. media ownership, however, allows for information control. Moreover, journalistic norms change as U.S. society changes. For example, U.S. media historically reflected moderate viewpoints, but as viewpoints in society become more polarizing, so do media representations (McLuskey and Kim, 2012). While journalists in Southeast Asia exhibit values toward promoting national loyalty and building a sense of community, especially in print media (Massey, 2000; Menon, 1998), journalists in the United States and other Western countries are more likely to engage in ‘aggressive journalism,’ including the criticism of national leaders (Ramanathan, 2016: 23). According to the 2014 World Press Freedom Index, the United States ranks 46, Malaysia ranks 147, and China ranks 175 out of 180 countries in terms of a free and open media without government censorship.
Study rationale and research questions

Although framing theories have long been tested quantitatively through content analysis, Carragee and Roefs (2004) posit that a problem with framing research is it often fails to examine the framing process within the broader political and social context, and Park (2013) calls for additional framing research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of international media coverage. Van Gorp (2007) avows research does not adequately consider the influence of culture on archetypal media frames, and Hume (2010) indicates mediated communication as it pertains to culture is ripe for investigation. Lee (2004) suggests Western crisis frameworks are generalizable, but more research is necessary to understand differences in cross-cultural crisis communication. Pinsdorf (1991) argues an organization, particularly an airline operating transnationally, must reflect varying cultural values for survival after a crisis. Since the disappearance of flight MH370, Malaysia Airlines has incurred financial loss, and the future of the organization is bleak (Centre for Aviation, 2014; Skynews.com.au, 2016). Understanding how international media frame an aviation crisis without an obvious cause provides insight toward organizational survival by responding to publics with different political, social, and cultural backgrounds. As such, this present study addresses several of the shortcomings of the content analyses identified herein and extends the discussion beyond descriptive findings while maintaining the strengths of quantitative content analysis.

Furthermore, scholars suggest future framing research should pursue ‘issue-specific frames related exclusively to a particular topic’ (Santos et al., 2013: 67). Although the only crisis plagued by ongoing mystery, the MH370 flight was one of several aviation crises that made 2014 one of the deadliest years for flying in almost a decade (Grant, 2014). Thus, this study has implications for future research about response strategies for international aviation crises. Based on a synthesis of previous research, an analysis of English-language newspapers in Malaysia, China, and the United States elucidates variations in framing the flight MH370 crisis by answering the following research questions:

**RQ1**: How is the MH370 crisis framed in English-language Malaysian, Chinese, and U.S. newspapers in terms of attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality?

**RQ2**: How does MH370 coverage in English-language Malaysian, Chinese, and U.S. newspapers reflect national interests in terms of the political, economic, militarist, sociocultural, and security objectives within each respective country?

**RQ3**: How does MH370 coverage in English-language Malaysian, Chinese, and U.S. newspapers reflect international citizenship in terms of each respective country’s compliance with international law, cooperation with or toward formal agreements, willingness to work with other countries, ethical behavior, global leadership, and promotion of world peace and stability?
**Method**

**Research design**

Framing is one of the most commonly applied research approaches in the communication field (Bryant and Miron, 2004). This study employs a quantitative content analysis design to analyze statistically the differences among international media frames and to make inferences about communication about a crisis without an obvious cause. Content analyses are essential for understanding communication messages, and ‘communication content merits systematic examination because of its assumed role as cause or antecedent of a variety of individual processes, effects, or uses people make of it’ (Riffe et al., 2005: 11). The researchers conducted an analysis to reflect the overall trends of MH370-related coverage in English-language Malaysian, Chinese, and U.S. newspapers and counted frequencies and made comparisons to elucidate the significance of the frames.

**Data collection and sample**

Data were collected from Malaysian, Chinese, and U.S. sources based on (1) media primacy in each country, (2) the availability of newspapers in English, and (3) the availability of newspapers in the LexisNexis Academic database to ensure systematic sample collection. Malaysia was selected because it is the country of origin for Malaysia Airlines, China was selected because the majority of the MH370 passengers were Chinese citizens, and the United States was selected because it is the country of origin for the Boeing aircraft. English-language newspapers were used in part because of the researchers’ language abilities but also because English-language media present global issues to an international readership and, thus, provide insight into the relationship between national interests and international citizenship. The oldest remaining newspaper and one of the top English newspapers by circulation in Malaysia is *New Straits Times*, a source used in comparative communication research among international sources (Massey, 2000; Park et al., 2016; Ramanathan, 2016); further, the *New Straits Times* is a part of the largest mass communication organization in Malaysia (Ramanathan, 2016). The top English newspaper in China is *China Daily*, which is state-owned and has been used in Chinese media content analyses (Luther and Zhou, 2005; Tai and Sun, 2007; Zhang et al., 2014). *The New York Times* is regarded as a model newspaper, is a top newspaper in the United States by circulation, and is frequently used in comparative research among international sources (Nossek, 2004; Tunstall, 1977).

All full-text articles related to flight MH370 from 8 March 2014 to 28 January 2015, inclusive, were obtained from *New Straits Times*, *China Daily*, and *The New York Times* through LexisNexis by key words. The time parameters were determined by the day flight MH370 disappeared to the day the Malaysian government declared MH370 likely crashed without survivors to allow insurers to pay the next of kin. The key words applied in headlines and full articles were ‘MH370’ and
‘Malaysia Airlines’ and ‘370.’ Duplicates of articles were deleted. Associated Press 
articles published in The New York Times were included in the sample because it is 
a U.S. news agency and The New York Times in this study represents the U.S. 
perspective. Some articles related to flight MH370 also covered other aviation 
crises in 2014, particularly Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 and Air Asia Flight 
Q78501; these articles were included in the sample. The search yielded 93 articles 
from New Straits Times, 155 articles from China Daily, and 150 articles from The 
New York Times for a total of 398 articles.

Coding scheme and intercoder reliability

The unit of analysis for this study was the article. The coding scheme was based on 
the premise that media frames ‘can be detected by probing for particular 
words...that consistently appear in a narrative and convey thematically consistent 
meanings’ (Entman, 1991: 7). However, because multidimensional and abstract 
concepts are complex to study from a social scientific perspective (Riffe et al., 
2005), the researchers developed precise conceptual and operational definitions 
of variables in a codebook.

The coding instrument was initially designed based on previous literature and 
prior to observation of the sample. The codebook explained the measures to the 
extent that each coding category allowed for replicability. First, the codebook 
consisted of basic information about the article such as publisher, publication 
date, and author of the article to ensure one particular journalist was not framing 
the crisis entirely differently than other journalists. The rest of the codebook 
focused on the appearance of the five media frames used in crisis communication 
and identified in previous literature (attribution of responsibility, conflict, eco-
nomic consequences, human interest, and morality), the presence of national inter-
ests (operationalized as economy, military, sociocultural values, political system, 
and security), and the mention of international citizenship (operationalized as legal 
issues, cooperation in formal agreements, willingness to work together, ethical 
behavior, and global leadership).

To measure nuance within the crisis media frames, the researchers adapted the 
20-question coding scheme used by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) about attribu-
tion of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality. 
A total of 18 questions were added to account for the distinct attributes of the 
MH370 disappearance as an international crisis with an unknown cause. For exam-
ple, the codebook included codes that distinguished between foreign and domestic 
governments both as a cause of the crisis and as a postcrisis alleviator, codes for the 
role of a corporation as a cause and as an alleviator, and codes for the presentation 
of multiple credible causes for the crisis. In total, there were 13 items about attribu-
tion of responsibility, eight items about conflict, nine items about economic conse-
quences, five items about human interest, and three items about morality.

Because this study aims to investigate research questions rather than to support 
hypotheses, two authors served as the coders (Park and Reber, 2010). The coders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding scheme</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five crisis frames</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of responsibility</td>
<td>Offers causes of or potential solutions for the crisis and a way of attributing responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Highlights disagreements among individuals, groups, organizations, or countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic consequences</td>
<td>Reports the financial significance of the crisis for individuals, groups, organizations, or countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human interest</td>
<td>Presents a human face or an emotional angle to the crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>Situates the event within the context of moral or religious values or social prescriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Discusses the country’s activities related to the production, exchange, or consumption of goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Includes information about the country’s military, soldiers, or military affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and/or society</td>
<td>Gives information about the beliefs, myths, values, norms, special artifacts, and/or social practices of the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National security</td>
<td>Offers information about how the country is protecting citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political system</td>
<td>Contains messages about the country’s political system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International citizenship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues</td>
<td>Presents the country’s compliance with international law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Expresses the country’s support for bilateral or multilateral agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>Reports the country’s willingness to complete international tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Offers to do good deeds outside national boundaries because it is moral or right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Highlights the ways that the country is raising international standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global peace</td>
<td>Situates global harmony as a priority for the country or the country as a primary actor in global peace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
completed three independent practice sessions, based on eight, 12, and 48 articles, respectively, prior to the actual coding. Between practice sessions, they discussed and agreed upon the classification of frames according to operational definitions and the codebook was modified as necessary. Intercoder reliability was assessed according to Cohen’s Kappa. The scores ranged from .76 to .95, which are acceptable coefficients for a content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002).

The coders then independently read each article of the sample one at a time and coded frames in the article according to the codebook while disregarding outside knowledge about flight MH370 and other issues discussed in the article. After coding, the relationships among media frames and variables associated with national interests and international citizenship were examined statistically to answer the research questions about communication about an international crisis without an obvious cause.

### Results

Before analyzing the five crisis media frames, though, the number of newspaper articles published was analyzed. As Table 2 shows, the majority of New Straits Times and The New York Times articles were published in the first month ($n = 98$, 66.6% and $n = 89$, 62.7%, respectively). In contrast, more than half of China Daily articles ($n = 48$, 51.2%) were published more than a month after the crisis happened. The difference among the three publishers was statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 34.06$, $p < .01$.

### Research question 1

The first research question explores crisis media frames in New Straits Times, China Daily, and The New York Times. For all three publishers, attribution of responsibility was the dominant frame used (New Straits Times: $n = 97$, 62.6%; China Daily: $n = 67$, 72.0%; and The New York Times: $n = 100$, 70.4%). However, as shown in Table 3, the second most frequently used frames were different among the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week postcrisis</th>
<th>1 n(%)</th>
<th>2 n(%)</th>
<th>3 n(%)</th>
<th>4 n(%)</th>
<th>5–8 n(%)</th>
<th>9–12 n(%)</th>
<th>12+ n(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NST</td>
<td>13(8.4)$^a$</td>
<td>36(23.2)$^a$</td>
<td>33(21.3)$^b$</td>
<td>16(10.3)$^b$</td>
<td>24(15.5)$^b$</td>
<td>16(10.3)$^a$</td>
<td>17(11.0)$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Daily</td>
<td>16(17.2)$^b$</td>
<td>10(10.8)$^b$</td>
<td>11(11.8)$^a$</td>
<td>8(8.6)$^a$</td>
<td>16(17.2)$^b$</td>
<td>9(9.7)$^b$</td>
<td>23(24.7)$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>43(30.3)$^b$</td>
<td>20(14.1)$^b$</td>
<td>19(13.4)$^b$</td>
<td>7(4.9)$^b$</td>
<td>23(16.2)$^b$</td>
<td>8(5.6)$^a$</td>
<td>22(15.5)$^b$</td>
</tr>
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$^a$Higher than expected value.
$^b$Lower than expected value.
newspapers. For example, the conflict frame \((n = 21, 13.5\%)\) was the second for *New Straits Times*, while the human-interest frame was the second for *China Daily* and *The New York Times* \((n = 14, 15.1\% \text{ and } n = 22, 15.5\%, \text{ respectively})\). Overall, the proportions of frames in each newspaper were significantly different, \(\chi^2(8) = 23.57, p < .01\).

To explore the details of the five crisis media frames employed by *New Straits Times*, *China Daily*, and *The New York Times*, Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) coding scheme was adapted to suit an international crisis with an unknown cause. Some interesting results were found in the data. First, one of the coding items asked whether the publisher ‘suggests that some level of domestic government has the ability to alleviate the crisis.’ Among the 97 articles in *New Straits Times* that used the attribution of responsibility frame, 82.5% \((n = 80)\) of the articles suggested the domestic government, in this case the Malaysian government, was an alleviator. The percentages for *China Daily* and for *The New York Times*, however, were relatively low \((n = 38, 56.7\% \text{ and } n = 39, 39.0\%, \text{ respectively})\).

Second, a coding item asked whether the publisher ‘suggests that some level of foreign government has the ability to alleviate the crisis.’ Among the 100 articles in *The New York Times* that used the attribution of responsibility frame, 86.0% \((n = 86)\) suggested a foreign government was an alleviator. This compares with *New Straits Times* and *China Daily* in which 76.3% \((n = 74)\) and 71.6% \((n = 48)\) of articles, respectively, suggested a foreign government was a postcrisis alleviator.

Lastly, a coding item asked whether the article ‘makes reference to God or a higher being or other religious tenets.’ In *New Straits Times*, 50% \((n = 8)\) of articles with a morality frame referred to a higher being or religious tenets. In *The New York Times*, 66.7% \((n = 2)\) of articles with a morality frame referred to a higher being or religious tenets. No *China Daily* articles mentioned God or a higher being or any religious tenets.

A crosstab test yielded that the generic roles in the societal evaluation of risk were different among the newspapers, \(\chi^2(10) = 47.72, p < .01\). As Table 4 indicates, the top three roles of each publisher were different. For example, risk arbiters, risk advocates, and risk informers were used most frequently by *New Straits Times* and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Crisis frames by publisher.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attribution of responsibility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>n(%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NST</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>China Daily</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NYT</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NST:** *New Straits Times*; **NYT:** *The New York Times*.

*a\(^2\)(8) = 23.57, p < .01.*  
*bLower than expected value.*  
*bHigher than expected value.*
China Daily. However, in articles in *The New York Times*, the dominant roles were risk informers followed by risk arbiters and risk bearers.

**Research question 2**

The second research question examines whether national interests were framed differently among the three newspapers. Table 5 shows the majority of *New Straits Times* articles did not contain any national interest frames (\(n = 102, 65.8\%\)). Sociocultural (\(n = 30, 19.4\%\)) frames followed by military (\(n = 15, 9.7\%\)) frames appeared in *New Straits Times* articles. Likewise, the majority of *China Daily* and *The New York Times* articles did not have national interest frames (\(n = 70, 75.3\%\) and \(n = 108, 76.1\%, \text{respectively}\)). Both *China Daily* and *The New York Times* articles included military (16.1 and 22.5\%, respectively) frames followed by sociocultural (\(n = 7, 7.5\%\) and \(n = 1, 0.7\%, \text{respectively}\) frames.

---

**Table 4. Generic roles in the societal evaluation of risk by publisher.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk bearers n(%)</th>
<th>Risk advocates n(%)</th>
<th>Risk generators n(%)</th>
<th>Risk researchers n(%)</th>
<th>Risk arbiters n(%)</th>
<th>Risk informers n(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NST</strong></td>
<td>5(3.2)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>37(23.9)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6(3.9)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10(6.5)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>63(40.6)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>China Daily</strong></td>
<td>8(8.6)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9(9.7)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4(4.3)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8(8.6)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>40(43.0)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NYT</strong></td>
<td>16(11.3)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6(4.2)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>11(7.7)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12(8.5)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>40(43.0)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*\(\chi^2(10) = 47.72, p < .01\).*

<sup>a</sup>Lower than expected value.

<sup>b</sup>Higher than expected value.

**Table 5. National interest by publisher.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economy n(%)</th>
<th>Military n(%)</th>
<th>Cultural/society n(%)</th>
<th>National security n(%)</th>
<th>Political system n(%)</th>
<th>Nothing n(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NST</strong></td>
<td>2(1.3)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15(9.7)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>30(19.4)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5(3.2)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1(0.6)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>China Daily</strong></td>
<td>1(1.1)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15(16.1)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7(7.5)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0(0)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0(0)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NYT</strong></td>
<td>0(0)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>32(22.5)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1(0.7)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1(0.7)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0(0)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*\(\chi^2(10) = 44.28, p < .01\).*

<sup>a</sup>Higher than expected value.

<sup>b</sup>Lower than expected value.
The difference among the three publishers in terms of overall national interest frames was significant, $\chi^2(10) = 44.28$, $p < .01$.

**Research question 3**

Finally, the third research question investigates international citizenship frames within the three newspapers. In each of the three newspapers, the majority of articles did not include any frames about international citizenship and, thus, were coded as ‘nothing.’ The second most dominant frame for each of the three publishers was the willingness to work together to complete international tasks. Nevertheless, the proportions of the categories were significantly different, $\chi^2(8) = 43.40$, $p < .01$. For example, the majority of articles in *The New York Times* ($n = 117$, 82.4%) did not include any information about international citizenship, and only 16.9% of articles in *The New York Times* discussed the willingness of the United States to complete international tasks. However, for *New Straits Times* and *China Daily*, the proportion of the ‘nothing’ category decreased ($n = 78$, 50.3% and $n = 63$, 67.7%, respectively) and the proportion of the ‘willingness’ category increased ($n = 62$, 40.0% and $n = 29$, 31.2%, respectively). Interestingly, *New Straits Times* published articles about cooperation in formal agreements ($n = 7$, 4.5%), ethical behavior ($n = 6$, 3.9%), and global leadership ($n = 2$, 1.3%). For all three newspapers, there were no articles about legal issues and global peace.

**Discussion**

This study investigates media frames associated with an international crisis without a known cause and reveals that crisis frames, national interest frames, and international citizenship frames differ according to the country of origin of the publisher. Malaysia, China, and the United States have different media systems, and media ‘reflect the values of the political and economic systems of the nations within which they operate’ (Hachten, 1987: 16). Because the Chinese government
established *China Daily* to present information about China to an international English readership (Luther and Zhou, 2005), its articles are considered to characterize China as the Chinese government wishes China to be characterized within the global community (Ostini and Fung, 2002). In the MH370 disappearance, *China Daily* predictably focused on the activities of the Chinese government in relation to the crisis. For example, *China Daily* depicts Chinese officials as advocates for Chinese citizens, which supports previous comparative media framing research suggesting that during crises Chinese media frame the Chinese government positively whereas U.S. media frame the Chinese government negatively (Feng et al., 2012).

Diplomatic relations between and among countries also affect media coverage of an international aviation crisis (Yan and Kim, 2015). Malaysia–U.S. relations, although strained at times because of U.S. involvement in Islamic countries, are improving. China–U.S. relations are complicated as the two countries vie for global economic and militaristic power. The most salient diplomatic relationship in media coverage of the MH370 crisis, however, is Malaysia–China relations with Malaysians as the risk generators and Chinese as the risk bearers. Prior to the MH370 disappearance, Malaysia and China were organizing various activities throughout 2014 to celebrate diplomatic friendship between the two countries. China is well known for its panda diplomacy, or the gifting of Chinese pandas to a country as a sign of friendship and cooperation, but the scheduled delivery of pandas to Malaysia in honor of the 40th anniversary of China–Malaysia relations was initially postponed after the MH370 crisis. *New Straits Times* covered the panda delay and other aspects of China–Malaysia relations such as the Chinese boycott of Malaysia tourism more prominently than did *China Daily* and *The New York Times*. Though not state owned, *New Straits Times* is pro-government and nationalistic (Sani, 2005).

However, in an attempt to maintain good standing with the regional superpower, *New Straits Times* accepted China as a hegemon and emphasized Malaysia did not want the MH370 crisis to damage its cordial exchanges with China. With this background in mind, the three research questions are discussed in relation to the findings and literature review.

**Crisis media frames**

The first primary objective of this study was to assess how English-language newspapers in Malaysia, China, and the United States framed the MH370 crisis in terms of attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality. Overall, the most common frame was attribution of responsibility, which involved responsibility for causing the disappearance of flight MH370 as well as responsibility for alleviating the harms resulting from the crisis. Among the three publishers, *The New York Times* most frequently employed information about causality within articles with the attribution frame and most frequently suggested multiple causes as credible, including accidental pressure loss or engine
failure, terrorism plots, and a pilot suicide mission. *The New York Times* also reported a CNN poll that indicated 9% of Americans believed space aliens hijacked the plane. In contrast, *China Daily* assigned causality the least frequently. Two reasons likely explain this result. First, from a cultural perspective, Chinese are more comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity than are Malaysians and even more so than are Americans (The Hofstede Center, n.d.). Second, similar to the response of Chinese media during a 2013 aviation crisis, *China Daily* might be reluctant to ascribe causality in order to bolster a reputation as a good international citizen, as opposed to one as a menace, in the global community (Yan and Kim, 2015).

Entman (2005) contends a central function of media frames is to propose solutions to problems. In organizational crises, however, U.S. media and foreign media offer different solutions to problems associated with an international crisis (Schultz et al., 2012). Among the three publishers, *New Straits Times* most often attributed responsibility to the domestic government, provided solutions to the crisis, and specified the crisis required immediate action. For example, a 26 March 2014 article in *New Straits Times* reported ‘the Malaysian investigation team has set up an international working group, comprising agencies with expertise in satellite communications and aircraft performance, to take this work forward’ (Abas et al., 2014: 7), and a 27 March 2014 article reported Malaysia Airlines personnel were ‘taking care of the next of kin and crafting ways and means to nurse the struggling airline back in shape’ (Hamid, 2014: 6). Such responses are expected considering that in March 2014 the Malaysian government owned almost 70% of the Malaysia Airlines stock and a prompt, appropriate resolution to the crisis would increase the likelihood of organizational survival.

*New Straits Times, China Daily*, and *The New York Times* each suggested foreign governments are necessary to help alleviate the crisis and recognized the need for multiple actors in the global community to collaborate in the search for the missing aircraft. For example, in a 10 March 2014 article, *China Daily* praised China’s ‘all-out efforts to locate the missing passengers’ and asserted ‘experts have weighed in on the importance of China’s role in the salvage mission’ (China Daily, 2014a: A1). Li Jinming of Xiamen University said China’s ‘marine forces are better equipped compared with many neighboring countries’ (China Daily, 2014a: A1). By highlighting China’s advanced military technology and patrol vessels, the article reminded the world that China is indeed a regional, if not global, power. However, *China Daily* also emphasized international collaboration. For example, a 7 April 2014 article urged Chinese to voice frustrations ‘in a proper and reasonable manner’ because ‘all the nations involved in the search need the cooperation and support of the [Chinese] people’ (Zhao, 2014: A12). In an article published on 18 June 2014, *The New York Times* accentuated the coordinated military efforts among Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Korea, and the United States—even ‘countries that have had considerable frictions lately’—in the MH370 search (Bradsher, 2014: A4).
The conflict frame was second most common in *New Straits Times* articles, while the human-interest frame was second most common in both *China Daily* and *The New York Times* articles. For example, amid international criticism of the Malaysia Airlines’ handling of the MH370 crisis, a 27 March 2014 article in *New Straits Times* used the conflict frame by reporting many Malaysians support Malaysia Airlines CEO Ahmad Jauhari Yahya because he ‘handled the MH370 crisis in a composed and calm manner, and that there was no ground to call for his resignation’ (Lingan, 2014: 12). Furthermore, *New Straits Times* articles addressed the domestic political conflict concurrent with the MH370 crisis in which government critics and civil society disparaged the hegemony of Malaysia’s ruling elite. For example, a 9 April 2014 article accused the opposition party of posting MH370-related information online ‘to provoke and incite hatred towards Malaysia’ (News Straits Times, 2014: 8).

The human-interest frame most often employed personal vignettes to emphasize how the MH370 disappearance affected the next of kin. For example, *The New York Times* (2014) articles emphasized the anger, pain, and tears of Chinese whose children were on board MH370. *China Daily* articles accentuated the pain of Chinese, for example, by naming those who lost their lives and by quoting a woman who lost her mother on MH370: ‘An airliner not only carries passengers but also the destinies of hundreds of families’ (Hou and Zhu, 2014). An and Gower (2009) show the human-interest frame is commonly applied in coverage about crisis victims. Although it is logical for *China Daily* to provide a ‘human face’ on the crisis because most of the victims were Chinese, the congruence between *China Daily* and *The New York Times* partially deviates from previous framing studies. Molleda (2011) claims media frame differently according to their geographic location in relation to the crisis location. According to this argument, *New Straits Times* and *China Daily* would frame the crisis more similarly since they are geographically much closer to the organization responsible for the crisis and to the victims of the crisis than is *The New York Times*. In the context of an Asian health crisis, frames in *China Daily* were unlike frames in U.S. media (Luther and Zhou, 2005). However, like this present study, previous aviation crisis research indicates Chinese and U.S. media frames tend to mirror each other (Yan and Kim, 2015).

In coverage of the Asiana Airlines flight 214 crash in 2013, attribution of responsibility was the dominant frame and morality was second most common frame employed in Chinese media (Yan and Kim, 2015). The frequent use of the morality frame is presumably because all passengers except for three Chinese teenagers survived the crash and some of the survivors credited a higher being for their survival (Yan and Kim, 2015). This present study, however, is consistent with other crisis research in which morality was one of the least used frames (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). While the morality frame was not a dominant frame for any of the three publishers, the morality frame was lowest for *China Daily*. Fearing that religion will influence politics and detract from devotion to the government, the Communist Party of China discourages religious practice. According to the Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism, China is the most
atheistic among all countries, while Malaysia ranks very high for religiosity (Gallup, 2012). The dominant Islamic religious ideology in Malaysian culture impacted media frames as *New Straits Times* used the morality frame the most among the three publishers to relay moral messages and to offer social prescriptions for behavior. For example, Nazrin Shah, the Sultan of Perak in Malaysia, addressed the opening of the state legislative assembly by stating, ‘Humans can only plan for the best, but Allah decides everything’ (Hussain et al., 2014b: 7). Additional articles in *New Straits Times* made references to prayer and trusting in Allah, although the Malaysian government distanced itself from reports that a shaman with magic bamboo binoculars assisted with the search efforts.

**National interest frames**

The second primary objective of this study was to assess how English-language newspapers in Malaysia, China, and the United States used national interest frames. While Yan and Kim (2015) show that political context and national interests affect media coverage of an aviation crisis as far as the types of sources that journalists utilize, this present study analyzed the nuance of national interest frames in international media. *New Straits Times* used the sociocultural frame most frequently, which is consistent with previous research indicating that journalistic norms in Southeast Asia promote national loyalty and a sense of community (Massey, 2000; Menon, 1998). The sociocultural frame included information about the beliefs, myths, values, norms, special artifacts, and/or social practices of the country. For example, *New Straits Times* referred to Malaysian songs and poetry recitations to pacify mourners and to the educational and scientific endeavors of Malaysians, e.g., Dr Mohd Rizal Arshad of the University of Science in Malaysia, an expert on acoustic imaging devices, and Datuk Azharuddin Abdul Rahman, the director-general of Malaysia’s Department of Civil Aviation, an expert in search-and-recovery missions (Arumugam, 2014; Hussain et al., 2014c). Chinese and U.S. media were again congruent and employed the military frame most frequently. For example, *China Daily* articles emphasized the use of Chinese satellites and naval vessels, including amphibious landing vessels, missile destroyers, and supply ships, to solve the MH370 mystery (China Daily, 2014b).

Another interesting point related to national interest frames is *New Straits Times* employed all five of the national interest frames (economy, military, sociocultural values, political system, and security) among the articles in the dataset, while *China Daily* and *The New York Times* articles applied only three national interest frames each. This is concurrent with research proposing journalists express more national loyalty when the news is perceived as ‘ours’ rather than ‘theirs’ (Nossek, 2004). *New Straits Times* was arguably closest to the crisis among the three publishers; thus, it was ‘our’ crisis and necessitated national interest frames within the dominant ideological culture. For example, in a 14 March 2014 statement, Defense and acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said Malaysia has a
‘duty to follow every lead. We owe it to the families. And we will not give up’ (Hussain et al., 2014a: 3). *China Daily* and *The New York Times* reported on ‘their’ crisis, which did not require as many national interest frames. For example, *The New York Times* reported on a meeting between Chinese officials and the families of MH370 passengers at which Liu Zhi, deputy secretary general of the Beijing government, indicated China was doing everything it could but the crisis was clearly Malaysia’s responsibility; however, Liu contended ‘the quality of the Malaysians’ response would certainly be lower if the Chinese government were not involved’ (Feng and Wong, 2014: A6). These findings support Dai and Hyun’s (2010) summary of their research that ‘lends support to the transformational view of globalization, which suggests that the nation state still matters in a globalized world, but is being recontextualized in a more complex world of politics and culture’ (p. 299).

**International citizenship frames**

The third objective of this study was to assess how English-language newspapers in Malaysia, China, and the United States employed frames about international citizenship. While Yan and Kim (2015) focus on national interests within an aviation crisis, this present study expands a theoretical understanding of international citizenship frames within the context of a crisis with an unknown cause. The dominant frame for *New Straits Times*, *China Daily*, and *The New York Times* was the willingness to work together to complete international tasks, probably because of the enormity of the effort required to search for MH370 in the expansive Indian Ocean. *New Straits Times* used four of the frames (cooperation in formal agreements, willingness to work together, ethical behavior, and global leadership), while *China Daily* and *The New York Times* only used two distinct international citizenship frames each. For example, a 16 March 2014 article in *New Straits Times* used the ethical behavior frame by defending Malaysia’s withholding of information, which was ‘the responsible thing to do to avoid causing more anguish to family members’ (Andres, 2014: 23). Further, a 15 May 2014 *New Straits Times* article used the cooperation frame as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak ‘urged the International Civil Aviation Organisation to increase regulations for real-time tracking of airliners’ and the leadership frame as Najib commended Malaysia for overcoming diplomatic and military sensitivities and uniting 26 countries for the search (Latif, 2014: 2).

Another observation associated with international citizenship is the timing of articles among the three publishers. *The New York Times* published the highest number of articles about MH370 in the first week after the aircraft’s disappearance. This is consisted with research that shows U.S. media typically report on aviation crises the most during the first week (Vincent et al., 1989; Yan and Kim, 2015). This study offers evidence that *New Straits Times* disseminated information about the MH370 crisis quickly to support the Malaysian global image and reputation as competent. *New Straits Times* published the highest number of articles in the
second week after the MH370 disappearance. *China Daily*, however, published the highest number of articles 12 weeks after the aircraft disappeared. Perhaps as time continued without much evidence to indicate what actually happened to MH370, it became more important for the Chinese government to establish an identity as a caregiver who helps citizens. For example, a 25 August 2014 article in *China Daily* quoted a Chinese graduate student: ‘Malaysia Airlines and others are not doing their jobs, so we have to organize’ (China Daily, 2014c: A2). *China Daily* focused on the Chinese perspective and rarely expressed an international perspective. In this manner, *China Daily* seemingly functioned as an official voice for the Chinese government in the MH370 crisis, while *New Straits Times* was more internationally focused during the crisis. Because Malaysia Airlines is an extension of the Malaysian government, Malaysia had to present itself as a good international citizen to preserve its global reputation.

**Conclusion**

An and Gower (2009) argued that attribution of responsibility is especially dominant in crises with controllability and intentionality. The results of this present study confirm previous research that indicates attribution of responsibility is the most commonly applied frame in crisis communication (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). In addition, this present study adds another dimension to theoretical knowledge in that attribution of responsibility is yet the most important frame even when the controllability of the crisis is unknown and the intentionality is ambiguous.

This present study further expands previous knowledge about the second common frame in an aviation crisis with an unknown cause. In business crises the economic consequences frame is the second most used (An and Gower, 2009), and in political crises the conflict frame is the second most used (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). The conflict frame in *New Straits Times* and the human-interest frame in *China Daily* and *The New York Times* were the second most used.

This present study’s unique combination of media frames with national interests and international citizenship in the crisis context is a response to previous quantitative content analysis research. The results extend beyond descriptive analysis to provide insight about media orientations during an international crisis. Although each newspaper employed a different focus of responsibility, attribution of responsibility was the dominant frame, which demonstrates it is the most important frame even with unknown controllability and ambiguous intentionality. Results also demonstrate significant differences in national interest frames perhaps partially influenced by different national media systems and by diplomatic relations between and among countries, which reinforces the findings of Yan and Kim (2015). This present study differentiates international citizenship frames and considers the timing of information dissemination to give a more nuanced understanding of crisis media frames.
Since this present study is one of the first to frame a crisis with ambiguous causality, additional research to consider national interests and culture, international citizenship, and media related to a crisis without direct causality is warranted. Specifically, additional research is necessary to understand the interactions among national interest, international citizenship, and media frames. Furthermore, replication of this study is important to substantiate its findings. The results of additional studies combined with the present results have the potential to influence crisis typology research, attribution theory research, and even paracrisis-focused research.

Research with a greater sample size beyond English-language newspapers would be helpful to understand more acutely the frames employed in such crises to reach domestic and international audiences. Coauthoring with international scholars who study the culture and understand the nuances of other languages involved in international crises would strengthen this line of research.

Overall, this study advances theoretical knowledge about media frames within the context of an aviation crisis with an unknown cause. This study was a unique exploration of the role of national interest frames and international citizenship frames in media coverage of the flight MH370 disappearance, a mysterious international crisis without precedent.

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