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Crimean Referendum: Annexation VS Reunification. Framing Analysis of Online News Coverage in Russia and the U.S.

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Crimean Referendum 2014: Annexation VS Reunification.

Framing Analysis of Online News Coverage in Russia and the U.S.

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines whether there is a frame difference in online news coverage of the controversial 2014 Crimean referendum by *The New York Times* and the Russian newspaper, *Kommersant*. The research is grounded in framing theory and literature on the attribution of news sources. The study is conducted in two languages and it seeks to examine how media systems, perspectives on the issue, journalistic standards, as well as cultural backgrounds and historical ties influenced framing of the event.

Sample online articles from each newspaper were selected and a quantitative content analysis was performed in order to identify the main themes, frames and source attribution patterns in media news coverage about the referendum. The pattern to quote official sources for providing justification and legitimacy to news stories has influenced the coverage in both newspapers: both *The New York Times* as well as *Kommersant* heavily relied on their respective government officials and experts. However, *The New York Times* provided a greater diversity of opinions supporting the values of a libertarian media system.

Politics was the dominant theme of the referendum-related articles in both newspapers, however, *Kommersant* and *The New York Times* touched on economy and military themes with different frequencies. A comparison between themes in two periods (before and after the referendum) has not shown a meaningful difference for both newspapers.

Kommersant's online coverage was less critical of Russian policies and frequently utilized a set of the For-referendum frames, rarely touching upon Russian military activities on the peninsula. However, the frame depicting breach of international law appeared with the same frequency as the For-referendum frames, showing that *Kommersant* tried to maintain

independence under the Russian neo-authoritarian media system. *The New York Times* focused on the illegitimate character of Crimean annexation and exposed every move of Russian troops, which is in line with U.S. foreign policy aims. However, the American publications did not hide the cultural and historical ties between Crimea and Russia and frequently mentioned the illegal character pertaining to Ukrainian protests and a temporary government.

Chapter One

Introduction

At the end of 2013 Ukraine experienced anti-government protests after Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych postponed the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union under economic pressure from Russia ("Ukraine suspends preparations", 2013). The protests in Kiev escalated into violent mass riots that left dozens of people dead and eventually led to the ouster of Yanukovych. The unrest spread beyond the capital and shifted to eastern Ukraine and Crimea, an autonomous part of Ukraine with close historical and cultural ties to Russia and the ethnic Russian majority. On February 27, 2014 unidentified armed men seized the headquarters of the Crimean local government, while an emergency session of the Crimean parliament voted for a new head –Sergey Aksyonov, the leader of a pro-Russia political party (Siddique, McCarthy, & Yuhas, 2014). A few days later the Crimean parliament voted unanimously in favor of formally seceding from Ukraine and becoming part of Russia. It was also decided to conduct a public referendum on the issue. The referendum on Crimea's status took place on March 16, 2014 and an overwhelming majority of Crimeans supported reunification with Russia (Herszenhorn, 2014). Ukraine, U.S. and EU officials criticized the referendum as illegitimate, however, on March 18 Russian president Vladimir Putin signed a treaty to incorporate Crimea into the Russian Federation. The Western world refuses to recognize Crimea as a part of Russia condemning the annexation and Russia's violation of international law ("Ukraine: Putin signs Crimea annexation", 2014).

The 2014 Crimean crisis has drawn a lot of media attention internationally. The annexation has been of political interest to many parties around the world and has intensified discussions about sovereignty, the right of self-determination, international law and a future political and economic landscape. The mass media is very powerful and influential in shaping public opinion regarding various issues, because "media may not only tell us what to think about, but also how to think about it, and, consequently, what to think" (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, p. 65). To general public, the understanding of the events in Ukraine is totally dependent on news media such as newspapers, TV news, and online news (Watanabe, 2014). In that regard, it is important to explore media coverage of Crimea's annexation and uncover how different parties portrayed the event.

To date there has been little research on the nature of news coverage of Crimea annexation by Russia in 2014 and there have been few studies examining the framing differences of online publications by American and Russian newspapers. The particular countries were chosen because they represent different media systems (libertarian and neo-authoritarian), have different cultural backgrounds and hold opposite views on the events that happened ahead and followed the referendum on Crimean status. The study seeks to examine how those differences affected news framing of Crimea's annexation. Of particular interest is the fact that Russia played a major role in the event and the fact that it has yet to be uncovered how Russia justified its controversial actions.

As news sources may have a significant effect on a news story (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991), the study also explores what sources the reporters from different countries utilized in their publications. Content analysis and cross-cultural comparison of online publications by *The New York Times* and *Kommersant* is used in order to reach that goal. These media outlets were chosen because they are arguably the most influential newspapers in their respective countries that provide high-quality content in their print and digital versions. The study will

explore online versions of the newspapers because the Internet has become a major source of news (Omar, 2014) and online news consumption has been increasing while print circulation keeps dropping (Chyi & Yang, 2009; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010). The sample under study covers a period of two months (one month before the referendum and one month afterwards) and it was analyzed by a quantitative content analysis grounded in framing theory. This paper contributes to the framing research within the cross-cultural context by including Russian and Western news outlets to establish possible differences across newspapers and nations.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Framing is one of the most common theories applied for the research in the field of communication and media studies. Media framing is considered to be "a tool of power that can be used in the struggle to define whose view of the world will predominate" (Hallah, 1999, p. 223). The thesis is grounded in framing theory, therefore the literature review provides an overview of framing theoretical framework and presents previous studies of framing applications to international news coverage.

In order to provide a better understanding of frames in the coverage of Crimea's annexation by Russian and the U.S. newspapers, the review then outlines major differences in media systems of those two countries, explains the importance of source attribution patterns and presents a context of the Crimean referendum. The final part of the review focuses on the various implications involved and explores Russian and Western perspectives on the issue.

Frame and Framing Process

The term "frame" was introduced by the English anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972) and was later applied to communication studies by Erving Goffman (1974). According to Goffman, a frame is a schema of interpretation that helps people to "locate, perceive, identify, and label events and occurrences, thus rendering meaning, organizing experiences, and guiding actions" (p. 21). Todd Gitlin (1980) defines frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (p. 6). As Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) observe, "frames influence opinions by stressing values,

facts, and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame" (p. 569). Similarly, Tankard (2001) claims that frames supply a context and suggests "what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (p. 100). Reese (2001) notes that frames are socially shared and persistent over time. The literature on framing theory indicates that the term could be understood as either a noun of frame or the process of framing (Zhang, 1999).

According to Wu (2006), framing is "one way, and indeed a most important way, of uncovering the complexity of the social construction of reality" (p. 253). Entman (1993) was one of the first researchers to define framing within the context of mass communications: "To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). According to Entman (1993), framing involves two processes: selection and salience.

Selection entails inclusion and exclusion. Including certain aspects of an issue makes them more salient than the aspects of the issue that are excluded by the selection. Selection process in framing theory has a lot in common with a gatekeeping concept that highlights selection bias by using particular news sources and omitting the ones less admissible to journalistic routine practices and media organizations (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Selection of news sources is particularly important for the proposed study that seeks to examine source attribution patterns of two media outlets and will be discussed in a separate section of the literature review.

Salience is defined by Entman as "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" (p. 53). An increase in salience improves the probability that the audience will remember the information. In addition to selection and salience, previous studies also indicate that the influence on frame sensitivity and

interpretation depends on individual's attitude and knowledge of an issue, strength of the messages, and the amount of exposure one has to a frame (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009).

Van Gorp (2007) summarizes several elements that play a role in framing: schemata, frame packages, framing devices, and reasoning devices. It is crucial to understand these elements for a better comprehension of frame analysis' results. Schemata are "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide the individual's processing of information" (Entman, 1993, p. 53). A frame package is an integrated structured kit for the frame that consists of the framing devices and reasoning devices. Framing devices include the word choice, the use of metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, depictions, catchphrases, and visual images (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In addition, some researchers indicate the importance of "the choices about language, quotations and relevant information" (Shah et al. 2002, p. 367), an evaluation of the newsworthiness of an event (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Tankard has proposed the most comprehensive identification, which consists of eleven framing mechanisms or devices (related mostly to news framing): "(1) headlines, (2) subheads, (3) photos, (4) photo captions, (5) leads, (6) source selection, (7) quotes selection, (8) pull quotes, (9) logos, (10) statistics and charts, and (11) concluding statements and paragraph" (Tankard, 2001, p. 101). Lastly, reasoning devices are explicit and implicit reasoning that deal with justifications, causes and consequences of the issue being reported.

According to Entman (1993), frames have four locations in the communication process: communicators, text, receiver, and culture. Communicators (authors of texts) make judgments and apply various frames to their texts. The receiver of the message (the reader) is either sensitive to those frames and does or does not perceive them. Lastly, culture is described as a "set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping" (pp. 52-53). This idea was probably built upon Goffman's idea (1981)

about the influence of cultural background on sensitivity to different frames. The influence of culture is also important for the study, as it examines framing of coverage by newspapers of the two countries with different cultural backgrounds. The four aforementioned locations are connected with four functions of frames according to Entman (1993): to define problems, to diagnose causes, to make moral judgments, and to suggest remedies.

After defining a frame and a framing concept and before moving forward to framing of international news, it is important to shed light on the process of framing and its stages. Scheufele (1999) distinguishes four stages in the framing process: frame building, frame setting, individual effects of framing, and journalists as audiences. Frame building focuses on how media outlets choose specific frames and negotiate them to their receivers. There are a variety of factors that could potentially influence how journalists frame a given issue including societal norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, external pressures from interest groups and other policy makers, journalistic routines, and ideological or political orientation (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978; Bennett & Entman, 2001). The Crimea case under examination is a highly politicized and controversial issue, the potential influence of abovementioned factors on frame building in the coverage of three countries is discussed further in the section about the differences of media systems in Russia and in the U.S.

The second major stage of the framing process is frame setting. Frame setting underlines the effects of frames by examining the ways that media highlight different facts and values to make an issue appear more relevant (Scheufele, 1999, p. 116). De Vreese (2005) claims that frame setting refers to the "interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions" (p. 52). Media effects theorists usually analyze frame setting on two levels: the macro-level and micro-level effects of that content (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). The concept of two levels is also mentioned by de Vreese

(2005) who outlines the individual and the societal level: "An individual level consequence may be altered attitudes about an issues based on exposure to certain frames. On the societal level, frames may contribute to shaping social level processes such as political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52).

The individual level discussed by de Vreese (2005) is consistent with the third stage of the framing process by Scheufele (2000) that examined how frames of social movements influence individuals. Early in 1974 Goffman noticed that journalists package news stories and in the process they give stories meaning. McQuail (2003) acknowledges that media outlets are the main means of public expression in our society; the frames journalists use help readers to process the complex amount of information available. It means that news frames are powerful and influential. Tankard (2001) acknowledges "the power of framing comes from its ability to define the terms of a debate without the audience realizing it is taking place" (p. 97). However, being themselves the receivers of news from other sources, journalists may also be influenced by the frames already in use and then may apply them to their stories. Scheufele (1999) calls it a fourth stage of the framing process.

The previous studies on framing news indicate that media content does not mirror the reality: it is through the framing of media discourses that reality is defined and organized (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997; Tankard, 2001). Mass media outlets decide "not only what events to be covered but also how the events are covered" (Liu 2009, p. 6). Thus, framing can affect the individual and public knowledge of a news topic, this makes it a perfect framework for the study. In the next sections we will focus on different types of frames commonly applied to news coverage and examine framing of international and political issues.

Types of Frames

Researchers do not always agree on what frames to look for in framing studies. It is generally assumed that the types of frames investigated depend on the types of issues under examination. Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) summarize types of frames commonly used in media studies. They distinguish gain and loss frames (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), episodic and thematic frames (Iyengar, 1991), strategy and issue frames (Capella & Jamieson, 1997), or human interest, conflict and economic consequences frames (Price et al., 1997). In addition to conflict, human interest and economic consequences frames, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identify the frame of attribution of responsibility and the morality frame. The aforementioned sets of frames are usually referred to as generic (de Vreese, 2005), because it is possible to apply them to various issues across disciplines. However, mass communication studies have also examined issue-specific frames applicable only to specific topics or events (de Vreese, 2005). Pan & Kosicki (1993) claim that issue-specific frames can significantly influence perception and interpretation of stories. "An issue-specific approach to the study of news frames allows for a profound level of specificity and details relevant to the event or issue under investigation" (Semetko & de Vreese, 2004, p. 93). As the issue of the Crimean referendum is very complex and unique, the research will be focused on certain generic frames as well as issue-specific frames that are defined by preliminary analysis that examined the related publications for "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman 1993, p. 52). By defining the frames in this manner we will provide insight into the complexity of how the occasion was covered by media outlets of two different countries.

De Vreese (2004) also outlines two approaches for frame identification: 1) the inductive approach "refrains from analyzing news stories with a prior defined news frames in mind" 2)

the deductive approach "investigates frames that are defined and operationalized prior to the investigation" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 53). As the focus of the study is on generic and issue-specific frames, the research utilizes both approaches. A preliminary analysis of media coverage identified the most commonly used frames, the application of these frames will be further examined by the use of content analysis techniques.

Framing International News and Political Issues

According to Flournoy and Stewart (1997), the audience's perception of a foreign country is under the influence of foreign news coverage by their home media. Framing theory has been "appropriate for analysing political and public controversy especially in the international context because frames have the potential to explain cultural dynamics" (Liu, 2009, p. 8). Entman (1993) indicates that cultural contexts also might lead to different news framing and further difference in interpretation. However, cultural context is not a single variable that influences the perception of international and political news. Lippmann (1921) acknowledges that "the artificial censorships, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meager time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs" force people to rely on the information from the media outlets so they can know more about the world events (p. 22). As certain events are distant and there is less approach and personal involvement in the issue, framing is much more easier to be achieved (McQuail, 2000). Shoemaker et al. (1991) note that events that occurred in nations perceived as important in U.S. politics and economics had a greater chance to appear in news coverage. Kunczik (2002) acknowledges that geographical and cultural proximity as well as tighter economic or ideological relations with a foreign country lead to more intensive coverage of the country.

Previous studies on framing also indicate that the framing theory is impacted by the socio-political reality (Scheufele, 1999; Entman, 1992; Pan et al., 1999). Bazaa and Hsiao (2010) note that international news coverage is largely influenced by the state of diplomatic

relationship between countries. Scheufele (1999) notes that government bureaucracies and other political or corporate actors may potentially influence frame building. The previous studies also examined such variables as history (Pan et al., 1999), national interest (Lee & Yang, 1995), political ideology (Pan et al., 1999) and diplomatic sensitivity (Wang, 1992). "Critical researchers consider media framing essentially a tool of power that can be used in the struggle to define whose view of the world will predominate" (Hallah, 1999, p. 223). The Crimean referendum had a wide international coverage and for a better understanding of frames used in that particular case, it is important to overview a few examples of previous studies on framing of international news, when political context, different ideologies and media systems played a crucial role.

Framing International News: Examples

One of the most vivid examples of how social-political reality influences framing and brings bias to news about international events is Entman's (1991) study which compared the U.S. news coverage of two similar international disasters: in 1983 the Soviet Union shot down a South Korean civilian airliner and in 1988 the United States shot down an Iranian civilian airliner. Due to a larger Cold War narrative, the Soviet Union was considered an enemy as well as the Iranians, while South Korea has always been an ally of the United States. Thus, the Korean disaster was portrayed as an intentional and deliberate attack by the Soviets, while the Iranian airliner was framed by the U.S. media as an unfortunate mistake and tragedy. However, it was not only a certain political reality that influenced framing of both events, but also the direct involvement of the United States (as a communicator) in one of the incidents. According to Graber (1980), the stories of American correspondents abroad must not only mirror the American political values, but also confirm American stereotypes. The study examining coverage of the 2011 Libyan uprising and NATO intervention by Qatari (Al Jazeera) and British (BBC) broadcasters (Al Nahed, 2015) found out that both Qatari and British network

displayed a pro-interventionist agenda that was in line with their foreign policy aims and political context. It should be noted both Qatar and Britain actively participated in NATO intervention. Kolmer and Semetko (2009) in their analysis of U.S., British, Czech, German, South African and Al Jazeera news acknowledge that "the reporting of the war was conditioned by the national contexts in which it was produced . . . [raising] . . . serious questions about the credibility and impartiality of TV news in the reporting of war" (p. 654).

Findings about the impact of socio-political reality on Russian media framing are also consistent with the concept that governmental and political context influence editorial policy. For example, the 1999 conflict in Chechnya (when Russia carried out the Second Chechen War) was portrayed in Russian media as 'an anti-terrorist operation…fighting the threat of international Islamic terrorism rather than secession' by utilizing the frame of 'War on Terror' (Snetkov 2007, p. 1352). Russian media demonized Chechen separatists and framed them as "terrorists" linking the Chechen conflict to the global struggle against international Islamic terrorism (de Waal 2004, p. 55).

All of these studies highlight the fact that journalists from different countries lack independence when they cover international, politically sensitive issues. However, the lack of independence may vary in accordance with a media system of a particular country and journalistic practices in use. The next section is focused on differences in the media systems of Russia and the U.S.

Media Systems of Russia and the U.S.

The classification of media systems has been discussed for many decades; various types of media systems have been applied to different countries. The four types of media systems identified by Siebert and Schramm (1956) became widely used after the publication of the classic book *Four Theories of the Press*. The authors divide media systems according to the following types: authoritarian, libertarian, Soviet communist and social responsibility type. In

the authoritarian model, media serve the state through direct governmental control, journalists are not allowed to speak out against the state; control is implemented by censorship and punishment (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1963; Oates, 2008). In the Soviet communist model, media is also controlled by the state, however, this model is defined by a higher volume of self-censorship. The main aim of media outlets in Soviet communist model is to serve the interests of the working class and provide the Marxist-Leninist view of reality. The libertarian model provides full autonomy to journalists and media organizations, allowing attacks on the government and welcoming freedom of speech. The social responsibility model is very close to the libertarian model, however, journalists are not completely free to publish what they like as they have certain obligations to society to provide information and balance (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1963; Oates, 2008). Even though these four models represent "ideal" situations and are rather simplistic (Oates, 2008), they reflect the major differences and can help to identify a particular model for each country under examination.

According to this classification, the U.S. media system is usually described as libertarian, as it welcomes diversity of opinions and operates under the principle of freedom of speech (Merrill & Lowenstein, 1979; Oates, 2008). This model is characterized by low state intervention, a strong form of journalistic professionalism, which is based on the "objectivity norm" and political neutrality (Oates, 2008). Under this media system, ownership of media is mainly private and there are no quotas for production and content, the main emphasis is on transparency (Downey, Downey, & Mihelj, 2012).

In the case of modern Russia, it is very hard to fit its media system into any of the four models. The roots of the Russian media system can be tracked to the Soviet communist model. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, where media outlets served the government and reinforced the Soviet ideology (Zasoursky, 2004), the model ceased to exist. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian media system has gone through a lot of

changes: ideological bans were lifted and the 1990 Law on Press abolished censorship (Koltsova, 2006). However, Marta Dyczok (2009) notices that even though there were numerous official declarations about media's independence in post-Soviet Russia, media outlets of modern Russia "remain essentially dependent on politically powerful actors while media content to a great extent reflects governmental policy" (p. 64). One of the most fulfilling descriptions of the modern media system in Russia can be found in the essay of de Smaele (2010). He states that in Russia the Western media "logic" prevails, however "authoritarian practices overrule the societal and media democratization processes" (p. 6). De Smaele (2010) also summarizes most commonly used labels concerning Russian media system, such as: 'transitional model' (Curran & Park, 2000), 'post-socialist' (Giorgi, 1995), 'post-communist' media (Sparks, 1997) or 'neo-authoritarian model' (Becker, 2004). Concerning the Russian media system, the study will utilize the description of neo-authoritarian model.

The difference between the media systems of the two countries under examination can be also assessed by the Freedom of the Press report by Freedom House, which annually ranks the performance of 197 countries according to the level of media independence ("Press Freedom Rankings", 2014). Based on this ranking, in 2014 the U.S. was classified as "Free" (30th place out of 197), while Russia as "Not free" ranked 176th out of 197. Based on these findings, the study suggests that media coverage of the U.S. with the libertarian media system and Russia with the neo-authoritarian media system portrayed the Crimean crisis and referendum through different dominant frames. It is also expected that there will be a broader range of views (news sources) in the online coverage by the U.S. than by Russia. The utilization of news sources is examined in the next section of the literature review as source attribution patterns play a crucial role in framing (Tankard, 2001; Entnam, 1993).

News Sources

Previous studies indicate that the choice of quotations and source selection is significantly important for identifying and measuring news frames (Shah et al. 2002; Tankard, 2001). Sources provide a reader with the context and guide him toward particular thoughts, increasing the authenticity of a story. In media research scholars have utilized such news sources as government officials, law-enforcement sources, organizations or corporations, people involved or affected by a news issue, etc. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) acknowledge that sources may have a significant effect on a news story.

According to Sigal's (1973) findings, official sources are quoted more often than individuals in news stories. Zoch and Turk (1998) note that media outlets depend on government officials for believability and credence. Similarly, Blumler and Gurevitch (1981) state that in political news, official sources are usually the dominant sources. However, if the selection of sources is limited to political elites, readers lack the diversity of opinions needed for a more objective perception, thus they are more likely to be easily manipulated.

Given the importance of source attribution and its potential influence on the audience, the study seeks to explore types of sources utilized by the reporters from Russia and the U.S. in the online coverage of the Crimean referendum. In order to understand which factors may have influenced Western and Russian coverage and which frames were applied by U.S. and Russian media outlets in their news articles, the paper then provides an overview of historical, political, economic, military and legal implications of the Crimean crisis, as well as Western and Russian perspectives on the issue.

History of Crimea: Overview

Crimea is a peninsula on the northern coast of the Black Sea with a recorded history that traces back to the 5th century BC, when the Greek settlements appeared along the coast.

In the early periods of its historical development the territory of Crimea was colonized and occupied by many other states and empires including the Romans, Scythians, Bulgars, Gots, Huns, Khazars, the Byzantine Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. Between 14th-17th century the Crimean aristocracy formed its own Khaganate as a part of the Ottoman Empire. The modern history of Crimea begins in 1783, when it was conquered by the Russian Empress Catherine the Great and became Russian territory.

The next war outbreak on the peninsula occurred between 1853-1856 – the Crimean War when the Russian Empire was fighting against an alliance of Great Britain, France, Sardinia, the Ottoman Empire and the Austrian Empire over the domination of the Black Sea. By the end of the war, Crimea was devastated and the territory stayed under the Russian control, the Black Sea was proclaimed a neutral zone.

Following the Communist Revolution of 1917, Crimea became a part of the Soviet Union and was given a status of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1921. During WWII the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. In 1944 the Soviet Union liberated Crimea, but Stalin accused the Crimean Tatars (the native population of Crimea) of co-operating with the Nazis and forcibly deported 200,000 Tatars to Siberia (Daydov, 2008). Crimea became an overwhelmingly Russian populated territory (Bebler, 2015). Following the radical ethnic cleansing, Crimea lost its pre-war autonomous status and became a part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

Not long after the death of Stalin, in 1954, Crimea was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Communist officials described this change of Crimea's affiliation as a symbolic brotherly gesture, which marked the 300th anniversary of Ukraine joining the Republic (Bebler, 2015). The consequences of this transfer were not dramatic as the changes were insignificant because Crimea stayed within the Soviet Union (Wydra, 2014). After an

all-Ukrainian referendum in February 1991, the territory of Crimea was upgraded again to the status of an autonomous republic within Ukrainian SSR.

The latest change of Crimean status before the 2014 annexation happened following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. When the agreement on the Soviet collapse was signed at the meeting of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus leaders in Belovezhskaya Pushcha, Russian President Boris Yeltsin agreed that Crimea could remain in Ukraine, with Russia's Black Sea fleet remaining at the largest Crimean city Sevastopol under lease (Wydra, 2014). Crimea was given significant autonomy (its own constitution, legislature and its own president). The periods of Crimean territorial affiliation during the 20th century are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Crimean Territorial Affiliation During the 20th Century

1921-1945	an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the USSR
1945-1954	an administrative region (oblast) in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
1954-1991	an administrative region (oblast) in the Ukrainian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
1991-2014	An Autonomous Republic within independent Ukraine

A brief historical overview shows that modern history of Crimea is connected with Russia. Not only has Crimea's Sevastopol long been a home city for the Russian Black Sea fleet, but also, according to the all-Ukrainian population census data of 2001, 58.5% of the citizens identify themselves as Russian, compared to the 24.4% identifying with Ukraine, and 12.1% identifying as Crimean Tatar. In 2013-2014 the unprecedented series of events in Ukraine provoked significant political changes and shocked the international community: Ukrainian civil riots led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia. In the next section we examine how the Ukrainian crisis of 2013-2014 resulted in the annexation of Crimea and

provide an overview of the connected implications as well as Russian and Western perspectives.

Ukrainian Crisis and Political Implications

In November 2013 the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, announced the suspension of a trade agreement with the European Union, in order to preserve Ukraine's national security, while seeking cooperation with Russia. This pro-Russian stance of Yanukovych led to growing protests on the central square of Kiev - Maidan (these protests are usually referred to as 'Euromaidan' as protesters demanded closer relations with the European Union). By the middle of December, when Ukraine signed an economic agreement with Russia instead of the European Union, mass protests had become more organized and grown up to 800,000 people (Baczynska, 2014). The Ukrainian Parliament passed, and then annulled restrictive anti-protest laws that resulted in several deaths; street riots became even more violent, eighty-eight protesters were killed in two days (DeFronzo, 2014).

Meanwhile, the Crimean autonomous government strongly supported pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych and condemned the unrest. In February, Euromaidan swept away the president with the support of an ultra-right militia and other leaders of the pro-European opposition. On 21 February, Yanukovych signed a deal with the opposition leaders and fled the capital. Suspending the constitution, Parliament voted to remove Yanukovych from power and to hold new presidential elections in May, 2014. The newly elected temporary government with Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk was considered illegitimate by Russia, the Russian officials viewed the events as a "coup d'état" (Trenin, 2014).

The unrest in Kiev triggered a political crisis in Crimea: on 23rd February pro-Russian demonstrations took place in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, while Tatar protestors in support of Euromaidan clashed with pro-Russian protestors in Simferopol, another major

Crimean city (Crimean Tatars, 2014). On 27th February, Viktor Yanukovych claimed he was still rightful president of Ukraine and asked Russia for protection from extremists in his country. On the same day the unidentified troops seized the local Crimean parliament and local government buildings, Russian flags were raised over those buildings. At the time of the conflict, the Russian government refused to acknowledge that the troops without insignia that occupied the Crimean peninsula were Russian Armed Forces and called them "local militias", denying any accusations of international law violations. Under the influence of Russia, during this armed occupation the deputies of Crimean parliament elected a pro-Russian chairman of the council of ministers of the republic - Sergey Aksyonov. On 1st March, 2014 the Russian Federation Council (the upper chamber of Parliament) officially approved an appeal by President Vladimir Putin to give permission for Russian troops to be sent into Ukraine to assist in "the normalization of the social and political situation in that country" (Waterfield & Henderson, 2014) and to "protect Russian interests" in Crimea as "self-defense forces" for the largely Russian population of that region" (Willi, 2015).

Following this move from Russia, Crimea's parliament stated unanimously that the district wished to join Russia: the local parliament session voted to hold a regional referendum on the status of Crimea. Fifteen days later, the majority of the Crimean population (97%) voted for the option to become a part of Russia in a controversial referendum condemned by most Western states as illegitimate. On 18 March President Putin signed a bill to absorb Crimea into the Russian Federation.

Legal Implications

The annexation of Crimea and the Crimean referendum have drawn much international attention and sparked a debate about international law. In his March special address to the Russian Parliament, Russian president Vladimir Putin stated that the referendum in Crimea was held "in full accordance with democratic procedure and international law" and emphasized

that Crimea has always been "an inalienable part of Russia" (Mezzofiore, 2014). The opinion of most Western countries is opposite for a number of reasons.

Burke-White in the article *Crimea and the International Legal Order* (2014) outlines that Russia "has cleverly embraced international law and, in so doing, exploited the tension between a fundamental principle that prohibits the acquisition of territory through the use of force and an equally fundamental right of self-determination to take Crimea as its own" (p. 65). The first principle is embodied in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter: "all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state" (Charter of the United Nations, n.d.). In 1970 the UN General Assembly also proclaimed "no territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognized as legal" (General Assembly Resolution 2625, 1970). In his March speech, Putin denied all the accusations saying that Russia's Armed Forces did not enter Crimea, they had been already there according to the previously negotiated treaty, and all the armed unidentified forces that occupied local facilities by force had no connections with Russian Army ("Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions," 2014). It should be noted, that only a year after the events, in March, 2015 Putin finally admitted to ordering Russian troops to seize Crimea weeks before it was annexed by Russia.

The second principle is the principle of self-determination –"respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" (Charter of the United Nations, n.d.) that provides a post-colonial or severely oppressed population the right to freely determine its status in the international community and future government. Burke-White (2014) acknowledges that Putin claimed "a broad right of intervention in protecting ethnic Russians, and a very low standard for the degree of oppression necessary to trigger the right of self-determination and subsequent independence" (p.68). In his speech Putin also reminded the audience of the U.S. position during the Kosovo conflict: "declarations of independence may,

and often do, violate domestic legislation. However, this does not make them violations of international law ("Address by President of the Russian Federation," 2014).

Finally, Putin concluded his address by arguing that the Russian peoples of Crimea had freely and fairly chosen to join with Russia as "the referendum was fair and transparent, and the people of Crimea clearly and convincingly expressed their will and stated that they want to be with Russia" ("Address by President of the Russian Federation," 2014). However, in reality the Crimea population had only been presented with two options: to reunify "Crimea with Russia as a subject of the Russian Federation'" or to restore "the 1992 Crimea constitution and the status of Crimea as part of Ukraine" (Brunova-Kalisetska, 2014). Other choices, for example, to remain in Ukraine under the current constitutional structure or to become an independent state were omitted. Burke-White (2014) states that these factors resulted in the UN General Assembly decision to condemn the referendum as illegal.

As summarized by Giuliani (2015), by annexing Crimea, Vladimir Putin has not only violated the fundamental texts of the United Nations, but also violated the statutes of the Council of Europe of which Russia is a member, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the terms of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum signed by Russia, the U.S., France and the U.K., two bilateral treaties signed with Ukraine, as well as the constitutions of Ukraine and Crimea. A resolution of the European Parliament dated March, 13th "firmly condemned Russia's act of aggression in invading Crimea, which is an inseparable part of Ukraine and recognized as such by the Russian Federation" (Paul, 2015). Most of the western countries, along with the Ukraine and the UN members from North America, Central, Oceania and Africa, have not recognized the Republic of Crimea as part of Russia. As of February 2016, Crimea has been recognized only by eleven nations other than Russia: Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Nicaragua, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

Military Implications

According to the Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet of 1997 between Ukraine and Russia, Russia was entitled to have up to 25,000 troops in Crimea as its Black Sea Fleet. Bebler (2015) and other western experts and observers claim that at the time of occupation, the estimated number of troops might have exceeded the negotiated number and achieved up to 30,000 Russian troops. Bebler (2015) also states that the military annexation of Crimea was prepared and professionally executed. In his emotional speech after the Crimea annexation, Putin denied all the accusations about military invasion by saying that Russian troops were sent to Crimea in line with a previously negotiated treaty, and the militias who occupied Crimean local government buildings, airports and other facilities were not Russian military, but rather local pro-Russian forces ("Address by President of the Russian Federation," 2014). Thus, according to Russian president, Russia never violated international law because its military never invaded Crimea.

According to Bebler (2015), three factors facilitated a successful military operation. Firstly, the Russian troops were already legally present on the Crimean peninsula. Secondly, the short distances to the most important strategic locations in Crimea "allowed for the quick insertion of air transported troops and the acquisition of targets" (Bebler, 2015, p 41). Thirdly, the Ukrainian militias of Crimea were given an order from the Ukrainian government not to resist. Thus, about 20,000 Ukrainian military personnel capitulated without a single shot fired. Moreover, most of them decided to remain in Crimea and swore an oath to the Russian flag. Although Russia de facto occupied Crimea, a military occupation regime was not established. Bebler (2015) concludes by saying that the annexation of Crimea "allowed for an increase in Russian military capabilities by taking over most of the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet, about 190 Ukrainian military installations, stocks of arms, ammunition and other equipment" (p. 41).

Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the Ukrainian crisis and further incorporation of Crimea is grounded in three main narratives.

Firstly, Russia perceives the admission of East European states into the EU and NATO, as well as NATO defense strategies (plans to deploy missile defense systems in East Europe) as a vital threat to its national security (Block, 2015). In his special address to a joint session of the two chambers of the Russian Parliament on March 18, 2014, Vladimir Putin clearly presented the geopolitical rationale for the annexation of Crimea. NATO's presence in close proximity to Russia's borders, "on Russia's historic territories", remains, to President Putin, an unacceptable compromise, thus the annexation prevented Crimea's possible inclusion into the North Atlantic Treaty area (Bebler, 2015). Hansen (2015) also acknowledges that the alleged Western support for the "color revolutions" in post-Soviet states such as Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) became a very important component of the contemporary Russian understanding of Self.

Secondly, Russia sees Ukraine as an important element of its own integration processes, "a factor, which guarantees the consolidation of Russian society and which rests on a thesis of shared history and shared historical memory" (Shelest, 2015, p.197). In his address, Vladimir Putin also highlighted Crimea's "invaluable civilizational and even sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism" ("Address by President of the Russian Federation," 2014). Crimea is framed as a region that is inherently Russian (Willi, 2015). The reunification with Crimea was said to undo the unconstitutional and unjust division from Russia sixty years earlier (Bebler, 2014). Western countries (and particularly the U.S.) are viewed as parties who orchestrated the regime change in Kiev in order to set Ukraine against Russia (Hansen, 2015). In the address Putin states: "And with Ukraine, our Western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear

and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally. After all, they were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in Crimea. They must have really lacked political instinct and common sense not to foresee all the consequences of their actions" ("Address by President of the Russian Federation," 2014).

The third main narrative around the Crimean referendum and further annexation is a perceived growing threat from far-right extremist parties for the majority of Crimea's population, which identifies themselves as Russians and speaks Russian language. During the Euromaidan protests, the Ukrainian Parliament proposed a bill to repel the Ukrainian language law, which guaranteed the use of two official languages in regions where the size of an ethnic minority exceeded 10%. This proposal triggered anxiety and caused demonstrations all over the territories where Russian language is widely used. Although the acting Ukrainian President Turchynov quickly exercised his veto, the Russian population of Crimea no longer felt represented by and within the Ukrainian state. Russia did not recognize a newly elected Ukrainian government perceiving it as "neo-Nazi"; from the Russian perspective, by annexing the peninsula, Russia helped to protect the Russian people (Wydra, 2014). Putin numerously emphasized the need to help Ukraine's Russian population and protect them from the 'fascist junta' in Kiev (Motyl, 2015). Shelest (2015) acknowledges that Crimean referendum has become a success story only in Russian domestic politics, but it remains a failure inside Ukraine and internationally.

Western Perspective

The conflict over Crimea developed in an international environment, which, apart from Ukraine and Russia, directly involved other important actors such as the European Union, the United States, the United Nations, NATO, OSCE. Many European countries opposed Russia's international law violations and aggressive stance. The leaders of the 28-member

European Union suspended trade and visa liberalization negotiations with Russia and threatened "additional and far reaching consequences" should Russia further destabilize Ukraine ("Putin's Stance on Ukraine," 2014).

Before the Crimean referendum European Union President Herman Van Rompuy stated: "We strongly condemn Russia's unprovoked violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity" ("Extraordinary summit," 2014). His position was backed by other European leaders such as Italian Premier Matteo Renzi, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. The U.S. agreed with the new Kiev government that the planned Crimea referendum on joining Russia would violate the Ukrainian constitution and that any such vote should be held nationwide. Before the referendum President Barack Obama noted that "the proposed referendum on the future of Crimea would violate the Ukrainian constitution and violate international law" (Burke-White, 2014, p. 74). On March, 10 British Prime Minister David Cameron said: "Ukraine should be able to choose its own future and act as a bridge between Russia and Europe" (Holehouse, 2014). British Foreign Secretary William Hague described the political situation as "the 'biggest crisis' facing Europe in the 21st Century" (Robinson, 2014).

According to the Western perspective, Russian actions in Crimea constitute a fundamental challenge to the order in Europe. Bock, Henneberg and Plank (2014) acknowledge that the Western coverage of Russia's annexation of Crimea, which undoubtedly violated international law, has been framed as neo-imperialist or even neo-Soviet response. The authors continue stating that "Russian foreign policy has been portrayed as aiming to re-establish imperial control of the ''near abroad'' (i.e., the newly independent republics that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union)—and in particular of Ukraine" (p. 102). Western countries also perceive the military invasion conducted by Russia as a very dangerous sign and a possible trigger to the events that would further threaten

European security and stability.

Chapter Three

Research Questions

The objective of the thesis is to examine how the Crimean referendum in 2014 was covered in online publications of Russian and U.S. newspapers. For that purpose two online versions of respected and influential newspapers were selected for further analysis. *The New York Times* and *Kommersant* were chosen because they are known in the U.S. and Russia as leading elite publications providing readers with high-quality print publications and online content. Both newspapers are well respected in their countries and reflect the liberal values of their readership.

Founded in 1851, *The New York Times* is one of the oldest daily newspapers in the U.S. with one of the highest print circulations in the country. It covers local, regional and national issues and devotes considerable attention to the international news and events. *The New York Times* is considered to be the most authoritative source of information and guidance on issues of public policy (Friel & Falk, 2004) that sets the news agenda for citizens, politicians, intellectuals and journalists of other media.

Kommersant is one of the most important dailies in Russia, which specializes in reporting national and international politics as well as information about financial markets (Beumers, Hutchings, Rulyova, 2008). *Kommersant* provides in-depth and comprehensive coverage and discusses controversial subjects from different angles. In 2015 *Kommersant* newspaper was at the top of "The Most Cited Russian Newspapers" rating, while *Kommersant* online version was among the top 20 most cited web resources ("Ratings of federal media," 2015). Even though the Russian press is ranked as "Not Free", this

newspaper is considered to be one of the liberal and independent sources that "laid the foundation for the development of intellectual influence of the press" (Vychuba and Frolov, 2007, p.51). According to Lipman (2010), *Kommersant* follows the principles of editorial independence and is not controlled or driven by loyalty to the state (p. 157).

The choice of the newspapers is justified by the fact that both newspapers provide high-quality content and project the principles of objectivity and neutrality, so their publications are considered to be comparable. That provides the researcher with a perfect opportunity to explore whether the coverage of the Crimean referendum was influenced by the differences in the U.S. and Russian media systems, the differences in their perspectives, political, historical, and other implications uncovered by the literature review. The paper seeks to examine whether there is a difference in their online coverage and aims to explore which news sources the two online newspapers relied on.

Based on the previous theoretical discussion about framing and media systems of the United States and Russia, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1 What sources did *Kommersant* and *The New York Times* use in their online coverage of the Crimean referendum?

RQ2 On what themes did *Kommersant* and *The New York Times* focus in online articles on the Crimean referendum? Is there any significant difference in themes between online coverage from Russia and the United States?

RQ3 What is the difference in themes of *Kommersant* and *The New York Times* publications about the Crimean referendum before it took place and afterwards?

RQ4 What are the most presented frames in *Kommersant's* and *The New York Times'* online coverage of the Crimean referendum?

RQ5 Is there any significant difference in utilization of frames in online coverage of *Kommersant* and *The New York Times*

Chapter Four

Method

In order to examine what news sources, themes, and frames were used in the online coverage of *The New York Times* and *Kommersant*, the study utilizes content analysis - a research method widely used in the field of media and mass communication (Neuendorf, 2002). According to Berelson (1952), content analysis is a research method used "for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). "Content analysis can be used to show how sources of messages construct messages and have motivations underlying the messages sent and how a source's message is intended to influence a specific receiver" (Wrench et al., 2008, p. 276). Thus, it is considered to be an appropriate method for this study.

According to de Vreese (2004), there are two approaches for frame identification: inductive and deductive. As the Crimean referendum is a unique issue, the inductive approach allows the detection of issue-specific frames through a qualitative content analysis of related news by identifying "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman 1993, p. 52). These issue-specific frames then are coded as holistic variables in a manual content analysis (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). During the preliminary analysis the researcher had in mind generic frames outlined in previous framing studies of news about conflicts and war. Thus, final framing content analytical variables were identified inductively and deductively.

Data Collection

All online publications covering the Crimean referendum in the online coverage of *The New York Times* and *Kommersant* were selected for further analysis, excluding articles with a different focus, letters to editors, transcribed live-broadcasts, and editorials. The search of publications was performed by using "Crimean referendum" and "referendum in Crimea" key phrases in the online databases of *The New York Times,* and "Крымский референдум", "референдум в Крыму" key phrases in the online database of *Kommersant.* The decision to conduct the referendum was sudden and articles about the possibility of the referendum had not occurred in media before the pro-Russian demonstrations took place in the Crimean city of Sevastopol and Crimean local government buildings were seized by unidentified troops in late February. For that reason this research is focused on a period of two months: one month before the referendum and one month afterwards - from February 15, 2014 to April 16, 2014.

A total of 182 relevant articles were identified: 80 articles by *The New York Times* (37 articles before the referendum and 43 articles afterwards)*,* and 102 articles by *Kommersant* (55 articles before the referendum and 47 articles afterwards).

Table 2

Distribution of Publications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Kommersant	102	56.0	56.0	56.0
	The New York Times	80	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	182	100.0	100.0	

The preliminary reading of the articles about the Crimean referendum identified five themes that were used in the referendum online coverage 1) politics, 2) economy/finance,

3) military activities/protests, 4) impact of the events on ordinary citizens, 5) other. Using these themes, the coder determined the main theme of each news story: if more than half of the story was devoted to one of the five themes identified, then the overall story theme was identified as such.

Frames Definitions

The pre-test study identified a set of frames used in the online coverage of the referendum.

1. *"Russia - invader" frame.* This frame focuses on the illegitimate character of the Crimean referendum and depicts Russia as a violator of Ukraine's territorial integrity. The frame includes such English as well as Russian keywords and phrases as "occupation", "annexation", "Russia's invasion/aggression", "Russia invaded Crimea", "Kremlin's intervention", "takeover", "land grab", "seizure of Crimea", "incursion into Crimea", "absorption", "Kremlin's grasp".

2. *"For referendum" set of frames.* This set of frames emphasizes the legitimate character of the Crimean referendum and focuses on the right of Crimea's self-determination. It portrays Ukraine's government as radicals and nationalists, illegitimate and fascist. The frame is divided into sub-frames which will be counted separately:

2.1 *"Protection of the Russian population" frame* includes such English as well as Russian phrases as "the right to protect the Russian-speaking population", "a threat to the lives and health of Russian citizens";

2.2 *"Self-determination" frame* includes such English as well as Russian phrases as "the right of self-determination", "consistent with international law";

2.3 *"Illegal Ukrainian government" frame* includes such English as well as Russian keywords and adjectives describing Ukrainian government as "illegal", "fascist", "Bandera thugs", "bandits", "gangsters", "an unconstitutional coup".

3.   *"Against-referendum" set of frames.* This set of frames emphasizes the illegitimate character of the Crimean referendum and describes it as a farcical, hastily arranged violation of international law. The frame is divided into sub frames which will be counted separately:

3.1   *"Breach of international law" frame* includes such English as well as Russian keywords and phrases as "a violation of Ukrainian constitution/ sovereignty/territorial integrity", "Russia's unlawful actions", "challenge to international agreements", "breach of international law", "unconstitutional", "illegal/illegitimate", "vote is fiction".

3.2   *"False referendum" frame* includes such English as well as Russian keywords describing the Crimean referendum as "separatist", "farcical", "false", "phony", "rigged", "disputed", "a farce", "a fiction", "a parody", "a sham".

4.   *"Crimean ties" frame.* This frame emphasizes historical and cultural ties of Crimea and Russia. The frame includes such English as well as Russian keywords and phrases as "predominantly ethnic Russian region", "the largely pro-Russian region", "close/strong historic and/or linguistic and/or cultural ties to Russia", "largely Russian-speaking Crimean peninsula", "pro-Russian sentiment is widespread", "home to a Russian naval base/Black Sea fleet", "a nostalgic place in the minds of many Russians".

5.   *"Russian military actions" frame.* This frame focuses on Russian military operation on the peninsula and assumes that unidentified troops that occupied Crimean territory before and during the referendum were Russian special forces. The frame includes such English as well as Russian keywords and phrases as "Russian military forces", *"*Russian troops stripped of identifying insignia", "Russian military installations", "deployment of Russian special forces", "military exercise / military maneuvers", "military preparations", "Russia's military moves", "military buildup", "escalation of Russian military actions", "militiamen, backed by Russian forces".

6.   *"Threat to peace and security" frame.* This frame outlines risks and fears concerning the Crimean referendum and/or assumes which states may be occupied by Russia in future. The frame includes the mention of the Cold War period and/or includes such English as well as Russian keywords and phrases as "to pose a threat to peace and security/sovereignty of Europe", "the next Crimea", "a threat of military confrontation/ response", "fears of a new military incursion", "threaten to split society", "a chilling prospect", "a threat to the individual states of Europe", "the Russian threat (expansionism), "geopolitical risks", "threats of violence/intimidation".

7.   *Economic consequences frame.* This frame emphasizes the economic consequences of the Crimean referendum. Neuman et al. (1992) identified it as a common frame in the news. The frame includes such English as well as Russian keywords and phrases as "sanctions", "travel/visa bans and/or restrictions", "asset freezes", "economic blockade of Russia", "economic punishment", "suspension of Gazprom exports", "economic isolation", "damage to the economy", "to punish/penalize Russia/ Putin", "impact on the country's economy", "the state of Russia's currency/ruble".

8.   *Comparison frame.* This frame compares the referendum in Crimea with previous, future and hypothetical referendums on the status of other states and includes comparisons with Kosovo (Yugoslavia), Catalonia region (Spain), Scotland (Great Britain), Quebec (Canada), Dagestan (Russia), Chechnya (Russia), Tibet (China), Taiwan (China), Abkhazia (Russia), South Ossetia (Russia), northern Cyprus (Turkey), Nagorno-Karabakh (Russia), Transnistria (Moldova), South Sudan (Sudan), Palestine (Israel).

9.   *Human interest frame.* This frame focuses on the reaction and emotions of Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar civilians of Crimea, Russia and Ukraine concerning the referendum and possible annexation. According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the

Human interest frame refers to an effort to personalize the news in order to capture and retain audience interest.

Coding Scheme

News articles were content analyzed in terms of the main theme, presence or absence of sources and presence or absence of frames identified by the preliminary analysis of the Crimean referendum online coverage. Each article was used as the primary unit of analysis. The analysis is based on the percentage of stories that contains each individual frame. A single story may contain multiple frames and sources of attribution. The articles were coded according to the following criteria:

1. Name of newspaper. *Kommersant* and *The New York Times*.

2. Publication date of the article. In order to reveal changes in online coverage of the stories, articles from each newspaper were divided into two periods: period 1- before the referendum took place (February,15 – March,15), and period 2 – after the referendum took place (March,16 – April, 16).

3. Sources of attribution. The articles were examined for presence or absence of statements and quotations from the following sources: Western, Russian and Ukrainian government officials (presidents, prime ministers and other local officials), Western and Russian experts (political commentators, professors), representatives of international organizations (representatives of the UN, the EU, and other organizations), news media (other media outlets: newspapers or news agencies, for example, The Washington Post, The Guardian, BBC, Associated Press, Izvestia), ordinary people and civilians (Ukrainians, Crimean citizens, Russians).

4. Story frames. "Russia-invader", "Protection of the Russian population", "Self-determination", "Illegal Ukrainian government", "Breach of international law",

"False referendum", "Crimean ties", "Russian military actions", "Threat to peace and security", Economic consequences, Comparison frame, and Human interest frame.

Chapter Five

Results and Discussion

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability refers to the extent to which independent coders agree on the coding of the content of interest with an application of the same coding scheme. In order to assess intercoder reliability of the present study the following steps were taken. First, the author (coder 1) coded the 182 news stories that appeared in the selected online newspapers, according to the coding scheme. Using the same coding scheme, another graduate student (coder 2) in Mass Communications at USF coded 20 % of articles (36 stories) that were randomly selected from the pool of 182. Intercoder reliability was assessed by two different measures: Percentages of coding agreement and Gwet's (2014) AC_1 coefficients. The results are presented in Table 3.

According to Neuendorf (2002, p. 145), percentage agreements "of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices." In this study, seven of the 21 coding categories showed 80-90% agreement and fourteen reached greater than 90% agreement between the two coders. According to Gwet (2014), an AC_1 coefficient of .60-.80 indicates "good" strength of agreement, and an AC_1 in the range of .80-1.0 is qualified as "very good." All AC_1 coefficients obtained in this study are thus within the acceptable range of agreement.

Table 3

Intercoder Reliability

Coding Category	% Agreement	Gwet's AC_1
Theme	86.1	.8389
Frames		
Human Interests	80.6	.6820
Comparison	86.1	.8027
Economic Consequences	91.7	.8526
Threat to Peace	86.1	.8069
Russian Military	94.4	.8902
Crimean Ties	86.1	.7459
False Referendum	88.9	.8688
Breach of Law	91.7	.8638
Illegal Government	91.7	.8580
Self Determination	80.6	.7511
Protection	91.7	.8876
Russia-Invader	91.7	.8476
Sources		
Civilians	100	1.0000
Media	94.4	.9231
Representatives	94.4	.9301
Russian Experts	94.4	.8941
Western Experts	97.2	.9566
Ukrainian Officials	97.2	.9535
Russian Officials	97.2	.9448
Western Officials	100	1.0000

In this study, the Crimean referendum is used as a case study to analyze and compare online media coverage in U.S. and Russian elite newspapers. The analysis of *Kommersant* and *The New York Times* allows examination of differing perspectives and approaches to the reporting of a controversial Crimean referendum in 2014. It provides more insight into how national and foreign policy interests, different media systems, various historical and legal

implications intersect with reporting practices.

The research explored what sources the two newspapers relied on, what themes were discussed in the online articles about the referendum, and what frames were used in the related articles in online coverage of the two countries. Five research questions guided the data collection and analysis using SPSS.

RQ1 What sources did Kommersant and The New York Times use in their online coverage of the Crimean referendum?

A series of pairwise z-tests of differences in proportions were performed in order to determine what sources were used in the coverage of both newspapers and in order to examine whether there is a significant difference in source attribution patterns between *Kommersant* and *The New York Times*. The results are summarized in Table 4. The results show that there is a significant difference in utilization of quotes and statements from Western, Russian and Ukrainian government officials as well as in utilization of citations from Western and Russian experts. The most quoted sources for *Kommersant* are the Russian government officials (67.6%) and the Russian experts (56.9%), while the dominant sources for *The New York Times* are the Western government officials (68.8%), followed by the quotes from the Russian government officials and the Western experts that appear in the coverage with the same frequency – in 37.5% of the stories. These results support the finding of Blumler and Gurevitch (1981) that official sources are usually the dominant sources in political news. It should be also noted that the statements from the Ukrainian officials are found in the Russian newspaper in 12.7% of publications (it occurred to be almost the least utilized source), while it is the third most quoted source for the U.S. newspaper (27.5%). According to these results, we may assume that the American newspaper offered a greater diversity of opinions providing more statements from the parties with differing perspectives on the Crimean referendum. However, it should be noted that *Kommersant* did not only

concentrate on the Russian perspective, but also provided statements from the Western government officials in 21.6% of its coverage.

The fourth most utilized source for both newspapers is Crimean and Ukrainian civilians: the citations of citizens appear in 17.6% of *Kommersant* news stories and in 22.5% of *The New York Times* articles. Both newspapers used official sources more often than individuals and civilians and this result is consistent with Sigal's finding (1973). As shown in Table 4, the next most used sources by *Kommersant* are the Western experts and Representatives of international organizations that are present in 13.7% of the publications followed by the Ukrainian government officials (12.7%), while for *The New York Times* the sources of Crimean and Ukrainian civilians is followed by the Russian experts (17.5%) and Representatives of international organizations (16.3%). The least utilized source for both newspapers is other media outlets (news agencies, other newspapers, and online sources). The quotes from other media outlets can be found in 9.8% of Russian publications and in 15% of the U.S. publications.

RQ2 On what themes did Kommersant and The New York Times focus in online articles on the Crimean referendum? Is there any significant difference in themes between online coverage from Russia and the United States?

In order to answer RQ2 the researcher followed a two-step procedure. First, Pearson's Chi-square test was used to test against the null hypothesis that the distribution of themes is the same across both newspapers. The Chi-square test results (Table 5) in a p-value are smaller than .05 (p=.001), it means that there is strong evidence to state that there is a difference in themes distribution across the newspapers. Second, a set of pairwise z-tests of differences in proportions were performed in order to determine which particular theme significantly differed in online coverage of *Kommersant* and *The New York Times*. The distribution of themes is shown in Table 6.

Table 4

Crosstab: Sources of Attribution

Source		Newspaper	
		Kommersant	The New York Times
Western government officials	Count	22a	55b
	% within Online newspaper	21.6%	68.8%
Russian government officials	Count	69a	30b
	% within Online newspaper	67.6%	37.5%
Ukrainian government officials	Count	13a	22b
	% within Online newspaper	12.7%	27.5%
Western experts	Count	14a	30b
	% within Online newspaper	13.7%	37.5%
Russian experts	Count	58a	14b
	% within Online newspaper	56.9%	17.5%
Representatives of international organizations	Count	14a	13a
	% within Online newspaper	13.7%	16.3%
Media outlets	Count	10a	12a
	% within Online newspaper	9.8%	15.0%
Crimean, Ukrainian civilians	Count	18a	18a
	% within Online newspaper	17.6%	22.5%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Newspaper categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Table 5

Chi-Square Tests: Story Theme

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.132[a]	4	.001
Likelihood Ratio	19.646	4	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	.022	1	.882
N of Valid Cases	182		

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.40.

Table 6

Crosstab: Story Themes

			Online newspaper		Total
			Kommersant	The New York Times	
Story theme	politics	Count	43_a	35_a	78
		% within Online newspaper	42.2%	43.8%	42.9%
	economy/finance	Count	32_a	12_b	44
		% within Online newspaper	31.4%	15.0%	24.2%
	military activities/ protests	Count	8_a	24_b	32
		% within Online newspaper	7.8%	30.0%	17.6%
	impact of the events on citizens	Count	12_a	6_a	18
		% within Online newspaper	11.8%	7.5%	9.9%
	other	Count	7_a	3_a	10
		% within Online newspaper	6.9%	3.8%	5.5%
Total		Count	102	80	182
		% within Online newspaper	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Online newspaper categories whose column proportions
do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

As results indicate, the dominant theme of both newspapers' publications concerning

the Crimean referendum is politics, which is followed by economy and finance in

Kommersant coverage, and military activities and protests in *The New York Times* coverage.

A series of z-tests (Table 6) determined that there is a significant difference in distribution of

these two themes. *Kommersant* touched upon the economy and finance theme in the coverage

of the referendum in 31.4% of publications while *The New York Times* only in 15%. It might

have happened because the issues of a possible inclusion of Crimea into the Russian

Federation and the influence of the event on the Russian economy had more direct

implications for the Russian audience, while for the American audience the issues of the state of Russian and Ukrainian economies and currency were of less significance. The difference in the distribution of the theme focused on military activities and protests (7.8% for *Kommersant* and 30% for *The New York Times*) can be explained by the fact that illegal moves of Russian troops on a foreign territory were a very sensitive topic for the Russian media as the deployment of troops had not been acknowledged by the Russian administration. That might have been the reason why the Russian newspaper did not address the military theme in the coverage of the referendum as frequently as the U.S. newspaper. The third most popular theme in *Kommersant* online coverage is the impact of the events on citizens (11.8%). *Kommersant* publications focused on that theme describing the impact of depreciation of the ruble and sanctions on ordinary Crimean and Russian citizens' lives and the influence of the crisis on people engaged in the Crimean tourism industry. *The New York Times* concentrated on the impact of the events in 7.5% of the publications and, unlike *Kommersant,* the news stories in *The New York Times* mentioned the emotions and fears of Crimean Tatars. A good example is a story dated March 13, 2014 with a headline "Mindful of Past Many Tatars Fear of Russian Future":

> As Crimea prepares to vote on Sunday on whether to secede from Ukraine and join Russia, the prospect of a renewed Russian presence in Crimea evokes for Tatars raw memories of Communist-era depredations…Citing examples like Abkhazia and Chechnya, many Tatars fear a war that would leave their relatively small population — roughly 12 percent of Crimea — subject to ethnic backlash and the sort of repression they only recently left behind. (Sneider, 2014)

The stories under the category of "other" theme appeared in both newspapers with the least frequency: 6.9% for *Kommersant* publications and 3.8% for *The New York Times* articles.

This category included news stories that could not be attributed to any other major theme and that could not be grouped in a separate category because of their relatively small number.

RQ3 What is the difference in themes of Kommersant and The New York Times publications about the Crimean referendum before it took place and afterwards?

The research is also focused on examining a possible difference in themes in *Kommersant* and *The New York Times* online publications on the Crimean referendum during the two time periods: before the referendum was conducted (February 15, 2014 – March 15, 2014) and afterwards (March 16, 2014 – April 16, 2014). A set of pairwise z-tests (Table 7) revealed that there is no significant difference in the distribution of most themes in both newspapers. The only difference that is supported by the test is the difference in the distribution of the "economy and finance" theme and "other" themes in the Russian online coverage. In the second period *Kommersant* focused on the "economy and finance" theme twice as often as in the first period: the theme of economy appeared in 40% of the news stories after the referendum took place. This can be explained by the unexpected development of the events: the decision to hold the Crimean referendum was very fast and *Kommersant* reporters could not possibly predict annexation and further economic consequences before the referendum was conducted. However, after the referendum took place and after the Russian government decided to proceed with "reunification", *Kommersant* publications started focusing more on economic measures against the Russian Federation and on the integration of Crimea into Russia's economy. The second theme showing the difference in the distribution across the two periods is the theme under "other" category. The results reveal that the first period includes all the articles coded under the theme "other", which illustrates that during the second period all the examined publications were assigned to a certain major theme. According to this finding, we may assume that *Kommersant* online

coverage became a little less diverse and more focused on major topics after the referendum took place.

Table 7

Crosstab: Story Themes in Period 1 and Period 2

Online newspaper			Publication date		Total
			February 15, 2014 - March 15, 2014	March 16, 2014 - April 16, 2014	
Kommersan	politics	Count	25_a	18_a	43
		%	45.5%	38.3%	42.2%
	economy/ finance	Count	11_a	21_b	32
		%	20.0%	44.7%	31.4%
	military activities/ protests	Count	6_a	2_a	8
		%	10.9%	4.3%	7.8%
	the impact of the events	Count	6_a	6_a	12
		%	10.9%	12.8%	11.8%
	other	Count	7_a	0_b	7
		%	12.7%	0.0%	6.9%
	Total	Count	55	47	102
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
The New York Times	politics	Count	17_a	18_a	35
		%	45.9%	41.9%	43.8%
	economy/ finance	Count	3_a	9_a	12
		%	8.1%	20.9%	15.0%
	military activities/ protests	Count	12_a	12_a	24
		%	32.4%	27.9%	30.0%
	the impact of the events	Count	3_a	3_a	6
		%	8.1%	7.0%	7.5%
	other	Count	2_a	1_a	3
		%	5.4%	2.3%	3.8%
	Total	Count	37	43	80
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Publication date categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

RQ4 What are the most presented frames in Kommersant's and The New York Times' online coverage of the Crimean referendum?

Kommersant Framing

As Table 8 shows the most used frame in the Russian newspaper is the Economic consequence (n=53, 52%). The prevalence of the Economic consequence frame in the Russian newspaper can be attributed to the perceived high level of importance of the referendum and its further influence on the state of Russia's economy. At the beginning of the first period *Kommersant* publications on the Crimean referendum view the event as an occasion of Russia's foreign policy, therefore direct consequences for the Russian economy are rarely mentioned. However, after March 7 when the Supreme Council of Crimea voted to join Russia, the Economic consequence frame appears almost in half of the sample materials, as then the event gradually became an inevitable part of Russia's domestic policy. The main concerns connected with the economy include decline in the value of the ruble and foreign investments, the transfer of the Crimea region to ruble transactions, sanctions against senior Russian and Crimean officials, asset freezes, visa bans, suspension of Russia from the G8 group, suspension of Gazprom exports, and Russia's economic isolation. For example, a news story published on March 17, 2014 in *Kommersant* noted:

> There is some evidence that The European Union has drawn up a list of 130 Russian officials responsible for Russia's actions in Ukraine. They could be subjected to travel bans and asset freezes. Also, Russia might be stripped of G8 membership and there is possibility of the G7 meeting in London instead of a planned G8 Sochi Summit in Russia. (Strokan, 2014)

Table 8

Crosstab: Frames of the Crimean Referendum

Frame		Newspaper		Total
		Kommersant	The New York Times	
Russia-invader	Count	14a	56b	70
	%	13.7%	70.0%	38.5%
Protection of the Russian population	Count	29a	5b	34
	%	28.4%	6.3%	18.7%
Self-determination	Count	25a	6b	31
	%	24.5%	7.5%	17.0%
Illegal Ukrainian government	Count	28a	16a	44
	%	27.5%	20.0%	24.2%
Breach of International law	Count	27a	35b	62
	%	26.5%	43.8%	34.1%
False referendum	Count	3a	9b	12
	%	2.9%	11.3%	6.6%
Crimean ties	Count	33a	25a	58
	%	32.4%	31.3%	31.9%
Russian military actions	Count	9a	40b	49
	%	8.8%	50.0%	26.9%
Threat to peace and security	Count	16a	23b	39
	%	15.7%	28.7%	21.4%
Economic consequences	Count	53a	35a	88
	%	52.0%	43.8%	48.4%
Comparison frame	Count	13a	23b	36
	%	12.7%	28.7%	19.8%
Human interest	Count	29a	11b	40
	%	28.4%	13.9%	22.1%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Publication date categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

The Crimean ties frame is the second most presented frame in Russian online coverage (n=33, 32.4%). Before the referendum, *Kommersant* articles often mention strong historic, linguistic, cultural, and spiritual ties of Crimea to Russia. Utilization of this frame provides a

certain justification to Russia's policy toward Ukraine and makes further Russian moves more

acceptable for the Russian audience. After the referendum, this frame often appears in

Kommersant publications in quotes and statements of high-level Russian officials. For

example, a March 19 news report in *Kommersant* includes the following quote from President

Vladimir Putin's address to State Duma deputies:

> Millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight
>
> becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation
>
> became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided
>
> by borders (Kolesnikov, 2014).

The Crimean ties frame is followed by the Human interest frame: 28.4% of *Kommersant*

online articles focus on reactions and emotions of Russian citizens, Crimeans, and Tatar

civilians. Most of the articles are dominated by quotes of civilians with pro-Russian

sentiment who express enthusiasm concerning "reunification with Russia". Even though it is

more of an exception, a contrary point of view can also be found in *Kommersant* online

coverage:

> However, for many Crimean citizens the secession from Ukraine is a personal drama.
>
> Father serves in a brigade of the Russian Black Sea fleet while his son is a Ukrainian
>
> soldier; mother of a Crimean fiancé is Chairman of the Party of Regions local
>
> department while mother of a bride is a member of the Batkivschyna party from Lviv…
>
> (Galustyan, 2014)

The results also show that more than one-fourth of *Kommersant* news articles utilized at

least one of the For-referendum frames: the Protection of the Russian population (n=29,

28.4%), the Illegal Ukrainian government (n=28, 27.5%), and the Self-determination (n=25,

24.5%). It can be assumed that *Kommersant* publications stress the national interest and

depend on Russian government policy: this finding supports Entman's (1991) theory that

states that socio-political reality influences media framing. An unexpected and interesting finding, though, is that the frame focused on violation of international law – the Breach of international law – also frequently appears in Russian online articles (n=27, 26.5%). *Kommersant* journalists quote other foreign media (The Wall Street Journal, Le Monde, Le Figaro) that report on Russia's unlawful actions. *Kommersant* articles also mention various foreign leaders who condemned Russia for violation of the Ukrainian constitution and territorial integrity. For example, a *Kommersant* news story of March 17 suggested:

> The referendum is regarded illegitimate by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, UK Prime Minister David Cameron, US President Barack Obama, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso and President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Japanese Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga. (Dudina, 2014)

The most likely explanation of the relatively high percentage of the Breach of international law frame in *Kommersant* online coverage is that the newspaper known as "one of the last strongholds of independent media in Russia" (Henry, Mauldin, & Humber, 2006) tries to stand up to high journalistic values.

Frames that have the lowest frequency in Russian coverage include the Threat to peace and security (n=16, 15.7%), the Russia-invader (n=14, 13.7%), the Comparison frame (n=13, 12.7%), the Russian military actions (n=9, 8.8%) and the False referendum frame (n=3, 2.9%). All of them, except for a neutral Comparison frame which compares the Crimean referendum to other referendums on status, attribute to a controversial character of the referendum and characterize Russia as an aggressor. The low percentage of these frames in *Kommersant* can be explained by the influence of Russian national interests, political implications and the neo-authoritarian media system. These frames are mostly mentioned in the direct quotes of foreign politicians and experts. However, the mere presence of such

frames in a number of *Kommersant* news stories shows that the newspaper tries to cover the subject from different perspectives and conform to high standards of journalism, even in the media system ranked as "Not Free" by Freedom House.

The New York Times Framing

The most utilized frame in the online coverage of *The New York Times* is the Russia-invader frame, which appears in 70% of publications. This frame implies Russian aggressive actions toward Ukraine and includes such words as "annexation", "land grab", "occupation", "seizure" and "take over". The frame also appears in connection with the second most presented frame in *The New York Times* online coverage which focuses on Russian military operations on the peninsula – the Russian military actions frame (n=40, 50%). An example of both frames is the following paragraph in the March 3, 2014 article of *The New York Times*:

> But the events unfolding in major Ukrainian cities in recent days appear to match a pattern played by the Kremlin in Crimea, where pro-Moscow forces paving the way for Russia to seize control were neither altogether spontaneous, nor entirely local (Roth, 2014).

As shown in Table 8, the Economic consequence frame is the third most presented frame in *The New York Times* publications (43.8%). In comparison to *Kommersant*, the American newspaper focused its coverage mostly on a possible economic blockade of Russia and such economic measures as sanctions or asset freezes, paying less attention to the state of Russia's and Ukraine's currency and the internal economic issues of Crimea. The Breach of international law frame has the same frequency in *The New York Times* online coverage as the Economic consequence (n=35, 43.8%). Unlike *Kommersant* articles, *The New York Times* publications mention the illegitimate character of the referendum not only in quotes of American and European leaders, but also in the reflections of *The New York Times* reporters. The Crimean ties frame was also used in abundance (n=25, 31.3%), although, the interesting

finding is that, despite noting pro-Russian sentiment and close ties to Russia, *The New York Times* publications gave a broader perspective and often indicated that the region is also populated by a large number of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars. Thus, the newspaper provided more objective reports. For example, the story of March 1, 2014 stated:

> The strategically important peninsula, which has been the subject of military disputes for centuries, has strong historic, linguistic and cultural ties to Russia. The population of roughly two million is predominantly Russian, followed by a large number of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars, people of Turkic-Muslim origin. (Smale & Erlanger, 2014)

As the results indicate, Threat to peace and security frame emerges in 28.7% of *The New York Times* news stories. This frame is mostly obvious in the coverage with frequently mentioned implications and references to the Cold War period, suggesting possible geopolitical risks triggered by "Russian expansionism". A good example of this frame is found in the following paragraph of the March 1 report of *The New York Times*:

> What began three months ago as a protest against the Ukrainian government has now turned into a big-power confrontation reminiscent of the Cold War and a significant challenge to international agreements on the sanctity of the borders of the post-Soviet nations. (Smal & Erlanger, 2014)

The Comparison frame also appears in 28.7% of *The New York Times* publications. A large portion of the Comparison frame includes references to Kosovo's secession from Serbia and compares the Crimea region to other regions like Catalonia in Spain, South Ossetia in Russia, or Scotland in Great Britain. This frame cannot be considered merely as pro or against referendum as in various articles different comparisons made by *The New York Times* reporters lead to opposite conclusions, thus *The New York Times* provided different perspectives on the portrayal of this controversial event. The frame of Illegal government,

utilized concerning the Ukrainian administration at the time of the conflict, describes Ukrainian leaders as "bandits", "fascists" and "gangsters". It appears in 20% of *The New York Times* news stories being dominated by the quotes of Russian officials and statements from Ukraine's former president Viktor Yanukovych.

The next emerging frame in *The New York Times* online coverage is the Human interest (n=11, 13.9%). While *Kommersant* utilizes this frame speaking about the reactions of Russians or Ukrainian citizens with a pro-Russian position, the same frame in *The New York Times* is dominated by portrayals of Tatar civilians and Crimeans who expressed doubts about the referendum. For example, it is hard to imagine that the following paragraph could have appeared in *Kommersant*, however, it emerges in the March 8 news story of the American newspaper:

> In Bakhchysaray, the historical center of what was once the Crimean Tatars' homeland, several hundred protesters, mostly Tatar women and children, marched against integration with Russia, waving Ukrainian and Tatar flags, and chanting "We're for peace," "Ukraine is inseparable," and "Russian soldiers, go home!" (Myers & Erlanger, 2014)

The frame False referendum dominated by adjectives "farcical", "phony", "disputed", "rigged" in description of the referendum shows up in 11.3% of *The New York Times* publications. This frame, along with Breach of international law frame is included in the Against-referendum set of frames. However, unlike the Breach of international law frame (which is present in 43.8% of articles), it is one of the three least utilized frames. It can be explained by the fact that there was often a fine line between the False referendum frame that implies the false and controversial character of the referendum and the Breach of international law frame that implies its illegitimate character. The meaning of both frames is very close,

but the adjectives indicated in the codebook for the False referendum frame were not used as often as it had been assumed before the coding was performed.

The percentage of the stories under For-referendum set of frames is small: 7.5% for the Self-determination frame and 6.3% for the Protection of the Russian population frame. These frames mostly appear in statements of Russian officials: often the context of a story implies that such justifications of the referendum are groundless. For example, one of *The New York Times* publications cited the Russian ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, who called the Crimean referendum an exercise in "self-determination", while the next paragraph includes the quote from the American ambassador, Samantha Power: "I missed the day in law school where self-determination was defined as Russia-determination" (Sengupta, 2014). Overall, according to the analysis of *The New York Times* online publications, it can be assumed that almost every article contained a certain frame as well as some opposing reasoning: allowing the readers of *The New York Times* to make their own decisions and decide "what to think about" the Crimean referendum and the parties involved.

RQ5 Is there any significant difference in utilization of frames in online coverage of Kommersant and The New York Times?

A performed set of pairwise z-tests of difference in proportions (Table 8) revealed that only three frames out of twelve did not show a significant difference in utilization by *Kommersant* and *The New York Times.* The publications of both newspapers did not differ considerably in the frequency of the Illegal Ukrainian government frame (27.5% for *Kommersant* versus 20% for *The New York Times*), the Crimean ties frame (32.4% for *Kommersant* versus 31.3% for *The New York Times*), and the Economic consequences frame (52% for *Kommersant* versus 43.8% for *The New York Times*). The most dramatic difference is seen in the frame Russia – invader (13.7% for *Kommersant* versus 70% for *The New York Times*), the Russian military actions (8.8% for *Kommersant* versus 50% for *The New York*

Times), and both For-referendum frames: the Protection of the Russian population (28.4% for *Kommersant* versus 6.3% for *The New York Times*) and the Self-determination (24.5% for *Kommersant* versus 7.5% for *The New York Times*). The difference in percentages is considerable, however, such distribution of frames was expected. It can be explained by a theoretical section of the research that outlines governmental and political context influence on editorial policy. Unsurprisingly, in order to justify the referendum and further Crimean secession from Ukraine, the Russian newspaper utilized the For-referendum set of frames more frequently and provided less evidence of the illegitimate character of Crimean annexation and Russian unlawful military moves, while the U.S. newspaper utilized the For-referendum frames mostly in the quotes of Russian political leaders and pro-Russian population exposing more data about Russian military activities. It should be noted that the Russian government had not acknowledged that the Russian military backed Crimean self-defense forces until April 17 when Vladimir Putin admitted that Russian troops were deployed to Crimea (Anischchuk, 2014). That might have been the reason why only 8.8% of *Kommersant* stories contained subtle mentions of Russian military maneuvers.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The 2014 Crimean referendum was a controversial international event that received considerable coverage in the mass media all over the world. This study is a comparative framing analysis of online publications from the U.S. and Russia. The event has been of political interest to both countries and provided an opportunity to examine themes, source attribution patterns and frames in the coverage of liberal, well-respected media outlets in Russia (*Kommersant*) and in the United States (*The New York Times*). According to Watanabe (2014), the understanding of the events in Ukraine totally depended on news media. This study has found these two newspapers differently described the same event. The reported differences can be explained by variations in political interests, media systems, journalistic standards, cultural and historical ties outlined by literature.

According to Shoemaker and Reese (1991), sources may significantly impact a news story. The results of this research on source attribution patterns are consistent with previous studies, which have shown that the most common sources in news stories are government officials (Sigal, 1973; Zoch & Turk, 1998; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981). Unsurprisingly, Russia and the U.S. relied heavily on their respective officials and experts. An important finding of the study is that the Ukrainian officials appeared more frequently in *The New York Times* coverage than in *Kommersant* coverage (27.5% vs 12.7%). This result reflects the different perspectives of both countries and shows how media outlets frame the publications by utilizing statements of government officials with compatible views to their national interests, rather than quotes with opposing views. Overall, *The New York Times* in

comparison to *Kommersant* showed a greater diversity of news sources. This result can be explained by the fact that the liberal media system of the U.S. welcomes diverse opinions operating under the principle of freedom of speech (Merill & Lowenstein, 1979). At the same time, even though *Kommersant* is considered one of the liberal and independent media outlets in Russia, it still exists under unwritten rules of its neo-authoritarian model and depends on the government's tone and attitude.

The study's results have shown the dominant theme of the referendum media coverage for both newspapers is politics; however, there is a significant difference in other themes of the coverage. The next most popular theme for *Kommersant* is economy and finance, while *The New York Times* focused on military activities and protests. This finding can be explained by the different national political interests that play a significant role in framing the international news. The Russian government had not acknowledged the presence of the Russian troops on the Crimean peninsula at the time period on which the research focused, so *Kommersant* strayed from revealing the details about Russian military operations. *The New York Times*, following the interests of U.S. foreign policy, exposed facts about aggressive Russian conduct. Nonetheless, it should be noted that a comparison between themes in time periods before and after the referendum has not revealed a major difference between the newspapers.

The results obtained indicate a meaningful difference in frames used by the two newspapers. It has been demonstrated that Russia tended to portray the Crimean referendum in a more favorable light, utilizing a set of the For-referendum frames more often than the U.S. However, the unexpected finding is that *Kommersant* often used one of the Against-referendum frames - Breach of international law. One of the most noteworthy issues to consider is that while both newspapers utilized similar frames, they emphasized different aspects. For example, the majority of the Human interest frame in *Kommersant* focused on

emotions and reactions of Crimeans and Russians favorable to the referendum, while *The New York Times* concentrated on the event's impacts on Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars and their doubts about the consequences of annexation.

Summing up the results, one can conclude the media coverage differences arise not only from a simplistic contrast between libertarian and neo-authoritarian models of the media system, but also come from political and national interests, and the cultural and historical ties between involved parties. Consistent with the findings by Reese (2003) and Scheufele (2000), the study's result showed that journalistic norms and routines of the particular media outlets also played an important role in the media coverage of the Crimean referendum. The results have indicated that *Kommersant* with a reputation of a liberal newspaper has been trying to perform independent reporting in Russia, a country identified by Freedom House as "Not Free", frequently utilizing quotes from Western officials (21.6%) and mentioning arguments against the 2014 Crimean referendum. Only a few studies compare coverage of media outlets that perform high journalistic standards in countries with different political and media systems. This thesis provided evidence that the U.S and the Russian newspapers had a different pattern of news coverage. The findings of this research add to the body of literature on framing presenting such cross-country comparisons.

By comparing the online coverage of two newspapers from different nations, the study also has implications for international communication research, as it examines numerous variables that influence international news coverage. This paper has shown that even though both newspapers are considered independent in their respective countries, their foreign coverage still relies on governmental sources and reflects their political ideologies. The study's results are also consistent with findings of Bazaa and Hsiao (2010) that indicate the international coverage is largely influenced by the states of diplomatic relationships between countries. The existence of this tendency as well as the dependence of the audience

perception on foreign news coverage by their home media (Flournoy & Stewart, 1997) implies readers should rely on a variety of news media in order to get a more complete picture of foreign events.

Limitations and Future Research

The Crimean referendum attracted a lot of attention around the world. This content analysis included only two months of news coverage from two newspapers in two countries. A longer-term observation and data collection from various outlets can provide a more accurate picture on how media systems and news sources affect the controversial referendum framing. Another limitation lies in the chosen methodology as the researcher decided to utilize issue-specific frames which, on the one hand, "allow for a profound level of specificity and details relevant to the event" (Semetko & de Vreese, 2004, p. 93) but, on the other hand, such an issue-specific approach is considered to be rather subjective. Oftentimes, the issue-specific approach makes it difficult to generalize and compare the analysis. In order to get a better understanding of how various media systems, political interests, cultural and historical ties influence media framing, further studies of the topic need to address more generic and new issue-specific frames.

The present study did not code for headlines and did not examine editorial materials, but only focused on news reports. Future framing studies on the referendum can pay particular attention to news stories' headlines, subheads and leads as these elements are also known as powerful framing devices (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Future framing research can analyze editorial and opinion columns, as these materials are more likely to express the subjective view of the newspaper which strays from the objectivity norm. Besides text, further research can explore visual framing in the news coverage between two countries. During the analysis, the researcher noticed a photo or a short video report accompanies almost every online publication. Visuals can operate as framing devices which offer "a

number of different condensing symbols that suggest the core frame" (Gamson & Stuart,

1992) and can also influence the evaluation of journalistic stories.

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Appendix

Codebook

Coded By_____

Story Number_____

1. Online newspapers

 (1) The New York Times   (2) Kommersant

2. Publication date of the article

(1)February 15, 2014 – March 15, 2014   (2) March 16, 2014 – April 16, 2014

3. Story themes

Please, code each publication into one of the five theme categories. Take into account only the dominant theme, other themes that may appear in the article should be neglected.

(1) politics;

(2) economy/finance;

(3) military activities/ protests;

(4) impact of the events on ordinary citizens;

(5) other.

4. Sources of attribution

Source	Yes/Present	No/Absent
Western government officials (including presidents, prime ministers and other politicians)		
Russian and Crimean government officials (including president, prime minister and other politicians)		
Ukrainian government officials (newly appointed prime minister and members of his government)		
Western experts (such as political commentators, professors)		
Russian experts (such as political commentators, professors)		
Representatives of international organizations (representatives of the UN, EU, etc.)		

Other media outlets (newspapers or news agencies such as BBC, Associated Press, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Izvestia)		
Crimeans, Ukrainian civilians		

5. Story frames

Please, code each article according to presence or absence of the frames identified below. Pay attention to certain phrases and keywords. A single story may contain multiple frames.

Frame	Yes/Present	No/Absent
1) ***Russia - invader.*** This frame focuses on illegitimate character of the Crimean referendum and depicts Russia as a violator of Ukraine's territorial integrity. The frame includes such keywords and phrases as **"occupation", "annexation", "Russia's invasion/aggression", "Russia invaded Crimea", "Kremlin's intervention", "takeover", "land grab", "seizure of Crimea", "incursion into Crimea", "absorption", "Kremlin's grasp".**		
2.1) ***Protection of the Russian population.*** This frame includes such phrases as **"the right to protect the Russian-speaking population", "a threat to the lives and health of Russian citizens".**		
2.2) ***Self-determination.*** This frame includes such phrases as **"the right of self-determination", "consistent with international law"**		
2.3) ***Illegal Ukrainian government.*** This frame includes such keywords and adjectives describing Ukrainian government as **"illegal", "fascist", "Bandera thugs", "bandits", "gangsters", "an unconstitutional coup".**		
3.1) ***Breach of international law***. This frame includes such keywords and phrases as **"a violation of Ukrainian constitution/ sovereignty/territorial integrity", "Russia's unlawful actions", "challenge to international agreements", "breach of international law", "unconstitutional", "illegal/illegitimate", "vote is fiction".**		
3.2) ***False referendum.*** This frame includes such keywords and adjectives describing the Crimean referendum as **"separatist", "farcical", "false", "phony", "rigged", "disputed", "a farce", "a fiction", "a parody", "a sham".**		

4) **Crimean ties.** This frame emphasizes historical and cultural ties of Crimea and Russia. The frame includes such English as well as Russian keywords and phrases as **"predominantly ethnic Russian region", "the largely pro-Russian region", "close/strong historical and/or linguistic and/or cultural ties to Russia", "largely Russian-speaking Crimean peninsula", "pro-Russian sentiment is widespread", "home to a Russian naval base/Black Sea fleet", "a nostalgic place in the minds of many Russians".**		
5) **Russian military actions**. This frame focuses on Russian military operation on the peninsula and assumes that unidentified troops that occupied Crimean territory before and during the referendum were Russian special forces. The frame includes such keywords and phrases as **"Russian military forces", "Russian troops stripped of identifying insignia", "military installations", "deployment of Russian special forces", "military exercise / military maneuvers", "military preparations", "Russia's military moves", "military buildup", "escalation of Russian military actions", "militiamen, backed by Russian forces".**		
6) **Threat to piece and security**. This frame outlines risks and fears concerning the Crimean referendum and/or assumes which states may be occupied by Russia in future. The frame includes such keywords and phrases as "**Cold War", "pose a threat to peace and security/sovereignty of Europe", "the next Crimea", "a threat of military confrontation/ response", "fears of a new military incursion", "threaten to split society", "a chilling prospect", "a threat to the individual states of Europe", "the Russian threat (expansionism), "geopolitical risks", "threats of violence/intimidation".**		

7) ***Economic consequences***. This frame emphasizes the economic consequences of the Crimean referendum. The frame includes such keywords and phrases as **"sanctions", "travel/visa bans and/or restrictions", "asset freezes", "economic blockade of Russia", "economic punishment", "suspension of Gazprom exports", "economic isolation", "damage to the economy", "to punish/penalize Russia/ Putin", "impact on the country's economy", "the state of Russia's currency/ruble.**		
8) ***Comparison frame***. This frame compares the referendum in Crimea with previous, future and hypothetical referendums on status of other states and includes comparisons with **Kosovo (Yugoslavia), Catalonia region (Spain), Scotland (Great Britain), Quebec (Canada), Dagestan (Russia), Chechnya (Russia), Tibet (China), Taiwan (China), Abkhazia (Russia), South Ossetia (Russia), northern Cyprus (Turkey), Nagorno-Karabakh (Russia), Transnistria (Moldova), South Sudan (Sudan), Palestine (Israel).**		
9) ***Human interest.*** This frame focuses on the reaction and emotions of Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar civilians. Human interest frame refers to an effort to personalize the news in order to capture and retain audience interest.		