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Creating Scandal to Avoid Panic:

How the UK Press Framed the *News of the World* Phone-hacking Scandal

Zuzanna Natalie Blaszkiewicz,
MSc in Media and Communications

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Zuzanna Natalie Blaszkiewicz

ABSTRACT

In the wake of the July 2011 *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal, the press was forced to cover an event which implicated journalistic transgressions, and not only at the *News of the World*, but with serious implications regarding practices of the entire UK press industry. Given these considerations, questions arose regarding not only how the press framed the revelations, but the role that newspaper ownership may have played in the choice of framing. Using the concepts of framing, ownership structure and media scandal, this research looks at the presence of varying frames, notably, that of media scandals, in relation to newspaper ownership. A content analysis was conducted of 200 articles featured in 6 different UK newspapers during the first month of the scandal: the *Sun* and the *Times*, both owned by News International, the same organization that owned the *News of the World*, as well the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, the *Daily Mirror*, and the *Daily Mail*, all owned by other organizations. A content analysis found that framing varied between those newspapers owned by News International and those owned by other organizations, with News International newspapers focusing less on a scandal framework and more on potential transgressions of the entire industry, a factor which contributes to the creation of a moral panic. Other newspapers decidedly chose the media scandal framework to cover the event, subsequently delegitimizing the potential creation of a moral panic by more definitively implicating the *News of the World* and individuals within the organization, notably News International owners Rupert and James Murdoch. The findings of this research further legitimize rather than challenge the power of the press to create or discredit media scandal for the benefit of its own industry. The potential for further research into coverage of the scandal, especially the accompanying investigation that led to recommendations for the future of the UK press industry in the form of the Leveson Report, could provide insight into how framing of the event may have changed over time, with further implications for the press' power in defining an issue.

INTRODUCTION

The press industry as a media institution plays a definitive role in shaping public consciousness and attributing salience to specific issues; news is not only news, but an active selection and creation of social reality (Goffman, 1974). By simply reporting on something, the press consciously asserts the importance of one issue over another, and through their reporting, defines for the audience how to interpret the issue (Tuchman, 1978). This concept of salience and selection known as framing (Entman, 1993) points to the incredible power of the press to construct the audience's understanding of events which consequently shape their knowledge of the world (Gamson, 1989).

This power, however, does not go unrecognized by the press industry itself, and various factors influence the choice of frame. Whereas the press was once considered the 'fourth estate', serving the societal role of watchdog over those with political, economic and cultural power (Lull & Hinerman, 1997), commercial interests have largely taken over as one of the determining factors for reporting on an issue. More specifically, the commercial interests of newspaper proprietors, whose increasingly concentrated ownership have significantly reduced the variability of news narratives present both within the press and the larger popular media landscape, are a distinguishing factor for recognizing a news frame (Tuchman, 1978). Framing, then, functions as a way to enhance those parts of a narrative that will be most financially and politically beneficial to newspaper owners and their interests. Publishing certain types of news events, however, is more conducive to satisfying both these criteria than others; one such news event is the media scandal.

Media scandals occur 'when private acts that disgrace or offend the idealized, dominant morality of a social community are made public and narrativized by the media, producing a range of effects from ideological and cultural retrenchment to disruption and change' (Lull & Hinerman, 1997: 3). Their typically transgressive nature of political, cultural or societal norms gives the opportunity for the press to reinforce ideological values and moral codes, while their dramatic presentation and often salacious subject matter tend to spark the public's interest, driving sales and revenue. Important to note is that the media, in this case, the press, actively work to construct a scandal, framing being a dominant instrument used to produce this narrative (Lull & Hinerman, 1997).

What happens, however, if those within the press industry are the transgressors of moral codes, more specifically, codes of the journalistic profession, and are obligated to report on these transgressions? Typically, political or cultural individuals or institutions are the perpetrators, and the press is the first to emphasize misconduct or wrong-doing. But the press' function as a 'fourth estate' with significant power and societal expectations means that

their transgressions can become the subject of intense public scrutiny as well. Consequently, this is exactly what happened with the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal.

The *News of the World*, a now defunct UK tabloid newspaper, found itself at the centre of controversy in July 2011 when the *Guardian*, a liberal UK broadsheet, broke the story of alleged hacking by *News of the World* employees into the mobile phone voicemail of Milly Dowler in 2002, a then missing 13-year old school girl from Surrey. The *Guardian* alleged that private investigators hired by the *News of the World* hacked into Dowler's mobile phone during her disappearance in order to garner information for a potential story, deleting her voicemails when her inbox was full and hampering police investigations into her disappearance. It is true that the *News of the World* was already facing investigations into allegations of phone-hacking, and although the deletion of voicemails was later proven untrue, the allegations of phone-hacking against an innocent victim of crime caused an outcry regarding the integrity of journalism and the extent of commercial pressures on journalists to obtain profitable news stories. The *News of the World* and the *Sun*, both UK tabloids, as well as the *Times*, a UK broadsheet, were owned by the same parent company, News International, and were all obligated to react to and report on the *Guardian's* accusations. After less than a week of intense scrutiny, head of News International Rupert Murdoch shut down the *News of the World* for good.

This self-professed 'scandal'¹ raises interesting questions about the media's role in framing an event. It would seem counterintuitive to believe that the press, who both define and create it, would negatively implicate itself as part of a scandal, since it was not only the *News of the World*, but the entire press industry that was at risk of being questioned and accused of moral and ethical transgressions. Even more interesting is the consideration of ownership and its influence on press coverage of the scandal. The forthcoming research aims to interrogate the traditional notions of the press' role in defining and framing a scandal within the context of ownership structure and the nature of the press' position at the centre of the scandal. Using a content analysis of articles from six UK newspapers during the first month of reporting on the scandal, this research will aim to answer the following question:

Given the power of the press to define an issue, how was the phone-hacking scandal initially framed in the UK press when the press institution was at the centre of the scandal? How did ownership structure influence the framing of the scandal in newspapers owned by News International?

¹ Given its widely publicized title in the press, the phone-hacking 'scandal' will be referred to as such in the context of this paper to avoid confusion.

This research paper will begin with a theoretical framework outlining the dominant theories and concepts implicated in this research, followed by a conceptual framework that will situate these concepts within the context of the research. An outline of the research objectives, methodology and research design will be followed by an analysis of the findings, ending with considerations for further research into press coverage of the still ongoing event.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section will outline some of the key theories and concepts that will comprise the foundation of this research, including literature on framing and media power, ownership structure and political economy of the media, and media scandals and moral panics.

Framing and Media Power

One of the most important theories for understanding the presentation of news stories is that of framing. Framing is, as defined by key scholar Robert Entman, ‘select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’ (1993: 52). Implicated in his definition is a conscious selection of events. Narratives, however, can be conceived unconsciously by journalists, and are subsequently interpreted unconsciously by audiences, within their cultural context. As Erving Goffman (1974) notes, frames are inherently related to culture; the way in which journalists think about and audiences come to understand news stories are related to the values, norms and patterns of knowledge within a given society (Van Gorp, 2007).

Identifying frames as a ‘bridging concept’ between culture and understanding, Baldwin Van Gorp (2007) has distinguished between the uses of frames and framing for journalists and audiences alike. As a tool for journalists, Van Gorp refers to what he calls ‘frame packages’, which are essentially constructed according to theme, and include ‘explicit and implicit statements that deal with justifications, causes and consequences within a temporal order...’ (2007: 64). These ‘frame packages’ provide journalists with the devices to be able to relay a narrative that audiences will understand and recognize, devices which include word choice, metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, visual images, descriptions, and stereotypes (Lippman, 1922; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007). Audiences, in turn, are able to interpret these narratives because of their recurring presence in the media, drawing conclusions based on knowledge of prior events (Van Gorp, 2007). Entman

highlights an important consideration, however, when he says that ‘most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omissions... may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience’ (1993: 54).

Debates regarding the perceived usefulness (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007) versus the potential agenda-setting function (Lippman, 1922; McCombs & Shaw, 1972) that frames can inherit for media institutions demonstrate their potential, amid consequences good or bad, for conveying news narratives. Because the focus of this research is on how the press frame an issue rather than how audiences interpret the frame, audience effects will not be discussed here in detail. That being said, it is worth mentioning that dominant frames can be contested, and audiences do not always interpret news frames as intended (Gamson et al., 1992; Entman, 1993; Kitzinger, 2000).

Why certain frames?

Because framing has already been implicated as a manufactured process of selection and salience, that is, in both the choice and presentation of issues or events, questions arise as to why certain frames are present over others.

As already noted, cultural values and norms are a key component for understanding news frames; subsequently, they are a consideration for the *choice* of news frames as well (Van Gorp, 2007). Narratives which reflect dominant values or ideologies of society will undoubtedly take precedent over those which do not (Lule, 2001). Similarly, the concept of newsworthiness helps define for media institutions which narratives to include. When reporting on social problems, for example, Stuart Hall et al. (1978) note that in order to be appealing to media audiences, narratives must feature elements which illicit emotional reactions, seem to pose a legitimate threat to a large portion of the public, or feature prominent public figures. It is not just the values of society, however, that are taken into consideration. The values of independent journalists, editors and news organizations can also be a defining factor in the choice of news frame (Gans, 1979; Gamson, 1989; Vliegenthart and van Zoonen, 2011); this notion will be discussed more thoroughly in forthcoming sections.

Nevertheless, there are also more practical reasons for the explanation of the choice of frame. Primarily, Rens Vliegenthart and Liesbet van Zoonen note that ‘...newsworthiness is dependent on how a particular event fits the time and space requirements of the news organizations [reporting on it]’ (2011: 103). Similarly, a consideration of the practical dimensions of framing an issue warrants a mention of news organizations as businesses. Presumably, news stories being presented are those that will be the most financially

profitable for news agencies (O'Neill, 1992). Again, this notion will be discussed in further detail in later sections.

Having noted how frames work and why some narratives appear when others do not, it is important to take a step back and ask why the consideration of news frames is important. The answer emerges when considering the power of media institutions.

Media power?

The process of selection and salience implicated in the notion of framing signifies the role that media institutions play in defining reality for its audiences. As William Gamson et al. (1992) have noted, people are generally uninformed about events which are not within close proximity to their everyday reality, and so media become the method through which they garner information about the world 'out there'. This role in defining reality is where media power lies. As Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester have argued, they 'see media as reflecting not a world out there, but the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others' (1974: 111).

Even further than defining what is news, and consistent with the agenda-setting theory of mass media, Bernard Cohen's oft-quoted phrase regarding the power of the press is undoubtedly relevant here: '[the press] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*' (1963: 13). Hall et al. have shared similar notions when they say that 'the media define for the majority of the population *what* events are taking place, but also, they offer powerful interpretations of *how* to understand these events' (1974: 340). The media's role in constructing the audience's reality of events is, for this research, of most significance when considering media power. The next consideration will be how that power functions within the press industry.

Ownership and Political Economy of the Media

The golden age of the press may long be over (Gerald, 1963), but the commercial and financial success that some newspaper proprietors now enjoy has vastly increased as a result of media concentration and conglomeration in a wide variety of media outlets (Murdock, 1982; Murdock and Golding, 2005). In relation to already noted discussions about media power, Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (2005) highlight the concerns among democratic theorists about the significant concentration of ownership among the mass communications sector, a definitive source of information for a large majority of media audiences; a

concentration of ownership means a concentration of information with little variety throughout (Curtain and Streeter, 2001).

Concentration in the press industry is especially problematic because of its status as a dominant source of information, yet as Bruce Hanlin notes, 'the survival of the press as a democratic institution depends on its survival as an industry' (1992: 37). In turn, its survival as an industry depends on the financial support that comes from being owned by the largest and most powerful media organizations (Manning, 2001). One such news organization is News Corporation, currently one of the largest media conglomerates in the world with ownership stakes in newspapers, books, magazines, television broadcasting and music companies, among others, controlling a significant portion of cultural and mass media production. Of most significance here is its branch in the press industry, controlled by News International and owning the *Sun*, the *Sun on Sunday* (a replacement for the now defunct *News of the World*), the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* in the UK. With ownership of four of the largest circulation newspapers in the UK (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2012), News International undoubtedly plays a significant role in defining news output to a large segment of the British public. What determines this output can be categorized as either profit or politics.

Like any other industry, the press industry is one based on profit, and while the decision to feature one news story over another may be influenced by various factors, Paul Manning recalls 'the inevitable dependence of all newspapers upon advertising revenue' (2001: 82) and subsequent audience preferences driving sales as the final consideration for story selection. Notably, other factors are influential in determining story selection as well. One such constraint, as Manning (2001) calls it, is the political structure of the newspaper, including not only the political affiliations of the news organization, but more significantly, the views of newspaper proprietors.

Newspaper proprietors

Among other influences, newspaper proprietors play a definitive role in determining the content of their newspapers, whether directly or indirectly. Primarily, as Manning has noted, 'there is little doubt that for newspapers, at least, proprietors have often had a powerful influence in shaping the character of the paper and the culture of the newsroom' (2001: 81). According to Murdock (1982), the power that proprietors exert is two-fold and can be distinguished as either structural or instrumental: instrumental power is that which is exerted through intentional and overt actions, while structural power constrains the choice of news narratives to those that align with the political or economic views of the organization and its owner. Political alignment is, of course, a noted influence for coverage of news stories.

During the Watergate scandal, for example, the *Washington Post*, a liberal newspaper, most vehemently pursued the publication of allegations against Republican president Richard Nixon, arguably because of the fact that it was a liberal publication and had a known contempt for Nixon (Schudson, 1992). Wary of repercussions, only once the allegations were undeniable and reporting on the story was unavoidable did all other newspapers do so, and they undoubtedly reported on Watergate within their own political perspectives (Schudson, 1992).

To be able to maintain their own as well as the organization's interests, then, newspaper proprietors establish their presence in the newsroom through, for one, hiring practices, as noted by Hanlin: 'proprietors invariably seek to safeguard their position through the appointment of an editor who shares, or at least accepts, their opinions on general policy, even if differing on detail' (1992: 45). They similarly note the pressures on journalists to conform to their proprietor's viewpoints and avoid behaviours or narratives that may be offensive or misaligned with the organization, as it could lead to a significant decrease in advertising revenue, readership, or both, resulting in their termination (Harris, 1992). As such, the following section will further examine one of the most notorious newspaper proprietors and media owners, coincidentally also at the centre of the phone-hacking scandal.

The influence of Rupert Murdoch

As a media mogul, Rupert Murdoch has gained notoriety for his controlling, intrusive and self-interested management style, and for this reason, probably best demonstrates the impact that a sole newspaper proprietor can have on his press publications (Hanlin, 1992). Manning notes how 'Murdoch has been highly interventionist in approach, dictating style, tone and format; encouraging certain kinds of story; forging an editorial stance in tune with his politics; and appointing people who broadly share his views' (2001: 89). This domineering style had, before the phone-hacking scandal, been largely beneficial to Murdoch and his News Corporation media empire, whose position as one of the largest multi-national media conglomerates allowed for market exploitation and predatory pricing to further increase sales and revenue and solidify News International at the top of the UK press industry (Manning, 2001). Notably, the sensationalistic reporting style of Murdoch's publications, a style which appeals to a large audience segment, have helped secure this position (Jenkins, 1992).

Given Murdoch's well-known ambitions towards profit, concerns about quality reporting and the influence of the Murdoch empire emerged when News International purchased the *Times* in 1981, one of the most prestigious and credible newspapers in the UK (Pauly, 1988). Indeed, Murdoch's influence shifted the *Times*' political affiliations to align with UK Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher in the eighties and Tony Blair in the nineties, ultimately benefitting from

changes in policy that allowed for the deregulation of British broadcasting and the growth of Murdoch's media empire with Sky TV, among other expansions (Hanlin, 1992; Manning, 2001).

Returning to press competition, however, Hanlin notes how 'the fiercer the battle for circulation, the greater the commercial pressures on editors to erode journalistic standards on matters of truth, accuracy and ethical acceptability' (1992: 45). In this vein, News International and Rupert Murdoch appear to have applied these pressures slightly too forcefully. Presumably, eroding journalistic standards appears to be exactly what happened when *News of the World* employees, under the pressures of working for Murdoch, turned to the unethical practice of phone-hacking in order to stay on top of the market. What their actions inadvertently led to was one of the most significant media stories of 2011, what was self-referentially labelled a full-scale 'scandal'. Coincidentally, scandals are typically one of the most profitable types of narratives for news organizations (Rooney, 2000); ironically, News International was unable to benefit on this occasion.

Media Scandals

A 'scandal' is essentially a story, a narrative with a plot and characters that almost exclusively plays itself out in the media (Bird, 1997; Lull & Hinerman, 1997). The press industry has regularly been accused of not only fostering, but also creating scandal. As leading scholar John Thompson has noted, 'most 'mediated scandals' are not simply scandals which are reported by the media and exist independently of them: they are, in varying ways and to some extent, constituted by mediated forms of communication' (1997: 49). James Lull and Stephen Hinerman share similar sentiments when they say that 'scandal is always shaped and given force by the technological means through which information is transmitted to the public as news' (1997: 7). Presumably, without the intervention of mass communication, scandals may not even be constituted as such, and would have significantly less exposure in the public domain.

In terms of its presentation in the media, Thompson (2000) has identified the sequential structure in which a mediated scandal takes place. It begins not with the transgression, but with the disclosure of the transgression, which he notes as the 'pre-scandal' phase. Next is the 'scandal-proper' phase, in which the claims and allegations are made public, followed by counter-claims and defences made by the transgressor. The third phase, what he calls the 'culmination', is when the media pressure applied to the individual transgressors leads to consequences that may include admitting guilt, resigning, being fired or being criminally

charged. Finally, the 'aftermath' phase allows for a reflection on the events once the most dramatic revelations have subsided (Thompson, 2000: 72-77). As Thompson (2000) notes, these phases can last weeks, months, or even years.

Notably, the transgression of moral codes and values is a defining characteristic of media scandals (Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 1997). Similar to framing, however, the definition of moral codes and values, and the relevance of their transgression to society, is dependent on the socio-historical context of the culture in which they are situated (Thompson, 2000).

Anatomy of a scandal

As Waisbord (2004) has noted, scandals occur when contradictory information about what is typically expected from public figures or institutions is made public. Further to Thompson's phases of a scandal, he has also outlined five characteristics that typify a scandal, including (1) the transgression of moral codes and values which (2) are known by 'non-participants' to have occurred, (3) are disapproved by or offensive to 'non-participants', and (4) are publicly condemned by 'non-participants', (5) with their condemnation resulting in the damaged reputation of those involved (Thompson, 1997: 41). Lull and Hinerman point to similar criteria with the addition of identifying perpetrators who must be held responsible for their actions (1997: 11); these criteria are used as tools to help frame an incident as a scandal. Notably, the event being known to 'non-participants' is what initiates the incident in becoming a scandal, while the notion of actions being publicly condemned by 'non-participants' highlights the media's role in providing an avenue for public condemnation.

Given these criteria, certain types of events are more susceptible to becoming media scandals than others. Lull and Hinerman (1997) distinguish between three different types of media scandal, what they categorize as institutional, star and psychodrama. Of most significance here is the institutional scandal, in which the actions of individual members of powerful institutions transgress dominant moral codes, either for professional or personal gain (Lull and Hinerman, 1997).

Especially vulnerable to scandal have been political institutions, and much literature on media scandals focuses on those within the political realm, precisely because these institutions wield some of the greatest power in society and can elicit some of the most intense scrutiny. In fact, Thompson (2000) implicates political scandals as essentially mediated events. Scandals such as the Profumo Affair, the Clinton-Lewinsky Affair and Watergate all received intense media coverage and came to illustrate the media's role in exacerbating institutional scandals for public consumption. Again referencing Watergate,

Michael Schudson (1992) explains how the initial *Washington Post* reports on the Watergate scandal were slow to be picked up by other news sources, but once the media's focus shifted from the presidential elections to further revelations of the scandal, the intense scrutiny aided by media coverage contributed to the eventual resignation of then-President Richard Nixon. Among other implications, Watergate exemplifies the media's role in driving an event to 'scandal' status.

Moral panics

While there is still much to be written about media scandals, worth mentioning is the concept of moral panics, a precursor to media scandal which has a significant body of academic literature. The idea of a moral panic was first realized by Stanley Cohen (1972) in his seminal work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*, defined as an event or situation which seems to elicit a significant threat to the morals and values of society, is thought to be widespread, and is heavily driven by the media. The key parallel is the media's role in creating a moral panic, and a scandal can turn into a moral panic when the actions of individuals are thought to be a result of larger social issues (Lull & Hinerman, 1997). Countless studies (Cohen, 1972; Hall et. al, 1978; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995; Critcher, 2003, for example) all point to the media's dominant role in creating moral panics around drugs, crime, paedophilia and other issues with moral or ethical undertones, through its use of news values, claims makers and primary definers, which all help legitimize the problem as worthy of a 'moral panic' (Critcher, 2003). Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda outline characteristics typical of a moral panic, which include concern over the behaviour, hostility towards the group engaging in that behaviour, consensus about the threat of the behaviour, disproportionality between the perceived and actual threat of the behaviour, and the volatility of the event, which can subside as quickly as it appears (1994: 156-159). While the conceptualization of and literature on moral panics is extensive, the key linkage between media scandals and moral panics is the media's role in creating and perpetuating these issues or events, with a distinction between individual transgressions and more widespread social problems.

Scandals of the press

Because of the power that the press institution has in its traditional role as a 'fourth estate' or watchdog, as well as its power in framing an issue and relaying information to the public, it seems reasonable to anticipate that it would be susceptible to scandal as well. There has been virtually no literature, however, about scandals *involving* individual representatives of media institutions. It may be that these scandals are rare and provide an insufficient body of analysis, or that the individual transgressions of a single journalist, for example, do not

warrant enough mediated visibility or individual influence to be as prominently featured in an institutional mediated scandal. There have been, however, some examples of individual transgressions framed as scandal within the press industry.

The Janet Cooke scandal, for example, involved the fabrication of a Pulitzer Prize-winning story by a *Washington Post* journalist, Janet Cooke. Once it was discovered that her story was fabricated, criticism focused on the individual 'rogue' journalist, Cooke, as opposed to the equally guilty *Post*, who failed to thoroughly check the facts of the story (Eason, 1986); placing individual blame on the transgression is consistent with the typical framework of a media scandal (Thompson, 2000). Similarly, Cooke's actions were vehemently derided and reflected on publicly by other journalists (Eason, 1986). Literature of the event, notably by David Eason (1986), did not focus on the traditional notions of media scandals or on the framing of the event, but rather pointed to reflections made by journalists regarding the trends of the industry and the contradictions of authority implicated in the Cooke scandal. As one among few examples of events involving the press which could constitute a media scandal, it appears that individuals in the press industry can be implicated in moral transgressions of 'scandal' proportion. With no concrete analysis of its framework, however, what this research intends to do is pose the media scandal framework against the press industry in relation to the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts of framing, ownership structure and mediated scandal are all imperative to understanding the coverage of the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal in the UK press. Primarily, the concept of framing is the basis of this research, which aims to distinguish differences between coverage among six UK newspapers. To understand framing is to acknowledge the fact that there are various ways in which the press covers the same event; this research intends to highlight these differences, where apparent, looking specifically for the presence of a media scandal framework. Subsequently, this will be done within the context of ownership structure as a key consideration for the explanation of varying frames.

As previously mentioned, the politics of news organizations and its owners are a distinctive factor when considering why certain frames are present within a news text. Similarly, the dominance of a few large corporations that now control much of the UK (and international) press and larger media industry points to the incredible power that these corporations have in defining issues for an ever increasing audience; the *News of the World's* parent company,

News Corporation, and its publishing branch, News International, certainly exemplify one of these large organizations. Because News International controls both the *Sun* and the *Times*, a comparison of these two newspapers against the *Daily Mail*, the *Mirror*, the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*, all owned by other organizations, will attempt to show the extent to which ownership may have influenced the way in which the scandal was framed. Having examined the literature on the characteristics of Rupert Murdoch as a proprietor will help give insight into not only the way in which News International papers framed the event, but also the way in which other, rival newspapers may have implicated Murdoch's role in the scandal in order to further their own commercial interests.

Research Objectives

As noted, framing, ownership structure and media scandals are well developed concepts that attempt to recognize and explain the varying presentation of similar news events, with an emphasis on the dominant role of media institutions to define these events. What this research intends to do is to interrogate the definitive role of the press for constructing these representations by examining the way in which the press framed controversial events surrounding its own industry. This notion will be considered by asking the previously stated research question:

Given the power of the press to define an issue, how was the phone-hacking scandal initially framed in the UK press when the press institution was at the centre of the scandal? How did ownership structure influence the framing of the scandal in newspapers owned by News International?

Subsequent considerations implicated in the research include asking:

- Was the traditional media scandal frame apparent in press coverage of the scandal?
- Did newspapers owned by News International frame the phone-hacking allegations against the *News of the World* as a scandal?
- Must there be a consensus among the press in order for an event to be considered a proper media scandal?

The expectation is that the framing of phone-hacking allegations in News International newspapers detracted attention from the unethical practices of *News of the World* employees specifically, focusing more on potential transgressions evident in the industry in the context of commercial pressures, with little emphasis on applying the scandal framework to the event. Rival newspapers will focus more on the transgressions at the *News of the World* as a

consequence of its owner, Rupert Murdoch, minimizing the extent to which phone-hacking was considered a common practice within the press industry.

More than determining how ownership structure may have influenced framing of the event, the implications of this research are to challenge the role of the press in *creating* or *delegitimizing* scandal; determining the extent to which the scandal framework was used to narrativize the event will help make this distinction. Notable digressions from this framework may allow for a re-consideration of the press' power to frame a narrative in a way that benefits its own industry, when its industry is negatively implicated.

METHODOLOGY

To be able to get an accurate representation of how the phone-hacking scandal was initially framed in the UK press, it appeared logical to look directly at the source of framing itself; in this case, the sources were the UK newspapers which covered the event. It was also important to analyze a diversity of newspapers that would be inclusive of the potential diversity of frames; this meant looking at a large sample of articles from a representative sample of newspapers. With these considerations in mind, posing questions to readers of the UK press in the form of interviews or surveys was immediately discredited as a valuable method for this research, which does not attempt to determine how audiences interpreted the presentation of events but rather, the way in which the events were *intended* to be interpreted. Similarly, asking those who were responsible for the presentation of events, using these same methods, would not have been as useful or as easily accessible as simply looking at the texts themselves. Having determined that an analysis of a body of text would be most beneficial, discourse analysis appeared to be a useful consideration for conducting this research. Discourse analysis is typically used to scrutinize in-depth both the content and form of a text, including the dimensions of language, inter-textuality and presentation (Fairclough, 1992). Given the time constraints of this research and the desire to garner insight into the overall framing of the event, however, the use of discourse analysis for this research proved impractical. To allow for a distinction of both the presence and the re-occurrence of frames among the *wider* UK press, content analysis emerged as the most suitable method for conducting this research.

Primarily, a traditional quantitative content analysis involves counting the re-occurrence of various dimensions within a text, including specific words, phrases, or images (Hansen et al, 1998). Similarly, a qualitative dimension of content analysis can be considered as the investigation of more general themes or topics within a body of text (George, 1959). For this

research, a qualitative approach to content analysis was more conducive to distinguishing the occurrence of frames, whose presentation is more easily recognizable by looking at general themes as opposed to specific words or other distinctly quantifiable characteristics of a text (Carney, 1972). Similarly, content analysis has been noted as a useful method for examining newspaper articles because of their textual form, as well as allowing for a relatively quick analysis of a large body of literature (Berelson, 1952); both of these considerations directly appeal to this research. Most importantly, however, content analysis aims to interpret the significance of the coded dimensions of a text to the larger social structure (Hansen et al, 1998); this research hopes to interpret the significance of its findings as it relates to the politics of newspaper ownership.

The problem with using content analysis alone is that at its best, it can only make inferences or assumptions about the context in which the content is presented (Berelson, 1952). Consequently, using content analysis exclusively could be detrimental to this research, which aims to distinguish framing in the *context* of newspaper ownership. This research aims to counteract the limitations of its chosen method by coding for both themes and topics which, when looked at together, will help contextualize other coded variables, including those that highlight ownership. To further legitimize as well as to exemplify the choice of variable categorization in context, excerpts from articles will be highlighted in the findings section of this research.

Similarly, the predominant concern with conducting a qualitative content, or thematic analysis, is the generally subjective nature of distinguishing theme. Without a proper definition of coded variables and the subsequent categorical choices for those variables, thematic coding can be largely inaccurate. To be able to most accurately code the theme of each article, the variable *topic* was considered in conjunction with the variable *theme*. Being able to determine the subject matter of each article proved beneficial for then more accurately identifying a corresponding theme. In turn, both these variables were crucial for distinguishing how the article was framed. The validity and reliability of the results were dependent on the appropriate choice and extensive definition of these two variables to be both mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Without time constraints, a discourse analysis would have been beneficial for further contextualizing coded variables; considering topic and theme, among other variables, however, is sufficient for determining framing in this research. Having discussed the choice of method, the next step is to outline the research design.

Research Design

Sampling

Sampling for this research was relatively straightforward. The primary concern was the inclusion of a representative sample of UK newspapers, both tabloids and ‘quality’ or broadsheet papers, as well as considering newspapers that were owned by both News International and rival organizations, allowing for a comparison of framing. The *Times* and the *Sun* were imperative for inclusion as both being owned by News International; the *Guardian* was also imperative because it first broke the story of the phone-hacking allegations and was most active in reporting on the scandal. The sources were rounded out with the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*, both tabloids which comprise two of the top three highest circulation newspapers in the UK, as well as the *Telegraph*, a broadsheet paper which also boasts a place as one of the three highest circulation broadsheet newspapers (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2012). The Sunday versions of corresponding newspapers were grouped together with the daily editions when relevant.

The subsequent consideration was the time-frame from which to pull the sample. Because of the still ongoing investigations and emerging revelations into phone-hacking at the time of writing, the body of literature from which to pull articles was extensive and unmanageable. For this reason, the focus of this research was on the initial framing of the phone-hacking scandal when allegations first surfaced in the *Guardian* on July 4th, 2011. Considering the primary framing of allegations was also of interest because of the more reactionary nature of the coverage, demonstrating the immediate narrative which was chosen by newspapers to frame the event. Articles were pulled from the first month of coverage using LexisNexis and a combination of search terms including ‘phone-hacking’, ‘News of the World’, and ‘Murdoch’, among others; still, the body of literature (over 900 articles) proved too big for the confines of this study. To further narrow down the literature, articles were pulled from every second day, starting with the initial coverage on July 5th through to July 29th. After eliminating duplicate articles that appeared in different versions on the same day, eliminating articles that only very briefly mentioned phone-hacking in relation to a different feature story, and eliminating audience opinion and commentary pieces, the final sample was narrowed down to include a total of 200 articles.

Research Tools

An appropriate coding frame is the fundamental component for a reliable and valid content analysis. For a more qualitative content analysis like this one, thoroughly defining variables is crucial, especially to ensure inter-coder reliability, which is the degree to which the results are replicable (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002). Variables 1 to 8 were standard variables to help identify each article and included: an assigned *ID number*; identifying which *newspaper* each article appeared in; the *type of newspaper* that it appeared in; the *date* in which it appeared; the *day* of the week and the *page number* that it appeared on; and the *number of words* in each article. Another variable, *owner*, identifying whether or not the newspaper was owned by News International, was also added. Variables *newspaper* and *owner* were especially important for cross-referencing results based on ownership structure.

To be able to distinguish the presence of a scandal narrative, it was imperative to define variables which would be indicative of a media scandal framework; for this research, these defining variables were *topic* and *sub-topic*, *theme* and *sub-theme*, and *blame*. The variables *topic* and *sub-topic* were categorized specifically enough to make the subject matter of each article easily recognizable, yet broad enough so that categorizations were not too exclusive or extensive. Based on the research pilot, which demonstrated relatively low inter-coder reliability scores for variables *topic* and *theme*,² a list of 9 topics were chosen and further tested that seemed to encompass the range of potential topics covered, with an added 'other' category for diverging topics.³ Variables *theme* and *sub-theme* were broader but were imperative for distinguishing the presence of a scandal framework; given the results of the pilot, themes were altered and added so that they could be more easily recognizable in a text.⁴ Similarly, the variables of *topic* and *sub-topic* were used as cues to help distinguish theme. The other most important variable for consideration was that of *blame* (and *secondary blame*), which helped define who was implicated or held responsible for the phone-hacking scandal, either explicitly or implicitly within the context of the article. Because this research takes place at the beginning of the phone-hacking scandal before any guilt was proven or any charges laid, it was of interest to see if there was a consensus of accountability among the press. Another set of variables included identifying the presence of quotes from *News International representatives*, *politicians*, *regulatory bodies*, and the *police*, determining which potential guilty parties were given a voice, while a final variable, *ownership reference*,

² Based on the pilot study, percent agreement for *topic* was 70.833%; *theme* was 54.167%.

³ After revising the codebook, percent agreement for *topic* was 85.632%.

⁴ Percent agreement for *theme*: 81.459%.

was established to determine whether or not those newspapers owned by News International acknowledged it.

The straightforward variables (variables 1 to 8) were coded before reading the article, followed by a reading and then re-reading of each article before coding more complex variables, such as *theme* or *sub-theme*; this was to ensure that the entire article was considered in the analysis, not just what was first apparent. Any confusion between the equal distribution of two categories of variables in one article, such as those of *theme* or *sub-theme*, primary or secondary *blame*, and *topic* or *sub-topic*, however, was amended by coding what was first presented in the article as the primary code. After having coded 200 articles in the same way, the next section will outline the results.

FINDINGS

Data collected in the content analysis will be outlined using frequencies and results from cross-tabulations, as well as highlighting examples of coded variable categorizations in context using excerpts from news articles. Results will then be discussed and interpreted in relation to the research question and subsequent considerations of framing and media scandals.

Coverage in the UK press

The primary concern is to identify both the main topics and themes featured in the 4 newspapers not owned by News International, as well as distinguishing any implications of guilt; getting a sense of general coverage will allow for the comparison of potential divergences in News Internationally-owned newspapers. Out of 10 potential **topics** which featured in the majority of reports related to the phone-hacking scandal, the most frequently occurring topic, consisting of 32 articles or 20.4% of the 157 articles coded, was that regarding the specific actions or behaviours of *News of the World* employees that either led to, contributed to or resulted in phone-hacking. This generally meant that the majority of the article's focus was on detailing or uncovering facts about the phone-hacking practices at the *News of the World* specifically. An article from the *Guardian*, for example, demonstrates the type of report detailing phone-hacking activities at the *News of the World*:

Police are investigating evidence that a News International executive may have deleted millions of emails from an internal archive... revealing daily contact between News of the

World editors, reporters and outsiders, including private investigators (Davies and Hill, 2011: 1).

The second most frequently occurring topic, with 12.7% or 20 articles, was that regarding the business or financial implications for either the *News of the World* or News International. These articles frequently commented on the effects of phone-hacking on advertisers in *News of the World*, sales of the newspaper, or repercussions for News International once the newspaper had been shut down. There were also questions regarding News Corporation's bid for full ownership of BSkyB, a satellite television broadcaster, in the wake of the scandal. The third most frequently occurring category was 'other', with 12.1% or 19 articles. The 'other' category included articles discussing press freedom and the role of the PCC, issues directly related to the personal lives of individuals involved in the scandal, or articles that only minimally touched on phone-hacking in relation to other news stories. Subsequently, the topic regarding political considerations, which included the relationship between Prime Minister David Cameron and former editors Andy Coulson and Rebekah Brooks, the lack of concrete action by David Cameron, and potential consequences for his political reception, comprised 11.5%, or 18 articles, while the topic of the Leveson Inquiry, which is the established judicial inquiry into phone-hacking, was featured in 10.8% or 17 articles.

Notably, the topic of ethical questions or commentary about journalism comprised only 3.2% or 5 articles, as did that featuring reactions to phone-hacking from David Cameron or other politicians. One article in the *Daily Mail* demonstrates the ethical questions raised by the scandal:

This terrible affair has caused every journalist to think long and hard. There has always been a tension between what some of us like to regard as the media's decent parts, working to inform the British people about things they should know, and the rough end of the trade (Hastings, 2011).

While most articles featured more than one topic, the category sub-topic was also coded with a very similar distribution of results.

The variable *theme* is also very important for considering the frame of the phone-hacking scandal. Broader than that of topic, 'theme' was divided into 5 categories: victimization, criminal behaviour, politics, moral and ethical considerations, and commercial implications. The most frequently occurring theme was criminal behaviour, featured in an overwhelming majority of 45.2%, or 71 articles. Notably, categorizations in this theme included topics regarding transgressions of *News of the World* employees or other implicated parties, such as the police, as well as potential repercussions, including inquiries or criminal charges. The

distribution of other themes was 20.4% commercial implications, 15.3% politics, 12.7% moral and ethical considerations, and 5.7% victimization. *Sub-theme* was coded using the same categories; only 56.1% of articles, however, contained a sub-theme. Similar to the variable topic, the distribution of categories in sub-theme reflected that of theme, with the notable exception of moral and ethical considerations which, along with criminal behaviour, were featured in 16.6% of articles.

When considering the variable *blame*, the most frequently occurring category, featured in 28.7% of articles, pointed to the *News of the World* generally as accountable for the transgressions. This meant that no specific person was held responsible for the phone-hacking, but that the way in which the *News of the World* functioned as an organization contributed to or condoned its practice. The excerpt below from a *Guardian* article demonstrates the implication of accountability for many individuals at the *News of the World*:

Journalists who worked at the News of the World say that their use of private investigators was routine, open and officially sanctioned. The former show business reporter, Sean Hoare, who worked there under Brooks, last year told the New York Times that he was actively encouraged to hack into voicemails by her deputy, Andy Coulson (Davies, 2011: 9).

The second most frequently blamed party was Rupert and/or James Murdoch, who were categorized together as owners of News International, and were implicated in 27.4% of coded articles. Blame meant that they were implicated as having encouraged or at least known about the practices of phone-hacking, or were considered responsible because of their status within the company, as demonstrated in the *Telegraph* article below:

... James Murdoch, European chief executive of News International, personally authorised at least one substantial settlement payment to a victim of phone hacking, in exchange for signing a gagging clause... The suggestion that his company had evidence of phone hacking in 2007 has exposed James Murdoch to questions about his role in handling the affair (Kirkup, 2011: 1, 4).

Other prominent figures at the *News of the World*, including Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson, were implicated in 10.8% and 5.7% of articles respectively. Similarly, journalists at the *News of the World* were significantly more likely to be held accountable (7%) as opposed to journalists within the press industry generally (1.9%). The lack of inaction by police in investigating phone-hacking allegations was considered a legitimate factor in the re-occurrence of its practice in 7.6% of articles featured.

Another variable for consideration is the presence of *quotes from News International representatives*, quotes which typically defended the knowledge of phone-hacking by executives; in non-News International-owned newspapers, these quotes were present in 23% of articles coded.

Given these considerations, it appears that the most common frame adopted by the UK press was to focus on the phone-hacking incidents as isolated events within the *News of the World*, made possible by the structure of the organization as run by Rupert Murdoch and his son James. The next consideration is determining whether or not these same trends were apparent in News International newspapers.

Coverage in News International newspapers

Noticeably, the *Sun* had the lowest number of reports on the event with only 11 articles, compared to a range of between 25 and 57 articles among the other five newspapers, averaging to 37 articles per paper. The most featured *topics* in the *Sun* were reactions to allegations of phone-hacking by politicians (3 articles), followed by reactions from Rupert Murdoch and other News International representatives (2 articles), and actions or behaviours of *News of the World* employees (2 articles). Notably, the presence of *quotes from News International representatives* was visible in 54.5% of *Sun* articles coded. The most featured theme, in 7 of the 11 articles that appeared, was of criminal behaviours. The blame for phone-hacking was distributed evenly between *News of the World* journalists, *News of the World* in general, and former editor Andy Coulson, each with 2 articles. The Murdochs were implicated in 1 article, as were private investigators and journalists in the industry generally; the remaining two articles did not pose blame to anyone. What News International newspapers did that other newspapers did not do is consider phone-hacking as a practice of the industry, as demonstrated in an article from the *Sun* below:

The newspaper group that owns the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday as well as the Daily Mirror have also been hit with allegations of phone hacking in the past week. And 305 journalists from across almost every title on Fleet Street were identified as having paid for illegally obtained data by the Information Commissioner in 2006. Four reporters working for The Guardian or The Observer were among those identified (Dunn, 2011: 4-5).

The *Times* featured 32 articles related to phone-hacking, significantly more than the *Sun* but still not as many as competing broadsheets the *Guardian* (57 articles) and the *Telegraph* (41 articles). The most featured *topics* in the *Times* were business implications for the *News of the World* and News International, with 7 articles, as exemplified below:

BSkyB's shares fell to a 2½-year low yesterday amid mounting speculation that News Corporation's phone-hacking scandal could derail its planned takeover of the satellite broadcaster (Costello, 2011: 8-9).

'Other' topics were featured in 5 articles, while ethical considerations and stories regarding the victims of phone-hacking each had 4 articles. The actions or behaviours of *News of the World* employees were only prominent in 3 articles, as was discussion about the Leveson Inquiry. The most prominent *themes* were those of actions or behaviours of *News of the World* employees (12 articles, or 37.5%), followed by 6 articles each regarding themes of business implications and moral or ethical commentary (16%). The theme of politics was implicated in 5 articles, or 15.6% of *Times* articles featured. These articles were less about the phone-hacking itself than they were about repercussions for politicians. For example:

Mr. Miliband ended a tumultuous 10 days significantly ahead of the Prime Minister, who was still taking flak over his decision to take Andy Coulson, the former *News of the World* editor, with him into the heart of No 10 (Hennessey, 2011: 8).

Finally, the most frequently *blamed* party in *Times* newspaper reports was decidedly the *News of the World*, with 41% of articles holding the organization in general accountable. Rupert and James Murdoch, as well as Rebekah Brooks and private investigators, were blamed in only 3 articles each, while journalists at the *News of the World* specifically, journalists in general, Andy Coulson, and the police were implicated in 2 articles each. Similarly, *quotes from News International representatives* were present in 31.3% of *Times* articles coded.

It appears that in *News International* newspapers, phone-hacking was comparatively less reported on, and while the general theme of criminal behaviour was similar to that of other publications, the topics were largely varied, with business implications for *News International* being most apparent (in 16.6% of all *News International* articles coded). Notably, blame was significantly less placed on the Murdochs. Similar to other newspapers, however, the majority of blame was placed on the *News of the World*, with the remainder distributed evenly among key players so as not to implicate any individual party as definitively responsible.

Below are three bar graphs comparing the percentage distribution of topic, theme and blame between *News International* newspapers, and those owned by other organisations.

Figure 1: **Topic** Distribution in UK Press Publications

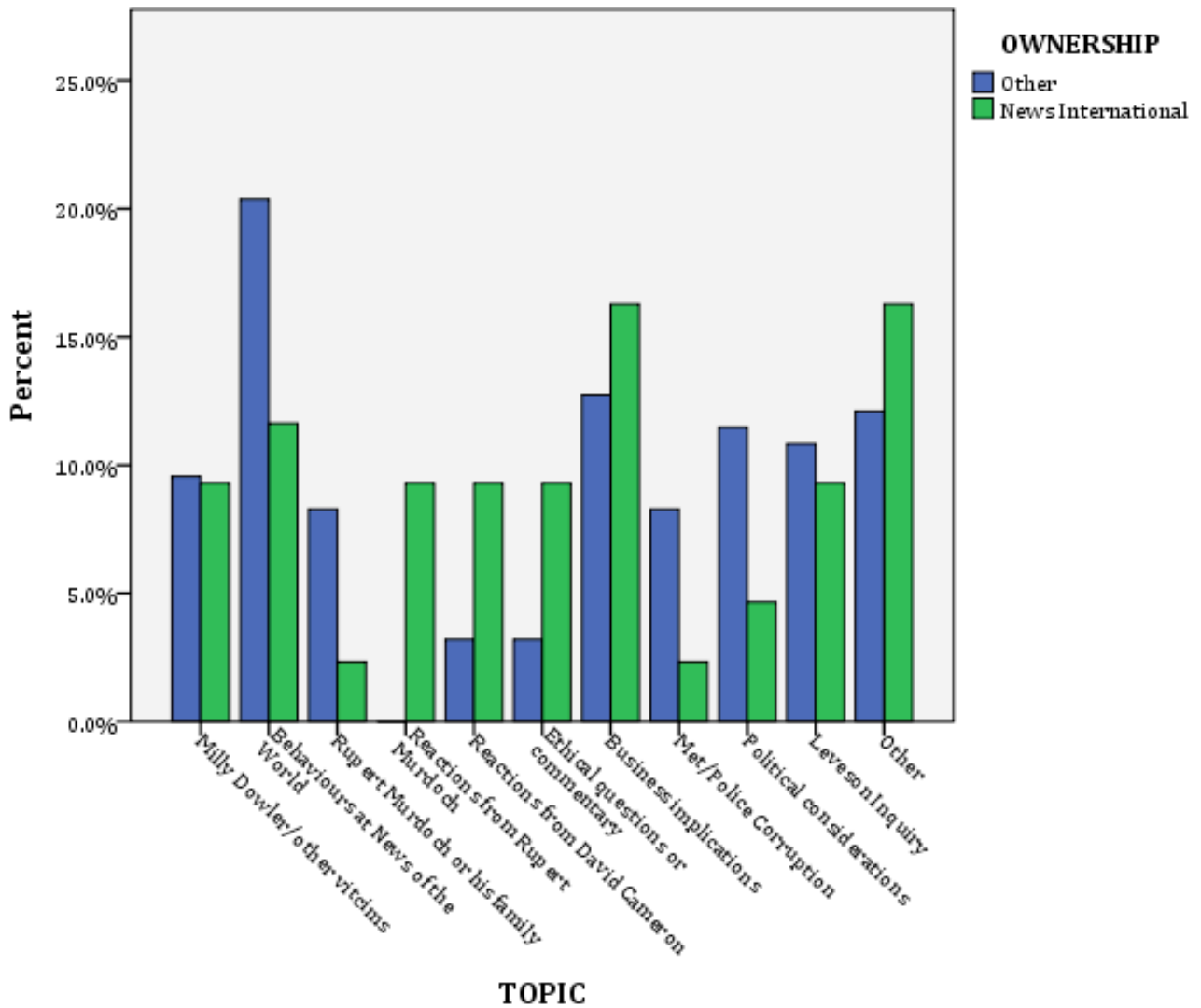


Figure 2: **Theme** Distribution in UK Press Publications

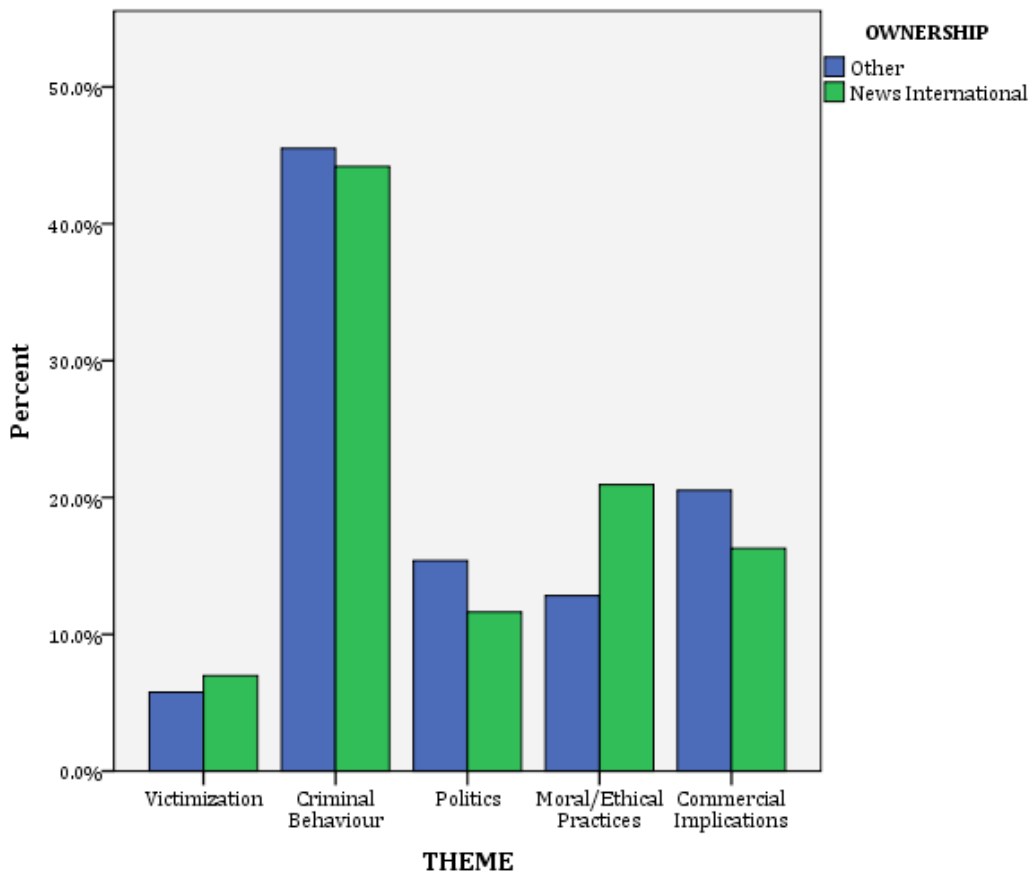
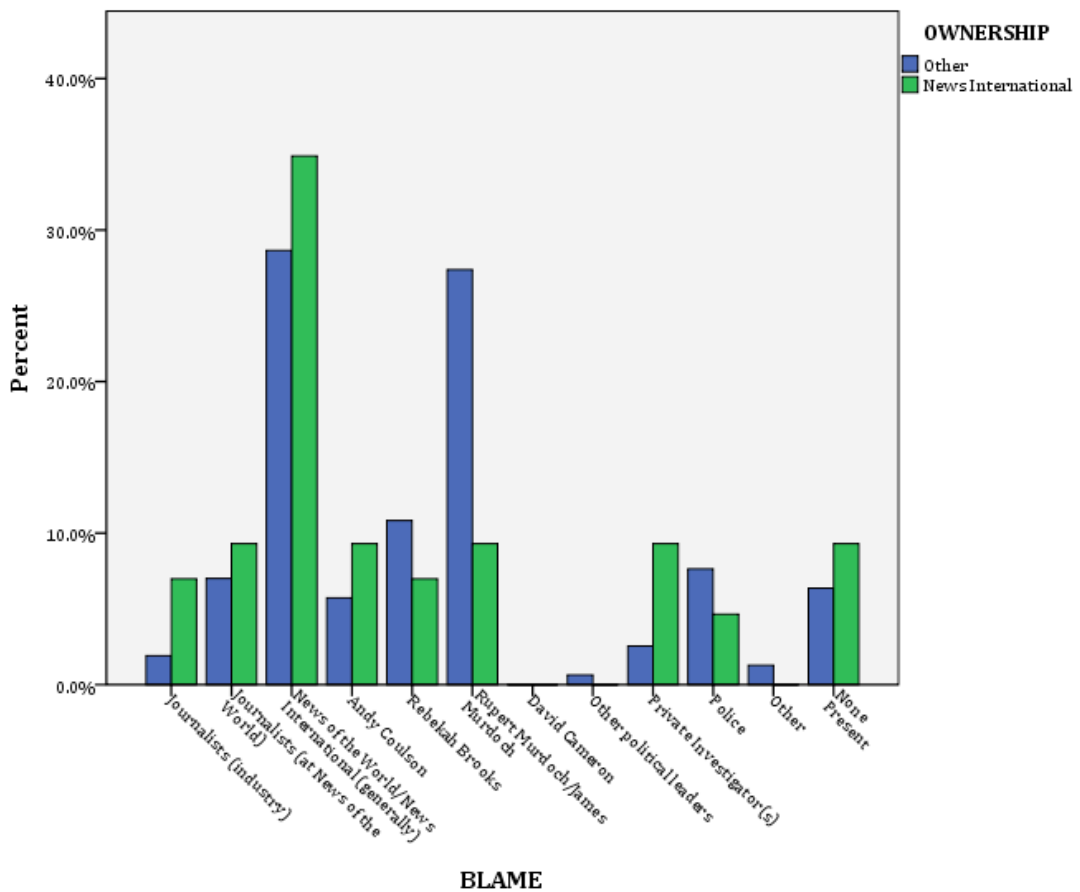


Figure 3: **Blame** Distribution in UK Press Publications



DISCUSSION

The above findings help answer the question of how the phone-hacking scandal was framed and how that frame differed in the context of newspaper ownership, but the question remains whether or not press coverage of the *News of the World* phone-hacking 'scandal' actually fit the scandal framework and, depending on the outcome, why.

Primarily, it will be beneficial to consider Thompson's structure of mediated scandal to identify its potential presence. The 'pre-scandal' phase is the disclosure of the transgression, while the 'scandal-proper' phase is the publication of the transgression. During the phone-hacking scandal, the disclosure and publication of phone-hacking were made by the same party, the *Guardian*. The 'culmination' phase, identifiable through legitimate consequences for those involved, was first and most obviously apparent when the *News of the World* was closed down by Rupert Murdoch, as well as with the resignation of former editor Rebekah Brooks as chief executive of News International. The final 'aftermath', or reflection phase, has yet to be fully realized, as the repercussions of phone-hacking are ongoing at the time of writing in the still active judicial inquiry into the case, but discussions about the events in the context of the Leveson Inquiry have undoubtedly been extensive. The phone-hacking, then, appears to at least fit the sequential structure of a mediated scandal. More importantly, however, is to consider whether the scandal framework was apparent in the coverage of phone-hacking based on the findings of coded variables.

Given Thompson's noted characteristics of a media scandal, certain topics and themes coded for during this research are more relevant to the scandal frame than others. The topic which focuses on the actions and transgressions of the *News of the World* employees and the related themes of criminal behaviours and moral and ethical considerations is most representative of Thompson's primary characteristic of a scandal framework, which is the transgression of moral codes and values. In this instance, those moral codes and values were of the journalistic profession. Worth mentioning is the extent to which transgressions of the journalistic profession are relevant to British culture; a historical relationship between the UK press and the public, reflecting both high praise and avid criticism, make journalistic transgressions of vested interest to the British public (Sanders, 2003). As noted, however, focus on these transgressions was largely situated within themes of criminality (in 97.3% of articles) as opposed to themes of moral and ethical considerations for journalism (present in only 2.7% of articles as main theme, and 13.5% of articles as sub-theme). Even further, the topic of ethical questions or commentary about journalism itself was only featured in 4.5% of articles as a main topic and 7% of articles as a sub-topic. While the practices of phone-

hacking were noted as illegal, and the behaviours of *News of the World* employees questioned, the extent to which they were initially commented on in the context of the journalistic profession was limited. News International newspapers did not have the above mentioned topic as the predominant frame in its articles, but the theme of moral and ethical considerations was much more prevalent.

Thompson's second characteristic is that of the transgressions being known to 'non-participants'. The phone-hacking was allegedly known (although this knowledge was vehemently denied) by many executives within the organization. Their status as 'non-participants', however, is questionable; even if they did not participate in the phone-hacking themselves, their position in the organization and their presumed encouragement, or at least wanton disregard, of these activities certainly implicated their participation. Similarly, they were not the ones responsible for exposing the transgressions, a characteristic typical of 'non-participants'. In this instance, the *Guardian* would be considered the key 'non-participant' which knew of and exposed the transgressions. Again, its status as a 'non-participant' could also be questioned given the accusations of phone-hacking posed against it by some newspaper, but its position outside of the *News of the World* and News International lends to its 'non-participant' status. Similarly, whether they were participants or not, *News of the World* executives, the *Guardian*, and politicians all publicly disapproved of phone-hacking, another two of Thompson's characteristics which can be exemplified by coded topics featuring reactions to phone-hacking by politicians and News International representatives. Notably, reactions to accusations and the subsequent condemnation of phone-hacking by Rupert Murdoch and other *News of the World* representatives were apparent in almost 10% of News International newspaper articles coded, but were a noticeably absent feature in other newspapers. Comparing the presence of quotes from News International representatives in 37% of News International newspapers with only a 23% presence in other newspapers further exemplifies this finding. With ownership considerations in mind, the greater presence of this topic in News International newspapers seems to be a legitimizing method for the 'non-participant' status of News International executives in the practices of phone-hacking.

Finally, Thompson's fifth consideration is that of a tarnished reputation resulting from moral and ethical transgressions, a consideration which is clearly evident for both the organization and the individuals involved in phone-hacking. Primarily, the reputation of the *News of the World* as a newspaper was certainly tarnished, enough so in the eyes of Rupert Murdoch to be shut down roughly one week after the scandal broke. Even further, Rupert Murdoch himself and his role as a capable leader of a global organization were questioned, especially with regards to the BSkyB takeover. His reputation as a proprietor, however, was not highly regarded to begin with, and criticism of his character was only further solidified through the

scandal. The accusations implicating former and current *News of the World* executives effected their reputation as well; notably, former editor Rebekah Brooks resigned as chief executive of News International weeks after the revelations and was arrested days later, with charges being brought against her at the time of writing. Even Prime Minister David Cameron's integrity was questioned in relation to his close relationship with former *News of the World* editor and ex-communications director for Cameron, Andy Coulson; he, too, is currently facing charges. Evidently, all those potentially implicated faced, and continue to face, some sort of public scrutiny as a result of the phone-hacking scandal.

Given these characterizations, it appears that the phone-hacking 'scandal' can fit the framework of a traditional media scandal. The definitive difficulty with unquestionably proving that a scandal framework was present is the fact that media scandals typically feature individual transgressions, even if those individuals represent larger institutions (Lull & Hinerman, 1997). Given the time frame from which the sample was taken, no one person at the *News of the World* had yet been formally charged or proven guilty of phone-hacking; it was at the press' discretion to identify who they thought was most responsible for the transgressions. Many individuals, including Rebekah Brooks, Andy Coulson and Rupert Murdoch, were implicated in the scandal, but in some instances, it was the *News of the World* as an organization or even other newspapers who were implicated in participating in this practice. A lack of agreement among the press on who to hold accountable for the transgressions, which may have been committed by individuals, groups, or entire organizations, weakens the distinction of the phone-hacking as a scandal. What it could be more representative of is a moral panic.

As previously mentioned, scandals can become moral panics when transgressions are thought to be part of a larger problem. Because the transgressions were implicated to the *News of the World* as an organization and in some instances, to the wider UK press industry, it seems as if a moral panic could have easily been created by the media. There was an expressed concern over the behaviours of phone-hacking among all those involved, especially politicians, who immediately cited the need for an investigation and inquiry into the alleged activities. There was some commentary over the negative perception of journalists which was only further perpetuated by the phone-hacking scandal, representing the hostility towards a certain group which is characteristic of a moral panic. Others thought that the repercussions for employees after the closing of the *News of the World* and the potential implications for press freedom resulting from the phone-hacking scandal were overreactions to a contained problem, another of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's noted criteria. The volatility of the event, which had little media exposure stemming from previous transgressions before it exploded with the *Guardian's* allegations against the *News of the World*, was undoubtedly present. But while

these criteria may have been visible, they were extremely limited in their presentation, especially in non-News Internationally-owned newspapers. Coverage avoided focus on moral and ethical considerations of the journalism industry, as well as avoiding extensive critical commentary by claims makers or primary definers, in this case, politicians. By choosing to focus more on other aspects of phone-hacking, the press adopted a scandal framework to delegitimize the possibility of creating a moral panic. The weakness in the scandal framework was, as mentioned, the lack of individual blame characteristic of a media scandal. Amidst this weakness, the press' determination for avoiding panic was solidified through its self-referential identification of the phone-hacking as a scandal. Notably, implications of these practices throughout the industry and a comparatively greater focus on moral and ethical considerations means that News International newspapers were more inclined to frame phone-hacking with aspects characteristic of a moral panic.

When considering the potential implications for the press industry that could have resulted from the creation of a moral panic, including decreased press freedom, investigations into the practices of other publications, weakened trust from its readers, and ultimately, a decrease in sales, it is safe to assume that the UK press would want to avoid legitimizing this frame. Even further, newspapers not owned by News International were more likely to benefit from the use of a scandal framework, a framework which was more apparent in these newspapers. The *News of the World* was, at the time, the highest selling newspaper in the UK and in direct competition with all other tabloid publications. By placing accountability on both the *News of the World* and the Murdochs, other newspapers were discrediting not only the *News of the World*, but all other News International publications, including the *Times* and the *Sun*, who were similarly in competition for readership with the *Guardian*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mirror*. Implicating Rupert Murdoch specifically was beneficial for delegitimizing other News International titles given his known intrusive involvement in all of his press publications. As noted, News International newspapers were more likely to focus on the topics and themes conducive to creating a moral panic; presumably, News International publications had nothing to lose by attempting to create a moral panic because its publications were already being questioned as part of News International. It may have even benefitted from the creation of a moral panic if other publications were seen as participating in this practice as well.

Given the subsequent considerations of this research, it appears that the traditional scandal framework was apparent in the majority of the UK press, with the general lack of individual accountability slightly weakening this framework. News International newspapers did have a distinctly different focus than other UK press publications, demonstrating that ownership structure can have a legitimate influence on the framing of events. Because of the prominent

scandal framework in the majority of the UK press, however, it appears that a consensus among the *entire* press industry is not necessary for an event to become a media scandal. Sustaining a moral panic, on the other hand, may require more concrete agreement. While the implicit consideration of this research asks whether the power of the press is challenged by the phone-hacking scandal, their symbolic power in defining the perception of an event seems only to be further legitimized by showing that when the conditions are present, the press can avoid creating panic in favour of scandal to benefit its industry.

Given the time constraints and aims of this research, looking at all coded variables was not possible. Further research could benefit from looking at any of the other descriptive variables for each article, such as type of newspaper, in conjunction with noted variables including topic and theme, to identify the possibility of other explanations for emergent trends. While both News International newspapers had similar framing, demonstrating the influence of ownership on the diminishing variety of news narratives, it might also be interesting to look at the distribution of topics in individual newspapers to see if this trend is apparent throughout the industry. Similarly, given Murdoch's known political affiliations and David Cameron's close personal relationships with both Andy Coulson and Rebekah Brooks, it would be worth closely examining the political considerations and commentary surrounding the scandal to get further insight into the noted controversial relationship between the press and politics.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was not only to distinguish the framing of the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal in relation to press ownership, but to challenge the power of the press to frame a negative event in which it was implicated. Using a content analysis proved beneficial for conducting this research, especially given the large body of text that was analyzed and the ease with which comparisons could be drawn between News International-owned newspapers and those owned by other organizations. It also made the distinction of factors which were representative of a media scandal more easily recognizable, giving insight into the general frame used throughout the majority of the UK press. Conducting a discourse analysis would have been beneficial to further legitimize the framing of the event as a scandal, but was not necessary given the qualitative nature of the variables coded for in the content analysis. Inevitably, there was a difference in the framing of events in newspapers owned by News International; these newspapers, including the *Times* and the *Sun*, were less likely to frame the event as a scandal and more inclined to report on the event

in a way that highlighted its potential of becoming a moral panic. Notably, the power of the UK press was not as much challenged as it was legitimized through its majority framing of the *News of the World* phone-hacking ‘scandal’ as a proper media scandal, when the conditions for creating a moral panic were evident. Similarly, because there has been little research on scandals *involving* the media, its ability to frame the incident according to its own agenda were tested, and proven successful, through this research.

More than one year after the *Guardian*’s revelations, the phone-hacking scandal is still being featured in the press, with the July 24th 2012 conclusion of 8 months of testimonials in the Leveson Inquiry, which featured hundreds of witnesses and ended with formal charges being brought against former *News of the World* executives Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson, as well as six other *News of the World* journalists. Given the time and space constraints of this research, and the ongoing coverage of the event, it was only feasible to analyze press coverage during the first month of the scandal. With a year of new revelations, testimonials and further accusations, the narrative surrounding the phone-hacking scandal has undoubtedly changed. Expanding this research over time or through the analysis of more UK press publications, especially Murdoch’s replacement for the *News of the World*, the *Sun on Sunday*, would be useful for further analyzing continued coverage. Considering the increasingly damaging accusations made against those involved, it would be interesting to see whether or not the press industry generally, or News International specifically, lost credibility or power, and to what extent, over the course of the scandal. Even further, expanding the scope of this research would be beneficial for considering whether or not the scandal framework remained, especially when considering the charges that have now been formally placed against some of those initially implicated. Content analysis continues to be a useful method for further expanding this research, as the body of analysis would only continue to grow, but the coding frame would need to be significantly revised to account for changing narratives in the press. Whether it be a media scandal, a moral panic, or a completely different narrativization, there is still much to be discovered about the ways in which UK press coverage framed the events surrounding the *News of the World* phone-hacking ‘scandal’.

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