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Shipping Crises in the Media

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the general media's portrayal of important maritime accidents which in the maritime media receive widespread publicity and are likely to have an impact on the shipping community's social image. To this purpose, news framing theories were researched and used in a content analysis of print media articles on six important maritime accidents and incidents during the period 2008 to 2012. The study examines related articles published in the UK newspapers with the largest circulation to review how the general media portrayed important accidents and incidents within the shipping world and community and to analyze how the Media had reported the six events that were finally chosen. The content analysis focused on the crisis classification of the disaster, the importance and length of coverage and the attitude of the media towards the specific companies, as well as the shipping industry as a whole.

JEL Classification: L9; R41; M14.

Keywords: Shipping; Media; Crises; Image.

1. Introduction

News in leading media has been shown to significantly affect the image of personalities, companies, and organizations, as well as whole industries or sectors of the economy. According to Macnamara (2005:1) the Media's portrayal of events seriously affects stock prices; leads to corporate collapses; causes falls in product sales; results in the resignation of senior office-holders, and even brings down governments. However, it is important to understand the nature of media reports in order to understand that media content may influence public attitudes and perceptions and how it influences or even shapes public policy (Slater and Rasinski, 2005).

Catastrophic events and disasters have always attracted the public's attention and subsequently the interest of the press. The analysis conducted in the context of this re-

search aims at examining the ways in which the media cover major cases of shipping incidents and/or accidents. It is a second step of a research that focuses on the image of shipping as it is presented by the media (Theotokas and Bissias, 2014). For this, certain cases have been chosen in order to examine the way they were presented by English language newspapers with the largest circulation. Specifically, the study asked the following questions:

1. Have the selected media covered important maritime incidents/accidents and if yes, to what extent?
2. Does coverage differ according to the consequences and the incident's/accident's location and does the nationality of victims play a role?

In the next section, the theoretical background regarding media content analysis and crisis categorization of victims is analysed. The third section analyses the specific story-lines of the selected cases. In this context, the analysis focuses exclusively on maritime disasters and catastrophic events. The study then elaborates on media context analysis findings and presents specific conclusions on the coverage of shipping crises by the media.

2. Theoretical background

The recently developed media effects theory is a complex field of research which has already led to many academic studies that allow us to conclude that the mass media have a significant impact on “public awareness, perceptions and even attitudes and emotions” (Macnamara, 2005:18). What makes mass media interesting is their capacity to provide the public with current and useful information especially in times when the general public may lack insight or experience on the topic or area of coverage (Driedger *et al.*, 2009).

2.1 Frame Theory

Media framing occurs when journalists or editors “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make [them] more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993:52). Media frames help journalists better identify then classify and hence edit to smaller and more interesting news stories the information that they receive on a daily basis (Gitlin, 1980). The framing theory is useful in that it allows a practitioner or academic to better understand and evaluate how stakeholders as well as the media seek and process information during a crisis situation and how news lines are formulated and developed (Wertz and Kim, 2010; Ashley and Olson, 1998).

The way in which a crisis situation is framed and presented within the first 10 days of media coverage is probably the most important time period for establishing, formulating and recording media attitudes towards an event or incident and its victims and/or protagonists. Results of research in other fields seem to confirm this and to suggest that a 10 day content analysis of the Press coverage is sufficient to determine the dominant framing of a risk event as it will later develop (Driedger *et al.*, 2009).

2.2 Approaches to Content Analysis

Content analysis is described by Neuendorf (1992) as the primary message-centred methodology. Accordingly, media content analysis is a specialized sub-set of content analysis which has nowadays become a leading research method for studying portrayals of numerous themes and issues (Macnamara, 2005:1).

Content analysis is characterised as a widely used qualitative research technique (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis relies heavily on a researcher's 'reading' and interpretation of media texts. Subjectivity and distortion of accuracy may lead to problematic if not subjective findings in this research methodology, which has been led researchers to criticize content analysis as both unscientific and somewhat unreliable (Macnamara, 2005). Nevertheless, qualitative media content analysis is still of paramount importance in understanding news frames and media approaches to current issues. To minimize the risk of subjectivity of qualitative content analysis, Newbold *et al.* (2002) proposed a specific methodology for media content analysis, which includes sampling of selected media forms (i.e. print media, radio, TV, the web), selected genre (news, current affairs, drama, soap opera, documentary, etc.), and selected specific issues and time periods. This proposal is consistent with that of Miles and Huberman (1994) who argue that sampling strategies for qualitative research should be mainly driven by a conceptual and theoretical question or a specific scientific hypothesis and not exclusively by a concern for total "representativeness" of a subject or issue in the Media.

2.3 Crises and Issues

Crises not only threaten to disrupt an organization's day to day operation, but also to jeopardise and possibly harm its reputation and future existence (Coombs and Holladay, 2002).

Essential to understanding the difference between a crisis and an issue is the role of publics. Most scholars accept Dewey's (1927) initial definition of "publics" as groups of people with common interests and beliefs with respect to an organization, who endeavour to act rather than sit passively without reaction or collective response (Botan and Taylor, 2004:654). Publics thus share common notions, beliefs and/or ideologies and may focus on the same perspectives of an incident, understanding or wanting a story to be framed and presented in the media in a particular manner.

Issues are described as specific situations or even specific events that may in the long run undermine credibility and damage public perception (Botan and Taylor, 2004; Crabble and Vibbert, 1985). In Public Relations literature, crises are critical issues that have reached a stage where any outcome or possible result at that particular time of an organization's non regularity may change its status towards any direction. A crisis is therefore an important turning point where the notion of risk is of paramount importance (Botan and Taylor, 2004:657). According to Grunig it is in this context that conflict may arise when an organization refuses to redevelop or reformulate its strategic goals or actions despite specific reactions or pressure by its key publics or stakeholders (Grunig, 2002).

In this analysis, the cases examined can be characterised as crises that possess the traits described above.

3. Case studies

We focused on 6 topics of crisis, or incidents that made headline news in national, regional as well as international maritime websites. The selected topics had made front page news stories and/or editorial features in leading international maritime newspapers, magazines and their websites (e.g. Lloyd's List, TradeWinds, Fairplay), and had also appeared in the maritime press in Greece (Naftiliaki, Naftika Chronika, the Sea Nation etc.); the selected topics were rated as important by a panel of five maritime journalists and three academics. All of them were crucial points of reference for the maritime press, as they demonstrated and portrayed negative images of shipping.

The Astro Saturn arrests. In November 2008, a large amount of cocaine attached to the Astro Saturn's hull was found by the Venezuelan Coast Guard inspecting the ship. Prosecutors arbitrarily targeted the ship's two top officers, master Georgios Koutikas and first officer Athanasios Doustsiyas who, after two years in custody, were convicted to eight years in jail. The incident was not considered a threatening crisis by the company or the maritime Press, but was considered an important incident by both the company and the maritime media.

The Maran Centaurus piracy attack. The Greek registered VLCC Maran Centaurus was hijacked by Somali pirates on 29 November 2009, about 800 miles off the coast of Somalia. There was a 28-member crew on board (16 Filipinos, 9 Greeks, 2 Ukrainians and 1 Romanian). The incident was not considered a threatening crisis by the company or the maritime Press, but was considered an important incident by both the shipping community and the maritime media.

The Aegean Wind fire. The Aegean Wind, a Greek general cargo ship, caught fire while sailing in the Caribbean Sea, off the coast of Venezuela, on 25 December 2009. The vessel was carrying iron ore from Brazil to Texas. The fire resulted in the death of nine and the injury of five of the 24-member crew. The incident was not considered a threatening crisis by the company or the maritime Press, but was considered an important incident by the maritime media.

The Costa Concordia disaster. A few hours after leaving the Italian port of Civitavecchia on January 13, 2012, the Costa Concordia, carrying more than 4,000 passengers and crew, struck a reef off the Tuscan island of Giglio. Several hours later, the ship capsized, resulting in the death and/or drowning of thirty-two passengers and crew. The company did not directly admit that the incident was a threatening crisis, but it was considered as such by the maritime Press.

The sinking of a boat carrying undocumented immigrants in the Aegean Sea. On 7 September 2012, a small vessel of unknown origins carried more than 100 undocumented economic immigrants from the coast of Turkey, near the city of Izmir, to an unknown destination in Greece. The vessel sunk for unknown reasons leading to the death and/or drowning of more than 60 passengers, most of them children and adolescents. The incident was not considered as a threatening crisis for any company but was framed as an important incident by the local, national, as well as the maritime media.

The pirate attack on the Jascon off the coast of Nigeria on 4 August 2012. The pirate attack led to the killing of two Nigerian naval guards and the kidnapping of four foreign nationals of Malaysian, Iranian, Thai and Indonesian origin. The incident was not considered

a threatening crisis by the company but it was an important incident for the maritime community, foreign employees and mariners in Nigeria, and was framed as a serious incident in the maritime media.

3.2 Crisis Consequences

We followed mostly Driedger *et al's* (2009) methodology and categorized the cases in terms of: a) major consequences(s), b) location of effect, c) previous or later cases of incidents and disasters for the company, d) fatalities, e) health and/or environmental and/or economic consequences for the local communities and companies involved. We included the nationality of first degree victims and whether the disaster was portrayed as a crisis by the maritime media in Europe (Table 1).

Table 1. Analysis of the cases examined

	Astro Saturn (11/2008)	Maran Centaurus (11/2009)	Aegean Wind (12/2009)	Costa Concordia (1/2012)	Piracy attack in Nigeria (8/2012)	Sinking of boat with immigrants (9/2012)
Major consequence	Illegal drug trafficking, crew imprisonment	Hijacking of vessel and crew	Death of 9 seamen and injury of 5	Death of passengers	Hijacking, death and Kidnapping	Death of passengers
Location of effect	Venezuela, S. America	Somalia, Africa	Caribbean Sea	Italy, Europe	Nigeria, Africa	Aegean Sea, Asia/Europe
Previous Cases of Crisis (for the company)	No	No	No	No	No	No
Secondary cases in the same year	No	No	No	No	No	No
Portrayed as Crisis or Incident by Maritime Media	Incident for the company and maritime community	Incident for the company	Incident for the company	Crisis for the company and local environment	Incident for company, mariners, foreign staff	Incident for national and local media
Fatalities	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
First degree victims' nationality	Greek officers were arrested and sentenced to jail	Mainly Greeks and Filipinos were taken as hostages	Greeks and Filipinos were killed and/ or suffered injuries	Undefined, but more than 20 nationalities were reported as victims including UK and Commonwealth citizens, US citizens and others	Dutch	Undefined, mainly from the Middle East and possibly east Turkey
Health Consequences	No	No	No	No	No	No
Environmental Consequences	No	No (but possible)	No	Yes	No	No
Economic Consequences	For the company	For the Company	For the Company	For the Company	Limited, for the company	No

Our case studies involved various major aftermaths, in most cases including fatalities, did not involve solely European waters, operators and/or citizens, and had minor environmental impact for local communities or economic after-effects for the company involved.

4. Methodology

This study examines media framing of major shipping incidents/accidents. The focus of research is not national or regional, but international. Consequently, the content analysis focused on specific English language newspapers. The researchers thus chose UK newspapers, which have the largest circulation and readership in Europe and are considered a point of reference at European level. The media chosen for the content analysis and their readership were the following:

- The Sun, the highest-selling “tabloid” in the United Kingdom, average circulation 2,751,219 copies daily.
- The Daily Mirror, the second largest “tabloid” in the United Kingdom, average circulation 1,122,563 copies daily.
- The Daily Telegraph the highest-selling “quality” newspaper in the United Kingdom selling on average 576,378 copies daily.
- The Times, a “quality” newspaper, the second highest in Britain and the largest in London, average circulation 394,102 copies.
- The Financial Times, Europe’s highest-selling English language business newspaper, printed format circulation of 305,000 copies daily worldwide (the British edition has a daily circulation of eighty eight thousand copies). FT.com has 4 million registered users and 250,000 digital subscribers, as well as 585,681 paying users.

The research approach was based on procedures that were consistent with those applied in other research that includes content analyses of press and web media (Reason and Garcia, 2007, Culley *et al.*, 2010, Angeli and Cunningham, 2006). Using the keywords of the 6 selected cases, we conducted a database search of newspapers from January 2012 through to December 2012. Our research was conducted at the British Library News Archive in London, UK. To ensure that the pool of articles gathered were appropriate for our purposes, we developed selection and further analysis criteria that allowed the analysis of only those articles which explicitly focused on the 6 main topics under consideration.

The analysis was based on all articles that focused primarily on the 6 selected cases. Our primary examination followed the 10 day rule as analysed by Driedger *et al.* (2009), we therefore focused on the ten day period of coverage after the manifestation or appearance of each incident/accident and on other significant events that followed those specific story lines. The coding scheme for this exercise consisted of two parts. The first recorded whether the 6 cases under examination had been reported in the general media. The second noted, through the articles cited, recurring attitudes and perceptions towards the shipping industry.

Thorough research yielded 310 articles that met the initial search criteria. All articles were then reviewed for content to ensure relevance to this study’s content and scope cri-

teria, and each article was assessed for overall format, as well as content messages and tone of reporting the incident. Each article's length (Short Articles-300 words, Standard-301 to 500 words, Long page-500 words+), and the type of article (Cartoon, Editorial, Interview, Letter to the Editor, News/report, Opinion/ Commentary/ Analysis, Small Comment, Public Statement by public figure) were also recorded.

The categorization and coding of information was based on Reason's methodology (Reason, 2007). For the assessment of tones and attitudes, the analysis was based mostly on Macnamara's (2005) and Romenti and Valentini (2010) studies on the contextual meaning of a message, therefore the focus was primarily but not exclusively on the adjectives used in the reviewed articles, as well as on metaphors, narrator viewpoints, tonal qualities (i.e. sarcasm, aggressiveness), visual imagery etc.

5. Results and discussion

In total, 57 articles were found to meet the criteria and were analysed. Of these articles:

- None reported on the Aegean Wind
- None reported on the sinking of the boat carrying undocumented immigrants in the Aegean Sea
 - None reported on the Astro Saturn arrests
 - 5 reported on the Maran Centaurus piracy attack
 - 50 reported on the Costa Concordia disaster
 - 2 reported on the pirate attack in the Nigerian Delta.

Most of the 57 articles were news articles (45 in total). Only a limited number were opinions, or commentaries and they all involved the Costa Concordia case. The Costa Concordia case was also reported on 25 front page articles. It should be noted that none of the other events or incidents under examination were front page articles or even got inside front, inside back or last page coverage.

The majority of the articles were short to medium. More specifically, the articles on the Costa Concordia and the Maran Centaurus incidents were mostly medium (with the exception of a few long articles), and in the Nigerian Delta piracy attack incident both articles were short.

We textually analysed all news articles for content, in particular in relation to attitudes and tones developed by the authors, i.e. positive, negative or neutral, either towards the shipping industry in general or towards specific organizations in particular. In the vast majority of the articles it was found that indifferent tones towards the shipping industry generally prevailed. When the analysis focused on articles reporting the Costa Concordia case, it was found that the articles were mostly (if not heavily) negative in tone towards both the company and its crew, but neutral in attitude towards the shipping industry. It should be noted that even the articles of quality newspapers appeared mostly negative towards the company and its crew but neutral or indifferent towards the shipping industry and its key players as a whole. This was anticipated, as the Costa Concordia disaster took place in Europe, involved British passengers and crew and belonged to an international shipping company with strong links to the UK market.

The relatively few articles on the Nigerian piracy attack and the Maran Centaurus news stories focused on informational text and represented information that had no biased or subjective content and notions. All articles were neutral in respect to the company, the crew and the shipping industry and cluster as a whole. Again, these two news stories did not involve British or Commonwealth companies and/or crew.

These findings reveal that the Press examined does not follow a specific approach that leads to predefined attitudes towards the maritime industry.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore whether cases that included incidents/accidents which have led to specific news frames in the Maritime Media, led to similar framing in English national print media. The analysis focused on 6 cases, mainly within the European Maritime industry. Our research demonstrated that general press coverage of this particular industry follows in a somewhat limited way the same framing techniques used by the Maritime Media: cases of incidents/accidents that were portrayed and/or framed as severe crises for a company in the maritime media, were also framed and portrayed with the same importance and severity in the General Print media. Nevertheless, from our research one could proclaim that, in almost all instances, ocean going shipping industry incidents/accidents do not make headlines in the general press. On the contrary, incidents/accidents in coastal shipping, under certain circumstances, attract widespread attention.

Locality of disaster, as well as nationality of victims also seem to play an important role. Hence cases that do not involve European and especially British or Commonwealth citizen casualties and have no considerable environmental effects within European waters, seem yet again to be of less interest to the English Media. This finding is consistent with the previous findings of research conducted by our team in previous years.

Although maritime transport is a typical B2B sector, passenger and cruise vessels which are the most visible part of the shipping sector are an exception, right on the nexus of B2B and B2C markets; so it makes perfect sense that they engage the attention of the media. A portion of the general public already has some perception of the passenger company (ferry or cruise), especially if it is a local company.

The findings of this analysis lead to the conclusion that what is considered as news of primary importance and makes the headlines in the maritime press is not considered as equally important and of the same magnitude in the general press. The analysis also leads to the conclusion that even the above mentioned extremely limited reporting by the Press on cases that involved incidents/accidents or disasters, does not show any considerable or excessive bias towards the shipping industry in general on the part of the authors in their reporting.

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