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Effects Of Conflict Sensitivity In News Stories And User-Generated Comments

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**EFFECTS OF CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN NEWS STORIES AND
USER-GENERATED COMMENTS**

by

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DISSERTATION

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of Wayne State University,

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Chapter 1 “Introduction”	1
<i>Background of the socio-political problem</i>	2
<i>Background of the theory and theory-building prospects</i>	5
<i>The experimental study: Overview of methodological approach</i>	8
<i>Limitations and delimitations of the study</i>	10
<i>Conclusion</i>	12
Chapter 2 “Literature Review”	14
<i>Theoretical bases and empirical implications of framing, conflict sensitivity, and securitization</i>	15
<i>Theoretical basis and empirical implications of user-generated content as the context</i>	32
<i>Hypotheses and research questions</i>	36
Chapter 3 “Method”	43
<i>Sample</i>	43
<i>Procedure</i>	44
<i>Stimulus material and manipulation checks</i>	45
<i>Measures</i>	51
<i>Conclusion</i>	53
Chapter 4 “Results”	54
<i>Description of the sample</i>	54
<i>Intervening factors in between-subjects comparisons</i>	56

<i>Check of operationalization of the dependent variables</i>	57
<i>Hypothesis testing</i>	60
<i>Additional analyses</i>	66
<i>Conclusion</i>	68
Chapter 5 “Discussion”	69
<i>Conflict sensitivity and securitization</i>	69
<i>Conflict sensitivity and perception of the complexity of a problem</i>	75
<i>Conflict sensitivity and emotional responses</i>	77
<i>Perceived value of conflict sensitive comments</i>	81
<i>Conclusion</i>	87
Appendix A: Stimulus Material	97
References	125
Abstract	136
Autobiographical Statement	137

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Pattern matrix of factor analysis.....	90
Table 2: Means and standard deviations of the main study variables – part 1 (peace journalism).....	92
Table 3: Means and standard deviations of the main study variables – part 2 (war journalism).....	93
Table 4: Analysis of variance results testing hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, and research question 1 for effects of journalism.....	94
Table 5: Analysis of variance results testing hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, and research question 1 for effects of user-generated comments.....	95
Table 6: Analysis of variance results testing research question 2 – interaction effects between journalism and user-generated comments.....	96

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Experimental conditions.....	96
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CHAPTER 1 “INTRODUCTION”

The 21st century offers digital media technologies, which allow acquisition of information as well as opportunities for expression to citizens across the globe, thus creating a true global village. Yet, the epoch is still deeply impacted by traditional problems, such as the misery caused by political violence. This dissertation reflects on the reality of the contemporary world, which includes both existing “new” technologies and depressing “old” conflicts. The media content of today is composed of the two following types of materials: the traditional content created by media professionals and the user-generated content created by the members of the wide public. Thus, this project considers the combined effects of these two types of content in context of the impact it has on audience’s views on violent political conflicts.

Studies on the effect of media have traditionally looked at either the impact of professional media or the impact of user-generated media. This project offers an experimental study that explores the combined effects of conflict-sensitive framing in news stories and user-generated comments about various military conflicts and wars. Hence, the study assesses the impact of conflict-sensitive (peace journalistic) news stories when accompanied by congruent or incongruent user-generated comments. The implications of this study have significance in relation to (a) existing socio-political issues and (b) scholarly questions surrounding media and political communication. This exploration offers an opportunity to enrich our understanding of contemporary media effects on audiences’ position regarding violent conflict. Importantly, the study also contributes to theory-building and theory-testing in the field of communication, tying tenets from framing, peace journalism (conflict sensitivity), and securitization theories.

This chapter provides an overview of key contributions of this dissertation. First, the social issue of focus is outlined. It is rooted in the options stemming from digital media technologies,

especially the ones regarding the mediated reflections on instances of political violence. The discussions on this issue will be enriched by the research findings of the dissertation. Second, the theoretical basis and the contribution of the dissertation is described. A number of theories have been utilized to compose the theoretical scaffolding of this work. Third, the methodological approach, which has been used to address the set of hypotheses and research questions is introduced. Finally, a broad synopsis of the limitations of the study and its appropriate delimitations is drawn.

I. Background of the Socio-political Problem

This project has the potential to fill a significant gap in the literature. Apart from its theory-building potential, an aspect that adds vastly to the importance of the project, this dissertation also offers normative implications of a real phenomenon in the contemporary society. Initially, it is crucial to understand the differences between the current media landscape and the media landscape of the past, which have been analyzed using established media effects theories. The analyses done in the past were discussed in connection to normative societal implications. However, the change in the media landscape begs for a reconsideration of the currently accepted normative mass communication proposals.

A considerable portion of the recent research done on this subject matter is focused on the description of user-generated content (e.g., Guo & Harlow, 2014; Kopacz & Lawton, 2013). An important trend that has been detected by scholars is the type of discourse that is problematic (Wojcieszak, 2011). Many Internet forums have become a hub for hate speech, reactionary ideologies, and other forms of repressive political positions (Harlow, 2015). Problematic political speech on digital-media platforms is another recurring problem surrounding serious cases of political violence and military conflict (e.g., Mirrlees, 2015; Sienkiewicz, 2015).

The implications of problematic speech on new media platforms have been discussed in normative and philosophical academic works for several decades to this date. Meek (2000) pointed out that while some theorists demonstrated optimistic visions of new media contributing to the improvements in the global social conditions, these enthused ideas were rather detached from reality. Meek argued that a tendency exists to appropriate all new media technologies to prolong existing inequalities and exploitations. Such pessimistic visions are apparent also in the works on media and war.

Marshall McLuhan presaged, as early as in the 1960s, that the rise of digital media would accompany a rise of “total war.” McLuhan (1968) declared that “civilization” is “the mother of war” (p. 24). He justified this claim by presenting examples of connection between each technological advancement of civilization and the increase in the level of brutality in wars between people. MacDonald (2006) highlighted that the recurrent tenet of McLuhan’s work states that “this implosion of the Gutenberg galaxy arms military planners with a new ideal of total war as total mobilization of media” (p. 513). MacDonald outlined the following illustration of media becoming increasingly more involved in military efforts: “As the ‘embedding’ of television reporters in American combat units in Iraq demonstrates, whole sectors of the popular media have already been absorbed into the field of military perception, one phase, it seems, of a drive for ‘world mobilization’ (or as one hopeful military planner puts it, ‘full spectrum dominance’)” (p. 513).

McLuhan (1968) specifically predicted an increase in the severity of future wars due to the fact that modern media technologies have begun allowing for the integration of military, economy, and education into a single complex. The media were, according to McLuhan, the tools of education. MacDonald (2006) referred to the “new media imperium” (p. 517), which, according to the tenets of McLuhan’s theory, normalizes war. Critical scholars have been presenting similar

arguments where the unholy economic union between the media and the military industry have been described as immensely maleficent for the masses but immensely beneficent for the elites (e.g., Giroux, 2008; Harvey, 2005; Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Furthermore, McLuhan (1968) suggested that one of the characteristics of total war will be the erasure of the separation between the civilian and military sectors. This forewarning provides an interesting set of lenses with which to interpret the current mass-media content in connection to military conflicts. A large number of citizens have the technological access to contribute user-generated content on virtually unlimited number of topics. Among these topics are political violence, terrorism, and military conflict. One interpretation of the current situation views the contributors of the user-generated content on the topic of conflict as a part of the military complex (Sieniewicz, 2015). Hence, through the changes in mass media, the role of the public is being transformed from being mere propaganda-audience to (unpaid) propaganda-workers. Such development initializes a new discussion on the ethics-related implications of realities that are redefined by mass media.

Ward (2014) deemed the current state of journalism ethics as obsolete and indeed inappropriate for the existing mass-media landscape. Ward recapped that the radical changes in the mass-media landscape require radical changes in terms of mass-media ethics. For example, the modern professional-media ethical code was conceived as a response to the radical change in mass-media production and distribution due to the rapid progress of the industrial revolution. According to Ward, the most noteworthy developments of contemporary technologies create a media landscape that is (1) “democratized” as citizens are active contributors to media content and (2) “globalized” as the discourses on media platforms easily transcend borders. The existing possibilities and inclusions that are enabled by digital media should provide a blueprint for the

reformed (and radical) media ethics. Ward (2014) advocated for such reformed media ethics to encompass “unity in difference” (p. 9). This approach recognizes that integrative notions are important for ethical codes for the creation of a playing field where a set of universal principles provides structure, which is crucial for the establishment of a common ground of understanding. However, the author acknowledged that such project requires a movement, which should arguably encompass a paradigmatic scope.

The problematic and somewhat enigmatic reality includes all perplexities of contemporary mass media, user-generated content, and political violence and conflicts, which are reflected upon by the contemporary professional mass-media and user-generated content. Possibly, this is the era of the McLuhanian total war. Perhaps radical media ethics are the proper response to the current challenge. If so, then indeed some type of paradigmatic change is necessary in both academic and professional understandings of mass media. At any rate, an indispensable addition to the current discussion are the systematic research works based on empirical observations of the contemporary trends. This dissertation project contributes to this discussion by offering evidence that can rebut or support some of the propositions that are frequently articulated.

II. Background of the Theory and Theory-building Prospects

This study adds to the existing pool of knowledge on the media effects of user-generated content specifically. Rapid development of new technologies has allowed countless possibilities for the creation and dissemination of various types of user-generated content, which includes textual content such as blogs or comments, video contentment, and multimedia materials. The academics are just catching up to this rapid development with their description of the phenomena that accompany the new trends, including effects of the new trends in mass communication. Media effects have many forms including behavioral, attitudinal, cognitive, emotional, and physiological

forms (Bryant & Zillmann, 2009; Potter, 2011). With such a plethora of new media platforms, user-generated content, and potential types of effects of these phenomena, a substantial systematic research program is necessary. Hence, this dissertation serves the purpose of adding to an area of research, which is still very new. Many pressing questions are more likely to be answered, thanks to the expansion of empirical research.

Second, this dissertation contributes towards the novel expansion of the research body related to peace journalism and conflict sensitivity. To be more specific, this study ties elements from framing, peace journalism (conflict sensitivity), and securitization theories. Furthermore, until recently, the topic of peace journalism and conflict sensitivity was not empirically tested in the context of new media technologies. In fact, few conference presentations (e.g., Tenenboim, 2015) proposed the necessity of exploring the interconnection between conflict sensitivity/peace journalism and contemporary media technologies/media landscapes. Hence, this study is on the frontier of rigorous empirical study on the effects of conflict sensitivity in the traditional form of professional-media content as well as in the novel form of user-generated content.

Conflict sensitivity in professional media coverage of political violence was labeled peace journalism by Galtung in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Lynch & Galtung, 2010). This type of coverage implies value on truth-over-propaganda, inclusive diverse perspectives on an oversimplified elite perspective, and exploration of peaceful solutions over justification of violence. Peace journalism represents a specific type of media frame, with its particular tendencies of problem definition, cause attribution, moral evaluation, and solution recommendation (Entman, 2003), which are in accord with conflict sensitive approach. War journalism, on the other end, is the type of framing that includes propagandistic features, focuses on elites, favors violence, and essentially ignores potentials for peace. The key argument of this

theory stresses that peace journalism is normatively a superior type of media coverage, which serves to co-create sustainable peace in societies. In comparatively recent years, a few scholars initiated empirical media effects studies (Kempf, 2005; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2013; Lynch, McGoldrick, & Heathers, 2015) and begun assessing the assertions of peace journalism/conflict sensitivity theorists who claimed that this type of coverage is normatively superior and leads to positive social outcomes.

The theoretical arguments of peace journalism offer a set of potential dependent variables, including the perception of the complexity of a problem and the perception of the likelihood of a peaceful solution or a lasting peace. Furthermore, potential dependent variables can be adopted from the published effects of peace journalism studies, such as Lynch and McGoldrick's (2013) experiment that looked at fundamental emotions as outcome variables. However, as the number of research works on peace journalism effects is so narrow, many other variables that possibly connect to conflict sensitive framing have not been explored. Specifically, the theory of securitization (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998) can be successfully combined with conflict sensitivity, offering a new set of variables to be considered by empirical studies.

Securitization theory provides a potential elucidation of the processes based on which conflict sensitivity leads to positive social outcomes. Particularly, securitization adds variables that can inform larger socio-political implications theorized in peace journalism literature. The main premise of securitization asserts that the speech act of securitizing move serves to remove an issue from the arena of normal politics and incorporate it into the arena of security. Once an issue is understood as a threat to security, extraordinary measures, which are often unacceptable in the arena of normal politics, are easily presented as acceptable or even preferable. Such extraordinary measures might include undemocratic practices or even the use of violence. Hereafter, the

mechanism behind negative societal impacts of war journalism appears to be working along the parallel principle as securitization. This means that peace journalism would then employ a process of desecuritization of an issue by removing the frame from its focus on existential threats to the focus on political nature of the conflict. A highlight of political aspects invites the possibility of political non-violent solutions. As the theoretical overlap between the theories of peace journalism/conflict sensitivity and securitization is established, relevant variables can be deduced for the purposes of empirical studies.

III. The Experimental Study: Overview of Methodological Approach to Address the Hypotheses and Research Questions

The dissertation employs an experiment to elucidate upon questions pertaining to effects of conflict sensitivity. Stimulus material include both news stories and user-generated comments on contemporary instances of war and political violence. Each of the two types of content employed either conflict sensitive framing or war-oriented framing. Therefore, the study illuminated the main and interaction effects of conflict-sensitive framing in news stories and congruent or incongruent framing in Internet users' comments. The population of undergraduate Wayne States University students was used to draw the sample of subjects. The outcome variables of interest concern audience's individual attitudinal reactions. A number of outcome variables was derived from previous studies and from prior theoretical consideration. A set of hypotheses and research questions was constructed to substantiate expected effects of conflict sensitivity.

The rationale behind the theory of peace journalism is compatible with the notion of desecuritization. Therefore, conflict-sensitive framing in news stories was expected to be linked to decreased effects that resemble securitization in perceptions of the audience. Same prediction

in terms of effects was deduced for conflict sensitive-framing in user-generated content, expecting that conflict-sensitive framing would be associated with lower perception of securitization.

The theory of peace journalism also provides indications of the potential outcomes of conflict-sensitive framing. One of the central ideas of peace journalism asserts that problems of political conflict are inherently rather complex. Thus, it was deduced that conflict sensitivity in both news stories and user-generated comments would be linked to the perception of intricacy of the discussed problem.

The previous research works done on the effects of peace journalism took a social-psychological angle by testing the link between conflict-sensitive framing of news and fundamental emotions. The results showed strong effects on three fundamental emotions specifically, which are hope, anger, and fear. Based on these results, it was expected that conflict sensitivity should be associated with increase in hope and decrease in fear and anger.

Because the literature on the effects of conflict-sensitive framing of user-generated content is such a new endeavor, a multitude of questions ought to be visited. A very pertinent query is whether the particulars of conflict-sensitive framing in user-generated comments are indeed appreciated by audience as being more valuable as opposed to comments that represent war-oriented framing. The study explored audience's perception of the positive value of conflict-sensitive user-generated comments.

An essential facet of real experience of audiences is that the overall information about a story tends to come from both professional journalistic and user-generated sources. Hence, the final perception picture in the minds of the audience is likely to be impacted by both sources. This study addresses the potential interaction effects.

The set of explored hypotheses and research questions gave a chance to enrich various bodies of academic literature. The findings of this study serve to supplement the knowledge on the effects of user-generated content, effects of conflict sensitivity in various types of media content, and interconnection between the theories of conflict sensitivity/peace journalism. Besides, the study is timely in providing rigorous academic information to enrich the discussion on the impacts of new media on serious social issues such as war and violent political conflict. Accordingly, through this dissertation some specific pieces of evidence can be presented on concrete attitudinal effects of conflict-sensitive framing in news stories and congruent or incongruent framing in user-generated comments.

IV. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Berger, Roloff, and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2010) stressed that a necessary initial consideration of any socio-scientific inquiry is carried out in anticipation of alternative explanations. This step is important as it helps to shed light on a number of limitations of a study prior to conducting it. Therefore, an assembly of actions can be taken by researchers in order to mitigate the issues. Such procedures improve the possibility of the socio-scientific study to yield valuable findings that help to explain the phenomena in question.

A standard set of procedures is also applied in this experimental study. These procedures assist to assess acceptable levels of validity and reliability. The procedures are described in detail in the chapter that cover the methodology and methods of the study. Some main limitations that are related to many forms of validity and reliability of the study were identified in the initial stages of preparation of the experiment. A number of steps have been taken to decrease the impact of the foreseen limitations.

First, control is an aspect that characterizes experimental research (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Any threat to the researcher's control poses further threats to both validity and reliability of the study. Therefore, the expansion of control means decreasing the potential shortcomings of an experimental study. One important part of improving control in this study involves stimulus material. The manipulation of the stimulus stories and user-generated comments was carefully conducted in order to increase the level of control over the dose of the independent variable. Eight distinct stories were included in the stimulus to decrease the chances of idiosyncratic reaction of specific subjects to specific types of stories. The stories were presented to the subjects in a random order and in randomly-assigned conditions. These randomization procedures also help to improve control over interference from unaccounted variables. Finally, the study was conducted in computer laboratory settings, which led to further improvement of control as this decreased the number of potential intervening factors.

Second, a general criticism of experimental studies is their artificial nature, which according to many authors poses the problem of lack of generalizability to non-artificial real situations (Babbie, 2004; Keyton, 2011; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002; Singleton & Straits, 2010). The criticism of artificiality is especially pronounced for studies conducted in laboratory settings. However, the laboratory setting used in this study resembles classrooms and computer laboratories across the campus. Students are accustomed to being in such environments. Thus, the setting for this study were not unusual or intimidating in comparison to other campus facilities. Furthermore, the procedure experience was something that is rather usual as well. Students were reading news stories and Internet users' comments on the computer screen. Such an experience resembles situations which participants would encounter in real life. Finally, a special set of steps were taken to make the stimulus material appear as regular news stories with regular sets of user-

generated comments as much as possible, despite the manipulation in accordance to the independent variable requirements. A number of academics and journalists were consulted in order to ensure the standard and customary appearance of the stimulus material. All these steps were employed to alleviate problems that could arise due to the extensive artificiality of the experiment.

Quality of data is crucial to the quality of inference that is drawn from a research work. Hence, the efforts to mitigate all potential problems within the study were meaningful in connection to the prospective value of the findings. This study, which as previously outlined, has potential for augmenting knowledge related to pressing socio-political issues as well as theory-building endeavors in the field of communication. Yet, the potential of the study was contingent upon the alleviation of design-related shortcomings. For this reason, the methodology was carefully reviewed to lessen any foreseeable issues.

V. Conclusion

This chapter introduces the backdrop of this dissertation, the subject matter of which is the media effects of conflict-sensitive framing of news stories and user-generated comments about contemporary cases of political violence. This project serves to inform an issue of timely social importance. Moreover, the project adds to mass communication theory building. Moreover, this introductory chapter outlines the social and theoretical significance of the research, provides justification of hypotheses and research questions, as well as offers justification for the methodology and strategies chosen for improving the quality of the execution of the study. The next chapter offers a review of the theoretical and empirical literature on this subject area, which informs the inquiry.

CHAPTER 2 “LITERATURE REVIEW”

The contemporary developments in the sphere of technology has remodeled the mass-media landscape in several ways. Therefore, it is vital that media effects researchers acknowledge the reconfigurations of the current epoch. While research shows that traditional professional media content is still the central source of impact when considering issues of elite politics such as international crises and conflicts, this content is not the only material that is widely available for audience. This reality requires attention and response from researchers. Hence, as the main goal of this project is the illumination of the impact that media messages have on people’s perceptions of international conflicts and crises, attention must be paid to the abundant presence of both traditional/professionally-created as well as user-generated media content.

The study of media effects has been evolving for over a century (Delia, 1987). This field has been conceived specifically due to the curiosity about media effects in the context of war propaganda. During the decades in which scholars have been exploring these types of issues, a number of theories on media effects in the context of politics and conflict have developed. Some theories have been established as convincing and suitable sources of explanation as demonstrated by empirical testing. The present challenge lies in extracting the knowledge that has been generated using the established theories applied to studies of contemporary reality; the reality of specific conflicts, new media, and old media. Such a challenge creates an opportunity for an empirical exploration, which will facilitate productive theory building.

The theory building that is enabled by the prospective dissertation is rooted in the proposed study’s keen response to the coexistence of professional/traditional and user-generated content, while connecting theoretical links between the concepts of conflict sensitivity, framing, and securitization, which were so far disconnected. The first main theoretical contribution of the

dissertation is the establishment of the connection between peace journalism/conflict sensitive framing and securitization. The second main contribution is testing and a comparison of the effects of conflict-sensitive framing that features in the format of traditional news story and in user-generated comments.

The theories of peace journalism/conflict sensitivity and securitization have been linked to the theoretical model of framing. The concept of framing thus provides one of the main bases of this study. Frames are structures that function on several levels – as vehicles that are used by elites to sway the interpretation of reality, as identifiable discursive structures that figure in mass-media content, and as psychological schemas that assist audience's understanding of an issue (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009). Frames are, moreover, useful as analytical tools that connect theories to observations of various phenomena (Entman, 1993). For instance, framing concept is useful in the empirical connection of frame as media content and frame in perception of audience (Scheufele, 1999).

Conflict sensitivity stems from the seminal idea of peace journalism (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Lynch & Galtung, 2010). This normative theory argues that the frames of peace journalism/conflict sensitive journalism have the potential to contribute to overall conflict de-escalation. Peace journalism frames oppose oversimplification of conflicts, violence, propaganda, cover-ups, and elite focus. Instead, conflict-sensitive frames promote the understanding of a conflict's complexities, peace efforts, and truth. Additionally, they focus on all involved parties, including the non-elites and the elites. According to the theory, such media coverage contributes to the formation of a society that is more apt for conflict de-escalation and essentially, peace.

Securitization was also originally conceived as a normative theory (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998). The main premise of the theory alleges that proposing a security risk is a justification

for means that are rather extraordinary within normal political processes. When viewed in more detail, a securitizing move includes the proposition that a referent object, which may be a nation, a state, or a civilization, is facing an existential threat. The threat does not necessarily have to endanger physical existence. It might be a threat to economic, cultural, or political existence of the system as well. Within such framing of an issue, a number of usually unacceptable means is considered appropriate and such means might include violence. Hence, securitization is considered a special type of framing (Vultee, 2010; Watson, 2012). The proposed dissertation explores the connection of conflict-sensitive frames in media content and securitization frames in the audience's perception.

By establishing the logical connection between the germane theoretical frameworks used in this study, a common ground for the deduction of hypotheses and research questions is shaped. This effort also allows inquisition into the effects of conflict-sensitive framing. It also allows for the expansion of research body on media effects from a mere consideration of only professionally-generated media content through the incorporation of user-generated content into its ambit.

1. Theoretical Bases and Empirical Implications of Framing, Conflict Sensitivity, and Securitization

Framing

Background of the Theory

One of the foundational pieces that have built the main groundwork for framing theory in the field of communication is the book by Gitlin (1980). The author took a critical position in an attempt to debunk the hegemonic influences on American society, which show manifestation in the notions of the elites as well as in mass media's framing. Gitlin reflected on Goffman's (1974) ideas, which outlined that "we frame reality in order to negotiate it, manage it, comprehend it, and

choose appropriate repertoires of cognition and action” (pp. 6–7). This definition of framing is acknowledged in some reiterations today. David and colleagues (2011) proposed that the most widely accepted definition of framing in contemporary studies of political and mass communication is that of Entman’s (2003): “Framing entails selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution” (p. 417). Influenced by Entman’s (2003) definition, Matthes and Kohring (2008) suggested that a frame essentially is “definition of problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 264).

Framing is understood in the communication field as a complex multifaceted phenomenon that occurs at various levels as a part of different processes. For instance, Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano (in Wahl-Jorgenson & Hanitzsch, 2009) acknowledged this multifaceted nature in stating that “framing is an individual psychological process, but it is also an organizational process and product, and a political strategic tool” (p. 175). Scheufele (1999) created a labeling for the various processes that are entailed in framing. Frame building, according to Scheufele, is the process of pressure that is employed by ruling elites, ideologies, and organizations on the form of frames, which are to eventually appear on the mass media. Frame setting is the process of media effects, where the mass-media frames are internalized by audiences as schemas. Scheufele also defined individual-level effects of framing where the frames or schemas, which are held by specific audience members, impact attitudes and behaviors of these individuals.

Framing was considered by other groups of theorists as a sub-component of the theory of agenda setting. The main idea of agenda setting proposes that the audience’s perceptions of the importance of an issue are the effect of the salience of that issue in mass-media coverage (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Framing under the umbrella of agenda-setting theory was labeled as

second-level agenda setting. This understanding suggests that media salience of particular attributes of an issue constitutes a frame and is demonstrated as media effect in influencing audience's perceptions of that specific issue (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997). Scheufele (2000) and Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) rejected the proposal of second-level agenda setting as an oversimplification that ignores important details of the framing process and thus creates an imprecise theoretical model for capturing processes behind phenomena. Scheufele (2000) pointed out that while agenda setting is centered on the salience of the content, framing is centered on attribution, which entails different processes of effect development. Thus, Scheufele concluded that framing should be treated as separate from agenda-setting theory.

Another perspective on framing distinguishes frames as rhetorical arrangements in a text and perceived it as agents of socialization in a socio-political system. For instance, Pan and Kosicki (1993) stressed on the link between frames and beliefs held by individuals, which states that: "framing analysis does not conceive news texts as psychological stimuli with objectively identifiable meanings; rather, it views news texts as consisting of organized symbolic devices that will interact with individual agents' memory for meaning construction" (p. 58). This angle implies a social-constructionist position in comparison to the rather social-scientific orientation of, for instance, Scheufele, and critical orientation of, for instance, Entman. Consequently, framing is divided along paradigmatic lines. The following section outlines these rifts.

Paradigmatic Divisions

D'Angelo (2002) provided a division of paradigms rooted in different understandings of the process of framing by the scholars in the field of communication. The first paradigm is cognitive. The scholars who adhere to this perspective are specifically interested in the conceptualization of frames as cognitive schemata, which are reflected in a text or exist within the

cognition of individuals. Thus, the scholars of cognitive paradigm investigate links between specific textual frames and the impact of these frames on the cognitive awareness of the members of audience. D'Angelo wrote that the goal of this type of research is "detecting thoughts that mirror propositions encoded in frames" (p. 876). In other words, framing is viewed as a psychological effect process by the proponents of this paradigm.

Second, critical paradigm is another way of understanding framing in communication scholarship. D'Angelo (2002) stated that in the conception of this paradigm, "frames are the outcome of newsgathering routines by which journalists convey information about issues and events from the perspective of values held by political and economic elites" (p. 876). Gitlin's (1980) piece proposed this pattern of conceptualization about framing. Gitlin viewed frames as operating within the accepted range that was safe for the political system's survival. In other words, framing is a political power tool according to the tenets of this paradigm.

Third, D'Angelo (2002) outlined the constructionist paradigm. According to this school of thought, framing is understood along the lines of Goffman's (1974) propositions without the political economy aspects that Gitlin (1980) inserted in the conception. D'Angelo summarized that framing is understood by the constructionist paradigm as the product of journalists who essentially serve as "information processors who create 'interpretive packages' of the positions of politically invested 'sponsors' (e.g., sources) in order to both reflect and add to the 'issue culture' of the topic" (p. 877). In short, constructionists view framing as the interpretive co-creation of reality where various viewpoints produce various frames. The difference between the constructionist paradigm and the critical paradigm lies in the perception of the level at which the elites dominate frame construction. While constructionists perceive all involved groups engaged in constructing frames

of interpretation, critical paradigm scholars argue that political-economic elites dominate frame construction through their hegemonic influence on the mass media.

The paradigmatic divisions of framing are symptomatic of general paradigmatic divisions that exist in the communication discipline (Craig, 1999). The following section summarizes how framing theorists foresee the future coexistence between the different paradigmatic niches.

Research Program Implications of the Paradigmatic Divisions

Entman (1993) outlined a very influential proposition where he used framing as an example of how the discipline of communication is advanced in general: “By bringing ideas together in one location, communication can aspire to become a master discipline that synthesizes related theories and concepts and exposes them to the most rigorous, comprehensive statement and exploration” (p. 51). With this argument, Entman recalled the origins of framing and a general popularity attached to the term “frame” in diverse areas of social sciences and humanities. Entman envisioned the opportunity that is provided by such shared concepts for unifying social sciences in a similar way as natural sciences, which are compatible in their overall endeavor towards knowledge building.

D’Angelo (2002) criticized Entman’s (1993) take on the “fractured paradigm” and his call for the necessity to create a “framing paradigm” as a venue through which communication can function as a connecting field between all social sciences. D’Angelo proposed that framing should be encountered within a Lakatosian “research program” concept where various theories meet and compete. Entman, by D’Angelo’s understanding, was advocating a singular master paradigmatic-theoretical lens. However, instead, D’Angelo was in favor of paradigmatic eclecticism: “Theoretical and paradigmatic diversity has led to a comprehensive view of the framing process, not fragmented findings in isolated research agendas” (p. 871).

I see this perspective of D'Angelo (2002) as more complimentary than contrary to Entman's (1993) proposal, as Entman stated at the conclusion of his thesis that "field of communication might develop from its wide ambit and eclectic approaches a core of knowledge that could translate into research paradigms contributing to social theory in the largest sense" (p. 58). Here it is of paramount importance to notice that Entman used plural, not singular, in his reference to paradigm. Nevertheless, D'Angelo advanced the argument as he provided philosophical grounding for how framing might actually accomplish that, which Entman envisioned it doing.

D'Angelo's (2002) proposal is noteworthy also because it might supplement a resolution for the Craig versus Myers philosophical predicament about a general state of communication theory. Craig (1999) argued for the coexistence and a dialogue between the constituents of the whole diverse spectrum of the different schools of communication theories. Myers (2001) opposed Craig's reasoning that certain theories simply become disqualified by not capturing the phenomena truly, and more suitable theories are generated based on testing and falsifiability. D'Angelo embraced eclecticism, however, he also valued more fitting theories as the ones that should arise to the esteem of acknowledgement after a fair competition in the theoretical marketplace of ideas. This eclectic welcoming of various paradigms while studying phenomena is justified by Craig, while the natural selection of better suited theories that capture phenomena in a more accurate manner is supported by Myers. Thus, D'Angelo was able to extract the strengths from both positions while staying close to critical realism in a philosophical sense.

Critical realism is the basic philosophical scaffolding that is appropriate in complimenting Entman's (1993) original argument of framing as an illustration of the unification of social sciences. The tenets of critical realism apply to a number of social sciences, for instance, to

international relations. In this context Adler (2013) wrote that critical realism presupposes ontology of material reality and causal relationships; however, critical realism also supports constructivist notions of language and meaning as the source that creates and perpetuates social relations (Adler, cited in Carlsnaes, Risse, & Simmons, 2013). Thus, critical realism is skeptical when it comes to epistemology, and it proposes that every observation is biased due to the preconception shaped by theoretical deduction. Realization of such inherent bias is a strong evidence against assumptions, which state that staying with a particular theoretical framework is sufficient. These tenets hold that social phenomena are complex to such a degree that very diverse epistemological, and therefore, also theoretical, approaches are necessary to capture certain aspects of reality. At the same time, the ontological existence of an objective truth is possible, and therefore, a notion of falsifiability still plays an ample role. Based on this grounding, critical realism plays an appropriate role as the universal philosophical underpinning of all disciplines that study social phenomena, including communication.

Therefore, ostensibly speaking, the most appropriate direction in the study of framing is an eclectic epistemological course (D'Angelo, 2002), which has the potential of discrediting those theories that inappropriately reflect the ontological reality (Myers, 2001). This approach will prospectively mend the undesirable fractures while keeping fruitful plurality in the theoretical foundations of framing (Entman, 1993). Plurality then serves particularly well for theoretical and empirical endeavors, such as the one that is proposed in this dissertation, which connects conflict sensitivity and securitization.

Conflict Sensitivity – Peace Journalism

Background of the Theory

The concept of conflict sensitivity is based on the notion of conflict-sensitive journalism, which in turn is the more contemporary label (Yiping, 2011) for the tendencies that were originally encompassed in the peace-journalism idea (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Lynch & Galtung, 2010). Peace journalism exists primarily in the following two main forms: (1) as an academic concept of understanding and analyzing of journalism and (2) as a movement to reform praxis of journalism. The two modes of existence of peace journalism are intimately interconnected on the platform of Galtung's broader philosophy of peace and conflict resolution, which might be labeled simply as conflict sensitivity.

The roots of peace journalism are traced to the pivotal article by Galtung and Ruge (1965). These authors criticized the structure of the Western mass media and the consequent prejudiced content of foreign affairs coverage that appears on the media. The biased content was labeled by the authors as *war journalism*. Galtung developed alternative practices and has been advocating for implementation of the same, which would lead to the generation of the type of content that he labeled as *peace journalism*.

Lynch and Galtung (2010) proposed that majority of the Western mass media's coverage of conflicts reflects war journalism. The main characteristics of war journalism include loyal orientations towards (1) propaganda, (2) elites, (3) violence, and (4) victory. Such coverage creates a biased picture of the actual events and offers a gross oversimplifications of reality. First, the oversimplifications enable propagandistic depictions of the conflict in terms of simple binaries, where one side represents "the good" and the other side is demonized as "the evil." Second, elite narratives dominate the coverage. Third, the focus is on violence and glorification of violence with a fetish for technology and weaponry. Within this focus, the mass media report current "scores" as if war was a sport. Fourth, along the lines of the metaphor of war as a sport, the conflict is

presented by the mass media as a zero-sum game. Hence, victory is the main goal without giving much space for the consideration of other alternatives. Lynch and Galtung concluded that this style of journalism is a justification of violence and is thus fundamentally hostile to peace.

Peace journalism should, according to Lynch and Galtung (2010), exemplify a more objective style of media-conflict coverage with orientations towards (1) truth, (2) people, (3) conflict, and (4) solution. First, more truthful coverage outlines a number of different parties who are involved in a particular conflict. Furthermore, all parties' suffering as well as lies are to be exposed by peace journalism, without tolerance for cover-ups or demonization of certain groups. Second, peace journalism has to incorporate narratives of people from various echelons of impacted societies, including but not exclusively centering on elite narratives. Third, the focus on conflict in peace journalism implies that the roots of the conflict should be traced in order to understand better the grievances of the involved parties. Violence is just a symptom of conflict and each conflict has some deeper causes that journalists should inform about. Fourth, peace journalism presupposes that journalists are also responsible for providing a summary of possible non-violent alternatives of dealing with a specific conflict.

In brief, peace journalism incorporates an attempt to provide an objective coverage of conflicts along with a coverage of possible directions of conflict resolution (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2013). Furthermore, peace journalism includes a dimension of propensity towards a radical change in the society, which would entail the society becoming more sympathetic towards peace. Shinar (2007) provided the below-mentioned characterization of this concept:

Peace journalism is a normative mode of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict, that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, and audiences towards war and peace. Such goals are sought through (a) critical evaluations of the current state of conflict coverage and (b) efforts to conceptualize professional values and practices in both theoretical and operational terms. (p. 2)

The broader implications of peace journalism's endeavor is a movement for overall increased conflict sensitivity for arriving at an understanding of issues between groups of people. Hence, peace journalism is also referred to as conflict-sensitive journalism (Yiping, 2011).

Peace journalism finds overarching support in framing (Lee, cited in Wilkins & Christians, 2009; Lynch & Galtung, 2010) – specifically, framing as defined by Entman (1993, 2003) where media frame provides the definition of a problem and its causes, moral evaluation, and recommendations for remedies. According to Gitlin (1980), it is evident that journalists are not able to avoid framing as only a limited number of attributes of an issue fits into the media coverage. Therefore, peace-journalism proponents have argued that conflict sensitivity ought to be the preferably adopted frame (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). In this manner, peace journalism basically exemplifies expansion of framing theory into a normative realm (Lee, cited in Wilkins & Christians, 2009).

Empirical Findings

Lee and Maslog (2005) observed that “peace journalism made a leap from theory to practice without the benefit of research” (p. 313). Similarly, Hanitzsch (2004) wrote: “Although much has been written about the benefits and limitations of peace journalism, many contributions to the debate are based on normative reasoning rather than empirical research” (p. 492). Since this criticism has been voiced, few scholars took up the challenge to proliferate the body of empirical work on peace journalism.

The first category of empirical works that incorporate peace journalism are content analyses. Particularly noteworthy analyses were conducted by Lee and Maslog (2005) and Maslog, Lee, and Kim (2006) in which tenets of war and peace journalism were used to derive content categories. The authors were able to empirically demonstrate that war journalism is one of the

styles of mass-media conflict coverage in non-Western countries as well. Furthermore, the authors sketched which specific tenets of war and peace journalism are predominantly used by the analyzed media outlets. The content analysis scholarship shows that war and peace journalism is indeed a phenomenon. Also, this type of empirical scholarships provides information on how exactly peace and war journalism tends to look in real media coverage.

The second category of empirical works includes experimental studies. The basic theoretical tenets of peace journalism contain the profound assumption that peace journalism has specific effects on individuals and perhaps also on societies as a whole. Experimental research is therefore a necessary step to substantiate these claims with evidence. However, the body of experimental studies on peace journalism is still very limited when compared to the number of other academic works on the topic.

The most noteworthy experimental effects studies include Kempf (2005), Schaefer (2006), Kempf (2008), Lynch and McGoldrick (2013), Thiel and Kempf (2014), and Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers (2015). While the researchers have found evidence supporting the effects claims of peace journalism, some limitations of the effects have been documented as well.

The initial endeavor, which imported the ideas of peace journalism into experimental evaluations was the study by Kempf (2005). From the theory, the author specifically extracted the notion of de-escalation-oriented framing on news about post-war Serbia. The results suggested that the subjects who read de-escalated stories (peace journalism) were more likely to report less biased evaluation of new democratic tendencies in Serbia. Hence, Kempf provided a first set of empirical results to support claims of theoretical peace journalism, which were forwarded in context of its positive effects. However, Kempf (2008) showed that effects of peace journalism are, in some cases, diminished by some specific a priori mental models that are held by audience

members. Thiel and Kempf's (2014) experiment demonstrated an interaction effect between peace-journalism type of framing in media content and individual frames embraced by audience members.

Lynch and McGoldrick's (2013) study compared the effects of peace and war journalistic framing of stories on asylum seekers and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Australia, and natural disaster crisis and Communist New People's Army in Philippines. The experiment yielded that peace journalism is associated with increased levels of hope, empathy, and happiness, while levels of anger and fear decreased in the emotions of the audience members. While all the previously mentioned studies applied survey-reports to detect outcome variables, Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers (2015) contributed to the diversity of their findings by using a physiological measure. The authors measured heart rate variability, which supported previous study's findings of peace journalism being associated with higher empathy and hope, while war journalism is associated with higher anger and distress.

The authors would tend to employ print news and television news stimulus material. Student samples were used as subjects in the reviewed studies. Kempf (2005), Schaefer (2006), Kempf (2008), and Thiel and Kempf (2014) studies were conducted in Germany with German student populations. Lynch and McGoldrick (2013) conducted the experiment in Australia and Philippines, while Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers (2015) reported data from Australia only. Diversity of contexts and tested populations enhances the external validity of the findings.

Thiel and Kempf (2014) pointed out that certain aspects have the propensity to decrease the level of peace journalism's effects. However, an evidence of the effects has been provided by the set of published studies. For instance, Schaefer (2006) demonstrated that consumption of peace journalism was associated with lower acceptance of military measures. Lynch and McGoldrick

(2013) affirmed that such effects have very serious socio-political implications, as tendencies among the public have a leverage on the decisions of the political elites. Military involvement is a part of such decisions. Hence, peace journalism can be understood as a crucial element that contributes to the creation of a broader societal-conflict sensitivity. Such appreciation of conflicts' complexities is related to greater appreciation of various approaches to dealing with conflicts, specifically non-violent approaches.

To summarize, the up-to-date experimental findings partially support a deductive model of peace journalism, which expects pro-social and peace-facilitative effects on audiences. New studies are still necessary in order to identify important interaction effects. Also, an increased number of stimulus contexts is a trend that appears to gain momentum among experimental peace journalism studies. Such trend is enhancing the rigor of the studies as it provides better control over unaccounted variables. Overall, further experimental studies are definitely still necessary on the topic, with a special inclusion of the element of user-generated content.

Securitization

Background of the Theory

The theory of securitization stems from the scholarship of international relations theorists of the Copenhagen School: Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde. Their body of theory is rooted in paradigmatically diverse composition of constructivism, critical theory, critical realism, and classical realism in international relations (Adler, cited in Carlsnaes, Risse, & Simmons, 2013). However, the theory has been used predominantly as constructivist and critical lens. The theory describes the process of securitization as a speech act through which an actor proposes that a referent object, usually a nation-state, is facing a security threat, which requires extraordinary measures for its elimination (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998).

According to the dominant concept of the securitization theory (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998), the tendency to think along the lines of security is constructed through a speech act. A securitizing move is a speech act that serves to remove the issue from the area of general political discussion and transform it to a matter of threat to some level of nation's and/or state's security. Security is defined here in broad terms, including state's sovereignty, stability of the political system, preservation of the cultural characteristic of the nation, and the like. For instance, one dimension of security is connected to the prominence of religious views versus secular views, which are specifically distinct for every nation or state (Karyotis & Patrikios, 2010; Jackson, 2015). Therefore, a securitizing move suggests the perception that one of the physiognomies of the nation and/or state could be harmed or even cease to exist. According to the theory, such speech act constructs a situation where the normal political patterns of dealing with issues are seen as inadequate. Hence, extraordinary measures must be employed And such measures include undemocratic practices. In simple terms, securitization is the process of employing political discourse to prioritize a perceived security issue before values of democracy.

Securitization and Framing: Compatibility Justification

The above-described process of securitization parallels with the general definition of framing as highlighting a problem into media salience, naming the causes, making moral judgments, and prescribing solutions (Entman, 1993; 2003). The problem is described by an actor, generally a politician, as a threat to a particular level of security. The cause of this problem is the proposed aggressor. The moral judgment within the dominant take on securitization tends to imply that the speech act proposes that protecting the referent object is the morally adequate action, while threatening the security of the referent object is an immoral action. As a final point, a vital aspect of securitization is the prescription of solutions that entail extraordinary measures. The out of the

ordinary characteristics of the suggested measures that stem from securitization provide an apology for the violation of normal democratic political processes. Thus, securitization serves as a tool to infringe democracy in democratic regimes by politicians (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998).

One process by which this infringement happens is called “cascading activation” (Entman, 2003). This process suggests that frames are conceived by the elite politicians and other members of the ruling echelons. Then the frames are passed to mass-media organizations, where the frames are in some cases altered to a degree through gatekeeping processes before they are embodied as media-content frames. This part of the process is analogous to Scheufele’s (1999) frame building. Then the media-content frames are passed to audiences where depending on the level of cultural congruence and on some other conditions, frames are internalized by the public. This part of the process mirrors Scheufele’s frame setting. Cascading activation provides a platform for the integration of securitization into framing, as Vultee (as cited in Balzacq, 2010) proposed, opining that securitization is “an organizing principle invoked by political actors – and, crucially, amplified or tamed down by the news media – in an effort to channel the ways in which issues are thought about” (p. 78).

The previous paragraphs outline how securitization resembles special type of framing. Watson (2012) pointed out that specifically because security appears so much as framing, the theory has not received broader attention among American scholars. Watson while speaking about framing and securitization, stated: “not only that these two bodies of work are compatible and based on strongly overlapping theoretical and normative commitments, but also that ‘security’ operates as a distinct master frame similar to ‘rights’ and ‘injustice’ and that securitization theory may usefully be understood as a subfield of framing” (p. 280).

In accord with D'Angelo's (2002) call for paradigmatic eclecticism in framing studies, Watson (2012) also proposed that "the literature on securitization and framing will be empirically and theoretically enriched through greater integration" (p. 301). Watson's proposal is indeed in adherence to the same logic as that followed by D'Angelo's proposition. The integration of framing and securitization scholarships is likely to provide such theoretical and epistemological vehicle that helps to illuminate complex phenomena of social reality.

Empirical Findings

Relatively recent studies have taken securitization towards a social-scientific paradigm and methodology. For example, Alexseev (2011) used securitization-derived concepts in the place of independent variables in a study of survey data. Specifically, Alexseev explored two broader concepts and their impact in support of migrant deportation in Russia. The two concepts are "securitization" and "security dilemma." Alexseev used data from Eurobarometer survey, which was administered in the Russian Federation in 2005. The dependent variable is characterized by Alexseev as "the unconditional and extreme support for wholesale deportation of migrants to their places of origin" (p. 514). The author constructed this variable from the survey questions on that matter. Some of the independent variables were, (1) "association of ethnic group with territorial claims" (p. 515); (2) "existential threat to native ethnic identities" (p. 517); (3) "threat to state capacity" (p. 517); and (4) "economic threat" (p. 517). Karyotis and Patrikios (2010) combined methods of discourse analysis and survey to assess the securitization of immigration in Greece. Discourse analysis was utilized to evaluate tendency in the rhetoric of country's political and clerical elites. Public-opinion poll results were used to assess securitization-related outcome variables.

Vultee (2011) took securitization theory into the sphere of experimental studies. He securitized media frames as independent variables and explored outcome variables, which were correspondingly derived from the securitization theory. Also, securitization tenets have been operationalized as independent and dependent variables by Vultee, Lukacovic, and Stouffer (2015). The authors conducted an experiment where specific types of media frames covering immigration, climate, and terrorism were linked to securitization, and specific types of audience's perceptions were linked to securitization as well. These specific studies show that the theory of securitization, as can be seen with peace journalism, has been moved towards the realm of experimental studies.

Current recommendations of some authors, such as Baele and Sterck (2015), stress upon the importance of increasing both the quantity and quality of empirical studies related to securitization theory. The authors proposed that a large number of theoretical works on securitization is sophisticated, leaving the empirical works limited in numbers and consequently limited in their analytical scope. Incidentally, the empirical studies on conflict sensitivity/peace journalism can be criticized for identical reasons. Thus, a remedy for this issue lies in conducting rigorous empirical studies that integrate the listed theories.

The platform of framing helps in the establishment of the connection between peace journalism/conflict sensitivity and a broad spectrum of communication paradigms. This paradigmatic diversity allows for methodological diversity as well. Thus, it justifies the transition of peace journalism from being a critical theoretical construct to a platform for experimental empirical test. A multitude of conflict-sensitivity variables can thus be empirically examined. Similarly, framing-related securitization theory can exist along the lines of the same logic tested through experimental tests. The notion of increasing empirical rigor in the study of peace

journalism as well as securitization has been called for by authors. Hence, the dissertation fills up the existing gaps in two literatures – the literature on peace journalism and the literature on securitization.

Furthermore, in order to answer the mentioned calls to increase empirical rigor in the study of any theory or topic, it is crucial to consider the construct validity and external validity of a proposed research project (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Construct validity concerns the process of selecting particular materials and settings for an experiment, which should encompass the essence of the target theoretical principles. External validity applies to the arrival of an appropriate generalization from a specific experiment, which is deemed valid for a variety of different real world circumstances. In order to capture well the contours of contemporary mass communication within this dissertation, the reality of online communication is also considered and incorporated to the empirical study of conflict sensitivity. Such approach, while permitting application of pertinent theoretical principles to the narrow constraints of an experiment, relates to media consumption experiences of population, which improves the potential of generalization. Therefore, the element of user-generated content is utilized as a part of the inquiry.

II. Theoretical Basis and Empirical Implications of User-Generated Content as the Context Tenets of User-Generated Content

The study of media effects in connection to professional journalism is gradually paying increased attention to the new digital media aspects of the contemporary mass-communication reality. Hermida (2010) pointed out that social media are an important source of news for many people. Thus, one of the most prestigious functions of journalism is not exclusively delivered through professional channels, but filtered through the judgments and choices of the wider public on the social media. Another example of the increasing impact of digital media is related to the

repercussions faced by media professionals. For instance, the credibility of journalists is perceived in a higher esteem for those professionals who are more interactive on social media (Jahng & Littau, 2016). This shows that even one of the crucial and valued aspects of journalistic professionalism can be perceived through the lens of expected behavior in accordance to the norms of social-media platforms. Such findings suggest that it is crucial that mass-communication scholarship, in general, considers new digital media as a noteworthy platform. One component of digital media communication that undoubtedly deserves close attention is user-generated content.

Van Dijck (2009) specified that user-generated content is content that is produced by “active internet contributors, who put in a ‘certain amount of creative effort’ which is ‘created outside of professional routines and platforms’” (p. 41). As Dylko and McCluskey (2012) outlined the phenomenon that they, among others, label as user-generated content is also overlapping some other concepts, which figure in the literature under various labels; for example, web 2.0, produsage, citizen journalism, and participatory news. Political user-generated content is defined as “information products that are published online and openly available, thematically focused on politics, to a significant degree shaped by an active participation of the users, and where this participation occurred voluntarily outside of the user’s professional routines and practices” (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012, p. 257). The authors also adopted a conception from Burns (2008) that characterizes production of a user-generated content as a process where “nobody who is willing to participate is excluded” (Dylko & McClusky, 2012, p. 256).

Theoretical Discussion of Effects of User-Generated Content

Holbert, Garret, and Gleason (2010) while talking about the political impacts that mass media potentially have within the reality of new-media technologies and user-generated content, mentioned that: “full range of effects is not only plausible, but distinctly probable, even amidst the

extraordinary socio-technological change occurring in our media system and democracy” (p. 16). The authors further argued that in the contemporary mass-media environment, the members of public are now likely to become agenda setters and opinion leaders. This transformation of the public, from being mostly an audience to becoming active political communicators in discussion with political elites as well as with other members of the public, is assigned to the emergence of the expression platforms and the interactive capacities of the new media. Holbert and colleagues proposed that the political effects of the new media are considerable not only in terms of the impact that the political elites exercise but also in regards to the newly acquired impact that the public now exercises as well.

Thanks to new media, the prospect of the public’s capacity, when it comes to playing an influential role in political discussions, are also disputed by skeptics. For example, Bennett, and Iyengar (2010) replied to the enthusiastic views of Holbert and colleagues (2010) with the claim that political impact through the user-generated new media content might be possible, but in reality, it is highly improbable. Furthermore, the potential success of a political testimonial, which is created by a member of the public and communicated via the new media, is largely dependent on whether the traditional mainstream mass-media outlets, such as popular television stations and newspapers, decide to promote that specific political message (Singer, 2005). This way, the traditional gatekeeping of the dissemination of political information is still in the hands of the mainstream media organizations, which are embedded in larger political systems (Ali & Fahmy, 2013). Hence, just because a somewhat larger chance exists today, scholars warn that it is inappropriate to think about the true prospects of the public to talk to the political structures as revolutionarily altered by the new media.

Empirical Studies (Specifically Regarding Comments)

Some authors have argued that there are instances when social movements' frames become more likable and trustworthy to some portion of the public than the government's frames. For instance, Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) highlighted that although social-media content about protest events in Egypt was not always truthful and reliable, this particular instance of user-generated content was still considered very credible by a large part of the population as the governmental mainstream sources were intensely distrusted.

Experimental evidence suggests that user-generated comments have effects on audiences. Among notable empirical works on the effects of this of user-generated comments, Lee and Jang's (2010) results showed that online comments have an impact on both the perceptions of the overall public opinion as well as on one's own opinion about a given topic.

Some research has also called traditional effects theories into question in the new-media age. Propositions of the spiral of silence theory were tested in the experiment by Yun and Park (2011). The spiral of silence was shown to be an incorrect predictor of behavior in online settings under certain conditions, and it was shown that participants were equally likely to create an online user-generated comment regardless of whether their opinion is perceived as a majority or minority opinion in the offline settings. The spiral of silence argument worked in respect to perceived online public opinion. Participants who perceived that they are holding a minority opinion within online settings were less likely to create a comment than those who were in the majority. This study demonstrated an important causal effect of the user-generated content on the willingness of those who are of contradictory opinions on whether or not to participate in the creation of user-generated content.

Walther, DeAndrea, Kim, and Anthony (2010) conducted an experiment using YouTube public service announcement videos with anti-marijuana messages and the manipulation of

corresponding audience comments was the independent variable. The results revealed that social identification with authors of particular comments as particular participant's peers is related to the subsequent effects of such comments, specifically on the subject's assessment of the video. Hence, the researchers have been demonstrating effects of user-generated comments through experimental studies across various situations.

The dissertation investigates the effects of framing when presented in the format of user-generated comments. As the magnitude of the effects of user-generated comments are disputed by some theorists and yet confirmed by some empirical studies, it is necessary to conduct more of such studies. Only further experimental research can determine the extent and the limits of the effects of user-generated comments.

Furthermore, the potentiality of user-generated comments' conflict-sensitive framing being a predictor of audience's frames will be explored through a number of hypotheses and research questions. The exploration of conflict sensitivity, specifically in context of user-generated comments in addition to professionally-produced news stories, can importantly contribute to further theory building as such research enriches both the literature on peace journalism and the literature on various new-media effects.

III. Hypotheses and Research Questions

The first hypothesis offers a novel inquiry connecting the theory of peace journalism/conflict sensitivity to the theory of securitization. Despite the fact that the existing literature has not yet explicitly connected the two theories, a clear common ground might be established between the two, drawing from existing studies. One concept that helps to bridge the gap between the theories is the polarization of positions. Considering the experiment by Kempf (2005), the style of story framing that has the characteristics of conflict sensitivity contributes to

audience's perception of a conflict as less polarized. Perceptions of polarizations between groups of people tend to be associated with outcome variables that are related to securitization (Alexseev, 2011).

Other examples of drawing the links between the theories are present in the available literature. Conflict sensitivity is the clear normative antithesis to ultimate militarism. Sondergaard (2015) argued that militarist and interventionists policies of recent American administrations have been justified by securitization. Moreover, Sondergaard cited quotations from presidents and other elite representatives of the administrations making remarks that securitize foreign intervention, claiming that the failure to become militarily involved in the conflict abroad threatens the security of the United States. For instance, the author pointed out the speech of Madelaine Albright justifying the bombing of Serbia as "when we fail to make the needed investments, we place our own future in jeopardy" (p. 545). Such zero-sum game approach is indeed characteristic of the war journalism phenomenon, as characterized by Lynch and Galtung (2010). This characteristic demonstrates a negative relationship between conflict sensitivity tenets and securitization.

The reviewed literature provides enough leads to arrive at the conclusion that a hypothesis that links conflict sensitivity to securitization can be constructed. Furthermore, the list of empirical results of multiple reviewed studies suggests that user-generated comments also have an impact on audience's perception. Within such trend, conflict sensitivity in user-generated comments should have impacts as conflict sensitivity in professional-generated news content. The outlined hypothesis therefore states:

H1: Conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments predicts lower perception of securitization.

The second hypothesis tests some of the staple tenets of the peace journalism theory. Lynch and Galtung (2010) asserted that peace journalism is indeed a peace-facilitative type of media coverage due to its appreciation of complexities that are inevitably encompassed in each conflict. While war journalism depicts conflict as a matter of arena with two competing parties with one central goal, which is the winning, peace journalism investigates conflict formation, with an outline of the number of involved parties, a number of pertinent goals, and a number of issues (Perez de Fransius, 2014). Hence, peace journalism is sensitive to the nuances of a conflict. Such approach offers an appreciation of the complexities that emerge when there is focus on aspects of conflict beyond elite focus.

The question to ponder upon is whether the audience indeed sees the complexity as more apparent when it is presented using conflict-sensitive framing. In line with this theoretical reasoning, conflict sensitivity in media coverage should make conflict complexity salient to the audience. As user-generated comments should also have similar effects in this process, the following hypothesis states:

H2: Conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments predicts a higher perception of the complexity of the problem.

The next set of hypotheses tests the connection between peace journalism/ conflict sensitivity and emotional responses. The experimental study by Lynch and McGoldrick (2013) demonstrated that effects of peace journalism include changes across the spectrum of fundamental emotions. The authors particularly documented an increase in hope and a decrease in anger and fear. Their experiment was conducted using television material as stimulus. This dissertation study contemplates replication of this test with the focus on textual news stories material.

Furthermore, the dissertation study added the component of user-generated comments to expand the replication. Framing of professionally-generated media material has shown to have effects on audience's emotions in numerous socio-psychological category of studies (e.g., Balzarotti & Ciceri, 2014; Nabi & Keblusek, 2014). While some studies have explored the connection between the emotional appeal of the stimulus material and user-generated content creation behaviors (e.g., Dafonte-Gomez, 2014), the emotional effects of user-generated comments are not thoroughly explored by scholars. Many authors have stated that a significant portion of user-generated comments tends to be racist, chauvinist, or politically problematic through other ways (e.g., Guo & Harlow, 2014; Kopacz & Lawton, 2013). This tendency suggests a considerable deficiency of conflict sensitivity in the framing of events that is expressed in a large number of user-generated comments. The logical question that emerges from this situation deals with the potential emotional effects of such content on audiences.

As Lynch and McGoldrick (2013) reported, the most pronounced effects of peace journalism can be found on the fundamental emotions of hope, anger, and fear. Therefore, this dissertation also narrows down focus on these three emotions. The predictions stated in the following hypotheses set expect similar trends as those found by Lynch and McGoldrick. The proposed set of hypotheses states:

H3a: Conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments predicts an increase in the emotion of hope.

H3b: Conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments predicts a decrease in the emotions of anger and fear.

The first research question considers whether the members of the audience recognize conflict sensitivity in user-generated comments as a positive value. Within the theoretical

argument of peace journalism, Lynch and Galtung (2010) considered conflict-sensitive framing as valuable material for readers, which was empirically supported by Lynch and McGoldrick (2013). Peace journalism is associated with more positive emotions among audience. Furthermore, Schaefer (2006) found that audience evaluated the de-escalation-oriented peace journalistic texts as better than the escalation-oriented alternatives. Ivie (2009) argued that the spectrum of information that is provided in peace journalism is conducive for democracy as it enhances the knowledge that public should have in order to make political decisions. These outcomes of conflict-sensitive framing are culturally very valuable for a common understanding of positive impacts on society.

It is still empirically unexplored whether the conflict-sensitive characteristics of user-generated comments will be appreciated by audiences to be as valuable as professional media content tends to be. While studies that would look specifically at perceptions of the value of user-generated content are not available, there are some works, which explored aspects that can be associated with evaluations of various types of online content. For instance, scholars explored how perceptions about the identities of the authors of user-generated content impact use of and trust in the source (Das & Pavlickova, 2014). Some results show how positive evaluation of user-generated content correlates with behavior. Kaufhold, Valenzuela, and de Zuniga (2010) reported that people who consume and/or trust political user-generated content tend to be more politically active online. Interesting findings are thus stemming from studies that have investigated audience's evaluation of user-generated online content, which in turn makes it worthwhile to explore audience's evaluation of conflict-sensitive user-generated comments.

The lack of empirical studies on conflict-sensitive framing of online materials makes it difficult to propose a specific hypothesis about the audience's value perception of such material.

Furthermore, correspondence or incongruity of the level of conflict-sensitive framing in news stories in comparison to user-generated comments might play a role in impacting audience's perception of the comments. Hence, the following research question is more appropriate for the exploration of a potential tendency:

RQ1: Will conflict-sensitive framing in user-generated comments predict higher levels of perception of the positive value of user-generated comments?

The final set of research questions explores the effects of interactions between various types of framing in news stories and in user-generated comments. Interaction effects of peace journalism were not yet extensively studied. However, Thiel and Kempf (2014) found that the effect of peace journalism framing in new stories is diminished by the interaction effect of incongruent a priori mental models. The pertinent literature on this subject will be enriched with documentation of other and additional types of interaction effects that either reduce or inflate the possible positive impacts of conflict-sensitive mass communication.

The research questions revisit the outcome variables explored by the hypotheses. In this case, the focus is on the congruence or incongruence of conflict-sensitive framing or the lack of it in various types of content. The research questions are centered on illuminating the understudied mediating effects of user-generated content on the perception effects of professional-media content:

RQ2a: How will the interaction of various types of framing of news stories and user-generated comments impact the perception of securitization?

RQ2b: How will the interaction of various types of framing of news stories and user-generated comments impact the perception of the complexity of the problem?

RQ2c: How will the interaction of various types of framing of news stories and user-generated comments impact the emotions of hope, anger, and fear?

CHAPTER 3 “METHOD”

This study intends to explore the effects of conflict-sensitive framing. The notion of conflict sensitivity determines the selection of particular frame elements that are to be employed in news stories and user-generated comments. The detection of the effects of such framing requires an experimental study. Experiments provide control over factors of time-order, manipulation of causal variable, and elimination of alternative explanations (Babbie, 2004; Campbell & Stanley, 1963). While this method might not incorporate all the complexities and nuances of real settings, it serves to isolate potential predictive links between variables.

News stories and user-generated comments were included in the experimental stimulus. Different framing of these materials corresponded to the independent variable of conflict sensitivity. The stimulus was presented to a student sample. Repeated measures design was employed in the experiment. Hence, subjects were exposed to all potential levels of the independent variable. Then outcome variables were measured using a questionnaire after each exposure. This approach permits within-subject as well as between-subject comparisons.

I. Sample

The research subjects were recruited among students from the Wayne State University. The students were recruited using the SONA participant management system of the Department of Communication. The participants were rewarded with extra credit. The SONA system allows rewards for students while protecting the confidentiality of the participants.

The experiment was aimed to address differences based on multiple variables. To document links between multiple variables, random sampling from a general population is not necessary (Basil, Brown, & Bocarnea, 2002). Therefore, a student sample is appropriate for this

study. The requirements of a true experiment were satisfied by the random assignment of subjects to conditions (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

The population of students at Wayne State University is very heterogeneous in comparison to other institutions of higher education. The diversity of Wayne State students covers includes variety in terms of race, ethnicity, country of origin, and age. The descriptive statistics of the sample reflect several aspects of this diversity. Also, students from various majors take required courses offered by the Department of Communication, and therefore, they have the opportunity to enroll in research studies for extra credit through the SONA system. This adds another aspect of diversity to the sample, which is introduced as the students involved in the study are majoring in various fields.

II. Procedure

The study involved participation of human subjects, and hence the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required. A detailed description of the procedure was presented to the IRB with all mandatory documentation and materials. The IRB granted the approval of the study in October 2015. Data collection begun in November 2015 and was completed in April 2016.

The experiment was conducted in a computer laboratory. Upon arrival, the subjects were randomly assigned a specific condition. The subjects were presented the information sheet, which outlined the basic features of the study as well as the aims of this inquiry. The subjects were encouraged to keep this document for their records. The sheet also included contact information of the researcher, as well as the contact information of the IRB for the occasion that the subjects wish to raise a concern to the higher overview body. The subjects were given the opportunity to seek any additional clarifications before the start of the experiment, during the experiment, as well as after the experiment. The researcher was present during the entire course of the experiment to

address the potential questions of subjects as well as to address any technological difficulties that could occur during the course of the experiment.

The entire experiment was administered by the computer program MediaLab. First, subjects were given the option to establish their consent for participation in the study by clicking on the “okay” tab to begin the experiment. As the initial part of the actual study, a survey with questions measuring the level of potential independent and confounding variables was administered. Next, subjects were presented eight stories accompanied with user-generated comments. After each story and each corresponding set of user comments, a survey with measures of outcome variables was administered. Finally, a survey of demographic information was administered. The demographic variables were measured after the experiment to decrease the potential of demographic identities acting as unaccounted extraneous variables.

Upon completing the study, subjects were encouraged to ask any questions or raise concerns, and even follow up on the findings of the study with the researcher after the completion of data analysis, in case they were interested.

III. Stimulus Material and Manipulation Checks

Construction

The goal was to construct a set of news stories and comments that would serve as meaningful stimulus material. Constructing research material, rather than simply using existing news or user-generated content, introduces a level of control, which is a crucial facet in an experimental study (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). The researcher’s control over the construction of stimulus material allowed to keep attributes of the material equivalent across different conditions, while properly manipulating the attributes of the stories that reflect the independent variables (Lecheler, Schuck, & de Vreese, 2014). The reliability of the experiment in

enhanced when such control is exercised. Also, the materials for the user-generated comments were constructed as well. The construction process was informed by reviewing multiple news articles and user-generated comments.

The material was constructed after consultation with academicians as well as mass media professionals to triangulate the check of face validity of the stimulus. The approached professionals reflected on the credibility of the material's appearance. The suggested changes from the consultation were applied.

Manipulation of the Independent Variable

The theoretical concept of framing significantly assisted construction of the material. Lynch and Galtung (2010) defined peace journalism as a form of framing, especially in terms of the definition forwarded by Entman (1993). For the purposes of empirical research, Entman's take on framing is used by Matthes and Kohring (2008) in the construction of frame elements. Matthes and Kohring argued that Entman's widely used definition of framing, which includes (a) defining a problem, (b) its causes, (c) moral evaluation, and (d) solution recommendations, can be utilized to extract exactly the four listed frame elements as parameters to consistently identify frames in empirical studies. Thus, the approach of frame elements is also advantageous for the designing of stimulus for an experimental study. While the application of framing to journalistic material is inherently rooted in the theory of peace journalism, the application of framing to user-generated material is arguably as intrinsic. Any unit of interpretation of events, whether professionally-generated or user-generated, is some type of a frame. The notion that framing is essentially inevitable is present in the early works on framing in the communication field (Gitlin, 1980). Hence, the frame element approach is appropriate and sound for the purpose of designing a stimulus material that mimics professional as well as user-generated media content.

A. Framing of the News Stories

The design required each story to be framed in two potential styles: one style resembling peace journalism and the other, war journalism. The basis of the stories was same in both alternatives. Peace-journalism level was achieved by employing specific frame elements that are characteristic to conflict sensitivity, while war-journalism level included frame elements that lack conflict sensitivity. For instance, the definition of the problem frame element in the stimulus Story 1 about Afghanistan focuses on human suffering under the rule of anti-Taliban warlords when framed as peace journalism. When framed as war journalism, the frame element of defining the problem centers on the fight against Taliban, while potential abuse of civilians by anti-Taliban warlords is trivialized. Also, within the tradition of peace journalism, the perspective of civilians is cited, while the war journalism frame limits to elite narratives.

The frame element of moral evaluation is particularly crucial in the manipulation of Story 2 about the Ukrainian conflict. Peace journalism stresses on the complexity of a conflict by highlighting the wrongdoings committed by various involved parties. Hence, peace journalistic framing explores moral perplexity in the acts of rebels as well as in governmental forces. War journalistic framing narrows the problem down by highlighting only one of the involved parties as the villains, in this case the rebels. Therefore, in war journalism rebels are referred to as terrorists, and their abuse inflicted on the prisoners is seen as torture. In light of this mode of focusing on specific events as well as choice of specific terms, rebels are portrayed as immoral.

In the case of Story 3 on Kosovo, the crucial frame distinction is rooted in the interplay of frame elements of problem causes and solution recommendations. Peace journalism recognizes organized crime as one of the issues that fuel potential violence outbreaks in the region. Thus, solution towards sustainable peace must address organized crime. War journalism simply

attributes violence outbreaks to historic tribal hatred, which can be addressed only by military “peacekeeping” force. Furthermore, the peace journalistic version cites local sources belonging to marginalized groups, while the war journalistic version cites an American elite representative who endorses military presence in the region.

A similar interplay between frame elements of problem causes and solution recommendations was employed in the construction of the two versions of the story on Tajikistan, the Story 4. Peace journalism recognizes poverty as one of the causes of violence and support for terrorism. Hence, an addressing of poverty by the international community is the suggested solution. This position is attributed to a peace activist from the region. War journalism ignores poverty and simply explains the causes as rooted in the larger terrorism problem, which requires violent counter-responses. This position is attributed to the elites.

The peace journalistic frame of the Story 5 on Colombia defined the problem as ongoing violence of the internal conflict. Thus, in the Story, the electorate supports peace plans. Also, the frame element of moral evaluation is stressed with its focus on broad human suffering caused by the violence of the conflict. The frame element of problem definition under war journalism highlights trade in narcotics and the leftist leanings of FARC. This definition shifts the attention of the moral evaluation on consequences for the United States in connection to narco-trade, hence undermining the peace talks.

For the Story 6 about Ivory Coast, the frame element of problem causes in the peace journalistic version attributes the broader ongoing violence in the region to foreign interferences that favor violent approaches to issues. The solution element therefore requires nonviolent approaches. In the war journalistic version, the cause of the problem is determined as the militants

in the Ivory Coast. Hence, crushing the militants violently is offered as the solution element of this frame. This version ignores the larger picture, which is provided in the peace journalistic version.

Story 7 discusses the migrant crisis in Hungary. The peace journalistic frame defines the problem as a refugee crisis. Such a track, with stating specific countries of refugees' origins including Syria, Afghanistan, and Democratic Republic of Congo, locates the causes of the problem in the political violence in those regions. War journalism limits the problem definition to an ambiguous migrant crisis without specifying the causes of migration. Thus, the perception is diverged to an internal issue in Hungary, completely omitting the violent conflicts that are the root of the matter.

Peace journalistic version of Story 8 on Nagorno-Karabakh problematizes the ongoing instances of violence, which are due to the conflict between the self-proclaimed state and Azerbaijan, which claims this territory. This perspective is supported by the focus on plight of the people in the region, which also contributes to the problematizing of reoccurring violence from the perspective of the moral-evaluation-centered frame element. War-journalism-oriented framing has a different spin on moral evaluation, as here violent conflict is portrayed as the path to democracy. Using such ideograph as democracy serves to evoke moral justification for a spectrum of political means, including violence in the perception of the Western audience.

B. Framing of the User-Generated Comments

For the user-generated comments that corresponded to the stories, the main distinction of the framing was focused on the elements of moral evaluation and solution recommendation. This approach was chosen after reviewing a considerable number of online comment forums discussing international politics and violence. Specifically, comments tend to frequently offer moral

evaluation and solution recommendations. Furthermore, whenever appropriate, other frame elements were also incorporated into the framing of the comments in the stimulus material.

One of the main distinctions between conflict-sensitive and conflict-insensitive framing is rooted in humanization versus demonization of one of the conflicting parties. The frame element of moral evaluation is a key aspect of either humanization or demonization. For instance, the conflict-sensitive (peace oriented) comments about Story 3 (Kosovo) acknowledge the number of victims on all involved sides of the older conflict. This type of framing humanizes suffering and supports further calls for sustainable peace in the region, which is part of the solution recommendation frame element. Conflict insensitive (war oriented) comments tend to determine one group as the problem and point to the alleged immorality of the group and thus, the illegitimacy of their claim. The solution-frame element then clearly points to more violence in order to defeat demonized group. Such view is further reinforced by claims of inherent, even inborn, tendencies towards violence among specific groups of people. User-generated comments for Story 4 (Tajikistan) were manipulated to mirror the technique applied to Kosovo comments, simply changing the context based on the narrative about Tajikistan.

An analogous approach was employed to achieve framing manipulation in the remaining content of the stimulus. Peace-oriented comments for Story 1 (Afghanistan) and Story 2 (Ukraine) call for de-escalation of violence as a solution, while war-oriented comments to these stories see escalated violence as solution. In comments for Story 5 (Colombia) and Story 6 (Ivory Coast), the main distinction between peace and war-oriented framing is rooted in the respective moral evaluations. In comments for Story 7 (Hungary) and Story 8 (Nagorno-Karabakh), conflict-sensitive framing is distinguished by proposing peace as a solution recommendation, while-war oriented framing employs demonization of groups to render particular moral evaluations.

Overall, eight different stories and corresponding set of comments for each of the eight were developed. Each story and each set of comments were written with various alternatives to reach combinations of the four possible levels of conflict-sensitivity (more information on the manipulation from the perspective of subject's exposure is covered under the sub-heading Measures/Independent Variable).

IV. Measures

Independent Variables

The independent variable is conflict sensitivity. This is a nominal variable where low level of conflict sensitivity is captured in the characteristics of a war-journalistic frame, while the high level is captured in the characteristics of peace-journalistic frame. The experiment considers the four following different levels of conflict sensitivity: (1) peace-journalism–framed story with peace-oriented comments, (2) peace-journalism–framed story with war-oriented comments, (3) war-journalism–framed story with peace-oriented comments, and (4) war-journalism story with war-oriented comments. The short labels for these four levels are: (1) PP, (2) PW, (3) WP, and (4) WW.

Each subject was exposed to each level twice. This procedure was aimed to minimize the potential effect of the unaccounted confounding variables, which might occur due to, for instance, a subject's personal position on a specific story. Hence, each subject saw eight stories and comments with double exposure to each level. This procedure allows for within-the-subjects comparison besides between-the-subjects comparison, which is a given in the experimental design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

Furthermore, the random assignment of the subjects to one of the four possible conditions decreased the possible impact of unaccounted confounding variables. As each of the stories

represented conflicts in different regions and subjects were randomly assigned to conditions with various types of frames captured in the stories and user-generated comments, the potential impacts of extraneous variables was assessed. The conditions are depicted in the Figure 1.

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable is *securitization*, which was captured through a set of dependent measures. The following set of items was planned to be used: (a) *The story talks about a very important problem.* (b) *The situation represents a real threat to the security in the area.* (c) *The story shows that the values appreciated by most Americans are in danger.* (d) *The story described a problem so serious that it needs very special measures to solve it.* A 7-point Likert scale with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 7 representing “Strongly Agree” was used to capture an interval level of measurement for each item (Keyton, 2011). High scores on each item indicate high level of securitization according to a deductive model.

The second dependent variable is *perception of complexity of the problem*. This variable was the predicted outcome of conflict sensitivity, as derived from the expectations related to peace journalism. Specifically, conflict sensitivity alleges that a conflict is complex and multifaceted. In this context, the following set of items was planned to be used: (a) *The problem described in the story is very complicated.* (b) *I think that the news story doesn't provide a full picture of the problem it describes.* (c) *I need more information to form an opinion about this issue.* Again, a 7-point Likert scale was used to capture the interval level of measurement of each item, with high scores indicating a high perception of complexity of the problem.

The third set of dependent variables reflects on the *fundamental emotions*, which have been documented as outcome variables of peace journalism by Lynch and McGoldrick (2013). The prediction expects conflict sensitivity to be associated with lower levels of anger and fear and

higher levels of hope. The following items were planned to be used: (a) *Reading this story I felt angry.* (b) *Reading this story I felt fearful.* (c) *Reading this story I felt hopeful.* The 7-point Likert scale was used to capture the interval level of measurement of each item.

The fourth dependent variable is *perception of positive value of user-generated comments.* This outcome is theorized by the current study, where conflict sensitivity in user-generated content should be associated with higher levels of perception of the positive value of user-generated comments. The following set of items was planned to be used: (a) *Some readers' comments include important information on the story.* (b) *Readers should not comment on stories of this type.* (c) *I would rather read opinions of experts than opinions of the public on a story like this.* Item (a) is a positive indicator, and items (b) and (c) are negative indicators of the variable perception of positive value of user-generated comments. The 7-point Likert scale was used as an interval measurement of the level of each item.

The next chapter addresses final adjustment in measurement of the outcome variables due to internal-reliability concerns.

V. Conclusion

The methodological plan for the conduction of the experiment has been outlined in detail in this chapter. Also, the chapter reflected on a number of steps and efforts that have been employed to increase validity and reliability of the experiment. The following chapter offers descriptive statistics regarding the sample and analyses addressing the hypotheses of the study.

CHAPTER 4 “RESULTS”

The set of descriptive and inferential statistics derived using the data collected in the dissertation experiment is encompassed in this section. First, a description of the sample is provided, thus outlining the demographic as well as other characteristics of the subjects. Second, the process of measuring each of the outcome variables is outlined. Finally, the statistical analyses testing the hypotheses and research questions are included.

I. Description of the Sample

The final number of enrolled research participants was 125. One of the participants was dropped from the analyses as the individual had not followed directions and had completed the study within an unrealistic segment of time, suggesting that the participant was not reading the material. Hence, the final-tested aggregate of participants was 124. This is an adequate number of subjects for an experiment with a between-within-subjects design, where each of the participants are exposed to each possible combination of the independent variables (e.g., Hong & Len-Rios, 2015; Tokunaga, 2013).

As the descriptive statistics reveal, the mean of age was 23 years ($SD = 6$). The youngest participants were 18 years of age, and the eldest participant was 55 years old. 63% of the participants were female, and 37% were male. There were 2 participants declined to identify their racial/ethnic background. Approximately 38% of the participants identified themselves as white or Caucasian; about 20% as Middle Eastern or Arab American; 19% as black or African American; 15% as Asian, South Asian, or Asian American; approximately 5% as Latino or Native American; and approximately 4% identified themselves as mixed race or biracial.

Among the participants, there were 78% who reported that their primary language used at home is English, while 22% reported to using a language other than English at home. It was also

found that 52% of the participants speak only English, while 48% reported that they also speak other language or languages. In total, 18 different foreign languages were reported by the participants, which are: Arabic, Aramaic, Bangla/Bengali, Chaldean, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Korean, Punjabi, Serbian, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Telugu, and Urdu.

Among the participants, 2 students reported undeclared or undecided majors. About 38% of participants were majoring in some area in the communication field, such as public relations, journalism, or communication studies. Approximately 27% of the participants were majoring in natural sciences, medical field-related areas, or engineering. Approximately 21% of participants were majoring in business or finance-related fields and approximately, 12% of them were majoring in social sciences or humanities.

The respondents reflected on their political views by answering questions regarding their position on a political spectrum through a 7-point scale, with 1 corresponding to “very conservative” and 7 corresponding to “very liberal”. Just 5% of the participants selected 1 or 2, which suggests conservative leaning; 60% of the participants selected 3, 4, or 5 suggesting centrist type of leanings; and 35% selected 6 or 7, which corresponds to liberal political leaning.

In addition, 78% of the participants indicated that they obtain a large or a considerable portion of news from online sources; 63% suggested that they pay some degree of attention to international news coverage; 69% of the participants reflected that they do not tend to post online comments about international events and politics, while 15% indicated that they tend to comment on these types of matters; 34% of the participants tend to not read, while 48% tend to read other people’s online comments about international events and politics; and 62% of the participants agreed with the statement that online-news platforms should always allow sections for readers’ comments, while 15% of the participants showed disagreement towards this trend.

II. Intervening Factors in Between-Subjects Comparisons

Based on the characteristics of the sample, certain variables were selected to serve for between-subjects comparisons to contribute to the information surrounding hypothesis-testing. The first of those was gender, with the two outlined nominal categories of female (63%, $n = 78$) and male (37%, $n = 46$).

The next between-subjects variable was age group. The participants were divided into two categories: Those aged 18–26 were in the category of younger adults (83%, $n = 103$), whereas those aged 27–55 were in the category older adults (17%, $n = 21$).

The native language of participants was also considered. Participants were divided into two groups. One group corresponded to native English speakers (78%, $n = 97$), and the second group covered all native speakers of languages other than English (22%, $n = 27$).

Another considered variable reflects on comparisons between individuals who report to comment frequently online about international political issues and those who do not. Hence the participants were divided into the group of frequent comment contributors (15%, $n = 18$), which was determined by a scoring of 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point Likert scale where 7 corresponded to “strongly agree” with the statement about commenting frequently. Those participants who scored 1, 2, 3, or 4 were included in the infrequent comment contributor group (85%, $n = 106$).

Finally, the sample was divided according to political views. Very few participants reported to being unambiguously conservative (5%). With the goal to compose somewhat equivalent groups for meaningful comparison purposes, the participants were divided into conservatives/centrists (38%, $n = 47$) versus liberals (62%, $n = 77$). Conservative/centrists scored 1, 2, 3, or 4 on the 7-point scale, with 1 being “very conservative” and 7 being “very liberal.” Liberals scored 5, 6, or 7 on the same scale.

III. Checks of Operationalization of the Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable 1

Dependent variable 1 (DV1) is the perception of securitization. Initially, a four-item scale was constructed to operationalize the variable. Principal component analysis (see Table 1) defined three of the four items loaded as highly correlated components of one factor:

DV1a: The story talks about a very important problem (Factor 1 loading of 0.843).

DV1b: The situation represents a real threat to the security in the area (Factor 1 loading of 0.618).

DV1d: The story described a problem so serious that it needs a very special measures to solve it (Factor 1 loading of 0.834).

These three items were added to calculate the value of DV1.

One of the initially considered items, DV1c, was not incorporated into the final measures for DV1 because in comparison to other three items its component loading was low (Factor 1 loading of 0.052). Thus, this item was less correlated with the other items of the scale, which meant that it was not as appropriate as the other three included for the determination of the final variable.

The computation of the final DV1 was initiated by following the formula applied to each different exposure: $DV1a + DV1b + DV1d$. Then, the final values of two specific types of exposure, such as PP were added (eg., $DV1.PPexposure1 + DV1.PPexposure2$). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Thus, the final measure of DV 1 ranged on a scale from 6 to 42, with 6 representing lowest perception of securitization and 42 representing highest perception of securitization.

Dependent Variable 2

Dependent variable 2 (DV2) is the perception of complexity of the problem. A three-item–scale was conceived in order to address this variable. Principal component analysis (see Table 1) showed that these three items loaded as correlated components of the second detected factor:

DV2a: The problem described in the story is very complicated (Factor 2 loading of 0.333).

DV2b: I think that the news story doesn't provide a full picture of the problem it describes (Factor 2 loading of 0.824).

DV2c: I need more information to form an opinion about this issue (Factor 2 loading of 0.832).

While the item DV2a did not show such a high correlation value in comparison to DV2b and DV2c, it still showed a correlation that might not be wholly ignored. Thus, all the three items were included in the calculation of the final DV2. As all the three items were added, (DV2a + DV2b + DV2c) and each specific type of exposure was added (eg., DV2.PPexposure1 + DV2.PPexposure2). The original items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Therefore, the final scale for DV2 ranged from 6 to 42, with 6 corresponding to the lowest possible perception of complexity of the problem and 42 corresponding to highest possible perception of complexity of the problem.

Dependent Variables 3

Dependent variable 3 (DV3) is composed of three specific sub-variables corresponding to the three selected from the spectrum of the fundamental emotions, which are hope, anger, and fear. In previous studies, these variables were operationalized with just one item each. Therefore, for replication purposes, this study also employs just one item to correspond to each of the variables. A 7-point Likert scale was applied to determine a self-report of the subjects' emotional state

For each of the DV3 sub-variables, the final value was calculated by adding the reported values for each of the two exposures of the same type. For instance, to reach the value of DV3(fear)

for PP, the following formula was applied: $DV3(\text{fear})PP.\text{exposure1} + DV3(\text{fear})PP.\text{exposure2}$. Therefore, for each of the final values of the fundamental emotions of DV3 sub-variables, the scales ranged from 2 to 14, with 2 corresponding to lowest possible level of that specific emotion, and 14 corresponding to the highest possible level of that specific emotion.

Dependent Variable 4

Dependent variable 4 (DV4) is the perceived value of the user-generated comments. The variable is centered on negative evaluation. The first item, DV4a, represents positive evaluation of comments, and hence, its scale mathematic values are considered negative. The other two items, DV4b and DV4c, represent negative evaluation of comments, and hence, their scale mathematic values are considered positive. Indeed, principal component analysis (see Table 1) revealed that the items were loaded as correlated on the third factor, with specific directions of the correlations as originally envisioned:

DV4a: Some readers' comments include important information on the story (Factor 3 loading of -0.585).

DV4b: Readers should not comment on stories of this type (Factor 3 loading of 0.704).

DV4c: I would rather read opinions of experts than opinions of the public on a story like this (Factor 3 loading of 0.664).

The items loaded at correlations that comprise a justifiable factor, and thus, all three items are considered in the construction of DV4.

The required addition towards the DV4 was attentive to the direction of the items. Hence, the flowing formula was employed: $DV4 = -DV4a + DV4b + DV4c$. Similarly, as with the variables DV1 and DV2, the final version of DV4 was constructed by simple addition of the exposures of a specific type (eg., $DV4.PW\text{exposure1} + DV4.PW\text{exposure2}$). Each individual

item's numeric value was determined through a 7-point Likert scale. Considering the employed formula, the possible final values for DV4 might range from -10 to 26. The scale point -10 represents the lowest possible level of negative evaluation of the user-generated comments. The scale point 26 represent the highest possible negative evaluation of the comments. In other words, the higher the scale value, the more negative are the user-generated comments evaluated.

IV. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 (H1) stated that conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments predicts lower perception of securitization. Composite measures of DV1 provided the following set of means and standard deviations to test this hypothesis; PP $m = 31.4194$, $SD = 5.0543$; PW $m = 31.1129$, $SD = 5.9799$; WP $m = 30.3790$, $SD = 5.8153$; WW $m = 29.3952$, $SD = 6.2404$ (see Table 2 and Table 3). Repeated measures ANOVA (analysis of variance) test yielded that there is no significant interaction between peace and war-oriented framing of news story content and corresponding user-generated comments for the purpose of impacting audience's perception of securitization $F(1, 124) = 0.999$, $p = 0.32$. While the framing of journalism showed main effect, $F(1, 124) = 18.132$, $p < 0.001$, this strong effect is in an opposite direction than that, which was predicted by the hypothesis (see Table 4). Framing of user-generated comments had no significant main effect, $F(1, 124) = 2.717$, $p = 0.102$ (see Table 5). Therefore, the aggregate results fail to support the H1.

Between-the-subject comparisons regarding the H1 demonstrated no significant results when comparing groups based on the variables of age, native language, and frequency of commenting on political and/or international issues on the Internet. However, there was a significant interaction of gender and framing of journalism, $F(1,124) = 4.159$, $p = 0.044$, $\eta^2_p =$

0.033, where both females and males perceive peace journalism as suggestive of a high security threat. However, males perceive war journalism as posing significantly lower security threat than women (the means for two war-journalism stories were WP $m = 30.8333$, $SD = 5.4735$; and WW $m = 30.0256$, $SD = 6.2377$ for women, while the means for men were WP $m = 29.6087$, $SD = 6.3403$; and WW $m = 28.3261$, $SD = 6.1646$).

Still considering the H1, there was also a significant interaction of political views and framing of user-generated comments, $F(1,124) = 4.704$, $p = 0.032$, $\eta^2_p = 0.037$. Specifically, conservative and centrist subjects demonstrated the tendency predicted by the hypothesis when the story was framed as peace journalism and the framing of user-generated comments differed. For peace-oriented user-generated comments, these subjects reported lower perception of securitization ($m = 30.0213$, $SD = 5.2357$), while for war-oriented user-generated comments securitization increased ($m = 31.0426$, $SD = 5.0775$). However, liberal subjects demonstrated an opposite tendency with higher perception of securitization with peace orientation in user-generated comments (for PP $m = 32.0727$, $SD = 4.7756$; for WP $m = 31.2078$, $SD = 5.5473$) and lower securitization with war-orientation in user-generated comments (for PW $m = 31.2078$, $SD = 6.5011$; for WW $m = 29.7273$, $SD = 6.4556$). With additional analyses included in the account, the majority of the evidence points to only very limited support for H1 under very specific conditions.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 (H2) predicted that conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments is associated with higher perception of complexity of the problem. Addressing this hypothesis, the means of the composite measure of DV2 were as follows: PP $m = 29.1774$, $SD = 6.4770$; PW $m = 29.8387$, $SD = 6.1597$; WP $m = 29.8145$, $SD = 6.1702$; WW $m = 29.8710$, $SD = 5.6955$ (see Table 2 and Table 3). As the repeated measures ANOVA results

suggest, neither the main effects nor the interaction effect were significant. Main effect of journalism was insignificant at $F(1, 124) = 0.905, p = 0.343$ (see Table 4). Main effect of user-generated comments was insignificant at $F(1, 124) = 0.766, p = 0.383$ (see Table 5). Interaction was insignificant at $F(1, 124) = 0.707, p = 0.402$ (see Table 6). Thus, the aggregate results refute the H2.

Between-the-subjects comparisons were performed as well in order to address potential effects on DV2 among specific groups of the sample. Neither of these tests yielded any significant interactions. Thus, between-the-subjects comparisons also refute the prediction of H2.

Hypotheses 3

Hypothesis 3 (H3) offered the following predictions:

H3a: Conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments predicts increase in the emotion of hope.

H3b: Conflict-sensitive framing in news stories as well as in user-generated comments predicts decrease in the emotions of anger and fear.

The set of variables DV3 was collected and analyzed to address the predictions.

Hypothesis 3 a: Hope

Addressing H3a, DV3 (Hope) means were as follows: PP $m = 5.6371, SD = 2.4506$; PW $m = 4.8790, SD = 2.0226$; WP $m = 6.0565, SD = 2.3661$; WW $m = 5.2097, SD = 2.1080$ (see Table 2 and Table 3). Repeated measures ANOVA was performed to test the hypothesis.

Journalism shows a significant effect in decreasing hope, despite the opposite prediction of the hypothesis, $F(1, 124) = 6.149, p = 0.015$, which suggests peace journalism is associated with lower emotion of hope than war journalism (see Table 4). Supporting the prediction of the hypothesis is the main effect of user-generated comments, which is both significant and high, thus

showing that peace-oriented–user-generated comments are associated with increased hope $F(1,124) = 23.030, p < 0.001$ (see Table 5). The interaction effects between journalism and user-generated comments is insignificant at $F(1, 124) = 0.081, p = 0.777$ (see Table 6). Therefore, the aggregate results partially support the H3a.

Between-the-subjects comparisons were performed addressing H3a. Neither of these tests yielded any significant interactions. Therefore, the results found for the aggregate sample replicate between different groups of subjects.

Hypothesis 3 b: Anger

Addressing H3b, DV3 (Anger) means were as follows: PP $m = 7.8871, SD = 2.8831$; PW $m = 7.9597, SD = 2.7301$; WP $m = 7.4032, SD = 2.4724$; WW $m = 7.7097, SD = 2.9598$ (see Table 2 and Table 3). Repeated measures ANOVA test suggested that in divergence from the hypothesis, anger was significantly higher in response to peace journalism, with main effect of $F(1, 124) = 4.645, p = 0.033$ (see Table 4). Main effect of user-generated comments was insignificant, $F(1, 124) = 1.008, p = 0.317$ (see Table 5). The interaction effect was also insignificant, $F(1, 124) = 0.393, p = 0.532$ (see Table 6). Hence, the H3b is not supported by the aggregate data on the emotion of anger.

Between-subjects tests showed no significant interactions in impacting the levels of anger when considering gender, frequency of commenting on political/international issues, and political views. However, interaction of native language and framing of user-generated comments had a significant effect on anger, $F(1,124) = 9.565, p = 0.002, \eta^2_p = 0.073$. While the level of anger is consistently higher among non-native speakers, a particularly steep difference occurs with significant increase of anger when non-native speakers are exposed to war-oriented–user-generated comments. For example, for non-native speakers, exposure to WP showed mean of $m =$

7.4444, SD = 2.0817, with increase of mean for WW exposure to $m = 9.4444$, SD = 2.2246. In comparison, mean of anger for native English speakers is significantly lower for WW exposure at $m = 7.2268$, SD = 2.9669.

Moreover, between-subjects test also showed a significant interaction of age group and framing of user-generated comments on anger, $F(1, 124) = 5.089$, $p = 0.026$, $\eta^2_p = 0.040$. Younger adults responded to user-generated comments as hypothesized in H3b, with increased anger to war-oriented comments. For instance, holding journalism at a constant war frame, the mean anger of young adults increased from WP at $m = 7.4175$, SD = 2.4675 to WW at $m = 8.0291$, SD = 2.7563. However, among older adults, the emotion of anger actually increased as a response to peace-oriented–user-generated comments. The example means of anger among older adults showing this contrasting tendency are WP at $m = 7.333$, SD = 2.5560, and WW at $m = 6.1429$, SD = 3.4682. As the between-subjects comparisons suggests, there is a partial support for some aspects of H3b under rather specific conditions.

Hypothesis 3 c: Fear

Addressing H3b, DV3 (Fear) means were as follows: PP $m = 6.9435$, SD = 3.0022; PW $m = 6.9435$, SD = 2.8235; WP $m = 6.4355$, SD = 2.6511; WW $m = 6.5081$, SD = 3.0162 (see Table 2 and Table 3). Repeated measures ANOVA showed that the main effect of journalism was significant, but contrary to the hypothesis, higher fear was shown to be associated with peace journalism, $F(1, 124) = 7.938$, $p = 0.006$ (see Table 4). The main effect of user-generated comments was insignificant: $F(1, 124) = 0.063$, $p = 0.803$ (see Table 5). The interaction was insignificant: $F(1, 124) = 0.047$, $p = 0.828$ (see Table 6). Hence, the aggregate results fail to support H3b regarding the emotion of fear.

Additionally, between-subjects test were applied to results on the emotion of fear. Neither of the tested interactions showed any significant effects regarding fear. Hence, the aggregate data tend to apply across different groups.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 (RQ1) asked whether conflict-sensitive framing in user-generated comments predicts higher levels of perception of positive value of the user-generated comments. DV4 was indexed at negative value of comments, thus low variable values suggest perceived positive value of comments and high variable values suggest perceived negative value of comments. The results of means were as follows: PP $m = 5.6694$, $SD = 5.8902$; PW $m = 8.9919$, $SD = 6.3802$; WP $m = 5.8952$, $SD = 5.5228$; WW $m = 8.6613$, $SD = 6.1219$ (see Table 2 and Table 3). Repeated measures ANOVA showed a rather strong main effect of user-generated comments, specifically with peace-oriented comments being associated with positive evaluations, $F(1, 124) = 57.638$, $p < 0.001$ (see Table 5). Framing of journalism did not significantly impact these perceptions: $F(1, 124) = 0.023$, $p = 0.878$ (see Table 4). Interaction affect did not significantly impact the perceptions either: $F(1, 124) = 0.667$, $p = 0.416$ (see Table 6). The aggregate results provide a strong support for the notion suggested in the RQ1.

Between-subjects tests suggest that there is no significant impact on the variation of DV4 from the variable of gender, native language, age group, and political view. A noticeable interaction occurs between the frequency of commenting on political/international issues and framing of user-generated comments, but this interaction is not statistically significant at 5% limit for p ; $F(1, 124) = 3.231$, $p = 0.075$, $\eta^2_p = 0.026$. The same tendency, which was observed for aggregate data, is true for both the groups of less frequent and more frequent comment-contributors. However, more frequent comment contributors tend to evaluate user-generated

comments more negatively, particularly the war-oriented comments, than the infrequent comment contributors. Yet, this difference can be accepted as significant only under the conditions that the limit for p value would be increased to 7.5%. Overall, between-subjects tests provided no refutation of the prediction of the RQ1.

Research Question 2

The second set of Research Questions 2 (RQ2s) asked about the interactions of journalism frames and user-generated comments frames in impacting the dependent variables addressed in Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Interaction of framing of journalism and framing of user-generated comments does not significantly impact DV1 – perception of securitization (specific test results are outlined in the sub-section regarding Hypothesis 1). Interaction of framing of journalism and framing of user-generated comments does not significantly impact DV2 – perception of complexity of a problem (specific test results are outlined in the sub-section concerning Hypothesis 2). Interaction of framing of journalism and framing of user-generated comments does not significantly impact DV3 – fundamental emotions of hope, anger, and fear (specific test results are outlined in the sub-section discussing Hypothesis 3). Beyond the RQ2 scope, the DV4, which is the perception of value of user-generated comments, was also not impacted by the interaction of the framing of journalistic stories and comments (specific test results are provided in the sub-section on Research Question 1). As the respective statistical procedures of repeated measures ANOVA demonstrated, none of the dependent variables were significantly impacted by the interaction of journalistic and user-generated frames (see Table 6).

V. Additional Analyses

One of the items that were initially anticipated to correspond to securitization variable (DV1) did not align with the other items on the corresponding factors. Therefore, it was not included in the calculation of the final measure of the variable. The item represents this statement: *The story shows that the values appreciated by most Americans are in danger.*

The set of responses was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, identical to all other items of dependent variables, with 1 corresponding to “strongly disagree” and 7 corresponding to “strongly agree”. The responses to the item did not load strongly on any of the other factors either. Thus, for the following additional analyses, the responses to this item are considered as an individual ideological security-related variable “danger to values appreciated by Americans,” which is explored by a complementary analysis. The final scores considered for the analyses are calculated by adding together both scores for this variable under same type of exposure, such as PP. Hence, the final scale for the variable ranges between 2 and 14, with 2 corresponding to the lowest final score of the variable and 14 corresponding to the highest possible score.

As the repeated measures ANOVA test demonstrated, neither framing in journalism [$F(1, 124) = 0.621, p = 0.432$], nor the framing in user-generated comments [$F(1, 124) = 1.522, p = 0.220$], or the interaction between these two variables [$F(1, 124) = 0.086, p = 0.769$] had any statistically significant impact on the perception of danger to values appreciated by Americans. However, between-the-subjects tests yielded one significant result. Interaction of framing in journalism and frequency of contributing user-generated comments demonstrated to have significant impacts on the perception of danger to values appreciated by Americans, $F(1, 124) = 4.729, p = 0.032, \eta^2_p = 0.037$. Frequent user-generated comment contributors associate war journalism with higher endangerment of values appreciated by most Americans, for example, for PW $m = 6.5556$, while for WW $m = 7.6111$. Infrequent comment contributors feel that values

appreciated by most Americans are slightly more endangered when reading peace journalism, for example for PW $m = 7.7645$ while for WW $m = 7.3774$. However, a problem with accepting the significance of this results is moreover rooted in the fact that one of the two nominal groups under the variable (frequency of contributing user-generated comments) corresponds to just 15% of the sample ($n = 18$), who are the frequent comment contributors. While the remaining 85% of the sample are in infrequent comment contributors ($n = 106$).

VI. Conclusion

Based on the data collected in the experiment, a set of analyses had been performed. The analyses suggest statistical significance for some of the tested associations. However, a more detailed discussion is necessary in order to clarify some of the findings suggested by the statistical models. Hence, the next chapter discusses the findings in consideration of a broader context, within which these results ought to be interpreted.

CHAPTER 5 “DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION”

Serious socio-political issues such as violent conflicts are discussed on platforms of traditional media and new digital media. The impacts of professional and user-generated content represent a phenomenon that should be studied rigorously. The results of this study illuminate certain aspects of this phenomenon. Implications of this study can reach beyond communication about direct political violence to various contexts of political conflict.

Thought-provoking, and in some instances, even surprising findings about conflict-sensitive framing in media coverage and user-generated content were uncovered by analyses of data collected in this experimental study. While some of the findings support deductive predictions, which were based on established theoretical models, other findings suggest a need to re-evaluate assumptions in current literature on the pertinent topics. Several repercussions stem from the tendencies that were illuminated through the current study. The implications range from theory-building suggestions to practical applications, as well as from future empirical research directions to consequences of debates on media ethics and online-communication ethics.

I. Conflict Sensitivity and Securitization

Despite the predictions of the first hypothesis, neither conflict-sensitive framing in news stories nor in user-generated comments lowered the perception of securitization among the audience. Furthermore, peace journalism was actually associated with higher perception of securitization. This means that conflict-sensitive framing of journalistic content impacts the audience perception in exactly the opposite way than expected, based on the postulations of theory-informed literature. Such an unanticipated finding calls for a set of theoretical and empirical considerations.

Theoretical Considerations

Based on the deductive model according to the tenets of the respective theories, securitization should be negatively related to conflict sensitivity. Hence, perception of securitization among audiences should be decreased by peace journalism and increased by war journalism. The logic of this deduction is that violence is proposed as an acceptable means by war journalism (Tehrani, 2002; Kempf, 2003; Shinar, 2007; Lynch & Galtung, 2010). Violence is presumably more likely to be acceptable when a security threat is proposed. This presumption is rooted in the premise of securitization. When an issue is discussed as a security threat, it leads to an abridged perspective of potential political solutions, and thus, leads to increased chances of acceptance of means that are normally unacceptable (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998; Vultee, 2010; Watson, 2012). Peace journalism is arguably expanding the horizon of the perception of the problem, specifically expanding the problem beyond just the arena of security. As the empirical data failed to support the proposed deduction, and furthermore, supported a different tendency, the theoretical model has to be re-evaluated.

The first crucial point to consider in the re-evaluation of the theoretical model is the (perhaps fallacious) assumption that securitization is normatively undesirable. A large part of the existing literature treats securitization as negative and de-securitization as positive political constructs (e.g., Aradau, 2004; Roe, 2012). Many reiterations of the theory by Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998) tend to view securitizing move as a tool for expanding the powers of the elites, who form the few, while abridging some types of freedom of the citizens, who form the many. Political violence is one such freedom abridgement. Floyd (2011) revised the theory with her attempt to create “just securitization theory.” Floyd argued that in the instances when a referent object is legitimate, a threat to the referent object is objective, and a proposed response is appropriate, securitization should be considered as an ethically justifiable course of actions.

Through the lens of Floyd's interpretation of securitization, it can be concluded that peace journalism is indeed attempting to securitize. However, the extraordinary response would not be violence, but an extraordinary pressure to alleviate the violence.

The second important theoretical consideration is possible for evaluating the shortcomings in peace journalism's ability to impact the audience's perception in normatively desirable directions. This would mean that indeed some tenets of peace journalism in specific dosages could fuel rifts between groups by reinforcing security aspects of the problems, particularly so, as perceptions of different issues among audiences are already existing with some specific and culturally-congruent contours (Entman, 2003). Thus, any frames coming to the audience are accepted or rejected based on the previously-held cognitive schemes. In some cases, tenets of peace journalism could fall flat or even backfire. For instance, extensive focus on civilians' suffering can indeed fuel justification for more violence in retribution, instead of contributing towards a more peaceful settlement of the issue. Such cases would make certain attempts of peace journalism rather destructive. Upon further empirical investigation into these propositions, a number of new potential directions emerge for the redefinition of securitization in connection to conflict sensitivity.

The third worthwhile direction stems from the understanding of two possible outcomes of securitization. McDonald (2012) proposed that one type of successful securitization produces an acceptance of the perception of threat, while another type produces an acceptance of the measures to eliminate the threat. McDonald's interpretation would serve as a useful source of characteristics for a more refined measures of securitization as a potential complex outcome variable of conflict sensitivity.

Findings of this study support the notion that the theoretical connections between securitization and conflict sensitivity should be considered in a more expanded fashion. Each theory would benefit by the broadened research and discussion, while fruitful theory-building can also arise from combining securitization and conflict sensitivity. Thanks to this combination, perhaps certain shortcomings of each of the theories could be identified as some of the suppositions that were outlined in this sub-section.

Methodological Considerations

The present study included specific operationalization of peace and war journalism as well as conflict-sensitive and insensitive user-generated comments. Due to the limitations of available time and space for the experiment, certain choices had to be made for which frame elements of conflict sensitivity are employed in journalistic and user-generated content. Some characteristics of the chosen frame elements might have the properties that make them susceptible for securitization in either a positive normative sense or in a negative normative sense. However, as this is not one of the controlled variables, it remains to be uncovered in future whether this study-design-related choice could have impacted the results.

Similarly, a specific choice was made to operationalize securitization. Possibly, a different or perhaps expanded operationalization scale of securitization might lead to different results. Furthermore, an important interconnection of empirical choices and theoretical considerations transpire in this discussion. In this case, with the selected operationalization of securitization, there is no specific element that suggests acceptability of violence or any other normatively problematic aspect. The items refer to the importance of the problem, magnitude of a threat, and necessity of extraordinary means. Such operationalization is compatible with Floyd's (2011) just securitization. Thus, the interpretation proposed by Floyd is justifiable and pertinent to the design of this study.

Gender and Securitization

Interestingly, gender played a role in impacting the perception of securitization based on the framing of journalism. Particularly, the significant decrease of the perception of securitization when reading war journalism comes specifically from males. Vultee, Lukacovic, and Stouffer (2015) also found gender differences in security-related outcomes of news content. The authors suggested that the research should pay more attention to gender impacts on securitization perceptions. Such a course is also found relevant, when looking at the findings of Grabe and Kamhawi (2006) and Kamhawi and Grabe (2008), who demonstrated that men and women process information from the news differently. Future investigations are necessary to properly explain such differences, especially considering the fact that perceptions of peace and war journalism have never been discussed as different based on the gender of audience members.

However, there was not any significant impact of user-generated comments on the perception of securitization for either women or men. Thus, the gender-based impacts of securitization perception are significant only when considering professional media content, at least within the context of the findings of this study.

User-Generated Content, Political Views, and Securitization

The findings also suggest impacts that specific framing of user-generated comments has on perceptions of securitization. These findings are specifically detectable when recognizing political views of the audience. Conservative and centrist individuals tend to perceive higher securitization with war-oriented comments, while liberal individuals tend to perceive higher securitization with peace-oriented comments. Variables that address individual political perspectives, such as trust in a specific government, have been linked to differences in securitization perception when considering professional-media content (Vultee, 2010). This study

suggests that political view is playing a role also in the effects that user-generated content has on security perceptions. However, the role of political views' impact on the effects of journalism and on securitization perception has not been replicated in this study. Hence, it appears that a number of nuances, including previous political views, framing of journalism, framing of user-generated content, and the specific topic of the coverage, play an interconnected role in the formation of security-related perceptions.

The detection of any impact of user-generated content on perceptions linked to securitization is an important empirical addition to the available knowledge on the topic. The importation of securitization theory to the communication discipline is a relatively new endeavor (Vultee, 2010; Watson, 2012). For that reason, the role of user-generated content in the processes of securitization is still utterly understudied. Based on the findings of this study, and after bearing in mind that a number of various studies document a plethora of political effects of user-generated content (eg., Lee & Jang, 2010; Tewksbury, 2013; Winter & Kramer, 2014; Yun & Park, 2011), it appears that further explorations of securitization in user-generated content represent an important course of future empirical investigations and theoretical debates.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

Future research should address certain distinctions that were projected in the above-provided theoretical discussion. Specifically, future studies should distinguish between securitization, which can be characterized negatively or positively in normative terms. Such course will help to isolate the specific type of securitization, which is associated with conflict sensitivity. Besides, more clarified normative valence increasing the spectrum of items of operationalization and broadening the number of concepts associated with securitization would also expand the

depths of information that can be reached by future empirical studies. Developing a securitization scale can also be a fruitful aspect of similar efforts.

Subsequent studies should also expand the information on the ways in which gender, political view, framing of user-generated content, and other possible variables interact with the effects that conflict-sensitive news framing has on securitization perception. As this experiment detected, some interaction effects of those variables seem to be occurring. Specific mechanisms of the apparent processes could be outlined by future studies.

II. Conflict Sensitivity and Perception of the Complexity of a Problem

Recent studies have shown that news complexity impacts perceptions of importance of a crisis or a conflict. Specifically, Kleinnijenhuis, Schultz, and Oegema (2015) proposed that when news frames are less complex, audience perceives the situation as a crisis, which is also associated with an upsurge of negative emotions. War journalism (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Lynch & Galtung, 2010) is characterized as a frame that lacks in complexity as it oversimplifies a conflict. It appears that simple war-oriented frame leads to the production of low news complexity, which is the characteristic of a crisis-like situation, therefore eliciting the perception of crisis in an audience. However, studies have not addressed the perception of the complexity of coverage in connection to peace journalism/conflict sensitivity theory. This study supplements this missing slot in the literature.

According to the findings, perception of complexity of the problem is not related to conflict sensitivity. None of the tests showed any connection between conflict-sensitive framing and complexity perceptions. Peace journalism theory presupposes that increased appreciation for the complexity of the problem, which is at the root of the conflict, is an important factor in contributing to expected effects of conflict-sensitive framing. Therefore, theoretical implications of the

disagreeing results of this study ought to be further discussed. However, it is also possible to locate some potential explanations for the divergence from the theoretical prediction in the design of the experiment.

Theoretical Considerations

One of the frequently-cited guidelines of peace journalism assert upon the importance to reflect on the multiplicity of parties in conflict and the multiplicity of goals that each of the parties pursue within the conflict (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). Such a complex picture is expected to be more informative, which then arguably helps to build a stronger case for nonviolent approaches to solving the conflict. However, the results of this study show that conflict-sensitive framing does not appear to increase the perceived complexity of the problem for the audience. This means that when war journalism stands on its own, people perceive it as rich in terms of complex information as opposed to peace journalism. Interestingly, the presence of peace-oriented comments with war-journalistic content did not impact the perception of the stories' richness in terms of complex information either. Hence, the findings suggest that perceived complexity of the conflict does not figure among the effects of conflict sensitivity, at least not in the conscious perception of the audience.

Methodological Considerations

The design of the study presupposed that each type of story, regardless of framing, was of a comparably equivalent length. Equally, the sections with user-generated comments were of roughly equivalent lengths regardless of the framing type. This decision was made with the purpose of controlling for extraneous factors such as length of the material. The limitation that stems from this is the degree to which the complexity of a conflict-sensitive narrative could be developed in stories and comments. Peace journalism essentially asks for longer discussion of

conflicts than that, which is provided by war-journalistic sound bites (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). Incorporating the length of material as one of the variables would be an important next step to illuminate upon this potentiality.

Another important empirical question is whether the audience is perceiving the complexity of the problem consciously. It is possible that this might be a rather subconscious process at some levels. Therefore, self-report would not be the most appropriate method of addressing the perception of complexity. The expansion of the research on conflict-sensitive media effects into the realm of physiological responses, such as the study by Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers (2015), which measured physiological indicators of emotional state, is one of the directions that can help to address such questions.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

As the previous sub-section discussed in detail, the condensed length of each story and the comment section posed a limitation in terms of depth, and thus presented complexity of the issue. Also, the self-report method of collecting data about the variable of perceived complexity is a limitation. Therefore, future studies should address these two main shortcomings. Additionally, varying lengths of stimulus materials should be used as well as additional methods other than a self-report of complexity perception should be employed, which could perhaps include physiological measures or indirect indicators, such as recognition memory or reinterpretation of the narrative. Mitigating these design-related problems would lead to additional empirical evidence, which is necessary to make the decision of whether to continue considering or to dismiss the perception of problem complexity as one of significant effects of conflict-sensitive coverage.

III. Conflict Sensitivity and Emotional Responses

The inquiry into emotional responses to conflict-sensitive framing of news stories and user-generated comments brought unexpected and intriguing results in many ways. As all the emotional outcomes of peace journalism in this study are contradictory to the available findings from other research works, potential theoretical and empirical reasons for this discrepancy have to be discussed. Interestingly, the peace-oriented–user-generated content demonstrates some of the positive emotional effects that have been predicted. Thus, it appears that the emotional response to conflict-sensitive media content framing is a very complex process impacted by a multitude of factors.

Theoretical Considerations

Previous studies have detected an association between peace journalism and positive changes in fundamental emotions, specifically, decrease of fear and anger and increase of hope (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2013; Lynch, McGoldrick, & Heathers, 2015). Those result were not replicated in this study, and furthermore, they showed a consistent significant association of conflict-sensitive journalism and negative emotional impacts with decreasing hope and increasing anger and fear. From the theoretical perspective, this discrepancy in findings suggests that peace journalism is affecting emotional responses in a more complicated fashion than hypothesized thus far.

Conflict-sensitive framing is not a simple tendency in news reporting, instead it incorporates a complex and intricate set of framing decisions, which creates an integrated peace-oriented discourse (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2015). Some authors warn about oversimplifying the dichotomy between war and peace journalism and prefer to characterize the conflict-sensitive style of journalism as a fluid tendency, which is “one step ahead of ruling social discourse in the direction of de-escalation, conflict resolution and reconciliation” (Kempf, 2003, p. 9). Within such

understanding, it is foreseeable that emotional responses to conflict sensitivity will not be uniform and consistent in all instances as different types of peace journalism vary more or less from war journalism. Hence, emotional reactions to these different types would vary as well.

The fact that emotional responses to conflict-sensitive framing of journalistic content were consistently negative in this experiment suggests that some aspect of this specific study might help to explain this tendency. One possible explanation is that the choices of particular frame elements associated with war or peace journalism might have a strong impact on emotional outcomes. For example, a conflict-sensitive frame element of problem causes, which examines deep roots of the conflict is less likely to increase hope than a frame element that explores potential non-violent solutions of the problem. Also, the in-depth analysis of conflict-sensitive framing can be disheartening in comparison to oversimplified framing of war journalism. The selection of stimulus is essentially a methodological choice that then in turn has implications for the empirical findings. Hence, it is further discussed in the following sub-section.

Regarding user-generated content, conflict-sensitive framing did not impact fear nor anger. However, hope has significantly increased among the audience after exposure to peace-oriented comments. This was the only instance when the hypothesis was supported, yet, the support was rather strong. Conflict sensitivity in user generated-comments appears to be very important in impacting overall perception of hope toward reaching higher levels. Such outcome is consistent with the other findings of this experiment about the perception of conflict-sensitive comments as more valuable than war-oriented comments. Hence, it appears that conflict-sensitive framing in user-generated content can have important positive impacts on the overall perception of the problem.

Methodological Considerations and Future Research Suggestions

Further attention to the methodological differences between the previous studies and this experiment might serve as a source for possible explanation of the findings' discrepancies. The studies by Lynch and McGoldrick (2013), and Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers (2015) applied the classic experimental design in which randomly selected groups were exposed to just one type of framing, either war journalism or peace journalism. This experiment used a model where each subject was exposed to each type of framing with different stimulus stories. This design choice could have played a role in impacting empirical results. However, the theory does not provide a specific explanation justifying such impact. Thus, additional theorizing and empirical comparisons should be done to explore such options.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2013), and Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers (2015) used broadcast video content as the stimulus material. This study used textual journalistic materials as the stimulus. The theory does not contain any suggestions on how and why modality of journalism can impact emotional responses. Nevertheless, video material is by default richer in certain information with audio and pictorial materials that are not present with just a print news story. Hence, a video can provide more complex conflict-sensitive-discursive narrative (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2015). Perhaps, such complex narrative inspires positive emotions, while a simpler take on peace journalism in a brief story has an opposite effect. Future studies should examine this potential.

Looking at emotional effects of conflict sensitivity in user-generated comments, demographic variables of the audience played a role to a degree. Only for the emotion of hope, the conflict sensitivity was associated with increase of hope across all groups. As far as the other emotions are concerned, conflict sensitivity was associated with decrease in anger only within two groups. Younger adults and people whose native language was not English tend to respond with

increased anger to war-oriented–user-generated comments. Thus, close attention should be paid to demographic characteristics of the audience in future studies.

Essentially, follow-up empirical studies are necessary to explicate varying emotional responses to peace journalism as well as peace-oriented–user-generated content. The fact that conflict-sensitive framing of professional and non-professional media content affects emotional responses is in itself very important. As recent research suggests, emotional reactions to news-media content are related to information retention and opinion formation (Bas & Grabe, 2015; Kuhne & Schemer, 2015). Hence, analysis of emotional effects can also tremendously help in illuminating other impacts of peace journalism as well as user-generated content with conflict-sensitive orientation.

IV. Perceived Value of Conflict Sensitive Comments

While the theoretical conversation about conflict-sensitive–user-generated content is new for the academic literature (Farrell & Allan, 2015), empirical research of this phenomenon is in its metaphorical infancy. When considering professionally-generated media material, Schaefer (2006) found that audience evaluated conflict-sensitive stories as better than war-journalism type of stories. This experiment is the first study to inquire about audience’s evaluation of conflict-sensitive–user-generated content. As the findings very firmly suggest, conflict-sensitive–user-generated comments were evaluated as more valuable by the audience than war-oriented comments. The detection of this trend has a few important theoretical implications as well as subsequent normative and practical implications, which are discussed further. Additionally, empirical implications and future research suggestions are discussed.

Theory: Conflict Sensitivity, User-Generated Content, & Peacebuilding

Even among the critics of peace journalism, the consensus appears to be that peace journalism is “good journalism” – the criticism stems from the proposal that peace journalism is not any different than an ethical professional approach to the craft (Benn, 2015; Fahmy & Eakin, 2014). Empirical studies show that audience evaluates conflict-sensitive journalism positively (Schaefer, 2006). However, positive evaluation of conflict-sensitive–user-generated content was so far only assumed, but not empirically tested. This experiment filled the gap and provided the empirical evidence to support the deductive theoretical notion. The perception of conflict-sensitive framing in user-generated comments is seen as something that is more valuable than the content that lacks the properties of conflict sensitivity, suggesting that the audience consciously appraises user-generated content. Furthermore, as other analyses performed within this study suggest, user-generated comments impacted some aspects of the overall perception of the discussed conflict. For instance, conflict-sensitive comments significantly increase the perception of hope regarding the conflict.

The findings are an important piece of support for the broader theory of conflict sensitivity, which requires opposition to cultural violence in any form, including user-generated form. Any type of communication, professional or user-generated, is a part of culture. Any type of violence is initially supported by cultural violence, which justifies structural or physical violent abuses of groups or individuals (Galtung, 1969; 1990). Peace/conflict sensitive journalism is the normatively preferable journalism because it opposes elements of cultural violence in professional-media coverage (Kempf, 2003), and the empirical evidence suggests that the normative effects on the audience are positive (Kempf, 2005; Schaefer, 2006; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2013; Lynch, McGoldrick, & Heathers, 2015). As conflict-sensitive–user-generated content also has positive effects, the notion towards “citizen peace journalism” (Farrell & Allan, 2015) should be

incorporated within the theory of peace journalism. Such notion complements well the theory of broader conflict sensitivity, which covers all cultural contributions towards peace building.

Radical Media Ethics

Tehrani (2002) argued that peace journalism should be revered as the standard for professional journalistic ethics in the contemporary world, which is globalized and where responsibility of journalists is expanded with expanded media reach and international implications of the media coverage. With conflict-sensitive–user-generated content having similar positive effects as peace journalism, conflict sensitivity in general media communication, professional as well as user-generated, should be considered as the global ethical standard as well.

Ward and Wasserman have been proposing re-evaluation of mass media ethics in order to address realities of the contemporary media environment and the globalized world (Ward, 2014; Ward & Wasserman, 2014; Ward & Wasserman, 2010). They acknowledge the high relevance of digital media and related phenomena such as user-generated content for the re-negotiation of media ethics. Ward (2014) stressed that today’s mass media are (1) “democratized” as citizens are active suppliers of media content, and (2) “globalized” as the media content is commonly disseminated across borders. Hence, Ward asked for a re-thinking of the media ethics into democratized and globalized communication ethics for all via-mass-media-communicating citizens. Ward called for radical media ethics and conflict sensitivity is, arguably, a concept that essentially contributes to global-media ethics.

Ward (2014) also stressed that the new radical media ethics should embrace “unity in difference” (p. 9), as this type of ethical code has to be co-constructed by the global community of citizens, as well as followed by this community. In order to engage with the possibility of globalization of media ethics, Christians and Nordenstreng (2004) explored possible universal

principles by analyzing moral teachings of several cultures. They outlined a set of principles, which in many ways overlap with the basic tenets of peace journalism (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). Christians and Nordenstreng highlighted (1) human dignity, (2) truth, and (3) nonviolence. These three global moral values are compatible with Lynch and Galtung's four basic principles of peace journalism, which are orientation towards (1) truth instead of propaganda, (2) people instead of elites, (3) causes of the conflict itself instead of symptomatic violence, and (4) nonviolent solution instead of violent victory. Such user-generated content that adheres to the outlined principles would be understandably perceived as valuable by the audience, which explains positive evaluation of conflict-sensitive comments by the audience in this experiment. Hence, conflict sensitivity in any type of media communication represents an important input for further construction of the theory of radical global media ethics.

Praxis

Empirical findings of this experiment support the theoretical model, which positions conflict-sensitive communication, professional as well as user-generated, as a part of a broader effort towards peace building. Local as well as global forms of peace building are encompassed within this notion. The normative proposal, which captures the notion, is radical media ethics. Besides the thus-far discussed theoretical tenets of the notion, it is absolutely crucial to discuss the practical aspects as well, especially so because the conflict-sensitive global-media ethics proposal presents a great burden of responsibility upon mass-media communicators, both professionals as well as enthusiasts such as the contributors of user-generated content.

Farrell and Allan (2015) presented a comprehensive discussion of challenges, possibilities, and limitations of "citizen peace journalism" by focusing on specific examples of user-generated video footage material documenting abuses of human rights in many contexts, including violent

conflict. While some technological aspects of limitations can be addressed over time, new limitations arise with the development of a genre such as conflict-sensitive–user-generated content. For instance, certain important conflict-sensitive–user-generated materials might escape wider attention as they become lost in the massive excess of various other materials that are plentiful on digital media.

The whole array of practical considerations must be further addressed with inputs, not just merely from academic and professional debates on the topic, but also from the wider mass of the global-media communicators. One of the most important issues is the fact that the discussions about conflict sensitivity and global-media ethics are performed among academics and in some instances also among academics and media professionals. Therefore, it is crucial to transport the pertinent conversations to the wider global public (Ward, 2014). One path is through the platforms of formal education. However, even peace journalism is not a broadly implemented concept within the journalism education (Benn, 2015). Even though peace journalism did not become the dominant paradigm in mass-communication schools, conflict sensitivity as a broader concept within the even broader concept of radical media ethics might have more success. Media effects research is the type of evidence, which has the potential to justify the case for expanding the education about conflict-sensitive communication.

Future Research Suggestions

This study is at the frontier of the research works on the effects that conflict-sensitive–user-generated content has on its audiences. Hence, the results of this study represent initial pieces of evidence, which are encouraging as they suggest positive effects. Yet, it is crucial to expand this body of research. Future studies on media effects should explore different contexts in order to determine other effects as well as the limitations of the effects. While experimental studies are

appropriate for research on effects, other types of studies are also crucial for expanding the overall understandings, which we have about user-generated content phenomena. For instance content and discourse analyses assist in providing valuable description of media content, while also serving as a useful source of information for the designing of experimental stimuli (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2013).

Specifically considering experimental research on media effects, certain additions to outcome measures would truly benefit from an exploration of the impacts of conflict sensitivity. Future studies should expand outcome measures beyond perception-oriented variables. For example, Dardis (2007) employed intended behavior measures as outcome variables of media framing of socio-political issues. Such an approach is achieved by asking a type of question regarding how the research participant would vote in a hypothetical election regarding an issue, for example. Another possibility is to go beyond the intended behavior to actual behavior. For instance, research participants might be asked to sign a petition or donate to a cause directly related to an issue. Similar design will significantly enrich the effects research in the area, especially as it would test theoretical works, which suggest important societal impacts of conflict-sensitive framing of the media content.

Moreover, future studies should explore factors that limit or possibly magnify effects of conflict-sensitive–user-generated content. Winter and Kramer (2014) found that audiences pay more attention to user-generated content that is recommended by other users (for instance, a large number of “likes” for a particular unit of user-generated content). Spence and colleagues (2013) found that user-generated content is evaluated as more or less credible based on the demographic identity of the perceived author of the content. The mentioned findings provide few new variables,

which might moderate the effects of conflict-sensitive–user-generated content. Hence, new studies should explore the effects of these factors.

Comparisons of various groups among the research participants in this experiment has shown that more frequent contributors of user-generated content tend to be more critical in their evaluation of all comments. Particularly, frequent comment contributors evaluated war-oriented–comments considerably more negatively than participants who contribute comments less frequently. This finding suggests that behavioral characteristics regarding digital media and user-generated content participation activities also moderates the effects of user-generated materials of other contributors. Accordingly, such behavioral variables are another source of important factors to be considered by future studies.

V. Conclusion

The explorations within this study aimed to contribute to the academic literature and to a broader knowledge-forming initiative in three main ways. The study focused on providing additional empirical evidence on media effects to add to the discussion required for arriving at a more comprehensive theory of conflict-sensitivity stemming from peace journalism. The study also strived to augment the body of evidence available on largely unknown spectrum of the effects of user-generated content. Finally, the theoretical endeavors of the study also attempted to enrich the normative discussion about journalism as well as general online mass communication, which provides a set of implications that are of significant relevance in the contemporary world.

The analyses of experimentally-obtained data revealed that the connection between conflict sensitivity and securitization is more intricate than was originally imagined. Conflict-sensitive journalism was associated with an increase in securitization. It is possible that further explorations, which will recognize various normative orientations of securitization, will clarify this puzzling

phenomenon. Furthermore, the analyses showed that conflict-sensitive journalism is associated with negative emotional reactions, particularly the increase of anger and fear as well as decrease of hope. These results are contradictory to the results of previous studies, suggesting that peace journalism and its emotional effects need to be carefully examined as a complex phenomenon with a range of framing variations as well as with a complex continuum of effects. Hence, the study provided a set of various considerations for future theoretical and empirical works, which will refine the theory of peace/conflict sensitive journalism.

The exploration of potential effects of conflict-sensitive framing in user-generated comments revealed important effects. The audience perceived conflict-sensitive comments as more valuable than war-oriented comments. Moreover, conflict-sensitive–user-generated comments were associated with an increase in hope. Hence, this study suggests that conflict sensitivity has positive effects on audience when presented in user-generated content form. It means that impacts that were theorized to stem from peace journalism are also applicable to peace-oriented framing in non-professional media content. Considering these findings, it is important that the theory of peace journalism is expanded to, perhaps, *theory of peace citizen journalism* or *theory of conflict-sensitive–user-generated content*.

Works that discuss peace journalism/conflict sensitivity are deeply connected to normative debate. Hence, discussion about peace journalism have been developed while paying close attention to professional and educational implications (eg., Lynch & McGoldrick, 2013; Benn, 2015). This study as well as some other recent empirical works on peace journalism (Thiel & Kempf, 2014) endorse that the effects of peace journalism are further explored, so that the recommendations for media educators and media professionals can be refined according to the updated and improved theory of conflict sensitive/peace journalism.

The findings that conflict-sensitive–user-generated content has an effect on the audience means that normative discussion on matters such as violent conflicts reaches beyond media professionals and their educators. Any new-media–savvy individual can be a contributor of conflict-sensitive or war-oriented content via various online and mobile platforms. Thus, Ward (2014) proposed that the current media landscape requires a redefinition of media ethics, carried out beyond the realm of media professionals. Ward argued for radical media ethics, which should be co-constructed and followed by all media communicators, professionals, as well as nonprofessionals. Radical media ethics is global and democratic, just as contemporary mass media are. The application of this proposal is very difficult to fathom at the point. However, it is crucial that academics, media professionals, and citizens begin this process. A failure to begin this process can result in McLuhan’s (1968) bleak vision of “total war,” where all the citizens are involved in a broader mediated conflict, as propaganda contributors, as their own kind of combatants.

This study provided additional empirical material to enrich the debate about conflict-sensitive communication. The collected evidence suggests that conflict-sensitive framing in both professional and user-generated forms has certain effects on how audience perceives news about wars and other instances of political violence. Furthermore, this inquiry proposes a future research program to expand and refine the existing knowledge about the impacts of conflict-sensitive framing. Such a research course will contribute to theory-building endeavors that are relevant not only for academics, but also for media professionals, as well as all citizens communicating on mass-media platforms of the contemporary world. Implications of conflict-sensitive journalism and user-generated content can be applied beyond overt political violence to conflicts that range from large-scale global tensions to localized problems within small communities.

TABLES

Table 1

Pattern Matrix of Factor Analysis

	Components		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
DV1a	.843*	-.104	-.116
DV1b	.618*	-.036	.082
DV1c	.052	-.140	.069
DV1d	.834*	-.005	-.006
DV2a	.565	.333	.054
DV2b	.009	.824*	.021
DV2c	-.023	.832*	.008
DV4a	-.034	.166	-.585*
DV4b	-.042	.014	.704*
DV4c	.017	.130	.664*

Note. Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Star symbol () labels measure items used in calculation of the variables.*

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the Main Study Variables – Part 1 (Peace Journalism)

Variable	Peace Journalism Stories	
	Peace-Oriented UGC	War-Oriented UGC
	M (SD)	M (SD)
DV1 (securitization)	31.42 (5.05)	31.11 (5.98)
DV2 (problem complexity)	29.18 (6.48)	29.84 (6.16)
DV3 (anger)	7.89 (2.88)	7.96 (2.73)
DV3 (fear)	6.94 (3.00)	6.94 (2.82)
DV3 (hope)	5.64 (2.45)	4.88 (2.02)
DV4 (perceived UGC value)	5.67 (5.89)	8.99 (6.38)

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of the Main Study Variables – Part 2 (War Journalism)

Variable	War Journalism Stories	
	Peace-Oriented UGC	War-Oriented UGC
	M (SD)	M (SD)
DV1 (securitization)	30.38 (5.82)	29.40 (6.24)
DV2 (problem complexity)	29.81 (6.17)	29.87 (5.70)
DV3 (anger)	7.40 (2.47)	7.71 (2.96)
DV3 (fear)	6.44 (2.65)	6.51 (3.02)
DV3 (hope)	6.06 (2.37)	5.21 (2.11)
DV4 (perceived UGC value)	5.90 (5.52)	8.66 (6.12)

Table 4

Analysis of Variance Results Testing Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, and Research Question 1 for Effects of Journalism

Variable	F	η^2	p
DV1 (securitization)	18.132*	0.128	<0.001
DV2 (problem complexity)	0.905	0.007	0.343
DV3 (anger)	4.645*	0.036	0.033
DV3 (fear)	7.938*	0.061	0.006
DV3 (hope)	6.149*	0.048	0.015
DV4 (perceived UGC value)	0.024	0.000	0.878

Note. Star symbol () signifies statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.*

Table 5

Analysis of Variance Results Testing Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, and Research Question 1 for Effects of User-Generated Comments

Variable	F	η^2	p
DV1 (securitization)	2.717	0.022	0.102
DV2 (problem complexity)	0.766	0.006	0.383
DV3 (anger)	1.008	0.008	0.317
DV3 (fear)	0.063	0.001	0.803
DV3 (hope)	23.030*	0.158	<0.001
DV4 (perceived UGC value)	57.638*	0.319	<0.001

Note. Star symbol () signifies statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.*

Table 6

Analysis of Variance Results Testing Research Question 2 – Interaction Effects between Journalism and User-Generated Comments

Variable	F	η^2	p
DV1 (securitization)	0.999	0.008	0.320
DV2 (problem complexity)	0.707	0.006	0.402
DV3 (anger)	0.393	0.003	0.532
DV3 (fear)	0.047	0.000	0.828
DV3 (hope)	0.081	0.001	0.777
DV4 (perceived UGC value)	0.667	0.005	0.416

FIGURES

Figure 1

Experimental Conditions

	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3	Condition 4
Story 1	PP	PW	WP	WW
Story 2	PW	WP	WW	PP
Story 3	WP	WW	PP	PW
Story 4	WW	PP	PW	WP
Story 5	PP	PW	WP	WW
Story 6	PW	WP	WW	PP
Story 7	WP	WW	PP	PW
Story 8	WW	PP	PW	WP

APPENDIX A: STIMULUS MATERIAL

Story 1 – Peace Journalism

US-trained anti-Taliban militias inspire fear in villages

Rahimullah used to be a farmer — just a “normal person living an ordinary life,” as he put it. Then he formed his own militia few years ago and found himself swept up in America’s exit strategy from [Afghanistan](#).

With about 200 men loyal to him, Rahimullah, 56, soon discovered a patron in the United States Special Forces, who provided everything he needed: rifles, ammunition, cash, even sandbags for a guard post in Aghu Jan, a remote village in Ghazni Province.

Then the Americans pulled out, leaving Rahimullah behind as the local strongman, and as his village’s only defense against a [Taliban](#) takeover.

“We are shivering with fear,” said one resident, Abdul Ahad. Then he explained: He and his neighbors did not fear the Taliban nearly as much as they did their protectors, Rahimullah’s militiamen, who have turned to kidnappings and extortion.

Mr. Ahad ran afoul of them in January, he said in a telephone interview. Militiamen hauled him to a guard station and beat him so badly that neighbors had to use a wheelbarrow to get him home.

“For God’s sake, take these people away from us,” Mr. Ahad, 36, said of Rahimullah’s militiamen. “We cannot stand their brutality.”

About 50 miles northeast of Mr. Ahad’s village, other anti-Taliban fighters arrested a 13- or 14-year-old boy in January and then killed him, the boy’s father said.

Asked about his militia’s treatment of the people, he acknowledged expelling several of his men who abused villagers. “I warned them several times not to rob or harass the people,” Rahimullah said. But in the same interview, he also claimed that many of the accusations against his men were part of a pro-Taliban conspiracy.

Story 1 – War Journalism

Accusations against US-trained anti-Taliban militias refuted by a commander

Rahimullah used to be a farmer — just a “normal person living an ordinary life,” as he put it. Then he formed his own militia few years ago and found himself swept up in America’s exit strategy from [Afghanistan](#).

With about 200 men loyal to him, Rahimullah, 56, soon discovered a patron in the United States Special Forces, who provided everything he needed: rifles, ammunition, cash, even sandbags for a guard post in Aghu Jan, a remote village in Ghazni Province.

Then the Americans pulled out, leaving Rahimullah behind as the local strongman, and as his village’s only defense against a [Taliban](#) takeover.

In Ghazni Province, the drive to create militias gained momentum after a series of anti-Taliban uprisings in 2012 emerged in areas once considered lost. Until they pulled out of Ghazni’s districts last year, American Special Operations units gave cash, ammunition and even armored vehicles to men who had little or no official connection to the Afghan government and were often former insurgents themselves.

One of them is Abdullah, a militia commander still calls the American Special Forces soldiers “my brothers.” The Americans, he said, had once fought alongside him in Ghazni’s Andar district, offering a sense of discipline — not to mention firepower and air support.

Recently claims have been raised alleging anti-Taliban militias violate human rights. Local residents have accused Rahimullah’s and Abdulla’s men of kidnappings and extortion.

Rahimullah replied that the accusations against his men were part of a pro-Taliban conspiracy.

Story 1 – Readers' Comments

Peace oriented

-But I know Taliban tortures captured militias. Lot of evidence. Militias must defend themselves.

-maybe so, but maybe promoting dignity and understanding can change the hearts and minds of the enemy, ending this stupid war sooner and with less bloodshed

-Good God - the horrors of war!! the last time a US audience had a chance to view this truth on the ground was in Vietnam. War is ugly,

-I think I have to be critical and still view the conflict from multiple sides and "understand" multiple sides. I heard something that after Rahimullah's militias harassed villagers few times, they were reprimanded by authorities. They went too far. But they were in the war for too long and perhaps stopped seeing the line between what is okay and what's not.

War oriented:

-I have no sympathy for those villagers as they were probably helping Taliban, but the guys trained by US military should be above some kidnapping and stuff like that.

-just kicked some terrorist asses.

-Abuses of villagers by militias are absolutely unacceptable.

-Acceptable? When you lose friends every day, seeing them with their heads blown off, come here and talk about what's acceptable....

-They probably deserved what Rahimullah's people did. Why do some people seriously think that those abused wouldn't be doing just as bad if not worse if the war was going Taliban's way?

-Rahimullah is US-backed terrorist and should be tried for war crimes. UN should act now.

*

Story 2 – Peace Journalism

Separatists accused of mistreatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war

The Kiev-based Center for Civil Liberties is preparing the groundwork for prosecution of well-known **rebel** commander Givi, who was shown on several YouTube videos earlier this year **mistreating** captive Ukrainian soldiers.

Mikhail Tolstykh, better known as Givi, is a leader of the **anti-government** battalion “Somali” fighting in Eastern Ukraine **on the side of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic.**

One of the videos shows Givi using a knife to cut the military insignia off captives’ jackets and stuffing them into their mouths.

Then the captives are blindfolded and driven to downtown Donetsk, where several elderly women are seen beating and throwing eggs at them.

Few days after the videos were released, Donetsk People’s Republic Prime Minister Alexander Zakharchenko handed the mistreated captives back to the Ukrainian military in exchange for captured rebels.

The Ukrainian captives showed several bruises on their bodies, but reported that the rebels provided basic medical treatment to them.

According to Zakharchenko: “We try hard to adhere to Geneva Conventions, but it is difficult to keep my soldiers calm when their relatives, civilians, are killed daily by Ukrainian artillery shelling.”

Story 2 –War Journalism

Separatists torture Ukrainian prisoners of war

The Kiev-based Center for Civil Liberties is preparing the groundwork for prosecution of well-known separatist commander Givi, who was shown on several YouTube videos earlier this year physically abusing and tormenting captive Ukrainian soldiers.

Mikhail Tolstykh, better known as Givi, is a leader of the pro-Russian separatist battalion “Somali” fighting in Eastern Ukraine.

One of the videos shows Givi using a knife to cut the military insignia off captives’ jackets and stuffing them into their mouths.

Then the captives are blindfolded and driven to downtown Donetsk, where several elderly women are seen beating and throwing eggs at them while shouting “you Ukrainian fascists came here to kill our children.”

Oleksandra Matviychuk, head of the Center for Civil Liberties calls what appears in the videos “terrorists’ flagrant violations of the Geneva Conventions.”

According to Matviychuk: “The YouTube videos showing actions of a separatist warlord Givi may also provide graphic evidence of war crimes.”

Givi expresses allegiance to the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic – break-away Ukrainian region. Ukrainian authorities consider Donetsk People’s Republic’s supporters a terrorist group.

Story 2 - Readers' Comments

Peace oriented

-But I know Ukrainian army tortures captured separatists. Many videos.

-maybe so, but maybe promoting dignity and understanding can change the hearts and minds of the enemy, ending this stupid war sooner and with less bloodshed

-Good God - the horrors of war!! The last time a US audience had a chance to view this truth on the ground was in Vietnam. War is ugly,

-I think I have to be critical and still view the conflict from multiple sides and "understand" multiple sides. I heard something that after Givi "harassed" the Ukr. soldiers, he talked to his superior commander about the situation how he needed a sort of break. He went too far. But he was in war already for a whole year then.

War oriented

-I have no sympathy for those fascists, but we should be above that kind of behavior. We are not animals like them.

-just kicked some fascist asses.

-What that commander did was absolutely unacceptable.

-Acceptable? When you lose friends every day, seeing them with their heads blown off, come here and talk about what's acceptable....he didn't kill them, they can consider themselves lucky.

-The Fascist-supporting scum deserved what Givi did to them. Why do some people seriously think that those abused wouldn't be doing just as bad if not worse if the war was going Ukrainians' way?

-Givi is pro Russian terrorist and that video will serve as good evidence when he will be tried for war crimes. UN should act now.

*

Story 3 – Peace Journalism

Houses of ethnic Roma torched in Kosovo

Several homes of ethnic Roma in central rural region of Kosovo were set ablaze last night.

“Recently many Roma have been under attack from the remnants of criminal militias that operate in the region even through the war ended,” a Romani community leader said, “They are armed and dangerous. Clashes between these groups over territory for their illegal activities unfortunately often spread to broader communities and civilians fall victims.”

Kosovo is the subject of a territorial dispute between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Kosovo. The latter declared independence on 17 February 2008, but Serbia continues to claim it as part of its own sovereign territory.

Kosovo's independence has been recognized by 106 out of 193 United Nations member states. The world community continues to be divided on the international recognition of Kosovo.

The territorial dispute has left the local police unable to address issues of organized crime that are closely connected to many incidents of escalated violence.

“A political solution of the Kosovo dispute should be a priority as it will set a ground for effective management of the territory,” US activist from the organization “Peace in the Balkans” said, “This will finally put a tap on organized crime that runs rampant, destroys lives, and endangers the fragile peace.”

Story 3 – War Journalism

New ethnic violence in Kosovo

Several homes of ethnic Roma in central rural region of Kosovo were set ablaze last night.

“Recently Roma have been under attack from the remnants of Albanian militias that still operate in the region,” a Romani official said, “The recent attacks against our villages were by Albanians. There are also aggressive Serbian militias that are hostile to Roma in our region.”

The main ethnic conflict is between Kosovo Albanian majority and Serbian minority. Sub-minority of Roma is perceived with distrust by both Serbs and Albanians.

Kosovo is the subject of a territorial dispute between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Kosovo. The latter declared independence on 17 February 2008, but Serbia continues to claim it as part of its own sovereign territory.

Kosovo's independence has been recognized by 106 out of 193 United Nations member states. The world community continues to be divided on the international recognition of Kosovo.

US Vice President Joe Biden commented on the possibility of increasing the number of US troops among the UN mission in Kosovo: “History will judge us harshly if we allow the hope of liberated and democratic Kosovo evaporate because we fail to stay the course.”

Story 3 – Readers' Comments

Peace oriented

1

Problems in the Balkans run far back. **By no means it's simple.** Political issues, bad management. And also organized crime that has a lot of power. Not a nice mix.

2

Are you saying it's all related? Like this problem too?

3

Most likely it's related to something. **Attacks** like this **don't happen in a vacuum.**

4

What makes horrible incidents like this even more complicated is that **criminal groups abuse the fact that they can blame their violence on some politically rooted actions.** Politicians who try to bring peace to people in Kosovo should be more attentive to that fact.

5

I think you should add bring peace to all people in Balkans. All. Indiscriminately all different peoples who have suffered. **There were plenty of victims on all different sides when fights broke out.**

War oriented

1

Just like Nazis. They are setting gypsies on fire like once they did people in gas chambers. So they should be dealt with like Nazis. **They want war so bring it to them and get them.**

2

Nazis? You guys know apparently nothing about gypsies! **Gypsies are the problem.** If you ever live somewhere with them you will lose all illusions.

3

That region is just bad. **Wars there will never stop.**

4

True. Lot of this violence is about revenge. Balkan people have thirst for revenge in their veins.

5

Since genocide went on in Kosovo it's not like they don't have a reason for wanting a payback.

6

What does that have to do with Gypsies' houses on fire? I really get mad when people pull some irrelevant information from the back of their memory and talk. This is some issue between locals and gypsies not that other old stuff.

Story 4 – Peace Journalism

Unrest erupts again in Tajikistan's region

Unrest broke out Friday in a remote town in the impoverished former Soviet state of Tajikistan that was rocked by large-scale civil disturbances in 2012, local media have reported.

The Asia-Plus news portal reported that security service forces attempted to detain a local resident suspected of substantial weapon possession, sparking a confrontation with residents in Khorog, a town just across the border from Afghanistan.

Weapon and drug trafficking is rife in the mainly Muslim nation of 7.5 million people, where chronic unemployment drives hundreds of thousands abroad yearly in search of work. Furthermore, Tajikistan is still very slowly and strenuously recovering from the desolation of the civil war, which ended in 1997 leaving nearly 100,000 dead.

The incident happened in a neighborhood in Khorog called Khlebzavod, which was a focal point for fighting between local clans and government forces in July 2012.

At least several dozen people, among them both locals and security forces, were killed in that violence.

Fighting in Khorog was sparked by the killing in the area of a high-ranking Tajik police officer, General Nazarov, which prompted government demands for the handover of a number of informal leaders in the town. Authorities claimed the assault on neighborhoods in which the leaders lived was an effort to apprehend Nazarov's assassins.

Local people have argued, however, that the campaign was a government attempt to bolster central control over the rugged Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous province, of which Khorog is the capital.

Gorno-Badakhshan covers almost half the country, but is sparsely populated, largely by ethnic Pamiri followers of the Ismaili branch of Shia Islam.

The close proximity to Afghanistan requires stationing of US anti-terrorism military forces in Gorno- Badakhshan.

Tajik peace activist Azizmo Nuri said: "Support for crime and any connections to international terrorism in impoverished Tajik regions will disappear if the level of poverty and despair is decreased among the population." She added that is the reason why many Tajik non-governmental organizations appeal to international community to increase support for development of impoverished Gorno-Badakhshan.

Story 4 – War Journalism

Unrest erupts again in Tajikistan's region

Unrest broke out Friday in a remote town in the impoverished former Soviet state of Tajikistan that was rocked by large-scale civil disturbances in 2012, local media have reported.

The Asia-Plus news portal reported that security service forces attempted to detain a local resident suspected of substantial weapon possession, sparking a confrontation with residents in Khorog, a town just across the border from Afghanistan.

Tajik authorities in press release that “when danger of terrorism affects the region, the response of the police and military must be tough in such cases.”

Weapon and drug trafficking is rife in the mainly Muslim nation of 7.5 million people.

The incident happened in a neighborhood in Khorog called Khlebzavod, which was a focal point for fighting between local clans and government forces in July 2012.

Security forces reported several dozen casualties in that violence.

Fighting in Khorog was sparked by the killing in the area of a high-ranking Tajik police officer, General Nazarov, which prompted government demands for the handover of a number of informal leaders in the town. Authorities claimed the assault on neighborhoods in which the leaders lived was an effort to apprehend **Nazarov's killers and stamp out an illegal tobacco smuggling ring.**

“Strong clan loyalties of Khorog residents tend to trump sense of responsibility and cooperation with the authorities. This made the investigation of General Nazarov’s murder difficult. This makes any investigation in the region difficult” said Tajik Interior Minister Ramazon Rakhimov.

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The close proximity to Afghanistan requires stationing of US anti-terrorism military forces in Gorno- Badakhshan.

Tajik President Emomalii Rahmon said that his administration is considering an appeal to the US forces for help with increasing threat of terrorism in Gorno-Badakhshan. Secretary of State John Kerry said he did not receive the official appeal from the Tajik side.

“Once we receive such appeal, I can assure that it will be considered carefully given the fragility of Tajikistan’s location,” the secretary of state added.

Story 4 Readers' Comments

Peace Oriented

1

Problems in the Tajikistan run far back. **By no means it's simple**. Political issues, bad management. And also organized crime that has a lot of power. Not a nice mix.

2

Are you saying it's all related? Like this problem too?

3

Most likely it's related to something. **Attacks** like this **don't happen in vacuum**.

4

What makes horrible incidents like this even more complicated is that **criminal groups abuse the fact that they can blame their violence on some politically rooted actions**. Politicians who try to bring peace to Khorog people should be more attentive to that fact.

5

I think you should add bring peace to all people in Tajikistan. All. Indiscriminately all different peoples who have suffered. **There were plenty of victims on all different sides when fights broke out**.

War oriented

1

Just like Nazis. **This terrorist scum will never change**. So they should be dealt with like Nazis. **They want war so bring it to them and get them**.

2

Nazis? You guys know apparently nothing about this place.

3

That region is just bad. **Wars there will never stop**.

4

True. Lot of this violence is about revenge. Tajik people have thirst for revenge in their veins.

5

Since genocide went on in Khorog it's not like they don't have a reason for wanting a payback.

6

What does that have to do with gun trafficking to Afghanistan? I really get mad when people pull some irrelevant information from the back of their memory and talk. This is terrorism issue not that other old stuff.

Story 5 – Peace Journalism

Colombia urged to proceed with peace

A covert CIA program has helped Colombia's government kill at least two dozen leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the rebel insurgency also known as FARC.

The National Security Agency has also provided "substantial eavesdropping help" to the Colombian government, according to the Post. And the US provided Colombia with GPS equipment that can be used to transform regular munitions into "smart bombs."

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said that the CIA has been "of help," providing Colombian forces with "better training and knowledge."

Santos started peace talks with FARC in 2012. Shortly after the talks began, Santos was re-elected president, gaining 51% of the vote compared with 45% for his rival Óscar Iván Zuluaga.

"The fact that the people of Colombia chose Juan Manuel Santos as the President shows that majority of the country is committed to peace and ending the civil war," said Ana Aldama-Vidas, an expert on Latin American affairs.

Critics of US foreign policy in Colombia urge that the current administration should support the peace talks. Professor Noam Chomsky said: "For far too long, Colombians have suffered torture, displacement, disappearance and general misery under the dark shadow of paramilitary as well as military terror".

Colombia, a country of 47 million people, is one of Washington's closest allies in Latin America and has received billions of dollars in American aid in recent years to combat drug trafficking and guerrilla groups

Story 5 – War Journalism

Colombia's questionable ceasefire with dangerous FARC

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Santos started peace talks with FARC in 2012, which have dragged on. The opposition leader Óscar Iván Zuluaga has charged that Santos is liable to concede too much to achieve peace, including allowing guerrilla leaders to skip serious punishment.

The instability that is caused by the insurgency fosters the organized crime in the region, according to the US Department of State. While FARC originally arose as an organization with political Marxist aims, in past several of the FARC leaders appeared on the US Justice Department's list of most dangerous drug trafficking organizations.

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Story 5 – Readers’ Comments

Peace oriented

1

The effort to promote the myth of smart bombs continues.

2

As bombs go, they are pretty smart. But I see your point that this type of language creates an illusion of civilians being protected from the explosions. That’s not the case. **Targets die and so do surrounding children, elderly and so on...**

3

Americans poking their noses somewhere again?

4

Actually, first of all it’s the CIA and Government. Not as if all of the American nation is doing this. Second, there is nothing wrong with helping people in other countries and “poking our noses.” What we should actually do is try to **assist in some way with the peace talks, if they ask.** Unfortunately we are quicker to send bombs.

5

BTW, the war is much more complicated than FARC versus Colombian Government. **There are many groups with different agendas.** That’s why peace takes a while to even begin to come somewhat true.

War oriented

1

The effort to promote the myth of smart bombs continues.

2

As bombs go, they are pretty smart. Kill a lot of **bad guys.** And sometimes some good guys. But such is life...

3

If CIA is on your side, **you might be the bad guys**

4

Why can’t Americans keep their noses out of **other people’s business?**

5

And your next whining complaint will undoubtedly be “why did the Yanks take so long to poke their nose into Britain’s business in WWI and WWII?”

6

Leftist bubble is seriously popped in Colombia. Your wonderful Marxist FARC friends with Che Guevara t-shirts are kidnapping, killing, and sending drugs to US.

Story 6-Peace Journalism

Ivory Coast in control of militia's strongholds

Ivory Coast's security forces have cleared most villages and small cities of anti-government militants, President Alassane Ouattara's office said Saturday in a statement.

Clearing up the stronghold areas was very difficult, since militants hid inside residential buildings and other facilities where civilians are, according to the office of Ivory Coast's National Defense and Security Council.

The militants belong to forces loyal to the former president [Laurent Gbagbo](#). Violence in the African country arose in 2011 when Gbagbo refused to step down from the office for the internationally recognized president-elect [Ouattara](#).

Initially Gbagbo's forces were controlling the majority of Ivory Coast. However with military support of NATO forces, [Gbagbo](#) was ousted from office and arrested.

Pro-[Gbagbo](#) militants vowed to continue their fight.

French Government asserted that a UN peacekeeping force is necessary. Many African diplomats, however, warned that any foreign interference would only lead to increasing violence.

According to the United Nations, due to the continuing violence more than 100,000 people have fled the country to neighboring [Liberia](#). At Old Pohan, a Liberian settlement next to the thickets that extend to the border, refugees greatly outnumbered the local population.

The humanitarian crisis is one of many important dimensions of the larger problem according to peace-building expert, Dr. Johan Galtung: "Ivory Coast reflects the problems that are unfortunately common in Africa," said Galtung, "the conflict exists on multiple levels including domestic problems of poverty, disparities that reach to colonization period, as well as larger African context and meddling of global powers such as France, Britain, but often also the US and today China."

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The U.S. Secretary of State at the time Hillary Clinton said Gbagbo's capture "sends a strong signal to dictators and tyrants. ... They may not disregard the voice of their own people."

Pro-[Gbagbo](#) militants vowed to continue their fight.

President Ouattara expressed hope that with "enduring friendly support" in logistics and technological aspects of warfare that is currently provided to Ivory Coast by France and other NATO nations including the US, his government will be able to defeat the militants.

Story 6 – Readers' Comments

Peace oriented

1

They are making it seem like violence is justifiable way of settling things.

2

Well there could be situations when use of force is inevitable to prevent grater harm. But I see your point that it is helps to promote the culture of violence. **While militants die and so do surrounding children, elderly and so on...**

3

Americans, French and Brits... Telling others what to do as always.

4

You should distinguish between what governments or people do. Many people in these countries have problem with their government's policies. We should not give them orders but for example what we should actually do is try to **assist in some way with the peace talks, if they ask**. Unfortunately we are quicker to send bombs.

5

BTW, the war is much more complicated because African continent is subjected to for-profit violence of corporations and greedy individuals. Then also tribal issues that were promoted by colonial powers. **There are many groups with different agendas**. That's why peace takes a while to even begin to come somewhat true.

War oriented

1

They are making it seem like violence is justifiable way of settling things.

2

How else will the dictators be ousted? Lot of **bad guys** have to die. And sometimes some good guys die in a process. But such is life...

3

If US, France or Britain is on your side, **you might be the bad guys**

4

US, France, Britain... Telling others what to do as always.

5

And your next whining complaint will undoubtedly be “why did the Yanks take so long to poke their nose into Britain’s business in WWI and WWII?”

6

So continues spending American taxpayers money on supporting some lousy African states that are then sending refugees and diseases like AIDS and Ebola to the US.

Story 7 – Peace Journalism

Hungary's new legislation to keep out migrants

Hungary's parliament has passed new legislation tightening asylum rules, and backed plans to erect a border fence to keep out migrants.

The new law allows the detention of migrants in temporary camps, the speeding up of asylum assessments and limiting the possibility for appeal.

The move was criticized by the UN and human rights groups.

Hungary has seen a rise in the number of migrants and asylum seekers in 2015, most of them entering through the southern border.

The government says about 72,000 migrants have entered the country so far this year, compared with 43,000 people in 2014.

The hope is that only "several dozen, or at most a few hundred" asylum seekers will be accepted in future, a senior government source told our correspondent.

The UN and human rights groups have criticized Hungary's immigration proposals.

The regional representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees warned that the legislation would have devastating implications for thousands of people seeking safety in Hungary.

Refugees from the wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of Congo could see their applications rejected automatically, reports from Hungary say.

"Eighty per cent of these people are fleeing war and conflict," said the UNHCR's Babar Baloch. "This is a refugee crisis, but it's being wrongly described as a migrant crisis by the politicians here."

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The new legislation was passed easily in a 151-41 vote on Monday, with the backing of the governing Fidesz party and the far-right Jobbik party.

"Hungary is confronted with the biggest surge of migrants in its history, its capacities are overloaded by 130%," said Interior Minister Sandor Pinter.

According to Pinter, Hungary will handle each asylum application on its own merits, albeit in a fast-track procedure, and will comply with the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees.

Story 7 – Readers’ Comments

Peace Oriented

- Stories like this help explain much about the continued problems around the world. The migrants are for a large part refugees from war plagued parts of the world.

- Yes. The “migrant crisis” is in fact refugee crisis. Wars produce this problem. We have to stop it where it starts I say no more wars.

- I second that. Peace! All people deserve a chance, shouldn’t be forced to live in war.

War Oriented

Those who run the former Eastern block countries like Hungary are thugs as they have always been. It is a shame that European Union democracies are supporting Hungary. The European Union is basically getting mugged by these thugs.

- Yes. The EU supports unorganized weak states that act like jerks.

- It is Hungary’s business to say no to damned migrants in their OWN country. Not the business of you two. In fact, our country should be more like Hungary!

Story 8 – Peace Journalism

Assessing Nagorno-Karabakh's prospects

At sunset flocks of swallows race through the pink sky over the central square of Stepanakert, a city once bombed and largely destroyed in a the post-Soviet war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the 21 years since the heavy fighting ended, there is still occasional shooting around the frontier with Azerbaijan, but this capital of the self-proclaimed state — this early “breakaway republic” — of Nagorno-Karabakh is peaceful.

Some 150,000 people live here, but the enclave has support from a much greater population of ethnic Armenians around the world, and on a summer evening the veranda of a restaurant on the corner of the main square is full of Karabakh's visiting benefactors. The sound of clinking glasses mingles with leisurely chatting in Armenian, French, English and Russian. The tranquil scene seems almost surreal, considering Karabakh's war-torn history and its militarized present.

Every local schoolboy knows that right after graduation he will put on his uniform and go to defend his state from enemies. That is what school programs taught the post-war generations; schools also train kids to assemble Kalashnikovs, throw grenades and climb walls for combat training.

Has Nagorno-Karabakh ever heard of a pacifist movement? “I have trouble imagining anything like that,” Stella Balayan, a school teacher in Martuni told The Daily Beast. She is still in mourning for her son, Col. Garik Balayan, who was killed in May 2014 during his night shift on the border.

Dozens of soldiers continued to die on both sides of the 21-year-old front line that is now the de facto border between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

When asked about how neighboring countries help Nagorno-Karabakh, the self-proclaimed state's foreign minister, Karén Mirzoyan, said: “We receive more support from the United States.”

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More than 30,000 people died in the Armenia-Azerbaijan ethnic conflict in the late 1980s and early 1990s; hundreds of thousands were forced out of their homes.

In the decades since the war that spawned this little “independent” enclave, the Armenian diaspora in the West has helped turn it into a surprising democracy.

In some crucial respects, indeed, it is more at ease and more fair to its people than Armenia itself.

When asked about how neighboring countries help Nagorno-Karabakh, the self-proclaimed state's foreign minister, Karén Mirzoyan, said: “We receive more support from the United States.”

Story 8 – Readers' Comments

Peace Oriented

- Stories like this help explain much about the continued problems around the world. Even the almost forgotten old conflicts still breed more violence. It is not as massive, but people still suffer and some die.

- Yes man. Wars produce problems for decades and sometimes centuries to come. Many generations face consequences. I say peace and no more wars.

- I second that. Peace! All people deserve a chance, shouldn't be forced to live in war.

War Oriented

- Those who run the former Eastern block countries like Nagorno are thugs as they have always been. It is a shame that US and other democracies are supporting Nagorno. The democracies are basically getting mugged by these thugs.

- Yes man. The US supports unorganized weak states that act like jerks.

- It is Nagorno-Karabakh's problem whether there is democracy or not. Armenian Americans should spend their money here, not there. They owe to us.

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ABSTRACT**EFFECTS OF CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN NEWS STORIES AND
USER-GENERATED COMMENTS**

by

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The discussion about normative repercussions of conflict sensitive framing of journalistic communication demands empirical evidence. Thus, this study provided experimental examination of effects of peace journalism. Furthermore, this study also explored the effects of conflict sensitive framing of user-generated comments. Widely popular digital media platforms provide countless and growing opportunities for regular citizens to create and share different types of content, including comments, which means user-generated content should be considered in evaluation of present-day media effects. The collected evidence suggests that conflict sensitive framing in both professional and user-generated forms has certain effects on how audience perceives news about wars and other instances of political violence. The findings lead to a set of theory-building suggestions. Also, the findings provide further information that is relevant regarding contemporary mass media and their effects in practical as well as normative sense.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

The study presented in this dissertation is the culmination of my work while approaching the doctorate at Wayne State University. My research focuses on political communication and digital media. I specifically study user-generated online content in connection to framing, peace/war journalism, and security/securitization. I have presented at a number of regional, national, and international conferences. I have also started publishing some of my works. The dissertation embodies the most complex of my endeavors. It combines tenets from various theories that I have been studying in order to contribute to a broader goal of knowledge-building. I strive to uncover such types of knowledge that have the potential to improve communication towards peace-building. For that reason I have chosen to look at the ways that professional and user-generated media communication impacts audience's perceptions of political violence. My deepest hope is that the information provided by this project will be useful to others.