

Fitting Reality: How U.S. News Coverage of Brazil and Its Social Ills Changed During the 2014 World Cup

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Resumen

Los periodistas a menudo usan el deporte para ayudar a examinar las cuestiones sociales. La cobertura de noticias de grandes eventos deportivos internacionales ayuda a influir en cómo la gente de todo el mundo percibe un país. Utilizando la teoría del *framing* para examinar en Estados Unidos la cobertura de noticias de la Copa del Mundo de 2014 en Brasil, este estudio determina que la cobertura de los problemas sociales en Brasil es generalmente negativa en *USA Today*, en el *New York Times* y *Los Angeles Times*: más de la mitad de los artículos sobre la Copa del Mundo que mencionan los problemas sociales se enmarcan de manera negativa durante el período de 45 días examinado. El periódico más negativo es el *New York Times*, con un 72% de sus artículos enmarcado negativamente. El diario *Los Angeles Times* tiene el mayor porcentaje de artículos positivos, con un 43% en una visión positiva y otro 43% en una visión neutra. Para *USA Today*, hoy en día alrededor del 50% de sus artículos se enmarcan negativamente y el 37% son neutrales. En general, este estudio indica que cuando los tres periódicos estadounidenses estudiados mencionan los problemas sociales en su cobertura de la Copa del Mundo en Brasil, la cobertura tiende a ser negativa en más de la mitad de los artículos, mientras que la mayoría de los artículos son pesimistas hacia la capacidad de Brasil para hacer frente a los problemas de su sociedad, algunos artículos - sobre todo en el diario *Los Angeles Times* - son más optimistas sobre la capacidad de Brasil para hacer frente a problemas como la delincuencia, la violencia y la desigualdad. Este estudio también revela que la cobertura de noticias tiene cambios al finalizar la Copa del Mundo, con los artículos, sobre todo en *USA Today* y *The Los Angeles Times*, llegando a ser más positivo que el éxito de Brasil en la organización del torneo se hace evidente. Mientras que el 77% de los artículos en general en el inicio de la Copa del Mundo son negativos, al final del evento solamente es el 30%. Viendo los periódicos individuales, *USA Today* tiene 100% de sus artículos negativos pero al final ya no hay ninguno negativo. El diario *Los Angeles Times* tampoco tiene artículos negativos al final. Sólo el *New York Times* sigue siendo negativo en un 75% hacia el final de la Copa del Mundo. Este estudio puede ser considerado optimista desde el punto de vista periodístico. Mientras que los periodistas son a menudo acusados de centrarse en lo negativo, la cobertura de la Copa del Mundo en Brasil indica que los periodistas pueden cambiar su visión en los medios de comunicación durante un período

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relativamente corto de tiempo. Como la celebración de la Copa del Mundo de 2014 en Brasil fue un éxito, los periodistas comienzan a escribir más historias que no se centran exclusivamente en el lado negativo de la sociedad brasileña. Los periodistas están modificando su marco para ajustarse mejor a la realidad.

Palabras clave: Copa del Mundo, Periodismo, Brasil, Cobertura de noticias, Problemas sociales en América latina

Abstract

Journalists often use sports to help examine social issues. News coverage of large international sporting events helps influence how people around the globe perceive a country. Utilizing framing theory to examine U.S. news coverage of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, this study determines that coverage of social issues in Brazil is generally negative in *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*. More than half of the articles about the World Cup that mention social issues are framed in a negative manner during the 45-day period examined. The most negative newspaper is *The New York Times*, with 72% of its articles framed negatively. *The Los Angeles Times* has the largest percentage of articles that are positively framed, with 43% having a positive frame and another 43% of its articles having a neutral frame. For *USA Today*, about 50% of its articles are negatively framed and 37% are neutral. Overall, this study indicates that when the three studied U.S. newspapers mention social issues in their coverage of the World Cup in Brazil, the coverage tends to be negative. More than half of the articles are framed in a negative manner. While the majority of articles are pessimistic toward Brazil's ability to deal with problems in its society, some articles – particularly in the *Los Angeles Times* – are more optimistic about Brazil's ability to deal with problems like crime, violence and inequality. This study also finds that the news coverage differs toward the end of the World Cup, with articles, particularly in *USA Today* and *The Los Angeles Times*, becoming more positive as Brazil's success at hosting the tournament becomes apparent. While 77% of the overall articles at the start of the World Cup are negative, that drops to 30% at the end of the World Cup. For the individual newspapers, *USA Today* goes from 100% of its articles being negative at the start to none of them at the end. *The Los Angeles Times* also has no negative articles at the end. Only *The New York Times* remains negative toward the end of the World Cup, with 75% of its articles still having a negative frame. This study might be considered an optimistic one from a journalistic point of view. While journalists are often accused of focusing on the negative, the coverage of the World Cup in Brazil indicates that journalists can

change their media frame over a relatively short amount of time. As it becomes clear that Brazil's hosting of the 2014 World Cup was successful, journalists start to write more stories that don't focus exclusively on the negative side of Brazilian society. The journalists are modifying their frame to better fit the reality.

Keywords: World Cup, Journalism, Brazil, News Coverage and Framing, Social Issues in Latin America

Fitting Reality:

How U.S. News Coverage of Brazil and Its Social Ills Changed During the 2014 World Cup

Introduction

The eyes of the world were watching Brazil when it hosted the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Soccer fans wanted to learn if Brazil would dominate the games on its home turf, but also wanted to find out which of the other powerhouse teams like Germany and Argentina would dominate. But more than the intricacies of the sport were being watched. Many fans and non-fans alike were curious whether Brazil would succeed in its hosting of one of the biggest sporting events in the world, second only to the Olympics, which also will be in Brazil in 2016. Would Brazil be able to put on a world-class party, without crime and poverty and income inequality taking center stage?

The World Cup was deemed by many observers as a success. "After being plagued by doubts over whether the stadiums would be ready and stay standing, and if Brazil's people would join in the fun or try to spoil it, their tournament is a winner" wrote a journalist for Associated Press International (Imray, 2014). A CNN writer reported that government officials were pleased with the outcome – except for the loss by the Brazilian soccer team to Germany in the semifinals. "...The World Cup was a triumph for the country's transportation and tourism industries" (Marcopoto, 2014). The Japan Economic Newswire likewise reported the World Cup was a success. "Organizational concerns loomed over the 20th finals ahead of the competition but after 64 matches and all said and done, Brazil came away with largely positive reviews, with many saying it was one of the best World Cups ever" (Japan Economic Newswire, 2014).

But not all news reports were in that positive vein. When an overpass bridge under construction in a host city collapsed in July 2014, killing one person and injuring at least 10 others, the news media reported on it as well as controversies related to the costs of the World Cup (Martinez, 2014). The Pretoria News in South Africa

noted that Brazil invested billions that could have been put to better use. Instead it created stadiums that won't be used much. It also resulted in corruption as unscrupulous developers took advantage of the situation under pressures to get everything ready in time (Pretoria News, 2014). Before the World Cup, there was a considerable amount of concern over the impact of the World Cup, and whether it would be worth the cost. On the website for U.S. News & World Report, one editor cited the example of Manaus, Brazil, which was going to host four games. The editor wondered whether the extravagance of the tournament – the \$300 million, 42,000-seat Arena Amazona was built specifically for the World Cup – was worth it (Garofalo, 2014). Other stories in the months leading up to the World Cup also focused on protests over spending on the World Cup instead of helping with the country's social ills, as well as the deaths of at least eight workers during the preparations for the games (Garofalo, 2014).

This study examines the news media coverage during the 2014 World Cup – starting a week before the games and ending a week after – to examine how journalists framed the news coverage. It examines three of the dominant newspapers in the United States: *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*. This study examines news coverage of the World Cup in June and July of 2014 and considers whether Brazil's hosting of the games is framed in a positive or negative light. While Brazil, a country of 202 million people, is South America's leading economic power, it also has high income inequality, a high crime rate and a slowdown in economic growth (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

When FIFA decided in 2007 to award the 2014 World Cup to Brazil, the organization said Brazil would have to improve the country's infrastructure, including extensively renovating the soccer stadiums themselves (Bond, 2007). FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) is the international governing body for soccer, or football, as the sport is called in much of the world (FIFA, 2014.) The country celebrated the decision, which was the only candidate country, with fireworks, balloons and cheers. Brazilian officials said their country was up to the task. "Soccer is not only a sport for us. It's more than that. Soccer for us is a passion, a national passion," said Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (Washington Post, 2007, p. E02). Brazilian Football Confederation President Ricardo Teixeira said, "We are a civilized nation, a nation that is going through an excellent phase. And we have got everything prepared to receive adequately the honor to organize an excellent World Cup" (Washington Post, 2007, p. E02). In an editorial, the *Folha de S Paulo* newspaper said Brazilian business would benefit and that Brazilian fans deserved the World Cup.

But it also said planning would be necessary to ensure that the event is a success (Irish Times, 2007).). Concerns were raised regarding violence, including a high murder rate, and corruption (Bond, 2007) (Irish Times, 2007). About 150 people a day were murdered in Brazil in 2006 – one of the highest murder rates in the world. Scandals included accusations of money laundering against the owner of a soccer club (Bond, 2007).

Literature review

International news media operate within limitations imposed by their governments, economic conditions and societal factors as they gather and disseminate the news. The media have a social responsibility to publish information that best serves society (Hachten & Scotton, 2007). Journalism research often looks at social, cultural and psychological aspects that may influence how events are portrayed.

Framing is often useful in helping researchers understand what journalists consider important (Zaharopoulos, 2007). Framing is a way to help the public make sense of relevant events (Gamson, 1989) (Tankard, 2001). Kuypers (2002) explains that the media use certain keywords, metaphors, concepts and symbols and help shape perception of reality by making some facts more relevant of salient. Framing also occurs in the use of sources for the story, and those sources can help shape the news (Johnston-Cartee, 2005). Media framing also influences political attitudes, with emphasis of certain values over others (Leighly, 2004)

Researchers use a variety of theoretical perspectives to study how news is portrayed and the role of bias and framing in the news. Several studies utilize framing in the analysis of news coverage of sporting events. Framing involves the selection, emphasis or exclusion of particular facts and ideas and making them more prominent. That portrayal of reality provides a certain context to the reader or viewer of news coverage (Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007) (Entman, 1993).

Close examination of news coverage often utilizes content analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2010) say content analysis is an efficient way to investigate the content of media. It's systematic, objective and quantitative. According to Entman, the text presents frames, "which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The articles for this study are examined in a systematic manner to determine the themes and tones that might indicate framing.

Studies examine sporting events as a way to consider how issues are portrayed even outside of the sports world. They examine such issues as activism and nationalism. They look at how a big sporting event such as the Olympics can help put the country, its culture and its people in a positive or negative light (Zhou et al., 2013) (Perry & Kang, 2012). One study examines TV's portrayal of female athletes in the 2012 Olympics in London and finds differences in how women's personalities and physical characteristics are described (Billings et al., 2014). Another study looks at how Olympic news aimed at children represents other cultures and people (Lester-Roushazamir & Raman, 1999). One study examines how the weather impacted media coverage of the 2008 Olympics in China (Zhong & Zhou, 2012). Another study examines coverage in *The Los Angeles Times* of the 1984 Olympic Games held in Los Angeles, and finds that assertions in coverage about the Soviet-led boycott of the games helped discredit the games and victories by U.S. athletes (Salwen & Garrison, 1987). A study examining factors that influence the public's support for sports stadiums and arenas shows that community residents with greater civic attachment and optimism were more willing to support major sports projects (Lasley & Turner 2010).

Several studies involving soccer and the World Cup examine issues related to cultural identity. For example, Denham and Desormeaux (2008) examine how English, Irish and Scottish newspapers characterized a violent incident in which French star Zinedine Zidane head-butted Italian defender Marco Materazzi in the final of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Using social identity as a conceptual framework, the study finds that English journalists were much more critical of Zidane, and the incident allowed journalists to make broader assertions about cultural values and social identities. One study of nearly three decades of media coverage of the World Cup finds that much of the media coverage involves elements of group and national identity (Tudor, 2006). That author urges researchers to examine TV coverage more, including how camera work, editing and framing impact how viewers experience the World Cup.

Other studies examine how soccer fans in Northern Ireland and Scotland fervently support teams that represent their beliefs (Bairner, 2001) (Foer, 2004) (Dimeo & Finn, 2001). Chari and Mhiripiri (2014) examine how soccer in Africa has deep cultural, social and political connections, and explore how media coverage of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa contributed to and was informed by the many narratives surrounding Africa. Another study of that World Cup examines the media impact on South Africa (Swarta, Linleyb & Bobc, 2013). It finds generally

positive news coverage during the World Cup but notes some unfavorable coverage prior to the games may have resulted in lower attendance.

This study involving media coverage of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil examines the following research questions:

RQ1. How do *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* portray the World Cup and its impact on Brazil?

RQ2. Does the portrayal of the World Cup and Brazil change after the World Cup is over?

RQ3. What do the dominant frames in the media coverage tell us about the journalism in the three newspapers?

Methodology

The three newspapers in this study are chosen for their wide circulation. *USA Today* has the highest average circulation of newspapers in the United States, with 4,139,380 as of September, 2014 (Beaujon, 2014). In addition to the largest national newspaper, the study also examines the general-interest newspapers dominant on each coast. *The New York Times*, which has 2,134,150 average circulation, is the third largest circulated newspaper in the country, following *USA Today* and *the Wall Street Journal*, which specializes in business coverage (Beaujon, 2014). The *Los Angeles Times* is the dominant newspaper in the Western United States, with average circulation of 692,900 (Sass, 2014).

For its content analysis, this study examines articles in the three newspapers that met certain criteria. Articles were selected using the LexisNexis Academic database. First, articles that were published between June 5, 2014, and July 20, 2014 are considered. The author wanted articles from one week before the games started to one week after they ended. The author reasoned this narrowly defined time frame could illustrate differences in media coverage that occurred over a relatively short but significant period of time. The World Cup took place June 12 to July 13, 2014. Second, in addition to the World Cup, the articles had to include some discussion of social issues in Brazil. Utilizing the search parameters in LexisNexis, the author searched for all articles in that time frame that included the terms "Brazil" and "World Cup" in addition to one of the following: "poverty," "health" "crime" and "environment." Those terms were chosen because they reflect wide-ranging social issues of concern on an international scale. The search was conducted individually for each newspaper as the source. The search was performed in both the general search function as well as the "advanced" search function to ensure that no stories were missed. The researcher also did similar

searches on each of the three newspapers' websites to make sure no other relevant articles had been missed. The number of articles in each newspaper under those parameters was 13 in *USA Today*, 59 in *The New York Times*, and 10 in *The Los Angeles Times*. The researcher then went through each article and eliminated articles that were duplicates or only about soccer, the weather, travel, fashion. Also eliminated were any blog entries, wire-service stories, staff editorials and guest columns by non-journalists. The articles considered are those by staff journalists about the World Cup in Brazil and include some mention of a societal issue faced by Brazil. The final numbers of articles that met those criteria were 8 in *USA Today*, 14 in *The New York Times*, and 7 in *The Los Angeles Times*.

The researcher considered each article utilizing a frame analysis approach that other studies have used in qualitative content analysis (Luther & Radovic, 2014) (Loblich, 2012). The researcher conducted a deep reading of the articles and determined whether each had a positive or negative frame toward Brazil and the World Cup. The author examined each article and based the determination on three factors: the headline, the central point or conclusion as found in either the lead paragraph or a "nut" paragraph in the article that summarizes the central point of the article, and the overall number of positive, negative or neutral paragraphs about Brazil, the World Cup and the challenges faced by Brazil. For example, if a paragraph stated Brazil has overcome

challenges, or was trying to overcome challenges, the paragraph was coded as positive. If a paragraph stated Brazil failed to overcome its challenges, the paragraph was coded as negative. If a paragraph had no mention of challenges or other related matters, the paragraph was coded as neutral. The articles were determined to have a positive, negative or neutral frame based on the number of paragraphs in each category as well as the headline and central point of the article. The author coded all of the content, increasing the reliability of the measurements.

Results

How do USA Today, The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times portray the World Cup and its impact on Brazil?

Overall, the examined articles about the World Cup in Brazil that also mentioned social issues reflect generally negative coverage in *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*. About 52% – 15 of 29 – of the articles have a negative frame to them. About 31% – 9 of 29 of the articles have a neutral frame to them. And only 17% – 5 of 29 – have a positive frame to them. (See Table 1.)

Considering the newspapers individually, *The New York Times* has the largest percentage of articles that are more negative. About 72% of its articles – 10 of 14 – are negative, 7% – 1 of 14 – are neutral and 21% – 3 of 14 – are positive. *The Los Angeles Times* has the largest percentage

Table 1

How articles about World Cup and social issues from June 5, 2014, to July 20, 2014, were framed

	Negative	Positive	Neutral	TOTAL
<i>USA Today</i> N=8	50% (4)	13% (1)	37% (3)	100% (8)
<i>New York Times</i> N=14	72% (10)	7% (1)	21% (3)	100% (14)
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> N=7	14% (1)	43% (3)	43% (3)	100% (7)
TOTAL N=29	52% (15)	17% (5)	31% (9)	100% (29)

Source: Author's data

of articles that are neutral and that are positive. About 43% – 3 of 7 – of its articles are neutral, about 43% – 3 of 7 – of its articles are positive and only 14% – 1 of 7 – of its articles are negative. For *USA Today*, 50% of its articles – 4 of 8 – are negative, 37% – 3 of 8 – are neutral and 13% – 1 of 8 – are positive.

The New York Times reminded readers of the widespread social problems in Brazil. In an article “Brazil on edge as World Cup exposes rifts” on Page A1 on June 10, 2014, reporter Simon Romero said while Brazil has made progress against poverty and other social ills, “Brazil is marked by rifts, with some people genuinely excited about the event while others are simmering with resentment over its ballooning costs and a sluggish post-boom economy” (A1). While the article does present some positives, the headline and three-fourths of the article’s paragraphs are about the challenges that Brazil has yet to overcome. For instance, the third paragraph talks about bitter strikes in major cities, with riot police in Sao Paulo using tear gas to disperse striking subway workers. “Brazilian legends of the sport, from Ronaldo to Romario, are voicing shame and disgust over troubled preparations in the nation...” (A1).

Likewise, *USA Today* featured a story “Strike, security shake confidence” by Taylor Barnes on Page 1C in its Sports section on June 11, 2014, that discusses how violence has impacted many cities in Brazil. “The precarious public security of Salvador, a city of 2.8 million people, reflects a larger trend in the region, where despite the increasing economic well-being of an area that traditionally was Brazil’s poorest, violence levels have risen dramatically. Of the 12 World Cup host cities, seven have seen their homicide rates rise in the last decade” (1C).

An example of the more neutral coverage in *The Los Angeles Times* is the article “World Cup reveals both best and worst of Brazil; The country shows it can pull off a global sporting event, but it still has deep domestic problems to tackle” by Vincent Bevins on Page A-1 on July 14, 2014. The article presents both positive aspects such as improvements to infrastructure as well as negative aspects such as continuing protests over inadequate public services. “Despite a few close calls, Brazil did manage to stage one of the world’s premier sporting events” (A1).

Thus, for RQ1 – How do *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* portray the World Cup and its impact on Brazil? – this study indicates that when the newspapers mention social issues in their coverage of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, the coverage tends to be negative. More than half of the articles are framed

in a negative manner. The newspaper that was the most negative in its coverage is *The New York Times*, with 72% of its articles framed negatively. The most positive coverage is found in *The Los Angeles Times*, with about 43% of its articles in that category. *The Los Angeles Times* also has the most neutral coverage, also with about 43% of the articles in that category.

Does the portrayal of the World Cup and Brazil change after the World Cup is over?

When considering the timing of the articles, a distinction is made between the coverage for 12 days at the start of the studied period – June 5 to June 16, including the first five days of the World Cup and seven days before it started – and the 12 days at the end of the studied period – July 9 to July 20, including the final five days of the World Cup and seven days afterward.

The study shows that the coverage near the start of the World Cup is overwhelmingly negative in the stories that mentioned social issues. About 77% – 10 of 13 – of the articles in the first period are negative. About 23% – 3 of 13 – are neutral and none of the articles are positive. The coverage is less negative near the end of the World Cup. Exactly 40% of the articles – 4 of 10 – are neutral, 30% – 3 of 10 – are positive and 30% – 3 of 10 – are negative.

Examining the individual newspapers, *USA Today* is the most negative at the start of the World Cup, with all 3 of its articles negative, followed by *The New York Times* with 6 of 7 of its articles negative. One of the articles in *The Los Angeles Times* is negative, with the other two neutral. At the end of the World Cup, *The Los Angeles Times* has the most positive coverage, with 2 of its 3 articles positive and the other was neutral. *USA Today* has one positive article and two neutral. *The New York Times* is the most negative at the end with 3 of 4 of its articles negative, and the other one neutral. (See Table 2.)

An example of the early negative coverage in *USA Today* is the article “Some Brazilians choose protests over World Cup; Critics say social ills need money more than games” by Alan Gomez in the Money Section on Page 1B on June 10, 2014. Gomez writes that “the World Cup also is producing an outpouring of anger over the \$11.3 billion the government plans to spend on the tournament when the once booming economy has slowed, major cities are choked by traffic gridlock, public hospitals and schools remain underfunded and millions of Brazilians live in extreme poverty” (1B).

An example of the later positive coverage in *The Los Angeles Times* is the article “Brazil tries to get back to some normalcy; With visitors leaving after the World Cup,

Table 2

**How articles about World Cup and social issues
were framed at the start and end of the tournament**

	Negative	Positive	Neutral	TOTAL
<i>USA Today</i> June 15-16, 2014 N=3	100% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (3)
New York Times June 15-16, 2014 N=7	86% (6)	0% (0)	14% (1)	100% (7)
Los Angeles Times June 15-16, 2014 N=3	33% (1)	0% (0)	67% (2)	100% (3)
TOTAL N=13	77% (10)	0% (0)	23% (3)	100% (13)
<i>USA Today</i> July 8-20, 2014 N=3	0% (0)	33% (1)	67% (2)	100% (3)
New York Times July 8-20, 2014 N=4	75% (3)	0% (0)	25% (1)	100%(4)
Los Angeles Times July 8-20, 2014 N=3	0% (0)	67% (2)	33% (1)	100% (3)
TOTAL N=10	30% (3)	30% (3)	40% (4)	100% (10)

Source: Author's data

the nation takes stock in the aftermath” by Kevin Baxter and Vincent Bevins in the Sports Section on Page C1 on July 15, 2014. “After seven years of planning and 31 days of competition, the most expensive soccer tournament in history is over. And the dire predictions that street demonstrations, massive transportation breakdowns and construction delays would disrupt the even proved unfounded, with Brazil’s tournament ranking among the most successful in World Cup history” (C1). The authors describe how government officials were celebrating the success of the games, and the article includes quotes from Brazil’s president, Brazil’s deputy sports minister, the chief executive of the organizing committee as well as soccer fans.

The New York Times, which featured negative coverage throughout the games, had an article about the loss of Brazilian’s soccer team to Germany that focused on the

negative view that Brazilians have about their country. The article, “Brazilians grumble and take stock after crushing World Cup loss,” by Simon Romero on Page A6 on July 10, 2014, said the Brazilian economy was booming in 2007 when FIFA awarded the tournament to Brazil. “Now the economy is sluggish, in its fourth consecutive year of slow growth. While the feat of lifting millions out of poverty over the past decade remains intact, (the new president) has grappled with widespread protests over political corruption and spending on lavish stadiums” (A6).

Thus, for RQ2 – Does the portrayal of the World Cup and Brazil change after the World Cup is over? – this study indicates that the coverage does change. It becomes less negative at the end. While 77% of the articles at the start of the World Cup are negative, that drops to 30% at the

end of the World Cup. For the individual newspapers, *USA Today* goes from 100% of its articles being negative at the start to none of them at the end. *The Los Angeles Times* also has no negative articles at the end. Only *The New York Times* remains negative, with 75% of its articles still having a negative frame.

Discussion and conclusion

The media coverage in the U.S. media about Brazil and the World Cup certainly is primarily about the games themselves. While the sports side is not a part of this study, it is interesting to note that news about social issues in Brazil is often mixed in with the results. For instance, when Brazil's team loses to Germany in the semifinals, some of the coverage focuses on how the defeat is yet another reason that Brazil to mourn, on top of all the challenges faced by Brazil in such societal issues as crime and violence.

This study examines how the news media focuses on social issues in the coverage of the World Cup. The World Cup brought a lot of attention to Brazil, and while many people may think of rainforest and carnival and soccer when they think of Brazil, they also may know that Brazil has problems with crime, poverty and the other issues. Using framing in a study involving sports is one way to help examine how news media cover issues.

What do the dominant frames in the media coverage tell us about the journalism in the three newspapers?

As this research indicates, when the three studied newspapers mention social issues in their coverage of the World Cup, the stories are generally framed negatively. More than half of the articles are negative, led by *The New York Times*, which has 72% of its articles framed negatively. The articles are pessimistic toward Brazil's ability to deal with problems in its society. *The Los Angeles Times* features the most positive coverage when it comes to the discussion of social issues in its coverage of the World Cup, with about 43% of its articles framed positively. Those articles are more optimistic about Brazil's ability to deal with problems like crime, violence and inequality.

Interestingly, the negativity is more pronounced near the start of the tournament. About 77% of the articles at the start of the World Cup are negative, but that drops to 30% at the end of the World Cup. The most dramatic change came with *USA Today*, which goes from 100% of its articles being negative at the start to none of them at the end. Likewise, *The Los Angeles Times* also has no negative articles near the end of the tournament. But 75% of the articles in the *New York Times* still have a negative frame at the end.

So how do these findings help address RQ3 – What do the dominant frames in the media coverage tell us about the journalism in the three newspapers? It appears that journalists are doing what they often do – focus on conflict (Zaharopoulos, 2007). At the start of the World Cup, many Brazilians and others are worried that the country would not be able to host a successful World Cup. There are questions about whether the stadiums would be finished, whether the transportation would be adequate, whether crime and violence would be a problem. As those questions begin to be answered – Brazil, for the most part, was able to host the games with few problems – the media coverage moves away from focusing on conflict. The media coverage moves from a negative frame to a more positive or neutral one. This lends support to findings from an earlier study of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa that showed more favorable coverage once the games were under way. (Swarta, Linleyb & Bobc, 2013). So this study of media coverage of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil helps show that journalists are able to shift frames depending on the reality of the situation.

Another finding is that journalists can use sports to help examine social issues. The Olympics, for instance, provide the host country a chance to showcase its culture and people (Zhou et al., 2013). Good journalists are able to recognize those public relations efforts for what they are and work to uncover a closer version of the truth. They also are flexible enough to be able to move beyond the dominant theme and see any shifting reality. There is no question a country takes an enormous risk when it offers to host a big sporting event, such as the World Cup. In the case of the World Cup in Brazil, the games not only were broadcast to a worldwide audience on networks like ESPN, Univision and others, but 20,000 journalists were covering the games (Suleman, 2014). About 1 million foreign visitors attended the games (Marcopoto, 2014). Brazil spent \$13 billion to \$14 billion to host the 64 individual games that made up the tournament (Baxter, 2014). News coverage of large international sporting events can help influence how people around the globe perceive a country for years to come.

Certainly there are limitations to this study. A future study could examine a year's worth of coverage – both before and after a big sporting event like the World Cup or the Olympics. Many issues may surface in the months – or even years – before a big event, and undoubtedly many challenges remain long afterward. A longer period of time considered in a study would help address that. Likewise, this study only focuses on three U.S. newspapers. It would be interesting to compare the news coverage in other parts of the world, notably in the host

country and in countries closer to the host. For example, this study could have examined Brazilian newspapers as well as perhaps newspapers in Chile, Argentina and other Latin American countries to help determine any differences in international news coverage.

Another aspect that should be addressed in future studies is the role of social media and online news coverage. Big sporting events like the World Cup and the Olympics are widely reported and discussed over the Internet long before print newspapers are on the street. In addition to news coverage, studies could examine how *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram* and other social media are used by fans, journalists and athletes in the context of a large sporting event. One report says that 400 million tweets were sent on Twitter about the games during the tournament (Swartout, 2014).

This study examines only the content of the news coverage. It does not examine the effects of the news coverage on the consumer. Future studies could examine reader or viewer response toward coverage. It would be interesting to determine, for example, if perceptions of Brazil changed as a result of the media coverage of the World Cup. One of the reasons countries like to host big sporting events like the Olympics and the World Cup is the chance to help brand the country in a more positive light (Zhou et al., 2013). A study in 2016, for instance, could examine what impact the media coverage of the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro will have on the public image of Brazil.

Finally, a study could be done utilizing participant-observation and in-depth interviews with the journalists covering the events. This would help address vital questions about why news and sports stories are covered a certain way. For the World Cup coverage, for example, a qualitative study with a reporter for *USA Today*, *The New York Times* or *The Los Angeles Times* would help explain why he or she is focusing on particular social issues, how he or she chooses sources and how he or she frames particular stories. That type of qualitative research would go quite far in explaining how and why journalists frame stories.

This study, which shows that media coverage and the framing of events can change over a relatively short period of time, might be considered an optimistic one from a journalistic point of view. While journalists are often accused of focusing on the negative, the coverage of the World Cup in Brazil indicates that journalists can change their media frame over a relatively short amount of time. As it becomes clear that Brazil's hosting of the 2014 World Cup is on its way to being a success, journalists start to write more stories that don't exclusively focus on

the negative side of Brazilian society. The journalists are modifying their frame to better fit the reality.

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