

Routine Adjustments: How Journalists Framed the Charleston Shooting

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This article presents an analysis of U.S. national newspaper coverage of the 2015 mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. A two-dimensional measurement scheme of time and space is used to examine media frames. Results suggest that journalists incorporated attributes unique to this tragedy into their reports by using a wide variety of frames that remained relatively consistent throughout the first 30 days of coverage. Compared with the results of studies of similar events, our analysis finds that news coverage of the Charleston shooting was more likely to use the past time frame (36%) and the societal/past combination frame (18%).

Keywords: framing, routines, mass shootings, content analysis, Charleston

Since 1982, more than 90 mass shootings have taken place in the United States, with more than 40 occurring since 2012 (Follman, Aronsen, & Pan, 2017). Some of the more horrific events have taken place in recent years, such as the October 2017 shooting at a Las Vegas country music festival—the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history with 58 deaths (Waxman, 2017); the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, with 49 casualties in June 2016; and the shooting in December 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut with 28 deaths, including 20 young children. Research has found that nearly one-third of such shootings worldwide between 1966 and 2012 were in the United States (Lankford, 2016). According to one article, “When it comes to gun massacres, the United States is tragically exceptional. There are more public mass shootings in the United States than any other country in the world” (Christensen, 2017, para. 1).

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The increasing frequency of mass shootings has meant that stories about them appear more regularly and are featured prominently in the media (Dahmen, Abdenour, McIntyre, & Noga-Stryon, 2017). In fact, one *New York Times* reporter describes being on a “tragic reporting circuit,” having written about four mass shootings in an eight-month span (Turkewitz, 2016, para. 5). Many observers believe that the regularity of such events ultimately results in reporting that is standardized and formulaic. For example, *Washington Post* reporter Paul Farhi (2015) notes:

For the news media, America’s epidemic of mass shootings have devolved into a grim routine. . . . Most follow the same playbook. Deploy reporters to the scene quickly. Interview eyewitnesses and families of the victims and the shooters. Check social media for clues to the attackers’ identity. Bring on the law enforcement experts for comment. (paras. 1–2)

Mullin (2015) comments on the “familiar elements of mass shooting coverage” (para. 12) in television news reports about the shooting deaths of 14 people in San Bernardino, California, and writes, “the sense of routine was . . . palpable” (para. 13). His story includes a tweet from journalist Nick Bauman of *The Huffington Post* that reads, “Someone just sent an internal email to our reporters about stories on this shooting with the phrase ‘You know the drill’ in it. Sadly true” (Mullin, 2015, para. 3).

According to Goodykuntz (2015), once details of a mass shooting are sorted out, “the fights begin” (para. 5) between pro- and anti-gun control sources. “This goes back and forth for a while,” he notes. “President Obama is mentioned—praised or vilified, . . . predictably depending on your political leanings—and . . . we move on” (para. 6).

Some scholars, critics, and journalists (e.g., Dahmen et al., 2017; Farhi, 2015; Goodykuntz, 2015) contend that such routine reporting makes it easier for the public to move on as well. Even former president Obama addressed the topic. “Somehow this has become routine,” he said while offering condolences to the victims of the October 2015 mass shooting at Umpqua College in Oregon. “The reporting is routine. My response here at the podium ends up being routine . . . we’ve become numb to this” (Jackson, 2015, para. 5).

A developing area of academic research examines news media coverage of mass shootings, focusing primarily on school shootings (e.g., Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Some researchers, such as Muschert (2007), have called for studies that investigate a wider variety of such events, and Holody and Daniel (2017) find that coverage of a mass shooting at an Aurora, Colorado, movie theater differed from results reported in several studies of school shootings. Therefore, this research seeks to add to the limited body of work examining nonschool shootings via a content analysis of the 2015 shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, at the historically Black Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where, during a Bible study session, a 21-year-old avowed White supremacist shot and killed nine people. Among the victims was the church’s pastor, Rev. Clementa Pinckney, who also served as a state senator.

How the news media addressed the Charleston shooting is worthy of investigation because its complexity can provide insight into how journalists address these tragedies. In addition to discussions of gun control, issues such as race, the Black Lives Matter movement, hate crimes, the White supremacist movement, and religion were significant components of coverage. The shooting also intensified debate over calls to remove the Confederate flag from government buildings in South Carolina and other Southern states.

The Shooting in Charleston

At 8:17 p.m. on Wednesday, June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof entered the church, posed as a prospective member, and took part in an ongoing Bible study session for nearly an hour (Ellis, Brumfield, & Edwards, 2015) before opening fire (Held, 2017). Eight church members died at the scene and a ninth died at a hospital (Ellis, Payne, Perez, & Ford, 2015). One survivor reported that Roof said he would spare her so that she could "tell the story" (Schuppe & Morrison, 2017).

Roof was arrested the next morning and offered no remorse for the killings. He reportedly said he had intended to start a "race war" (Held, 2017) and that his actions were necessary because of an epidemic of Black-on-White crime (Sack & Blinder, 2016). He was found guilty and sentenced to death (Hawes & Evans, 2017) and is currently sitting on federal death row (Schuppe & Morrison, 2017).

Predictably, Roof's crimes prompted more debate about gun control (Jervis, 2015). The National Rifle Association argued that stricter gun laws would not prevent future shootings. However, President Obama said the shooting could have been prevented had it been more difficult for Roof to purchase the Glock semiautomatic handgun he used to kill his victims (Jervis, 2015).

Given strong evidence that Roof's actions were racially motivated and elaborately planned, his charges included federal hate crimes (Shoichet & Perez, 2015). "We think that this is exactly the type of case that the federal hate crimes statutes were, in fact, conceived to cover," U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said. "Racially motivated violence such as this is the original domestic terrorism" (Shoichet & Perez, 2015, para. 2).

The Charleston shooting also provided impetus for Black Lives Matter protests (el-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2018). Just two months before the shooting, Pinckney helped lead a prayer vigil for Walter Scott, an African American who was shot and killed by a local police officer while attempting to run away. Pinckney also advocated for legislation requiring police officers to wear body cameras while on duty (Weaver & Bowers, 2015).

Furthermore, the shooting reopened public debate about the ethics of displaying the Confederate flag on government grounds, most notably at the South Carolina State House (Bradner, 2015). The flag, often considered a racist symbol, was seen by many as disrespectful toward the victims and their families (Blaser, 2015; Henderson, 2015; Taylor 2015) and was ordered removed from government buildings in July 2015 (Ellis et al., 2015).

To date, only one published study of media reports about the Charleston shooting has appeared. Using critical discourse analysis, el-Nawawy and Elmasry (2018) examine how *Anderson Cooper 360°* on CNN and *The O'Reilly Factor* on Fox News covered the incident and found crucial differences between the two programs. *Anderson Cooper 360°* focused on humanizing the shooting victims and highlighting the community of Charleston's response to the tragedy. Portrayals suggested that the city "defeated the challenge of a racist crime with solidarity, resilience, grace, faith and forgiveness" (el-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2018, p. 949). On the other hand, *The O'Reilly Factor* focused on defending the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, stressing that institutional racism no longer exists in the United States. Although both programs addressed racism, they suggested that most Americans are not racist and "ignored the structural context of racism that creates the conditions under which racist violence thrives" (el-Nawawy & Elmasry, 2018, p. 955).

Framing Media Coverage of Mass Shootings

Many analyses of coverage of mass shootings use framing theory, which has become a popular area of research for communication scholars (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016; Weaver, 2007). Framing is especially helpful in such studies because of its connection to journalistic practice and professional routines (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014), which Shoemaker and Reese (2014) define as the "patterned, repeated practices, forms and rules that media workers use to do their jobs" (p. 165). Entman (1993) wrote:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

A media frame, according to Tankard (2001), is a "central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration" (pp. 100–101). McCombs and Ghanem (2001) write that framing is "the construction of an agenda with a restricted number of thematically related attributes to create a coherent picture of a particular object" (p. 70). Shoemaker and Reese (2014) note that, "as journalists write news stories, they can consciously or unconsciously add one frame or another, because that's what they have been trained to do and because frames help the facts make sense" (p. 176).

Weaver (2007) notes that framing's popularity "may have to do with the ambiguity or the comprehensive nature of the term. 'Frame' can be applied to many different aspects of messages and to many different types of messages" (p. 144). Frames can be conceptualized as independent or dependent variables (Scheufele, 1999). Furthermore, there is no consensus on a specific set of frames used by journalists (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Ghanem (1997) points out that most studies use framing to apply to a single event, making cross-issue generalizability difficult, and Bichard (2006) cites "a need for an accurate framing measurement strategy and categorization that is applicable to a variety of media platforms" (p. 331).

Chyi and McCombs (2004) developed a two-dimensional measurement scheme of examining frames to address cross-issue generalizability in a systematic fashion. Several studies of media coverage of mass shootings have employed their framework (e.g., Holody & Daniel, 2017; Kwon & Moon, 2009; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Park, Holody, & Zhang, 2012; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014), which organizes the measurement of frames around the dimensions of time and space, because they “represent central organizing ideas in journalistic practice” (p. 25). The space dimension consists of five levels, viewed as a continuum: (1) At the individual level, the news event is framed within a scope limited to the individuals involved in an event; (2) at the community level, the news event is framed as relevant to a particular community; (3) at the regional level, the news event is framed as relevant to a more general population such as residents of a metropolitan area or state; (4) at the societal level, the news event is framed in terms of social or national significance; and (5) at the international level, the news event is framed from an international perspective. The time dimension consists of three levels: past, present, and future. The two dimensions are combined and sorted by space and time.

Chyi and McCombs (2004) first applied their framework in a study of *New York Times* coverage of the 1999 Columbine school shooting in Littleton, Colorado. They found that 54% of the stories were framed at the societal level in terms of space, and 70% utilized the present time frame. The societal/present combination was most prominent, with 39% of the stories employing these frames. In addition, stories with the past time frame tended to use the individual space frame, and the future time frame was associated with use of the societal space frame.

Muschert and Carr (2006) examined coverage of eight lower-profile school shootings between 1997 and 2001. Their results were similar to Chyi and McCombs’ (2004) in that societal was the leading space frame and present was the leading time frame. The number of stories using the societal frame was a bit lower than in Chyi and McCombs, at 40%, and more stories (86%) were framed as present. The societal/present frame combination was most prominent at 31%, followed closely by the community/present frame with 29%. Frame changing was more likely to occur in these eight events.

Schildkraut and Muschert (2014) compared Columbine coverage with that of the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut. Their analysis revealed similarities in that the societal space frame and the present time frame were most prominent. However, differences were noted in the use of space frames. The societal space frame declined after the first 10 days in coverage of Sandy Hook, but use of the same frame increased over time in Columbine coverage. In addition, the individual/present frame combination was much more likely (22% vs. 7%) to be used in stories about Sandy Hook. This increased attention on the victims led the researchers to speculate that journalistic routines changed in the 13 years between events.

Holody and Daniel (2017) found that national and local newspapers differed in their coverage of the shooting in Aurora, Colorado, where 12 people were killed at a movie theater. National newspapers focused on the individual and societal space frames, with each type of frame appearing in 43% of the articles. Local newspapers also employed the individual space frame most (44%) but also made significant use of the community frame (40%). The individual/present frame combination was most prominent, appearing in nearly 40% of the national newspaper articles and in more than 32% of the local newspaper articles. The researchers propose that this combination was dominant because journalists tended to concentrate on the specifics of the shooting being covered.

Scholars have also used Chyi and McCombs' (2004) framework to assess the quality of media coverage of other issues. In a study of urban newspaper reporting about methamphetamine use, Schwartz and Andsager (2008), find that frequent use of the present frame along with an emphasis on the individual frame in articles not mentioning gay men provide evidence that journalists did not view methamphetamine use as a serious problem among the general population. Cassidy (2017) employed the framework to analyze sports journalists' coverage of the coming-out announcements of National Basketball Association veteran Jason Collins and football All-American Michael Sam. Although the individual/present frame combination was most prominent, significant use of community and societal frames indicates that coverage went beyond the basics and discussed larger issues facing gay professional athletes.

Some scholars have voiced criticism of Chyi and McCombs' (2004) framework. Park, Holody, and Zhang (2012) state that "the analytic scheme reduced rich details of the shooting incidents to the point that it was difficult to determine what the findings meant in terms of audience understanding of an incident" (p. 479). Other studies have added to or altered the framework in various ways. Kwon and Moon's (2009) examination of the Virginia Tech shooting incorporated collectivistic storytelling into the time and space frames because the authors were comparing U.S. and South Korean newspapers. Cassidy (2017) added two identity-based components to the space frames (professional basketball/football community and gay athlete) because there was little geographic relevance to examining coverage of Collins and Sam.

The present study extends Chyi and McCombs' (2004) framework by examining the time and space frames present in each paragraph of stories about the Charleston shooting. Previous studies have used the individual story as the unit of analysis. Although, as Chyi and McCombs (2004) note, "framing is not about every aspect or attribute of an object" (p. 31), it is possible, given the complexity of issues surrounding the Charleston shooting, that multiple frames are present in stories. Relatedly, Graber (2005) contends that studies coding only small portions of news stories can omit important themes. Thus, analyzing each paragraph might provide additional detail and insight into the routines of mass shooting coverage, aiding our understanding of journalism.

Research Questions

Given the unique circumstances of the Charleston shooting and that research into mass shootings in general, and nonschool shootings in particular, is a developing research area, four research questions are proposed:

- RQ1: How many news stories about the Charleston shooting were published and how were they distributed during the first 30 days of coverage?*
- RQ2: What is the distribution of space frames during the first 30 days of coverage?*
- RQ3: What is the distribution of time frames during the first 30 days of coverage?*
- RQ4: Are there any relationships between the use of space and time frames in combination during the first 30 days of coverage?*

Method

Content analysis was used to answer our research questions. Articles from *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* were examined based on their status as leading, influential national newspapers. Wanta and Hu (1993) have explained that such papers can have an agenda-setting effect because they often impact how issues are covered by other media organizations. The four newspapers have also been cited in many studies as elite and/or prestige publications (e.g., An & Gower, 2009; Carpenter, 2007; Davidson & Wallack, 2004; Golan & Lukito, 2017; Kwon & Moon, 2009; Lacy, Fico, & Simon, 1991).

The LexisNexis Academic database was used to select articles from *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Washington Post*. Full-text keyword searches were conducted for "Charleston" from the "newspaper" source for a 30-day period (June 17–July 16, 2015) to mirror other studies of mass shootings (e.g., Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Holody & Daniel, 2017; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). To acquire *The Wall Street Journal* portion of the sample, one of the authors obtained a subscription, allowing access to the paper's archives. The relevant articles were selected using "Charleston" as the search term for the same 30-day period. For all the papers, stories where the Charleston shooting was the main focus or played a prominent role were chosen for analysis, as were stories written as a consequence of the shooting (Holody & Daniel, 2017). Letters to the editor were not included. Stories appearing in multiple newspapers were coded once.

The articles were coded for the date of publication and word length. Every headline and paragraph of the articles was coded for the space frame and the time frame. Headlines were included because Chyi and McCombs (2004) instructed coders to utilize article headlines when deciding on the most prominent frames.

The space frame consists of five levels: (1) The *individual* level includes discussion of individuals involved in the Charleston shooting (e.g., the victims, the gunman, their family members), interactions among them, or descriptions of their acts, reactions, or background information; (2) the *community* level includes discussion of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Charleston, or any other single community or a particular group; (3) the *regional* level includes discussion of the Charleston metropolitan area, the state of South Carolina, or any other state or region—in other words, the impact of the event on a metropolitan area, state, or region; (4) the *societal* level includes discussion of concerns and/or events with nationwide interests—in other words, the impact of the Charleston shooting on the nation as a whole; and (5) the *international* level includes discussion of the global impact of the Charleston shooting, related phenomena or social problems seen in other countries, or the interaction between multiple countries.

The time frame consisted of three levels: (1) The *past* level includes discussion of previous events that have no direct link to the Charleston shooting (e.g., other potentially race-related shootings, the status of race relations in the nation, the life story of any of the victims or the gunman) or analysis with a historical perspective; (2) the *present* level includes discussion of events or developments surrounding the Charleston shooting at the time of the event or immediate or short-range consequences of the shooting; and (3) the *future* level includes discussion of the long-term effects of the Charleston shooting, suggestions for solutions, actions to be taken, or changes in policy that may prevent similar events from occurring.

Two of the authors served as coders. For reliability purposes, 17 articles (approximately 12%) were analyzed by both, consistent with recommendations of leading content analysis texts (Neuendorf, 2017; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). Using Scott's π , the level of agreement was .83 for the time frame variable and .80 for the space frame variable.

Results

A total of 136 articles were analyzed. These articles varied in word count ($M = 946$, $mode = 1,411$, $Mdn = 847$, $minimum = 246$, $maximum = 2,426$, $SD = 443$) and number of paragraphs ($M = 21$, $mode = 14$, $Mdn = 19$, $minimum = 4$, $maximum = 62$, $SD = 11$). Addressing RQ1, most articles on the shooting appeared within the first five days ($N = 62$, 46%) and the second five days ($N = 41$, 30%), with coverage of the event diminishing over time (in the third five days, $N = 16$, 12%; in the fourth five days, $N = 6$, 4%; in the fifth five days, $N = 8$, 6%; in the sixth five days, $N = 3$, 2%). Coverage was split between the number of articles appearing in *The New York Times* ($N = 57$, 42%) and *The Washington Post* ($N = 48$, 35%), with substantially less coverage in *USA Today* ($N = 16$, 12%) and *The Wall Street Journal* ($N = 15$, 11%).

The data were examined using two complementary analyses to answer RQ2 and RQ3. First, because each paragraph in the articles was coded for a space frame and a time frame, the number of paragraphs representing these frames was calculated for each article. This analysis revealed that, on average, the societal frame appeared the most ($M = 7.73$ number of paragraphs, 37%) followed closely by the individual frame ($M = 7.54$, 33%). Paragraphs representing the community frame occurred less ($M = 4.92$, 20%). The regional ($M = 1.94$, 9%) and international frames ($M = 0.10$, 1%) were not generally used. As might be expected, the time frame used the most was present ($M = 11.11$ number of paragraphs, 53%), and this was followed by the past frame ($M = 7.60$, 33%). The future frame was used sparingly ($M = 3.39$, 14%).

Visual inspection of the space frame and time frame codes indicated relatively low levels of variability. In other words, journalists who employed a space frame tended to use that frame throughout their writing. To test this assessment empirically, standard deviations were calculated for each article with respect to both the space and time frames. Analyses revealed support for frame consistency within each article. For the space frame, the modal standard deviation was 0 ($M = 0.75$, $Mdn = 0.80$, $minimum = 0.00$, $maximum = 1.64$, $SD = 0.51$) with a negatively skewed distribution (-0.20). Likewise, there was little variation in the use of the time frame in these articles ($M = 0.45$, $mode = 0.00$, $Mdn = 0.46$, $minimum = 0.00$, $maximum = 1.05$, $SD = 0.28$) with a negatively skewed distribution (-0.14). To determine whether the article length is related to the variability of the use of the space and time frames, correlational analyses were conducted. Articles that had higher word and paragraph counts did not have greater variability in their use of the space frame ($r = -.07$, $p = .22$; $r = -.09$, $p = .14$, respectively) or in use of the time frame ($r = .13$, $p = .06$; $r = .02$, $p = .40$, respectively).

Although minimal variation is seen overall, any pattern where variation did occur could offer insight into how the articles about the shooting were structured. Figure 1 represents the locations (paragraph numbers) in articles about the Charleston shooting where changes in the use of space frames occurred.

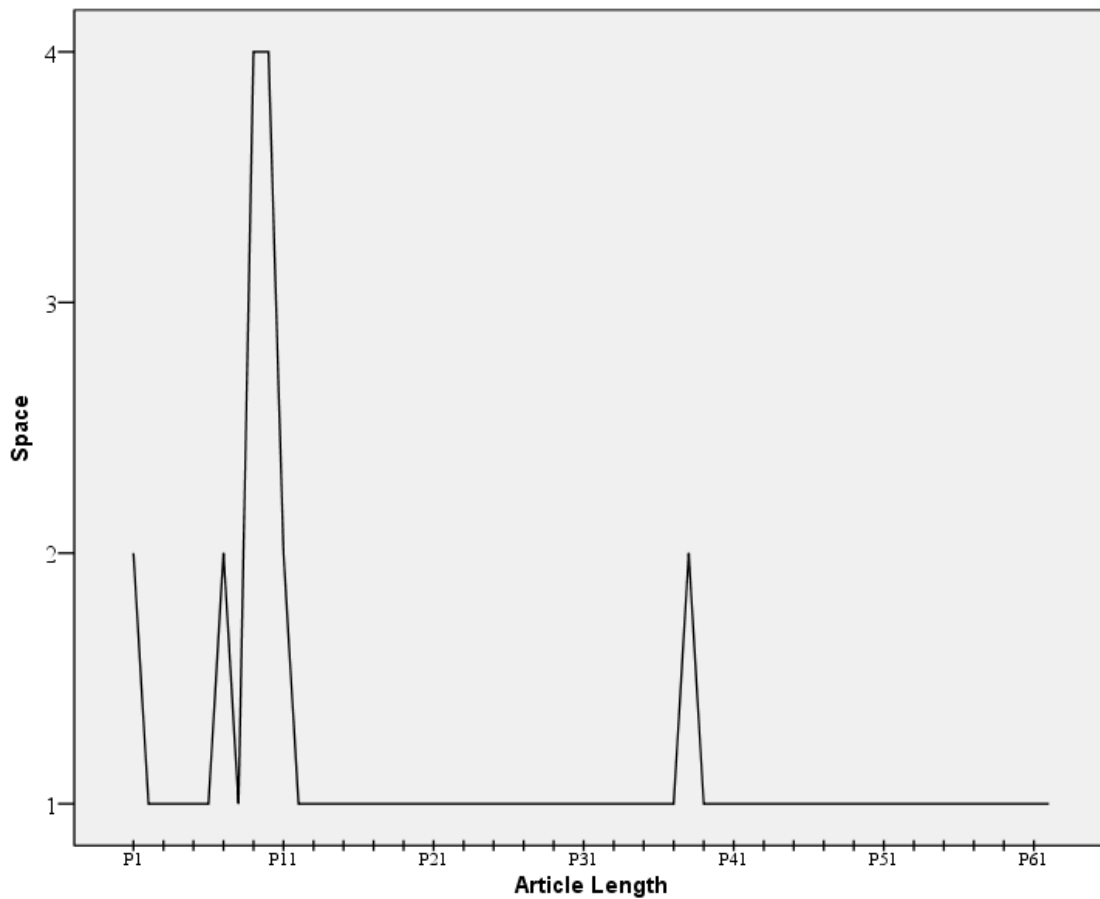


Figure 1. Location of modal space frame changes based on paragraph number.

The correlation between paragraph number and modal space frame was significant ($r_s = -.18, p = .02$). Longer articles tended to use the individual and community frames, while shorter articles focused on the societal frame. Figure 2 illustrates the locations in the articles where changes in the use of time frames occurred. There was no correlation between article length and modal time frame ($r_s = .10, p = .13$). The modal paragraph length for these articles was 14, so the data were analyzed as they specifically related to articles that were between 1 and 14 paragraphs long. Results from this dichotomization revealed that shorter articles showed no relationship between paragraph number and modal space frame ($r_s = .03, p = .43$). For these articles, the individual, community, and societal frames appeared regularly regardless of article length. A significant negative correlation exists between paragraph number and modal time frame ($r_s = -.31, p = .02$), revealing that articles approaching 14 paragraphs focused on the past time frame. The interpretation for articles longer than 14 paragraphs did not differ from the overall correlational results for the number of paragraphs and the modal space frame and the modal time frame discussed above (number of paragraphs and modal space frame, $r_s = -.15, p = .09$; number of paragraphs and modal time frame, $r_s = .03, p = .34$).

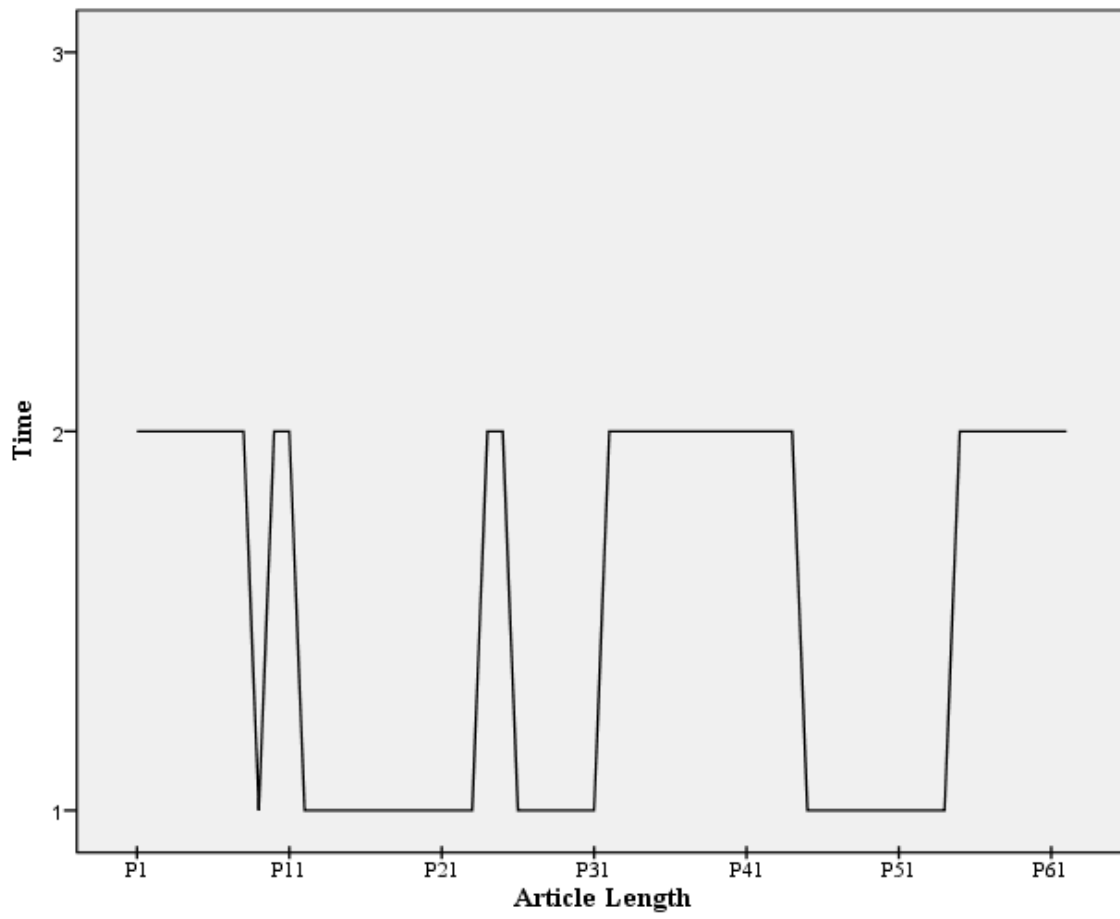


Figure 2. Location of modal time frame changes based on paragraph number.

The second, complementary analysis included computing an overall space frame and time frame code for each article. This task was accomplished by taking the modal paragraph score for the space frame and the modal paragraph score for the time frame so that each article had two overall scores: one representing the modal space frame for that article and one indicating the modal time frame for that article. Although this overall score for the space and time frames reflects traditional approaches to coding frames (e.g., Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014; Schwartz & Andsager, 2008), the method of calculation is unique to the current investigation. In a few instances, articles were written so that two frames occurred most frequently (i.e., multiple modes existed) for the space frame ($N = 5$), the time frame ($N = 5$), and the space/time frame ($N = 1$). Unfortunately, given the infrequent appearances of multiple modes, no meaningful comparisons with this subset of articles could be made. Therefore, to answer RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, results were ultimately calculated using the overall space and time frames in the remaining 125 articles. The societal space frame was employed most often ($N = 54$, 44%), followed by the individual space frame ($N = 38$, 30%) and the community frame ($N = 26$, 21%). The regional frame was little used ($N = 7$, 5%), and the international frame never appeared as the modal frame in any of the articles. The articles primarily used the present ($N = 68$, 54%) and past ($N = 45$, 36%) time frames, while few articles relied on the future time frame ($N = 12$, 10%). Therefore, with respect to RQ2, journalists writing about the Charleston shooting tended to focus on societal, individual, and community frames during the first 30 days of coverage. Regional concerns were unlikely to be addressed, and international implications of the event were not covered. Answering RQ3, these data reveal that journalists concentrated on presenting immediate consequences (i.e., present frame) of the shooting or on linking events that happened before the shooting (i.e., past frame).

RQ4 asked whether a relationship exists between the use of specific space frames and the use of time frames. As shown in Table 1, when journalists focused on future implications of the shooting, they considered the societal impact of the event.

Table 1. Cross-Tabulations for Use of the Space Frame and the Time Frame (N = 125).

Space frame	Time frame		
	Past	Present	Future
Individual	11 (9%)	27 (21%)	0 (0%)
Community	10 (8%)	16 (13%)	0 (0%)
Regional	2 (1%)	5 (4%)	0 (0%)
Societal	22 (18%)	20 (16%)	12 (10%)
International	—	—	—

Note. The international space frame did not appear as the most common frame in any article.

Articles employing the past or present time frames tended to discuss individual, community, and societal issues surrounding the Charleston shooting. No articles focused on international issues associated with the event.

Because news and opinion articles might differ in their use of space and time frames, additional analyses were conducted to explore this possibility. The results from this analysis are presented in Table 2 for opinion articles—defined as stories written by columnists or those labeled as editorials, op-eds, or opinion pieces. There were 28 articles coded as opinion articles (*The New York Times*, $n = 9$; *The Washington Post*, $n = 15$; *The Wall Street Journal*, $n = 4$). Of these articles, 24 had unimodal space or time frames and could be analyzed. As Table 2 reveals, articles focused on the societal frame with past and present information featured. The remaining news articles ($n = 101$) demonstrated the same pattern of findings as those presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Cross-Tabulations for Use of the Space Frame and the Time Frame for Opinion Articles (N = 24).

Space frame	Time frame		
	Past	Present	Future
Individual	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Community	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
Regional	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Societal	10 (43%)	4 (17%)	1 (4%)
International	—	—	—

Note. The international space frame did not appear as the most common frame in any article.

The data were examined to determine whether a relationship exists between when an article was published within the first 30 days of the shooting and the modal space frame and modal time frame. Results revealed no relationship between date of publication and the use of a particular space frame ($r_s = .13$, $p = .07$), but a positive correlation was found between date of publication and the use of the time frame ($r_s = .20$, $p = .01$), indicating that articles published later in the 30-day window tended to highlight future-oriented issues such as suggestions for policy action and long-term effects.

Discussion

This research contributes to the growing body of literature examining media coverage of mass shootings in the United States. Whereas much of the earlier work examined school shootings, this effort broadens the focus and deepens our understanding through an analysis of the Charleston shooting—a tragedy that was arguably more complex than some other mass shootings and one that did not take place at a school. While the overall results note some similarities in the coverage of Charleston and other mass shootings, some intriguing differences were also found (see Table 3). Discussing how our findings fit in the context of other studies utilizing Chyi and McCombs' (2004) framework provides additional insight into developments and changes in the routines of journalists covering such tragedies.

Table 3. Comparison of Results Across Studies; Percentages of Space Frames and Time Frames Used in National Newspaper Stories.

	Space frame					Time frame		
	Individual	Community	Regional	Societal	International	Past	Present	Future
Columbine	17	29	2	52	0	16	71	13
Other schools	21	29	2	48	0	10	78	12
Sandy Hook	18	16	16	46	4	8	84	8
Aurora ^a	43	8	2	43	4	16	70	14
Charleston	30	21	5	44	0	36	54	10

Coverage of the Charleston shooting was prominently featured in the four newspapers examined ($N = 136$), but some earlier events received more media attention during the first 30 days of coverage. For example, there were 170 and 132 articles, respectively, in *The New York Times* following the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). There were 117 articles published about the Aurora shooting in *The New York Times* and *USA Today* (Holody & Daniel, 2017). In this study, however, only 73 articles appeared in those two papers. Thus, the relative dearth of media attention given the Charleston shooting lends some credence to complaints that coverage of mass shootings has become more routine; because of the frequency of mass shootings, they do not merit as much attention as they once did.

However, coverage of Charleston was extensive in terms of article length. As noted earlier, the average article length was 946 words. Although most studies of mass shootings do not report information about article length, national newspaper articles covering the Aurora shooting tended to be considerably shorter ($M = 702$; Holody & Daniel, 2017). One reason for this could be that the Charleston shooting prompted discussion of a host of societal issues beyond gun control, and that was borne out in the depth of the articles, if not their number.

Adding to the argument that the Charleston shooting was a unique event is the relative lack of frame changing throughout the first 30 days of coverage. Previous studies of mass shootings found extensive changes in framing. Chyi and McCombs (2004) found shifts from the individual to societal space frame in later stories about Columbine, while the opposite was true in stories about Sandy Hook (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). This contrasts with the results here, where we found no relationship between date of publication and use of the space frame. Schildkraut and Muschert (2014) suggested that journalistic routines regarding use of the space frame may have changed since Columbine. But the results of this study indicate that changes in use of the space frame over the duration of coverage may have more to do with the details of a specific event. However, in keeping with much of the research on mass shootings, a positive correlation was found between publication date and use of the future frame, which tended to appear in articles published later in the 30-day period.

While previous studies have found relative overall consistency of frame usage, the increased use of the individual space frame (stories about individuals involved) in coverage of more recent mass shootings has prompted researchers to conclude that journalists' routines have shifted in light of the increased regularity of

mass shootings (Holody & Daniel, 2017; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). The results of this study bear that out as well, though not to the degree of Holody and Daniel (2017), who found more than double the use of the individual space frame in national newspaper stories about the Aurora shooting, compared with Chyi and McCombs (2004) and Schildkraut and Muschert (2014; see Table 3). But the finding of 30% usage of the individual frame in coverage of the Charleston shooting is a substantive increase over several studies of earlier shootings. Also worth noting is that the shooters in both Charleston and Aurora did not die at the scene, unlike Columbine and Sandy Hook. So one reason for the increase in use of the individual frame could be because there was additional and ongoing information about both perpetrators. Supporting this contention are findings that longer articles (more than 14 paragraphs) about the Charleston shooting tended to utilize the individual frame. However, the lower overall percentage of individual frames for this study when compared with Holody and Daniel (2017) also lends some credence to speculation that the complexity of the Charleston shooting led to more consistency and variety in frames used, as does the finding that the community frame (stories focusing on Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Charleston) also tended to be used in longer stories.

Similar to results of previous research, the societal space frame (stories focusing on the impact of the shooting on the nation as a whole) was the leading space frame of this study. However, more attention was given to community frames and regional frames (stories focusing on South Carolina or the South in general) than in Holody and Daniel (2017; see Table 3). Also consistent with the findings of other studies is the use of the present time frame. However, coverage of the Charleston shooting was much more likely than coverage of other shootings to use the past frame (see Table 3). The increased use of the past frame seems logical here considering the bounty of information available about the shooter. Numerous stories delved into Roof's background and on how he came to be a White supremacist. Also, some of the victims were prominent citizens of Charleston—most notably Pinckney, the church pastor and a state senator. Holody and Daniel (2017) speculate that increased use of the past frame is an indication that "mass shootings are no longer the unknown" (p. 92).

No time/space frame combination dominated overall coverage of the Charleston shooting. Individual/present was the leading combination at 21%.¹ The same combination led coverage of the Aurora shooting, but at a much higher percentage (39.8%; Holody & Daniel, 2017). Societal/present was also prominent in Charleston, with 16% of stories adopting this combination.² Similarly, this was also the second leading combination in the Aurora study. But, once again, the percentage was much higher at 29%. The societal/present frame combination tended to dominate coverage of school shootings. For example, 49% of stories about Sandy Hook focused on societal/present (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014).

¹ An example of the individual/present combination is: "A white gunman opened fire Wednesday night at a historic black church in downtown Charleston, S.S., killing nine people before fleeing and setting off an overnight manhunt, the police said" (Horowitz, Corasaniti, & Southvall, 2015, p. A15).

² An example of the societal/present combination is: "The shooting massacre of a black pastor and his parishioners at a South Carolina church on Wednesday night once again confronted President Obama with a moment of racial turmoil in a country that for all its progress has yet to completely shed the burden of hatred and division" (Baker, 2015, p. A18).

Perhaps the most compelling difference in coverage of Charleston when compared with other mass shootings is the finding that 18% of the stories focused on the societal/past combination.³ This combination was a minor component of Columbine and Sandy Hook coverage, with 2% and 3%, respectively, of the articles falling into that category (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). This result also speaks to the uniqueness of Charleston. Because this event raised a multitude of other societal issues beyond gun control, it seems that journalists felt the need to provide historical background information related to these topics in their coverage. Although previous research does not report data on opinion articles, it seems logical that the uniqueness of Charleston is also evident by the fact that 43% of the stories employed this frame combination, and nearly two-thirds (64%) of these articles adopted a societal space frame. In addition, the community/past frame combination was featured more in stories about Charleston than it was in stories about other mass shootings (7% vs. 4% in Columbine and 0% in Sandy Hook; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014).

In Columbine coverage, Chyi and McCombs (2004) noted that "journalists . . . enhance issue salience on the media agenda through frame-changing" (p. 31), while Schildkraut and Muschert (2014) write that "the media used continual frame changing" (p. 36) in their reports about Sandy Hook. On the other hand, McCombs and Ghanem (2001) state that framing emanates from a restricted number of attributes. Similarly, Holody and Daniel (2017) note that "most coverage of a single event . . . tends to use a small number of similar frames" (p. 90). These perspectives are worthy of consideration in light of the findings of this study, which finds little evidence of frame changing in coverage of the Charleston shooting. However, a fairly wide variety of frames were employed consistently throughout the 30-day period due to the event's connection to a host of other relevant issues; these could be considered extended frames, defined as frames other than those that made the event news in the first place (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). The fact that such details can be discovered by using Chyi and McCombs' measurement scheme for media frames further speaks to the framework's applicability for studying media content, especially for research on journalistic practice and routines.

To that end, when designing this study, we decided to code every paragraph and headline for each story about the Charleston shooting because we hypothesized that, given the complexity of the event, doing so would provide a fuller and more detailed account of how journalists cover mass shootings. However, relatively low levels of variability were found in the articles. In other words, journalists consistently employed a single space and time frame throughout a story. Thus, the results here provide additional support for Chyi and McCombs' (2004) original decision to code for an overall space and time frame for each article.

Like all research studies, this study has some limitations. First, we examined only leading national newspapers. It is possible that other forms of media would use different space and time frames and combinations. An examination of local media might also produce different results. For example, Holody and Daniel (2017) found differences between national and local newspapers in their study of the Aurora shooting. This research, like many other studies of mass shootings, examined only the first 30 days of coverage. Although results have consistently shown that coverage tends to subside long before 30 days, it is possible that examining coverage for a longer duration would provide additional useful information. Other research has demonstrated

³ An example of the societal/past combination is: "Police are investigating the fatal shooting of nine African Americans at AME Church in Charleston, S.C., as a hate crime committed by a white man. Unfortunately, it's not a unique event in American history" (Butler, 2015, p. B1).

that the average time an issue remains on the public agenda is slightly more than 18 months (McCombs & Zhu, 1995).

Another potential limitation is that this research—like many studies of mass shootings—did not pinpoint the placement of the articles in the newspapers. However, studies have shown that how and what types of stories are featured on the front page are in a state of flux due to the newspaper industry's attempts to deal with economic pressures exacerbated by audience migration to the Internet (Tanikawa, 2017). This suggests that page placement may not be as important as it once was. However, the substantial media attention devoted to the Charleston shooting makes it very likely—especially during the initial days of coverage, when the vast majority of the stories were published—that the articles were prominently positioned overall.

As noted earlier, the measurement scheme employed here has come under some criticism by scholars who think it is lacking in nuance (Park et al., 2012). Chyi and McCombs (2004) acknowledge this, noting that their purpose was “not to describe the specific details . . . but to examine framing as a process in journalistic practice” (p. 31). However, the two-dimensional measurement scheme is valuable in that it enables comparison of coverage of various mass shootings. This is important—particularly for a study such as this one, which is interested in examining journalistic routines—because it allows patterns and differences in coverage of similar events to be easily observed, unlike many other framing studies whose measurement can only be applied to a single incident (Bichard, 2006; Ghanem, 1997) or those whose framework is more general, such as Iyengar's (1991) classification of episodic and thematic frames.

Conclusion

The term *routine* has been mentioned consistently throughout this manuscript. Indeed, some of the initial paragraphs mention observers and scholars lamenting that it has become routine to cover and write about mass shootings because of their frequency. For the most part, however, those comments are not complaints about the routines used by journalists to do their jobs. Gaye Tuchman (1973), the author of several classic ethnographic studies of how news is made, notes that journalists need routines because they are expected to report on “unexpected events on a routine basis” (p. 111). She further states that, “without some routine method of coping with unexpected events, news organizations, as national enterprises, would flounder and fail” (p. 111). Certainly, mass shootings are “predictably unpredictable” news events in that they occur with increasing regularity, yet one cannot predict when and where they will happen. Thus, they are still extraordinarily important events and fall into a typification Tuchman (1978) describes as “what a story.” Berkowitz (1992) found that existing routines for these types of stories acted as a baseline of sorts for coverage, but that journalists improvised to incorporate additional elements of importance to that particular what-a-story into their reports. That same kind of adjustment can be seen when comparing coverage of Charleston with that of other mass shootings. Reporters used many of the enduring narrative strategies and routines developed over the years, but their coverage of the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church—particularly the consistent use of a wider variety of frames, along with increased attention to the societal/past frame combination—shows they also incorporated attributes unique to this tragedy into their stories. This, in turn, suggests that journalistic routines for covering mass shootings are shifting and evolving and are thus not as formulaic and rote as some critics contend.

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