Protest News Framing Cycle:
How *The New York Times* Covered Occupy Wall Street

JULIAN GOTTLIEB[1]
University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

This article introduces a *protest news framing cycle* and presents the results of a longitudinal analysis of news attention and framing of protest movements. To identify the frame-changing dynamic occurring over time, a content analysis of the news coverage of Occupy Wall Street was conducted on 228 articles and 37 editorials in *The New York Times* from the start of the protest in September 2011 until long after the protest had subsided in July 2014. The article identifies longitudinal changes in news frames about the economic substance of the protest and the ensuing conflict between protesters and city officials during the occupation. Findings suggest that conflict had a significant impact on the number of news stories about the protest. Further, the results demonstrate how news framing opportunities changed as the movement reached different stages of the news attention cycle. As the movement grew, journalists focused on the movement's economic grievances, including economic inequality, bank bailouts, and foreclosures. As the movement peaked, news attention shifted to the intensifying conflict between city officials and protesters.

Keywords: framing; news attention; social movements; The New York Times; Occupy Wall Street

Introduction

Amid a global economic downturn with financial institutions run amok, and what many see as the corrupting influence of corporate money on political processes (Gitlin, 2012), a wave of economic and antigovernment protest activity has stretched across many cities around the world, from London to Cairo to Hong Kong to New York City. Embodying the spirit of this global economic discontent, the Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS) offered a refreshing blend of boldness and provocation long dormant in U.S. politics.

OWS expressed outrage over the lack of accountability in the aftermath of the recession, bank bailouts, and, importantly, rising economic inequality (Castells, 2012; Gitlin, 2012; van Gelder, 2011). Within less than a month of the occupation, protests had spread across the country in cities such as Oakland, Boston, and Chicago—and resonated globally—in London, Tokyo, and Sydney (Young, 2013). Although the timeliness of the protesters' message of political equality and economic fairness galvanized widespread public support, cities resisted accommodating the protests.

Echoing the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle, local governments forcefully evicted the protesters with aggressive policing and arrests. This phenomenon has been well documented in previous studies (Tarrow, 2011). Although the showdown between city officials and police, on one hand, and the protesters, on the other, ultimately led to OWS's unraveling, the mass media spectacle it created (Dayan & Katz, 1992) played a complex but important role in shaping the movement's identity and amplifying the movement's message (Young, 2013). Yet, as former *New York Times* media reporter Brian Stelter (2011b) observed, "Lacking a list of demands or recognized leaders, the Occupy movement has at times perplexed the nation's media outlets" (p. B1). Journalists faced a daunting task when it came to striking an appropriate balance of taking the claims of protesters seriously and being critical when they faltered. Consequently, media scholars have taken up the question of how much news coverage of protests is warranted and what considerations should be emphasized in the coverage. Many have found coverage to be insufficient on a number of levels (Boykoff, 2006).

Studies have long observed the tendency for news organizations to ignore, marginalize, or delegitimize protests—something scholars have termed the "protest paradigm" (Di Cicco, 2010; Young, 2013). As one illustration, Giuffo (2001) concluded in a study of four globalization-related protest events that the news coverage of the events focused too heavily on "the small percentage of protesters who acted violently" and "glossed over or misrepresented" the underlying issues that led to the protests (p. 14). Other studies have come to similar conclusions about the focus on violence over substance (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012; Cammaerts, 2013).

Yet some scholars disagree about whether emphasis on violence and conflict will inherently marginalize protesters' claims. DeLuca and Peeples (2002) suggest of the 1999 protests in Seattle that the (sometimes) violent clashes between police and protest expanded news coverage of the larger issues that emerged during the WTO protests. In another study of the news coverage about the WTO protests in Seattle, Rojecki (2002) observes that, while "mass arrests could easily have become the focus of coverage," news organizations provided broad coverage about the essential issues and legitimacy of the protest (pp. 162–163). Overall, there is some dispute about the degree to which the news focus on violence and conflict among protesters and police at the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle marginalized the protest or drew attention to the broader themes of the protest.

Although the WTO protest in Seattle received a substantial amount of news coverage, the protest itself was short-lived because it was linked to a specific event, the WTO Ministerial Conference. Consequently, the major protest events occurred within several days of the conference and then ended. On the other hand, OWS did not experience time pressures to dissolve because it was not linked to a specific event. As a result, it lasted more than three months, remobilizing several times after the physical

occupation had ended. As Oliver and Maney (2000) have argued, "much more information is needed about temporal and other variations in patterns of media coverage" (p. 495). OWS presents a unique opportunity to examine how the amount of protest coverage and the framing devices journalists employ change longitudinally. The goal of this study is to examine how journalists balanced their attention to the Occupy movement's issues and grievances with the conflict between protesters and city governments throughout the course of the protest and after its dissolution.

To understand how journalists adopted and employed different news frames during different phases of the protest, I develop a theoretical model of the *protest news framing cycle* (Downs, 1972; Tarrow, 2011) based on research about journalistic practices, media framing, and social movements. To illustrate the model, I utilize a novel approach to content analysis (Matthes & Kohring, 2008) of *New York Times* coverage of OWS from September 2011 to July 2014. I supplement the content analysis with a discourse analysis (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012; Xu, 2013) to examine the frames journalists used as well as portrayals of protesters' issues and the conflict that occurred between protesters and city governments.

The study makes several contributions. The first contribution is the introduction of a protest news framing cycle, which models the cyclical changes in news framing of protests between substance, conflict, or a combination of both that occur at different stages of a protest. The second contribution is the development of a new approach to content analysis, which involves extracting the overall news frame of a story from smaller passages within a story. Third, the study provides empirical evidence of Oliver and Maney's (2000) expectation that media coverage of protest events will change over time and be sensitive to ongoing political processes such as the response of the government to contentious protest behavior. Fourth, it offers an initial answer to a question posed by Rojecki (2011) that asks, "Which tactics are most successful for achieving success as measured by issue salience and issue frames?" (p. 97). My findings suggest that confrontational tactics, measured here in the form of protester arrests, can have positive effects on issue salience but deleterious effects on the framing devices journalists employ. More specifically, this research substantiates previous findings that, as conflict between protesters and police heightens, substantive coverage of protest issues starts to decline (Murray, Parry, Robinson, & Goddard, 2008). I elaborate on the implications for international protests in the conclusion.

Theoretical Issues

Journalistic Practices

Scholars have noted that depictions of social movements in the news are, for the most part, guided by journalists' professional norms, rules, and values (Boykoff, 2006; Oliver & Maney, 2000). For example, the size and disruptiveness of a protest increases the probability of news coverage as well as the proximity of the news event to the news organization (McCarthy, McPhail, & Smith, 1996; Oliver & Myers, 2003). Most protests do not receive extensive coverage until they mobilize many participants.

In addition to the size of a movement, studies have documented that news organizations are attracted to protests because of the news value of conflict or controversy (Oliver & Maney, 2000). As Gans

(2004) observes, if protesters engage in confrontational or militant tactics, "the reportage is apt to be about militancy . . . the issues that protesters represent obtain much less attention" (p. 48). Similarly, Teune (2014) argues, "Aspects of social movements that attract media interest, such as mass demonstrations and images of conflict, are more or less incompatible with the activists' wish to see their story told" (p. 302).

This is consistent with previous research on news values. Galtung and Ruge (1965) as well as others (Cole & Harcup, 2010) describe how unexpected or negative features of an event that make the story newsworthy will also be emphasized in the reporting. In the case of protests, conflict between protesters and police can attract news interest and might take precedence over the claim that initiated the protest (Wouters, 2013). Concerning OWS, plenty of tension existed between local governments and the protests that spanned the country, which journalists could easily package into dramatic, event-driven stories about the protest. The conflict was relatively easy to quantify, at least in terms of protester arrests. For example, early in October, more than 700 protesters were arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge, drawing considerable media attention and catapulting the movement into the national spotlight.

The New York Times noted that the protesters' conflict with city officials and police treatment of the protesters likely helped fuel more media attention. In a self-reflexive article, *New York Times* writer Brian Stelter (2011b) said, "Press coverage, minimal in the first days of the occupation in New York, picked up after amateur video surfaced online showing a police officer using pepper spray on protesters" (p. B1). Given journalists' propensity to cover protests that are large and disruptive, as well as the dramatic clashes between Occupy protesters and police, there is reason to believe that conflict, in the form of protester arrests, drove the amount of Occupy-related coverage. This leads to my first hypothesis:

H1:   *Variation in the frequency of OWS stories was driven by conflict, measured as variation in the number of arrests over time.*

Issue Attention Cycle

The amount of news attention to issues of public importance can fluctuate immensely over time. Journalistic practices and news values can influence what stories will receive attention (Cammaerts, 2013). Among the early studies to examine the temporal quality of issue salience in the media was Downs' (1972) work on the "issue attention cycle."

Downs developed the concept of an issue attention cycle to highlight how specific issues surface and decline in news and public discourse in a cyclical pattern. Issues start in a latent, "pre-problem stage" (Downs, 1972, pp. 39–40), in which a political problem largely remains unnoticed by the public until a dramatic series of events elicits news and public concern about the problem. This leads to "alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm" (ibid., p. 39). Unfortunately, frustration mounts quickly when people realize the costs of *solving* a problem are high. Intense public interest and media scrutiny decline, and other competing issues shift attention away from the initial problem. At this point, the issue enters a "post problem stage," in which attention to the issue is dormant unless new developments occur. Downs

claimed one of three factors would determine the duration of each stage in the cycle: the nature of the issue itself, public opinion about the issue, and journalistic approaches to covering the issue.

Although Downs' (1972) model has been influential, some scholars have questioned its core assumptions and applicability (Oh et al., 2012). Chyi and McCombs (2004) find the unit of analysis is too broadly defined as a social issue rather than a specific news event. Some have questioned Downs' articulation of the mechanisms underlying the issue attention cycle (Nisbet & Huge, 2006). Others have recommended a simplified version of the model with three stages: waxing interest, maintenance, and waning interest (McComas & Shanahan, 1999). At least one study has questioned the applicability of the model in an international context. Brossard, Shanahan, and McComas (2004) found a cyclical pattern in U.S. coverage of global warming, but less of a cyclical dynamic in the French coverage, suggesting the issue attention cycle may be bound to the U.S. context only.

Despite concerns about the generalizability of the model, the cyclical nature of news coverage has been demonstrated on various issues (Shih, Wijaya, & Brossard, 2008). However, little scholarly attention has been devoted to how protest coverage conforms to the issue attention cycle.[2] As Wouters observes (2013), the majority of studies about the reaction of the media to protests treat the protests as *static* rather than *dynamic*. Further, he suggests that integrating "dynamic aspects of issue-attention would open a box of intriguing questions" (p. 175). One such question involves the framing of protest at different stages in the issue attention cycle.

Nisbet and Huge (2006) argues that framing is a crucial mechanism underlying the issue attention cycle. Framing 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" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Previous work has shown that an issue's place in the issue attention cycle can heavily influence the type of frames that arise in news coverage of an issue (Shih et al., 2008). There is reason to suspect not only that protests coincide with the issue attention cycle but that different frames emerge in the news coverage of protests at different stages of the protest. Chyi and McCombs' (2004) "frame changing" concept is helpful for understanding why this might be the case.

Frame changing is the notion that journalists often reframe a news event by emphasizing different attributes of an event "to keep the story alive and fresh" (Chyi & McCombs, 2004, p. 22). Concerning protest coverage, studies have documented that journalists use various news frames in protest coverage, including depictions of the substantive matters, especially the grievances of protesters (Boykoff, 2006; Harlow & Johnson, 2011), and frames emphasizing the conflict between protesters and institutional actors (Oliver & Maney, 2000). In the case of OWS, there was an abundance of opportunities for these two types of frames: economic frames and conflict frames. Tarrow's (2011) "cycle of contention"

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[2] McCarthy et al. (1996) is an exception. This study compares police records of demonstrations in Washington, DC, in 1982 and 1991 and finds that television coverage of the protests was subject to the impact of media issue attention cycles.

theory about the ebb and flow of contentious collective action is useful for determining when journalists would be likely to switch between these two frames.

Cycle of Contention

Tarrow's (2011) "cycle of contention" theory posits that a conflict between challengers and the state can become a cycle of contention when it contains the following elements: a phase of heightened conflict in a social system involving rapid diffusion of collective action, innovation in the forms of contention employed, new or transformed collective action frames, the coexistence of organized and unorganized participation, and information flow between challengers and authorities. Tarrow (2011) argues that such contention produces externalities, which are advantageous to challengers, and require states (or other authorities) to be repressive, facilitative, or some combination of the two. Ultimately, this produces an outcome to the collective action, which will either satisfy or fall short of the demands of the challengers. At each phase of the cycle, the opportunities and constraints for challengers can increase or decrease based on the timing and adoption of particular tactics. Of crucial importance in the present study is the role of news organizations in amplifying the collective action frames of protesters to those in power and the public. However, the relation of protesters to the state will influence the way news media respond to protest—amplifying protest claims or focusing on escalating conflict (Oliver & Maney, 2000).

Herein lies what I call the "protester's dilemma." Boyle et al. (2012) explains this in the following passage:

> Ultimately, protesters face a difficult challenge. News coverage is important to achieving protest goals, yet such coverage may not be forthcoming unless protesters engage in dramatic and even violent action. However, those very actions that attract media attention are often central features of stories that delegitimize the protesters. (p. 130)

Thus, protesters do not want to attract the *wrong kind* of attention. Despite this difficulty, the literature suggests successful protests will engage the broader public by actively seeking a positive representation in the news. By seeking positive representation, I mean the ability of protests to compel news organizations and ultimately the public to adopt their preferred framing. In other words, protests want news organizations to highlight the legitimacy of their aims and concerns as well as emphasize the proactive and effective measures taken by protests to remedy their concerns. For example, Edgerly, Toft, and Veden (2011) observed that the May 1, 2006, U.S. immigrants' rights march and rally organizers were able to "control the [media] portrayal of the marches and rallies as 'peaceful' rather than violent by using specific visual elements to enhance the media's reception of the protests as non-deviant" (p. 328). Tactics such as "having many children in the marches . . . and waving many U.S. flags" appeared to be "an effective way to gain positive news coverage" (Edgerly et al., 2011, p. 328).

Like the immigration protests of 2006, OWS also went to great lengths to avoid portrayals of the movement as violent. For example, the main body of Occupy Oakland issued an apology after some isolated acts of violence and renounced acts of vandalism by fringe protesters ("Occupying the National Debate," 2011). OWS also made substantial efforts to garner positive news coverage as exemplified by its

Occupy Sandy relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Such efforts help protests elicit more public sympathy, broaden the scope of concern for the protest's goals, mobilize people to join the collective action, and exert a strong influence on whether the public perceives the protesters' escalation of conflict as legitimate (Boyle et al., 2012).

To summarize, journalists may change the framing devices they use to report on protests. This may in part be a result of two factors: Protest strategy and tactics change over time in a cyclical pattern (Tarrow, 2011), and protesters actively work to influence journalists' framing of their protest. To better illustrate the complex relationship between journalistic practices, the issue attention cycle, frame changing, and the cycle of contention, I introduce a *protest news framing cycle*. The term refers to the cyclical changes in news framing of protests between substance, conflict, or a combination of both, which occur at different stages of the protest. Table 1 illustrates the model.

The protest news framing cycle is premised on the following propositions: First, in the *pre-problem stage* of the issue attention cycle, both public and news attention to the underlying issue(s) behind the protest and collective action itself are latent or completely absent. Thus, no dominant news frame will emerge in the pre-problem stage.

Second, in the *alarmed discovery stage* of the issue attention cycle, public and news attention to the underlying issue(s) behind the protest increase rapidly, especially when the protest mobilizes, engages in contentious or disruptive actions, and introduces a collective action frame that illustrates the ethos of the protest cause. In the alarmed discovery stage, journalists will employ conflict frames in stories about the contentious actions of the protest and substance frames when considering the novel claims of the protesters.

Third, in the *costs of significant progress stage* of the issue attention cycle, public and news attention peak, corresponding with the boiling tension between the state and protesters. In this phase, the size of the mobilization of protesters is at its maximum. Mass participation in collective action produces journalistic focus on the issues, ideas, and grievances of protesters. However, as the mobilization reaches its height, the exchanges between protesters and the state become tense and antagonistic; here, conflict frames are likely to dominate coverage.

Fourth, in the *decline of public interest stage* of the issue attention cycle, public and news attention fade after a drawn-out conflict, protest demands are facilitated, or a lengthy stalemate ensues. In any of these scenarios, conflict, its persistence, or its resolution is likely to be the dominant news frame for a host of reasons. To begin with, the state's choice to repress a protest will likely amplify the conflict and heighten the newsworthiness of the conflict. In addition, even if the state facilitates the protesters' demands, it is unlikely that all the protesters' demands will be met or that all the protesters will be satisfied, which may produce newsworthy intraprotest conflicts. In the end, the decline of public interest likely signals the substantive claims of the protest have been exhausted from a news perspective.

Table 1. Protest News Framing Cycle.

Stages of issue attention cycle	Cycle of contention	Protest size +/−	News attention +/−	Dominant news frame
Pre-Problem	Opportunities for challengers to instigate conflict with state and rapidly diffuse collective action	Small/limited	None	No dominant frame
Alarmed discovery/ enthusiasm	Innovation in tactics of contention	+	+	Conflict
	Development of new or transformed collective action frames	+	+	Substance
Realizing costs of significant progress	Organized and unorganized participation	+	+	Substance
	Heated exchanges of information and communication between protesters and the state	=	+	Conflict
Decline of public interest	Repression, facilitation, or a combination of both by the state	−	−	Conflict
Post-problem	Collective action produces a successful or unsuccessful result	−	−	No dominant frame

Note. + indicates an increase; = indicates no change; − indicates a decrease.

Finally, in the *post-problem stage* of the issue attention cycle, the issue reaches a conclusion or enters a dormant period. Here, collective action produces a result that places the protest somewhere on the spectrum of success or failure. A dominant frame is no longer present unless the protest remobilizes or new facts come to light about the protesters' claims or actions.

To examine the assumptions posed in the protest news framing cycle, I ask the following questions about the news coverage of the Occupy Wall Street protest:

RQ1:   *What is the effect of confrontational protest tactics, measured in the form of arrests, on the frequency of economic and conflict frames?*

RQ2a: *What is the frequency of economic and conflict frames over time?*

RQ2b: *During which stage of the issue attention cycle are economic and conflict frames most likely to be present?*

Methods

My approach to testing the hypothesis and research questions is a content analysis of news frames of *New York Times* articles and editorials. I supplement this with discourse analysis to provide a deeper investigation of the prevailing themes, ideas, and opinions that comprise each news frame by building on recent scholarly works about OWS (DeLuca et al., 2012; Xu, 2013). I chose *The New York Times* because it is the "paper of record" for the United States (Harlow & Johnson, 2011), adheres to traditional journalism norms and ethics, and was in closest proximity to the most vibrant and disruptive encampment of the Occupy movement. I examined coverage from September 17, 2011, to July 18, 2014. I chose this period because it covers the beginning of the protest through the time at which I began writing the present study so I could obtain the largest sample of stories possible.

A series of LexisNexis searches for "Occupy Wall Street" and "Occupy movement" yielded 265 relevant results. This study includes 37 editorials and 228 reports. I coded each editorial and report, employing *Dedoose Version 4.5*, which is a Web application for analyzing qualitative and mixed-method research data (Dedoose, 2013). Following the strategy of Nisbet and Huge (2006), which is outlined as the manual holistic approach by Matthes and Kohring (2008), I identified the relevant frames by reviewing newspapers, magazines, television reports, official statements, and activist media content. To further guide this process, I relied on previous studies about the news framing of OWS and other protests (DeLuca et al., 2012; Xu, 2013). Once I identified the two most relevant frames, I coded the full content of each story, looking for discussion of conflict and of economic concerns.

Whereas previous studies have utilized an entire story or article as the coding unit (Xu, 2013), the coding unit in this study is a smaller unit within each story, which I call a passage. Passages vary in length from a line of text to a few sentences or even several paragraphs. This approach resembles the linguistic approach to studying frames, in which the sentence or a paragraph is often the unit of analysis (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Entman (1993) outlines the logic behind using passages by noting that often a

single sentence can perform the basic function of framing. To examine these passages, I used a deductive approach in which I identified passages with the help of a coding scheme that contained criteria for what constituted economic and conflict passages.

My criterion for economic passages was that the text emphasized the economic grievances of protesters, including economic inequality, financial regulatory failure, outrage about government bailouts of banks, Wall Street greed, poverty, or unemployment. For conflict, my criterion was that the text had to discuss disagreement between government officials and protestors or disagreement between police officials and protesters. I considered any reference to any of these economic or conflict elements of a story as a passage.

I used the coding of economic and conflict passages to make an inference about the overall frame of the article. Upon identifying all the economic and conflict passages in an article, I used a simple formula to infer an overall frame for each article. The advantage of this approach is that the frame extraction process is more objective and reduces effects of ambiguity that can arise when an article must be assigned a single overall frame by the researcher. As Matthes and Kohring (2008) put it, "frames are not 'found' by the researcher but 'computed' by the computer program" (p. 261).

I used a simple majority criterion for passages. When the number of conflict passages was greater than the number of economic passages in an article, I designated the article as having a *conflict frame*, and vice versa for economic frames. When the number of conflict and economic passages was equal, I designated the article as having a *mixed frame*. By providing a mixed frame category, I could more accurately account for framing elements that would otherwise be missed in a dichotomous coding scheme. If an article contained neither economic nor conflict passages, no frame was applied.

I tested for sensitivity by changing the 50% threshold to 65% and 75%, and then compared this with the 50% level. The results differed little, so my approach appears robust with respect to changes from a majority of passages to higher levels. I also tested this passage-based scheme against a traditional coding approach by hand, coding 20 articles for an overall frame based on title and lead paragraph. The correspondence between the hand-coded frame and the frame extracted from counting the passages for each article was 85%.

A motivation behind using this approach, which is premised on the notion that frames are really composed of smaller passages in a news story, is that merely extracting a frame from the title or first paragraph of a news story (Nisbet & Huge, 2006) often misses critical elements and details of a story (Althaus, Edy, & Phalen, 2001). Many stories include multiple interpretations of news events, making it difficult to justify coding a news story with a single frame. Using the qualitative analysis tool *Dedoose*, I was able to account for these mixed stories and measure the exact balance of economic and conflict passages.

To test for intercoder reliability of this procedure, I first trained five undergraduate political science students in the coding procedure and asked each to code 41 randomly selected passages; 21 of these were economic passages, and 20 were conflict passages. This amounted to roughly 11% of the

economic passages and 12% of the conflict passages in the overall sample. All the pooled Cohen's κs were 1.00, meaning all the coders tagged the passages in the reliability test exactly as I had tagged them.

Two of the undergraduate coders were selected to code 70 (26%) of the 265 articles I had already coded for economic and conflict passages. Using the 50% threshold discussed above, I deduced the overall frame from the articles the undergraduates coded and compared the results with the frames I extracted from my own coding. The intercoder reliability test yielded a Cohen's κ above 0.8 for both economic and conflict frames.

Results

Frequency of Coverage

The solid black line in Figure 1 illustrates the rise and fall of *The New York Times*' attention to the Occupy movement. Between September 17, 2011, and September 30, 2012, 265 articles and editorials appeared in *The New York Times* containing the phrase "Occupy Wall Street" or "Occupy movement."

Although it has been estimated that more than a thousand protesters converged on Zuccotti Park and pitched their tents when the occupation began on September 17, 2011 (DemocracyNow!, 2011), OWS received little coverage in *The New York Times* in the first week. On September 23, Ginia Bellafante (2011) wrote a dismissive piece, questioning the motives of the protests, entitled "Gunning for Wall Street, With Faulty Aim." From September 17 through the end of September, just four articles about OWS appeared in *The New York Times*. The lack of OWS coverage at the movement's inception seems consistent with the idea that journalists approach protests with a heavy dose of skepticism until the protests reach a tipping point and become extremely disruptive.

To better understand how the disruptiveness of the protest shaped *New York Times* coverage of Occupy, we can look at the data on arrests, which is plotted in the dotted line in Figure 1. By one count, there have been more than 7,500 arrests at Occupy protests in 122 different cities (Occupy Arrests, 2014).[3] The gray dotted line in Figure 1 indicates the number of arrests at OWS in New York from the beginning of the protest through its one-year anniversary. More than 2,100 arrests took place in New York during this period. About one-third of the arrests in New York occurred in the first two weeks of the protest, with a second peak in mid-November 2011. As Figure 1 suggests, it took many arrests at the outset of Occupy to gain the attention of *The New York Times*, with a lag of several weeks between the peak of arrests and the peak of attention from the newspaper. But later, during the November surge in arrests, with *The Times* already committed to Occupy as a news event, coverage surged immediately as arrests rose.

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[3] OccupyArrests.com includes "only confirmed arrests specific to Occupy events" (Occupy Arrests, 2014). The website posts links to news articles that corroborate the numbers.
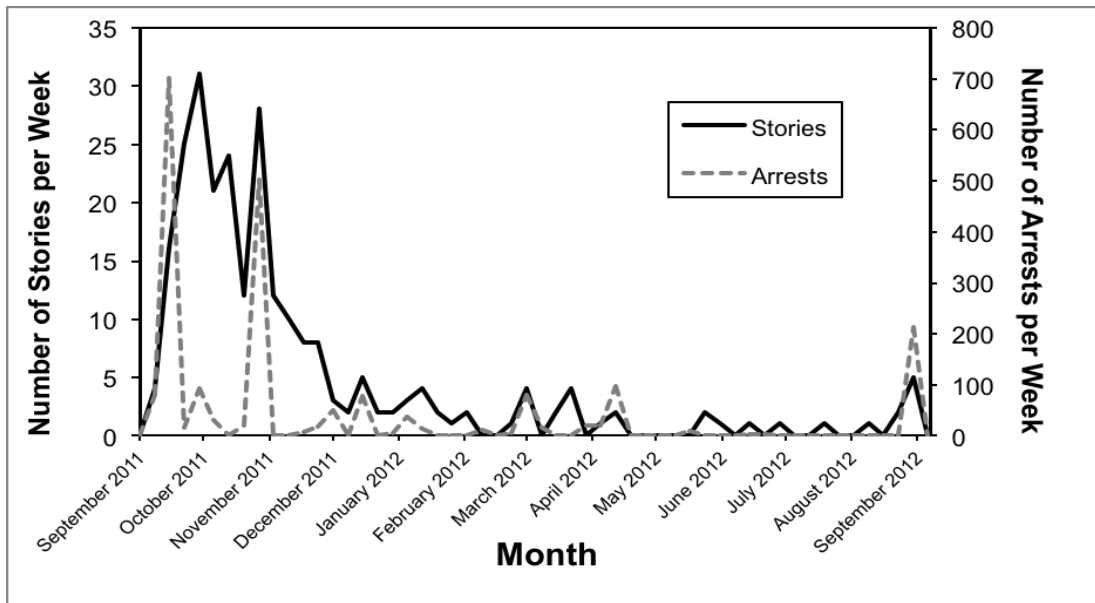
***Figure 1. Number of arrests of protesters at Occupy Wall Street in New York
and number of* New York Times *stories per week about Occupy Wall Street.***

My hypothesis stated that the number of stories would be driven by variation in the number of arrests. Visually, Figure 1 suggests that this is the case, and to test for significance of the relationship, I examined simple correlations. Table 2 displays the results: The number of news stories about OWS and the number of arrests of protesters are positively correlated, and the relationship is significant at the .001 level. Because the unit of time is the week, and stories typically appear the day after an event, I did not lag the arrests figure when computing the correlations.

***Table 2. Correlations of Story Frequency and News Frames in
The New York Times *With Occupy Wall Street Protester Arrests.***

Variable	n	%	Pearson's correlation coefficient	df	p
Stories	265	—	.508	146	< .001
Economic	102	0.38	.323	146	< .001
Conflict	124	0.47	.623	146	< .001

Until October 2011, OWS was largely a local phenomenon. The story moved quickly from the city/metropolitan desk to the national desk with headlines such as "More Than 700 Arrested as Protesters Try to Cross Brooklyn Bridge" and the apropos "On Wall St., A Protest Matures" (Baker, Moynihan, & Nir, 2011; Sorkin, 2011). Indeed, the protest was maturing and growing. Subsequently, *The New York Times*

coverage of Occupy was growing rapidly by the middle of October 2011, and journalists were paying closer attention to the movement's activities. Although only 8 articles appeared over the first two weeks of coverage, there were about five times as many articles in the subsequent two weeks. From October 3 to October 18, a total of 57 articles appeared.

Coverage peaked the week of October 11, 2011, at 36 stories, with as many as 7 stories on October 15, 2011, alone. Following that peak, as the solid line in Figure 1 shows, coverage declined until the week of November 12, which featured 29 OWS stories, At this point, there was still an average of about 3.5 stories per day, making Occupy a regular presence on *The New York Times*' agenda. During this period in November, cities were beginning to elevate their rhetoric about evicting the protesters, which reinvigorated the coverage and led to a second peak in news stories. At this time, the lag in stories after conflicts between police and protesters shortened considerably because journalists were already embedded at the encampments, and they had become hypersensitive to the mounting confrontations. The second peak was followed by another decline to about 6 stories at the end of November. During this stage of the protest, the weather was beginning to dampen the conditions at the protest camps, and many of the evictions across the country had already taken place. Few protesters remained. Many of the prominent storylines about the protest had been exhausted by December.

Overall, the story of *New York Times* coverage, told in terms of the sheer number of stories, can be summarized as a slow and skeptical start, a quick rise after mass arrests on the Brooklyn Bridge, with two peaks spaced about a month apart, but with typically daily coverage over the whole two-month period until the end of November 2011. By early 2012, coverage largely disappeared, until the one-year anniversary of the Occupy movement in September 2012, when more than 200 protesters were arrested. Since then, the movement has received little attention, with only 12 stories appearing after the one-year anniversary. Lending support to H1, the variation in the amount of coverage followed major confrontations between police and protesters. Although coverage lagged behind conflict in the form of protester arrests at the movement's inception, the coverage eventually corresponded with the arrests of protesters quite closely from mid-October to the end of November 2011.

A significant topic of inquiry in the media and social movements literature has centered on which protest tactics are most successful at increasing protest issue salience (Rojecki, 2011). The results here provide some indication that confrontational protest tactics, such as getting arrested, will increase news attention to a protest, measured in the number of news stories. Yet, as observed in previous research (Gans, 2004; Teune, 2014) and according to the findings of this study, this comes at a considerable cost: the loss of a protest's narrative control over the dominant news frame in protest coverage.

RQ1 asks what effect confrontational protest tactics have on the frequency of economic and conflict frames. The correlation between arrests and both types of frames is positive and statistically significant (see Table 2). This reiterates the notion that arrests can increase attention to the protest and its message, but arrests can also increase the news attention to conflict as well. In this case, the contentious strategy of OWS produced more conflict framing than attention to the protesters' economic concerns.
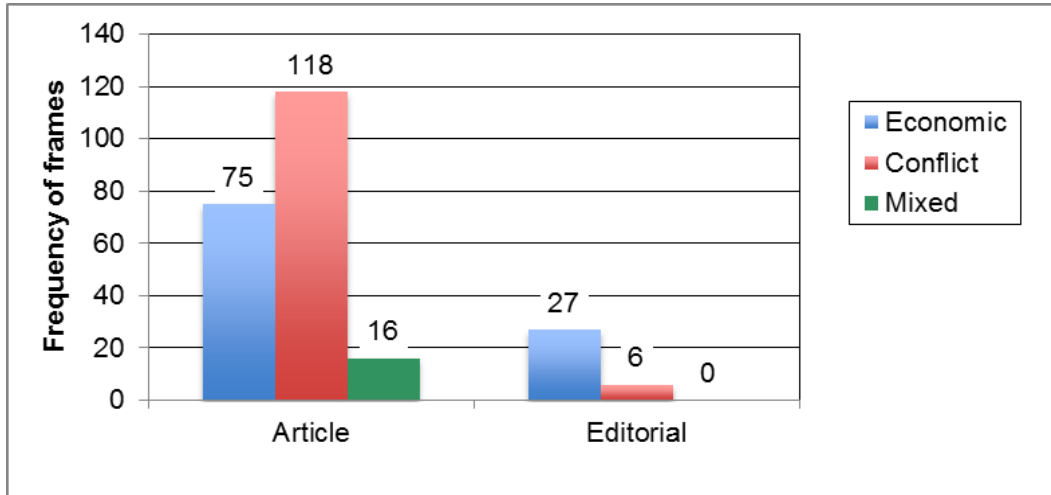
Protest News Framing Cycle

Figure 2. The number of news frames in **New York Times** *coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement, September 2011 to July 2014.*
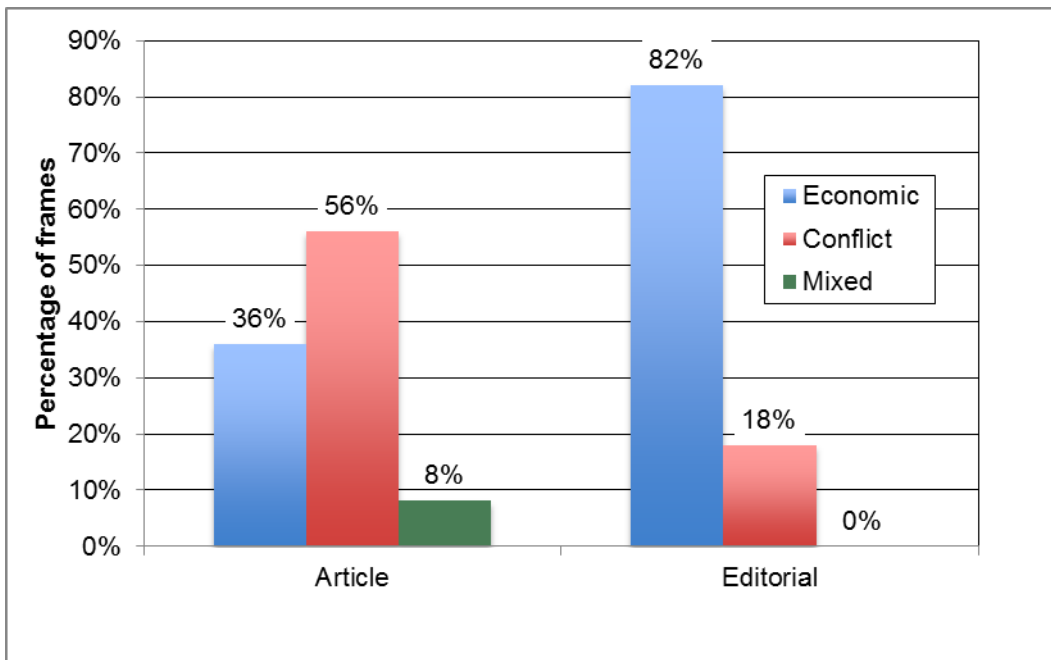

Figure 3. The percentage of news frames in **New York Times** *coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement, September 2011 to July 2014.*

RQ2a asks what the frequency of economic and conflict frames is over time. Figures 2 and 3 give a partial answer to RQ2a by showing the overall count of each frame (Figure 2) and the percentage each frame comprised of all articles and editorials (Figure 3). The dominant news frame in the reporting is the conflict frame (n = 118, or 56%). As David Carr (2011a) stated bluntly, "Media coverage has tended to focus on civil disobedience because that is where the action is" (p. B1). Headlines such as "Some Cities Begin Cracking Down on 'Occupy' Protests' and "Across U.S., Demonstrators Face Arrests and Evictions" signal the strong newspaper focus on the conflict between city officials and protesters (Foderaro, 2011; McKinley & Goodnough, 2011).

Although fewer in number, the overwhelming majority of the 33 editorials were economic frames (n = 27, or 82%). This suggests articles and editorials played a slightly different role in the news coverage. The event-driven reporting was more apt to focus on protester clashes with police, and the editorials were better suited to carefully consider the economic themes of the protest, such as inequality. At the same time, the frequency of frames was not static throughout the coverage.

To fully address RQ2a and RQ2b, which ask about when in the issue attention cycle are economic and conflict frames most likely to appear, I plot the frequency of economic frames and conflict frames over time, distinguishing articles in Figure 4 from editorials in Figure 5. In addition, Figure 6 displays a subsample of the first 10 weeks of the protest during its zenith and abrupt dissipation.
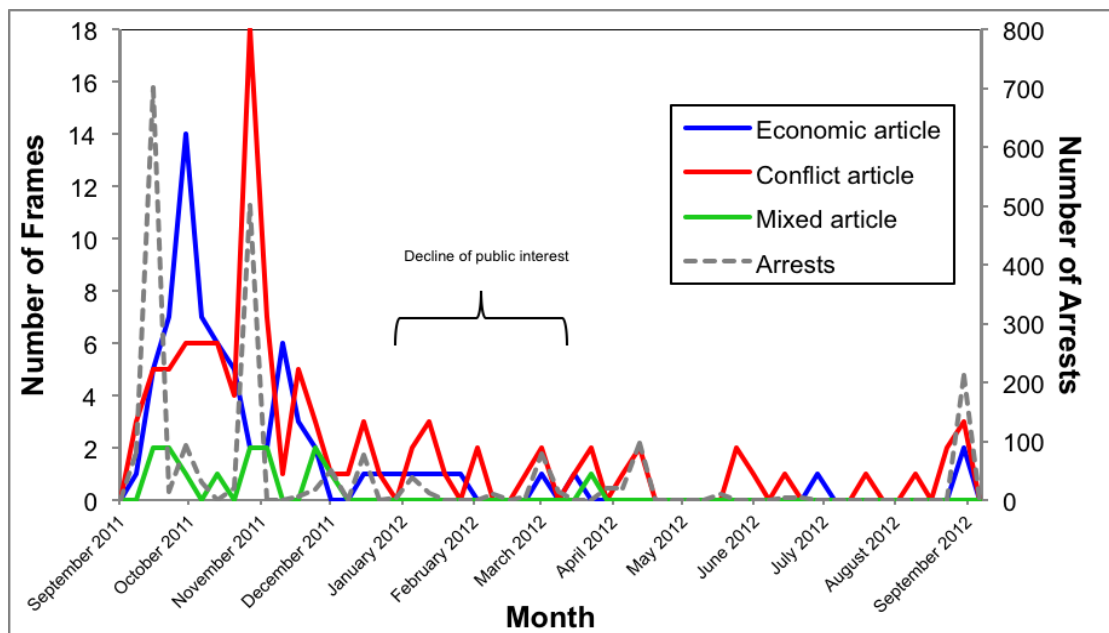

Figure 4. Number of **New York Times** *article news frames and number of arrests, September 2011 to September 2012.*

Figure 4 shows the protest news framing cycle. From the outset, the contentious behaviors such as the blocking of the Brooklyn Bridge and subsequent arrests elicited articles with conflict frames. At the same time, the protesters' fundamental claims about inequality also received a lot of attention from journalists and the first dominant frame that emerged in the news coverage around the middle of October was the economic frame. It is reasonable to consider last week of September 2011 through the end of October 2011 the alarmed discovery stage of the issue attention cycle. In part, the protesters' shrewd transformation of a complicated inequality problem into the 99% meme helped journalists discover a compelling storyline to capture the economic concerns of the protesters.[4] The growth of the protest over this period gave journalists an extra sense of urgency to shed light on their grievances.
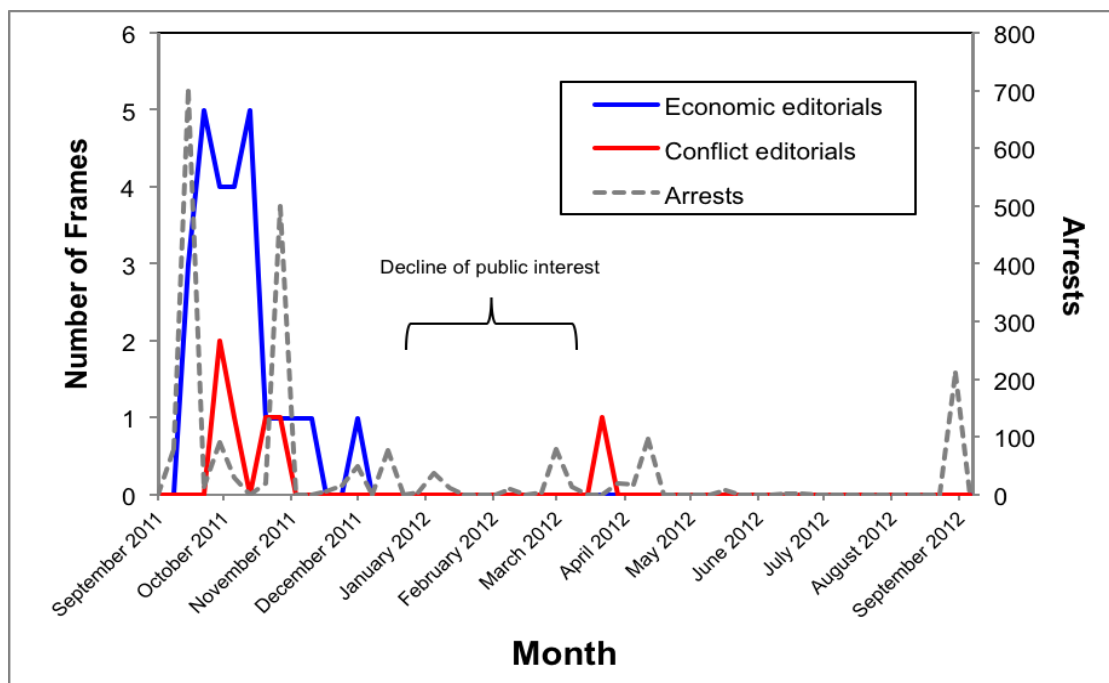

Figure 5. Number of **New York Times** *Editorial News Frames and Number of Arrests, September 2011 to September 2012.*

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[4] There is some dispute about the origins of the term *99%*. Some have attributed the origin of the term to anthropologist, David Graeber (Sharlet, 2011). Others have suggested noted economist, Joseph Stiglitz, may have popularized the term in a *Vanity Fair* article titled "Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%" (Stelter, 2011a; Stiglitz, 2011). Regardless, the term was adopted early in the movement and largely embodied the spirit of the movement during the physical occupation and aftermath.

As depicted in Figure 6, from the third week of the protest through the end of October, when the movement peaked, the articles and editorials had an economic focus by almost a two-to-one ratio. This quickly waned. The beginning of November 2011 could be characterized as the third stage of the issue attention cycle, when protesters recognized that initiating economic reforms would prove to be difficult and any attempts to change the existing order would face powerful institutional resistance. By this time, the economic angle was mostly exhausted.
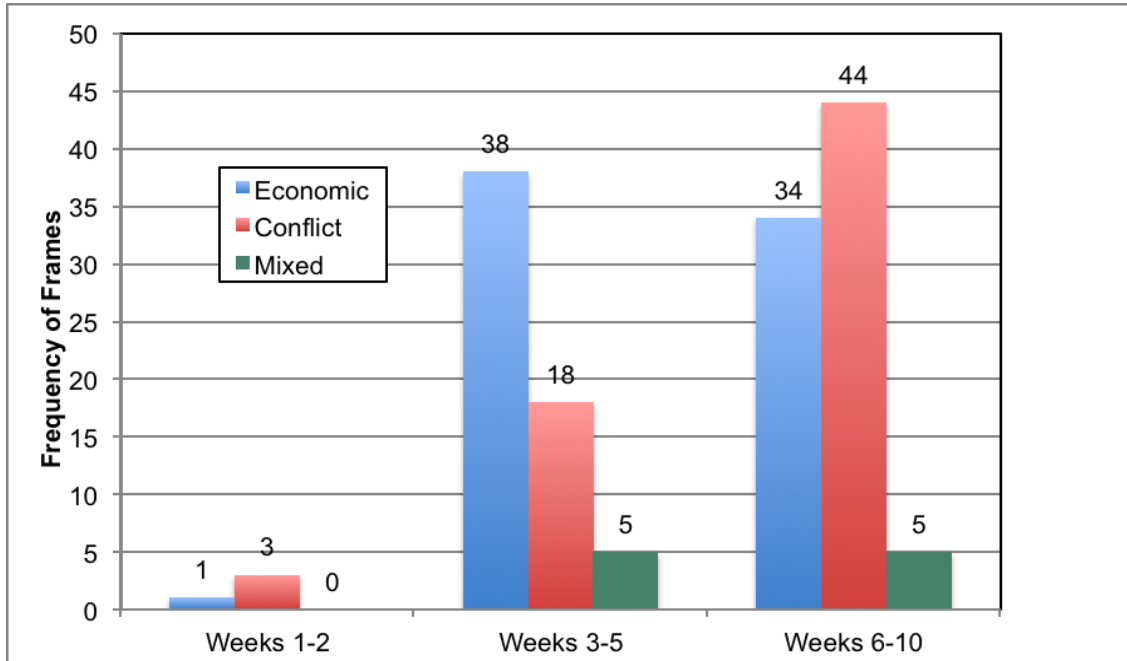

Figure 6. Frequency of article and editorial news frames in* New York Times *coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement, September 2011 to November 2011.

Economic frames declined and eventually fell behind conflict frames, especially as the exchanges between New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the protesters intensified, which produced a November surge in protest arrests. This finding replicates work from Murray et al. (2008), which demonstrated that coverage of protest issues declines when conflict escalates. Almost one-third of all the conflict stories appeared in the month of November 2011. By the middle of the month, there was a story about police arresting protesters or evicting camps almost every day.

The answer to RQ2b appears to be that the focus on the economic concerns of the protest coincides with the protest's growth during the alarmed discovery stage of the issue attention cycle. As the movement grew and formulated the problem, the newspaper delved into Occupy movement's origins and the protest's potential to materialize political and economic reforms. However, it became clear that the protesters could not organize well beyond the confines of their encampments. Public support subsided, and the narrative shifted. Conflict frames dominated the coverage when OWS had reached the later stages

of the issue attention cycle. Journalists realized it would not be so easy for the protest to actualize demands and yield concessions from elites. Scrutiny from city governments intensified as stories emerged about cities' protest eviction plans and looming showdowns between police and protesters.

As November faded, *The New York Times* continued to report on the desperate struggle of the protesters to resist evictions by police. When the protest marked its two-month anniversary on November 17, it was clear that the gesture was mostly symbolic and most Occupiers could sense their days were numbered. As David Carr (2011b) ruminated, "[after the Zuccotti Park eviction] it is inevitable that Occupy Wall Street will eventually become more of an idea than a place" (p. B1). Carr and others reflected on how the movement's physical dissolution would impact its future legacy.

Public interest declined and news organizations focused on life after the occupation in late November and December 2011. OWS had reached the end of the issue attention cycle. Despite an ambitious agenda, the movement would not be able to tackle many of the issues it wanted to and could not withstand the harassment of unsympathetic city officials.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to analyze when journalists adopt different news frames during the course of a protest. To accomplish this goal, I proposed a theoretical model of the protest news framing cycle, suggesting that coverage of protest begins with a focus on conflict, shifts to more emphasis on substance, and then returns to conflict. To test the model, I examined news coverage of the Occupy Wall Street protest in *The New York Times*. The results of my analysis show that the model can explain changes in news frames as a protest progresses through these phases.

The study wrestled with how journalists balance attention to the issues that mobilize protesters with the conflict protesters escalate against the targets of their indignation. A large debate in the literature focuses on how and whether journalists delegitimize or marginalize protests by drawing attention to conflict at the expense of the substance of a protest (Boykoff, 2006; DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; Rojecki, 2002). The findings here indicate that protesters can make their issues more salient in the news by escalating conflict and getting arrested, but that journalists tend to focus on the conflict instead of the protest issues. This is especially true when protesters fail to be innovative in their strategy and tactics to accomplish protest goals, when the state or other actors repress the protest, and when public interest in the protest diminishes.

Yet the idea that news framing often works to delegitimize protest is not settled, particularly in the international context (Cottle, 2011). A cross-national comparison of news coverage of the Iraq War protests found that the U.S. press invoked the protest paradigm far more than the UK press (Dardis, 2006). In work on news coverage of protests in Belgium, Wouters (2013) suggests the U.S. political system "thrives far more on conflict than the Belgian political system" (p. 12). Consequently, the balance between protest issues and conflict might vary substantially depending on the country, the protest, and the media, especially when protests are short-lived or linked to specific events like G20 or World Trade Organization meetings. Further inquiry about the degree to which news organizations in different countries

attempt to marginalize protesters or even report on conflict would provide an indication of whether findings in the United States about the protest paradigm and other framing devices hold in countries with a different media and political system.

One limitation of this study is that it is limited to an analysis of *The New York Times*. In addition to studying other newspapers and protests, a promising line of scholarly inquiry would be to examine the robust activist media content produced by protest participants and independent citizen journalists. As Martin (2010) observes, examining movement publications gives scholars a sense of what movement actors consider newsworthy. Such an investigation could provide a more nuanced look at how activists develop innovative collective action frames. From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy Central in Hong Kong, protests have produced their own newspapers and press releases. This continued trend may even call into question the extent to which protests rely on traditional news organizations at all to promote their messages, which would have huge implications for persistence of the protest paradigm.

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