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**Discouraging stereotypes? US newspaper coverage of ethnic minority entrepreneurs
before the economic downturn**

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Abstract

While research shows that ethnic minority entrepreneurs make a relevant contribution to economies, academic studies often convey a rather negative image of their entrepreneurship as necessity- rather than opportunity-driven, and with little innovation. This study examined the U.S. newspaper coverage of these entrepreneurs during the five years before the economic downturn. It found that only one-tenth of the articles were negative, while two-thirds were positive. Two-thirds of the articles mentioned assistance programs that could help entrepreneurs. The vast majority of the articles presented positive frames of minority entrepreneurs and their contributions. This study found that newspapers can be important sources for ethnic minority individuals interested in becoming entrepreneurs and provide information useful in formulating public policy.

Keywords

Stereotype, entrepreneur, minority, newspaper, framing, content analysis

Discouraging Stereotypes? U.S. Newspaper Coverage of Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurs Before the Economic Downturn

In the beginning of the new century, the United States economy boomed. But in 2008, the economy crashed and Congress passed an historic \$700 billion bank bailout (Sahadi, 2008). Much research has shown that ethnic minority entrepreneurs can help bolster an economy (Barreto, 2007; Sriram, Mersha, and Herron, 2007; Warren, 2007), and ethnic minority groups are often considered as an untapped resource because they have a higher propensity to be involved in entrepreneurship (Copulsky and McNulty, 1974; Waldinger, 2001; US International Trade Commission, 2010). At the same time, media coverage of minority groups can be racist or portray these groups as being to blame for their poor economic conditions (Avraham and First, 2010; Ojo, 2006). Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the framing of minority entrepreneurs in the US.

In the US, minority-owned businesses are on the rise (Barreto, 2007). From 1982 to 2007, the share that minority owners have of the overall business landscape grew from 7% to 21% (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2007; US Census Bureau, 2011). Because minority populations are expected to become the majority in the US by 2050, the economic viability of minority business owners *will* affect the whole United States economy (Langston, 2008; Sriram et al., 2007). However, stereotypes can discourage a person from starting a business or lower the expectations that others foresee of the person succeeding (Langowitz and Morgan, 2003). A stereotype is ‘a belief about a group of individuals’ (Kanahara, 2006, p. 306). The dominant group decides the meaning of the stereotype (Kawai, 2004), so that assumptions are made about individuals based on the

dominant group's perceptions (Kanahara, 2006).

Journalists can influence what people know or think about a particular issue based on the frames, or dominant themes (Pan and Kosicki, 1993), that they use in their stories (Iyengar, 1991; Reese and Lewis, 2009). Media outlets need to be aware of the frames they use in news coverage because these frames can have public policy implications (Entman, 2010; Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Reese and Lewis, 2009).

Newspapers are a highly credible source of information (Rumpza and Bellmont, 2009). People who graduate from college and have higher incomes are more likely to read the newspaper (Newspaper Association of America, 2008), and are the people who often determine public policy. Although newspaper readership is down overall, more Americans are relying on online news sources (Rumpza and Bellmont, 2009), including newspaper Web sites and search engines that can connect people directly to the newspaper articles. The democratic process needs people to be informed about how the economy works or can be improved. Media outlets can help people get more involved as they learn about how the well being of different parts of their city, state, or country can personally affect them because of the economic benefits (Deuze, 2006).

Previous studies about entrepreneurs that have examined newspaper and print content have shown that the stories can contribute to stereotypes (Langowitz and Morgan, 2003; Warren, 2007) and actually hamper the entrepreneurial spirit (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2004). This study examines the role of US newspapers in framing minority entrepreneurs and whether these frames contribute to, or challenge, stereotypes. The study can help define policy that promotes effective minority entrepreneurship.

Framing theory

People make sense of their world by developing expectations or frames of the situation (Baran and Davis, 2009). Frames are dynamic and are used to understand and make sense of new information (Reese and Lewis, 2009). Framing theory originated with Goffman (1974) who said that people often use social cues to determine how to act and what to think. Social frames help to understand events and can be interpreted and changed by people involved or not involved. According to him, news media are interpreters of events and definers of what the frame is, thereby influencing the overall views of society. Gamson and Modigilani (1989) said that framing 'is the primary meaning-making activity of media' (as cited in Rodriguez, 2007: 577). Journalists use 'metaphors, key sentences, and symbolic verbal and graphic means' to create frames (Avraham and First, 2010: 484). Framing theory is now used to examine the social and political ramifications of what frames people learn from media organizations (Baran and Davis, 2009) and how some people use symbols to influence the interpretation of public affairs (Rodriguez, 2007). News stories can have a much larger impact on stereotypes because the representations they create seem more realistic than entertainment or marketing output (Correa, 2010).

Pan and Kosicki (1993) argue that media frames are communicable and related to journalistic professional routines. They say that framing identifies 'signifying elements that might be used by audience members' to construct meaning from the news reports (58). In news stories that are not 'hard news' and are more issue-oriented, Pan and Kosicki state that journalists often write in a way that is like hypothesis-testing. 'A theme is presented or implied, and evidence in the form of journalists' observations of actions or quotations of a source is presented to support the hypothesis' (60).

According to Entman (2010) frames can define problems, specify causes, convey moral assessments, and endorse remedies. There are two forms of framing: episodic and thematic (Iyengar, 1991: 2): ‘The episodic news frame focuses on specific events or particular cases, while the thematic news frame places political issues and events in some general context.’ How minority groups are portrayed affects how people perceive them. Iyengar concluded from his experiments that regarding the issues of racial inequality and poverty, media frames influenced whether or not readers attributed the cause to the person him or herself or to society as a whole. Ojo (2006: 355) found in a comparison of ethnic and mainstream newspaper coverage that a wide variety of issues, ‘such as employment, cultural identity, investment, parenting and social services, politics, business entrepreneurship and immigration affairs’ were reported in the ethnic newspaper, but the mainstream newspaper primarily focused on minority crime stories or cultural events. Also, in Correa’s (2010) study about the *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*, almost half of stories in the Hispanic newspaper focused on the success of the Latina women featured, but only a third of stories in the *Miami Herald* focused on success of Latina women. Nearly a third of *Miami Herald* articles focused on Latina women as attractive consumers, whereas about 5% of *El Nuevo* articles had this frame. In other words, in both studies, the ethnic newspaper had a much broader ‘social construction of reality’ than did the traditional newspaper. But according to Gamson (2001) news coverage could *promote* social causes through frames that reveal the injustice, explain who is being harmed, and talk about how to address the injustice. Advocacy journalism is one form of this. Dawn Turner Trice of the *Chicago Tribune* argues that journalism *can* play a role in social justice. She defined advocacy journalism

as ‘looking at an issue more in-depth to see if there is a correlation and what is the actual reality of a situation’ (personal communication, January 22, 2009). She said that advocacy journalism has to be objective, fair, and accurate, but with the idea of advocating for change.

Why is framing important to policy making? Doyle (2006: 450) found that financial journalists ‘are largely unaware of responsibilities they might perform in relation to civic empowerment and democracy.’ Entman (2010) said that elite decision makers can be significantly affected by media framing because of how they perceive current or future public opinion. ‘Effects (of framing) on those who actually make policy decisions might well be more important than those on public opinion itself’ (Entman, 2010: 393). In the search for journalistic objectivity, Entman said that journalists tend ‘to treat *political process critically but policy substance passively*’ (italics in original: 395). In other words, they often focus less on the substantive issues that need to be understood to create good public policy. Reese and Lewis (2009: 793) said, ‘(T)he news media cannot abrogate their responsibility to critically examine policy assumptions embedded in frames. . . . We need to understand better how dominant frames become so with the active participation of the news media.’

Previous research that has examined the framing of entrepreneurs has found that newspaper coverage can either foster or hamper the entrepreneurial spirit of an area (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2004). Research specifically about newspaper framing of female entrepreneurs concluded that media coverage reinforced old stereotypes and could contribute to the ‘glass barrier’ effect where women are thought to only start businesses because they have no other option, thereby being perceived as less serious about business

(Langowitz and Morgan, 2003). This is similar to the stereotype that ethnic minority entrepreneurs who establish businesses in ethnic-related areas, also have few choices in getting a job, and are often perceived as less serious about business overall. But no framing research has thus far taken Reese and Lewis' suggestion to examine the dominant frames of ethnic minority entrepreneurs and the implication to US public policy as this study attempts to do.

Ethnic entrepreneurship literature

When entrepreneurs are portrayed in the US, they are often 'the little guy who wins out against the large-scale company by dint of his vision, hard work and integrity' (Warren, 2007: 263). Even in other countries, US entrepreneurs are shown to have a positive spirit (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2004). The stereotypical image of an entrepreneur in most Western countries, including the US, is white, middle-aged, and male (e.g. Ogbor, 2000). Thus, ethnic minority entrepreneurs lie outside of the stereotypical norm.

Who is an ethnic minority entrepreneur? Definitions focus on the interconnectedness people feel with their self-identified ethnic group (Chaganti and Greene, 2002).ⁱ Ethnic minority-owned businesses typically have some common characteristics: they are predominantly small enterprises, and are often concentrated in low-entry activities, where market development may be limited. Although they share the problems faced by other businesses with similar size and sectoral traits, these entrepreneurs can face more difficulties when starting and developing their businesses, which can limit their potential. For example, ethnic minority business owners often face discrimination by financial institutions and have limited business experience. Informal

sources of support, such as personal or community-based networks, play an important role in providing information, coaching, and financing (Helweg and Helweg, 1990; Light, 1972).

Ethnic minority entrepreneurship is a rather recent academic field. Still, there is an emerging consensus that this type of entrepreneurship is playing a crucial role in the restructuring of the Western industrial economies (Fregetto, 2004). Yet much of the main academic focus has been on explaining the so-called ‘stranger hypothesis of entrepreneurship’ that argues that ethnic minority individuals become entrepreneurs at a disproportionate rate because they have limited opportunities in conventional employment, while entrepreneurial activities are more accessible (Copulsky and McNulty, 1974). In fact, some researchers argue that people might be *driven* to self-employment, an idea described as necessity-based entrepreneurship. This stance assumes that ethnic minority businesses are founded as a matter of last resort, as if no other employment options exist (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). As a result, necessity-based entrepreneurship is considered to be ‘inferior’ to opportunity-based entrepreneurship, which is thought of as innovative and having more potential of creating jobs. Necessity-based entrepreneurship is not believed to contribute to economic growth (Wong, Ho, and Autio, 2005). The distinction between these two types of entrepreneurship has gained wide popularity and policy impact through the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). GEM is a comprehensive assessment across more than 40 countries of the role of entrepreneurship in national economic growth (Sternberg and Wennekers, 2005).

In the US, investment in minority businesses has been of national concern. In 1969, the Minority Small Business Investment Company was started to help fund these

businesses (Gupta, Shatzkin, and Leung, 2001). Now there are programs set up within the Small Business Administration and US Department of Commerce to continue this process (Langston, 2008; SBA Office of Advocacy, 2007). However, the companies headed by minority owners averaged about 54 cents to the dollar made by non-minority owners (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2007). John Rice, CEO of Management Leaders of Tomorrow, a training program that helps minority candidates to become entrepreneurs and leaders, said that minorities ‘need access to mentors, connection, and business skills not taught in the classroom’ (O’Brien, 2009).

Sriram, Mersha, and Herron (2007) examined factors important to minority entrepreneurs: cultural values, education or training needs, and resource requirements. Financial and social networks are vital for inner city entrepreneurs to survive. Minority entrepreneurs need more awareness of assistance programs, as they are less likely to use them than non-minority entrepreneurs. Also, people within minority communities need to let others know about the assistance programs (Crick and Chaudhry, 2000). More research needs to be conducted to improve public policies that will encourage more entrepreneurial development in the inner cities (Ram, 1997; Sriram, et al., 2007). By understanding how stories about minority entrepreneurs are framed, we can begin to understand how they are represented in our culture and help to form policy that promotes their work.

Research questions

Studies that examined media coverage of entrepreneurs found there was stereotyping and word usage that could hamper entrepreneurs from starting businesses or

continuing them. But it is important to also focus on the public policy aspects of minority entrepreneurship. Therefore, the following research questions were derived:

RQ1: How are ethnic minority entrepreneurs framed by selected US newspapers?

RQ2: What public policy implications are suggested by the newspaper frames?

Method

The method used for this study about US newspaper coverage of ethnic minority entrepreneurs was content analysis. To clarify the patterns and characterizations, framing analysis was used. Pan and Kosicki (1993) found that implied causal relationships can occur in news stories that lead to conclusions for public policy. The news discourse itself can shape the public debate over these policies through media coverage of policy issues and as a source of information used by those interested in developing policy. Framing analysis examines how issues are conceptualized and therefore ‘allows for more fruitful analysis of the conceptual evolution of policy issues’ (p. 70).

The LexisNexis Academic Database was used to select full-text articles in US newspapers between 2003 and 2008 by using the terms ‘ethnic entrepreneur’ or ‘minority entrepreneur.’ⁱⁱ By using these broad terms, we specifically aimed to capture ethnic minority entrepreneurship as covered by newspapers, rather than to preselect articles covering entrepreneurs of specified ethnic origins only. The year 2008 was selected as the ending year of the study because the authors wanted to focus on coverage of minority entrepreneurs before the economic collapse in the US in late 2008 caused many people to lose their jobs. In order to get longitudinal data, five years were examined. Like Langowitz and Morgan (2003), the current study only used articles that had 450 words or more to ensure the news accounts were not just briefs.

The topics assessed quantitatively were the gender of the entrepreneur, the country of origin or race, type of financing, future of the business, and profitability of the business. These topics were chosen because they were used in previous entrepreneurship research (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2004; Langowitz and Morgan, 2003).

Part of the qualitative analysis, as has been shown in other framing research (e.g. Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011), was examining positive, negative, and neutral coverage. For this study, positive articles were defined as, 'Portrays entrepreneurship as a good thing for the entrepreneur(s), the economy, or overall society. May briefly mention a negative aspect or problem, but this is not the focus of the article.' Negative articles were defined as, 'Portrays entrepreneurship as a bad thing for the entrepreneur(s), the economy, or overall society. May briefly mention a positive aspect or highlight, but this is not the focus of the article.' Neutral articles were defined as, 'The article uses neither an extraordinary amount of positive or negative words or it is a balance of both positive and negative comments about entrepreneurship.'

As mentioned in the literature review, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's policies often assume that necessity-based entrepreneurship does not have as much positive economic impact as opportunity-based entrepreneurship. Necessity-based entrepreneurship was defined by descriptions such as, 'no other job found, discriminated in previous job; does not fit in with organizational/work culture, employments never work out; entrepreneurship is last resort.' Opportunity-based entrepreneurship was defined by descriptions such as, 'recognized business opportunity, realized market potential; value creating.' Both could be mentioned in the same article.

Also mentioned in the literature review were two other potential frames: ethnic

minority entrepreneurs face challenges that white entrepreneurs do not, and the impact that these entrepreneurs have on have on the economy in the city, state, or country. If either of these frames were mentioned, they were counted.

Because public policy is one thing that journalists can help explain, two important public policy topics were examined: 1) assistance programs for minority entrepreneurs, either governmental or non-governmental; and 2) other governmental policies, such as targeting goals for minority contracts or other economic policies to encourage entrepreneurship. Anytime these policies were mentioned, they were counted.

A total of 110 articles were downloaded from 23 newspapers in 20 citiesⁱⁱⁱ. All of the articles were coded by one of the authors, while 21% (23 articles) were coded by the other author to determine intercoder reliability. Positive, negative, or neutral framing of the articles had 94% agreement. Necessity versus opportunity in starting businesses had 90% agreement. The other intercoder reliability agreements were: challenges frame, 88%; influencing economy frame, 82%; entrepreneur assistance program frame, 100%; other government policies frame, 86%. Because of the ease of the topics, gender, race, and financing had 100% agreement.^{iv}

Results

To begin assessing how US newspapers presented ethnic minority entrepreneurs, the quantitative data was examined. Fifty-four percent of articles mentioned one or more entrepreneurs. INSERT TABLE 1 HERE.

In summary, more than two-thirds of the minority entrepreneurs featured in the newspapers were men. More than half were African American, while one-fourth were Hispanic or Latino. Close to one-third of the entrepreneurs had enough personal savings

to start their businesses, while one-fifth had investors. Some had formal help – one-fourth received formal minority entrepreneur financing, while about one-fifth received government-supported financing. More than three-quarters planned to expand their businesses. Overall, the quantitative data present a positive description of the minority entrepreneurs as being able to secure financing to start and expand their businesses.

Frames

Overall positive, negative, or neutral frame toward minority entrepreneurs

The first step in examining the framing of minority entrepreneurs by the newspapers was to look at the story as a whole and determine the positive, negative, or neutral story frames, as defined in the Methods section. Only 10% of the stories were negative, 23% were neutral, and 67% were positive. Of the 11 negative stories, three were about a controversy with the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs. The other articles were negative about the economy or the opportunity for minority entrepreneurs in their cities. Only two articles were negative about a specific entrepreneur who was accused of misusing a program. Of the two-thirds of articles that were positive, some focused on specific entrepreneurs who were doing great things, despite the odds against them. Others didn't mention specific entrepreneurs, but talked positively about programs that could help minority entrepreneurs. In summary, most stories were positive about ethnic minority entrepreneurs or encouraged more entrepreneurship in ethnic minority communities.

Necessity versus opportunity frame

As mentioned in the literature review, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) influences policy-making through the categories opportunity versus necessity

based entrepreneurship, where ethnic minority entrepreneurship typically is considered to fall into the latter category, claiming that many ethnic minority entrepreneurs begin their businesses out of necessity because they cannot find another job. However, generally US entrepreneurs often are portrayed as seeing starting a business as an opportunity.

Therefore, one important item to examine was the frame of necessity versus opportunity when creating the business. Although 26% of articles did not mention any aspect of how a business was started, 27% focused on opportunity. One example of the opportunity frame from the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* is an African American man who stated: 'This is a lifelong dream. I always wanted to own my own business,' said Cobb, who has a master's degree in business and management. 'This is a project that I have nurtured from its infancy and with the help of my employees.' The *Portland Oregonian*, on March 15, 2007, talked about a Latino man: 'Alvarez had dreamed of owning his own business since the cousins were young in the Mexican state of Jalisco.' The article said he saved up his money and started a grocery when the neighborhood's old grocery closed. Another *Oregonian* article, on November 20, 2003, discussed an African American female entrepreneur who moved from Idaho to Portland to start a vegan bakery because she felt that the new city would be more open to the idea. A Taiwanese couple saw opportunity in the United States. 'I think a lot of immigrants want to fulfill the American dream, and that is to own their own business and make a good living and support their families,' Liu-Jen Chu said. (*Richmond Times Dispatch*, May 17, 2006) Therefore, some US newspapers stressed that minority entrepreneurs can find opportunities to create businesses.

Unlike the GEM dichotomy discussed in the literature review, however, 47% of articles mentioned that the entrepreneurs used a *combination* of necessity and opportunity to start their businesses. One example in the August 2, 2004 edition of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* was a man of mixed ethnicities who loved cooking Moroccan-French food, but who was on the brink of bankruptcy before moving to Minnesota. Now he has an \$8 million a year business. ‘You take American know-how and immigrant hard work, and you put it in this country anywhere, and you don’t have anywhere to go but succeeding,’ he said. On December 3, 2003, *USA Today* featured an African American man who ‘started at a time when the nation, and especially the South, had two economies, one white and one black.’ He started his own construction company, but had little success until he saw the opportunity to get some city contracts when they were opened to minority contractors. His business grew to have revenues of \$225 million with 700 employees in 12 cities. Another example was in the May 13, 2005 *Portland Oregonian* where a female minority entrepreneur had difficulty finding a teaching or art job because of a disability, but her self-confidence gave her the determination to start her own floral shop with an artistic twist. ‘Since my parents had been florists, I always had the confidence to do that,’ she said. ‘But, I wanted to do it in my own way.’ In other words, these articles showed that although the entrepreneur had some difficulty finding a job or creating a business, he or she also saw a business opportunity and wanted to take advantage of that.

In summary, about 75% of the articles showed that the minority entrepreneurs exploited, in some form, business opportunities that they had identified. None of the

articles focused on the idea that minority entrepreneurs had no other options and, therefore, had to start their own businesses to have a job.

Ethnic minority entrepreneurs face challenges frame

Forty-three percent of the articles mentioned the idea that minority entrepreneurs faced challenges that often white entrepreneurs did not. Although there are many aspects to this frame, the specific themes that emerged were: more difficulty in securing financing, lack of opportunities compared to others, difficulty getting into sectors not considered ‘ethnic,’ and convincing people that you are ‘American.’

Examples of quotes from the articles related to this frame are: ‘Minority-owned businesses tend to be smaller and have access to less capital to sustain them through tough times. Even in a good economy, minority-owned businesses are more likely to go under than white-owned ones, according to the Small Business Administration.’

(*Portland Oregonian*, April 20, 2008) ‘‘If I were a white guy, my company would be doing \$100 million a year,’ said Samuel Patterson, CEO of Veridyne Inc., an information technology firm in Broomall. ‘But I’m not, so I’m at \$14 million. I say that without hesitation, without reservation. I’m not looking for a handout. All I need is a fair opportunity, and I’ll take care of the rest.’’(*Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 18, 2004) After September 11, 2001, one Muslim entrepreneur said, ‘We have to get involved in the mainstream, show our faces and do charity, so people can see we are part of Houston.’ (*Houston Chronicle*, August 15, 2004)

These examples show that there are specific problems that minority entrepreneurs face that white entrepreneurs do not. So unlike the assumption that all entrepreneurs have challenges to starting their businesses, more than 40 percent of articles acknowledged

specific obstacles that minority entrepreneurs have to face that could hamper their success.

Impact on the economy frame

Fifty-one percent of the articles mentioned the idea that expanding minority entrepreneurship will help the economic development of the whole community. The frame focused on the direct impact that minority entrepreneurship would have on the local, state, or national economy, including increasing the number people employed in areas that have had very low business success rates.

“The success or failure of minority-owned businesses will increasingly drive the success or failure of the overall U.S. economy,’ according to a recent paper from the Tuck School at Dartmouth.’ (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 11, 2005) ‘Minority businesses can play a crucial role in addressing the problems in our communities. Entrepreneurship creates wealth and that recycles dollars back into our communities.’ (*Birmingham News*, September 2, 2004) ‘At the mention of the word ‘immigrants,’ many Minnesotans think of low-income families living off the public dole, a recent study shows. Carlos Lopez, on the other hand, thinks of workers, entrepreneurs and potential clients -- in other words, a group that in Dakota County may wield more than a half-billion dollars in buying power.’ (*St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 6, 2005) ‘The program arrives in Milwaukee at a time when leaders appear to have reached a consensus that the metropolitan region cannot thrive as long as the urban center is blighted with mass unemployment and chronic deindustrialization.’ (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 3, 2006)

These examples show that more than half of newspaper articles in the study informed the readers that minority entrepreneurs can have a positive impact on the economy either by producing jobs or by reducing the need for public assistance. This frame is important because of the confirmed effect that more minority entrepreneurs can have on the economy for all citizens.

Public policy implications

Assistance programs for entrepreneurs

One of the public policies regarding ethnic minority entrepreneurs is assistance programs. Some of those are governmental assistance, while others are non-governmental. Of the 110 articles, 66% talked about at least one program. All of the articles that did not mention entrepreneurs focused on entrepreneurial assistance programs. (But in some of the articles, both programs and entrepreneurs were mentioned). Governmental assistance programs were mentioned most frequently (58%): local/state, 40%; national, 10%; and both, 8%. Non-governmental support networks were mentioned in half of the articles. Close to one-fifth of the articles criticized the programs for not doing enough for the entrepreneurs. In about one-third of cases, they were praised for the work they were doing for the entrepreneurs. In more than half of the cases, the programs were just described so readers could become more informed about them. In close to half of the program articles, entrepreneurs were used as examples of people who successfully used the programs. Several articles talked about both governmental and non-government programs and how they all could help minority entrepreneurs.

Some of the positive things that were said about the programs were the following: ‘The Urban Entrepreneur Partnership is a market-driven national initiative that’s getting

off the ground in a handful of pilot cities. It's based on the premise that conventional anti-poverty programs haven't stopped the downward spiral in America's urban centers.' (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 1, 2006) 'White's private business supplements a growing movement among public agencies to promote minority- and women-owned and disadvantaged business enterprises within the construction industry.' (*Portland Daily Journal of Commerce*, January 23, 2006) 'Milwaukee hosts a U.S. Small Business Administration program next month that economists consider the sort of catalyst that is essential to rebuild the nation's distressed communities and inner cities.' (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 20, 2005)

Other comments were negative: 'Timothy Bates, an economics professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, said in a study last year that many programs designed to assist minority business executives 'generate little entrepreneurship because they relegate minority firms to overcrowded, low-growth lines of business.' (*Washington Post*, March 24, 2008) 'Of course, we all want Peterson to succeed. . . . But you've got to question the logic behind the university's decision to tap a non-minority to lead its minority business programs in a city where many minorities are distrustful of large public institutions.' (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 31, 2007) 'Roberts joins a chorus of entrepreneurs and officials complaining of abuse in the federal initiative, which is designed to boost small and minority entrepreneurs. Such start-ups tend to serve lower-income, rural and other markets often neglected by the big carriers. Yet, those critics say the small businesses often are 'fronts' for larger investors, many of which are national cellphone companies that don't need the handouts.' (*USA Today*, February 13, 2006)

These positive and negative examples show that newspapers in this study were balanced in discussing assistance programs for minority entrepreneurs.

In summary, two-thirds of articles mentioned assistance programs for entrepreneurs. Almost 60% of those articles discussed governmental programs. Much of it was neutral, but even mentioning the programs implies some value in them. Several articles mentioned both non-governmental and governmental programs, some of which are cooperative between the two types. Therefore, US newspapers seem to support the policy that government and other entities incentivize minority entrepreneurs, e.g. by providing access to start-up capital.

Other government policies as a frame

Monetary assistance is not the only government policy suggested by the newspaper articles. Thirty-three percent of articles mentioned other government policies, such as awarding minority contracts and other economic policies that encourage minority entrepreneurship. Older entrepreneurs may have had affirmative action contracts, but according to USA Today, those have been declared unconstitutional since 1989 (Copeland, 2003). Now the government, through Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations, can target goals for minority businesses, but not *require* that those goals be met (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2011). An aspect of these contracts often is a certification process that registers businesses as meeting standards for minority status. Because the certification process can be difficult, another policy implication could be assistance in completing or speeding up the process. Other suggestions included improving public policies to encourage entrepreneurship.

Some quotes that fall into this frame are: ‘To boost participation, Warner announced directives on specific goals and holding agency personnel accountable for meeting those goals, Virginia Department of Transportation construction contracts and consolidation of the certification process.’ (*Richmond Times Dispatch*, May 5, 2004) ‘The goal for minority contracts is 5 percent, but right now, only 2.8 percent of state contracts are being issued to minority-owned firms. The closest we came was in 1998, when minority contracts reached 4.8 percent.’ (*Wisconsin State Journal*, April 20, 2008) ‘The disparity in major contracts demonstrate a fundamental hurdle for many minority businesses, as well as small businesses in general. The sheer size of government and competition from wealthy and established companies makes it difficult for most to win.’ (*Annapolis Capital*, October 3, 2004) ‘He also expects to encourage City Hall to compel big companies to play ball with small, minority-owned firms, even if that means making minority participation in development deals a condition of public subsidies. That approach has been successful, he said, in Chicago and Atlanta, where mayors have pressed white executives to work with minority entrepreneurs.’ (*Boston Globe*, February 15, 2006) ‘The Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Commerce have established programs to help American companies do business in West Africa, which according to the federal government is a \$600 billion emerging market.’ (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 26, 2005)

In these examples, some newspapers highlighted the goals that programs have to improve minority entrepreneurs’ standing in the business community and create new connections with minority markets. In summary, about one-third of articles discussed

how government policies could expand beyond programs to help ethnic minority entrepreneurs, including working with established businesses.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study used newspaper coverage as a measure of what is being discussed about ethnic minority entrepreneurs. Although newspapers are created daily and often thrown away, the messages they created now stay available in cyberspace through programs like Google or library search engines. Therefore, the implications of what is said in the newspaper coverage is even more important than in previous years, as it could potentially impact readers for a much longer time period.

The first research question about how ethnic minority entrepreneurs were framed by US newspapers found that the entrepreneurs were largely described in a positive manner. Close to half discussed the challenges that face minority entrepreneurs, but without blaming them for the economic situation, unlike what was found in previous research by Avraham and First (2010) and Ojo (2006). Half of the articles mentioned the positive effect that minority entrepreneurs can have on the overall economy. This thematic frame, as Iyengar (1991) discussed, tells the readers to focus on their own best interest by encouraging the success of minority entrepreneurs.

Much previous research on ethnic minority entrepreneurs focuses around low-threshold businesses founded out of necessity due to the difficulty to get employment. However, of the 67 entrepreneurs featured in the articles, none was described as starting the business only out of necessity. More than one-fourth focused on opportunity, while most of the articles described a combination of opportunity and necessity. Thereby, the newspaper articles can truly become a source of inspiration for potential entrepreneurs by

creating role models.

The second research question focused on public policy implications in the newspaper articles. One part of public policy is creating programs to encourage and sustain ethnic minority entrepreneurship. Two-thirds of articles mentioned assistance programs, a majority of which were governmentally based. This finding shows that most of the newspaper articles informed minority entrepreneurs about programs they could use and at the same time explained to a general reader about how the programs could help the overall economy. Sriram et al. (2007) suggest that educating people about the existence of programs is an important factor in getting ethnic minority individuals interested in becoming entrepreneurs. In other words, the articles could have a positive effect on minority entrepreneurship.

Another aspect of public policy is targeting a percentage of government contracts to ethnic minority entrepreneurs or other general policies that encourage minority entrepreneurship. About a third of articles mentioned how governmental agencies, from local to national, were creating targets for minority business owners to be awarded contracts. The articles showed positive examples of how this policy transformed some cities, while other cities had much lower awards of governmental contracts than the percentage of minority groups in the area. Although relatively few articles mentioned governmental contracts for minority entrepreneurs, the ones that did seemed to show the positive economic impact the policy could have.

The fact that the coverage was vastly positive shows that US newspapers seem to be practicing advocacy journalism to some extent in the topic of ethnic minority entrepreneurs. This seemed to be especially true in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, as it

was the only paper that had a reporter specifically assigned to minority and business issues. In fact, she often injected opinion sentences into her articles to advocate for more and better programs for minority entrepreneurs, even to the point of criticizing government officials, much like you would see in an editorial piece.

Because people get information from magazine and television news as well, future research needs to examine those media, especially looking for differences between mainstream and minority-owned media. In addition to using traditional media, future research needs to examine social media networks and bloggers to see a new way of how minority entrepreneurs can get information. Limitations of this study include the number of frames examined. Other researchers may select different aspects to examine, but the ones in this study were based on topics from the literature review. Also, this study specifically focused on the starting of business, or entrepreneurship, but the findings could be expanded by including established minority businesses as well.

The current study is a vital step in the process of showing how mediated communication can advance economic prosperity. It shows that positive information about minority entrepreneurs exists, but more needs to be done to see, as Entman (2010) suggested, how journalists can frame substantive issues that need to be understood to create good public policy. Correa (2010) said that news frames can have a strong impact on stereotypes because of their realism. In this study, minority entrepreneurs were portrayed positively, much like US entrepreneurs in general. Reese and Lewis (2009) argued that it was important to look at how frames impact public policy. In this study, the frames were positive as a whole toward starting or continuing public policies to assist minority entrepreneurs.

Gans (2003) states that Americans are experiencing economic disempowerment and need economic democracy, an 'economic equality to enable every citizen to take advantage of the political opportunities and to obtain the political skills and rewards that now accrue mainly to people with high income and education' (p. 122). In fact, one of the newspapers in the study, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* said, 'There's greater recognition now that closing the economic gap is the civil rights issue of the 21st century.' In combination with positive media frames about ethnic minority entrepreneurs, more minority individuals, especially in inner city areas, could see themselves as able to start and sustain their own businesses, thereby enhancing the well being of their neighborhoods, cities, and states, and the overall country as well.

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Table 1

Characteristics of ethnic minority entrepreneurs mentioned in US newspapers*

Gender		Race/Ethnicity (60% of articles)		Financing (58% of articles)+	
Male	68%	African American	56%	Personal savings	29%
Female	27%	Hispanic/Latino	23%	Formal minority entrepreneur financing	23%
None	5%	Asian	11%	Investors	19%
		Eastern European	1%	Government-supported financing	17%
		Middle Eastern	1%	Business bank loan	12%
		Mixed race	1%	Friends/family	8%
		Other	7%	Personal bank loan	4%
				Client contracts	2%
				Personal credit	2%
Future of business (97% of articles)		Profitability of Business (42% of articles)			
Expand in the future	77%	Increasing profits	69%		
Maintain the business	19%	Loss	11%		
Succession plan	2%	Decreasing profits	9%		
Close business	2%	Stable	7%		

* 54% of articles mentioned at least one specific ethnic minority entrepreneur. These data are based on those articles.

+ Numbers add to more than 100% because some articles mentioned more than one form of financing

End notes

ⁱ The definition of entrepreneurs for this study is intentionally broad. We take a definition that is similar to self-employment as it is this thought that is more widely expressed in the general public that newspapers would reach. This is also the definition scope that is taken by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor cited by Reynolds et al., (2005). We do not specifically have innovation as a requirement of entrepreneurship.

ⁱⁱ Because this study's purpose is examining how US newspapers covered ethnic minority entrepreneurs, the terms 'business owner,' 'businessman,' 'businesswoman,' or 'business person' were not included in the search. Entrepreneurship is a special subsection of business ownership that focuses on creating a business. It is especially important given the need for economic development after the 2008 economic downturn.

ⁱⁱⁱ The newspaper articles came from: Albuquerque Journal, NM, 2; The Capital, Annapolis, MD, 2; Baltimore Daily Record, MD, 3; The Record, Bergen County, NJ, 3; Birmingham News, AL, 5; Boston Globe, 5; Buffalo Daily News, NY, 4; Charleston Post and Courier, SC, 2; Houston Chronicle, 3; Madison Capital Times, WI, 2; Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, WI, 28; New York Post/New York Times, 5; Philadelphia Inquirer, PA, 3; Portland Oregonian/Portland Daily Journal of Commerce, OR, 17; Richmond Times Dispatch, VA, 4; St. Louis Post Dispatch, MO, 2; St. Paul Pioneer Press/Minneapolis Star Tribune, MN, 11; USA Today, 5; Washington Post/Washington Times, DC, 4. Milwaukee actually has a reporter specifically covering minority and entrepreneurial issues, which is most of the reason it has the most articles.

^{iv} The full code book is available from the authors upon request.