The Dilemma of Organizational Transparency: A Critical Metaphor Analysis of Media Reframing of Crisis Events in Danish and British Tabloids

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Abstract

Crisis communication frameworks highlight that organizations ought to prepare in the event of an organizational crisis by including crisis response strategies in their outward communication to journalists and the media. One specific crisis response strategy, namely, transparency, is expected by external and internal stakeholders. Transparency is attributed to raised expectations for ethical and social governance. That includes an expectation that institutions must hold themselves accountable in order to expect trust in return. Earlier practices show that organizational actors adopt silence or denial as a crisis response strategy, thereby increasing media scrutiny for perceiving silence as an inadequate response. This illustrates how certain response strategies may face backlash, which became a pivotal learning opportunity for managing organizational crises, ultimately leading to a proactive shift towards more transparent practices. Furthermore, the cases presented in this case relate to two crisis events that occurred in the past two years: in Denmark, three Danish companies were accused of being involved in doing business activities with Russian shadow fleets. This sparked intense media scrutiny and appeared in multiple local news outlets. In the UK, the Infected Blood Scandal resurfaced following a public inquiry, exposing how thousands were contaminated with blood by the National Health Service (NHS), leading to widespread public outrage and media condemnation. What both cases have in common is that Danish companies and the British government attempted to be transparent. Subsequently, this is the dilemma of transparency; a paradox in that transparency is embraced in academic discourse and organizational practices, while still being under media scrutiny. This thesis will examine why transparency responses failed for the three Danish companies allegedly involved in Russian shadow fleets. Particularly, one of those companies, Saga Shipping, was attempting to be open and truthful about its business activities. The thesis explores what organizations and crisis frameworks may be missing. The thesis will mainly aim to examine this dilemma through the media lens – specifically by analyzing how Danish and British tabloids reframe transparency through metaphors. Metaphors are a powerful, persuasive tool in engaging readers and structuring a specific understanding of an event. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory describes how each individual possesses a conceptual system that is fundamentally metaphorical. This conceptual system is sort of like a mental map built around metaphors, which structures our understanding of the world and how we frame events. This will lead to a comparative analysis between Danish and British tabloid coverage of reframing crisis events through metaphors, and what these cultural differences say about global trends of institutional distrust, even while transparency is a widely used communication strategy.

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1 Introduction

In times of crises and public scrutiny, organizational transparency has become a reputational necessity. From Dieselgate to whistleblowing incidents involving Snowden and WikiLeaks, critical stakeholders increasingly demand openness and honesty in corporate and governmental affairs. That is why transparency, particularly during crises, is widely regarded as a positive strategy in several fields of literature, as disclosing information helps build trust with stakeholders and the public. I emphasize that this claim is not provided without being supported by several scholars' research on transparency, highlighted by Albu & Flyverbom (2019, 269), Holland et al. (2021), Brad R. Rawlins (2008), and Griffin et al. (2013), among others. Holland et al. (2021) explore the perceptions of message transparency and claim that the way an entity responds during a crisis can make-or-break an organization's opportunity to impact stakeholder attitudes, behaviors, and emotions (Holland et al. 2021, 2). Additional literature on transparency, as cited by Brad R. Rawlins (2008), highlights a strong link between organizational transparency and trust. According to Rawlins (2008), organizations that utilize transparency are communicatively encouraging public participation by sharing substantial information, enabling informed decision-making, and holding themselves accountable, inevitably opening themselves up to public scrutiny and making organizations more likely to be trusted (Rawlins 2008, 1). According to Rawlins (2008), the loss of trust in corporations is due to some of the most damaging corporate frauds in U.S. history, resulting in demands for transparency. A 2003 Golin/Harris survey reported that people want companies to be more "[...] *open and honest in business practices, communicate more clearly, effectively, and straightforwardly, and to show more concern and consideration for their stakeholders, such as employees and customers*." (as cited in Rawlins 2008, 2). The survey suggests that transparency ought to have these distinct qualities and includes three important elements, i.e., information that is truthful, including stakeholder participation in identifying the needed information, and objective and balanced reporting of an organization's activities and policies that hold the organization accountable (Rawlins 2008, 6). This definition of transparency will lay the foundation for the aim of the research.

While transparency is widely associated with trust, a recent survey from 2025 reveals a more complex picture. Edelman, a global PR firm known for evaluating institutional trust through its annual Trust Barometer, reports that we are in a current "*crisis of grievance*" (Edelman 2025). The surveys show that 61% of people believe governments and businesses make lives more difficult and primarily serve the rich, leading to a deep distrust across all four institutions, including business,

government, the media, and NGOs. Among the top findings, business is viewed as less ethical, with many believing that companies fail to address societal issues. The survey illustrates why even well-intentioned transparency may backfire in a climate of widespread institutional skepticism (Edelman 2025). These findings are particularly relevant to this thesis, which examines the paradox that lies in a company being publicly criticized despite its transparency efforts.

Subsequently, although transparency is widely embraced in academic discourse and organizational practice, it is rarely examined critically. For instance, the media and public may expect absolute accountability in politically sensitive issues, even for aspects beyond a company's control. In today's global climate, marked by war and geopolitical tensions, consumers increasingly scrutinize companies' actions. This is no surprise – people have strong opinions and ethical expectations of organizations. Due to this, I argue that transparency might not be enough to shield companies from backlash. What happens, then, when transparency fails to protect a company's reputation from the media – and what can we learn from this?

1.1 Research Question

Motivated by this ambiguity surrounding transparency in crisis communication, this thesis analyzes how metaphors are used in Danish and British tabloid media to reframe transparency efforts, thereby revealing their potential limitations. Through a comparative study of Saga Shipping's alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets and the Infected Blood Scandal in the UK, the thesis explores how media cultures influence whether transparency is perceived as sincere or performative. Informed by Edelman's 2025 Trust Barometer, which highlights a decline in public trust in business to address societal issues, I argue that transparency must be understood within its context. By examining metaphorical framing patterns, the thesis reveals how crisis events are reframed and how metaphors are a powerful persuasive tool in guiding public understanding. This illustrates the dilemma of transparency; although transparency is widely accepted as the ideal communication strategy, it may be reframed by the media and come under intense media scrutiny, thus framing corporations as complicit despite transparency claims. Therefore, I will introduce the research question that will lay the foundation for my thesis:

RQ: How is transparency reframed through metaphors in Danish tabloid coverage of Saga Shipping's alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets compared to British tabloid coverage of the Infected Blood Scandal, and what does this reveal about the dilemma of transparency?

To elevate the theoretical framework, I will not only examine the reframing of transparency but also the paradox it presents: Despite transparency being widely promoted as best practice in crisis frameworks, why did Saga Shipping's transparency attempts still trigger media scrutiny, with specifically tabloid outlets framing the company as complicit? To answer this, I will apply Critical Metaphor Analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory to conduct a comparative study, allowing for an exploration of how the media framings of transparency vary across cultural contexts. This will offer insight into how media cultures shape public understanding, revealing how transparency efforts may be reframed depending on cultural contexts.

2 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review the existing literature on transparency in crisis communication. The purpose is to situate this thesis within an academic context by exploring how transparency functions as a communicative strategy and its role in media and culture. I will also frame the overall research in existing literature through a constructivist and interpretative lens in understanding crisis as a contextual phenomenon. While the theories will not be included in the theoretical framework, I will present and evaluate theories that remain relevant for the intended discussion of the dilemma of transparency.

Defining the structure of this chapter is necessary to reflect the progression from general crisis communication theory toward a nuanced understanding of the media's influence in constructing crises and legitimacy. Each section builds on the previous, with transparency and the media as the connecting thread. Chapter 2.1 begins by introducing transparency within the broader field of crisis communication research, before narrowing in on Chapter 2.2, which focuses on the cultural, contextual, and media-related aspects that influence how crises are perceived and managed by the media. This is followed by Chapter 2.3, which briefly discusses crisis response strategies, particularly the developmental shift from silence to transparency. These sections lay the groundwork for understanding how transparency is traditionally positioned within crisis communication and how organizational and journalistic actors shape crisis narratives. Finally, Chapter 2.4 defines research gaps and positions this thesis as a contribution to crisis and media literature.

2.1 Transparency in Crisis Communication Research

In this chapter, I will establish a fundamental understanding of traditional perspectives in crisis communication literature before focusing on the media. I will provide a brief overview of Timothy W. Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and discuss the role and relevance of transparency within this framework. As mentioned in the introduction, transparency plays a significant role in crisis communication strategies. However, I will not review general crisis communication theory in-depth. Instead, I will position this thesis within the field to establish how transparency has been conceptualized in crisis communication research, particularly in ways relevant to how the media reframe and assess transparency efforts. Particularly, I find SCCT appropriate to

engage with in this subchapter, as it offers a framework for organizations to manage their reputation and emphasizes the anticipation of stakeholder expectations.

In Coombs' article titled *Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (2007), he emphasizes the effectiveness of various crisis response strategies in mitigating reputational threats (Coombs 2007, 163). The article further asserts that crises threaten organizational reputation, and the changes that follow an organization after a crisis can affect how stakeholders interact with the organization. Post-crisis communication can be used to repair reputation and/or prevent reputational damage. SCCT provides the evidence-based framework for understanding how to maximize the reputational protection afforded by post-crisis communication (Coombs 2007, 163). Coombs defines a crisis in the following words:

> "[…] *a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat.* […] *Crises threaten to damage reputations because a crisis gives people reason to think badly of the organization*." (Coombs 2007, 164)

Following the definition, a crisis affects the organization financially, and stakeholders may sever ties to the organization and/or spread negative word of mouth. Coombs further describes steps in evaluating reputational threats by determining the degree of responsibility attached to a crisis. He categorizes crises into victim, accidental, and preventable clusters (Coombs 2017, 168). By identifying the crisis type, the crisis manager can anticipate how much crisis responsibility stakeholders will attribute to the organization. If the organization has experienced a similar crisis, it will suffer greater crisis responsibility than an organization with no history of crises (Coombs 2007, 169). This classification is essential for understanding how and when transparency is used and how it is likely to be received. I would argue that in low-responsibility crises, transparency may be seen as a proactive effort to maintain trust. In high-responsibility crises, however, it may be perceived as insufficient or insincere. Thus, transparency should not be regarded as an inherently optimal strategy, but rather a contested one and a context-dependent approach shaped by stakeholder expectations and media interpretation. This will become evident later in the thesis when I discuss how the Danish

articles demonstrate that, because the Russian shadow fleet crisis was heavily centered on one company, USTC Group, it bore greater crisis responsibility than the other organizations, due to its extensive history of previous crises (cf. Chapters 3.4.1 and 4.1).

So, while Coombs outlines the steps necessary to anticipate and evaluate reputational threats, his work also highlights a common limitation in crisis communication research – the frequent reliance on guidelines rather than a deeper consideration of the context in which a crisis unfolds. To further illustrate this managerial tendency in the literature, Frandsen and Johansen's description of the life-cycle offers a similar structured view of crisis progression, which outlines crises in three stages: (1) the pre-crisis, (2) the crisis stage, and (3) the post-crisis stage. In the pre-crisis stage, organizations usually develop crisis preparedness and prevention plans (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 71). Additionally, the crisis stage refers to the moment an organization is in a crisis. This stage requires making decisions, including the evaluation of possible solutions, assessing possible risks and consequences, and finally selecting the most appropriate course of action (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 81). Finally, the post-crisis stage includes evaluating, learning, and implementing necessary changes after the crisis to prevent recurrence. Organizations that fail to learn from a crisis may face similar issues, as neglecting the learning process leads to greater drawbacks than benefits (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 83).

Furthermore, I find it necessary to briefly criticize the life-cycle and highlight how certain crisis communication theories can be inattentive to the broader social, political, and media-driven contexts in which a crisis unfolds. While the life-cycle offers a structured approach to managing crises through sequential stages, its linearity assumes that crises follow a predictable timeline and can be resolved solely through internal organizational measures. However, this depends on the nature of the crisis. For instance, Saga Shipping, despite efforts at transparency, still faced severe reputational backlash. This illustrates a gap in the literature: Crisis frameworks often overlook how external forces, like media framing or geopolitical tensions, can override internal efforts to control a crisis. Additionally, I interpret the life-cycle to implicitly suggest that the stages cannot overlap and are finite, meaning that a crisis only ends once evaluation and learning have occurred. But in politicized or mediatized contexts, this is rarely the case. The aftermath of the shadow fleet controversy, for example, still lingers as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war. Despite the company's attempt to control the crisis, the shadow fleet debate remains shaped by the media well beyond the company's control. Therefore, including crisis communication in the literature review is essential for

understanding transparency not as an inherently effective strategy, but as dependent on how it is received, contested, or reinterpreted due to context.

2.2 Culture, Context, and the Role of Media in Crisis Communication

Culture is a significant element to discuss in crisis communication because it shapes the context in which crisis responses are constructed, perceived, and interpreted. In this thesis, where media framing and stakeholder expectations are central, acknowledging cultural dimensions allows for a more nuanced understanding of how transparency is communicated and received across different societal and organizational settings. The role of culture will be considered through the two perspectives in cultural studies: the functionalist and the interpretive (or symbolic) approaches. While these approaches are not part of the core analytical framework, the interpretative perspective offers insight into how cultural meanings are constructed in media framings of transparency. These theoretical perspectives will examine how different actors, particularly the media, interpret crisis responses as cultural performances shaped by norms, values, and expectations.

Several scholars have pointed out that traditional crisis communication research tends to prescribe actions without fully addressing the wider cultural context. For instance, Jesper Falkheimer and Mats Heide (2006) argue that early research on culture and crises has been rooted in a functionalist approach (180). However, in recent years, they note a gradual shift towards a social constructivist approach, which emphasizes a need to consider linguistic, political, and socio-cultural differences. Rather than treating culture as a generalization, exemplified by Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture, there is a growing recognition of the need for multicultural awareness and an interpretative approach to account for how people respond and understand crises differently (Falkheimer & Heide 2006, 180). Their review reinforces the argument that crisis communication has largely been dominated by non-contextual case studies and prescriptive guidelines, rather than being grounded in a socio-cultural and contextual framework (Falkheimer & Heide 2006, 181). Although the article is nearly two decades old, the rise of globalization and digitalization has only reinforced the importance of adopting an interpretative approach in today's crisis communication landscape.

Frandsen and Johansen (2017) define the functionalist approach as focusing on norms and values that distinguish people from different cultures, while the interpretative approach explores culture as a meaning-making phenomenon (124). Common to both perspectives is the idea that culture, whether national or organizational cultures, will never form a homogeneous entity, but one

that can be divided into subcultures, such as regional or local cultures. However, the functionalist approach treats culture as an object to 'manage' for organizational survival and performance (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 124). While this may be useful for understanding how organizations aim to maintain stability, it reduces culture to something to control and overlooks its messy and politically charged nature. This limitation is especially relevant to this thesis, as the approach emphasizes internal adaptation and integration, but pays less attention to how external factors, such as the media and the public, interpret and reconstruct organizational responses. In a media-driven context, such omissions are critical.

Additionally, since this thesis adopts a discursive and constructivist approach, an interpretative view becomes particularly relevant to discuss in this literature review. It emphasizes that culture is not fixed but multifaceted, dynamic, and dependent on context. While these approaches are not central to the analytical framework, they highlight how culture shapes public meaning-making around crises. Frandsen and Johansen (2017) mention that the Swedish management scholar, Mat Alvesson, developed the interpretative approach further by expressing an interest in the meaning aspect of social expression. According to Alvesson, people are meaning-seeking creatures, meaning that culture is dynamic, emergent, and dependent on the situational context (126). This view aligns with the thesis' philosophical stance (cf. Chapter 3), where events are socially constructed and negotiated between people.

Building on this understanding of culture and context, the media is a key channel where these meanings are shaped and circulated during crises. Accordingly, it is essential to briefly examine the media's role in crisis communication. While previous research has applied an organization-centric approach in much of crisis communication literature, it is nonetheless important to recognize the reciprocal influence between organizations and the media. Subsequently, we can gain a better understanding of crisis communication when attention is paid to the organization's response and to how the media can spread a crisis like wildfire, leading to the many voices that begin communicating about a crisis. This results in a rhetorical arena, which is a dynamic physical or social space where multiple 'voices' accelerate the communicative complexity of a crisis, such as the news media, consumers, citizens, or employees who exchange opinions and engage in a struggle, with an audience observing the 'entertainment' unfold like spectators of a 'gladiatorial combat' (Coombs 2007, 171; Frandsen & Johansen 141-142). This highlights how transparency is influenced by organizational messaging and media reframing.

Consequently, the role of the media in crisis communication is closely tied to the concept of the rhetorical arena. In the arena, the media exemplifies one of the 'voices' through their coverage of crises, which has evolved into a distinct genre known as crisis journalism (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 177). Journalists often 'break the news', writing articles where serious allegations are made against an organization, and their reporting can significantly contribute to the escalation of a crisis. This selection process is driven by news values, most notably, negativity, where bad news is considered more newsworthy than good news (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 181). In this sense, the media act as power brokers, as they become gatekeepers of public opinion. They can interpret an organization's legitimacy efforts by selecting which facts to highlight, what tone to adopt, and which legitimacy attempts to validate or reject (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 178). I would argue that legitimacy/transparency strategies resemble a performance, like a stage before an audience. In the rhetorical arena, the media do not simply report; they act as both commentators and directors, shaping the narrative in ways that either affirm or undermine the organization's efforts. As spectators of this performance, the public forms judgments not only based on the organization's actions but also on how those actions are framed, challenged, and highlighted by the media. Therefore, understanding the media's role in crisis communication is highly relevant to this thesis, as it explores how transparency is reframed through media narratives.

Going back to culture, Falkheimer and Heide (2006) mention that culture can be divided into two perspectives – an objective and a subjective perspective of culture (185). The subjective perspective is the preferred approach, as it pertains to the view that culture can be seen as a system of meaning. Falkheimer and Heide (2006) state: "*For this reason, understanding of a culture requires a focus of meanings and contexts. In other words, one must understand the real-world settings in which people live and work, and their standpoints on those settings and performance*." (186) As mentioned earlier, an interpretative approach aligns well with the aim of this thesis, as it shifts crisis communication away from generic guidelines toward a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is constructed in cultural contexts. This is especially relevant in the case of Saga Shipping's alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets and the Infected Blood Scandal in the UK, where transparency efforts were interpreted differently by the media, highlighting how meanings shift depending on cultural and contextual framing. As a consequence, crisis managers must acknowledge this gap and recognize that people create meanings that are dissimilar to the sender's original message, possibly even creating a misalignment in the transferring of a message. From a social constructivist

perspective, inherent biases may come from inevitably interpreting and constructing meanings in different ways (cf. Chapter 3.1.3).

I also deem it essential to engage with key scholars' perspectives on media relations, particularly the role transparency plays in how the media reconstructs organizational crisis responses. Going back to Coombs (2007), framing research in mass communication demonstrates the rationale behind crisis types as crisis frames (166). Coombs talks about frames on two levels: Frames in communication and frames in thought. Frames in communication include the way words, phrases, or images are presented in a message. Frames in thought include cognitive structures, such as scripts or schemas, that people utilize when interpreting information (Coombs 2007, 167). This is also why the media frames events that can significantly influence public opinion, as frames emphasize certain values or facts that stand out when individuals form their beliefs around what they read. Coombs exemplifies this by implying that framing effects occur when a communicator might select certain factors to emphasize rather than give the full picture. The receivers of that message will then shift attention to those factors when forming their opinions and making judgments (Coombs 2017, 167). This is especially relevant considering that the Conceptual Metaphor Theory is closely linked to cognitive linguistics and how metaphors can frame understandings of abstract concepts onto concrete things (cf. Chapter 3.2).

2.3 From Silence to Transparency – Crisis Response Strategies

This chapter outlines the historical shift from early crisis response strategies such as silence or denial to the increasing prominence of transparency as the preferred approach. By tracing this development, I aim to contextualize how transparency became the ideal crisis response strategy. This will set the stage for the paradoxical nature of transparency, regarding its wide acceptance as the ultimate crisis strategy. First and foremost, Coombs describes that crisis response strategies have three objectives for protecting reputations: (1) shape attributions of the crisis, (2) change perceptions of the organization in crisis, and (3) reduce the negative affect generated by the crisis (Coombs 2007, 171). These aims inform the development of various communicative strategies, including the shift from silence to transparency.

Coombs further identifies numerous crisis response strategies that vary depending on the crisis type and level of reputational threat. These crisis response strategies are guided by the degree of crisis cluster (i.e., *victim cluster*, *accidental cluster*, or *preventable cluster*) (Coombs 2007,

168). Among these strategies are silence and transparency, which emerge as contrasting approaches, each with its communicative implications based on the degree of cluster and reputational threat. Coombs then further emphasizes that, in most cases, the news media ultimately serve as the final arbitrator of crisis frames (Coombs 2007, 171), highlighting the media's role in constructing and reconstructing narratives, even when organizations attempt to control them. While Coombs briefly acknowledges this, his focus remains on practical guidelines and immediate organizational responses, with limited attention to how the media reshape or challenge these efforts. In some cases, transparency does not emerge as a deliberate choice but as a performance shaped by media scrutiny. That is why the media do not merely reframe transparency but set the conditions under which transparency is expected. This suggests that the shift from silence to transparency is a response to the changing media logic and public expectations, known as the mediatization of society (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 180). Taking this one step further, crisis communication literature focuses on crisis response strategies that are implemented at the appropriate time, with careful attention to message content and delivery channels, to manage stakeholder expectations and mitigate reputational threats. For instance, while Coombs scratches the surface of media relations in his paper, he writes: "*The frames used in the news media reports are the frames that most stakeholders will experience and adopt. That is why it is critical that crisis managers present 'their side of the story' to the news media*." (Coombs 2007, 171). On one hand, Coombs is right to highlight that media frames shape public understanding of a crisis. On the other hand, simply presenting one's side of the story is not enough. While doing so may signal accountability, transparency, and potentially influence media frames, such claims often overlook the complexity of crisis contexts, especially in politically sensitive contexts. Coombs further makes the exception that online crises (viral incidents, such as the cliché example of cancel culture) are not only shaped by journalists, but also by a broader mix of actors and online critics (Coombs 2007, 171). These shifts highlight the increasing complexity of communicating transparency in a digitalized media environment.

Building on this overview of crisis response strategies, I will focus on the two contrasting strategies, silence and transparency, and their developmental significance in crisis communication. A key example of this shift can be seen in Exxon's handling of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 – a case often cited as a turning point in how silence and denial were perceived and how transparency began gaining ground as a more appropriate crisis strategy (Williams & Olaniran 1994, 6). The oil tanker caused a rupture, spilling 240,000 barrels of oil into the water and onto the shore. This garnered immediate media attention, angering many with the spill and leading Exxon to lose

public trust. During this crisis, Exxon initially downplayed the severity of the incident and avoided transparency, which created an echo chamber of public scrutiny. According to Williams and Olaniran (1994), Exxon initially adopted a burden-sharing strategy, followed by scapegoating, and ultimately an acceptance of guilt. The first approach was to claim that the weather was partially responsible for the damage caused by the oil spill, which proved to be a communicative failure. Exxon faced harsh criticism for its slow and inadequate response, and its reluctance to accept accountability ultimately backfired (Williams & Olaniran 1994, 12). I would argue that the Exxon Valdez oil spill includes a pivotal learning opportunity for managing modern organizational crises, illustrating how backlash from silence or denial contributes to a shift towards more proactive transparency. Similarly, I would argue that silence or avoidance becomes increasingly risky in today's media landscape, especially with the rise of social media, where information spreads quickly, and companies that neither respond in a timely manner nor with transparency may appear guilty by omission. I will note, however, that generalizing crisis response strategies will not suffice – utilizing the appropriate strategy requires insight into the context of the crisis. Executing the right strategy at the right time, at the right place, and in the right context ought to be considered by crisis communicators.

2.4 Research Gaps & Contributions

Finally, I will summarize all the research gaps identified throughout the literature review and outline how my research aims to address them. While the literature review on crisis communication offers a wide array of strategic tools to solve organizational crises, it remains predominantly organization-centric. This internal focus often overlooks how the media can reframe transparency efforts. As a result, many existing frameworks present rigid guidelines that neglect the broader contexts in which a crisis unfolds. This is also why I decided not to work within the traditional crisis communication framework, because its organization-centric focus tends to overlook the media's crucial role in shaping crises and forgets the importance of considering how crises are embedded in a broader political, social, and discursive contexts that influence crisis response strategies. To address this gap, this thesis shifts the analytical focus from organizational intentions to media reframing of transparency. The case of Saga Shipping, for example, illustrates that transparency does not guarantee reputational recovery. Despite the company's efforts to be open and honest about its alleged connection to Russian shadow fleets, it still faced media scrutiny. This illustrates the paradox of

transparency; the intention as an act of honesty may be interpreted and reframed differently by other 'voices', specifically the media.

A second gap concerns the media's role in crisis communication. As Frandsen and Johansen (2017) note, the media's role in shaping a crisis remains relatively underexplored in academic literature. They highlight that several researchers have pointed out the lack of research on crisis communication and the news media, which is generally relegated to a secondary position within crisis studies (Frandsen & Johansen 2017, 186). This thesis responds to that gap by placing the media's role in reframing transparency at the core of the analysis.

Finally, the literature shows that transparency tends to be treated as a universal tool that facilitates trust. However, crisis literature lacks examining when transparency fails, backfires, or is reframed in ways that challenge its intended effect. This thesis aims to address this gap by conducting a Critical Metaphor Analysis of the media reframing of Saga Shipping's alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets and the Infected Blood Scandal, where the goal is to understand how transparency is reframed through metaphors by Danish and British tabloid outlets.To summarize, this thesis contributes to the literature by complicating the concept of transparency, highlighting its paradoxical nature by analyzing the media's persuasive power in reframing a crisis event, and exploring the limits of transparency.

3 Research Design

This chapter will introduce the research design that will lay the framework for the thesis. The research design will be divided into four main chapters, beginning with the philosophy of science, theoretical framework, analytical methodology, and data collection method. Each chapter outlines the choices behind the study's approach to examine transparency attempts in media discourse.

3.1 Philosophy of Science

This chapter will explore the philosophical approach that guides my research design. There are two reasons why I deemed a constructivist approach most suitable for this thesis: First, because I perceive knowledge as something shaped by language, social norms, and cultural contexts. In chapter 3.1.3, where I discuss limitations and considerations of the approach, I mention the inherent bias in the interpretative variability of using social constructivism, where both I and readers may interpret things differently. This interpretative variability is an important reason for deciding to incorporate social constructivism, because it aligns with the thesis' case, influenced by the language, power, and the discursive context shaping the media's reframing of the alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets and the Infected Blood Scandal. Secondly, a discursive and constructivist approach is particularly relevant because it emphasizes that culture is not fixed but multifaceted and dynamic. Therefore, a social constructivist approach creates a connecting thread throughout the research design. This philosophy of science will inevitably influence the choice of theoretical framework, methodology, data collection, and interpretation of data. This will shape the direction of the findings and create a common thread. In qualitative research, the philosophical foundation is not separate from the method but shapes every step. The philosophical approach guides what will be studied, how data is collected, and how findings are interpreted (Duberley et al. 2012, 15). In this case, the way the media reframes crisis events makes a constructivist perspective particularly useful.

Furthermore, the philosophy of science is grounded in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1967) definition as presented in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Through their understanding of the philosophical perspective of reality, I will explore ontological and epistemological considerations that align with my research and attempt to position social constructivism within the thesis's research design. This includes a discussion on how my viewpoints will inherently shape the theoretical choices in this thesis.

Ultimately, this chapter intends to show the underlying building blocks of the research process by showing the interrelationship between ontology, epistemology, and research design.

3.1.1 Social Constructivism

Berger and Luckmann (1967) contend that reality is socially constructed, and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which this occurs (13). In simple terms, social constructivism refers to socially constructed knowledge maintained through human interaction, thereby shaping our perception of reality. Our reality is not an independent, objective entity but a construct that individuals in societies, cultures, or institutions persistently uphold. Nevertheless, Berger and Luckmann (1967) claim that there is a general agreement that the "[…] *sociology of knowledge is concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises*." (16). This quote suggests that our knowledge is shaped simultaneously by our social environment and our thoughts and backgrounds, which continuously influence each other. Subsequently, I find the following statement useful in defining social constructivism: "*Knowledge about society is thus a realization in the double sense of the word, in the sense of apprehending the objectivated social reality, and in the sense of ongoingly producing this reality.*" (Berger & Luckmann 1967, 84) Berger and Luckmann (1967) make it clear that our reality is not an independent, objective entity; it is rather a construction that is persistently upheld between individuals in societies, cultures, or institutions. The quote illustrates that the act of understanding our reality and ongoingly producing this reality is through shared knowledge, where a collective reality emerges, as individuals contribute to its construction through social interactions. Knowledge, in this sense, is 'objectified' through language and brings objects to be apprehended as reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 84). In simple terms, language has the power to turn ideas or experiences into something concrete – something we can recognize and treat as part of reality. This is something unique to our species. For instance, the popular Danish word *hygge* is deeply rooted in Danish culture and understood by those who speak the language. However, non-Danish speakers may understand the concept intellectually but still struggle to conceptualize it and fully grasp its cultural and nuanced associations. Language categorizes elements of our world in ways that shape perceptions and attitudes. It can carry and enforce positive or negative connotations, reinforce social norms, or challenge them altogether. Therefore, Berger and Luckmann (1967) perceive language to be the most essential aspect in the construction and maintenance of social reality, saying:

> "*Language provides the fundamental superimposition of logic on the objectivated social world. The edifice of legitimations is built upon language and uses language as its principal Instrumentality. The 'logic' thus attributed to the institutional order is part of the socially available stock of knowledge and taken for granted as such.*" (1967, 82)

Indeed, the power of language is truly taken for granted, despite its ability to give form to experiences and make sense of realities that might otherwise remain unarticulated or even unconceived. I agree with this notion, specifically its relevance to this thesis, because if language can shape how we understand our world, then it must be the very tool through which an organization's reputation can be built, challenged, or repaired. Essentially, Berger and Luckmann (1967) contend that language serves as the primary method in the perception of reality and go so far as to claim that language is "[…] *the most important sign system of human society*." (51), emphasizing its significance in shaping our social interactions, knowledge, and understanding of reality.

3.1.2 Ontological and Epistemological Approach

I also find it necessary to include ontological and epistemological considerations in the equation. I will first look at each concept individually and afterwards attempt to integrate its significance into my thesis. Ontology concerns how we perceive and define the nature of reality, or more specifically, what the world is to us and what we consider existing (Kastberg 2016, 9). Ontology is often referred to as what is "out there", which is traditionally understood as having to do with objective facts. However, due to the problematic connotations associated with that term, ontology typically pertains to observable entities in our world (Kastberg 2016, 10). In short, ontological assumptions apply to what we believe constitutes social reality. Furthermore, epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge – how we understand the world and the ways we can acquire that understanding. In simple terms, epistemology is about knowing what we *can* learn about the world. Here, the emphasis on 'can' is based upon the idea that knowledge is limited to what we can truly know and understand about the world (Kastberg 2016, 9).

I therefore perceive it to be useful to discuss how ontology and epistemology influence the case of this thesis. As mentioned earlier, my beliefs as a researcher will inevitably influence the

choices I make throughout the thesis. However, it also offers valuable insights into how corporate transparency is communicated and how media discourses contribute to the construction of reality in politically sensitive crises. I will clarify the role of ontology and epistemology in this project to lay the foundation for the argument I will later unfold.

Ontologically speaking, I adopt a social constructivist perspective by viewing the thesis' case as a social construction shaped by rising geopolitical tensions and institutional distrust. Within the perspective of social constructivism, I adopt a relativistic ontological position that asserts reality as not objective or fixed but produced through social interaction and in a constant state of revision (Grix 2002, 177). In line with this position, I adopt a relativistic ontology, implying that there is no fixed truth and that knowledge is continuously produced and reproduced through social interaction. A relativistic ontology does not imply that transparency is a universal concept, but a communication strategy that is shaped by its social, historical, and geopolitical context. Thus, the way transparency is interpreted and framed in tabloid articles is viewed as a dynamic social construction rather than a single, fixed reality.

Therefore, a subjective epistemological position follows, acknowledging that knowledge is dynamic and understood by the researcher's interpretation and that understanding is influenced by its social context (Grix 2002, 177). Epistemologically, we gain knowledge through interactions, language, and our social experiences. Our understanding comes from our interpretations of meaning-making within a specific context (Kastberg 2016, 9). Epistemologically, I deliberately apply theories that offer tools to understand our world while exploring how social constructions arise and function within our social reality. In this thesis, I adopt a subjective epistemology, which exists on two levels: One being the interpretations I independently make towards the topic, affecting how I select, analyze, and present the data, and the second being those interpretations made by the media. This comes with inherent biases in that a subjective epistemology means that others might interpret the data differently than I do (cf. chapter 3.1.3).

3.1.3 Considerations and Limitations to Social Constructivism

Ultimately, I have put forth the claim that social constructivism is a field of knowledge that suggests our reality is shaped through the interplay between the social environments we inhabit and the human thoughts that mutually influence one another. I also claimed, according to agreed-upon scholars, that

language is an essential tool in the construction and maintenance of reality (cf. Chapter 3.1.1). Subsequently, it goes without saying that any discussion of social constructivism must also acknowledge its inherent limitations, biases, as well as considerations. Acknowledging that both knowledge and reality are socially constructed, I recognize that readers of the tabloid news articles may interpret the crisis events differently than I do. Likewise, readers of this thesis may interpret my claims and data differently from how I do. Such interpretive variability is an inevitable consequence of adopting social constructivism as my philosophical foundation, and certainly in line with a relativistic ontology and a subjective epistemology. With this in mind, my interpretations are deeply intertwined with my convictions and the cognitive and social reality I have constructed as a researcher. This inevitably opens space for both agreement and disagreement with how I interpret the case in this thesis.

One could view this as a limitation or as a neutral inevitability grounded in each individual's social reality. However, the way I plan to navigate this 'limitation' is not to eliminate subjectivity, but to claim a stance, argue for it with well-founded reasoning, and reflect on its relative variabilities. In doing so, I maintain subjectivity in accordance with social constructivism while inviting readers to critically assess my arguments, rather than passively accept or reject them, thereby strengthening the analytical process. This shows that I aim for reflexivity, which in constructivist and discursive research is highly important, considering the multitude of interpretations one can derive from a study. This reflexivity shows that there is no claim to full objectivity, but that my interpretation is one of many possible perspectives (Ide & Beddoe 2024, 726).

Ultimately, adopting a social constructivist perspective means that this thesis does not aim to establish a single, absolute truth. Rather, this allows me to critically engage with the subject matter and recognize multiple, context-dependent truths rather than seeking one objective reality. This means multiple perspectives emerge in response to the research question. The diverse knowledge I have acquired through different university majors, such as a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in International Business Communication, shapes my social reality and academic understanding of the project's case as well. Therefore, I aim to contribute new knowledge and insights through my philosophical lens regarding the dilemma of transparency and how tabloid media coverage frames transparency attempts.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter will lay the foundation for the theoretical framework, where I will present Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which offers an understanding that metaphors are not only linguistic but central to human cognition and thought. To expand this, I incorporate Zoltán Kövecses' (2009) framework on metaphors in culture and the media. Additionally, the media's use of metaphors as framing devices will be explored through Christ'l De Landtsheer's (2009) perspective, which emphasizes the persuasive function of metaphors through political contexts. Finally, I will discuss the connection between metaphors and transparency, which will be useful for the analysis, as metaphors may persuade public understanding. This perspective provides a basis for analyzing how metaphors function in media coverage of the case. I will also address the limitations in Lakoff and Johnson's work, primarily that while their book *Metaphors We Live By* was groundbreaking research, the field has developed significantly since the 1980s.

3.2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In our climate, it is taken for granted that metaphors are important and abundant in language (Musolff & Zinken 2009, 1). Metaphors are not only for making speech more colorful, but also a way of visualizing concepts, a way of thinking, and making sense of the world through powerful conceptualizations and images. Particularly in various media coverages of political or controversial issues, metaphors shape how people understand situations (Musolff & Zinken 2009, 1). One might ask: How exactly do metaphors shape our understanding? To conceptualize metaphors simply, Andreas Musolff and Jörg Zinken (2009) give the example of someone saying, "*my job is a jail"*, where the speaker is not actually working in a jail but merely insinuates that he dislikes his job (2). This phrase is not to be taken literally, but figuratively. The addressee knows this, and the speaker knows that the addressee knows this. How will the addressee understand that the speaker said his "*job is a jail*"? Musolff and Zinken explain that the addressee figures out the speaker's communicative intentions by (a) cognitively constructing a category labelled 'jail', involving an unpleasant feeling of being in a confining situation like being imprisoned in a physical jail, and (b) including the speaker's job in an ad-hoc category (Musolff & Zinken 2009, 2). The word 'jail' becomes a placeholder for an abstract category that defines an unpleasant and confining situation. This is the simple understanding of a metaphor.

Let us take this understanding even further. In the book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe how each individual possesses a conceptual system that is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. These concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to people, which is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 3). But our conceptual system is neither something we are aware of nor something we actively think about. Lakoff and Johnson explain that in our daily activities, we simply think and behave along certain lines, following patterns that feel natural while based on metaphorical thinking. What these lines are is not necessarily obvious. Put simply, this conceptual system that Lakoff and Johnson speak about is sort of like a mental map built around metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 3). This may all sound very abstract. To simplify this conceptual system, language is one way of looking at this subconscious system. To give an idea of what it means for a concept to be metaphorical and for such a concept to structure an everyday activity, Lakoff and Johnson exemplify this in the metaphorical concept argument is war, which forms a single system of subcategorization reflected in everyday language by a variety of metaphorical expressions like '*his criticisms were* right on target' or '*I* demolished *his argument*' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 4). Here we see the person that we are arguing with as an opponent. We gain and lose ground, plan and use strategies. The things we do in arguing are influenced by the concept of war. Lakoff and Johnson explain that the conceptual metaphor argument is war illustrates how we are hardly ever conscious about the way we speak about certain topics. We talk about arguments in terms of war, because we conceive of them that way – and act in accordance with the way we conceive things.

Similarly, in the metaphorical concept time is money, metaphorical expressions derive from this metaphor in everyday language, such as '*you're* wasting *my time'* or '*this gadget will* save *you hours'*. These are all metaphorical because we use our everyday experiences with money to conceptualize time. This is even tied to our culture. There are cultures where time may not be perceived as a limited resource or like money. Metaphorical concepts can characterize a system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 9). The examples I gave above of metaphors are so natural and pervasive in our thoughts that they never occur to most of us as metaphors. They illustrate that CMT views metaphors as more than just language; it views metaphors as human thought processes and guides our thinking as important framing devices (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 6).

Before I continue presenting types of metaphors, I would like to point out that while Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) is groundbreaking research, the fact that the book is decades old serves as a limitation, and more recent contributions have widened the field of CMT. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that our physical experiences are deeply intertwined with our thoughts, shaping the way we interpret the world through metaphors. They argue that metaphors are rooted in our bodily, cultural, and cognitive experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 18). However, Manuela Romano and María Dolores Porto (2016) mention in their book *Exploring Discourse Strategies in Social and Cognitive Interaction: Multimodal and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives,* not only the cognitive aspects, but the persuasive and manipulative power of metaphors. They state that CMT cannot be disconnected from the sociocultural context or discourse interaction (Romano & Dolores Porto, 82). They state that Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) book *Metaphors We Live By* studies metaphor in a decontextualized and universalist way, which misaligns with current trends of contextualizing metaphors, both socio-culturally and discursively (Romano & Porto 2016, 82). While Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) is certainly groundbreaking research, the decades-old book overlooks that metaphors not only help us understand our world, but also that metaphors are a strategy of emotional and ideological 'manipulation'. While I find Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) concepts relevant in analyzing the thesis' case, these limitations cannot go unnoticed. This shows that recent contributions argue that metaphors are both conceptual/cognitive and discursive/contextual. The chapter on analytical methodology clearly illustrates the importance of analyzing the persuasive nature of metaphors, and not only their conceptual aspects (cf. Chapter 3.3).

I will now outline key concepts that are essential for guiding the analysis, providing tools that will identify and interpret how metaphors shape meaning, influence perception, and frame the media's portrayal of the case. Conceptual metaphors can be categorized into distinct types, each serving a purposeful cognitive and discursive function. Identifying these types is essential in uncovering how abstract ideas are structured and communicated in discourse. From Lakoff and Johnson's book (1980), I will include three types in the analysis, namely, structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, and personification.

3.2.1.1 Source Domain and Target Domain

Before I present the three types of metaphors, I digress briefly to explain source and target domains, as they are essential for understanding metaphors. I mention in the following chapter 3.2.2 that by

metaphors representing one thing as another, metaphors can create new meanings, thereby shaping how we understand and think about ideas. In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. An example is when we talk about *life* in terms of *journeys*, *arguments* in terms of *war*, *theories* in terms of *buildings* (Kövecses 2010, 21). A convenient way of capturing this is in the following conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B, which is called a **conceptual metaphor**. For example, the conceptual metaphor **crime** (conceptual domain A) is a **disease** (conceptual domain B) rings alarm bells if the media chooses to weaponize the metaphor – either by exaggerating crime rates or, sometimes subconsciously, by fueling a movement for tougher laws and policies against crime. In this case, crime is understood in terms of a disease, leading to metaphorical expressions such as "*crime is spreading*". That is also why, when I refer to **metaphorical expressions**, I draw on Kövecses (2010), who defines them as **linguistic metaphors** (21). This leads to discussion about source and target domains. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called the **source domain**. The conceptual domain that is understood this way is called the **target domain**. In crime as a disease, the source domain is disease, which is the concrete idea, while the target domain is crime, meaning the concept we are trying to make sense of through metaphorical expressions (Kövecses 2010, 22). These two terms will be used as tools to understand and analyze how metaphors connect familiar ideas to abstract concepts, helping us understand their meaning and persuasive impact by the media.

3.2.1.2 Structural Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that structural metaphors go beyond simply helping us orient, refer to, or measure concepts, as personifications or ontological metaphors do, which will be presented further below. Instead, structural metaphors allow us to take a well-understood concept and shape it to how we think about a more abstract one. The metaphor I presented earlier, argument is war, is a classic example of a structural metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 61). In this case, the concept of war (source domain) provides a structure for how we talk about and make sense of argument (target domain), using terms like attack, defend, and win in conversational contexts relating to debating another person or arguing. Structural metaphors differ from ontological metaphors, which treat abstract experiences as objects or containers. Instead, structural metaphors map the structure of one complex concept (war) onto another (argument), helping us understand and talk about it in more

concrete terms (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 61). Simply speaking, structural metaphors are cases where one understands a concept by comparing it to another that is more familiar or organized, like the example about 'war' helping us make sense of arguments. This becomes relevant in my analysis, where I examine how tabloid media adopt structural metaphors to shape public understanding of abstract or controversial topics. Recognizing these underlying metaphors allows us to see how certain interpretations are emphasized while others are downplayed, offering insight into the subtle ways language influences perception.

3.2.1.3 Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors are a type of conceptual metaphor where abstract ideas or experiences are understood through concrete objects, substances, or containers (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 25). Put simply, ontological metaphors help us understand abstract things, like emotions or daily activities, by treating them as if they were a physical object. They allow us to give shape to things we cannot see or touch, making them easier to make sense of. Ontological metaphors serve various purposes, and their different subtypes reflect these purposes. Table 1 categorizes these metaphors into specific types and provides examples. For instance, in the category 'entity and substance metaphors', rising prices can be conceptualized as an entity through *inflation*, like in the phrase 'inflation *makes me* sick'. Ontological metaphors help us view events, activities, emotions, etc., as entities and substances (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 26). Along with this subtype, we can *refer* to an entity ('The *honor of our country* is at stake in this war'), *quantify* an entity ('There is *so much hatred* in the world'), *identify an aspect* of an entity ('I can't keep up with *the pace of modern life*'), see an entity as a *cause* ('The *pressure of his responsibilities* caused his breakdown'), and *set goals* of an entity ('He went to New York *to seek fame and fortune*') (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 26-27). This gives us a way of referring to our experiences and is necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with said experiences (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 26). Another type of ontological metaphor is the container metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain container metaphors in the following way:

> "*We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-*

out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surface. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and an outside." (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 29).

This poetic definition refers to the idea that rooms, houses, and ourselves are containers. Moving from one room to the other is moving from one container to another, that is, moving *out of* one room and *into* the other room. '*A clearing in the woods*' is seen as having a bounding surface, and therefore we can view ourselves as being *in* the clearing or *out of* the clearing, *in* the woods or *out of* the woods. Container metaphors are when we understand these experiences as spaces having insides and outsides, boundaries, and substance. A clearing does not have literal walls, but we perceive it as a natural boundary within the context of the woods. This kind of metaphor helps us organize our spatial experience. The clearing in the woods is the fuzzy area where the trees stop and the clearing begins. This is where we impose boundaries, which is an act of quantification (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 29). The phrase may be interpreted literally or metaphorically as signifying a moment of clarity or insight. However, there is a difference between containers and substances. For instance, in a tub of water, both the tub and the water are viewed as containers. However, the tub is a **container object** while the water is a **container substance** (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 30). Table 1 illustrates a few examples of types of ontological metaphors.

Entity and Substance Metaphors	Container metaphors
Ex: ***Inflation as an entity***	**Land areas:**
- Inflation is *lowering* our standard of living	- There is a clearing *in* the woods
- We need to *combat* inflation	- There is *a lot of land* in Kansas
- Inflation is *backing us* into a corner	**Visual field**
- Inflation is *taking its toll* at the checkout counter	- The ship is *coming into* view
- Inflation *makes me sick*	- I *have* him *in* sight
	- That's *in* the *center of* my *field* of vision
	Events, actions, activities, and states
	- Events as objects (Did you *see* the race?)
	- Activities as substances (He's *immersed in* the book)
	- States as containers (He *fell* into depression)
	Others:
	- Time as space (We're *approaching* the deadline)
	- Emotions as containers (She's *in* love)
	- Emotional state as entity (*I'm at a crossroads*)

Table 1: Types of ontological metaphors (based on Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 25-32)

These ontological metaphors help us understand how transparency is framed by the media. A possible example is that one might use container metaphors to describe events as being '*outside the boundaries* of acceptable behavior', where metaphorical boundaries are drawn to frame what counts as transparency. I would argue that transparency itself is framed via container metaphors, as the term signifies openness, visibility, or a sort of surface where information is hidden inside a container, and transparency is the substance that opens the container. This is especially relevant in cases where organizations are mentioned metaphorically as containers, such as in 'the organization *came out* with the truth'. I interpret those ontological metaphors to function this way, as they shape how the media frames information and transparency as breaking or maintaining boundaries.

3.2.1.4 Personification

Personification is an ontological metaphor referring to a physical object as a person. These types of metaphors allow us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 34). Some examples are 'This *theory explained* to me the behavioral science', '*Life has cheated* me', and '*Cancer* finally *caught up with* him'. These examples show that something nonhuman is spoken as human. However, personifications can vary in terms of aspect and purpose. Consider the example of inflation in the expression 'The dollar *has been destroyed* by inflation'. Here, inflation is personified, but the metaphorical concept is not '*inflation is a person*' but '*inflation is an adversary*'. Personification can thus give us a specific way of acting toward inflation. Thus, we consider inflation an adversary that can destroy us, similarly to how a person can (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 34). The key point is that a wide range of personifications allows us to make sense of phenomena in human terms that we can understand based on our motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics.

3.2.2 Culture & The Media in Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Taking this further, the Hungarian linguist Zoltán Kövecses (2009) extends Lakoff and Johnson's work by showing that metaphors are both universal and specific to cultures and media (11). Kövecses argues that metaphors differ significantly in cultures, where the concept of war might be viewed as a dance in some cultures, where the opponents are seen as performers. If such a culture exists, people would view arguments differently and talk about them differently, where discourses are structured in another way. Kövecses develops the discussion further by introducing culture and discourse in CMT, emphasizing that conceptual metaphors vary across cultures and within subcultures (Kövecses 2009, 11). Specifically, he divides this into two dimensions, namely the intercultural (cross-cultural) and intracultural (within-culture) dimension (Kövecses 2009, 12). He explains that culture is a set of shared understandings. The production and comprehension of discourse assumes that speakers share such understandings of the world (Kövecses 2009, 12). To be more specific about the influence metaphors have on culture and their importance for this project, Kövecses explains that several distinct causes produce differential experiences and hence different metaphors:

> "*We are attuned to the world in which we live most of the time. […] This world consists, for us, of ourselves (our body), the physical environment, the physical and social aspects of the settings in which we act, and the broader cultural context. Since all of these aspects of the world can vary in many ways, the metaphors we use can vary in many ways*." (Kövecses 2009, 18).

The factors that determine this variation include the physical environment, social context, cultural context, and the communicative situation in which a metaphor takes place. Take the example of Western media, where crime is often metaphorically framed as a disease, such as in the expression '*crime is spreading'* or a '*fight against crime*'. These metaphors cohere with dominant social narratives about crime being dangerous or requiring control, rather than being perceived as, say, a social problem needing compassion or structural reform. This is an example of how culture influences the metaphors people produce. Kövecses' point in the quote is that metaphors are shaped by the need for ideas to fit within how a particular culture already talks, thinks, and understands a topic, particularly within its communicative situation and context.

In terms of politics and the discussion of political issues in the media, metaphors are used as framing devices that carry political weight, influencing how audiences perceive events and where they position themselves on the issue. Christ'l De Landtsheer (2009), a Belgian scholar in Political communication, highlights the persuasive effects of metaphors by stating that:

> "*Aristotle distinguished between direct and desired effects that result from the replacement of words by unexpected words. Orators who possess this precious gift […] are, for example, able to hide particular perspectives while stressing others, or to obtain the audience's attention by simplifying complex problems*." (De Landtsheer 2009, 62).

Because metaphors are so closely embedded in our thinking, they can penetrate our interpretations and understandings of certain topics. By representing things by other things, metaphors can create new meanings of simple topics, transporting their meaning, and by doing so, metaphors can obfuscate and potentially change thinking (De Landtsheer 2009, 63). Perhaps some may point out the manipulative tendency attached to this concept. Nonetheless, if I were to tell a disordered person to

‘clean up your act’, I would inadvertently attach the metaphor of cleanliness and purity onto them. This shapes a specific understanding of the person. By representing one thing as another, metaphors create new meanings and can clarify and complicate perception. De Landtsheer points this out as a persuasive tactic politicians use, which I argue still applies to my study. This perspective offers necessary insight for addressing the analytical purpose of this project, as metaphors construct a persuasive version of reality. Ultimately, this understanding of types of metaphors, culture, and metaphorical framing in media provides a foundation for identifying metaphors’ function in media discourse. By recognizing metaphorical patterns, I will be able to examine how the media potentially frames a narrative that dismisses transparency attempts through persuasive means, especially in cultures with a higher sensitivity to political controversies regarding war, where the public discourse demands greater accountability from institutions. More specifically, I will be looking into doing a comparative study of Danish and British media coverage of metaphors as the main persuasive tool in reframing transparency attempts. This requires a cultural understanding of national media cultures and the cultural variations in the use of metaphors.

3.2.3 Theoretical Reflections on Metaphors & Transparency

Finally, I will briefly outline how CMT will be applied in the analysis. Although chapter 3.3.2 will provide a more detailed explanation of the data analysis method and how it integrates theory and methodology, I find it necessary to highlight the relevance of metaphors to the theme of transparency.

I find CMT particularly relevant for this project, as the media is often seen as a conveyor of facts. Media discourse not only reports events through facts but frames them through persuasive means, specifically tabloid outlets. When journalists cover claims of transparency, they do not simply relay the facts but use metaphors to strategically position those claims as credible, deceptive, laughable, or hypocritical. Studying these metaphors reveals the underlying judgments and shows how transparency is not merely claimed but constructed and contested through language. This is where I believe that including metaphors to examine the dilemma of transparency through media articles becomes essential. Metaphors, though often overlooked, are significant framing devices used in media discourse. Transparency becomes a storied concept, mediated and interpreted rather than stated explicitly. For instance, De Landtsheer (2009) emphasizes the political power of metaphors, noting how they can illuminate or obscure meaning. His work on CMT shows that metaphors can reveal hidden ideological positions, highlight power relations between ‘us’ versus ‘them’, and

indicate which side the media supports. Depending on the context, metaphor serves as a form of manipulation and a means to strategically direct the reader's attention for different purposes. Additionally, one limitation in Lakoff and Johnson's CMT is its dominant cognitive approach, which seems to treat metaphors as an unconscious reflex of bodily experiences. However, I argue that this view should not be isolated from a pragmatic perspective, which adds that metaphors can be deliberate tools of persuasion.

On a final note, a possible limitation in CMT is the inherent subjectivity in identifying and interpreting metaphors. As mentioned in chapter 3.1.3, I acknowledge the limitations grounded in a social constructivist approach. The interpretations that I make may introduce potential biases, and I plan to address this by being reflexive in my research and ensuring replicability. In the same way, these biases are intertwined with the interpretivist position I adopt for this project. As outlined in chapter 3.1, my role as a researcher is grounded in a social constructivist perspective, where subjective biases may be an inevitable limitation. Nevertheless, I strive to maintain reflexivity throughout the research process. Instead of applying a strict procedure like the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Group 2017), I aim to provide alternative explanations of how I identify metaphors, which allows the reader to follow the reasoning behind the analysis. This will be further elaborated in chapter 3.3.2, where I outline the data analysis method and my effort to establish a thorough and replicable analytical approach.

3.3 Analytical Methodology

In this chapter, I will present the analytical method for guiding the analysis, focusing on Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and the data analysis method. This chapter will explain the methods for identifying, interpreting, and explaining metaphors and how this three-way process helps uncover underlying persuasive meanings in media texts. The chapter also discusses the steps taken to ensure replicability throughout the analysis. Additionally, I decided to adopt a critical methodological approach, as this will help in exposing not only the persuasive tactics tabloids employ in metaphors, but also the underlying power dimension in how metaphors shape public understanding.

3.3.1 Critical Metaphor Analysis

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) allows us to take one step closer to examining how metaphors evoke emotions and use persuasive means to influence audiences in the media. Jonathan Charteris-Black (2004), a linguistics Professor from the University of the West of England, connects metaphors to persuasion in ideology and politics in his book *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. In his book, Charteris-Black extends Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) research on metaphors by identifying their significance in the ideology that underlies belief systems. While politics certainly forms the underlying background of the cases, my focus will be primarily, but not exclusively, on the aspects where Charteris-Black discusses the function of metaphors as a persuasive function and how this can be applied as an analytical method.

Firstly, CMA is influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is concerned with increasing our awareness of the social relations that are forged, maintained, and reinforced by language use to change them by demonstrating how particular discursive practices reflect socio-political power structures (Charteris-Black 2004, 29). Metaphors in the media are important to think about critically, as they are evidence of underlying ideological positions. CMA helps uncover these implicit ideologies and the social processes they reflect. However, I do not assume that all metaphors inherently reflect social power differences or require critical interpretation. Only those that meaningfully connect to the research question and reflect the context in which they appear.

Furthermore, Charteris-Black (2004) connects metaphors as typically used in persuasive tactics. Because metaphors are persuasive, they are frequently employed discursively in rhetorical and argumentative language (Charteris-Black 2004, 7). Thus, the aim of CMA is an

awareness of how an underlying persuasive function in the choice of metaphors influences the interpretations made by text receivers (Charteris-Black 2004, 9). Additionally, what makes metaphors inherently persuasive is that they are deliberate. That means considering the speaker's intentions within specific contexts (Charteris-Black 2004, 10). This is what makes CMA so useful for this research, as it advances beyond traditional Conceptual Metaphor Theory by building on the idea that metaphors are tools of persuasion that shape ideologies. Charteris-Black explains the influence metaphors have on interpretations that reflect the social world through the rhetorical act of persuasion. When employing a metaphor, the speaker invites the hearer to participate in an interpretative act. The hearer will then interpret the metaphor between what is said and what is meant, which Charteris-Black argues is the defining pragmatic aspect of metaphor (Charteris-Black 2004, 12). Therefore, CMA emphasizes the important role metaphors have in forming opinions, which is a fundamental persuasive act. This makes critical analysis of metaphors essential, as they provide insight into the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of the discourse community in which they appear. With that being said, the following will explain the three stages in the methodology of CMA. The three stages proceed by (**1) identifying** the examples of metaphors, **(2) interpreting** the conceptual metaphors they exemplify, and finally, **(3) explaining** the results to suggest understandings or thought patterns which construct or constrain beliefs and actions.

3.3.1.1 Metaphor Identification

Charteris-Black (2004) explains that metaphor identification is initially concerned with ideational meaning, meaning identification of whether metaphors are present in a text, and establishing whether there is a contrast between a literal source domain and a metaphoric target domain (35).

Before I outline the methodology for metaphor identification, there are some limitations in attempting to identify metaphors that must be acknowledged to ensure the most accurate identification possible. Charteris-Black (2004) argues that any word can be a metaphor if the context and the speaker's intent allow it. This creates a tension between encoding and decoding by receivers, aligning with a relativist ontological position (Charteris-Black 2004, 35). These inherent limitations of a social constructivist approach are inevitable. Nevertheless, I will attempt to create a methodology carefully outlined to ensure replicability and accuracy, despite potential interpretative biases. I aim to mitigate this challenge by applying a consistent identification process grounded in theory and contextual reading.

To ensure replicability and accuracy, an explanation of metaphor identification is necessary. Firstly, metaphor identification has two stages. The first stage requires a close reading of the chosen texts to identify candidate metaphors. An example of this is looking for candidate metaphors that suggest one thing in terms of another (e.g., "*The economy is collapsing*", i.e., the economy is a building). These metaphors are then examined in relation to whether there are shifts between the source and target domains. This can appear on a linguistic, pragmatic, or cognitive level, even if the metaphor has become conventional over time (Charteris-Black 2004, 35). This happens by doing a so-called incongruity test, which is a simple way to spot metaphors by examining if there is a mismatch between literal and possible metaphorical meanings. An example of incongruity is if there is a gap between what is said and meant. For instance, the literal expression "*The city is very busy*" is replaced by the metaphor "*The city never sleeps*." This is incongruous because cities do not literally sleep, creating a tension that signals a metaphorical expression. Therefore, the incongruity test means identifying a possible gap between a literal expression and the candidate metaphor found in the text. This will be done in relation to identifying through reference to the context in which the candidate metaphor is mentioned (Charteris-Black 2004, 35).

3.3.1.2 Metaphor Interpretation

Metaphor interpretation is concerned with interpersonal meaning, identifying the social relations that metaphors construct (Charteris-Black 2004, 37). This stage involves establishing a relationship between metaphors and the cognitive factors that determine them. This stage involves examining the cognitive basis of metaphors by identifying underlying conceptual metaphors that shape their meaning. When interpreting metaphors, we can assess how deliberately the metaphor was chosen to shape a particular social message or viewpoint (Charteris-Black 2004, 38). Put simply, I will interpret the source and target domains and the conceptual metaphor during this stage. Consequently, metaphor interpretation illustrates a cognitive and conceptual level. This further means that metaphor interpretation requires understanding the metaphor's cognitive meaning, highlighting that metaphors perform beyond their literal meaning. Additionally, this stage includes interpreting the type of metaphor (structural, ontological, or personification).

3.3.1.3 Metaphor Explanation

Metaphor explanation moves from meaning to function, focusing on the textual meaning and social role in persuasion (Charteris-Black 2004, 35). This stage involves uncovering the rhetorical motivations behind metaphor use by linking metaphors to their broader social contexts and discourse practices (Charteris-Black 2004, 39). In practice, I will analyze how metaphors in media texts evoke emotional responses and prioritize certain interpretations, thereby shaping public opinion and social reality. The persuasive role of metaphors forms their rhetorical foundation and is key to revealing underlying attitudes and beliefs (Charteris-Black 2004, 41). Consequently, interpretation and explanation allow for a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, cognition, and social power in discourse (Charteris-Black 2004, 42). These stages follow the framework of Charteris-Black (2004), while adapted to suit the media context of this thesis. Table 2 summarizes the three stages in CMA for the analysis.

Step	Focus Area	Questions Asked
1) Metaphor Identification	Linguistic Surface	What metaphorical elements are present?
2) Metaphor Interpretation	Cognitive level	What is the underlying conceptual metaphor?
3) Metaphor Explanation	Discursive/Contextual	What social or ideological function does the metaphor serve, and how does it reflect its context?

Table 2: Summary Table of CMA Steps

3.3.2 Data Analysis Method

Finally, I will briefly outline how the methodological and theoretical approaches will be integrated in the analysis. First, I will clarify that the theoretical chapter on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) will not be analyzed in isolation, but as part of a broader Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). The theoretical framework is operationalized by translating abstract theoretical concepts, such as source and target domains, structural and ontological metaphors, and personification into concrete analytical

steps that unfold across three stages: metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation. This enables me to explore not only what metaphors are used, but also how they shape meaning. To ensure accuracy and replicability, the analytical process is carefully structured and clearly outlined, despite the inherent subjectivity of interpretive research. The analytical process will begin by identifying each metaphorical expression in chronological order. For each, I will **(1) identify** the metaphor by determining its source and target domains and the underlying conceptual metaphor. This includes categorizing it as a structural metaphor, ontological metaphor, or a personification. On a side note, I have decided to utilize the *Master Metaphor List* (1991) by George Lakoff, Jane Espenson, and Alan Schwartz as a guiding tool to identify conceptual metaphors. The list is only meant as a resource and may be limited in its use of American examples. However, the list will show examples of conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions and will be used to further the analysis by providing examples of similar metaphors found in that list. However, the list is only utilized as an aid and not present in all analyses. Next, I will **(2) interpret** the metaphor by examining the conceptual meaning and determining its cognitive, cultural, or contextual function, and finally, I will **(3) explain** the metaphor by analyzing its rhetorical and persuasive function, linking it to the broader social role in persuasion. On a final note, I recognize that the selected data and the analytical approach are not intended to generalize the dilemma of transparency. However, I aim to provide a nuanced insight into the persuasive role of metaphors within news articles that challenge or reject transparency attempts.

3.4 Data & Data Collection Method

The following chapter presents a detailed account of the data used in this thesis. I will begin by outlining the context of the cases selected for analysis, first focusing on Danish tabloid coverages and then on British tabloid coverages. Additionally, this chapter includes a description of the organizations that were mentioned in the Danish news media. Next, I will describe the data collection method with a discussion about the choice of news outlets, the criteria for selecting articles, and the approach taken to ensure consistency across both national corpora.

3.4.1 Case Descriptions of Danish Tabloid Coverage

To provide context for the case, I will introduce the three organizations mentioned in the Danish news article, all of which were linked to Russian shadow fleets. Following this overview, I will focus specifically on Saga Shipping, Wrist's subsidiary, which I claim made efforts to be transparent about its involvement. I have decided to include one Danish article from *Ekstra Bladet* (Appendix 1) for in-depth metaphor analysis, as it provides rich metaphorical and discursive material. I will also include another Danish article from *BT*, which will be included in the analytical discussion chapter, particularly chapter 4.2 (Appendix 2). This selection was made based on the metaphorical content and potential for discursive analysis, rather than a strict balance in the number of Danish and English articles. Additionally, it is worth noting again that the Danish and British tabloid articles differ in content. While the crisis involving Saga Shipping centered on alleged involvement with the Russian shadow fleet, and an attempt at transparency that ultimately failed, the British tabloid articles focus on The Infected Blood Scandal (cf. chapter 3.4.2). I will note that the Danish tabloid articles will not be translated into English in order to preserve the original metaphors and avoid anything getting lost in translation. However, I will explain their analytical and contextual meaning in English throughout the analysis.

3.4.1.1 Saga Shipping, SDK Shipping, & L&N Supply Ships

Three companies were named in Ekstra Bladet's and BT's article (Appendix 1 & 2), which I find relevant to briefly introduce. First, Saga Shipping was founded in 1972 in Skagen, Denmark, and became part of Wrist Group following its acquisition in 2002. As a subsidiary within the offshore supply service industry, it provides spare parts, stores, provisions, and passenger transport at anchor

and during transit (Saga Shipping n.d.). In simple terms, Saga Shipping helps ships stay stocked and running by delivering necessary supplies and crew members. Furthermore, while Saga Shipping is a minor subsidiary that specializes in offshore supply, Wrist operates as a global leader in ship supply, ensuring that vessels receive food, goods, provisions, and other essential supplies (Wrist n.d). However, since my data specifically references Saga Shipping, my analysis will primarily center on the subsidiary rather than its parent company, as news outlets in the occurrence of shadow fleets have not mentioned the latter. Finally, due to my familiarity with Wrist through my employment there, I possess personal insight into the strategies employed in the company's crisis response and transparency efforts. However, this represents a limitation, as my knowledge of how the other two companies managed the crisis is limited. Consequently, while I plan to analyze the entirety of the article's use of metaphors in connection with the three companies, I can only address Saga Shipping's transparency attempts.

The second company is SDK Shipping, which is a subsidiary of USTC Group. The parent company operates across multiple sectors, including oil and energy, shipping and logistics, ship owning, risk management, and much more (SDK Group n.d.). The Danish media paid more attention to SDK Shipping than Saga Shipping and L&N Supply Ships, largely because of its connection to USTC Group. The parent company has been at the center of several notable crises, including the Nordic Waste scandal, which brought attention to the environmental hazards following a landslide, and the Dan-Bunkering scandal, where the company was convicted of supplying jet fuel to Russian intermediaries who ultimately resold the fuel to Syria (Dianafilomeni 2024; The Maritime Executive 2021). Moreover, appendix 1 reveals a focus not only on USTC but also on its owner family, Torben Østergaard-Nielsen, and his daughters, Nina Østergaard Borris and Mia Østergaard Rechnitzer (USTC Group n.d.; Dianafilomeni 2024). The coverage implicitly frames them as central figures responsible for the controversy. This aspect will be further explored in the analysis.

Finally, the third company mentioned in Appendices 1 and 2 is L&N Supply Ships. The company provides transport personnel, provisions, and spare parts for ships in and around Kattegat and Skagerrak (L&N Supply Ships n.d.). L&N Supply Ships has received minimal attention from the two articles and will therefore not be further described.

3.4.2 Case Description of British Tabloid Coverage

Furthermore, I have decided to conduct a comparative study alongside a case relevant to Britain that, while not similar in topic, is comparable in terms of public controversy, organizational crisis, and the media's reframing of corporate/institutional transparency. In chapter 3.4.3, I elaborate on why a comparative study with Danish and British tabloid articles is necessary to answer the research question. For now, I will only present the case description of the British tabloid coverage of the media's reframing of transparency attempts. Additionally, between the 1970s and the early 1990s, over 30,000 NHS (National Health Service) patients were given blood transfusions contaminated with hepatitis C or HIV, leading to 3000 people dying and leaving thousands with health conditions. This happened because the NHS, unable to meet domestic demand, imported blood products from the U.S., where paid blood donors were at a higher risk of carrying these viruses. At the time, proper screening was not yet in place, resulting in thousands unknowingly infected. In July 2017, the former prime minister, Theresa May, announced a public inquiry into;

> "[…] *why men, women and children in the UK were given infected blood and/or infected blood products; the impact on their families; how the authorities (including government) responded; the nature of any support provided following infection; questions of consent; and whether there was a cover-up*." (Collyer Merritt 2024).

The topic of the public inquiry is included in Appendix 4, an article by *the Sun*, which reports on how the findings impacted the victims' families, and how the tabloid frames the crisis by emphasizing the importance of accountability following crisis events (cf. Chapter 4.4).

3.4.3 Data Collection Method

In this section, I will present the data collection method by discussing why I chose to conduct a comparative study and how I selected the news outlets for analysis. Firstly, I find a comparative study essential to answer the research question because it allows an exploration of different national media cultures. Particularly, I mentioned in the introduction that Edelman's 2025 Trust Barometer reveals a larger institutional distrust that is not specific to Denmark but the entire world. That means that the

readers of this thesis can learn from the fact that transparency attempts are not only challenged or rejected by *Ekstra Bladet* or *BT*, but also challenged by the British tabloid press. What makes analyzing the British tabloid reframing of transparency attempts interesting is the fact that the UK is well-known for its sensationalist media format. It is the only country to have developed a competitive and popular press that, in turn, has created a nationwide tabloid culture (Greenslade 2015).

A comparison of national media cultures will therefore reflect global trends of institutional distrust through metaphor-rich persuasion. However, one limitation in examining tabloid journalism is that these outlets often prioritize shock value and sensationalism by using exaggerated language to attract readers. While this limitation can be at the expense of attempting to analyze the context behind these cases, tabloids' use of metaphors still reflects deeper cultural trends, especially in a time of institutional distrust. Thus, while exaggerated language characterizes tabloid journalism, this can still be relevant in examining how metaphors are persuasive in shaping public understanding of legitimacy and accountability. For instance, while tabloids may be perceived as bad journalism, they are incredibly influential in British culture (Greenslade 2015). In contrast, Denmark lacks an equally overt tabloid culture, with the analysis showing that tabloid outlets like *Ekstra Bladet* or *BT* adopt a more restrained tone compared to *the Sun*. Another limitation is that all news outlets are shaped by their political orientation, which influences how they interpret and present the issues they cover. While I will not go into detail about each outlet's political stance, I acknowledge that this may influence the way events are framed. However, this highlights how transparency is shaped by broader global trends, which will be analyzed through the persuasive function of metaphors.

Furthermore, around 15 local news outlets reported on the incident involving the three Danish companies' alleged involvement with the Russian shadow fleet. While a corpus linguistic analysis of all 15 articles could have been insightful, I chose not to pursue this approach for several reasons. The first reason is the clear presence of churnalism (a tendency for journalists to copy-paste PR materials) across several of those articles (cf. Boumans 2017, 2265). This reduces the originality and analytical depth, which is why I refrain from a broader corpus analysis. The second reason relates to considering the pros and cons of quantitative and qualitative approaches. While quantitative approaches offer advantages by focusing on word or phrase forms, such as frequency and typicality, they diverge from the aim of the thesis, which centers on meaning and context. Since this thesis is concerned with how metaphors convey underlying attitudes toward transparency attempts, a qualitative approach is more suitable. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative analysis allows for

interpretation of the different meanings attached to words and phrases in context (Charteris-Black 2004, 32).

Finally, I will briefly touch upon the time frame between the Danish and British news articles. The selected time frame spans from May 2024 (Appendix 3 & 4) till December 2024 (Appendix 1 & 2). This period ensures the data reflects the current perception of transparency and media framing, particularly in crises such as the NHS infected blood scandal in the UK and the alleged Danish involvement with Russian shadow fleets. Choosing this recent window also aligns with ongoing societal concerns about institutional trust and transparency, as reflected in sources like the Edelman Trust Barometer (2025), which keeps the discussion about transparency in a time of distrust relevant and ongoing.

4 Analysis

The analysis will follow the structure outlined in the data analysis method (cf. chapter 3.3.2). I will begin analyzing the Danish tabloid coverage, focusing on one article at a time and breaking down key metaphorical expressions present in the text. The same process will then be applied to British tabloid coverage. The final chapter of the analytical framework will be a comparative analysis of Danish and British articles with a discussion about differences in national media cultures. The analysis will be structured around metaphorical expressions using the three stages in Critical Metaphor Analysis. This will ensure a thorough, comparative analysis that addresses the research question by revealing how transparency is framed in Danish versus British tabloid coverage through metaphors, and what these framings suggest about broader limitations of transparency in politically charged contexts and institutional distrust.

4.1 Danish Tabloid Coverage of Transparency – *Ekstra Bladet*

On December 21, 2024, the Danish tabloid outlet *Ekstra Bladet* published an article titled "*Blod på hænderne*[1]", covering the scandal involving three Danish companies allegedly engaging in business with Russian shadow fleets, potentially circumventing sanctions (Appendix 1; Gardel 2024). The following chapter will examine important metaphors that will help answer the research question about what these metaphorical expressions suggest about persuasion and the reframing of rejecting transparency attempts. I have picked three metaphorical expressions to analyze that I find important in answering the research question.

4.1.1 Metaphorical Expression 1 – "*Blod På Hænderne*"

Firstly, I will begin with metaphor identification of the first expression in *Ekstra Bladet*. Since interpreting metaphors can be subjective, it is essential to confirm that an expression is indeed metaphorical in order to ensure precision and assess congruity. The metaphorical expression, "*Blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1, l. 3), serves as a catchy and impactful opening title, setting the tone from the very beginning. The literal meaning of the phrase refers to someone who has physically committed murder or violence and has their hands stained with blood. Additionally, to determine whether this

[1] ENG Translation: "*Blood on one's hands*"

phrase qualifies as a metaphor, I apply the incongruity test, where I will examine whether there is tension between what is said and what is meant. While the expression "*blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1, l. 3) might seem initially metaphorically congruent, the context in which it is mentioned is essential. If the phrase had been used in a literal context, such as *"Han fik blod på hænderne efter at have slået manden ned*[2]*,"* it might be taken literally. However, its placement as the article's headline signals a figurative phrase, suggesting complicity in an immoral act rather than a physical act of violence. This contextual cue reveals a clear tension between the literal and intended/figurative meanings, which means that the metaphor passed the incongruency test and therefore can be confirmed as a metaphor.

Furthermore, Charteris-Black (2004) states that metaphor interpretation includes establishing a relationship between the metaphor and the cognitive factor that determines them (37). I will identify the conceptual metaphor and then the source and target domains. Firstly, I identify an overall conceptual metaphor, which is morality is purity. The conceptual metaphor frames morality in terms of cleanliness. Common metaphorical expressions that derive from this conceptual metaphor may be "*She is of pure heart*" or "*He is as pure as the driven snow*" (Lakoff et. al. 1991, 186). However, the metaphor "*blod på hænderne*" is not referring to moral purity, but rather its absence. Therefore, I suggest a contrasting conceptual metaphor: immorality is a physical stain. Here, immorality is framed as something dirty or soiling an otherwise clean moral state. The metaphor "*blod på hænderne*" evokes the image of a physical stain, signifying a metaphorical involvement with violence or murder, and shows complicity in wrongdoing. It suggests that the guilt is visible and marked on the body itself. This form of imagery is quite a strong choice for a title. It establishes an intense scene for the readers and frames the entire article negatively regarding the alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets. Other metaphorical expressions within this conceptualization may be: "*To have dirt on one's hands*" or "*a stain on the conscience*". Therefore, since I have classified the phrase to be a metaphor by identifying its conceptual metaphor, I can now determine the source and target domains. The source domain is a physical stain, and the target domain is guilt or immorality. The conceptual domain 'guilt or immorality' (target domain) is an abstract concept that is understood through the concrete idea 'physical stain' (source domain). This relationship between the two domains allows the reader to understand guilt by mapping it onto a concrete concept. By expressing an abstract idea through a familiar, physical image, the metaphor

[2] ENG Translation: "*He got blood on his hands after hitting the man.*"

'activates', so to speak, a cognitive schema that makes the meaning more immediate and impactful. Subsequently, I identify the phrase strategically positioned to frame an event in a concise yet powerful way. The context surrounding the expression suggests that the metaphor is used to imply that the three Danish companies are complicit in the Russia-Ukraine war. Furthermore, I interpret that the primary function is ontological. As mentioned in chapter 3.2.1.3, ontological metaphors are a type of conceptual metaphor where abstract ideas are understood through concrete objects, substances, or containers (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 25). To be more specific, I interpret the metaphor to be a container metaphor, where *blood* is the container object and the *hands* are the container substance (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 30). The metaphor treats complicity as a concrete substance with the figurative use of blood and as a literal stain on one's hands. This aligns with the logic of container metaphors, where the hands become the substance that holds the evidence of wrongdoing. This framing contributes to the persuasive power of metaphors and exposes guilt, which resonates with the media's broader use of metaphors to frame transparency through metaphorical expressions about violating boundaries.

In the final step of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), metaphor explanation, I will analyze the persuasive/contextual aspects surrounding the metaphor. I mentioned that the metaphor serves as a catchy and impactful headline that immediately sets the tone for the entire article. I have also distinguished between the literal meaning of the phrase and the figurative meaning, that is, complicity in wrongdoing. Considering the textual cues is vital in analyzing its persuasive function. The metaphor is placed in a headline, which frames the event regarding the alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets in a specific way. By evoking strong, violent imagery associated with moral wrongdoing, the metaphor positions the implicated Danish companies not only as passively involved but also as complicit in the Russia-Ukraine war. This initial framing will negatively affect Saga Shipping's attempt to be transparent about its business activities. This means that "*blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1, l. 3) immediately frames an image associated with crime or murder, which will stir public outrage toward the companies mentioned. This initial framing (and the emphasis on Torben Østergaard-Nielsen's past corporate crises) sets up the event toward a specific moral conclusion. Within the broader discourse of institutional distrust and calls for transparency, it implies a failure of ethical conduct while ignoring transparency attempts (cf. Appendix 1, ll. 40-45 for reference).

4.1.2 Metaphor Expression 2 – "*Skyggeflåde*"

In this chapter, I will analyze "*Skyggeflåde*[3]" (Appendix 1, ll. 16, 19, 45), which is particularly persuasive in its associations with the Russia-Ukraine war. Beginning with metaphor identification, the metaphor is synonymous with '*dark fleet*' or '*grey fleet*' and describes a group of ships that engage in fraudulent practices (marineforum 2025). However, there are a few differences in these terms. Dark fleets are commonly referred to as the shadow fleet. Grey fleet refers to the fact that after the outbreak of the war, foreign companies were quick to disguise the origin of ships, where the color 'grey' illustrates the difficulty in determining their compliance with sanctions (marineforum 2025). Additionally, to determine whether this phrase qualifies as a metaphor, I will look for incongruity to determine possible tensions between the literal and metaphorical meaning. Although the expression "*skyggeflåde*" may not appear incongruent at first, since the average reader might not immediately recognize it as a metaphor, placing it in a context with related terms like '*dark fleet'* and '*grey fleet'* reveals that these fleets are framed through dark colors and shadows. I would argue that the literal meaning of the noun suggests a fleet of dark ships or ships that exist in shadows. However, the incongruity becomes clear in the tension between the literal meaning and the contextual use of *shadow fleets*. This is not only due to the existence of alternative terms like *dark fleet* and *grey fleet*, but also because the term is widely used to describe fleets that disguise the origin of the ship to evade sanctions. Particularly, the term is widely associated with the Russia-Ukraine war. So, because *shadow* does not describe the physical composition of a ship, but rather the difficulty in determining a ship's origin, I identify an incongruity between the literal meaning and the contextual meaning, meaning that it is indeed a metaphor.

Moving on to metaphor interpretation, I will interpret the conceptual metaphor and source and target domains. I have established three synonymous metaphors that all refer to something hidden or framed with a dark or grey color. I have also established that the figurative meaning describes fleets that disguise the origin of the ship to evade sanctions, which suggests secrecy or deception. Thus, I would argue that the conceptual metaphor is secrecy is darkness/a shadow/hidden. The conceptual domain from which the abstract concept is made concrete is darkness (source domain), while the abstract concept is secrecy (target domain). This conceptual metaphor gives rise to metaphorical expressions such as "*grey fleet*", "*dark fleet*", "*he kept me in the*

[3] ENG Translation: "*Shadow fleet*"

dark", "*a dark past*", "*a shady deal*", or "*operating in the shadows*". These metaphorical phrases rely on associations between darkness and secrecy or moral ambiguity. This becomes evident when contrasted with the opposing conceptual metaphor clarity is light (eg., "*bringing things to light*"), where light represents truth or knowledge, while darkness signifies something hidden, deceptive, or suspicious. Additionally, the metaphor is a structural metaphor. One could argue that both darkness/a shadow/hidden (source domain) and secrecy (target domain) are abstract concepts, however, the metaphor maps the structure of the target domain as a complex concept to allow us to understand darkness as something hidden. The metaphor labels secrecy as darkness because it allows the reader to reason about concealment as if it shares the same characteristics of darkness, i.e., something that is hard to see through. The conceptual metaphor has a generally strong persuasive function, as it frames the actions of the involved companies as intentionally concealed. By mapping the qualities of darkness onto secrecy, the metaphor invites the reader to interpret the actions of companies associated with the *"skyggeflåde"* as secretive and suspicious. This metaphor simplifies a complex issue into a narrative where being linked to shadow fleets suggests guilt by association.

Finally, metaphor explanation includes analyzing the persuasive and contextual aspects of "*skyggeflåde*". Although the term may not be immediately recognized as a metaphor, since it has become a general term for masked ships involved in the Russia-Ukraine war, it carries political undertones that can be explored through Christ'l De Landtsheer's (2009) framework mentioned in chapter 3.2.2. Because the Russia-Ukraine war is highly politicized, the metaphor functions as a subtle framing device that shapes how readers perceive the three Danish companies. The metaphor draws attention by simplifying a complex issue. In this way, the metaphor guides the reader's interpretation by reframing all companies (particularly SDK Shipping) as complicit despite Saga Shipping's claims of transparency amid the alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets. This framing of all three companies being complicit is exemplified in the following: "*Alle afviser at have gjort noget galt. Men som det ene af selskaberne i Skagen siger, er det ikke altid sådan lige til at gennemskue, om et skib er fra skyggeflåden. Men det kan man altså godt. Og man skal. Ellers får man ukrainsk blod på hænderne*[4]." (Appendix 1, ll. 44-47). Here, the metaphor acts as a subtle rhetorical tool. As De Landtsheer (2009) notes, metaphors influence perception by highlighting

[4] ENG Translation: "*All deny having done anything wrong. But as one of the companies in Skagen says, it's not always easy to tell whether a ship belongs to the shadow fleet. But actually, you can. And you must. Otherwise, you'll end up with Ukrainian blood on your hands*."

certain interpretations about the event by simplifying a complex issue. In this case, by representing fleet activity in terms of "*shadows*" and assigning complicity in terms of "*blood on one's hands*", this framing compels readers to associate business activities with secrecy, complicity, and negligence.

4.1.3 Metaphor Expression 3 – "*Så er der nogle alarmklokker, der burde ringe i Skagen*"

The final metaphorical expression that I will analyze in Ekstra Bladet's article is exemplified in the following excerpt: "*Selvom et skib er indregistreret i Tyrkiet, og besætningen måske kommer fra Bulgarien, og forsikringen er et tredje sted, så er der nogle alarmklokker, der burde ringe i Skagen*[5]." (Appendix 1, ll. 31-33). In applying an incongruity test to identify the phrase as a metaphor, the literal expressions imply physical alarm bells are ringing in Skagen, North Jutland, to signal a warning. The figurative meaning indicates that the companies in Skagen should have noticed danger signs or done something to avoid any form of wrongdoing, which is a subtle way of assigning blame or complicity. So, because there is an incongruity between the literal and figurative meaning, the phrase can be confirmed as a metaphor. In identifying the metaphor to ensure that the phrase is indeed a metaphor, I will state that the idiom "*to set alarm bells ringing*" is a common English idiom (Collins Dictionary n.d.). However, the phrase does not carry the same ironic tone as in the excerpt. This is evident considering the phrase "*alarmklokker, der burde ringe i Skagen*" implies accountability tied to Skagen. Thus, Skagen becomes metaphorical in that it refers literally to a specific location, which becomes figurative for companies operating in Skagen. The place represents local actors, like Saga Shipping, whose duty is to notice suspicious activity. The metaphor maps a physical sound (alarms) to the mental process of awareness. It suggests something is wrong, and companies in Skagen should recognize the warning signs.

Furthermore, I will interpret the metaphor through source and target domains and identify the conceptual metaphor. I have identified that the figurative meaning of the metaphor refers to the responsibility of companies in Skagen, whose duty is to notice warning signs indicating possible Russian shadow fleets and act accordingly, implying a moral call for accountability. Because the metaphor maps the physical sensation of hearing alarm bells ring, connecting it to the demand of

[5] ENG Translation: "*Even if a ship is registered in Turkey, the crew may be from Bulgaria, and the insurance from a third party, Skagen should've heard the alarm bells ringing*."

immediate attention, I interpret that the conceptual metaphor is suspicion is a warning signal. The source domain is thus warning signal, while the target domain is suspicion. Metaphorical expressions that derive from this conceptual metaphor are "*red flags*" or "*wake-up call*". Therefore, the type of metaphor is structural. This is clear in that the abstract concept of suspicion is made concrete in terms of warning signals. The metaphor structures our understanding of how suspicion emerges, framing it as though we are listening to actual alarm bells. It suggests that when certain warning signs appear, they should trigger a sense of alertness and imply a responsibility to notice and respond to suspicion.

Finally, metaphor explanation includes analyzing the persuasive and contextual aspects of the metaphor "*Så er der nogle alarmklokker, der burde ringe i Skagen*" (Appendix 1, ll. 31-33). I would argue that the metaphor is highly persuasive because it reframes oversight of Russian shadow fleets as a matter of common-sense watchfulness, where warning signals, like alarm bells, ought to be noticed by anyone paying attention. In this framing, the metaphor assigns responsibility and indirectly rejects any claims of mistake in accidentally dealing with shadow fleets. It subtly implies that companies cannot claim ignorance. Moreover, when this metaphor is contextually situated within a text filled with irony and sarcasm (cf. chapter 4.2), the rhetorical pressure intensifies. The subtle irony enhances the metaphor's persuasive function by highlighting the absurdity of oversight of the shadow fleet, thereby increasing the demand for accountability placed on Danish companies to uphold ethical business practices in a mocking tone.

4.2 Framing of Transparency in Danish Tabloid Coverage

In this chapter, I will summarize *Ekstra Bladet's* article (Appendix 1) and discuss how metaphors frame transparency. I will also discuss cultural aspects and contextualize how the analysis of metaphors serves as a rhetorical tool in tabloid media's coverage of politically sensitive issues. This includes an analytical discussion of *BT's* article (Appendix 2) that reports on the same event but in a more neutral tone. These two articles are essential to discuss in terms of how transparency is framed through metaphors.

Ekstra Bladet's "*Blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1; Gardel 2024) frames the involvement in an ironic and critical tone. The accusatory and moralizing tone frames the companies as complicit in enabling illicit activities. This is evident in the headline "*Blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1, l. 3), signifying not only alleged involvement in doing business through the Russian shadow fleet, but that

the three Danish companies are complicit in the war against Ukraine. This initial framing sets the tone for the rest of the article with strong imagery. The article illustrates this framing by writing the following: "*Danske selskaber bliver ved med at hjælpe Putin med at føre krig. Vores gamle bekendte fra Nordic Waste, Torben Østergaard-Nielsen, er selvfølgelig med*[6]." (Appendix 1, ll. 5-6). The headline, coupled with this statement, escalates the crisis by framing commercial trading as directly aiding warfare. It frames the involvement of Danish companies not as passive or accidental business activities but as active participation in war, implying moral complicity. The use of "*help Putin wage war*" is highly persuasive and implies intentional collaboration with perpetrators of war. The irony in the phrase "*vores gamle bekendte*" adds a layer of cynicism by mocking the founder of USTC Group for engaging in habitual wrongdoing, showing a lack of accountability for constantly being known for scandals.

Furthermore, I would argue that cultural elements are at play here, particularly the pervasive use of Danish irony, which is reflected several times throughout the article. Consider the following example: "*EU har indført sanktioner mod russisk oliehandel, så russiske olietankere ikke kan købe forsyninger i EU. I stedet bruger russerne udenlandske skibe. Disse skibe undgår helst vestlige havne. I stedet kaster de anker på havet, for eksempel ud for Skagen, hvor man er i fred for politiet*[7]." (Appendix 1, ll. 20-23). I interpret the excerpt to exemplify Danish irony, which lies in its dry tone used to highlight the fact that Russia is still able to anchor at sea where fleets are "*safe from authorities*." This phrase is not meant to be taken literally, but rather a critique of the loopholes in enforcement. When this ironic tone is paired with metaphors such as "*blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1, l. 3), the result undermines transparency by rejecting any attempt. This is coupled with the fact that *Ekstra Bladet* focused mainly on SDK Shipping's past actions to highlight that organizational crises are a natural occurrence for the founder of USTC Group. Thus, both devices work together to criticize the three Danish companies and highlight the deeper power dynamics involved in how transparency is publicly framed. Subsequently, the article's primary focus is on the founder of USTC Group and his alleged tendency to engage in unethical business practices. In this article, the only mention of Saga Shipping's transparency attempt is the journalist implying that all three companies have denied

[6] ENG Translation: "*Danish companies continue to help Putin wage war. Of course, our old acquaintance from Nordice Waste, Torben Østergaard-Nielsen is involved*."
[7] ENG: "*The EU has imposed sanctions on Russian oil trade, preventing Russian oil tankers from purchasing supplies within the EU. Instead, the Russians use foreign ships. These ships generally avoid Western ports. Instead, they anchor at sea, for example at the coast of Skagen, where they are safe from the authorities*."

doing anything wrong, except for recognizing Saga Shipping's comment on the difficulty in determining whether a ship is a Russian shadow fleet (Appendix 1, ll. 44-45)

Furthermore, on December 19, 2024, the Danish tabloid outlet BT published an article on the same topic titled "*Danske firmaer har serviceret mistænkte skyggeflåde*[8]*"* (Appendix 2; B.T. 2024). While *BT*, like *Ekstra Bladet*, addresses primarily SDK Shipping's tendency for recurring involvement in scandals, it approaches the issue with a noticeably more neutral tone. Rather than emphasizing the event with irony or sarcasm, *BT* grounds its reporting in factual information drawn from external media and focuses on the details rather than passing judgment (cf. Appendix 2, l. 8). The reason why I find including the article important is that while Ekstra Bladet disregarded claims of transparency in that "*all deny having done anything wrong*" (Appendix 1, l. 44), BT states Saga Shipping's transparency claims in the following: "*Saga Shipping siger til Dagbladet Information og Danwatch, at man ikke ønsker at handle med skyggeflåden, og at man holder sig inden for de gældende regler*[9]." (Appendix 2, ll. 30-31). This neutral type of framing opens up space for readers to decide for themselves if Saga Shipping's transparency claims are credible. This contrasts with *Ekstra Bladet's* sensationalist style of framing, illustrating that different reporting styles affect the framing of transparency. This contrast highlights how framing can alter or shape public perception of corporate transparency in an era of institutional distrust. Whereas *Ekstra Bladet* leads the reader's understanding of transparency through an accusatory interpretation through irony, *BT* creates space for readers to form their own judgments. Even though media outlets may report on the same topic, this difference shows how media outlets exert discursive power by challenging or preserving transparency claims. This shows the power the media has in creating a narrative that shapes public understanding of any kind of event. *BT's* neutral framing may allow companies to maintain a degree of image control, while confrontational framings suggest a push for accountability. Consequently, these differences illustrate that public understanding of transparency attempts is not only shaped by the facts but by the metaphors that persuade readers to understand an event in a specific way.

[8] ENG Translation: "*Danish Companies Have Serviced Suspected Shadow Fleet*"
[9] ENG Translation: "*Saga Shipping tells Dagbladet Information and Danwatch that they do not wish to do business with shadow fleets and that they comply with applicable regulations*."

4.3 British Coverage of Transparency – *The Sun*

The article in this chapter, titled "*Victims of contaminated blood scandal need guilty to be punished for their lethal negligence & callous deceit*" (Appendix 3; The Sun 2024), is short, but sharp and impactful. While the article is sensationalist and filled with metaphors, I have decided to analyze three metaphorical expressions that demonstrate how the British tabloid The Sun employs figurative language to frame involvement in controversial crises. Including British articles like this one serves to broaden the scope of the comparative analysis by contrasting Danish and British media frames. This will allow me to examine different media cultures by contextualizing how metaphors frame transparency.

4.3.1 Metaphorical Expression 1 – "*Lethal Negligence & Callous Deceit*"

The phrase that I will first begin with identifying appears in the following headline: "*THE SUN SAYS Victims of contaminated blood scandal need guilty to be punished for their lethal negligence & callous deceit*." (Appendix 3, ll. 1-3). I will apply an incongruity test to demonstrate that the phrase "*lethal negligence & callous deceit*" serves a metaphorical function (Appendix 3, l. 3). The noun "*negligence*" means failure to take proper care of something, resulting in harm (Cambridge Dictionary "negligence" n.d.), and "*deceit*" means keeping a truth hidden to get an advantage (Cambridge Dictionary "deceit" n.d.). To confirm that these are indeed metaphors, I will examine whether it makes sense to say that negligence is lethal or deceit is callous. The terms "*negligence*" and "*deceit*" are abstract concepts understood through animate beings. They do not literally possess the capacity to kill or express callousness in the way humans do. This creates a clear incongruity between the literal and figurative meaning of the phrase. The metaphor may not immediately be noticed as a metaphor, yet it involves a tension between what is said and meant. We interpret the sentence because we personify abstract concepts and treat "*negligence*" and "*deceit*" as agents that *can* kill and *can* be callous. The mismatch between the literal and figurative expression confirms that the phrase functions as a metaphor.

Additionally, I will continue to interpret the metaphor by beginning with the type of metaphor. I interpret that the type at play here is personification. Personification is a subtype of the ontological metaphor and refers to experiences in terms of human characteristics (cf. Chapter 3.2.1.4). In this case, *the Sun* maps human traits onto abstract concepts, such as the consequences of the NHS's handling of the Infected Blood Scandal, calling them negligence and callousness. In contextualizing

these personifications, *the Sun* emphasizes that because victims were infected with HIV and hepatitis C through contaminated blood, the actions and inactions of the NHS and doctors, marked by negligence and deceit, led to people dying. I interpret that there are two conceptual metaphors at play here, namely, negligence is lethal, and deceit is cruelty. However, I recognize another layer to these conceptual metaphors that must be interpreted in relation to the context in which they are mentioned. Because the headline is referring to systemic failure leading to the deaths of many victims, and the article is constantly using violent imagery like "*Thousands who had blind faith in the NHS in the '70s and '80s were killed by it*" (Appendix 3, l. 4), "[…] *covered up the deadly consequences*" (Appendix 3, l. 18), "[…] *the truth was too dangerous*" (Appendix 3, ll. 18-19), and "[…] *a monstrous and appalling scandal*" (Appendix 3, ll. 28-30), I interpret that the overarching conceptual metaphor is institutional failure is death/murder (cf. Lakoff et al. 1991, 67 for reference on *failure is death*). The conceptual domain from which the abstract concept is made concrete is death/murder (source domain), while the abstract concept is institutional failure (target domain). I would argue that metaphorical expressions that derive from this conceptual metaphor could be the examples I gave above. This illustrates that the article consistently uses the same metaphors to increase the emotional impact of metaphors of violence. The framing moves from being merely a scandal to a crime, creating distrust of institutions.

This leads to the explanation stage, where I consider how these metaphors function discursively and persuasively in the article. Similar to Ekstra Bladet's headline "*blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1, l.3), *The Sun* frames the NHS's negligence as an act that kills, framing the entire article within an emotional register that evokes moral outrage and a desire for justice. The emotional appeal is heightened through metaphors of violence, which frame the NHS not as a failed system but as a perpetrator, intensifying public anger and undermining any attempt at institutional trust. Any attempt by the perpetrators to be transparent about their desire to compensate the victims is even framed by *the Sun* in the following:

> "*The vast compensation the PM has pledged to pay is of course welcome. But justice for all those victims requires the guilty to be punished for their lethal negligence and callous deceit. That – and not the vague promises that the State will learn lessons – is by far the best deterrent to avoid a repeat of such a monstrous and appalling scandal*." (Appendix 3, ll. 24-29)

In this passage, the Sun acknowledges the Prime Minister's pledge of financial compensation but immediately frames its legitimacy by positioning it as insufficient. By framing transparency attempts through personifications like "*vague promises*" (Appendix 3, l. 27), *the Sun* constructs the U.K. government's crisis response strategy as a political performance. The examples I gave above regarding the violent imagery prioritize punishment as the ideal outcome of the scandal ties into the overarching conceptual metaphor of institutional failure is death/murder, where institutional failure deserves to be brought to justice and not merely financially compensated for. The attempt at transparency is therefore rejected, and thus the Sun prioritizes the following demand: "*Nail the guilty*" (Appendix 3, l. 7).

4.3.2 Metaphorical Expression 2 – "*Nail the Guilty*"

This phrase, which frankly sounds like something from the Stone Age, is framed as the article's subheading and sets the tone of the entire article (Appendix 3, l. 7). The focus on punishment due to institutional failure is communicated almost as a call for perpetrators to be burned at the stake. The examples of metaphors I gave above, i.e., "*lethal negligence & callous deceit*." (Appendix 3, ll. 3) or "[…] *covered up the deadly consequences*" (Appendix 3, l. 18) shows that the article demands punishment rather than "*vague promises*" that the state will learn its lesson (Appendix 3, l. 27). I will thus apply an incongruity test to see whether the phrase works as a metaphor that frames the entire article as a call for punishment. At first glance, the phrase could work as a literal expression, implying that someone should be physically nailed for their crimes either through hammering them or by crucifixion. But in this context, it does not refer to the literal act of crucifixion but calls for the perpetrators to be held accountable by exposing or legally punishing those responsible. I interpret this based on the earlier examples that illustrate more accountability from the NHS through violent metaphors. This shows that there is a clear mismatch between the literal meaning (physical act of nailing) and the figurative meaning (demanding legal or moral accountability). This incongruity confirms that the phrase is metaphorical.

Furthermore, I will continue to metaphor interpretation and analyze the conceptual metaphor at play with its source and target domains. Because I concluded that *the Sun* frames the event in a way that emphasizes bringing the guilty to justice through metaphors pertaining to murder or death, I interpret that the conceptual metaphor at play here is justice is crucifixion, with justice as a target domain and crucifixion as a source domain. From the source domain are metaphorical

expressions, such as: "*Heads will roll*" (Cambridge Dictionary "heads will roll" n.d.), or "*he was hung out to dry*" (Cambridge Dictionary "hang someone out to dry" n.d.), both expressions suggesting punishment as crucifying someone. These metaphors illustrate the point that *the Sun* intentionally frames that justice ought to be direct and harsh, and not vague promises made by the government about avoiding repeating the same mistake. Additionally, I interpret that "*nail the guilty*" (Appendix 3, l. 7) is a structural metaphor. This is evident in that crucifixion (source domain) structures how we conceptualize and concretize justice (target domain). The entire framing of the article frames perpetrators as criminals deserving to be brought to justice through an almost symbolic sacrifice.

This leads to metaphor explanation, where I will analyze what this kind of framing does to the persuasive and contextual aspect of the article. The metaphor "*nail the guilty*" (Appendix 3, l. 7) describes punishment by evoking an image of harsh punishment, suggesting that those responsible for the scandal should be brought to justice and publicly exposed. This framing, with metaphorical expressions like "*lethal negligence & callous deceit*" (Appendix 3, ll. 3) or "[…] *a monstrous and appalling scandal*" (Appendix 3, ll. 28-30), reflects the UK's tabloid culture that uses sensationalist and emotionally charged language. It frames the event in a way that invites readers to interpret the Infected Blood Scandal through a cognitive schema that aligns with themes of crucifixion and punishment. My initial impression of this metaphor is that the guilty are almost painted as villains in a biblical narrative, fueling the public outrage and need for a cathartic outcome.

4.3.3 Metaphorical Expression 3 – "*Truth was Too Dangerous and Costly to Admit*"

The final metaphorical expression I will analyze is exemplified in the following excerpt: "*They covered up the deadly consequences because the truth was too dangerous and costly to admit*" (Appendix 3, ll. 18-19). This phrase functions similarly to "*lethal negligence & callous deceit*" (Appendix 3, ll. 3) in that the nouns "*negligence*", "*deceit*", and "*truth*" are spoken as animate objects. Truth cannot literally be dangerous or costly in the literal sense of the term, or at least not in the way weapons can be dangerous, or products can be costly. *Dangerous* and *costly* are adjectives that we typically assign to concrete things. I can therefore already conclude that the phrase passed the incongruity test and is a metaphor that suggests a deeper, hidden meaning.

Furthermore, I will first discuss the context in which the metaphor is mentioned and then interpret the conceptual metaphor. I will begin by stating that the sentence carries a double

meaning: it not only describes what happened but also constructs a story about how the perpetrators may have perceived the truth. *The Sun* frames it from their perspective and suggests that the truth is being told through their eyes, and described as dangerous and costly (Appendix 3, ll. 18-19). Because I interpret the metaphor as having a dual function, I believe there are layers to interpreting the conceptual metaphor. The first layer pertains to framing "*the truth*" as "*dangerous*", leading to the first conceptual metaphor: Truth is danger. A similar expression that derives from this is, for example, "*the truth could destroy her*". Regarding the second layer, which is that "*the truth*" is not only "*dangerous*" but also "*costly*", I interpret that the overarching conceptual metaphor is: Truth is a threat. Therefore, threat is a source domain used to understand the abstract concept of truth. Additionally, I interpret that the type of metaphor is personification. Like "*lethal negligence & callous deceit*" (Appendix 3, l. 3), the Sun concretizes the concept through qualities that describe the truth as a threat.

Finally, in the metaphor explanation, I will analyze the discursive and persuasive aspects of the metaphor and how it contributes to the overall reframing of transparency. Firstly, truth is an abstract concept that can be interpreted and understood differently. The truth is not necessarily framed as a moral imperative, but as a threat. *The Sun* is framing the Infected Blood Scandal by telling a story. Consider the following excerpt:

> "*Doctors lied, even injected contaminated blood without consent, knowing it was risky. They covered up the deadly consequences because the truth was too dangerous and costly to admit. Governments from Margaret Thatcher's to Tony Blair's shamefully did the same.*" (Appendix 3, ll. 16-19).

This illustrates that *the Sun* constructs a narrative about systemic betrayal, where truth is a threat, and the guilty evade justice. The phrasing shows *the Sun* accusing rather than reporting on what happened. The article does not state "*some doctors lied, according to reports*" but "*Doctors lied*", which shows intent. *The Sun* uses this metaphor to dramatize institutional failure by suggesting that truth could destroy reputation by being "*dangerous*" and too "*costly*" to paint the crisis as a financial liability for perpetrators. The entire article and the examples of metaphors that I discussed tap into ideas about institutional corruption, creating an "*us*" versus "*them*" narrative, and shape the event into a broader

narrative about institutional corruption, not just a news report about one specific instance of a mere crisis.

4.4 Framing of Transparency in British Tabloid Coverage

In this analytical discussion, I will present how *the Sun* frames transparency efforts in the Infected Blood Scandal. I concluded that the first article (Appendix 3; The Sun 2024) adopts an accusatory tone, emphasizing the need for accountability in the Infected Blood Scandal. The article makes heavy use of metaphors that accuse the government of a cover-up and emphasize the victims' demand for justice. The article is short, but sharp and impactful, playing a strong persuasive role in framing the scandal as a deep betrayal, thereby amplifying the moral outrage. Additionally, I will also discuss cultural aspects and contextualize the metaphors that serve as persuasive tools to influence public understanding of the Infected Blood Scandal.

I concluded that *the Sun* constructs a story-like presentation about the Infected Blood Scandal through metaphors. While the framing illustrates the event through a narrative, other features amplify the understanding of the crisis. For instance, I mentioned that key conceptual metaphors were institutional failure is death/murder (cf. Chapter 4.3.1), justice/punishment is crucifixion (cf. Chapter 4.3.2), and truth is a threat (cf. Chapter 4.3.3). These conceptual metaphors all have in common underlying themes of death, violence, being brought to justice, punishments, and moral condemnation. This form of framing does not merely report on the facts but creates a narrative that constructs the reader's understanding about the crisis through a specific angle. One striking feature is also the "*us*" versus "*them*" narrative that shapes the crisis into a story about institutional corruption. While it is known that the NHS, among others, was responsible for the Infected Blood Scandal (Collyer Merritt 2024), *the Sun* remains vague about mentioning them. Even though *the Sun* mentions explicitly the guilty at times, for example in "*Doctors lied* […]" (Appendix 3, l. 4), "[…] *Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer's* […]" (Appendix 3, ll. 8-10), "[…] *the NHS* […]" (Appendix 3, l. 11), "[…] *Margaret Thatcher's to Tony Blair's* […]", "[…] *the PM* […]" (Appendix 3, l. 25), "[…] *the State* […]," the article remains vague and refers to those behind the crises through repeated pronouns as "*they*" without clarifying who "they" are (Appendix 3, l. 2, 18, 25). Other markers show that the article rarely specifies names or roles. For instance, consider these examples: The claim "*Incriminating documents were destroyed*" (Appendix 3, l. 21) does not specific what or who these documents were destroyed by, "*Specific people made these calls*" (Appendix 3, l. 24) implies that this

was a larger, intentional operation without specifying who was behind the scandal, and defining who "*the guilty*" are (Appendix 3, l. 25) is left unanswered. I would argue that this vagueness is intentional. It is a deliberate strategy to persuade readers that there must be a symbolic battle between the public ("us") and those in power ("them"), which further proves the point that the media influence public opinion and inadvertently has an influence in the institutional distrust that is present today (cf. Chapter 1 on Edelman's 2025 Trust Barometer). The article encourages readers to understand events as if those responsible for the crises are enemies.

Furthermore, I find it essential to briefly include a second text from *the Sun* to situate the analytical discussion in a broader context. The second text, titled "*Criminal charges must be next step, say victims of NHS blood scandal as 'chilling cover-up' revealed*," is also about the Infected Blood Scandal and adopts a more neutral tone than the earlier article from *the Sun* (Appendix 4; Robinson 2024). The article takes a justice-driven stance, focusing on the victims' call for accountability in the NHS blood scandal. It frames the event as a systemic failure deserving of legal punishment, emphasizing betrayal, outrage, and the urgency for action in the aftermath of the inquiry's findings. The article is quite long due to detailed descriptions of victims' experiences with the scandal. Therefore, I have only included in the appendix the most important parts to incorporate into this analytical discussion (cf. Robinson 2024 for the full article). While Appendix 3 calls for justice through metaphors of crucifixion, punishment, and institutional corruption, Appendix 4 shifts the focus to the victims' reactions to the inquiry findings, highlighting how victims and their families respond to the government's crisis response strategy. For instance, the article begins by framing the event by reminding the readers about the scale of the tragedy involved in the Infected Blood Scandal: "*Sir Brian Langstaff, chair of the inquiry, concluded there had been a "catalogue of failures" which had "catastrophic" consequences* […]" (Appendix 4, ll. 21-22). This reframing of the event is again illustrated through personifications seen in the brackets "*catalogue of failures*" and "*catastrophic consequences",* where victims feel "*validated*" by the findings due to finally being given "*a voice*" (Appendix 4, l27, 34). The target domain in conceptual metaphor truth is a threat is again brought into play in the following quote "*There's a long way to go yet for justice but it feels like finally someone has asked the right questions on our behalf and dug into the truth to get us answers*" (Appendix 4, ll. 35-36), as this framing not only emphasizes the need for transparency, but the need for accountability. It shows a genuine moment of transparency, which suggests relief and validation after decades of silence and denial.

4.5 Comparative Analysis

In this final chapter of the analytical framework, I will conduct a comparative analysis to evaluate general differences in *Ekstra Bladet's* and *BT's* reframing of corporate involvement with Russian shadow fleets and t*he Sun's* reframing of the Infected Blood Scandal. This includes an analytical discussion about cultural differences in Danish and British tabloid coverages and how the media differences reframe organizational transparency efforts.

In chapter 4.2, I discussed that the Danish tabloid framing shows a stance of the three Danish companies' alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets rooted in Danish irony and sarcasm. I identified metaphors that examined how *Ekstra Bladet* framed an organizational crisis through these key metaphors: "*Blod på hænderne*" (Appendix 1, l. 3), "*skyggeflåde*" (Appendix 1, ll. 16, 19, 45), and *"[...] så er der nogle alarmklokker, der burde ringe i Skagen"* (Appendix 1, l. 33). The first metaphor is mentioned in the headline and is the first framing a reader will notice in reading the article. The metaphor "*Blod på hænderne*" evokes a strong image associated with complicity in the Russia-Ukraine war. This sort of framing will negatively affect Saga Shipping's attempt to be transparent about its business activities, as the metaphor evokes an image that symbolically reflects murder or crime, which stirs public outrage against the three Danish companies. While the article highly emphasized the past actions of the founder of USTC Group, the downfall is that by *Ekstra Bladet* briefly mentioning Saga Shipping and L&N Supply Ships, the article is framing all companies under the same umbrella as those behind the Nordic Waste and Dan-Bunkering scandal. I discussed that one key feature of the article "*Blod på hænderne*" is the use of Danish irony, sarcasm, and cynicism in mocking the founder of USTC Group by referring to them as "*old acquaintances*" and "*old friends*", implying the fact that the founder is known by the media for his tendency to cause organizational crises (Appendix 1, ll. 5, 12). I argued earlier in Chapter 4.2 that this is an example of Danish irony that reflects something rooted in the Danish tabloid culture. While on one hand, I would say that tabloid media is generally perceived as bad journalism in Denmark, on the other hand, I interpret the tabloid articles I have analyzed in this thesis to speak on behalf of public opinion, reflecting the culture in which the articles are published. The pervasive use of Danish irony undermines any attempt at transparency in a cynically sarcastic framing by dismissing Saga Shipping's comment on the difficulty in determining whether a ship is a Russian shadow fleet or not (Appendix 1, ll. 44-45).

Furthermore, situating this article in relation to the media culture in which it was published is essential. While there is a limitation in that I picked one main Danish and British article to analyze, and two others to contextualize transparency efforts, *the Sun* demonstrates a great example of how British tabloid journalism uses sensationalism and emotional language to frame institutional distrust. This makes it a valuable case for understanding how the dilemma of transparency unfolds in the media, where there is institutional distrust and where attempts at transparency might be framed as performative rather than sincere. While the Danish articles contain more cynical remarks about its crisis, the British articles were more dramatic due to the story-like framing of the Infected Blood Scandal. For instance, the three conceptual metaphors in Appendix 3 are institutional failure is death/murder (cf. Chapter 4.3.1), justice is crucifixion (cf. Chapter 4.3.2), and truth is a threat (cf. Chapter 4.3.3). This is crucial in understanding that *the Sun* constructed a narrative through these conceptual metaphors. Themes of death, punishment, and moral condemnation frame the Infected Blood Scandal as a story for readers to cognitively structure their understanding of the crisis. The article does not merely report on the abstract concepts of institutional failure, justice, or truth (target domains) but structures them through concrete understandings about death, crucifixion, and threats (source domains). This illustrates an essential difference in Danish and British media cultures. While *Ekstra Bladet* reframed the alleged involvement with Russian shadow fleets through familiar cultural understandings about Danish irony by reporting on the event in a cynical tone, *The Sun* reframed the Infected Blood Scandal through a story that I interpret is meant to influence public opinion in an "*us*" (the public) versus "*them*" (institutions) narrative. This leads me to the concluding discussion, where I will discuss what these contrasts reveal about the dilemma of transparency and how they help address the research question.

5 Concluding Discussion

This final chapter will be a concluding discussion, where I will evaluate the findings and discuss their meanings for the thesis' research question. I will begin by addressing what I perceived to be the dilemma of transparency, which I presented in the first chapter. That means that I will pick up on my earliest grounds for researching this topic, and how the findings will conclude my motivation for this thesis. Finally, I will conclude the thesis by answering the research question concisely.

5.1 The Dilemma of Transparency

I began this thesis by presenting my aim for research, which is about the paradoxical nature of transparency as a crisis response strategy. In the first chapter, I presented frameworks that show a strong link between trust and transparency (Rawlins 2008). I discussed that transparency is attributed to raised expectations for ethical and social governance. That includes an expectation that institutions must hold themselves accountable for their actions in order to expect trust in return (Rawlins 2008, 6). I also discussed that this expectation for transparent business practices is a result of earlier practices of adopting silence and denial as a crisis response strategy. In chapter 2.3, I used the Exxon Valdez oil spill as an example, where Exxon faced harsh criticism for their slow and inadequate response, which ultimately backfired (Williams & Olaniran 1994). This example illustrates how the crisis became a pivotal learning opportunity for managing organizational crises, which ultimately led to a proactive shift towards more transparent practices. However, the dilemma of transparency manifests in several ways. The thing is that while I refer to it as the 'dilemma' of transparency, I rather see a 'paradox' in transparent business practices, which I find important for crisis communicators to consider. First of all, Edelman's 2025 Trust Barometer indicates that 61% of people believe governments and businesses make life more difficult and are only interested in serving the rich, leading to institutional distrust (cf. Chapter 1). The second paradox is that transparency is widely embraced in academic discourse and modern corporate practice (Albu & Flyverbom 2018; Holland et al. 2021; Rawlins 2008; Griffin et al. 2013). Literature reveals that disclosing truthful information, including stakeholder participation in needed information, and reporting objective and balanced information about an organization builds trust with stakeholders (Rawlins 2008, 6). But why, then, did disclosing truthful and transparent information about the involvement of the Russian shadow fleet fail for Saga Shipping? What is the dilemma of transparency that crisis communication scholars fail to see? That surely means something is wrong with our favorite crisis response strategy, namely,

transparency. Or rather, something that we might not *realize* about transparency. This leads me to question that I posed in the introduction: What happens, then, when transparency fails to protect a company's reputation the media – and what can we learn from this? (cf. Chapter 1).

Beginning from the literature standpoint, I discussed that the crisis frameworks I presented in the literature review (cf. Chapter 2) focus excessively on providing rigid guidelines on handling crises rather than having culture and context in mind. For instance, Jesper Falkheimer and Mats Heide (2006) argue that early crisis communication tends to prescribe actions rather than addressing the wider cultural context. However, recent years show a shift towards considering linguistic, political, and socio-cultural contexts (cf. Chapter 2.2). I discussed that this illustrates that crisis communication has largely been dominated by non-contextual case studies and prescriptive guidelines, rather than being grounded in a contextual framework (Falkheimer & Heide 2006, 181). This shows that the focus should not be on choosing the *right* strategy, but on the right strategy *depending* on the culture and context. For instance, Saga Shipping might have thought that transparency is the most appropriate crisis response strategy because it shows truthfulness and openness – two ideal qualities in maintaining a desirable organizational image. And when I speak about context and culture, what I mean exactly is that, based on my perception of reality, choosing a crisis response strategy requires contextualizing these aspects:

(1) The consideration that we are living in a politically sensitive time. At one point, I used the cliché example of cancel culture to illustrate the sensitivity regarding any kind of scandal or incident, creating a rhetorical arena where people argue for, against, with, or across a crisis (cf. Chapter 2.3). This creates a battleground for a mix of actors to criticize and structure a crisis where the accused is guilty until proven innocent. This highlights the increasing difficulty in communicating transparency in a highly sensitive media environment, where there is no way to make online critics give the benefit of the doubt.

(2) Transparency might not be enough. Now, does this mean that organizations should not use transparency as a crisis response strategy? The answer is no. The entire process in this thesis – from literature review to the theoretical framework to the analytical process – showed me that transparency is expected to come with accountability. The analysis on Saga Shipping's crisis and the Infected Blood Scandal illustrates that it is not enough to merely disclose truthful information about business/institutional practices, but needs to be tied to statements about how the organizations will take accountability, and perhaps a form of compensation. While offering a solution was not the aim

of this thesis, I conclude based on my analysis (and even my own observations, academically and personally speaking) that accountability is important for persuading public opinion. This is because crisis communicators may not even be aware that transparency, if used as a standalone strategy, can be perceived as defensive. In an age of a highly sensitive culture, transparency may be read as: "*This is our full, honest business practices. Take it or leave it."* This is, of course, only my own interpretation. But think about the fact that people want to be seen and heard and expect institutions to understand. Even if an organization *is* innocent of doing business with Russian shadow fleets, the Russia-Ukraine war is perceived by many as a horrible tragedy, and anyone affiliated with the war is immediately guilty until proven innocent – which is unfortunate for some, fortunate for others. This means that Saga Shipping might have considered a small statement to legitimize the other side's feelings by stating the tragic circumstances of the war. Pure transparency without any accountability will be judged regardless. This is why context and culture are so important. The analysis of *the Sun's* article (Appendix 4) shows that victims were "*validated and vindicated*" and felt they were given "*a voice*" after the inquiry findings about the scandal were made public (Appendix 4, ll. 27, 34). While the two cases I chose for the thesis are in no way similar, in crises where victims are involved, either directly or indirectly, the public expects justice or accountability from organizations. Again, this is only my own subjective interpretation considering the culture and context in which the crises unfolded. Therefore, I interpret that organizations should not chase *narrative control*, but *narrative resilience*. Regardless of how much an organization attempts to control a certain outcome, news outlets (specifically tabloids) will sensationalize and frame a crisis in a narrative only to sell to more readers. Nevertheless, I conclude that my research shows why narrative resilience is so crucial for organizations to understand in preparing for future crises.

5.2 Conclusion

Finally, I will conclude this thesis by answering the research question. Briefly, the research question pertains to how transparency is reframed through metaphors in Danish and British tabloid coverage of crisis events, and what these reveal about the dilemma of transparency (cf. Chapter 1.1). The thesis aims to explore how transparency efforts are reframed differently across media cultures and how metaphors shape public understanding of crisis events. The comparative analysis illustrates that both Danish and British reframe events, where the Danish articles question the legitimacy of companies through Danish irony and cynical remarks, and British articles construct a story-like narrative of institutional corruption through crucifixion and a demand for justice. These differences reflect how

national media cultures influence whether transparency is interpreted as sincere or performative. The key insight is that transparency functions as a paradox. Transparency is both expected and challenged. While organizations may aim to appear open, their efforts can backfire if the media frame them as defensive or morally complicit. For crisis communicators, this highlights the need to understand not just *what* is said, but *how* it is framed. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is just one way of understanding the media's ability to reframe a crisis event. Metaphors reveal how abstract issues are structured, and that the media do not simply report facts but reframe them to structure how the public understands and reacts to certain events. Concluding, metaphors illustrate how the dilemma of transparency can either amplify or undermine organizational crisis response strategies by shaping public understanding through emotionally charged metaphors. Comparing *Ekstra Bladet* to *the Sun* articles reveals how national media cultures influence the framing of transparency, where British tabloid journalism sensationalizes crises, intensifying public distrust.

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7 Reflection

Problem-oriented competencies

I have developed problem-oriented competencies by identifying and formulating a research question that is relevant to both contextualizing the media's ability to reframe crisis events and making it useful for future crisis communication in an organizational context. This has helped me in identifying and understanding how to solve a problem that is both academically and practically useful. Specifically, I think that the topic I chose is relevant, since I think that we live in a highly sensitive time, politically speaking. This has helped me in analyzing complex dynamics between the media and organizations. Specifically, I have gained a deeper knowledge of communications and cognitive linguistics, which will help me analyze real-world organizational challenges.

Interpersonal competencies

This semester, I wrote the thesis independently. At times, I had the opportunity to discuss with fellow students about the process and discuss each other's theses. This included discussing various frameworks, theories, methods, etc., which I found useful to learn about other students' working progress. Additionally, I found it beneficial to engage in group supervision meetings and discuss frameworks with my supervisor. I learned plenty by speaking to other students about the process of writing a thesis. So, it was nice to see how others were doing. On the other hand, while I have written many individual projects, working alone quickly becomes a long-winded process. There are many things to include in the thesis before reaching the analysis. However, this experience has helped me build a deep and complex knowledge of cognitive linguistics and transparency strategies. So, while working independently on a thesis is a long process, I recognized the times when external input could enhance the quality of my work.

Structural competencies

At the start of the semester, I created a plan to structure the framework of my thesis, dedicating a lot of time to preliminary research. I initially drafted an outline that included an introduction, theoretical and methodological framework, and a section for data analysis. However, as I progressed with the writing, I learned that developing the framework alongside writing suited me better. This led to a long process in revising, including removing sections that no longer aligned with the aim of the thesis.

Although the writing process was delayed due to illness earlier in the semester, I was able to structure my time and work intensively in the final months leading up to the deadline.

Metacognitive competencies

I would argue that I have greatly developed my metacognitive competencies by reflecting critically and objectively on the project's topic. Primarily, this has been the most challenging project I have written. There were many aspects to consider in researching a thesis. Some begin with a fundamental framework in how transparency is talked about in academic research and organizational practices, while being able to criticize, evaluate, and contend with those frameworks. For instance, I had to research how transparency is discussed in crisis communication, the media, culture, and context. The philosophy of science developed my competencies in thinking objectively about my own biases and limitations and what that meant for the research I had to do. Most importantly, I found Conceptual Metaphor Theory difficult to understand in the beginning due to its abstract nature. However, I thought that the theory is a genius display of cognitive linguistics that not many notice about metaphors and how we structure our understanding of certain things.