

The Southwestern Mass Communication Journal

Spring 2015
V. 30, No. 2

The Southwestern Mass Communication Journal (ISSN 0891-9186) is published semi-annually by the Southwest Education Council for Journalism and Mass Communication.

<http://swmcjournal.com>

In This Issue:

Anonymous Sources: More or less and why and where?

Hoyt Purvis, University of Arkansas

Are You Talking To Me? The Social-Political Visual Rhetoric of the Syrian Presidency's Instagram Account

Steven Holiday & Matthew J. Lewis, Brigham Young University
Jack L. LaBaugh, Brigham Young University – Idaho

Comparative Advertising of Services

Fred Beard, University of Oklahoma

Onward Christian Soldiers: How Arkansas Political Candidates Deploy Religious Texts to Motivate Voters

Rich Shumate, University of Arkansas-Little Rock

The 2013 Steubenville Rape Case: An Examination of Framing in Newspapers and User-generated Content

Mia Moody-Ramirez, Tonya Lewis & Ben Murray, Baylor University

Would Eye Lie to You?: Reexamining CBS' Reported Phone Response to "Murrow versus McCarthy"

Ian Punnett, Arizona State University

ANONYMOUS SOURCES: More or less and why and where?

Hoyt Purvis

Abstract:

Anonymous sources have been important factors in some of the major news stories of our time. But does this reliance on unnamed sources go too far? The use and possible abuse of anonymous sources is a matter of continuing controversy in the media and can have a direct bearing on the credibility of the media. Questions related to the use of such sources are examined in a study of the use of anonymous sources in 14 daily editions of three daily newspapers, focusing on the quantity of articles using anonymous sources, their subject matter, location, and rationale for using unnamed sources. This is done within the context of the ongoing controversy about the reliance on such sources in major news organizations. Results of this study are reported and analyzed and provide some clear indications about the extent and nature of the use of anonymous sources, and point to a possible over-dependence and problematic trend.

Confidential information can be vital to journalists in their duty to inform the public about matters of importance. A number of the most important investigative stories of our time – the classic example being the historic Watergate scandal of the early 1970s – have been based, at least in part, on information from anonymous sources. Some of the most respected journalists and news organizations in the country readily admit that anonymous sources are

highly important to their work. Philip Taubman, former Washington bureau chief for the *New York Times*, told *Editor and Publisher* magazine (Strupp, 2005) that unnamed sources can be “indispensable” for journalists.

But does this reliance on unnamed sources go too far? How extensive is the current use of such sources? What is the primary rationale for granting anonymity? What subject areas involve the largest use of unnamed sources? Coverage from which locations results in the heaviest use of these sources? These questions will be examined through a study of the use of such sources in three newspapers and within the context of ongoing controversy about reliance on anonymous sources in major news organizations.

“I see the overuse of anonymous sources as a major cause of public distrust of the news media,” says Gene Foreman, who managed newsroom operations at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for more than 25 years. (2013) Readers constantly “complain about the overuse of anonymous sources,” said *Washington Post* Ombudsman Andrew Alexander in 2009.

The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists states that journalists should identify sources whenever feasible, noting that “the public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources’ reliability.” The ethics code further states that journalists should “always question sources’ motives before promising anonymity.” (SPJ)

In 2003, following the Jayson Blair scandal at the *New York Times*, in which the young reporter engaged in a prolonged binge of fabrication and plagiarism, an editorial in *Editor & Publisher*, a journalism trade publication, accused the *Times* of being addicted to anonymous

sources: “One inescapable conclusion from this scandal is that the *Times* has developed an addictive tolerance for anonymous sources, the crack cocaine of journalism.” (2003). Although this may be a rather dramatic depiction, there is no doubt that the *Times* has often relied on anonymous sources.

Despite all the admonitions about relying too heavily on anonymous sources, the solemn pledges to limit their use, and the legal limitations that can come into play when reporters are ordered by courts to reveal sources, such sources continue to be used with regularity. “I think we use them more than we like to admit,” said Nicholas Kristof (2008), Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and columnist for the *New York Times*.

Following the Blair scandal, the *Times* announced that it was tightening its standards on unnamed sources. “We resist granting sources anonymity except as a last resort to obtain information that we believe to be newsworthy and reliable,” wrote then Executive Editor Bill Keller (2008) and Allan Siegal, who had been appointed as the paper’s “standards editor.” While pushing for reduced dependence on anonymous sources, Keller in 2008 said, “The ability to offer protection to a source is an essential of our craft.” And he called it “high-minded foolishness” for a news organization to foreswear anonymous sources altogether.

After the announced tightening of standards on the use of anonymous sources, there was an apparent reduction in the number of articles in the *Times* relying on such sources. According to a study requested by Clark Hoyt (2008), public editor of the *Times*, and conducted by students at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, the number of articles relying on anonymous sources fell by roughly half after the tighter policy on their use was

instituted. That study analyzed every article in six issues of the paper published before the policy and six from 2007. Although the study focused on limited periods, it would seem to indicate a definite decline in the use of anonymous sources.

Although there is periodic evidence of such declines in the use of anonymous sources, it is also apparent that they continue to be widely used by leading news organizations. So even though the Columbia analysis had indicated a drop in the use of anonymous sources in the *Times*, as Clark Hoyt (2010) was nearing the end of his stint as the *Times'* public editor, he said the paper continued to squander readers' trust "by using anonymous sources so often and so casually." He said, "The *Times* continues to use anonymous sources for information available elsewhere on the record. It allows unnamed people to provide quotes of marginal news value and to remain hidden with little real explanation of their motives, their reliability or the reasons why they must be anonymous."

In another study of the use of anonymous sources in 16 newspapers before and after several major controversies involving such sources, results showed an overall decline in the use of anonymous sources in 2004 compared with compared with 2003. Journalism professors Renee Martin-Kratzer and Esther Thorson (2007) found a decrease in the use of anonymous sources in newspapers in their study of 16 papers, including four of the nation's largest in circulation. This appeared to reflect the newspaper industry's increased attention to the issue of anonymous sources following a series of controversies and embarrassments. However, the study's authors concluded that this trend did not hold true for television network news, "where the frequency of anonymous sources increased from 2003 to 2004." The study also indicated that the increased reluctance to use anonymous sources in major newspapers "did not extend

to stories about the Iraq War.” Indeed, there was actually an increase in unnamed sources in government and foreign affairs stories. The study’s authors said it appeared that editors and reporters “are making a greater effort to reserve anonymity for topics in which on-the-record information is hard to obtain.”

In the period analyzed by the Columbia students before the new standards were introduced at the *New York Times*, roughly one-third of the anonymous sources in the newspaper had been from Washington, where, as Hoyt (2008) wrote, “anonymity is bred into the political and government culture.” However, in the later period, that had declined to roughly one-fourth of the total.

The current public editor of the *Times*, Margaret Sullivan (2014), recently wrote, “I’ve been critical, repeatedly, of the overuse of unnamed sources, while acknowledging that they are sometimes necessary. Certainly, they have dominated the paper’s recent coverage from Washington.”

Dean Baquet (2011), current editor of the *New York Times* and the paper’s former Washington bureau chief, calls himself a “defender of anonymous sources,” but acknowledges that the *Times* uses such sources “too much – especially the Washington bureau.” He reminded that “some of our biggest and most important stories came from anonymous sources. ” Baquet said, “We try to crack down, but anonymous sources do a lot of good. We have pledged at various times to reduce dependence on anonymous sources, but they are still frequently used.”

Anonymous sources are particularly associated with Washington and with coverage of national government and government-related news. “Washington reporters couldn’t operate without promising confidentiality,” said Fred Brown (2007), retired state capitol bureau chief for the *Denver Post* and a TV political analyst. “In the rest of the country, confidentiality is not as necessary, not as acceptable.” Brown added, “Anonymity is fine for tips, but verification should be on the record. In a business devoted to transparency and disclosure, journalism loses credulity and its claim to virtue when anonymous sources are used indiscriminately.”

An indication of how endemic anonymous sources are in Washington could be seen in an incident in July 2014 when White House press secretary Josh Earnest became testy as reporters pushed back against White House criticism of a *Washington Post* article for relying on anonymous sources. As reported by Andrew Kaczynski of BuzzFeed Politics (2014), Anita Kumar, White House correspondent for McClatchy Newspapers, said in response to Earnest’s criticism, ‘You criticize anonymous sources, but we have anonymous sources from you all every day...How can you criticize that when that’s all you give us every day except for the briefing?’

This was also pointed out on Twitter by Peter Baker (2014), *New York Times* White House correspondent, who said “@PressSec condemns anonymous sources. Just arriving in email White House invitation to reporters for call with anonymous admin officials.” He was referring to a scheduled White House phone call with reporters and “senior White House officials” on jobs training programs.

When he was an investigative reporter, Bill Marimow (2008), now editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, said he often used anonymous sources. However, Marimow, who won a

Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting, said he relied on such sources “only as a last resort when their information is an important part of an important story, and is not available otherwise – and when disclosure might put a source in jeopardy.”

“There is nothing more toxic to responsible journalism than an anonymous source,” said Daniel Okrent (2004) when he served as the “public editor” (readers’ representative) at the *New York Times*. However, he added, “There is often nothing more necessary, too; crucial stories might never see print if a name had to be attached to every piece of information.”

“Reporters ought not grant anonymity too easily,” said Robert Kaiser(2003), who was an associate editor at the *Washington Post*, “but their willingness to do so is not hard to understand,” Kaiser said reporters don’t see much value in badgering reluctant sources to speak on the record. “It’s easier to go along, as shown by the number of ‘senior administration officials’ quoted in the *Post* and elsewhere.”

“Confidential sources are a staple of *Post* reporting,” former *Washington Post* Ombudsman Deborah Howell (2005) acknowledged in 2005, although she said that “the rules on how they are used have been tightened.” Howell noted that the *Post* was among many media outlets “trying to rein in the use of anonymity, feeling that credibility suffers when readers don’t know who sources are or what their agendas might be.” Three years later, Howell (2008) said, “I think the *Post* still uses too many anonymous sources.” This was partially due to “government and sports sources not wanting to go on the record,” she observed, noting that in too many cases reporters “give anonymity when it’s unimportant.”

Anonymity, when granted judiciously, can benefit the public interest and be important to the media in fulfilling its watchdog role. As Andrew Alexander, who succeeded Howell as the *Post* ombudsman, noted in 2010, "Sources often require confidentiality to disclose corruption or policy blunders. On a lesser scale, stories can be enriched with information from sources who would suffer retribution if identified." However, Alexander (2010) echoed comments made by Howell and said the *Post* erodes its credibility and perpetuates Washington's "insidious culture of anonymity" by casually agreeing to conceal the identities of those who provide non-critical information. Too often, he said, the *Post* grants anonymity "at the drop of a hat."

Alexander (2010) joined a long line of *Post* ombudsmen over the decades who criticized the newspaper for failing to follow its own standards on anonymous sources. He called the problem "endemic" and said reporters should be blamed but the solution "must come in the form of unrelenting enforcement by editors, starting with those at the top." Despite the *Post*'s stated policies setting "a high threshold for granting anonymity," there was evidence that the use of anonymous sources was growing, Alexander said. The phrase "spoke on condition of anonymity" appeared in an average of 71 *Post* stories a month in the first five months of 2010, an increase over the previous year. And, Alexander said, that those ubiquitous "senior administration officials" were quoted more than 130 times in the five-month period in 2010.²¹

Frank Fellone (2010), deputy editor of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, said of anonymous sources, "We don't like them much at this newspaper." He added, "We have a rule here about sources who insist on remaining anonymous in print must have two."

The late Al Neuharth, the *USA Today* founder, was a consistent critic of reliance on unnamed sources and when *USA Today* began in 1982, “we effectively banned all anonymous sources.” If anonymous sources are used, Neuharth (2004) said, “Fiction gets mixed with fact.” Therefore, Neuharth said, “the only way to win the war against this evil is for journalists at all levels to ban all anonymous sources.” To his chagrin and the embarrassment of *USA Today*, however, in 2004, after Neuharth had retired (although still writing a weekly column), the paper was rocked by a scandal involving anonymous sources when it was determined that star reporter Jack Kelley had fabricated numerous sources and stories.

A CURRENT ASSESSMENT: SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the widely proclaimed disdain for anonymous and unnamed sources, a purpose of this study is to take a snapshot view of the quantity of such sources used in three newspapers, to provide an assessment of how extensively such sources are being utilized in day-to-day news coverage. The study also focused on some specific aspects of the use of unnamed sources in terms of subject matter and reporting locations.

Each of the three newspapers were examined to provide a total of 14 daily issues from May, June, and July 2014. Most of the issues were weekday editions within a two-week period, but two additional dates were also examined for some additional perspective.

The three papers examined in the study are the *New York Times* (national edition), *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, and *USA Today*. They were not selected necessarily for their comparability, but to provide a look at three newspapers that differ in many respects. (Print, not on-line editions were analyzed.)

The *New York Times* is considered by many to be the most important American newspaper. By any standard it ranks high in reputation and circulation, and has the third highest circulation among U.S. papers. The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* is a regional daily newspaper, which includes coverage of national and international news as well as state/local. *USA Today*, with the second highest daily circulation among U.S. newspapers, has a limited number of “news” articles, but provides basic coverage of national and international news. Both *USA Today* and the *Democrat-Gazette* have in the past taken a principled stand against the use of anonymous sources. It should be noted that the *Democrat-Gazette* and *USA Today* have far less space devoted to news than does the *New York Times*; on average, for the 14 days in this study the news hole in the *Times* was four to five times as large as the other two papers, meaning that there were many more news articles from the *Times* to factor into the study. All news articles in the first or “A” sections of the newspapers were considered for this portion of the study.

A separate and secondary category involved the use of unnamed sources in the sports sections of the three papers. This was to determine how much difference there might be between news and sports coverage in using such sources. Informal observations by the author have suggested that there considerable reliance on such sources in sports coverage, where there would seem to be much less justification for not naming sources.

In addition to the quantity of articles relying on unnamed sources, the study also examined the subject matter of articles using such sources and the primary reasons cited for granting anonymity when they were specified. Further the study indicated the geographic origin or location from which these articles were reported, although not all carried a dateline.

RESULTS

The study left little doubt that the *New York Times* does rely heavily on unnamed sources. For the 14 daily editions in the study, there were 103 news articles that used such sources. (See Table 1.) That is an average of 7.35 articles per daily edition. Many of these articles included multiple unnamed sources. The highest number on any one day was 14 on May 30, 2014. There was not one single story of exceptional importance that day but a variety of issues ranging from delays in treatment in veterans' hospitals to conflicts in the Middle East.

During that same period, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* had a total of 32 news articles that used unnamed sources and *USA Today* had 10 such articles.

Datelines (geographic indicators of the location where the article originated) in the *Times* were dominated by Washington (29 stories) and overseas reports. Washington accounted for 28 per cent of the articles with unnamed sources. Other cities with multiple datelines included Jerusalem and Baghdad 5 each; London 4, Los Angeles, Beijing, Kabul, and Cairo, 3 each. Other than Washington, there were U.S. datelines only on 8 articles, although some stories from New York did not carry a dateline.

Washington, with 9, also accounted for the largest number of datelines on *Democrat-Gazette* articles using anonymous sources, almost all of which were from news service reporting. Of 32 datelined stories, 17 came from a scattering of foreign locations, including Bangkok, Ramallah (West Bank), Baghdad, and Cairo, along with Los Angeles, with 2 each.

Datelines appear infrequently in *USA Today*. During the period under study, Washington datelines were on 4 stories using anonymous sources, with one each from Baghdad and Vatican City.

As for the subject matter of articles using unnamed sources, international affairs and U.S. national security/military were clearly the dominant topics. In the *Times*, there were 38 articles related to international affairs and 26 to national security, with those two categories accounting for about 60 per cent of the articles using unnamed sources. Other major topics were government-public policy (15), politics (8), and Congress (6). Obviously there was some overlap in story categories, but each story was assigned to a category based on the most dominant topic within it.

In the *Democrat-Gazette* there was a similar pattern, although with fewer total articles. International affairs was the subject of 14 articles, and national security 11, with politics (3), the only other subject of multiple stories. In *USA Today*, there were 5 security/military-related stories and 3 on international affairs, the only subjects with multiple stories.

For this study, there are two basic types of quoted or referenced sources. One is the “generic” unnamed source: administration officials, officials, a senior official, people familiar with, etc. The other category involves specific reference to anonymity and often an indication of why the source was granted anonymity.

These were some of the rationales for anonymity that were cited in the *Times*’ articles: because of the sensitivity of the matter; not authorized to speak publicly; citing government policy in declining to be identified; had filed a whistle-blower complaint; for fear of retribution;

to protect internal discussions; because of diplomatic protocol; had not been cleared to brief the public; asked not to be quoted by name in talking about national security; for fear of reprisals; asked not to be named in talking candidly about internal party views; in order to preserve relationships at the agency; for fear of losing their jobs; not authorized to discuss intelligence matters; because the investigation was continuing; for fear he could be prosecuted.

In the *Democrat-Gazette*, with most of the articles using unnamed sources coming from the Associated Press or “wire reports,” the reasons cited for anonymity included: because intelligence matters were involved; according to people familiar with the plan; weren’t authorized to discuss the covert program publicly, because of concerns over being detained; not authorized to discuss details of the negotiations; not authorized to speak to the media; feared for his life; to avoid repercussions from the authorities; sensitive subject.

The reasons cited in *USA Today* included: the sensitivity of the matter; not authorized to speak publicly; not authorized to speak publicly because of pending court cases; or the source was identified as a person with knowledge of the situation.

SPORTS SECTIONS

In comparison to the news sections of the newspapers, the number of stories in the sports sections was much smaller. (See Table 2.) Most of the articles that did cite unnamed sources related to sports business – contracts, hiring and firing of coaches or managers, ownership,

player signings, etc. In the 14 daily editions of each paper in this study, none of the papers had more than two sports stories with unnamed sources on any one day. The *Times* has the smallest total number (5), well behind the *Democrat-Gazette* and *USA Today* with 10 each, but still averaging less than 1 per day. Eight of the total of 25 stories related to one subject: the dispute over the ownership of the Los Angeles Clippers NBA team.

ANALYSIS

The extent of the use of anonymous or unnamed sources in this study was substantial by any standard, particularly in the case of the *New York Times*. While there have been periodic downward trends in the use of such sources in the past, often following major controversy, the period examined for this study demonstrates heavy use of these sources in news articles.

The two other papers, both of which have a history of strong opposition to citing anonymous sources, had far fewer news articles using such sources but they did appear with some regularity, an average of more than two a day in the *Democrat-Gazette* and a total of 10 in *USA Today* in the 14 editions examined.

The *Times* and the Associated Press (which reported many of the stories in the *Democrat-Gazette*) in most cases provided reasons for granting anonymity. Some seemed valid while others were less convincing. By far the largest number simply said that the source was unauthorized to speak to the media, which doesn't offer much explanation. Also cited in a number of cases was "sensitivity," which, again, doesn't really tell the reader much. Appearing to be more compelling were those who cited fear of retribution or personal safety.

It must also be noted that in a number of cases, terms such as “officials” or “senior administration officials” or “government officials” and in some cases “advisers” or “strategists,” were used without any specific identification of who these individuals were.

Jack Shafer (2014), columnist on the media and politics for Reuters news service, has been a persistent critic of anonymous sources and has been especially critical of the *Times* and the *Washington Post* for relying more heavily on them than other print outlets. He noted that two stories that appeared in the *Times* during the period of my study, and which relied on anonymous sources, turned out to be inaccurate. That, of course, raises a number of questions about too readily using these sources and granting anonymity and the danger of undermining media credibility.

It is probably not surprising that by far the largest number of stories with anonymous sources in this study relate to national security and/or military matters, representing 60 percent of such articles in the *Times* and 78 percent of those in the *Democrat-Gazette*. In the case of the Arkansas newspaper, only one staff-written local story used unidentified sources, although many of those related to national security or international affairs were “compiled by *Democrat-Gazette* staff from wire reports.”

Also not surprising was the large number of stories emanating from Washington, far more than from any other location and bearing out comments cited earlier in this paper suggesting that “anonymity is bred into the political and government culture (Hoyt, 2008).” Undoubtedly, the nature of the way things are done in Washington lends itself to leaks and

anonymous or unnamed sources, but this study and others suggest that a disproportionately large percentage of Washington stories fall into this category.

Beyond the dominance of Washington, the datelines on stories from around the world reflect the locations of flashpoints and international crises, where in some cases news coverage can be very perilous for both journalists and sources. However, particularly when U.S. government officials are quoted (but not identified), questions arise as to whether anonymity is too easily granted. As the current executive editor of the *Times*, Dean Baquet (2011), said when he was Washington bureau chief, although “some of our biggest and most important stories came from anonymous sources,” they can be used too often.

The secondary study on sports coverage indicated a small but steady number of stories using anonymous sources, in a section of newspapers that would not normally be associated with unnamed sources. One inference that might be drawn, however, is that with the increasing development of sports as big business, there could well be an upward surge in sports stories with unnamed sources -- particularly at those points when player signings and contracts, hiring and firing of coaches and managers occur, and in controversies about use of performance-enhancing drugs.

This study of the use of anonymous sources and the reasons, subjects, and origins of stories utilizing such sources provides a limited view and analysis, offering a snapshot of such coverage in three newspapers. However, it does provide important indicators about the extensive use of anonymous sources, far more than many would expect or acknowledge. There

is no question that coverage of some important stories is dependent on such sources, but there is a danger of over-dependence and what may constitute a troubling trend.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF NEWS ARTICLES USING ANONYMOUS/UNNAMED SOURCES

	NEW YORK TIMES	ARK DEM-GAZETTE	USA TODAY
May 28	4	0	0
May 29	8	2	1
May 30	14	3	1
June 2	6	3	0
June 3	5	3	1
June 4	10	4	2
June 5	9	2	0
June 6	9	3	0
June 9	5	2	1
June 10	5	2	1
June 11	2	1	0
June 12	12	2	1
June 23	6	4	1
July 9	8	1	1

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF SPORTS ARTICLES USING ANONYMOUS/UNNAMED SOURCES

	NEW YORK TIMES	ARK DEM-GAZETTE	USA TODAY
May 28	1	1	1
May 29	1	2	2
May 30	1	2	0
June 2	1	1	0
June 3	0	0	2
June 4	0	0	1
June 5	0	0	0
June 6	0	0	0
June 9	0	0	0
June 10	1	1	2
June 11	0	2	0
June 12	0	0	0
June 23	0	1	1
July 9	0	0	1

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Running Head: SYRIA'S SOCIO-POLITICAL VISUAL RHETORIC ON
INSTAGRAM

ARE YOU TALKING TO ME?
THE SOCIO-POLITICAL VISUAL RHETORIC OF
THE SYRIAN PRESIDENCY'S INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

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ABSTRACT

ARE YOU TALKING TO ME?
THE SOCIO-POLITICAL VISUAL RHETORIC OF
THE SYRIAN PRESIDENCY'S INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

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In 2013, the Syrian presidency used Instagram to frame itself in a mediated way to two distinct audiences—one English language, and the other Arabic language. This study used Grounded Theory to examine the recurring themes of the visual rhetoric and quantitative content analysis to identify the thematic differences that were visually communicated to each audience. Results indicated statistically significant differences in the visual presentation of the rhetorical themes of patriotism and nationalism, more prevalently communicated to the English language audience, and empathy, more prevalently communicated to the Arabic language audience. The study discussed implications in media gatekeeping, socio-political communication, and reputation management.

Keywords: agenda-setting, visual framing, reverse causality, Syria, Instagram

Are You Talking to Me?
The Socio-Political Visual Rhetoric of the Syrian Presidency's Instagram Account

Introduction

In July 2013, amidst increasing escalated conflict within its borders and expanding mass media coverage internationally, the Syrian presidency began utilizing a relatively new platform of mass communication that allowed it to bypass the gatekeepers within the media and frame itself in a visually rhetorical way that it could mediate. The platform was a medium called Instagram, and by using it to present their own viewpoint, the Syrian presidency was engaging in a socio-political form of visual rhetoric that would chronologically parallel a series of watershed moments over the next two months, and would often visually contrast the coverage of those events by the world media.

The first 68 pictures posted to the account depicted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, and his wife, Asma, interacting with the Syrian people in patriotic and religious ways. Many of the images featured large gatherings of people, and the descriptions accompanying the initial images were brief, concise, and written exclusively in Arabic. Each of these indicators have been studied and supported as hallmarks of Arab culture (see al-Olayan & Karande, 2000; Eid, 2009; Kalliny, 2010; Nydell, 1987).

However, on 31 July, 2013, the Instagram account began displaying images that were accompanied by exclusively English descriptions that were more detailed in their content, a hallmark of Western culture (see al-Olayan & Karande, 2000; Hall, 1976). In fact, only 19% (N=16) of the next 86 images posted to the account, which included *all* of the images posted in August and September 2013, were accompanied by an Arabic description. None of the images during this period of time had multi-lingual captions.

While one could only speculate all the reasons for the substantial shift in language and audience of the Instagram account, the fact that it happened is intriguing, and guided our study, since two distinct rhetorical agendas had been set. To date, no studies have analyzed Instagram as a medium for visual rhetoric through the lens of socio-political communication. The objective of this study, then, was ultimately to identify what was being said to each audience.

Historical and Theoretical Background

Before continuing, it is necessary to ground the historical timeline of events in mass communication theory, so that our research questions and hypotheses can be understood.

Media Framing of Syria

At the time the Syrian presidency established the Instagram account, it was fully engaged in the battle for Homs, a Syrian city that was home to the opposition. On 30 and 31 July, 2013, just one week after the Instagram account had been established, and on the date the account began posting images with English descriptions, the Syrian capture of the city of Homs received major coverage by news media outlets that included BBC, *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Mail*, *The New York Times*, *Times of Israel*, *Reuters*, *Times of London*, Fox News, Syrian News and others. While some outlets reported the incident in English as "complete liberation of Homs" (Klostermayr, 2013), and included either no images of the city, or images of victorious troops, others featured images of destruction, and reported on the "destroyed Syrian city" (Mackey, 2013). This event was the capstone on ongoing media coverage of the siege of Homs, as well as other attacks throughout the month by the Syrian presidency on Syrian opposition. Since nine of the ten most read

newspapers in the world are in English, and 307.7 million people read them (Kunad, 2013), exposure to this incident was virtually unavoidable in a world where 375 million people speak English as their first language (Curtis & Romney, 2006). Needless to say, the English speaking world wanted to know what was going on in Syria, and the media was ready to answer the call.

Valenzuela and McCombs (2009) argued that the way the media influences the prominence of issues can affect individuals' opinions of governments and public figures. The effects of this influence of prominence in the media are well-studied, and the common consensus is that significant media coverage of an event can have a profound effect on the setting of public agenda and opinion (Iyengar, & Kinder, 1987; Valenzuela & McCombs, 2009).

Although the standard timeframe for agenda-setting effects has been found to range anywhere from four weeks to two months (Salwen, 1988; Wanta & Yu-wei, 1994; Winter & Eyal, 1981), in the case of online media relating to issues of high personal salience, this timeframe can be reduced to as little as one to seven days (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002).

In the case of a nation, studies have found that if media coverage is negative, individual viewers link the negative attributes of the news reports to the respective nation (Turan, Colakoglu, & Colakoglu, 2009), which puts the represented nation at a high risk of being permanently labeled the way the media has framed it, if it does not quickly and decisively engage in public relations. With so much news circulating about the Syrian government and its actions in Homs, it was imperative that the Syrian presidency frame

itself swiftly and effectively as a response to its representation in the media before the court of public opinion indicted them and sentenced them.

Reverse Causality

To do this, the Syrian presidency engaged in a mechanism of public relations known as reverse causality. Normally defined as communication that preempts news coverage (Wanta & Wu, 1992), when taken in the context of perpetuating conversation, reverse causality endeavors to alter perception, by enabling individuals, who are willing to engage in communication, to influence both the way they are represented and the public opinion that is forming around them (Salmon & Glynn, 2009). Furthermore, Salmon and Glynn (2009) argue that it gives minority factions the power to overcome majority sentiment. Salmon and Glynn (2009) argue that this mechanism of reverse causality explicitly pertains to interpersonal and small-group communication processes. While arguing that most social media is interpersonal communication on a global scale (Sheldon, 2008) would support the use of this theory in this study, it may also devalue the effectiveness of such actions in an increasingly viral social media world that is constantly being redefined by a mass audience. Employing the Internet and social media in crisis communication has been the focus of a number of studies (Liu, 2010, Taylor & Kent, 2007; Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011; Taylor & Perry, 2005), though the effects of crisis communication through Instagram, with its unintrusive capability for framing and presenting images in a rhetorical style, has not yet been explored. This did not deter the Syrian government from using the resource to insert its perspective into the global conversation.

The images on the Syrian presidency's Instagram account contrasted so heavily with the media agenda favoring news reports of the ongoing atrocities within the country that Western media sources quickly became aware of the Instagram account and its images. Between July and September 2013, *The Daily Mail*, *New York Daily News*, *The Telegraph*, *The Huffington Post*, *Times of London*, and an assortment of other widely read news sources included coverage of Syria's account that mirrored the sentiments of *The Daily Mail* from 4 September, 2013, that called it a "sickening" showcase of a "fantasy world" (Daily Mail Reporter, 2013).

Framing Visual Rhetoric

Popular or not, the Syrian presidency had successfully framed itself by choosing a perspective on Syria that it wanted the public to perceive as reality and made it salient by communicating it to the world. Entman (1993) explained that that frames (also known as *schemata*) highlight certain facets of reality and conceal others, and that the manner in which information is presented influences the way audiences interpret events and may cause them to react differently. He further argued that politicians are compelled to compete with mass media over news frames, because "frame in a news text is really the imprint of power" (p. 55).

Within framing, visuals are an effective mechanism, because they are capable of overwhelming facts as well as obscuring issues (Wischmann, 1987). Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) argued that visuals can be framed similarly to text because they make use of the same rhetorical tools of metaphors, depictions, and symbols, which "purport to capture the essence of an issue or event graphically" (p. 51). However, because viewers read images as proof (Dauber, 2001) that they are witnessing truth, and may be less

aware that their news is being framed for them than when it is happening with words, visual framing has a distinct advantage over framing in text (Messaris & Abraham, 2003).

Scholars have researched the effectiveness of visual framing campaigns within the media topics of tobacco (Schneider et al., 2001) and pharmaceuticals (Landau, 2011) in advertisements, the portrayal of suburban neighborhoods in films (Dickinson, 2006), the images of natural disasters in newspapers (Borah, 2009), reporting on international cultures (Holiday, Lewis, Nielsen, & Anderson, 2014), and the fields of civil rights movements (Johnson, 2007), civil wars (Galander, 2012), environmental causes (Tarin, 2009, McHendry, 2012), and wartime reporting (Fahmy, 2005, 2007, 2010; Fahmy & Kim, 2008).

Such campaigns of imagery can create awareness of a different perspective that can breed empathy and understanding of the topic (Johnson, 2007), or at least dilute the strength of the negative opinion since "any message (informational or persuasive) will tap into an existing store of information, impressions, beliefs, [and] evaluations" (McQuail, 2010, p. 517) if it can be communicated to an audience. Lippmann (1922) stated the importance of "recognizing the triangular relationship between the scene of action, the human picture of that scene, and the human response to that picture" (p. 11).

Social Media and the Internet

The Syrian presidency's challenge was to create visual rhetoric and successfully bypass the gatekeepers of the media that had already framed the group negatively, so that it could communicate a perspective of itself that it viewed as representative. The answer was found in modern means of mass communication. In today's world of rapidly

developing advancements, technology minimizes the global reach of national governments' messages (Galander, 2012). The impact of limited control of messages has been studied in intercultural research (Artz & Kamalipour, 2003; Straubhaar, 1991; Theobald, 2004), and the Internet, and subsequently social media, has given the mass public previously unprecedented access to wartime imagery (see Smith & McDonald, 2011) and allowed special interest groups to set their own agendas and gain the attention of mass audiences (Tarin, 2009).

Instagram

Within this world, Instagram is a uniquely situated social media outlet that specializes in efficiently distributing visual rhetoric on a personal or global scale to its 150 million monthly active users (instagram.com/press), Facebook's more than 1 billion monthly active users, as well as other social media sites. Since its launch in 2010, brands have already recognized the viral potential in advertising their products on Instagram through sponsored posts of endorsed celebrities (Bercovici, 2012), and political campaigns have harnessed its potential in raising awareness of candidates during the campaign process (Lewandowski, 2013).

Even though the nature of Instagram appears to encourage rampant sharing of photos, and the platform was designed as a “quick and enjoyable way to share experiences through a series of pictures” (Collard, 2012, p. 47), Moore (2011) argues that more than 35% of users, many of whom never upload a single picture, use the app to follow other users. With such a strong culture of observing what other users are posting, Bardzell's (2009) sentiments that an application or artifact must be thought of as rhetoric, and not simply as a tool becomes even more prescient of Instagram today, and speaks to

why a group would want to use the platform to depict a world view for an audience that is eager to learn more about the group.

In fact, production is often conceived with an audience in mind. McCune (2011) states that “users consciously produce images with ideas of reception and exchange within the Instagram social media network” (p. 39). His extensive research of Instagram found six common motivations for sharing personal media with a global network of strangers: sharing, documentation, seeing, community, creativity, and therapy. Of these, *seeing* was defined as, “the urge to...present one’s own viewpoint” (McCune, 2011, p. 59). McCune (2011) found that one-fourth of Instagram users identify themselves with this motivating factor, feel they have “the power to ‘be seen by as large an audience as possible’,” and believe that they possess “a personal worldview that can be mediated by photography and thus by Instagram” (p. 65).

In application then, by using Instagram to visually frame its activities and values, the Syrian presidency circumvented the major news media and presented a mediated, personal worldview to two audiences—Arab nationals that the Syrian presidency wanted to rally to its cause, and the Western world previously limited by the agenda of Western media. When it comes to the world of Instagram, both audiences are eager to view images and share them virally across social media platforms (McCune, 2011).

While theoretical speculation is intriguing, it is a far cry from intent. Without asking the Syrian presidency whether it was attempting to engage in reverse causality through visual rhetoric, we can only make observations about coincidences. However, al-Assad went a long way toward bridging this divide during three key public addresses that occurred while his administration was posting images to Instagram.

The first address was a speech at Damascus University on 4 August, 2013, in which al-Assad spoke candidly in Arabic to an assembly of the Syrian society, including parties, politicians, clerics, and unions, about the foreign media and Syria's obligation to its citizens. It was given a week earlier than planned because of the "fast pace of developments" (Speech, 2013, para. 1) that forced the regime to move into crisis communication mode. This placed it within one week of the major mass media news coverage of the events in Homs, and furthered the argument that the Syrian presidency willfully attempted to engage in the practice of reverse causality. In the speech, al-Assad referred to the "violent campaigns in the media" (Speech, 2013, para. 10), that had an ultimate goal to "cause panic and fear" (Speech, 2013, para. 66). Al-Assad referred to this as "an orchestrated media campaign which has met a partial success thanks to the high technology it possesses, the money it spends, and because of the dubious trumpets it hires in order to promote this campaign of deceit with unparalleled shallowness" (Speech, 2013, para. 5). He went on to substantiate the claim that his administration was engaging in reverse causality through Instagram and other social media that could not be controlled by governments or opposition in the media:

We started some modest mechanisms for passing information, not necessarily through the media. But these mechanisms are still not sufficient to face this huge media campaign. The more we move ahead in terms of transparency and pass correct information quickly to our citizens the more they will be immune. Then, these media campaigns will not be of any use. The ultimate purpose of this media attack is to cause panic and fear, or to inflict defeat without a battle. (Speech, 2013, para. 66)

Clearly, there was a distinct message that the Syrian presidency wanted to communicate to its own people, without having to go through the media. But what was that message? Discovering this was one of the fundamental research questions of the present study:

RQ1: What themes was the Syrian Presidency attempting to communicate to an exclusively Arabic language audience in the visual rhetoric of its Instagram account?

Additionally, two English language interviews followed this address. Charlie Rose conducted the first on 8 September, 2013, for the CBS news program “Face the Nation,” and Greg Palkot and Dennis Kucinich conducted the second for Fox News on 17 September, 2013. In both interviews al-Assad made it clear that he was the one with the authority and perspective to show the world what life was really like in Syria. In his interview with Charlie Rose, al-Assad straightforwardly explained:

This is the reality. I'm telling you the reality from our country. We live here. We know what's happening. And they have to listen to the people who live here. They cannot listen only to their media or to their research centers. They don't live here. No one lives here but us. (Steers, 2013, para. 26)

Clearly, al-Assad felt that the world would more accurately learn about what was going on in Syria by avoiding the media and going directly to rhetoric from the Syrian government. Instagram served as a source for precisely this type of information, but what was it that the Syrian presidency wanted the world to understand about it? This question propelled the other fundamental research question of the present study:

RQ2: What themes was the Syrian Presidency attempting to communicate to an exclusively English language audience in the visual rhetoric of its Instagram account?

To reiterate, our initial analysis of the Syrian presidency's Instagram account revealed that the first 68 images posted to the Syrian presidency's Instagram account were accompanied by exclusively Arabic descriptions. Of the following 86 images, 70 images were accompanied by exclusively English descriptions, and 16 images were accompanied by exclusively Arabic descriptions. None of the images posted to the Syrian presidency's Instagram account from its launch in July 2013 through September 2013 had multi-lingual descriptions. Clearly, the Syrian presidency had something it wanted to say to each of these audiences that would be clearly understood by each audience. And so, we formulated the following research question:

RQ3: Is the visual rhetoric different when the descriptions accompanying the images are predominantly in Arabic, as opposed to when they are predominantly in English?

Method

To begin this research, we conducted a constant comparative analysis (Eaves, 2001) of all 155 images posted to the Syrian presidency's Instagram account ([instagram.com/syrianpresidency](https://www.instagram.com/syrianpresidency)) from 24 July, 2013, through 30 September, 2013. We selected this sample because it coincided with the initiation of the account, major media news coverage of the events in Homs, the speech given by president al-Assad at Damascus University, the U.N. inspection of Syria for chemical weapons, the use of chemical weapons within Syria, major news media coverage of the Instagram account

and the use of the chemical weapons, and al-Assad's interviews with CBS and with Fox News. Using Grounded Theory, a theory in which themes emerge organically during a process of analysis and comparison of information (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we were able to identify visually prevalent themes within the Instagram images.

After performing a constant comparative analysis using open coding and dimensionalization (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), we used the identified themes and performed a quantitative content analysis of all 155 images posted to the Syrian presidency's Instagram account, to establish whether there was a difference in the depiction of those themes between the Arabic audience (AA) images and the English audience (EA) images.

Coding Procedure

One Arab national U.S. doctoral student and two U.S. national graduate students conducted the constant comparative analysis using Grounded Theory. Through this process, the themes of nationalism and patriotism, depictions of youth, religion, societal support, and empathy were identified as prevalent themes within the visual rhetoric of the Syrian presidency's Instagram images. After this process was completed, two coders, one of whom was blind to the study, coded the Instagram images for the established themes. Both coders were trained, and detailed instruction on coding categories was given prior to coding. To establish intercoder reliability, 25 images from outside of the sample were selected. This sample was equivalent to 16% of the study sample. Using Krippendorff's Alpha, intercoder reliability was measured on the themes of nationalism & patriotism ($\alpha=.90$), depictions of youth ($\alpha=1.00$), religion ($\alpha=1.00$), societal support ($\alpha=1.00$), and empathy ($\alpha=.84$). Given an appropriate rate of intercoder reliability using Krippendorff's

Alpha, coding commenced on the sample. After coding was completed, the data was entered into SPSS, where chi-square tests were utilized to quantitatively analyze the thematic differences between the EA images and the AA images.

Results

The sample of this study consisted of 155 images (84 with Arabic descriptions, 63 with English descriptions, and 8 without descriptions). The 8 images without descriptions were excluded from the study.

Nationalism & Patriotism

The theme of nationalism & patriotism appeared in 20 (13.6%) AA images and 29 (19.7%) EA images. Assumptions were checked and were met, and a chi-square analysis showed that there was a significant difference ($X^2=8.00$, $df=1$, $p=.005$) between expected depictions of nationalism and patriotism in AA images and EA images and their actual depiction. Phi, which indicates the strength of the association between these two variables, was -.233, thus the effects size is considered moderate, or acceptable.

Depictions of Youth

Youth were depicted in 32 (38.1%) AA images and 28 (19%) EA images. There was no significant difference in the depictions of youth between AA images and EA images.

Religion

Religion, as a theme, was depicted in 25 (17%) AA images and 14 (9.5%) EA images. A chi-square analysis showed that there was no significant difference in the amount of depictions of religiosity between the two groups of images.

Societal Support

The theme of societal support appeared in 28 (19%) AA images and 15 (10.2%) EA images, thus there was no significance in the depiction of societal support between the two groups.

Empathy

22 (15%) of the AA images and 5 (3.4%) of the EA images contained depictions of empathy. A chi-square analysis showed that there was a significance in the differences between the expected and the actual AL and EL depictions of empathy ($X^2=8.00$, $df= 1$, $p=.005$), and Phi indicated a moderate, or acceptable, relationship (.233) between the variables.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare the content of the Syrian presidency's visual rhetoric toward two distinct audiences, one English and one Arabic, and to establish whether there was a significant difference in the visual rhetoric toward each audience.

We analyzed each image from the Syrian presidency's Instagram account from 24 July, 2013, through 30 September, 2013, using a qualitative analytic approach, known as constant comparative analysis, and identified the specific themes of nationalism and patriotism, depictions of youth, religion, empathy, and societal support as themes framed for the audience of this social media platform.

After extrapolating the themes, we performed a content analysis with a goal to see whether the identified visual themes were equally prevalent between audiences, or whether certain themes were framed for specific audiences. Our content analysis revealed

that certain themes, such as depictions of youth, societal support, and religion were equally distributed between both English and Arabic audiences. This finding would seem to suggest that there was not a substantial difference in the depictions of themes between audiences. However, there were significant differences between audiences when it came to the depiction of the themes of nationalism and patriotism, and empathy. Within this statistically significant difference, the theme of nationalism and patriotism was framed for an English audience in the Instagram images, while the theme of empathy was highlighted in the Arabic audience Instagram images.

As a result of this analysis, we can definitively say that the Syrian presidency advanced the themes of nationalism and patriotism significantly more when the audience of the visual rhetoric was English language than when the audience was Arabic language. Could this imply that the Syrian presidency wanted an English language audience to see Syria as a strong, unified nation? Furthermore, the Syrian presidency advanced the theme of empathy significantly more when the audience was Arabic language than when the audience was English language. Could *this* imply that the Syrian presidency wanted an Arabic language audience to see the Syrian presidency as a compassionate administration?

During the window of time that this study analyzed, the public was told that 2.1 million Syrian refugees had fled the country and were being housed primarily throughout Lebanon and Jordan (UNHCR, 2013), and that many of the members of the Syrian opposition were disaffected Syrian nationals. There was also an active political and media campaign to rally world opinion in support of a military strike on Syria. Furthermore, Syrian opposition was actively using popular mass communication

strategies, which had worked successfully across various social media platforms and other mediums during the Arab Spring for opposition forces in countries like Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, to advance their agenda and gain support for their rebellion (Lesch & Haas, 2012).

But even Barack Obama understood that he needed to rally support for a military campaign in Syria from an American people and a world that were weary of war and skeptical of joining in on a campaign that did not directly affect them, their freedom, or their safety. At a press conference in St. Petersburg, Russia on September 6, following the G-20 meeting, President Obama said, “I knew this was going to be a heavy lift...I understand the skepticism. I think it is very important, therefore, for us to work through, systematically, making the case to every senator and every member of Congress” (Lermen & Wingfield, 2013).

Although past scholarship has traditionally supported the hegemonic perspective of government-press relations which states that governments have an overwhelming ability and power to create frames and set agendas on news coverage of war to manage public opinion (Bennett & Paletz, 1994; Carruthers, 2000; Herman & Chomsky, 1986; Mermin, 1999; Zaller & Chiu, 1996), recent international campaigns have found limited public support, further suggesting that the public around the world have become more informed by a broad base of media outlets and more judicious about what they choose to support (Patrick & Thrall, 2007), as well as generally more skeptical and propaganda-weary (White, 1952) of the media.

The significant depiction of nationalism and patriotism visually framed within the Syrian presidency's Instagram account to an English language audience, compounded

with the significant depiction of empathy visually framed to an Arabic language audience, while these external forces were playing out on an international stage, strongly correlates with the notion that the Syrian presidency was aware of all of this. It strongly suggests that it was indeed endeavoring to engage in reverse causality, and, as Salmon and Glynn (2009) argued, alter perception and influence both the way they were represented and the public opinion that was forming around them, perhaps in the hope of convincing Americans and the world against going to war with a healthy, unified nation, and persuading Syrians that their presidency was a compassionate administration, fighting for their best interests against terrorists who had forced them to seek refuge outside of Syria. The finding that religiosity was prevalent in 70% of the Instagram images directed toward an Arabic language audience, though perhaps not of any statistical relevance to the study, does help to further the argument that the Syrian presidency wanted to appeal to one of the Syrian people's most fundamental cultural beliefs as it inserted itself into the conversation with this audience.

One could argue here that the Syrian presidency itself is part of this society that is “fully grounded in the Islamic religion” (al-Olayan & Karande, 2000, p. 71), so it makes perfect sense that it would frame the theme of religion in its visual rhetoric, and that it is so ingrained in them as a part of this society, that it couldn't even be considered remarkable. Curiously, though, when al-Assad spoke to representatives of this society, in the Arabic language, at Damascus University in August 2013, he mentioned religion only once, and his only reference to Islam was as an adjective describing terrorists (see CGGL, 2013). This trend was repeated in al-Assad's English language interviews as well, when once again al-Assad only briefly touched on the topic of religion, and rhetorically framed

it as a characteristic of the fundamentalist and extremist fringe of Syrian society (see Global Research, 2013; Steers, 2013), despite the fact that religion influences every aspect of a Muslim's life (Kalliny, 2010), and 87% of Syrians are followers of Islam (Bureau of Democracy, 2012). Al-Assad clearly championed secularism and obscured the theme of religiosity in his verbal rhetoric during this time by associating it with fundamentalism and terrorism. The fact that the theme of religion was so prevalent within the visual rhetoric of the Syrian presidency's Instagram account strongly suggests that its presence contributed toward the presidency's attempt to engage in reverse causality and appeal to the emotional side of disaffected Syrian nationals.

The fact that the Syrian presidency used Instagram to engage in this socio-political communication has revolutionary implications for the app itself and for the future of social media. Further studies would greatly contribute to the conversation about whether the use of socio-political communication within a medium like Instagram could affect public perception or contribute to the formation of public opinion, but this study contributes to the finding that politicians and even nations are using social media platforms like Instagram to engage in such conversations because of the limited amount of control that the media has over social media outlets, and their content.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further studies could conduct a content analysis of the images of the Syrian presidency's Instagram account using Hall's (1976) studies of high-context and low-context cultures, and Hofstede's (1980) studies of levels of individualism to determine whether the visual rhetoric of the Instagram images supports the established levels of context and collectivism identified for Syria and the Arab world. To determine whether

the Syrian presidency's socio-political rhetoric and visual framing was an effective persuasive tool, a study could be designed to measure awareness and opinions of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, or Asma al-Assad both before and after reviewing the images. This experiment could be designed to test subjects who may or may not know what the al-Assads look like before viewing the images. Still, other studies could compare the Syrian presidency's Instagram account to that of President Obama's Instagram account and/or Instagram accounts for the Syrian opposition from the same window of time, to analyze how the rhetoric from these accounts were interacting with and responding to each other. These types of studies would have implications within the conversation of public relations, crisis communication, and image management.

Additionally, in October 2013, the images on the Syrian presidency's Instagram account began incorporating the combined use of both Arabic and English language descriptions. A further study could be conducted to determine how and whether the content of these images changed as well.

While an entire body of scholarship could develop around the Syrian presidency's Instagram account, future studies should look more broadly, and examine the use of Instagram by corporations, politicians, or nations, to determine how users who are not individuals are utilizing the app. These types of studies would have implications within the conversation of public relations, crisis communication, and image management.

Because Instagram is a new platform for communication that is being constantly redefined in an ever-evolving world that is becoming more and more orchestrated by social media, any additional scholarship on the app will become a valuable addition to the scant amount of studies that do exist (see Collard, 2012; McCune, 2011; Moore, 2011;

Nielsen, Weston, Holiday, & Lewis, 2014), which will help us all to understand our brave new world of mass communications.

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Abstract

A review of the research devoted to services advertising and comparative advertising revealed few studies on the comparative advertising of services. The research findings reported here confirm that services advertisers in the U.S. frequently employ comparative television advertising and that there has likely been an increase in its use since the 1970s. Other findings—such as the difference in frequency of use by services versus product advertisers, the extent to which services advertisers include substantiation in their commercials, and the extent to which comparative advertising is used by the advertisers of different types of services—are also reported. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed, as are recommendations for future research.

Key words: comparative advertising, services advertising, advertising message strategy

The Comparative Advertising of Nonprofessional Services

The importance of the services sector in the U.S.—which accounts for more than 75% of the country’s GDP (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011; EconomyWatch, 2011) and more than 66% of personal consumption expenditures (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014)—has led to many calls for research on services advertising (e.g., Abernethy & Butler, 1992; Tripp, 1997). Some have noted specifically that little research has focused on message tactics (Grove, Pickett, & Stafford, 1997). Indeed, the findings of her review of the services advertising literature led Tripp (p. 36) to ask, “Is comparative ad content effective?”

Recent, aggressively comparative campaigns on behalf of cell phone service providers (T-Mobile), tax preparation services (TurboTax), satellite television providers (DirectTV), and auto insurers (Allstate) suggest that many services advertisers employ the tactic. Yet despite noting that some services advertisers obviously use comparative advertising, Grewal et al. (1997) referenced no studies of the comparative advertising of services in their widely cited meta-analysis. A review of the literature published since then uncovered only seven studies on services advertising, most of which investigated only nonprofessional services such as legal and medical.

While both the advertising of services and the comparative advertising of products and physical goods have received considerable attention, little research has focused specifically on the comparative advertising of nonprofessional services. Moreover, there is no research available at all regarding the extent to which the strategic uses of comparative advertising are consistent with recommendations and guidelines published in the services advertising literature. Thus, the purpose of the study reported here is to address this gap in the research literature by, first, reviewing the research devoted to services advertising objectives and message strategy and,

second, investigating the comparative TV advertising strategies and tactics employed by services marketers in the U.S.

Literature Review

“Strictly” comparative advertisements refer explicitly to identifiable competitors, while “implied” comparative ads make references to “the other guy” or competitors in general (Brown & Jackson, 1977; Jackson, Brown, & Harmon, 1979). Prior to the mid-1960s, when some advertisers in the U.S. began identifying competitors in their TV commercials, the use of strictly comparative advertising was quite rare among national advertisers, although implied comparative ads (e.g., comparisons with “Brand X”) were fairly common. Research, however, confirms the use of strictly comparative advertising increased, especially after the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) began encouraging it in the early 1970s (Beard, 2010).

Estimates of both strictly and implied comparative ads in the U.S. range from about 7% (Wright & Barbour, 1975) to 23% (Taschian & Slama, 1984) to between 30% and 40% (Donthu, 1992; Koten, 1984; Neiman, 1987). Estimates of the use of comparative advertising on TV are similar, ranging from 14% (Abrams, 1982) to around 19% (Brown & Jackson, 1977) to 48% (Beard, in press a) to as high as 80% (Pechmann & Stewart, 1990). Some industry observers suggest a likely increase during the first decade of the 20th century (York, 2009), as well as increases in both lawsuits and complaints to the National Advertising Division (NAD) of the Council of Better Business Bureaus (York, 2010) over comparative claims.

Brown and Jackson (1977) reported that just 9.7% of TV commercials for services were comparative, versus 42% for drugs, 23.8% for household products, 20.2% for foods, 18.8% for consumer durables, and 15.5% for personal care items (strictly and implied, combined). None of

the services ads were strictly comparative. Still, with just four major services categories (local services, financial, telecommunications, and insurance) accounting for more than \$30 billion in annual advertising expenditures (Kantar Media, 2012), U.S. services marketers are likely spending billions of dollars annually on comparative print ads and television commercials.

Services Advertising: Strategic and Tactical Recommendations

The differences between services and products have led to many recommendations for message strategies and tactics. Unlike manufactured goods, (a) services cannot be seen, felt, tasted, or touched; (b) there is little separation between service production and consumption; (c) the performance of the service production process is less standardized and more heterogeneous; and (d) services cannot be stored for later consumption. However, it is important to note that the service-dominant (S-D) logic perspective (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) has recently challenged the IHIP (intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability) taxonomy of differences between manufactured goods and services, arguing that both goods and services derive their value through use, or the service they provide.

George and Berry (1981) offered the earliest set of services advertising recommendations: services advertising should (a) have positive effects on contact personnel, (b) capitalize on word-of-mouth (WOM), (c) provide tangible clues, (d) make the service more easily understood, (e) contribute to continuity, (f) and only promise what is possible. Other contributors to the literature have also recommended making services more tangible and more easily understood (Grove et al., 1997; Hill & Gandhi, 1992; Mittal, 2002). As Grove et al. (p. 2) warn: "Particular care must be taken to ensure that the information presented via advertising does not introduce more abstraction and confusion in the effort to distinguish a service

offering/seller.”

Hill and Gandhi (1992, p. 65) offered three recommendations for using advertising to enhance the tangibility of a service: (a) “incorporate into ads physical evidence and artifacts showing physical facilities such as service delivery sites,” (b) associate the service with “concrete, specific language and symbols,” and (c) “capitalize on word-of-mouth advertising....” Legg and Baker (1987) proposed “vivid information” as a means for tangibilizing service offerings and enhancing understanding. As they write, “The concept has been operationalized as including concrete, specific language, pictorially illustrated information, direct experience, and case histories.” Hill and Gandhi (p. 67) similarly recommended “documentation strategy” as a means for verifying “the scope, characteristics, performance record, or effects of the service with concrete information to provide a realistic picture of the service and give the service credibility.”

Other contributors to the literature recommend dramatizing the performance of a service or its benefits as a tactic for aiding consumer understanding (Legg & Baker, 1987). As Hill and Gandhi (1992, p. 67) write: “There is a setting, an audience, a performance team, a backstage, and so on, and these components, taken together, describe the exchange process. An implication for advertising is to present a set of actions using drama to provide a unifying framework for describing and communicating aspects of the services exchange.” Similar to the “documentation strategy” proposed by Hill and Gandhi, Mittal (2002) proposed the most recent and specific set of recommendations for services advertising message strategies. They consist of a physical representation of the service delivery system (such as a visual of a SafeLite AutoGlass repair van), documentation of the effective past performance of a service provider, the depiction of a service performance episode, documentation of successful service consumption (such as a

satisfied customer testimonial), and the depiction of a service consumption episode.

Research Questions

Research on comparative advertising (Beard, in press a; Brown & Jackson, 1977), examinations of the advertising trade literature, and casual observation of the mass media suggest advertisers of nonprofessional services in the U.S. frequently employ both strictly and implied comparative advertising. Moreover, although empirical studies of services advertising effects have almost entirely ignored the comparative format, recommendations for services advertising suggest there is some potential for positive outcomes. Answers to the research questions below provide insights into the frequency and strategic uses of comparative television advertising in the advertising of services.

RQ#1: How frequently is comparative versus noncomparative advertising used for the advertising of services on U.S. television?

RQ#2: What types of comparative TV ads are used more or less frequently in services advertising?

RQ#3: To what extent do comparative TV ads for services substantiate their claims?

RQ#4: Does the use of comparative TV advertising and use of different types of comparative ads differ among different types of services?

RQ#5: To what extent is price information emphasized in comparative services TV ads?

RQ#6: Do national advertisers differ in their uses of comparative services TV advertising compared to local services advertisers?

Method

Sampling consisted of a constructed week of TV commercials broadcast on the four top-

rated U.S. broadcast networks. The sampling procedure is identical to that employed by Brown and Jackson (1977), with the addition of FOX. Fourteen three-hour daytime (8:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m., CST) and primetime combinations (7:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m. CST, Monday–Saturday and 6:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m. CST, Sunday) were selected randomly to construct a complete week of 43 hours of programming. Excluded from the sample were promos for TV programs, station IDs and PSAs, help wanted and recruitment ads, ads promoting charitable giving, and commercials on behalf of theatrical films and DVD releases, stage plays, and sporting events. All repetitions of commercials were included in the total sample. Other findings on the comparative advertising of products and physical goods were reported in Beard (in press a).

Categories

Commercials were coded as strictly comparative if one or more competitors were named, shown, or both named and shown. They were coded as “competition implied-brand” if they named or showed a “generic” or unbranded competitive product or service (e.g., “the phone company” or “cable”) or if they identified one or more competitors by referring to them but not by name (e.g., “other brands” or “One of the top five brands...”). A third category, “competition implied-category” ads, consisted of those that acknowledged or implied the existence of competitors but did not directly refer to them (e.g., “The value only we deliver...”) (Beard, in press a). Such ads often include puffery but are not synonymous with it, since some puffs do not require competitors to be valid (e.g., “They’re Great!”).

Definitions and coding instructions for commercial length, service type, and consumer versus business-to-business advertising were adapted from Brown and Jackson (1977), Jackson et al. (1979), and Turley and Kelley (1997) (see Table 1 for a summary of the categories). A

category for local versus national advertising was defined using a definition published by the City of Mesa, Arizona (2012) for the purposes of local taxation.

Advertising claims were coded as substantiated if they included such language as “Tests prove,” “Surveys show,” or “Independent laboratory studies reveal,” or they supported their claims by citing an independent source or third party (e.g., J.D. Power or *PC Magazine*) (McDougall, 1978). Comparative commercials were coded as having absolute price information if an actual dollar amount for a regular or sales price was mentioned (Turley & Kelley, 1997). Commercials referencing lower prices than competitors, percentage discounts or money-saving offers, absence of fees, promotional incentives, or a promise of monetary value were coded as having relative pricing information.

Procedures

One coder and the author began by discussing the coding scheme, category definitions, and code sheet. They then practiced independently coding ads not included in the sample. Training continued until a test of intercoder reliability conducted using a separate sample of 75 commercials indicated acceptable levels of reliability (see Table 1).

Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2005) observe that “Coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices.” The reliabilities reported in Table 1 (percent agreement and Cohen’s *kappa*) meet these guidelines. Moreover, they compare favorably with Brown and Jackson (1977), who reported only percentage of agreement for their categories, with 89% for their comparative versus non-comparative category and 76% for their type of comparative ad (strictly versus implied).

Findings

Description of the Sample

A majority of the 1,401 commercials in the sample were for consumer products (68.9%) versus consumer services (29.7%, or 416 ads). Most of the 416 services ads were 30 seconds in length (68.3%), followed by 15 seconds (19.5%), 60 seconds (7.9%), 10 seconds (2.4%), and other lengths (1.9%). The frequencies of the commercials were skewed by daypart (71.6% daytime) and by network: ABC (12.0%), CBS (16.1%), NBC (28.1%), and FOX (43.8%). The most frequently advertised consumer services were legal (4.8%), communications (4.1%), health care/weight loss/dental (4.1%), education (3.8%), and insurance (3.8%).

Research Questions and Answers

How frequently are comparative television commercials used in the advertising of services? More than 40% of the 416 services ads were comparative, confirming that the format is used fairly often. However, as an answer to the second research question, just 2.2% of all the services ads were strictly comparative, whereas 13.5% were competition implied-brand and 24.5% were competition implied-category.

To what extent do comparative services commercials substantiate their claims? Among the 416 services commercials, only 13 (3.1%) included substantiation. However, at 6.0%, significantly more of the comparative ads (strictly comparative and both types of implied) included substantiation compared to the noncomparative commercials, at only 1.2% ($X^2=7.554$, $df=1$, $p < .01$).

How does the use of comparative advertising differ among different types of services? Comparative advertising (strictly and both types of implied) was used most often for

communications services (including cable/satellite TV, Internet services, and telephone services), followed by insurance, financial services (including investing, lending, and identity theft), healthcare (including weight loss and dental services), household services (including cleaning, repairs, and home security), news/amusement/entertainment/tourism services, legal services, services in an “other” category, and education (see Table 2). The only car rental commercial in the sample was comparative. These differences were statistically significant ($X^2=36.965$, $df=8$, $p < .001$). Although ads for communications services accounted for just 13.7% of the sample, five of the nine strictly comparative ads in the sample were for communications services.

There were also significant differences among service types in regards to their frequency of use of the implied-brand and implied-category formats ($X^2=19.7$, $df=7$, $p < .01$) (see Table 2). Strictly comparative ads were excluded from this analysis because of their infrequent use, as were ads for services in the “other” category. Although most services advertisers relied on the implied-category format more often than the implied-brand, this was not the case for advertisers of healthcare (including weight loss and dental) and legal services. Conversely, communications (e.g., cable/satellite TV, Internet), financial (e.g., insurance, investment, identity theft, tax preparation), household (e.g., repairs, improvements, security), and news/amusement/entertainment/tourism services employed the implied-category type much more frequently than the implied-brand type.

To what extent is price information emphasized in comparative services commercials? At 6.0% versus 3.6%, comparative services ads included absolute pricing information significantly more often than noncomparative ads did. Conversely, a much larger percentage of noncomparative services ads included no pricing information (45.4% versus 34.1%).

Comparative services commercials also included both absolute and relative pricing information more often than noncomparative services ads (19.9% versus 11.2%, respectively). Nearly identical percentages of comparative and noncomparative services ads (40.1% and 39.8%, respectively) included relative pricing information. The differences among all these frequencies were statistically significant ($X^2=9.275$, $df=3$, $p < .05$).

Finally, does the use of comparative advertising differ between national versus local services advertisers? National advertisers were significantly more likely to employ comparative versus noncomparative advertising (47.9%) compared to local services advertisers (32.0%) ($X^2=10.891$, $df=1$, $p < .001$).

Discussion and Conclusions

Compared to the 9.7% that Brown and Jackson (1977) found, at 13.5%, the present findings suggest a statistically significant increase in the use of competition implied-brand TV advertising by services advertisers since the 1970s ($X^2=.98$, $df=1$, $p < .05$). Moreover, the finding that 2.1% of the services ads were strictly comparative, versus the zero percent that Brown and Jackson reported, suggests an increase in this type as well, although the difference was not quite significant ($z = 1.887$, $p = .059$). As Beard (2013) reported, creative executives continue to feel quite favorably toward the use of comparative advertising, although they also seem less confident in the effectiveness of strictly comparative versus noncomparative advertising. The finding that contemporary services advertisers appear to be using comparative advertising more often than advertisers some 30 years ago is consistent with these beliefs.

The findings also show that services advertisers consistently opt for the less aggressive types of comparative advertising. One obvious explanation for this finding is that services

advertising decision makers are concerned about the risks associated with comparative advertising. Among these risks are the generation of awareness for competitors, a tendency for advertisers to lose focus on their own message strategies, a negative effect on source credibility (Beard, 2013; Grewal et al., 1997), and the potential for brand confusion. Some empirical research has also confirmed the widely held professional belief that comparative advertising can produce backlash (e.g., the perception that the advertising is unfair or excessively malicious) and other negative responses (James & Hensel, 1991; Sorescu & Gelb, 2000). Beard's (2013) survey of advertising executives confirms their beliefs that comparative ads often have negative effects on attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), brand loyalty, and repeat purchase. Moreover, Beard's (in press b) investigation of comparative advertising for prominent, non-professional services brands showed it is especially likely to encourage negative affective and conative responses among older consumers.

Specifically regarding the risk of brand confusion, as noted earlier, Grove et al. (1997) warned that services advertisers should take special care not to cause confusion in their efforts to differentiate themselves from competitors. Moreover, comparative advertising's likely positive effect on brand-name recall is one of the few cognitive outcomes for which the findings of empirical research and surveys of advertising creatives remain contradictory (Beard, 2013).

As recent dust-ups among competitors in categories as varied as cell phone services, sports drinks, and ready-to-eat soups demonstrate, two additional and important risks are the likelihood that a competitor may counterattack—such as Verizon's "There's a Map for That" response to comparative ads on behalf of AT&T in 2009—or file a lawsuit (e.g., AT&T's response to Verizon's "There's a Map for That" campaign). Indeed, historical research has

shown that advertisers over the past century often allowed themselves to be drawn into comparative advertising wars, and that many who did reported regretting it (Beard, 2010).

The recognized risks associated with comparative advertising are also consistent with recent economic theory and research on “combative advertising.” Combative, versus constructive, advertising identifies and promotes products and brands, while failing to expand markets overall (Marshall, as cited in Chen et al., 2009). Chen and his colleagues concluded that if combative advertising leads to indifferent consumers, rather than partisan ones—which was one of the outcomes of the long-distance services advertising wars of the early 1990s—it could also lead to procompetitive outcomes where all the combatants become collectively worse off.

Yet the findings of this study show that many services advertisers do employ comparative advertising. Obviously, they do so based on the belief that it will be effective. Scholarly researchers have concluded almost overwhelmingly that comparative, versus noncomparative, advertising has significantly greater effects on such related cognitive outcomes as ad attention, ad interest, message recall, attribute recall, message processing and on the conative outcomes of initial brand trial and purchase intention (Beard, 2013; Grewal et al., 1997).

Comparisons with competitors or the category overall seem likely to help communicate the concrete and specific information that services scholars argue is so crucial for effective advertising. Safelite AutoGlass’s comparison of its resin to the “inferior resins” used by “the other guys” offers an excellent example of such a tactical use. Comparisons with competitors would also seem to be an effective way to dramatize the performance of a service, its benefits, and the likelihood of satisfactory consumption. Moreover, the greater cognitive effects attributed to comparative advertising suggest it is an especially good match with another frequently

recommended services advertising tactic—the encouragement of favorable WOM (George & Berry, 1981; Hill & Gandhi, 1992).

There are also theoretical explanations for why comparative advertising may often represent a good match for services advertisers and their goal of highlighting service performance. For instance, and citing Kelley's application of attribution theory, James and Hensel (1991) argued that people are more influenced by information they obtain from someone else about a third entity if that information pertains to the entity's factual performance or actions.

On the other hand, some services scholars have also suggested that, when consumers process information about services as opposed to products, it likely differs from the traditional hierarchy-of-effects paradigm and its three hierarchies (Mittal, 2002; Tripp, 1997; Legg & Baker, 1987; Young, 1981). One possibility is that services consumers follow a fourth hierarchy, feel-do-learn, rather than those implied by the learning, dissonance attribution, and low-involvement hierarchies (Young). If this were the case, then at least some of the risks associated with comparative advertising—such as a negative effect on source credibility, potential for backlash, a decrease in favorable A_{ad} and possibly A_{br} —could be especially problematic for services advertisers.

Another important finding is that a significantly larger percentage of the comparative services commercials included substantiation, compared to the noncomparative ones. One explanation for this finding is Beard's (2013) report that advertising creative executives believe comparative advertising will be more effective than noncomparative advertising when claims are well substantiated, believable, and strong. Another is Grewal et al.'s (1997) finding that the inclusion of “credibility enhancers” in comparative ads (e.g., the use of credible sources, two-

sided messages, or the support of claims with factual information) leads to a significant increase in the favorableness of attitude toward the brand (A_{br}) and greater purchase intention.

However, it is important to note McDougall's (1978) suggestion that what was "unique" about comparative versus noncomparative ads is that the former frequently "implied that factual information, often in the form of scientific tests or independent research, has been gathered as a basis for the comparative claim" (p. 40). The present finding, that only 6.0% of the comparative services ads included such substantiation, suggests McDougall (1978) was mistaken about the extent to which substantiation is included in comparative ads or that this is a tactical feature that has changed a great deal since the 1970s.

A related finding of importance is that—although a significantly larger percentage of the comparative services commercials included substantiation, compared to the noncomparative ones—only 3.1% of the services ads overall included substantiation. This would seem to be quite inconsistent with the services advertising recommendations presented in the literature. As McDougall (1978) observed regarding substantiation: "The inclusion of substantiations presumably increases the credibility of the claim and reinforces the legitimizing function of the advertising" (p. 41). As noted earlier, researchers have consistently emphasized the value and importance of concrete, specific language or "vivid information" for tangibilizing services, making them more easily understood, and, thus, reducing the perceived risk caused by the often heterogeneous performance of service production. As McDougall concluded based on the results of his comparative advertising experiment: "Advertisers should use substantiated claims whenever possible to increase the acceptability of their messages" (p. 50). This conclusion would seem to apply especially to services advertising.

On the other hand, it is interesting to find that comparative services commercials included absolute pricing information significantly more often than noncomparative ones did and that noncomparative ads failed to include any pricing information significantly more often. One explanation for this finding is Beard's (2013) survey report that contemporary creative executives held more favorable attitudes toward comparative versus noncomparative advertising in more price competitive markets and for products priced lower than competitors. Still, at only 6.0% and 3.6%, it's fairly clear that most services advertisers prefer not to compete on the basis of absolute pricing in either their comparative or noncomparative commercials.

Findings also show that the advertisers of two professional services, healthcare and legal services, used competition implied-brand comparative advertising significantly more often than the advertisers of the mostly nonprofessional services. It's not clear why these advertisers might opt for the more aggressive type of comparative advertising. Such "personal-interactive" professional services (Mills & Margulies, 1980) provide highly customized solutions that focus on the personal nature of their customers' problems. Most of the other retail-oriented services in the sample provide predominantly semi-customized solutions that focus more on things, rather than people, and the tasks that customers need accomplished. One possible explanation, then, is that personal-interactive professional services face greater difficulties in tangibilizing their offerings or differentiating themselves from competitors.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

One study limitation is that the findings apply only to services advertisers in the U.S. and to broadcast network television advertising. Moreover, while sampling from the major broadcast networks made it possible to longitudinally compare the findings with those of Brown and

Jackson (1977), they no longer deliver the majority of TV advertising in the U.S. It would be valuable to investigate how the use of comparative advertising for services might differ, for example, among cable networks and online media. There are also no good estimates of the use of comparative magazine advertising because all the prior content analyses combined services with other types of products or advertisers. A content analysis of services advertising in magazines using this study's categories would, thus, make a valuable contribution to the literature.

Another recommendation would be to survey ad agency creative executives regarding their beliefs about comparative services advertising. Prior surveys of ad agency executives (Beard, 2013; Rogers & Williams, 1989) neglected to include services versus products among the conditions moderating the perceived effectiveness of comparative versus noncomparative campaigns. Moreover, there are no surveys at all of marketing or client-side advertising executives on the topic of comparative services advertising. This is especially important because many agency creative executives report clients are often reluctant to employ comparative advertising (Beard, 2013). Moreover, early surveys of practitioners, beginning with Barry and Tremblay (1975), have also indicated more favorable views of comparative advertising among agency practitioners compared to corporate marketing and advertising executives.

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Table 1

Summary of Categories and Intercoder Reliabilities

	Percent Agreement	Cohen's <i>kappa</i>
Length of Spot		
10 sec., 15 sec., 30 sec., 60 sec., Other	98.7	.975
Consumer Service Type		
Financial/Investment/Identity Theft, Insurance, Airlines, Credit Cards, Lodging, Communications, Health Care, Education, News/Amusement/Entertainment/Tourism, Shipping/Delivery, Home Cleaning/Repairs/Related Services, Car Rental, Other	98.7	.981
Local versus National		
Local, National	100.0	*NA
Comparative		
Comparative, Noncomparative	96.0	.918
Comparative Type		
Competition Named, Competition Shown, Competition Both Named and Shown, Competition Implied-Brand, Competition Implied-Category, Noncomparative	89.3	.839
Number of Products/Services/Brands/Opponents		
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Not mentioned/Competition Implied-Category	92.0	.872
Substantiation		
The ad substantiates one or more of its claims; The ad does not substantiate any of its claims	97.3	** .738
Price Advantage		
Absolute Pricing Information, Relative Pricing Information, Both Absolute and Relative Pricing Information, No Pricing Information	97.3	.959

Kappa* is undefined when there is 100% agreement between two coders and values are invariant. *Kappa* is low due to a high likelihood of chance agreements. Note: The complete codebook, six pages in length, is available from the PI on request.

Table 2

Comparative Advertising Frequency of Use by Service Type

	Percent Comparative*	Implied- Brand	Implied- Category
Communications	64.9	10.5	45.6
Insurance	50.9	22.6	26.4
Financial	50.0	16.7	33.3
Healthcare	41.4	24.1	15.5
Household	36.0	4.0	32.0
News/Amusement/Entertain- ment/Tourism	34.3	5.7	28.6
Legal	26.9	14.9	11.9
Other	21.4	0.0	14.3
Education	18.9	3.8	13.2

Note: *Includes strictly, implied-brand, and implied-category comparative ads.

Onward Christian Soldiers: How Arkansas Political Candidates
Deploy Religious Texts to Motivate Voters

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Introduction

There is an old saying that two things polite people don't talk about around the dinner table are religion and politics, lest tempers flare and feelings get bruised. Certainly, then, deliberately combining religion and politics would seem at first blush to be beyond the pale, particularly in an officially secular country such as the United States, where the First Amendment of the Constitution commands Congress to "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Yet, on both the national and state levels, many candidates engage in religious expression as they court voters. This is true in the state of Arkansas, where, for example, in late 2013, U.S. Senator Mark Pryor aired a television commercial in which he held up a copy of the Bible, looked directly into the camera, and told voters it was his "North Star."

According to a survey of religious affiliations from the Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project, the percentage of adult Arkansans who identify themselves as evangelical Protestants is the highest of any state, at 53 percent, with an additional 10 percent identifying with historically black Protestant churches holding similarly conservative social views (Pew Research, 2007). Thus, political candidates in Arkansas are making their appeals in a state where 63 percent of the adult population subscribes to conservative Protestantism. Perhaps it is no great surprise, then, that candidates resort to using Christian-oriented texts and imagery during the

course of their campaigns. But to what degree do they do so, and how do they construct those appeals?

This research paper looks at the way political candidates for two statewide offices in Arkansas in 2014 – U.S. Senate and governor -- used Christian-oriented texts and imagery to communicate with and motivate voters, through a textual analysis of images and artifacts produced by these campaigns using two theoretical lenses, symbolic convergence theory and dissociation.

The five candidates in this study were U.S. Senator Mark Pryor, a Democrat running for re-election; U.S. Rep. Tom Cotton, a Republican running against Pryor for the Senate; Mike Ross, a Democrat seeking the state's open governorship; Asa Hutchinson, running for the Republican nomination for governor; and Curtis Coleman, also seeking the Republican gubernatorial nomination.

Pryor was running for a third term in the U.S. Senate as a Democrat in a state that had become substantially more Republican since he last ran in 2008. Cotton, a veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan first elected to the U.S. House in 2012, opted to give up his House seat to challenge Pryor. The governor's post was open because the incumbent, Governor Mike Beebe, a Democrat, was term-limited. Ross and Hutchinson were both former members of the U.S. House, representing the southwestern and northwestern parts of Arkansas, respectively. Coleman, a businessman from Little Rock who ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 2010, was trying to harness Tea Party support to win his first political office.

Literature Review

Religiosity has a long history in American public life. As early as 1774, the First Continental Congress installed chaplains in both of its houses, and prayer was offered at George

Washington's first inauguration in 1787 (Medhurst, 2009). More recently, in 1976, Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist Sunday school teacher from Plains, Georgia, courted evangelical voters by making overt references to his personal faith during his campaign for the White House. For Carter's gambit to work, a natural constituency would have to exist that could be swayed by such an appeal, and conditions would have to be right for the public to be amenable to it (Hahn, 1980). However, there is a flip side to this coin; namely, the fear that naked appeals to evangelical voters might turn off non-evangelicals who were uneasy with putting someone with Carter's religious views in the White House. Carter navigated this by establishing, through his rhetoric, a double standard which held that it was appropriate to vote for someone because of his religion but inappropriate to vote against him for the same reason (Hahn, 1980). In using this approach, then, candidates who want to court religious voters with overtly Christian messages must also be careful to make those appeals in ways that will not alienate voters who are uneasy with such appeals.

Hart (1977) explained America's civic piety as a contract between government and organized religion, in which each side agrees to maintain pretense of separation between church and state. Under this contract, government refrains from being overly religious, while organized religion refrains from being overly political, and both sides keep the terms of the contract away from the public. Thus, a country that is simultaneously religious and secular can reconcile the cognitive dissonance flowing from this inherent paradox.

Medhurst (2009) developed a framework for discussions of mixing religious themes and imagery into civic discourse, which asks if talk about religion is either necessary or desirable in American politics; what aspects of religion are relevant to the political process if such talk is necessary or desirable; if some aspects or uses of religion are simply inappropriate; how to

reconcile the constitutional issues of free speech and free exercise of religion with the equally constitutional issues of no religious test and no establishment of religion; and how religious and democratic attitudes toward truth, knowledge, virtue and belief can be reconciled.

In 2007, during his first campaign for president, Republican Mitt Romney gave what has been dubbed the “Faith in America” speech in an effort to deflect concerns about his Mormonism (Medhurst, 2009). In the speech, Romney defended the inclusion of faith in public life (answering yes to Medhurst’s first question), although he insisted he would not try to interject his own Mormon faith in the public sphere if elected president (attempting to address the fourth.) Analyzing the media’s reaction, Medhurst found substantial criticism of Romney’s remarks and a consensus “that religious questions are not generally appropriate for a political campaign” (Medhurst, 2009, p. 210). However, this media reaction was at odds with polls showing that a vast majority of Americans find faith and religious belief important to leadership and believe they are appropriate topics for debate (Medhurst, 2009). This type of polling information is what, almost certainly, creates the assumption among candidates in Arkansas and elsewhere that they can benefit by engaging in the ritual of using religious themes in their political communication with voters.

A campaign is, in essence, a courtship between candidates and voters, and “potential supporters must be aware of the candidates in terms of characteristics that the supporters deem important” (Nesbit, 1988, p. 19). Political consultants describe this process as “cue value,” which involves creating narratives that distinguish candidates from their opponents (Nesbit, 1988). In a state such as Arkansas, where evangelical Protestants are a majority, using Christian texts and imagery is a way to build “cue value” and facilitate the courtship between candidate and voter.

So if religiosity has an important and enduring place in American political life, how can its use by candidates be analyzed? In this study, symbolic convergence theory and its associated critical method, fantasy theme analysis, are employed. Symbolic convergence is a dynamic process through which people, by sharing particular fantasy themes in texts or oral messages, create a common social reality to explain their collective experience, using narrative accounts, metaphors, irony and word play (Bormann, 1982). Symbolic convergence theory is based on two assumptions – first, that communication creates reality and, second, that the meanings individuals attach to symbols converge to create a shared reality or community consciousness (Foss, 2009). As used here, fantasy doesn't mean something imaginary or not grounded in reality; rather, it refers to “the imaginative and creative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need” (Bormann, 1982, p. 52). Through this process, values are tested and legitimized for the group, and individual fantasy themes then work together to build a rhetorical vision that creates a symbolic reality for the participants (Bormann, 1972).

This phenomenon was cited by Bishop (2006) in his analysis of how fantasy themes found in news coverage of Fred Rogers (“Mr. Rogers”) created a rhetorical vision of him as the world’s nicest grown-up. An analysis by Duffy (2003) of fantasy themes created by racist hate groups online found that they were effective in creating a community, despite employing narratives that were historically inaccurate and immoral. “For those participating in the drama of these rhetorical visions, they constitute a shining vision of hope and renewal. Individuals who feel marginalized by society, victimized by an unfair economic system, and beset by forces beyond their control can participate in a stirring drama of Biblical proportions. They can be one of the Chosen People” (Duffy, 2003, p. 307).

The process of assessing rhetorical visions in political discourse is also informed by Lakoff (2002), who isolated two models around which political discourse revolves: the Strict Father model, which is derived from the traditional nuclear family and holds strength, discipline, and self-reliance as paramount, and the Nurturing Parent model, in which values such as love, empathy, and nurturance hold sway. Conservative Christians apply the Strict Father model to politics by linking their religious system of moral accounting with free-market economics, believing that if each person observes the rules and pursues his or her own self-interest, individual self-interest will be maximized. By contrast, the Nurturing Parent model holds that empathy and compassionate actions supplant strict rules. These two different ways of looking at the moral universe, then, help shape different rhetorical visions for conservatives and liberals – and, by extension, Republicans and Democrats – across a wide variety of issues. This led to the following research question with regard to the two statewide campaigns in 2014 in Arkansas that were studied here:

- RQ1: Do the rhetorical visions of the Democratic candidates reflect the Nurturing Parent model and the rhetorical visions of the Republican candidates reflect the Strict Father model?

Using symbolic convergence theory and Lakoff's framework, Page and Duffy (2009) analyzed political campaign advertising in a 2006 Senate race in Missouri between Democrat Claire McCaskill and Republican Jim Talent, isolating 14 separate fantasy themes. Their goal was "to understand and assess the rhetorical visions of the candidates and describe the social reality the candidates are asking voters to embrace" (Page and Duffy, 2009, p. 131). Using fantasy themes to understand rhetorical vision involves analyzing the themes and looking for patterns, with those patterns appearing most frequently identified as major themes that become

the subject of the analysis and those patterns appearing infrequently discarded as unimportant elements of the rhetorical vision (Foss, 2009).

Page and Duffy looked at fantasy themes broadly related to morality, rather than focusing specifically on religious themes, although some of the fantasy themes did touch on religious impulses. However, their approach in applying symbolic convergence theory to political advertising, as well as their use of Lakoff's Strict Father and Nurturing Parent models, can be adapted to look more specifically at Christian-oriented religious themes in political communication.

In this study, symbolic convergence theory leads to three additional research questions:

- RQ2: How are the candidates using Christian-oriented messaging and imagery to create fantasy themes, and what fantasy themes are they creating?
- RQ3: What rhetorical visions are the candidates trying to create with those fantasy themes?
- RQ4: Do party labels affect candidates' use of Christian-oriented messaging and imagery?

Another method candidates use to make religious appeals in a fashion that broadens their voter base and respects constitutional limits is dissociation. Dissociation, as it pertains to communication, involves altering the presentation of a message "to remove an incompatibility arising out of the confrontation of one proposition with others, whether one is dealing with norms, facts, or truths" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 413). Through this process, an appearance of reality is created that is distinct from the reality itself, which can then allow the recipient of a message to reconcile contradictions arising within that reality (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). In essence, dissociation is a solution that can be employed when

incompatibilities require alternation of conventional thinking (Perelman, 1979). Lee and Lee (1939) identified the use of what they termed “glittering generalities” in propaganda, in which words that can mean different things to different people – including terms such as “democracy” and “Christianity” – are deliberately employed to make people more receptive to messages, which facilitates the dissociation process.

An example of dissociation in a political context took place in California in 1998, when Ron Unz, the sponsor of a ballot initiative to outlaw bilingual education, used rhetorical dissociation to blunt opposition from the immigrant community by moving the debate away from the benefits of students learning in their native language and, instead, shifting the debate to the benefits of forcing them to learn English (Cisneros, 2007). “By transcending the traditional framework of language policy as a tool of assimilation into the white, American mainstream, Unz was able to paint his initiative as an alternative that truly served the best interests of immigrant minorities by ensuring them English instruction” (Cisneros, 2007, p. 4). Dissociation has also been used in the debate over same-sex marriage, where organizations opposed to marriage equality framed their messages as abstract discussions about the meaning of marriage, rather than social animus toward gay and lesbian Americans (Cloud, 2014). In the 2012 U.S. presidential race, the campaigns of both Democratic President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, used dissociation in their religious appeals along a binary of faith versus works (Maddux, 2013). While evangelical Christian activists in the 1980s and 1990s judged candidates by their willingness to embrace particular positions on issues such as abortion, evolution, and homosexuality, in 2012, the campaigns of both Romney and Obama took a different approach; namely, stressing how Christian merit is based on acts of mercy. Thus, both

campaigns sought to build a broader base of religious voters by minimizing doctrinal differences (Maddux, 2013).

Dissociation, then, can be a powerful – perhaps even vital – tool for candidates trying to make religious-based appeals if their own religious faith or political positions appear to be at odds with the moral concerns of those voters mostly likely to be swayed by a religious appeal. Likewise, candidates who want to make appeals to the public’s religiosity can broaden them for consumption by the largest possible audience. Dissociation resolves the incompatibility between making an appeal based on faith without making an overt expression of faith that might alienate some voters, thus allowing candidates to make a faith appeal without mentioning faith itself.

This study examines the use of dissociation to answer a final research question:

- RQ5: How are the candidates using dissociative logic in their Christian-oriented messaging, including use of the terms “faith,” “values,” and “Arkansas values,” to create an appeal that goes beyond rigid dogma?

Methodology

Texts and artifacts generated by all five campaigns between August 2013, when Cotton became the first of the five candidates to announce his candidacy, and April 2014, when the study concluded, were collected and analyzed. The artifacts included TV advertisements aired by the campaigns, which were collected from YouTube and campaign Web sites; promotional videos posted on campaign Web sites; texts, including promotional texts and press releases, posted on campaign Web sites; interviews given by the candidates, obtained either from the campaign Web site or from the news organization that conducted the interview. Because one of the goals of this study was to ascertain the degree to which Christian and religious themes were being employed, the sample collected included all available artifacts. In all, 20 artifacts were

collected and analyzed from the five campaigns: four each from Pryor and Cotton; three each from Ross and Hutchinson; and six from Coleman.

To discover fantasy themes and delineate a rhetorical vision, evidence related to the content of the communication is collected, including video or audio tapes, manuscripts, observations and recollections of participants (Cragan & Shields, 1981). Analysis of the collected evidence must take into account that visual and textual documents are created in a specific context by particular people with particular purposes, generating intended and unintended consequences (Manson, 2002). In this analysis, all of the texts and artifacts are constructed in the same context (a political campaign), by the same types of people (candidates and political handlers), for the same purpose (to win an election.) Therefore, these texts and artifacts have the commonality needed to warrant comparison because they all represent an active decision by a campaign to try to send a message or create an impression. These texts and artifacts were also easily obtainable and amenable to textual analysis.

A key question to ask in deciding what to look for in gathering data is whether the artifacts can address, in both an ontological and epistemological sense, the intellectual puzzle being solved (Manson, 2002). With that question in mind, this study looked for instances of overt Christian messaging, such as use or display of the Bible or direct quotes from Scripture; non-overt religious messaging, such as references to God that were not specifically Christian or scenes of people praying; and faith/values messaging, such as references to faith and values that were not specifically religious but had a religious inference.

Texts and artifacts were examined to identify instances in which candidates chose to produce religious-based messages and define the fantasy themes and rhetorical visions arising from them (RQ2 and RQ3); distinguish between texts and imagery generated by Democratic

candidates and those generated by Republicans (RQ4); differentiate between the degrees of religiosity exhibited in the texts and imagery (RQ2, RQ3 and RQ5); and determine if party affiliation affected a candidate's adherence to either the Strict Father or Nurturing Parent model of political discourse (RQ1).

Findings

All five of the candidates used Christian and religious texts and themes in their campaign communications. However, there were distinct differences in the degree to which candidates employed religiosity, how they constructed religious-based fantasy themes, the rhetorical visions they tried to create, and their use of dissociation.

Of all of the candidates, Pryor employed the most overt Christian messaging. The opening ad of his campaign, which aired throughout December 2013, was entitled "What I Believe." In it, Pryor was shown sitting in a chair in a dimly lit living room, dressed in an open-necked, buttoned-down red shirt with what appeared to be a Bible open in his hands. "I'm not ashamed to say that I believe in God, and I believe in his Word," Pryor said. The screen then faded to black and the words "Mark Pryor" appeared on the screen. Then, Pryor returned in a tighter shot, with the Bible now closed. "The Bible teaches us that no one has all the answers, only God does, and neither political party is always right," he said. The camera faded to black again, and the words "What I Believe" appeared on the screen. When the shot returned to Pryor, he was holding the Bible by the edge, gesturing with it toward the camera. "This is my compass, my North Star," he said, as the camera panned in more closely. "It gives me comfort and guidance to do what's best for Arkansas. I'm Mark Pryor, and I approved this message because this is who I am and what I believe."

From his first sentence, Pryor was clearly trying to get the audience to identify with him by saying he was “not ashamed” to be a Christian and pronouncing his belief in the Bible, establishing the fantasy themes as a candidate who was devout, faithful, and righteous. Then, in the next sentence, he conflated his religious pronouncements with politics by saying the Bible teaches “neither political party is right” and it was his “compass,” establishing the fantasy theme as a candidate whose politics were grounded in his Christian faith. Then he brought these points home once again when he extended the mandatory tag line – “I’m Mark Pryor, and I approved this message ...” – to add “because this is who I am and what I believe.”

Pryor’s overt Christian messaging also extended to his campaign Web site. Under a navigation tab entitled “Meet Mark,” a biography of the senator appeared in which the word “faith” was used in the headline and four times in the body text. “Mark’s Christian faith has instilled in him values that shape his life,” the first sentence read. The third paragraph noted “Mark’s faith was the bedrock of his life when he fought a life-threatening type of cancer nearly 20 years ago.” Also, “Mark’s deep sense of responsibility in how we govern stems from his personal foundation of faith.” The first sentence of the final paragraph read, “Values grounded in his Christian faith, tested by his own successful battle with cancer, and applied on a daily basis to his work on behalf of the people of Arkansas, Mark Pryor ignores partisan politics to do the very best for the people of Arkansas.” As in the television ad, Pryor portrayed himself as a candidate who was faithful and grounded, which informed his work as a senator.

Another example of Pryor’s religious posturing was a March 17, 2014, interview with the Web site Politico, which centered on his pedigree as a member a famous Arkansas political family. (His father, David, is a former governor and U.S. senator.) “In Proverbs, it says a good name is worth more than great riches,” Pryor said. “I feel like that ought to be my verse for life

because I've really been blessed with a good name" (Hohmann, 2014). His paraphrased quote is from the Bible, specifically Proverbs 22:1: "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth." So even when answering a question that had nothing to do with religious faith, Pryor chose to use a Biblical quotation, portraying himself as a candidate who was grounded and thankful.

The rhetorical vision Pryor created was of a man whose life and work as a senator were grounded in a sincere and deeply-felt Christian faith. The images and language were very direct and personal, but they were not specific to any particular denomination. Indeed, from an analysis of his campaign texts alone, one could not determine to what faith tradition he adheres, beyond the fact he is a Christian. Pryor's rhetoric, in which he links his faith to his desire to serve Arkansans' interests in the Senate and ties it to his battle with cancer, clearly followed the Nurturing Parent model.

Pryor's Republican opponent, Tom Cotton, did not employ Christian or religious themes to nearly the same degree as Pryor. And when he did, they were mostly employed to make rhetorical points against Pryor, rather than talking about his own faith.

In a television ad entitled "Phony as a Three-Dollar Bill," which aired in April 2014, Cotton disputed an earlier attack ad from an outside group, the Senate Majority PAC, which charged that earlier in his career, Cotton had worked as a consultant on behalf of insurance companies. After highlighting media coverage from the *Washington Post* and *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* disputing the charges made in the ad, Cotton's ad ended with this tagline: "After 24 years in politics, Mark Pryor has become unfaithful to the truth." There were, of course, any number of ways the Cotton campaign could have called the ad untruthful, so the choice of the word "unfaithful" was telling, given Pryor's emphasis on his faithfulness. Rather

than rolling out a fantasy theme of himself as a faithful candidate, Cotton chose instead to paint the opposite picture of his opponent – even though Pryor’s campaign was not actually behind the ad Cotton was criticizing.

Cotton also chose to develop a contrast with Pryor on specific political issue near and dear to many politically active religious conservatives – a bill pending in Congress to change the Affordable Care Act to prohibit the federal government from forcing an individual to purchase health insurance covering services to which they have a moral or religious objection, including abortion and contraception. Cotton was a co-sponsor of this measure in the House; Pryor did not take a position.

In a radio interview with Tony Perkins, head of the conservative Family Research Council, on January 10, 2014, Cotton said, “Freedom of religion is about more than the way we worship in church on Sunday morning or on Wednesday night. It’s about the way we live out our lives, and that includes our lives in the workplace, or our lives when we choose our health insurance plans. And I think it is deeply offensive that the (Obama) administration, through Obamacare regulations, are forcing people who are opposed to abortion to pay for it or subsidize it, whether it’s for themselves or for others. That, I think, deeply violates every American’s freedom of conscience, even if you don’t object to abortion, because if they can violate your freedom of conscience on this matter, then it might be your freedom of conscience on another matter next ... If the government is willing to violate the freedom of conscience of Catholics, then Baptists or Methodists or Lutherans or anyone else could be next. And that’s why we have to stand for the freedom of religion for every faith in America.” Thus, Cotton was creating a fantasy theme as a candidate who stands up for religious freedom. And while he used language to broaden the message beyond an evangelical audience by mentioning Catholics and Lutherans,

he also clearly aimed for evangelicals by talking about worshipping on “Wednesday night,” which is a common time for church services in many evangelical denominations.

Though Cotton didn’t mention Pryor in this interview, on the same day it aired, his campaign posted a press release in which he called on Pryor “to stand on the side of religious freedom rather than protecting President Obama’s prized health care law at all costs.” Thus, while portraying himself as a candidate who will stand for religious freedom, he cast Pryor as a candidate who won’t, while also managing to tie this fantasy theme to Obamacare, a central issue in the Senate campaign.

While Cotton used religious themes to draw contrasts with Pryor, he did not directly use them to talk about himself; indeed, Cotton’s campaign highlighted his military service to the exclusion of his personal faith. However, in a television ad called “Infantry,” which aired in November and December 2013, Cotton’s mother, Avis Cotton, gave her son a testimonial. She was shown sitting in front of a Christmas tree, holding a photo album in her hands. “It was Christmas. I was a newlywed and alone,” she said. The shot cut to a woman’s hand moving over a photo album containing old pictures. “Lynn (Cotton) was in Vietnam, but Christmas was harder when our son was in Afghanistan,” she said. The shot then moved to a montage of photos taken of Cotton in uniform while he was in the U.S. Army. “Tom has a passion to serve our country ...” Mrs. Cotton’s message here was that her son was a candidate willing to make sacrifices -- to the point of choosing to be away from his family at Christmas -- in the service of his country.

The rhetorical vision Cotton created would seem at first blush more about Pryor than himself: Pryor as a candidate was unfaithful, untruthful, and unwilling to stand up to defend religious faith. Yet, Cotton used those characterizations to contrast himself with Pryor, in effect

creating a rhetorical vision that, unlike Pryor, he would be a strong, dedicated senator upon whom Arkansas Christians can depend. Cotton used religious discourse indirectly to reflect on Pryor, rather than talking about his own faith. His rhetorical vision clearly adhered to the Strict Father model – a masculine image of strength, rather than a more feminine image of nurturing.

In the race for governor, the lone major Democratic candidate, Mike Ross, employed direct religious imagery, although not to the extent Pryor did. At the beginning of a two-minute video entitled “What Do We Love About Arkansas?” posted by his campaign in April 2013, Ross’s voice was heard off camera: “What do we love about Arkansas?...” which segued to shots of a girl getting a drink out of a water fountain, crops in a field, and a sunset over a river. “... the land, our neighbors caring about neighbors, our faith ...” At this point, the video showed a pair of hands holding an open Bible with stained-glass windows in the background. “... our safety and everybody’s opportunity to get ahead.” Thus, Ross conflated Christian faith with other bedrock parts of Arkansas life, such as young children, agriculture, scenery, and neighborliness. He went on to say “my grandparents taught me the values of hard work and personal responsibility” and his parents, who were both teachers, “taught me the value of a good education.” Toward the end of the video, Ross can be seen in the left side of the shot, sitting around a kitchen table with an empty plate in front of him, holding hands with a young boy who was the focus of the shot and other unidentified people who were just out of camera range. The representation here was of Ross and (presumably) his family saying grace together before a meal. “As your governor, I’ll never stop fighting for the common sense Arkansas values that we were raised on and still believe in,” he said. Thus, the Christian act of showing gratitude was linked to “values” Arkansans “believe in.” The fantasy themes expressed here were that the

candidate was devout, faithful, and grounded. This video also dissociated an overt Christian message into a broader discourse of “values.”

The same shot of Ross saying grace at the kitchen table was used in his first television ad, which began airing in January 2014. In this ad, as the grace shot is shown, the words “Married for 30 Years” came across the screen, linking texts of faithfulness and groundedness to Christian faith. Ross did not narrate this ad; his voice was heard only at the end, saying, “I’ll never stop fighting for the common sense Arkansas values that we were raised on and still believe in.”

Ross’s rhetorical vision was that of a man who shares the same experiences and values of the people of Arkansas -- grounded in Christian faith – and would bring those values with him in his role as governor. The use of religious texts was personal but largely indirect and somewhat dissociative. The only direct mention of Ross’s own faith tradition was in the biography on his campaign Web site, which noted he and his wife are members of the Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in Little Rock. Like Pryor, Ross’s rhetorical vision adhered to the Nurturing Parent model by linking his desire to help Arkansans as governor to his Christian faith.

Of all of the candidates studied, Asa Hutchinson, a Republican candidate for governor, made the least use of religious texts, and all of them were used dissociatively. In a promotional video posted on his campaign Web site, which was later adapted into his first television ad, Hutchinson said, “Arkansas’s next governor will have to stand up to Washington liberals like President Obama and Nancy Pelosi. I’m Asa Hutchinson, and I’ve fought for conservative ideals all my life, like tax cuts for middle class families. I’ve always defended the sanctity of life, never wavered. And I believe in the Second Amendment, just what it says. And Obamacare? I’ve always opposed it, always will. I’ll be a governor with Arkansas values and Arkansas common sense.” Thus, Hutchinson equated “values” with secular political issues, such as gun rights, tax

cuts, and Obamacare. With the exception of his comment about defending the “sanctity of life,” none of these issues was religious in nature. Yet, by linking them with the term “values,” which has an inherent religious connotation, he created a fantasy theme as a candidate grounded in something beyond mere political belief.

His campaign posted another promotional video on its Web site, entitled “Asa on Values.” He was shown sitting in a dining room, wearing a white buttoned-down shirt open at the collar, which set him off in the frame against a darker background. “My values were shaped growing up on the farm, where you learned the importance of hard work and initiative and responsibility, helping your neighbors, the importance of community and faith,” he said. “These are the values I learned, and they have shaped both my private life and my public service as well. And these are the values that I will take into my role as governor.” Here, Hutchinson made a direct link between “values” and “faith,” listing the latter as an ingredient of the former. Thus, he created the fantasy theme as a candidate grounded in values rooted in faith.

The rhetorical vision created by Hutchinson was as a man grounded in a faith that not only informed his stances on political issues but would also undergird his actions as governor. The religious discourse used here was more subtle and dissociative than Ross. The only mention of Hutchinson’s own faith tradition was in a biography of his wife, Susan, who “volunteered as a teacher at a Christian school in Bentonville until she was expecting their first child.” Hutchinson’s rhetorical vision adhered to the Strict Father model, particularly in his use of action phrases such as “stand up,” “fight,” and “defend.”

In contrast to Hutchinson and Ross, the other Republican in the race, Curtis Coleman, was more overt and specific in his use of Christian texts. His biography on his campaign Web site noted he “studied in the Master of Divinity Program at Southwestern Baptist Theological

Seminary in Fort Worth TX,” which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

According to the seminary’s Web site, it “equips men and women with a strong theological foundation to fulfill God’s calling on their lives. Rooted in Scripture and branching out to fulfill the Great Commission, Southwestern’s motto is ‘Preach the Word, Reach the World’”

(Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). The biography also noted Curtis and his wife, Kathryn are “active” members of Little Rock’s First Baptist Church. The fantasy themes articulated here were the candidate as devout, righteous, and faithful.

In a speech announcing his candidacy for governor in February 2013, Coleman said, “if necessary, I will stand on the border of our state and say, ‘No. Not in Arkansas,’ to a federal government that would attempt to infringe or destroy those fundamental rights guaranteed to us by our Creator, including and especially the right to keep and bear arms.” In this instance, Coleman cast American political rights as gifts from God, rather than flowing from the Constitution. Thus, he cast himself not only as a candidate who is devout but as a candidate willing to fight, if necessary, to defend gifts given by the Creator.

On his campaign Web site, under a tab labeled “Marriage,” Curtis also made this statement: “God instituted and defined marriage as between a man and a woman before He instituted government. Government has no authority to redefine an institution that predated it.” In essence, Coleman asserted same-sex marriage cannot be a political matter because, in his view, God has already settled the issue. The fantasy theme here was not only that he was a candidate who would defend religious belief, but he was also an authority on its interpretation.

Coleman also issued the following press release saluting Christmas 2013: “Ten little toes on two little feet. A perfect little baby ... perfect in more ways than could be seen. ‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only

begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.’ John 1:14. Who besides the Father knew that crude Roman spikes would some day tear the flesh and sinew of those two little hands and two little feet? And so we can join with the shepherds and sing from our own redeemed hearts, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth, peace, good will toward men! Your friendship is one of those special gifts for which Kathryn and I are so thankful ... and what has continued to fuel our desire to serve you and the people of Arkansas!’” Here, Coleman’s expression of his devout Christian faith was linked to his thankfulness for his supporters, which was in turn linked to his desire to serve as governor.

Coleman also issued this press release saluting the National Day of Prayer: “Our country’s rich heritage was born in prayer, and if we are to continue that which our Founders gifted us, we must continue to bathe our homes, our schools, our families, our government, and our nation in fervent prayer. Religious freedom and reliance on God are the cultural foundation for most Americans and Arkansans. It is enormously important that, as a nation, at least once a year we focus our hearts and minds on Almighty God, but it is equally important that prayer is the hallmark of our daily lives.” By linking the continuation of “that which our Founders gifted us” to “fervent prayer,” Coleman conflated politics with religion in a way that once again made him a voice of interpretive authority. The “cultural foundation” for Arkansas is “religious freedom and reliance on God,” asserting that those two things go together, even though religious freedom, for some people, might not include God at all. Coleman went on to prescribe daily prayer as “enormously important.”

More than the other four candidates, Coleman created a rhetorical vision of himself as a man who was devout, righteous, and faithful and was not afraid to express his deeply held beliefs with authority. His vision was direct, personal, and not the least bit dissociative. His own

personal Baptist faith was central and discernible. He painted himself clearly as a Strict Father, with strong opinions grounded in what he sees as absolute truths.

Chart 1: Use of Fantasy Themes

<u>Pryor</u>	<u>Cotton</u>	<u>Ross</u>	<u>Hutchinson</u>	<u>Coleman</u>
Candidate is devout	Opponent is unfaithful	Candidate is devout	Candidate's values are grounded in faith	Candidate is devout
Candidate is faithful	Candidate is a defender of faith	Candidate is faithful	Candidate's politics are grounded in values	Candidate is faithful
Candidate is righteous	Opponent won't defend faith	Candidate's politics are grounded in faith		Candidate is righteous
Candidate's politics are grounded in faith		Candidate is thankful		Candidate's politics are grounded in faith
Candidate is thankful				Candidate is a defender of faith
				Candidate is thankful
				Candidate is an authority on faith

Chart 2: Use of Dissociation/Model of Discourse

<u>Pryor</u>	<u>Cotton</u>	<u>Ross</u>	<u>Hutchinson</u>	<u>Coleman</u>
Little dissociation	No dissociation	Dissociation	Dissociation	No dissociation
Nurturing Parent	Strict Father	Nurturing Parent	Strict Father	Strict Father

Discussion

RQ2, RQ3, and RQ5 asked how the candidates used Christian-oriented messaging and imagery to create fantasy themes, what fantasy themes they created, what rhetorical visions

flowed from those fantasy themes, and how the candidates used dissociative logic in their Christian-oriented messaging, including use of the terms “faith,” “values,” and “Arkansas values,” to create an appeal that goes beyond rigid dogma.

Each of these five candidates employed Christian and religious texts and imagery and dissociation in distinct ways. Pryor offered a highly personal vision of a man whose life and work as a senator were grounded in a sincere and deeply felt Christian faith. Cotton offered an indirect vision of himself as a strong candidate for Arkansas Christians by creating a contrast with Pryor, whom he depicted as unfaithful, untruthful, and unable to defend faith. Ross, like Pryor, offered a personal, though more dissociative, vision of himself as a man grounded in Christian faith who shared the values of the people of Arkansas and would bring those values with him to the governor’s mansion. Like Ross, Hutchinson offered a vision of a candidate grounded in a faith that informed his political views and would undergird his actions as governor, but he didn’t articulate those values as specifically Christian. Coleman alone offered a muscular, unvarnished vision of himself as Christian of strongly held beliefs inseparable from his political worldview. Pryor and Coleman made the least use of dissociative logic; Hutchinson, the most. Cotton, uniquely, focused on his opponent rather than himself, making dissociation unnecessary.

RQ4 asked if party labels affected candidates’ use of Christian-oriented messaging and imagery. Clearly, the two Democrats running in these races, Pryor and Ross, felt the need to use direct Christian messaging and imagery in their campaigns, while two of the Republicans, Cotton and Hutchinson, did not. The third Republican, Coleman, directly employed Christian texts in his speeches and press releases, but he did not use Christian imagery in his video materials. There was no direct correlation between party label and the degree of Christian-oriented messaging and

imagery. However, it should be noted that after the completion of this study, Coleman was eliminated in the Republican primary, and of the remaining four candidates, there was a correlation between party and the degree of Christian-oriented messaging used, with the Democrats using more than the Republicans.

RQ1 asked if Democratic candidates would adhere to the Nurturing Parent model and Republicans would align with the Strict Father model. The proposition was supported, although that finding cannot be generalized beyond these two Arkansas races.

Avenues for Future Study

As a textual analysis, this study was limited to identifying and analyzing Christian imagery and texts used in these campaigns and extrapolating the rhetorical visions the candidates were trying to create. Thus, this analysis could not answer a larger, and perhaps more important, question: Do these rhetorical visions actually work in persuading voters to support the candidates? Clearly, all of these candidates feel the need to engage in this practice, on the assumption it is necessary because Arkansas's electorate is overwhelmingly Christian. But investigating if this assumption is warranted is an avenue for future study. This could be done with focus groups to gauge reactions to exposure to Christian texts, or perhaps with an experiment in which the reactions of voters shown Christian texts could be compared with those of a control group.

Election Results

In the November election, after this study was completed, Cotton defeated Pryor and Hutchinson defeated Ross, part of a Republican wave that gave the GOP a clean sweep of every statewide elected office in Arkansas for the first time since Reconstruction.

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The 2013 Steubenville Rape Case: An Examination of Framing in Newspapers and User-generated Content

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Abstract

Using the lens of medium theory, this content analysis explored the framing of the Steubenville rape case in newspapers and blogs before, during and immediately following the trial. Our findings indicate newspapers focused on social media's role in documenting the rape and the trial of the two assailants. Blog posts, on the other hand, focused on rape victims' rights and social media's role in bringing the case to justice. Of the 78 newspaper articles and blog posts coded, medium type did not make a significant difference in the framing of perpetrators and the actual act of rape. However, there was a significant difference in how the media types framed the case in general. This is a noteworthy finding, as it appears that newspapers were colorblind in their coverage and not as prone to use race frames as indicated in previous studies. Conversely, blog posts offered a platform for discussing issues that were omitted in mainstream media such as women's rights, rape myths and the need for rape awareness/prevention programs for parents and youth.

Introduction

“Huge party!!! Banger!!!!” Trent Mays, a sophomore quarterback on Steubenville’s football team, tweeted in reference to an end-of-the-summer party held in his hometown of Steubenville, Ohio. Later that evening, Mays and his teammate, Ma’lik Richmond, raped a 16-year-old girl, who did not remember the details of the night until she saw photos, text messages and videos posted by attendees (Oppell, 2013). Social media helped to kick off the party. Social media would also lead to uncovering the crime and the conviction of Mays and Richmond a year later. When the story of the Steubenville rape first surfaced, media outlets portrayed the sexual assault as a night of teen alcohol-fueled partying gone wrong; however, the case soon revealed numerous layers and implications for new media and communications studies. Questions arose over Internet privacy, media ethics for user-generated content and compassion in the 21st Century.

Studies of today’s rape culture have generally focused on media framing of the act, victim blaming and gender framing and race (e.g., Benedict, 1992; O’Hara, 2013; Barnett, 2012; Worthington, 2013). Conclusions frequently confirm findings from Benedict’s (1992) landmark study that identified persistent rape myths perpetuated by journalistic accounts, such as the portrayal of survivors according to a “Madonna-whore” dichotomy that invites audiences to interrogate victim behaviors. This frame also includes the representation of perpetrators as isolated examples of abnormal behavior despite evidence their actions conformed to socially sanctioned gender norms.

Other studies (i.e. Brown, Testa and Messman-Moore, 2007, O’Hara, 2012; Durham, 2013) have looked at the situational factors in blaming rape victims including victim attractiveness, dress, alcohol intake and timing of resistance to sexual advances. Brown and Testa’s (2007) study indicated that “exposure to negative social reactions toward a rape victim reduced willingness to provide emotional support to that victim” (Brown et. al., 2007, p. 490-92). Race is also a common topic of analysis. For example, Benedict (1992) found the content of coverage to be racist, class-oriented, sexist and inaccurate. The most common rape story often contained the scenario of Caucasian female victim with an African-American male perpetrator.

More recently, studies have turned to framing of rape on the Web. Worthington (2013), who has written a series of articles on sexual assault, examined news framing of rape on the website of South Africa’s most popular newspaper after the passage of major legislation to reform the treatment of sexual assault from 2008-9. Her analysis of 145 online news stories revealed frames emphasizing male dominance and justice denied. Worthington attributes the publication’s deviation from traditional frames to news values such as drama, conflict and celebrity. Her findings suggest that media philosophy and media organization reputation can be important influences on news framing.

While these articles offer a great foundation for studies on rape and media coverage, there is a gap in the literature on articles that explore how social media and user-generated content have changed the dynamics of media framing of rape—particularly cases that are documented and exposed using social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Research on social media has become particularly important as people use it for “slut shaming,” or “victim blaming,” trends that have become more widespread in recent years (Alaniz, 2013). Teens videotape, photograph and share online the sexual antics of mostly girls who are intoxicated or inappropriately dressed to make fun of them and/or to teach them a lesson (McDonagh, 2013; Roberts, 2013; ABC News, 2013).

In one such example, in September 2012, 15-year-old Audrie Pott of Saratoga, Calif., was raped at a party when she was too intoxicated to defend herself. After passing out at a party, Pott

awoke to find writing all over her naked body. Her male classmates had taken and shared pictures of the entire act. After photos taken by her three assailants circulated at school and online, she took her own life (Lindin, 2013). In another example, Amanda Todd hanged herself in her home in British Columbia after the trauma she sustained in cyberspace carried over to the real world (Kemp, 2013; Lindin, 2013). She made a nine-minute YouTube video describing the incessant bullying and violent attacks she was enduring because three years earlier, when she was 12, a stranger had persuaded her to bare her breasts for a photo that was later circulated online. She committed suicide one month after making the video, in October of 2012.

With the explosion of social media, and extensive use of user-generated content, an environment exists in which individuals readily share personal information about themselves and others (Singer, 2013). It is common for people to document their lives through social media. Once this information is online, it is no longer in the control of the person who posted it (Solove and Schwartz, 2009). Accordingly, the widespread publication of personal information diminishes the individual's ability to protect his or her reputation and control perceptions by others.

Internet shaming and rape is a new phenomenon that deserves a closer look in the academy. This study analyzes differences in how blogs and mainstream media framed the Steubenville rape case, and the changing dynamics of traditional and social media framing of rape.

Review of the Literature

To explore the literature on rape and framing, we look to two streams of literature: (1) medium theory (2) media studies on rape. Meyrowitz (1985) coined the term "medium theory" to describe the incorporation of history and culture in studying media. Medium theory includes the idea that technology is a dominant force through which media influences society and culture. The theory utilizes a variety of approaches to examine how the means of expression of human communication influences the meanings of human communications. This study looks at media frames through the lens of medium theory to assess the extent to which medium (blogs versus newspapers) influenced the framing of the 2012 Steubenville rape case that received national coverage.

Social media networks have created an avenue by which the public can post messages that reach large audiences with both the details of their everyday lives and personal content of the lives of other people (Knight & Hunter, 2013). Social media tools include interactive social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn, as well as blogs, podcasts, message boards, online videos and picture albums and mobile telephone alerts (Taylor & Kent, 2010).

One of the other byproducts of UGC is the implication for privacy or lack thereof. In the Steubenville rape case, witnesses posted details of the rape on Twitter and users retweeted and commented on those posts. In a lapse of judgment, a major television network broadcasted the name of the victim, a blatant violation of journalists' ethical standards and scholars' best practices for covering rape cases. However, a determined crime blogger noted the tweets regarding the rape and alerted authorities of the crime. If not for those tweets and subsequent blog posts, the victim may not have reported her rape.

Blogs

Blogging is another consideration in this study as a blogger is credited with helping to break the case along with a hacker who posted video featuring details of the night's events. Scholars often equate blogging with citizen or participatory journalism (Goode, 2009). In its simplest form, the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary describes a blog as "a Website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by

the writer.” Stanyer (2006) adds that blogs are the online equivalent of a journal or diary, with regular entries that include video clips and photos.

Media framing

A growing list of researchers has examined media coverage of social problems such as spousal abuse and racial issues from a media framing perspective (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Messner & Solomon, 1993; Entman and Rojecki, 1993). Such studies generally support the idea that journalists and editors select, package and disseminate news through organizational processes and ideologies (Watkins, 2001). In their exploration of news narrative structures repeated over time, Bennett and Edelman (1985) argued that most news stories maintain the status quo by presenting social problems within comfortable cognitive frames that disallow the entry of alternative renditions.

The basis of framing theory presumes the prevalent media will focus attention on newsworthy events and place them within a sphere of meaning. In his landmark study, Entman and Rojecki (1993) discussed how journalists embed frames within a text and thus influence thinking. He defined the term by noting that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52).

Framing and rape

As mentioned in our introduction, media studies of framing of rape and violence toward women have traditionally fallen into one of three categories: victim blaming, gender frames, and race. Studies examining news about gender violence frequently confirm findings from Benedict’s landmark study, which identified persistent rape myths perpetuated by journalistic accounts (1992). Survivors most frequently are portrayed within a narrow dichotomy, suggesting either virginal innocence crushed by an unwarranted attack or promiscuous irresponsibility that actually provoked assault with a variety of behavioral choices such as substance abuse, revealing attire, or decisions to venture to unsafe locations (Benedict, 1992).

Other analyses of rape often focus on the dynamics of race and stereotypes. Benedict (1992) found the articles included depictions that were racist, classist, sexist and misleading. The most common covered rape story contained the scenario of Caucasian female victim and an African-American male perpetrator. These stories, which proved statistically inaccurate, reflected and perpetuated the attitude that Caucasian women are more valuable than African-American women. In another study on race, Lule (1995) evaluated the media coverage of Mike Tyson after his sentencing for the rape of Desiree Washington, a contestant in the Miss Black America pageant. He noted that African-American writers reflected on the idea that the African-American community sympathized with Tyson, while showing little sympathy for his accuser. Conversely, the most dominant portrayal of mainstream media was the depiction of Tyson as a savage or decidedly inhuman beast.

Victim blaming is a chief segment of the rape literature. O’Hara (2012) concluded that much of the news media’s coverage of sexual violence frequently portrays brutal rapists who prey on victims depicted either as ‘virgins’ or as promiscuous women who invited the rape (e.g., Benedict, 1992; O’Hara, 2013, p. 247). The victim-blaming frame places culpability on the victim to indicate she is responsible for the action, i.e., she chose to consume alcohol, to dress a certain way and/or to venture into an unsafe area, thus suggesting that she should have known better than to engage in risky behaviors. Such victim-blaming discourse is a staple of sexual assault news (Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997; Weaver et al., 2000; Worthington, 2013).

Another study indicated that rape is more likely to occur when the perpetrators are in a group (i.e. Murnen and Kohlman, 2007). The two looked at sexual aggression in college athletics and fraternities, and concluded that data backed up the association between all-male groups and sexual assault and the idea that sexual violence is masculine. Murnen and Kohlman (2007) argue that athletes commit violence against women because of the sense of entitlement that is instilled in them by universities that pamper them.

Medium Theory: New media rape

More recently, studies have turned their attention to new media platforms. Durham, (2013) found that bloggers and commentators quickly identified the patriarchal and victim-blaming aspects of The New York Times' coverage, resulting in an influential petition and an apology from The Times. Durham's (2013) analysis revealed bloggers and commentators engaged in feminist dialogue, raising awareness of patriarchal frames of sexual violence as well as fostering reformist actions. However, the study also pointed to a continued need for watchfulness and activism around sexual violence and child abuse.

Similarly, Worthington (2013) examined online news about the gang rape of a teenage girl after she left her homecoming dance in Richmond, Calif. Findings suggested frames debated the crime's causes, with a variety of sources offering competing explanations, many of which invoked identity discourses tying intersections of gender, race, and class with place. In contrast to previous research, some framing implicated social structures by referencing gender socialization as a cause of rape. In another study, Worthington (2013) examined news framing of a rape case in stories published on SFGate, the website of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the largest metropolitan daily newspaper in Northern California. Worthington found online media added a fresh perspective of commentary that also included women's advocates representing an anti-rape organization and the National Organization of Women and teachers.

Worthington (2013) attributes the change to recent reforms in gender violence coverage and online news' increased need to update major stories. Study findings also suggested that frames debated the crime's causes with a variety of sources offering competing explanations that often tied to intersections of gender, race and class. In contrast to previous research, some framing implicated "social structures by referencing gender socialization as a cause of rape" (Worthington, 2013, p. 116). In her conclusions, Worthington encouraged researchers to study social media trends to remain current in the rapidly changing media environment.

Medium theory is concerned with the role that technology plays in changing society, shaping patterns of communication in human relations and bringing change to larger aspects of social organization in society (Deibert, Ronald J. Parchment, 1997). With these goals in mind, our research questions explore the following questions:

RQ₁: How did newspapers and blogs differ in their characterization of social media in the coverage of the Steubenville rape case?

RQ₂: How did newspapers and blogs differ in their framing of the Steubenville rape case?

RQ₃: How did newspapers and blogs differ in the characterization of the perpetrators?

RQ₄: How did newspapers and blogs differ in their characterization of the victim?

Methodology

To address these four research questions, this study examined news coverage of the Steubenville case through content and textual analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Altheide & Johnson (1994) instruct readers to immerse themselves in the data, organize it into categories and ask other researchers and readers to look over their articles and gauge the validity.

Similarly, Squires (2007) suggests a grounded theory approach based in the idea that a researcher must be guided as much as possible by the meanings available in the data themselves rather than shoehorning data into preexisting theoretical models. Through intense interaction with text, one can achieve confidence that his or her analysis makes sense and go beyond mere opinion (Squires, 2007).

Therefore, the textual analysis included reading and identification of the key themes emphasized in the selected sample (Entman and Rojecki, 1993). The primary researcher and two graduate students read the artifacts multiple times and highlighted code words and themes. Cycling through data, the researcher was able to see similarities and differences in the articles and blogs and keep track of thematic elements (Squires, 2007). After compiling the sub-themes, an emergent pattern was created, which provided the evidence for an argument about the nature of news media coverage of rape.

Content analysis

Content analysis helped “identify, enumerate and analyze occurrences of specific message and message characteristics embedded in communication texts” (Frey, Botan, Friedman, Kreps, 1992, p.194; Condelli, L. & Heide, W. (2004). The headline and entire story was the coding unit of analysis. To ensure that the constructed categories were the most appropriate for this study (description of the victim, description of the perpetrators, social media and overall frames), the researchers conducted an initial analysis of themes. An agreement on 40 out of 44 items coded (91% agreement) indicated the themes were sufficiently operationalized.

Once these themes were established, the primary investigator coded the entire sample of newspaper articles and blog posts (n=78). A second researcher, a graduate student, separately evaluated 10% (8) of the units and cataloged them. The intercoder reliability test using Holsti’s coefficient yielded 100% agreement for number words in stories/blogs, 100% for article type, 96.1% for frame, 90% for depictions of perpetrators, 96% for depictions of victim and 98% for depictions of rape. Chi-squares, frequencies, percentages and t-tests were the statistical tests used to answer the research questions. Analysis of the data using the categories is summed up using frequencies, percentages and descriptive statistics shown in four tables to display the findings—one for each of the four areas of comparison.

Sample

To make the research manageable, the researcher confined the study to newspaper articles and blog entries released Dec. 12, 2012 to June 11, 2013 during the period that corresponded with the nonjury trial of the accused rapists and the aftermath of the sentencing. To select the newspaper articles for our sample, researchers conducted a search on LexisNexis Academic using the keywords “Steubenville” and “rape.”

We included the census of the newspaper articles and most blog posts found on Lexis Nexis in our sample.¹ Altogether, the sample included 44 newspaper articles and 34 blogs. The newspapers in our sample were *The New York Times* (7), *The Washington Post* (2), *USA Today* (4), *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (20), and the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* (11). National, mainstream newspapers and local papers were included. Because of its proximity to Steubenville—approximately 40 miles—Pittsburgh-area newspapers were considered as local publications.

¹ For the Huffington Post, which had 55 posts, we used a systematic sampling of every 10th blog entry to select the sample of blog posts from the publication. For Jezebel, which had 34 posts, we used a systematic sampling of every over blog post to select the sample of blog posts from the publication. Many of the blog posts were similar in content to other blog posts or only briefly mentioned the Steubenville rape case, but did not focus on it.

Table 1: Number of newspaper articles and blog posts included in sample

Publication	n(Lexis Nexis n)	%
Pittsburgh Post Gazette	20 (20)	26%
Pittsburgh Tribune Review	11 (11)	14%
USA Today	4 (4)	5%
New York Times	7 (7)	9%
Washington Post	2 (2)	3%
<hr/>		
Total newspaper articles	44	
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Jezebel	17 (34)	22%
Deadspin	8 (9)	10%
Nation's Blog	3 (3)	4%
Huffington Post	4 (55)	5%
New York Times Blog	2 (6)	3%
<hr/>		
Total blog posts	34	
<hr/>		
Total in sample	78	100%

The researchers chose The New York Times and Washington Post because these news outlets are considered elite, which means they have the power to influence how other news outlets cover various events (Merrill et. al., 1980).

Researchers selected blogs using Newstex, an aggregator of more than 3,000 blogs indexed on LexisNexis Academic (Table 1). The blogs in our sample were: Jezebel (17), Deadspin (8), The Nation’s Blogs and (3), Huffington Post (4) New York Times Blog (2). These are premiere blogs that have a niche audience relevant to our study or are spinoffs of well-known parent companies. Jezebel, a feminist blog owned by Gawker Media focusing on women’s interests, reports that it has roughly 10 million monthly views. Deadspin, which focuses on sports, news and commentary, has a self-reported readership of 460 million views overall. The Nation’s Blog focuses on political and social misrepresentations. Both the Huffington Post and the New York Times are offshoots of their parent companies. The New York Times blog has a self-reported circulation of almost 2 million people.

Findings and Discussion

The first research question asked how did newspapers and blogs characterize social media in the Steubenville rape case. To answer this question, we coded various aspects of social media (Table 2). Findings indicated that there was not a significant difference in how the two platforms characterized social media in their coverage of the case. The Anonymous theme made up the largest percentage in this category with 18 or 35.29% of newspaper articles and 15 or 42.85% of blog entries. Content focused on how the 12-minute video leaked by an anonymous cell or “hactivist” group called, “KnightSec,” revealed footage of teens making cruel jokes

about the rape case. Articles and blog entries often discussed the video of “drunk Steubenville high school athletes having a blast making fun of the 16-year-old girl who was raped by beloved football players Trent Mays and Ma’lik Richmond last August.”

Articles and posts included the idea that the video is disturbing and that the speaker identified by the name, ‘misternunya,’ described himself as an independent journalist who posted the video. In the video, one of the onlookers, “Michael Nodianos cracks himself up as he calls the girl ‘deader than’ JFK, OJ’s wife, Caylee Anthony, and Trayvon Martin, amongst others.”

Table 2: Newspaper versus blog mention of user-generated content

Mentions of UGC	Newspapers		Blogs	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Perpetrators arrested/sentenced/charged with threatening victim on Twitter	4	7.84%	2	5.7%
Photos/texts of victims released on Facebook	6	11.76%	4	11.4%
Photos/texts of victims released on YouTube	9	17.64%	4	11.4%
Photos of Victim Released on Instagram	2	3.92%	1	2.85%
Blogger helped break case	6	11.76%	8	22.85%
Anonymously released video/asked for public apology	18	35.29%	15	42.85%
Perpetrator’s cousin makes cyber threats via online media	6	11.76%	1	2.85%
n=78 $\chi^2=4.73$ df=6 p-value=.58 p < .05	51	99.97%	35	99.90%

YouTube was the second most popular user-generated content mentioned by newspapers with 9 (11.76%) total. Conversely, the role of bloggers was the second most popular category for blogs with 8 (22.85%) total and the third most popular for newspapers with 6 (11.76%) total. Instagram was the least popular social media platform for both media platforms with only a small percentage of the sample mentioned it.

Both newspaper and blog entries in our sample indicated via Twitter posts, videos and photographs revealed the two assailants had sexually assaulted Jane Doe for several hours while other partygoers watched. Newspaper articles and blog posts also focused on how the sexual assault made local news—even after various students had deleted the various Instagram photos and tweets of the victim, who was from across the Ohio River in Weirton, W.Va. After learning of the video and images, the rape victim came forward with allegations of being drugged and gang-raped by the two high school football players who were from Steubenville, a town of 19,000 in eastern Ohio (Broderick, 2012).

Many of the artifacts in our sample cited other blogs and tweets in their coverage of the sexual assault. Newspaper articles were more likely to frame social media as having a role in the rape and in trying the victim before the case reached the courtroom. For instance, reporters discussed how the case originated in user-generated content and highlighted efforts by Goddard, a 45-year-old Web analyst and crime blogger (Macur & Schweber, 2012). According to many articles, she heard about the case early on and rushed to investigate it herself because she had little faith that the authorities would do a thorough job. Goddard took screenshots of posts, photographs and videos before posters removed them and posted them on her site, Prinniefied.com.

Likewise, blogs mentioned Goddard's role in breaking the case. A December 17, 2012, Jezebel blog entry titled, "We Wouldn't Know About the Steubenville Rape Case If It Wasn't for the Blogger Who 'Complicated' Things," attributed the publicity of the Steubenville case to Goddard. The blog entry concluded that without the social media angle, the Steubenville rape would have just been another story about a young woman raped by athletes while she was unconscious from drinking too much alcohol.

Later, media coverage turned to protests regarding the handling of the case and the perception of a cover-up. During this phase, blog entries cited tweets. According to one blog entry, hundreds of people turned out in the small town to support the victim. Several attendees live tweeted comments such as: #OccupySteubenville[19] was priceless. I hope any other rape victims feel comfortable coming forward. Witnesses should come forward. Elizabeth (@ElizabethRumson) December 29, 2012[20]. Live tweeting—and the posting of other user-generated content—is noteworthy as social media provide an idea of what was going on at the rally. They also served as abbreviated news stories for people who were not able to attend the event. Once again, social media played an important role in the Steubenville rape case.

After the trial ended, blog topics ranged from coverage of sexual assault on college campuses, to rape in New Delhi, and analyses of how mainstream media covered the trial. The Huffington Post blog, in particular, analyzed media's coverage of the case. Blog posts focused on how patriarchy dominates media's framing of rape. One entry asserted that Poppy Harlow, a CNN Reporter, was 'outraged' over Steubenville rape coverage criticism. It included the following excerpt (Poppy Harlow, CNN Reporter, 'Outraged' Over Steubenville Rape Coverage Criticism, 2013, para. 1):

CNN's coverage of the Steubenville rape trial verdict was met with an onslaught of criticism this week after network reporters stressed the impact the decision will have on the rapists, not on the victim. According to sources who spoke exclusively with The Wrap, the criticism is taking its toll on reporter Poppy Harlow.

Depiction of rape

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines rape as forced sexual intercourse and emphasizes that force can include physical or psychological coercion (Barnett, 2012). The words used to describe sexual assault can change an individual's perception of a rape case (Table 3). In the case of the Steubenville sexual assault, the two assailants digitally penetrated the victim. It is also important to note that this was not the first time the victim was digitally penetrated that night, according some of the eyewitness reports.

Newspapers and blogs in our sample tended to remain objective when it came to describing the act. The overwhelming majority of the artifacts in our sample described the act as "rape" with 33 (62.26%) of newspapers using the term and 22 or (70.96%) of blogs using the term. The second most popular term was "sexual assault" with 11 (20.75%) of newspapers using the term and 5 (16.12%) of blogs using the term. These differences between newspapers and blogs were not statistically significant. The term 'digital penetration' was also common with 7 (13.20%) of newspapers and 2 (6.45%) of blogs using the term. We thought this noteworthy, as the actual act was digital penetration. While people might question the cruelty of "digital penetration," in Ohio, there is no ambiguity in what constitutes rape (Ohio Revised Code, n.d.). "Digital penetration" is rape. This term emerged after Anonymous released video footage detailing the assault and Jane Doe described the night's events at trial.

Table 3: Characterization of rape by newspapers and blogs

Characterization of Rape	Newspapers		Blogs	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Rape	33	62.26%	22	70.96%
Sexual Assault	11	20.75%	5	16.12%
Digital Penetration	7	13.20%	2	6.45%
Oral Sex	2	3.77%	2	6.45%
n=78 $\chi^2=1.57$ df=3 p-value: .67 p < .05	53	99.98%	31	99.98%

Twitter posts, videos, and photographs circulated by some individuals who attended the parties suggesting that the perpetrators had sexually assaulted the unconscious victim over several hours while others watched (Macur & Schweber, December 17, 2012). In one photograph posted on Instagram by a Steubenville High football player, Jane Doe is shown looking unresponsive as two boys carry her by her wrists and ankles. Twitter users wrote the words “rape” and “drunk girl” in their posts. Comments in the Anonymous video included, “She is so raped,” he says. “Her puss [sic] is about as dry as the sun right now.” Later in the video, one of his friends says, “That’s not cool bro” and “That’s like rape. It is rape. They raped her.”

Citizens carried out the theme of rape using hashtags and Twitter posts. Almost immediately, the hashtag “#rapeapologist surfaced on Twitter along with a petition demanding CNN apologize to the rape victim and her family, prompted by www.change.org. Citizens accused CNN of portraying the perpetrators in a sympathetic light. A response on Twitter declared, “@PoppyHarlowCNN, those boys destroyed their own lives when they committed a violent crime called rape” (Sciullo, 2013).

Media Frames

Research question three asked how did newspapers and blogs differ in their framing of the Steubenville rape case? Newspaper articles split 50/50 in their framing of football players as either All-American athletes with a positive or negative connotation with 12 (35.29%) newspaper articles and 3 (12%) of blog entries using this description (Table 4). This finding was statically significant. Newspapers had a similar number of negatively framed articles that discussed football players—12 (35.29%). All-American football framed negatively was the most popular theme for blogs with 10 (40%) of the posts containing this frame The idea of a cover-up was the second most common frame in blog posts with 8 (32%) of the posts containing this frame.

Table 4: Frames in newspapers and blog

Frames	Newspapers		Blogs	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
All-American Football-positive	12	35.29%	3	12%
All-American Football-negative	12	35.29%	10	40%
All-American Football-neutral	4	11.76%	0	0
Rape cover-up by officials/coaches/friends of players etc.	6	17.64%	8	32%
Victim/slut-shaming discussed as societal concern	0	0	4	16%
n=78 $\chi^2=12.76$ df=4 p-value .01 p < .05	34	99.98%	25	100.00%

When we began the study, we were not aware the “All-American” athlete frame had both positive and negative connotations—which led to a change in our codebook to reflect the true nature of the articles and blog posts. Negative articles characterized the assailants as having a “lack of morals and values.” Articles with a positive tone focused on their hero status and their contributions to the football team.

A *New York Times* piece led with the idea that the party was to be the last big night out before many of Steubenville’s high school students left the “decaying steel town,” bound for college (Macur and Schweber, 2013, para. 3). The article continued that for others, it was simply a way to “cap off a summer of socializing before school started in less than two weeks.” The paragraph ended with the idea that the football players had a bright future. “For the lucky ones on the Steubenville High School football team, it would be the start of another season of possible glory as stars in this football-crazy county.”

Blogs were more likely to frame the football team negatively. For instance, they discussed how football perpetuates a rape culture. A Huffington Post blog entry stated that this “hypermasculine, gender exclusive environment that young men are widely encouraged to excel in, often at the expense of their education,” fosters incidents such as the Steubenville rape (“American Football Culture and Sexual Violence,” 2013). The article included this excerpt (“American Football Culture and Sexual Violence,” 2013, para. 10):

Just look at the teenage football players involved in the horrific Steubenville rape case. In a town where the high school football team is lauded as if it were a college or professional team, these boys displayed an ignominious understanding of sex, boundaries, and their own power in the world. They not only raped and dragged around a passed-out young woman, but some were recorded boasting about it—the assault seemingly proving their manhood. Extremely disturbing, yes, but are we surprised?

Allegations of a cover up

The case led to allegations of a cover-up to protect the well-liked Steubenville High football team (McDonagh, 2013). Articles that included this frame encompassed the idea that the coach was standing by his players. A *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* article discussed how the attention brought allegations of a “cover-up against police authorities and ridicule of the town for what some consider unhealthy hero worship of Steubenville High’s wildly popular and successful Big Red team” (Togneri, 2013, para. 10).

Judge Thomas Lipps, who presided over the trial, described his decision not to move the trial to another venue as a tactic to show transparency, “it is important to have open proceedings to address rumors and opinions about the case that have sprouted on social media and elsewhere” (Ove, 2013, para. 2-3). His comment was in response to accusations by bloggers and online activists who accused local officials of “a cover-up, asking why more students have not been charged and suggesting that justice has been trumped by the prestige of the popular high school football team.”

Depictions of perpetrators

Research question three asked how did newspapers and blogs characterize the perpetrators. In contrast to articles that used frames, non-biased articles described the perpetrators with objective adjectives, such as students and 16-year-olds. Other articles that did not frame the perpetrators, simply described them as two “high-school athletes” with no further elaboration. Both newspapers and blogs mostly identified the boys as football players with 37

(88.09%) newspaper articles and 20 (62.50%) of blog entries using this description (Table 5). The term ‘rape crew’ was also used to describe the boys in two blog posts 2 (6.25%).

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette featured this example of the objective coverage that we found in our sample “a nonjury trial of two Steubenville High School students raping a 16-year-old West Virginia girl last summer will be open to the public, an Ohio judge ruled Wednesday” (Ove, 2013). Rather than describing the victim as intoxicated and the boys as football heroes, Ove (2013) described the party and the trial. The article included the following quote, “Malik Richmond and Trent Mays, both 16, are accused of attacking the girl after an alcohol-fueled party in August in Steubenville (para. 4).” Conversely, other articles in our sample characterized her as either drunk, inebriated, passed out, etc.

	Newspapers		Blogs	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Steubenville High School football players	37	88.09%	20	62.50%
Steubenville High School students	1	2.38%	1	3.12%
Boasted about posts	2	4.76%	3	9.37%
Apologized	1	2.38%	2	6.25%
Sobbed	1	2.38%	2	6.25%
Rape Crew	0	0	2	6.25%
Drunk Football Players	0	0	2	6.25%
<i>n</i> =78 $\chi^2=10.63$ <i>df</i> =6 <i>p</i> -value=.10 <i>p</i> <.05	42	99.99%	32	99.99%

Other posts discussed the boys’ behavior during the rape and the trial period. A few discussed that one of the boys sobbed after the judge sentenced him. Another blog entry focused on how CNN handled the court case and appeared sympathetic toward the perpetrators. In an in-depth New York Times article, a reporter described an assailant’s home and interviewed family members and friends who depicted him as an All-American athlete. The article included this flattering description of Mays’ athletic achievements: “two shelves filled with athletic trophies could be seen inside a second-story room.” The same article included an excerpt from Adam Nemann, Mays’ lawyer, who described the case as unusual because the police collected no physical evidence or testimony from the girl who asserts she was raped (Macur and Schweber, 2013).

Nemann also discussed the question of consent. He said, “was she conscious enough to give consent or not? We think she was. She gave out the passcode to her phone after the sexual assault was said to have occurred” (Macur and Schweber, 2013, p. para. 30). The assailant’s lawyers also discussed the disadvantage that social media created for his client because so many people discussed the incident online through blogs and on Twitter. He described the case as an uphill battle because people formulated opinions based on what they see on social media. “In a small community, it exponentially snowballs out of control. I think the scales are a bit unbalanced.”

However, he countered that the online photographs and posts could ultimately be “a gift” for his client’s case because the victim had posted provocative comments and photographs on her Twitter page before the incident. He added that those online posts “demonstrated that she was sexually active” and showed that she was “clearly engaged in at-risk behavior” (Macur and Schweber, 2013, p. para. 55).

Victim framing

Research question four asked how did newspapers and blogs characterize the victim. In contrast to articles that used frames, non-biased articles described the victim with objective descriptors, such as student and 16-year-old (Table 6).

Table 6: Newspaper versus blog depiction of victim

Victim identified as:	Newspapers		Blogs	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
16-year-old girl/teen/student/victim	28	42.42%	22	57.89%
W. Virginia teen/girl/student	16	24.24%	3	7.89%
Unconscious/incapacitated/ drunk/inebriated victim/girl/student	17	25.75%	7	18.42%
Jane Doe	5	7.57%	6	15.78%
n=78 $\chi^2=6.81$ df=3 p-value: .08 p<.05	66	99.98%	38	99.98%

Differences in how newspaper articles and blogs framed the victim were not statistically significant. Both platforms mostly identified Jane Doe as a 16-year old with 28 (42.42%) newspaper articles and 22 (57.89%) of blog entries using this description (Table 6). West Virg. Girl/resident was the next most popular term for newspapers with 16 (24.4%) using the term. Three (7.89%) of the blog entries in our used West Virg. teen/girl/victim as a descriptor. Conversely, adjectives describing the victim as intoxicated and/or unconscious were the second most popular theme for blogs with 7 (18.42%) of posts using it. Worth noting is media rarely depicted the assailants, who had also been drinking the night of the event, was rarely revealed in articles. Rounding out the top three descriptors for newspapers was unconscious with 17 (25.75%) of posts using the term. Worth noting is some reporters mentioned their publication’s policy of not identifying sexual assault victims. In only a few articles were more details about the victim and circumstances of the rape offered.

Slut shaming/victim blaming

Also noteworthy is the ‘slut-shaming/blaming’ frame was not as common as we initially anticipated when beginning the study. Slut shaming and victim blaming were most often mentioned to discuss tendencies by the media or society to blame the rape victim for her attire and behavior (Benedict, 1992).

When articles included the term ‘slut,’ it was usually in reference to Jane Doe’s response to the sexual assault in text messages, “I wasn’t being a slut. They were taking advantage of me.” One example of a negative portrayal included: “The victim had a crush on (Trent) Mays, the quarterback of Steubenville High’s wildly popular ‘Big Red’ football team. She looked forward to saw him at a party on Aug. 11, witnesses testified.” However, victim blaming was illustrated in some of the articles that offered details of her drinking. For instance, many articles and blog posts included this description of the trial, “a 16-year-old girl was so intoxicated from drinking blue slushes spiked with vodka that she could not consent to sex with two high school football players charged with raping her after a night of partying, prosecutors said Wednesday (Ove, 2013, para. 1.”

A *New York Times* article discussed the dichotomy between people’s feeling about Jane Doe and the perpetrators. In the article, Nate Hubbard, a Big Red volunteer coach, voiced harsh, suspicions (Macur and Schweber, 2013, para. 3). “The rape was just an excuse, I think,” said the 27-year-old Hubbard, who is No. 2 on the Big Red’s career rushing list. “What else are you going to tell your parents when you come home drunk like that and after a night like that?” said

Hubbard, who is one of the team's 19 coaches. "She had to make up something. Now people are trying to blow up our football program because of it (Macur and Schweber, 2013, para. 3)." In an effort to provide both sides of the story, the article discussed how some people accepted the "account of sexual assault, and were weary of what they called the protection and indulgence afforded the football team." The article stated that the people who were critical of the football team and its protected status, real or perceived, did not want to be identified for fear of retribution from Big Red football fans.

Referring back to the literature (Worthington, 2013; Durham, 2013), our findings indicated that blogs provided a platform to introduce some different frames—particularly on advancing women's rights and curbing gender violence. For instance, to counteract the victim-blaming frame, blogs often discussed it and offered solutions for stopping it. In a New York Times blog post that focused on a similar rape incidence, the author discussed how victim blaming is exemplified on social media. Tweets from teenagers across the country "had no trouble placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of an unconscious girl, showing that what happened in Steubenville certainly did not happen in a vacuum. One came from a parent, shown holding her own child even as she condemned someone else. As parents, we owe it to ourselves and our children to look at the uncomfortable truths surrounding this case and figure out how to ensure it doesn't happen again (Schulden, 2013, para. 5)."

In fact, many blogs and newspaper articles discussed the rape culture; however, Jezebel, Huffington Post and The Nation's Blogs were more likely to discuss women's rights than the other publications in our sample. A January 4, 2013, Nation's Blog piece described "America's rape problem" and attacked media's coverage of sexual assault. "We live in a country where media is revered as The New York Times finds it necessary to describe an 11-year-old gang rape victim as 'wearing makeup and fashions more appropriate to a woman in her 20s.'" The blogger stated that while the public response to the widely covered Steubenville case has largely been supportive of the victim – "thanks in part to pictures distributed online by partygoers that show the girl clearly unconscious - there has also been the standard victim-blaming."

Conclusions and Implications

Referring back to the literature review, medium theory often focuses on the particular characteristics of each individual medium with an emphasis on how communication technologies transform the political, social and cultural configuration of society. The Internet holds much opportunity to spread information and to reach a large audience as a forum for activism (Royal, 2003). Web coverage, community and grassroots efforts may have helped to level the playing field when it comes to garnering support for rape victims.

Several implications emerged from this analysis of blogs and newspapers. First, while not statistically significant, blogs and newspapers differed in their depictions of social media. Blogs focused on rape victim rights, rape culture, previous media frames, and one blogger's role in mainstream media's coverage of the case. Conversely, newspapers focused on social media's role in this case, the Steubenville football team, the trial and circumstances surrounding the party such as alcohol and unsupervised teenagers. Newspapers often framed social media as a tool that fueled the 'mob mentality' mentioned in our literature review.

One explanation for the difference in how blogs and newspapers framed the case differently is the tenets of journalism and news values, as revealed by Worthington (2013) in her study findings on rape and gender violence. Responsible journalists try not to inject their own biased opinions into stories. Conversely, blogs implicitly focus on a person's opinions as mentioned in the review of the literature. In addition, one of the key news values in the news industry is to lead with something that is odd—in this case, it was the role of social media. The

social media angle helped it pass the news value test. In other words, without the social media angle, it is a nonstory because girls are raped all the time. What made it national news is students videotaped the rape and used social media to broadcast it for the world to see.

Sourcing and attribution is another key difference in blogs and newspapers. Traditional journalistic norms require that journalists include sources for assertions made, which is one reason newspaper reporters were more likely to focus on the role of social media in the coverage of the Steubenville case. Newspaper reporters included actual tweets and hashtags verbatim in their news reports. This type of coverage gave the article credibility. In addition, newspapers offered more in-depth research information and details on a topic versus blogs, which are shorter and more conversational in tone. Bloggers, on the other hand, do not have to include secondary sources as blogs are understood to be based on the opinions of the writer.

Media as part of the story

While social media was the primary focal point of articles and blog entries, traditional media also became a part of mainstream and social media coverage of the case. FOX News, CNN, MSNBC and a local station revealed Jane Doe's name on the air (Fung, 2013). In its attempt to present fair and balanced reporting, commentators accused CNN of portraying the assailants as All-American athletes who had never been in trouble before. Many of the blogs and newspapers in our sample addressed these oversights (Fung, 2013). Traditional news outlets responded that they addressed the many questions raised by citizen journalists and creators of user-generated content such as releasing the name of Jane Doe. The Washington Post underscored this sentiment with this excerpt, "The Washington Post in general does not name juveniles accused of a crime, but because of the widespread publicity surrounding this case, it is naming the defendants."

In response to this oversight, Poynter Institute quoted Lauren Wolfe, director of the Women's Media Center "Women Under Siege" project: "What I'm so furious about, after the act perpetrated on this young woman, is our media's take (Sciullo, 2013). Mainstream media, of course, reflects society—so in this case, they reflect rape culture. But shouldn't we expect more from the media? Aren't there such things as news judgment and context and analysis?"

Framing of race

Secondly, race was not an issue in the articles in our sample as we anticipated based on the literature review. Based on our review of the literature, we thought race would be highlighted more frequently in this case in which both a black and white male sexually assaulted a female e.g., Benedict, 1992; O'Hara, 2013; Barnett, 2012). However, race was rarely, if ever mentioned. This may be a signal of the evolution of rape coverage and possibly the various studies on rape have permeated the newsrooms. Another explanation of the colorblind coverage may be because there were two perpetrators of different races—the race frame was neutralized. We also attribute this in part to the uniqueness of this case and the many different angles for the press and citizens to cover. News values include proximity, conflict, uniqueness, celebrity, timeliness, etc. This case included many of these angles so there was no need to focus on race.

Education

Thirdly, blogs urged parents and educators to be proactive in addressing privacy and social media concerns such as the ones that emerged in the Steubenville case to prevent similar cases from occurring in the future. In October 2013, both assailants were sentenced to at least a year in juvenile jail. Mays was sentenced to an additional year in jail on a charge of the illegal use of a minor in nudity-oriented material, to be served after his rape sentence is completed. This

sentencing brought closure to a high-profile case that unfolded after an onslaught of text messages, social media posts, online photos and video clips unveiled the sexual assault of an underage and unconscious female (Welsh-Huggins, 2013).

Teenagers who do not fully understand the legal consequences of sending sexually explicit text messages are finding themselves labeled as convicted sex offenders for the rest of their lives. Solutions are diverse. Bill Albert, spokesman for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, encourages parents to concentrate on making their kids aware of the potential legal and emotional implications of sexting (“Sex and Tech: Results from a Survey of Teens and Young Adults,” 2008). Conversely, Hasinoff (2013) advocates for laws that lessen the severity of punishment for sexting. She encourages legislators and legal authorities to think of consensual sexting as a creative form of self-expression. She argues that new media researchers must facilitate a shift in common sense by examining how and why teenagers and adults sext (Hasinoff, 2013).

Compassion and civility

Professors and parents might also encourage students to challenge people who practice Internet shaming. Students must be willing to speak up and to criticize people for their ideas and not the individual themselves. We encourage educators to teach units on compassion and empathy to help people think of how they might feel if they were on the receiving end of shameful content. Compassion is “the emotional response generated by the suffering of others and then wanting to act on it by helping” (Taylor, 2013). Empathy is defined as the ability to imagine walking in the shoes of another (Vanderbilt University, 2009). Compassion and empathy for the rape may have compelled bystanders to stop the sexual assault instead of recording it and sharing it via social media. Goleman (n.d.) states “with compassionate empathy” individuals not only understand a person’s predicament and feel with them, but they are also spontaneously moved to help, if needed.

Social media policies

Fourthly, social media policies might also be useful in preventing future cases. People often have a morbid curiosity for events that are disturbing. A good journalist remains empathetic while retaining his or her professionalism. This raises the question of how to draw new boundary lines of privacy with the existence of the Internet and social media. Although privacy is a personal right that should be protected, how can we prevent future atrocities without putting a face to these crimes? Professional journalists who are trained in these areas have an understanding of the importance of following these guidelines. However, creators of user-generated content often do not. A New York Times blog post discussed how to keep from raising rapists or children who will not only stand by and allow a violating assault to occur, but end up blaming the victim as well? Much of the change needs to come from how we frame the way we discuss rape” (Schulten, 2013, para. 5).

Conclusions

Using the lens of medium theory, this analysis used a mixed-method approach to explore the framing of the Steubenville rape case in newspapers and blogs. Social media became a double-edge sword in the case. On one hand, content of the victim’s rape was recorded and disseminated using social media. On the other hand, the Steubenville rape case would have likely gone completely unnoticed if it not been for a concerned blogger who began posting tweets and pictures of the events on her page and sharing it with the public.

Unfortunately, women are raped every day in America. It is not unusual for the crime to involve young people or athletes, but what set this particular crime apart was the involvement and impact of social media. In the end, citizen journalism played a role in how the media covered the case because part of the role of a journalist is to answer questions that other sources might bring up. In this case, they had to address the release of the victim's identity on social media and the gory details of her sexual assault.

The literature on rape suggests that victim blaming and the perpetrator's race are the primary topics in rape literature. However, our findings indicate that race, while previously, a big factor in the coverage of rape, was not prominent in the articles and blog entries coded. This is a significant finding, as it appears that newspapers were colorblind in their coverage and not as prone to use race frames as indicated in previous studies, while blog posts offer a platform for discussing issues that are left out of mainstream media such as women's rights, rape education, etc.

Medium type did not make a significant difference in how the perpetrators, case and actual act of rape were framed. However, there was a significant difference in how the media types framed the case in general. Findings are important because of social media, average citizens have a tool to share their thoughts on a much grander scale than ever before. New media, specifically, user-generated content added an element of novelty. We will likely see more in the future of this trend. We hope this analysis of newspaper articles, blogs, implications and solutions will help educators, parents and students navigate the terrain of social media, shaming and privacy in the 21st century.

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Would Eye Lie to You?:
Reexamining CBS' Reported Phone Response to "Murrow versus McCarthy"

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Abstract

This exploratory, historical study collects firsthand knowledge from two veteran broadcasting executives and two telecommunications experts regarding the night Edward R. Murrow devoted his March 9, 1954, TV program to "taking on" Sen. Joseph P. McCarthy. Using the elite interview methodology, never before revealed firsthand testimony of a CBS affiliate phone operator challenges the accepted story of massive public phone response to CBS in the four hours after *See It Now* aired. Also, a novel technological approach reveals how an investigation of telecommunications capacity can play an important, but previously unrecognized role in determining the truth of a long-accepted event even 60 years later. For the first time, this inquiry introduces critical new testimony into the public record with regard to CBS' claim that 2,365 viewers called the network during a four hour timespan, mostly in support of America's most respected journalist, and the role that CBS would have played in the subterfuge.

Key words: Murrow, McCarthy, elite interview

March 9, 2014 marked the 60th anniversary of Murrow's TV broadcast, "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy." According to many, this 30-minute episode of the CBS Television Network show *See It Now* (Season 3, Episode 25) that aired at 10:30 p.m. EST on a Tuesday remains electronic journalism's finest hour (Novak, 1979; Leab, 2009). The Radio Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) named its most coveted award in honor of Murrow, a man who "lived by a code too rigid for mere humans to meet" (Edwards, 2004, p. 829). His fame is owed in no small part to his work on this program, considered by some to be so courageous that it inspired a decisive, pro-Murrow, anti-McCarthy response from the American viewing public, "one of the greatest in broadcast history" (Murray, 1975, p. 15). In some media circles, Murrow's "takedown" of McCarthy is still spoken of as an "exemplar of nonfiction television" (Rosteck, 1994, p. 1).

There may be some fictional elements to the story after all, however. Two days after "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" aired, the New York Herald and the New York Times each cited some impressive numbers in support of that claim (Murray, 1975):

Four hours after the broadcast CBS had received 2,365 (telephone) calls of which all but 151 were favorable to "See It Now." The network also received 2,850 telegrams of which only eighty-six were negative. The final nationwide tally of favorable calls was 11,567 measured against 781 protests. Many of the respondents claimed that they had never telephoned or written a broadcast station before, but that they had been so moved by this telecast that they felt compelled to respond (Murray, 1975, p. 15).

Not to be outdone in its praise for Murrow, when Newsweek followed up on the story on March 22, 1954, the national number had inflated from about 12,500 to 15,000 calls (after *all* of

the phone calls to the local affiliates were factored in, it was claimed) (Thornton, 2003). Specifically, it was the major market CBS affiliates that made these reports believable: “A greater proportion of calls favorable to Murrow were also tabulated in Washington, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Chicago” (Murray, 1975, p. 15). In every case, however, “the Eye” network was the only source for this data (Thornton, 2003). Even today, when Murrow’s story is told, the massive, positive public reaction is cited often as an indication of his genius and/or to reaffirm journalism’s role in shaping public opinion (Rosteck, 1989).

A steady, skeptical voice in academia has made the credibility of *See It Now*--and more specifically, “A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy”--contested territory (Dougall, 1967; Rosteck, 1994; Leab, 2009). Research has explored the reaction to Murrow *vis a vis* the surprisingly few letters to the editors of major newspapers mentioning the show in the weeks and months following March 9, 1954 (Thornton, 2003). While scholars might have had their suspicions, to date, media historians and even critics who have written extensively about “A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy” have not vetted fully published accounts of the supposedly overwhelming, national phone call and wire responses (Murray, 1975; Rosteck, 1994). Of new and important interest to scholars is whether a key aspect of Murrow’s legacy can be proven to be either likely true, likely false, or exaggerated by investigating the technical limitations of the CBS network’s private branch exchange (PBX), also known as an operator-assisted switchboard. This paper seeks to provide a previously unexplored, but potentially conclusive challenge to CBS’ self-serving, self-reported numbers and fill-in the knowledge gap with regard to how many phone calls CBS news could have received on the night of March 9, 1954.

Literature Review

In Newtown N. Minow's 1961 address to the National Association of Broadcasters entitled "Television and the Public Interest," more commonly referred to as the "Wasteland Speech" (Minow & Lamay, 1996, p. 4), the newly appointed Federal Communications Commission chairman praised Murrow's journalistic style. Minow held up the show, *See It Now*, as a model for the news media (Minow, 1961). To emphasize that point further, in a similar 1961 keynote to the RTNDA delivered soon after the "Wasteland Speech," Minow again singled out Murrow and suggested journalists should pursue "editorializing on a widespread basis" (Dougall, 1967, p. 123). In a 2006 interview, the former FCC chairman was still rhapsodic about "Edward R. Murrow and (producer) Fred Friendly in the McCarthy days . . . that's when television really was, in my opinion, performing the role it should in our society" (Jones, 2006, p. 4).

The legend of Murrow and Friendly has cast a large shadow over other media as well. Producer-director-writer-actor George Clooney generated six Oscar nominations for his film about the Murrow-Friendly collaboration, *Goodnight and Good Luck* (2005), a drama that forwards the portrayal of Murrow as "the patron saint of broadcast news" (Schafer, 2005, p. 1).

Veneration for the hagiography of Edward R. Murrow, however, is no longer an article of faith in journalism. Academia consistently has criticized "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" for being a "prominent example of the questionable use of materials as instruments of impartial journalistic reporting" (Murray, 1975, p. 13) as it was structured as an inventive juxtaposition of some of McCarthy's most outrageous sound bites and Murrow's biting commentary (Murrow, 1954). Of course, by writing around actualities, Murrow could cherry-pick the words and images that would maximize his attack on "the junior Senator from Wisconsin" (one of many subtle jabs Murrow took at McCarthy in the broadcast) (Murrow,

1954). Straying from journalistic requirements of neutrality and objectivity, Murrow employed irony, sarcasm and satire (Rosteck, 1989). With this method, Murrow controlled the dialogue between himself and his avatar of McCarthy with the same testimonial certainty that the Senator himself enjoyed with friendly witnesses called before his House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) (Pederson, 2009). Rosteck (1989) proffers that Murrow's approach to McCarthy should be properly viewed as less *60 Minutes* and more *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*:

Once we read "A Report on Senator McCarthy" as ironic argument instead of "flawed news report," concerns about inconsistencies in the text and problems with its interpretation are relieved. Once we admit to the accusatory intent of "A Report on Senator McCarthy," the sarcastic and satiric tenor of Murrow's commentary is explicable. The emphasis in the text upon the character of McCarthy is rationalized. Also, the curious subverting of the generic visual conventions of the news report, while out of place in the objective news documentary, are rendered quite compatible, within the generic conventions of the public accusation (Rosteck, 1989, p. 294).

Seemingly, Murrow and Friendly's philosophy would be compatible with this assessment as they made no secret of their interest in using TV news as a cudgel (Leab, 2009). Both men believed that good journalism should not be hindered by "artificial fairness." As Leab (2009) framed it, Murrow saw no value in balancing Hitler evenly against Churchill.

Another consistent criticism of "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" was the show had been too long in the making. As Murrow himself mentioned on the night of the broadcast, his pushback against McCarthy came after others more brave (Balyley, 1981). Many of McCarthy's colleagues in the Senate had denounced him publicly already. The editorial staffs and columnists at even Republican-leaning newspapers such as the Chicago Tribune, the

Milwaukee Journal and McCarthy's hometown paper in Madison, WI, had been calling out McCarthy for being a "bully" for some time (Thornton, 2003). While fans of Clooney's movie were given the impression it was Murrow who ignited the rebellion in 1954, actually editors at the Nevada State Journal were the first in the nation to criticize McCarthy in 1950 (Balyley, 1981).

Murrow's producer and collaborator, Fred Friendly, never denied that Murrow's televised, coordinated attack on McCarthy had been lauded inaccurately for leading the charge against "McCarthyism." In his 1967 memoirs, Friendly admitted that Murrow refrained from doing an anti-McCarthy show for a long time because "Ed didn't want to get too far ahead of public opinion" (Leab, 2009, p. 71).

If CBS is to be believed, Murrow's timing appeared to be just right. CBS claimed TV viewers from six large metropolitan markets such as Pittsburgh responded to the program in unprecedented numbers. "Friendly later estimated that between seventy-five to a hundred thousand wrote, telegraphed or telephoned in response to the program: 'We never really knew the exact count'" (Leab, 2009, p. 80).

In sum, Murrow and Friendly, respected men of renowned integrity, broke established journalistic convention and used a major broadcast network to lampoon a U.S. Senator at a time when it fit their personal objectives. Murrow and Friendly eschewed standards of neutrality and objectivity in order to "get" McCarthy. The reported "hosannas from the vox populi," however, supposedly took the curse off of Murrow's journalistic sins (Doherty, 2003, p. 77). Yet, no scholarship or objective proof exists to demonstrate CBS' "the ends justify the means" scenario of voluminous calls, wire messages and letters of support to the network or its affiliates. A fresh critical approach to this purported historic viewer response is overdue.

RQ: Based on CBS and CBS affiliates' known telecommunications technology and audience practices, can the claim that 2,365 viewer opinions were received and logged as either pro-Murrow or pro-McCarthy by CBS Network's home office between the hours of 11p.m. and 3a.m. on the night of March 9, 1954 be substantiated?

Methodology

This exploratory, historical study consisted of four, brief elite interviews with broadcast executives and telecommunications experts. In the absence of any previously published scholarship that verified CBS' pro-Murrow/anti-McCarthy viewer response tabulations, the researcher decided to pursue elite interviews with those who had empirical knowledge of either CBS/affiliate audience measurement practices in general, the reception of large scale TV news viewer feedback, and/or the technical capabilities of the 1954-era telephone systems required to process caller volume in the range of CBS' claims. The researcher decided to limit this exploratory study to the Eye network's primary claim: The opinions of 2,365 callers were recorded and tabulated by CBS Network's home office between the hours of 11p.m. and 3a.m. on the night of March 9, 1954.

The elite interview method was chosen in order to determine if firsthand witnesses, broadcasting and telecommunications experts could contribute relevant new knowledge to the research question. The researcher adhered to Hothschild's (2009) elite interview research method with regard to information gathering. Pursuant to the prescribed standards of rigor, the researcher did not ask direct, binary "up or down" questions. Indirect questions were worded in such a way that responses maintained some uniformity but allowed pursuit of each area of inquiry

(Hothschild, 2009). With this method, interviewees can offer analysis, analogies and anecdotes (Hothschild, 2009).

Primary and follow-up interviews were conducted on the phone and online during a three week period beginning around July 20, 2014 and ending August 10, 2014. Two experts were interviewed by phone at their convenience. Two other experts agreed to be interviewed only via email due to their strenuous schedules and the time required to research some answers. All interviewees were instructed that the researcher was gathering information for a scholarly study. Email interviewees were questioned using the synchronous, in-depth, semistructured modality. Synchronous, in-depth, semistructured interviewing differs from e-mail surveys in that the answers are revealed through back-and-forth email exchanges over a period of time (Hothschild, 2009). Synchronous, in-depth, semistructured interviewing differs from a “virtual focus group” in that no participants are aware of any other participants’ answers (Meho, 2005).

The foci of this exploratory inquiry was twofold. Questions were designed to investigate both historical television industry practice and the capabilities of the available phone technologies pertaining to the reception of a large, spontaneous viewer response in 1954. It was expected that those questioned would confirm network TV practice of providing ample personnel and resources to collect viewer responses to programming. The email interview respondents were also asked to judge the capability of existing technologies in 1954 with regard to vigorous and spontaneous audience reaction.

Findings

Ray Faiola is the Director of Audience Services for the CBS Television Network in New York. January 2014 marked the beginning of Faiola’s 35th year with CBS (Raynes, 2013). CBS

Audience Services oversees the processes by which viewer opinions to news products are collected, including the management of CBS phone operators. A phone interview was conducted in the early afternoon on August 4, 2014 with Faiola. Because Faiola said he would grant a few minutes quickly, an audio recording was not possible. Faiola, however, agreed to provide relevant background information on the past collection of audience feedback to news programming.

In the 1950s, Faiola said, “Every department--CBS Radio, CBS News--was responsible for its own calls. Every call would have come through a central switchboard and transferred to the appropriate department.” This was a multiple step process. According to Faiola, the operator would first plug into the blinking line, greet the caller, determine what extension would serve them, then transfer that call to the appropriate extension. A department such as a newsroom might have the capability to accept only one call at a time or have a dozen or more incoming lines.

In the late 1960s, Faiola explained, the CBS phone system became automated. At the end of normal business hours, there were no live operators to transfer calls. Instead of a live operator, the caller would hear a recorded message encouraging the viewer to call back during regular business hours. Faiola offered that a daytime operator might, under some circumstances, take down the caller’s comments and pass them along.

Faiola was uncertain whether CBS operators had nighttime duty before automation to collect audience feedback. When asked how a researcher might be able to determine whether there were ever live operators in the 1950s, Faiola said it was “impossible to determine how many operators were employed then on a given night.” Asked whether audience feedback information might be available in the CBS archives, Faiola stated unequivocally that “there was

nowhere you could go, nobody you could ask” to determine telephone operations of the 1950s because it would be buried in a storage facility somewhere in “boxes of memoranda.”

William Caughlin is the veteran Corporate Archivist of the AT&T Archives and History Center, the nation’s largest business archives with 45,000 cubic feet of records and 15,000 artifacts dating to 1869, located in San Antonio, TX and Warren, NJ. The AT&T Archives and History Center’s primary mission is to serve the business activities of AT&T and the scholarly needs of serious global researchers with accurate and timely information on the history of AT&T and the telecom industry. After the researcher uncovered a 1949 photograph of operators at a CBS’ switchboard (Appendix A), Caughlin was asked to determine its make, model, capacity and operating characteristics with regard to its function on March 9, 1954 (interview conducted via email between researcher and Caughlin from August 5, 2014 to August 11, 2014).

IP: I've included a link to a photo of a CBS switchboard from 1949. Do you think you could identify it?

WC: The image appears to depict a Bell System 605 PBX switchboard, first introduced in 1928. CBS had a private branch exchange or PBX. These were smaller versions of manual switchboards used in telephone central offices, like those operated by New York Telephone in Manhattan at the time.

IP: As switchboard technology developed, how quickly were switchboards at large companies replaced completely? Were they likely just to be expanded or modified?

WC: Manual, multiple-position PBX switchboards were designed to add new operator positions, as needed (Appendix B). Because they required a large capital expenditure, they were also meant to last decades. That 1949 close-up you shared only shows two operator

positions. Each PBX operator (members of the Communications Workers of America supplied by AT&T as part of the contract) would control the same number of lines, usually (between) 100 and 150 apiece in a big office building. Thus, if CBS had 3000 office phones in its building, then 20 operators would be required to staff the switchboard. But that number could vary, depending on the grade of service required. Faster response times would require more positions and women on the job. A PBX operator handled one call at a time, but her colleagues would be making connections simultaneously.

IP: Just to confirm, there would have been no automated systems in 1954, correct?

WC: Not for a business the size of CBS, which would have used a multiple, manual PBX switchboard, like the 605 named above. CBS's manual PBX system would have been replaced eventually by a dial version.

IP: Based on your knowledge of multiple incoming lines and the operator assisted switchboards, what would be an approximate number of incoming calls per hour that could be handled by a single operator after hours at a switchboard like the one pictured?

WC: That depends on her level of skill and experience.

Mike Sandman, a 40-year telecommunications installation and training veteran, concurs that the skill level and experience of an operator would be crucial to handling any large volume. But Sandman, the proprietor of a Chicago company that trades in and manufactures missing vintage telephone parts, believes even with a very experienced operator, CBS' PBX system would have had limits that nobody could transcend. Sandman offered many variables to phone call efficiency in the PBX system even with the two operators as shown in the 1949 CBS photo

(interview conducted via email between researcher and Sandman from August 6, 2014 to August 7, 2014) .

MS: Two (operators) would double (the response rate to incoming calls). With three operators, depending on the configuration of the switchboard, if the operator on the right had to pass a plug to the operator on the left it would be less than double (the response rate) per position. If three switchboards were totally duplicated, which is extremely unlikely, then it would double and triple (the response rates). That said, it's never constant traffic. Everything happens in bunches. How many they could do would depend on whether they are doing a supervised or unsupervised transfer.

IP: Can you explain those terms?

MS: An unsupervised transfer is just transferring the caller and hanging up without regard as to whether the caller wants the call, is there, or not. A supervised transfer waits until the person answers and the operator announces the call before hanging up.

IP: Given the PBX system such as the one CBS is photographed as using (Appendix A), could a single operator even handle 2,365 calls in four hours? This would mean roughly 600 calls an hour or ten calls every minute or roughly a new call every six seconds. In short, in your opinion, given the time it took a single operator to connect, answer, transfer and then go to another line, is 2,365 callers in four hours even possible by a single operator?

MS: I doubt a human could (answer and transfer) 600 calls in an hour. They (would have enough time to) just answer the call and hang-up on them. Being a phone man for over 40 years I can tell you that I've never seen any kind of operator required to do that. It could probably be done if the company hated the callers and wanted to provide no service at all.

Now retired from broadcast news, Al Primo came to WABC-TV in New York in 1968 in order to turn around its third place news department with the Eyewitness News format. After WABC-TV became the highest-rated news program in New York, under Primo's guidance, the Eyewitness News model was copied extensively at the ABC network owned-and-operated TV stations and other affiliates across the country. Before his major market and network success, Primo started at WDTV-TV in Pittsburgh as a copy boy in 1953 then moved full-time to the switchboard to accommodate his studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Primo worked the WDTV-TV switchboard from 3p.m. until 12p.m., Monday through Friday, until late 1954 when he took a position in the newsroom.

Along with another young man, John Conomikes (who would later become President and CEO of Hearst Television, Inc), Primo was the operator on duty at CBS-affiliated WDTV-TV the night of March 9, 1954, the station cited specifically by CBS as one of the many affiliates with an historic phone response volume. Interviews were conducted via telephone between researcher and Primo from August 5, 2014 to August 11, 2014:

IP: Do you recall a giant influx of calls from viewers that night wanting to talk about Edward R. Murrow versus Sen. McCarthy?

AP: I think not a single one--not many calls at all. I cannot remember a single one. And frankly, the only time we had input from the outside audience was when we went off the air or some show was interrupted for some reason or another and then people would just call like crazy. Then as (the news anchor) used to say, "The switchboard would light up like High Mass at the Vatican."

IP: This switchboard would have been a standard PBX system where you would have plugged in an incoming call and then plugged into another one line, correct?

AP: Yeah, there were maybe five or six lines. When the call came in you could put it to the newsroom or the traffic department or wherever.

IP: How many calls in an hour, if you had to, do you think you could transfer to the newsroom in 1954? How many do you think the newsroom could handle?

AP: Not very many. In the evening hours, there was nobody there. The newsroom had maybe one person in it, maybe a camera man, maybe another person editing a piece.

IP: Just another reason why CBS' claim that 2,365 calls in four hours after the Murrow/McCarthy broadcast might seem suspicious?

AP: It never happened. Back in those days, it just couldn't happen technically. I mean, I called CBS (in New York) all the time because we were an affiliate. We would call up to the newsroom and say, "What can we promote? What are you guys doing? What film is coming?" There would be some old lady answering, "Hello, CBS." You used to call CBS, NBC, or ABC, and some person answered the phone. I assume they had a bunch of them . . . but to be perfectly honestly with you, I do not think they had the capacity (to take a lot of calls).

For example, Primo explained that in the 1960s at ABC/WABC-TV, there would be multiple daytime phone operators but "after six it went down to one," so "calls would be routed to the newsroom" to be answered by newsroom personnel. An operator would remain on duty only until midnight because Primo thought it was in the public interest to take audience feedback "for a half hour after the (11:00 p.m.) news broadcast had ended."

Asked whether he recalled the largest viewer response ever received in the WABC-TV newsroom after hours, Primo said, "ten or 12 would be a high number." Based on his experience as news director to reaffirm definitively on CBS' reported 2,365 calls starting at 11:00pm on a Tuesday night in 1954, he said simply, "Impossible."

Afterward

The phone operator on duty on March 9, 1954 in Pittsburgh, one of the six cities cited by CBS as being overwhelmed by phone calls, happened to be a journalism student and a future news media legend. Primo's memory is unequivocal with regard to a spontaneous outpouring of supportive phone calls for Edward R. Murrow: "I think not a single one." While this testimony does not speak directly to the RQ with regard to CBS' primary claim that 2,365 opinions were recorded and tabulated by CBS Network's home office in New York between the hours of 11p.m. and 3a.m. on the night of March 9, 1954, it undermines CBS' credibility as an accurate self-reporting source. If CBS executives would be willing to report a false story about callers in Pittsburgh, why not New York? Primo's expertise as a phone operator and his experience running a large newsroom operation further informs his disbelief of CBS' claims: "Back in those days, it just couldn't happen technically . . . Impossible."

According to the phone tech experts, the mathematics of the claim provides another disproof. In short, a PBX system creates a series of shrinking bottlenecks: a finite number of incoming lines, a finite number of operators answering those lines, a finite number of internal lines in the newsroom to transfer the calls, a finite number of employees in the newsroom to answer the calls in a finite amount of time. In order to answer 2,365 viewer calls in four hours, even two experienced live operators would only get 12 seconds with each caller. With three operators, the response rate could rise as high as 18 seconds per call. Even after a brief generic greeting, that does not leave much time to discuss with the viewers their feelings about an emotionally charged subject such as Sen. Joe McCarthy. If the operators were merely transferring the calls to the newsroom or Murrow's *See It Now* office, as Primo explained, the

number of calls answered would have become even smaller. According to AT&T's Caughlin, there would have been several hundred lines coming to CBS' PBX but only a small number of extensions in any given office within the building. Of course, if the operators were transferring the response to another office, then another set of poll takers would have had to be answering calls at the conclusion of the show at virtually the same rate. Again, CBS has never provided any details on how these calls were handled, no methodology, no notes. For the first time, this technical and human operator information makes a clear argument for why CBS could not.

Based on CBS' known telecommunications technology and audience practices, therefore, 2,365 calls after the March 9, 1954 broadcast of *See It Now* cannot be substantiated. In the interest of accuracy, scholars, scholarly works and textbooks should refrain from further perpetuating the myth of thousands of callers "so moved by this telecast that they felt compelled to respond" until it can be verified. More likely, as Primo indicated, it would have been just one or two operators until midnight. If there had been one, two or even three "old ladies answering, 'Hello, CBS,'" however, those dynamics would have made a popularity poll of this type technically and humanly impossible. In fairness, perhaps those "poll numbers" were never meant to be taken as gospel. Perhaps one of "Murrow's boys" was merely making up numbers for a fellow reporter over at the New York Herald or the New York Times in an attempt to "out-McCarthy" McCarthy and things got out of hand. It could have all been a mistake.

In fact, there are other examples of CBS *mistakenly* reporting numbers with regard to public outcry to its programming (Woronowycz, 1995). In November of 1995, *60 Minutes* (a news show in the Murrow tradition) and the CBS Network were accused of conspiring to hide from the FCC about 16,000 letters of complaint. The issue concerned a broadcast that accused Ukrainians of being anti-Semitic. CBS had maintained publicly that it had reached out personally

to the thousands of angry Ukrainian-Americans who had written letters that should have gone into CBS' public file:

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — After twice changing its stance, CBS now has admitted that it never responded to any letters sent by viewers complaining about the broadcast of the "60 Minutes" segment "The Ugly Face of Freedom."

In a reply to a petition submitted by attorney Arthur Belendiuk on behalf of Alexander Serafyn and the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America charging the network with fraud and misrepresentation, CBS said human error was responsible for the company's failure to mail responses, which earlier it had said were sent (Woronowycz, 1995, p. 1).

In its defense, CBS pointed out that twice-false claims of the complainants being contacted by a network representative, and the subsequent misplacement of 16,000 letters that should have been available for public scrutiny, "resulted from the good faith, although negligent, error of a single CBS employee" (Woronowycz, 1995, p. 18). This single CBS employee-- Director of Audience Services Ray Faiola--had told Ukrainian-Americans interested in the whereabouts of their responses, that their letters had "been sent to long-term storage" and "it would be impossible for my staff to retrieve (them)" (Woronowycz, 1995, p. 4).

Conclusion

Beyond this exploratory study, future elite interviews could be conducted with yet-to-be located living CBS phone operators, Communications Workers of America union archivists, and retired CBS publicists. The importance of the *See It Now* program in the development of broadcast journalism warrants great academic consideration. In a study like this where other primary source material in the "historical record" does not exist or has been intentionally obscured, oral history may be an under-appreciated source.

If an investigation of CBS' telecommunications capabilities had substantiated CBS' capabilities that night, then it might have affirmed CBS' other claims of up to 100,000 respondents nationwide in the days following the broadcast. Conversely, by revealing that affiliate viewer feedback to "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" was either modest or even minimal, this study gives CBS' credibility a "black eye" that requires further scholarly attention.

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Appendix A



View of two operators and their switchboard at CBS studios, May 31, 1949.
(Photo by CBS Photo Archive/Getty Images)

Appendix B

View of an eight station PBX switchboard, company unknown.
(Courtesy of AT&T Archives and History Center)

