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INTRODUCTION OF CANDIDATES AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION - HOW NEWS MEDIA'S INTRODUCTION OF CANDIDATES MAY AFFECT PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CANDIDATE

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INTRODUCTION OF CANDIDATES AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION -
HOW NEWS MEDIA'S INTRODUCTION OF CANDIDATES MAY AFFECT
PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CANDIDATE

An Essay Submitted to
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College of Arts and Sciences
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Master of Arts

By
Ian W. Memmer
2019

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Abstract

This study examines the introduction of candidates in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election by examining 1,666 online articles in 3 cable news and 3 online newspapers covering the day before their announcement, the day of announcement, and the day following the announcement. The amount of coverage and tone of the articles was examined to determine the effects of agenda setting, media polarization, and first impressions. Results found variation in the amount of coverage given to candidates; online newspapers generally gave more coverage than online cable news; media polarization occurred slightly in favorable coverage of candidates but all candidates received more favorable than unfavorable articles; and there was no direct connection between media coverage and the candidate's position in the polls after the first week. Overall, the first impressions of a candidate at their time of announcing candidacy had little effect on the eventual outcome of the 2016 election.

Key Words: 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, agenda setting, media polarization, presidential candidates, first impressions

Introduction

Many researchers have contended that the news media have a strong impact on how the public perceives candidates. The purpose of this thesis was to gain a better understanding if the news media's agenda setting function in introducing candidates in a major election may affect public perception of the candidate. While studies have examined agenda setting in elections (McCombs, 2004; Olds, 2013), one area not analyzed is the effect of presentation of candidates at the start of the race, specifically the amount and type of coverage and tone, and type of first impression set.

This study examined the impact of this framing by comparing the news media coverage of the day before the announcement, the day of announcement, and the day following the announcement of presidential candidates in the 2016 election. The paper focused on the amount of coverage and tone (favorable or unfavorable). Key components of this race were: the number of candidates from each major party; five from the Democrats and seventeen from the Republicans, and that 2016 race was more contentious than was predicted for both parties with relatively unknown candidates developing substantial followings. Among these relatively unknown political candidates were Donald Trump, a business owner and reality television star in the Republican primary, and Bernie Sanders an independent, socialist senator from Vermont for the Democratic primary.

Significance

The significance of this thesis is, from a communications management standpoint, to see if the news media as an agenda setter, helped shape the public perception as well as the outcomes of the election. For example, did the news media introduce candidates

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similarly or not? Did cable and newspaper introductions differ? What effect, if any, were these first impressions set by the news media? Did the amount of news coverage in the introduction affect the initial polls? By reading this thesis, communicators, managers, and those in the news media would have a better understanding of what effect, if any, these introductions had on the initial perceptions in the race.

Chapter one of the thesis will review the literature on agenda setting, polarization, and first impressions and their effects in covering elections. Chapter two will outline the methodology used in this study. Chapter three will present the findings. Chapter four will discuss the findings and implications for further research.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on the theories of agenda setting, news media polarization, and first impressions as related to the past three presidential elections (2008, 2012, and 2016). Most research in the existing literature focused on the outcome of an election, for example, Burmila and Ryan (2013) specifically concentrated on how digital media effected the election, and Knuckey (2012) examined the effect of the selection of vice presidential candidates as a factor in the election. Few studies focused on what effect the news media had in creating the initial public perception of Presidential candidates when those candidates announced that they were running. This gap in the literature is the reason for the selection of this topic for this thesis.

Agenda Setting

Discussion of the agenda-setting function of news media dated back to Lippmann (1922) in *Public Opinion*. Lippmann argued,

> "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (p. 61).

Lippmann's comments are critical in understanding how the news media affect people's perceptions. Rather than shaping people's opinions, Lippmann argued that society and culture already do that, and all people in society have to do is absorb that information.

Building upon Lippmann, McCombs and Shaw (1972) theorized that more people receive their information about candidates in elections through the mass media rather

than in person. Focusing on the 1968 United States, Presidential election of Richard

Nixon, McCombs and Shaw emphasized how important the news media were in

influencing people's opinions. They concluded that because people receive much of their

information from the news media, how the news media portray information about

candidates would affect public perception. Since their study, the news media's impact on

perception became even larger and more influential, due to the public's increased

dependence on technology, advances in technology, and a 24-hour continuous news cycle

(Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Darmon, Fitzpatrick, & Bronstein, 2008; Oliveira &

Murphy, 2009).

McCombs (2004) added another component, the larger news picture, which may

affect agenda setting. McCombs argued that large, important events such as the terrorist

attacks of September 11, 2011, and the aftermath, would dominate the news for an

extended time. Prior to such an event, insignificant or less important stories dominated

the news. Thus, the news media set the agenda dependent on what they viewed as the

most important or newsworthy stories.

In the time leading up to a United States Presidential election, the news media

decided what issues to report. For example, if a major catastrophe happened, then the

election took a back seat to that event (McCombs, 2004). Otherwise, the news media

decided that the election or a candidate's introduction dominated the news media

coverage. Olds (2013) concluded that mass media coverage of an issue and the level of

public attention placed on that same issue mirror each other. Thus, if the news media

decided to spend time discussing a particular candidate, then the level of public attention

toward that candidate reflects that attention.

Understanding agenda setting theory is critical to understanding the interconnectedness of the role of the news media, public opinion, and public discourse. Critics argued that agenda setting theory attempts to categorize the issue rather than show the actual multi-faceted nature of it. Whether agenda-setting theory categorized the effects of the news media did not discount the point that those who watch or read particular news media would have an outlook influenced by consumption of the information found in the news media. One outcome of agenda setting is the idea of polarization, or the increasing notion of news based on ideology.

Polarization

Information on polarization, related to news media and elections, runs throughout the literature. Two different types of polarization exist: media polarization and political polarization. The first polarization, media polarization, is that the media are dispensing news coverage based on political ideology. As politics become increasingly polarized, not wavering from extreme political positions so, too, has the media (Callander & Wilson, 2015). Many in the news media took these positions (e.g., Keith Olbermann, Glen Beck, and others), which were more reflective of the polarizing political climate, rather than unbiased traditional journalism. Media polarization occurs throughout the media, not only with partisan pundits, but also in the news reporting. Through the history of elections and news media, media polarization helped to explain some of the disconnect that existed in the news media, specifically between what one news outlet reported compared to another (Callander and Wilson, 2015). For example, Baum & Groeling (2008) concluded that Fox News benefited Republicans, whereas the Associated Press benefited Democrats.

Because of greater media choice, individuals may ideologically select media according to their political positions (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). This second type of polarization is political polarization, which exists among consumers of the media rather than in the media itself. Rather than individuals challenging existing media ideological positions, they seek to consume this type of slanted news media to reinforce their existing positions (Slater, 2007). These ideological positions, which may be polarizing in and of themselves, may in turn polarize the news media. Melki & Pickering (2014) argued that political polarization might ultimately affect media polarization in that in order to keep an audience, the media produce more politically biased programs.

Both Democrats and Republicans would agree that there is both media and political polarization, although the extent of it and the exact sources and amount of coverage differ depending on which political side one favors. Polarization and agenda setting are two of the most critical concepts in the existing literature that relate to elections and the media. Although polarization and agenda setting certainly played an important role in analyzing the news media, when looking at the candidates themselves, first impressions and introductions also influenced how people viewed a candidate.

First Impressions

Many scholars agreed that first impressions were important in influencing individuals (Rubenfire, 2017; Mattes, Spezio, Hackjin, Todorov, Aldolphs, & Alvarez, 2010). Perceptions of people often stemmed from how a person looked and acted (Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011) or what others have said about them. These first impressions can lead to stereotyping, which is difficult to overcome. A first impression can influence the perception of a candidate by the public, which could potentially have a lasting effect

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on how the people viewed that candidate or candidate's campaign. The problem in overcoming a perceived negative first impression can be extremely difficult, specifically for political situations (Foos, 2016). Foos argued that both personal and impersonal interactions, such as the first impression, had significant effects on support for a candidate. Thus, the way in which the media presented candidates (favorable or unfavorable) could have a significant impact on the public perception of their potential success. With the increase in digital technology, the influence of these first impressions (negative or positive) could be more important (Little et. al, 2011).

2008 Presidential Election

Much of the existing literature regarding the 2008 election focused on analyzing how the news media may have affected the outcome of the election. Research emphasized news media coverage after the party conventions. The 2008 U.S. Presidential election was the first election where digital media played an important role in the election (Burmila & Ryan, 2013; Knuckey, 2012, 2013).

Analysis of the 2008 US Presidential election's Vice Presidential selection, or 'the Palin effect' illustrated agenda setting theory in action. The extensive coverage of Palin also emphasized the influence of first impressions; her impression (whether positive or negative) transferred to McCain's campaign. Because of her approach and newness on the national stage, the media set the agenda by giving her extensive coverage.

While researchers agreed Palin did affect the media agenda in early coverage, they disagreed on the extent of the effect. Through analyzing poll data and research on the election and changes in attitudes,' Knuckey (2013) concluded that Palin ultimately hurt the Republican ticket in 2008; "Given the negative freighting of feelings toward

Palin, this effect was especially evident among moderates and independents" (Knuckey, 2013, p. 962). Burmila and Ryan (2013) concluded that Palin did not ultimately have a negative effect on the outcome of the election. They argued that "Sarah Palin did not have a unique or unprecedented influence on the race; at best, she had precisely the small effect on vote choice in 2008 that we would expect of any running mate" (Burmila & Ryan, 2013, p. 958).

Johnson (2011) examined the influence of agenda setting in citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is journalism by ordinary citizens, posted on iReport and Johnson correlated it with the journalism found on traditional news media. Whereas at first glance, it would seem that the two forms are not related, Johnson concluded that traditional news media set the agenda as to what stories citizen journalists reported. "In many cases when a story was covered by mainstream media citizen reporters used the facts from the stories reported, analyzed the information, added their opinion to the story, and then posted the story on iReport" (Johnson, 2011, Vol. 28, p. 1) Johnson concluded that the news media set the agenda across outlets, from traditional to social.

Overall, Hardy, Kenski, & Jamieson (2010) theorized that the media's agenda setting function shaped the perception of opinions of the 2008 candidates. The more someone watched the news and read the newspaper, the more someone perceived that the election of Senator John McCain would be a continuation of President George W. Bush's policies, and that the election of Senator Barack Obama would be an alternative to that continuation. They concluded opinions of the people changed depending on how much they paid attention to the news media. Ultimately, the coverage and news media portrayal of the two candidates aided Obama more than McCain, and the outcome of the

election reflected that notion. In the discussion of the 2008 election, media polarization received little attention.

2012 Presidential Campaign

Building upon the digital technology used in the 2008, the U.S. Presidential election of 2012 saw an increased use in the medium (Eddlem, 2012). With 9 in 10 American adults learning about the election from a news source, the influence media had could be significant (Gottfried, Barthel, Shearer, & Mitchell, 2016). Patterson (2016) commented on the role of social media during this election. Whereas most Americans still received much of their political news and information from traditional media, social media use increased significantly.

One of the key components of agenda setting for the 2012 United States Presidential election was increased political polarization of news where people only read, listened to and watched news that fit their political agenda (Gandleman, 2012). Rather than watching or reading unbiased news media, people preferred to receive news from someone with whom they agreed. This political polarization came to the forefront during this election, as more people turned to biased news sources. Republicans turned to Sean Hannity or Glen Beck for their news; Democrats turned to Al Sharpton or Rachel Maddow for theirs (Gandleman, 2012). Rather than disseminating opinion from non-biased sources, people wanted news that fit their agenda (Wicks, Wicks, & Morimoto, 2014). This political polarization led to more media polarization and possible agenda setting for coverage as the media worked to retain an audience.

2016 Presidential Election

The role of the news media in the 2016 election was a significant one. The 2016 United States Presidential election provided the focus for this thesis. For this election, the background of the candidates was unique compared with prior elections. In the previous presidential elections, the presidential candidates were primarily 'establishment' candidates, with the notable exception of Palin. In this election, particularly in the preprimaries and primary, 'outsider" candidates emerged as popular choices, including Ben Carson, Carly Fiorina, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump. Most of these outsider candidates might not have had a chance in previous elections (Jacques, 2014; Lenchner, 2015). Chuck Todd of NBC's 'Meet the Press,' said of the 2016 race that the election system is broken; and, that this election might have an outsider candidate make it further than in a typical election (Jacques, 2014). In part, the news media aided these candidates in going from virtual obscurity to household names.

This change was in large part due to the extensive 24/7 news coverage. Because media constantly had to have news to report and they looked for stories to cover, their need could have set the agenda. As a result, these outsider candidates likely received more exposure. For example, Senator Bernie Sanders, a once unknown independent senator from Vermont, became one of the most talked about candidates by young voters (Blake 2016) . Prior to this election, Sanders most likely would not have had the media coverage and the polling popularity that he experienced in this election cycle (Lenchner, 2015). Miller (2015) detailed the unique nature of Donald Trump's campaign and the impact of his media coverage on the election. Even though the media pounded Trump

with tough questions, and at times, he faltered in answering them, he received extensive coverage that increased public awareness of him.

Whereas most of research focused on the race after the primaries, the most comprehensive studies were Patterson's (2016) Shorenstein Center studies. In three studies, he examined the preprimary, primary, and post primary sections of the 2016 United States Presidential Election. Patterson (2016a) discussed the preprimary period of the 'invisible primary' or the campaign period before the primaries and caucuses. Patterson argued that media exposure was crucial during this period. He contended that although journalists played a political brokering role in presidential primaries, the electorates' decisions during this invisible primary stage derived from news values rather than political values, as candidates' political values may be unknown at this time (Patterson, 2016a). At this stage, people developed impressions from what they saw in the media more than from analyzing the candidates' political positions. Patterson contended that substance and issues did not come into play until much later in the process.

Patterson (2016b) followed this analysis of the preprimary period with a study of the 2016 presidential primaries. Focusing on the primary stage of the election between January and May, he again stressed the importance of the early stages of elections (invisible primary) in forming people's first impressions of a candidate. Thus, the importance of first impressions, particularly in the pre-primary and primaries, was of utmost importance for a candidate to be successful.

This paper focused on the impact of the first presentation of the candidate (their announcement) in the preprimary stage to determine the effect of the first impression.

Research Questions

For purposes of this paper, news media referred to cable TV online databases and online newspapers. The following research questions were advanced,

RQ 1: Did the news media provide the candidates the same amount of coverage?

RQ 2: Did the amount of coverage of candidates differ by media type (cable TV

or   newspaper)?

RQ 3: Did media polarization occur in coverage of candidates?

RQ 4: Did the amount and type of news media's coverage of the candidates

reflect the candidates' standings in the polls one week after

announcement?

Chapter 2

Method

Sample

This thesis analyzed online cable TV news, and newspaper articles available as electronic articles. Gottfried, Barthel, Shearer, & Mitchell (2016) found that in the 2016 election, over 90 percent of United States adults initially learned about the election from one of eleven news sources, with cable news topping the list of sources at 24 percent. Because such a large number of people accessed information online in 2016, as well as ease of retrieval, analysis of online articles made sense for this project.

Analysis focused on cable news as opposed to network news for two reasons: first, because many people received their news from cable TV (Patterson, 2016a, 2016b) and second because the online databases for network news were not easily accessible. Of cable news networks the top three, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC were analyzed. These networks according to media magazine *Variety* in 2015 were the three largest cable news networks, according to viewership in the United States,

> Looking at Nielsen's most current estimates for the Dec. 29, 2014-Dec. 27, 2015 ratings year, Fox News Channel easily led among the cable news networks…Its average audience of 349,000 viewers in the demo was up 13% vs. 2014, and was followed by CNN with 243,000 (up 30%), MSNBC with 143,000 (down 18%) and HLN with 114,000 (down 3%) (Kissell, 2015 p. 1).

The online newspapers analyzed were *The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post.* According to the Alliance for Audited Media, in 2013

The Wall Street Journal was the most circulated newspaper in the United States; *The New York Times* was second; and *The Washington Post* was the seventh most circulated newspaper in the United States (Alliance for Audited Media, 2013). In addition, these three newspapers had strong online presences. In 2015, these three newspapers were the first United States newspapers that enabled readers to pay to read per article (O'Reilly, 2015). Thus, these three newspapers had both a strong online presence and a print presence.

Measurement Procedures and Data Collection

This study analyzed all declared presidential candidates, unlike Patterson (2016b), which only looked at the six most prominent candidates from both parties. This study covered all candidates at the start of their 'invisible primary' seasons by their presence in the news media on the day before their announcements (see Appendix A), the day of announcements, and the day after announcements in the six news sources.

The method of searching for each candidate in the news sources was twofold. The first method was to search using the first name and the last name of the candidate (e.g. Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump) and the second method was to search using just the last name (e.g., Clinton or Trump). This thesis studied a sampling of the existing news sources that included 1,666 total articles.

Similar to Patterson (2016a), the unreliability of computer coding meant trained coders identified relevant themes for all materials. Coders identified all actors in a given report and evaluated tone (positive or negative) (Patterson 2016a); and coded the article

as "favorable' or 'unfavorable' toward the particular candidate. For an article to be unfavorable there was an overall negative tone, such as a questioning of a candidate's qualifications or unfavorable phrases. For an article to be favorable, there was an overall positive tone, a reassuring of a candidate's positions, or favorable phrases were present throughout the article (See Appendix B).

When it was difficult to determine whether an article was favorable or unfavorable, the coders used other aspects of the article, including the photos. For example, coders identified an article written about Donald Trump that was slightly more positive but had a photo of him pointing with his mouth open in an angry position, as unfavorable. To establish reliability, two coders participated in training, reading the same articles independently. Comprehensive spot checks maintained a minimum 85 percent inter-coder reliability rate.

In light of previous studies (Pew Research Center, 2009, 2012) and for purposes of this paper, *New York Times, Washington Post,* CNN, and MSNBC were classified as liberal, or Democratic leaning news outlets, and *Wall Street Journal* and Fox News were classified as conservative, or Republican leaning news outlets. Real Clear Politics average poll, which takes into account many of the top polls from around the country including NBC, Rasmussen, Washington Post, among others, provided additional information. Rather than just choosing one poll, this gave a broader idea of candidates' poll standings.

Chapter 3

Results

Analysis of the news articles revealed that news media coverage at the time of the candidates' announcements of candidacy had little influence on the candidates' success or failure. Exploration of four research questions examined different aspects of the media coverage.

Amount of Coverage

Research question one focused on whether the examined news media provided the candidates the same amount of coverage to candidates. Significant variations in coverage existed (See Appendix C). Coverage ranged for the Democrats from Clinton (188 articles) to Webb (24 articles). The amount of coverage for Democrats did go in the order of declaration of candidacy i.e., Clinton declared first and Webb last. Coverage for the Republicans ranged from Cruz (159 articles) followed closely by Bush (156 articles) and Paul (155 articles) down to Gilmore (3 articles). Although Cruz did declare first, no direct relationship between the order of declaration and the amount of coverage existed as did for the Democrats.

For the Republicans, the candidates who received the highest number of articles written about them came in two waves. The first wave was March-April at the beginning of the preprimary season, and included Cruz, Paul, and Rubio. The second wave was about half way through and included Bush and Trump. None of the other candidates received anywhere near the amount of coverage these candidates did. Gilmore, the last Republican to declare, barely had anything written about him and did not last long in the primaries.

Type of Media

Research question two examined the possible differences in coverage by media type, cable TV, and online newspaper articles (See Appendix D). All candidates received more newspaper coverage than cable coverage, except Webb (12 articles) who received the same amount of coverage in both.

For Democrats, cable coverage ranged from Clinton (73 articles) to Chafee (11 articles) and newspaper coverage ranged from Clinton (115 articles) to Webb (12) articles. The increase in coverage varied considerably. Sanders received 300% more coverage in newspapers than cable, O'Malley 100%, and Chafee 73%, with Clinton receiving only 57% more newspaper than cable coverage.

For Republicans, cable coverage ranged from Bush (74 articles) to Gilmore (0 articles) and newspaper coverage ranged from Cruz (96 articles) to Gilmore (3 articles). The percentage of difference between cable and newspaper coverage varied significantly. In order of difference between online newspaper versus online cable, Huckabee 176%, Pataki 100% and Kasich 119%, Jindal 82%, Rubio 83%, Christie 56%, Paul 56%, Cruz 52%, Trump 39%, Santorum 44%, Carson 33%, Fiorina, Walker 24%, Graham 20%, Bush 11%, and Perry 7%. Clearly, online newspapers and cable TV did not provide similar coverage of the candidates.

Role of Media Polarization

The third research question focused on whether media polarization occurred in coverage of candidates during the candidates' announcements. (See Appendix E). Defining media polarization as giving more favorable coverage to candidates of the political ideology matching that of the media outlet, five of the six media outlets although

fairly similar in ranges did give an overall higher range of favorability for candidates matching their political ideology.

In the liberal media outlets favorability in *The Washington Post* ranged from 64 to 100% for Democrats and from 55 to 100% for Republicans. *The New York Times* ranged from 83 to 100% for Democrats and from 62 to 100% for Republicans. MSNBC ranged from 50 to 100% for Democrats and 40 to 100% for Republicans. CNN ranged from 62 to 100% for Democrats and 50 to 100% for Republicans. In the conservative media favorability Fox News ranged from 53 to 100% for Democrats and from 63 to 100% for Republicans. Only the conservative *Wall Street Journal* showed a different favorability range of 77 to 100% for Democrats and 57 to 100% for Republicans.

In looking at the specific individual ratings for the conservative *The Wall Street Journal* favorability percentages for 4 Democrats were 100% (O'Malley, Chafee, & Webb), 83% Sanders to 77% Clinton. On the Republican side the favorability percentages were 100% for 7 Republicans (Santorum, Pataki, Graham, Bush, Jindal, Walker, & Kasich), 94% Rubio, 86% Perry, 84% Paul, 83% Huckabee, 78% Cruz, 75% Carson, 71% Trump, 67% Christie and 57% Fiorina. Fox News favorability percentages for individual Democrats were more varied 100% O'Malley, 87% Webb, 75% Sanders, 66% Chafee, to 53% Clinton. On the Republican side, Fox News favorability percentages were 100% (Kasich, Graham, and Fiorina), 93% Perry, 88% Santorum, 90% Carson, 85% Walker, 84% Christie, 80% Rubio and Pataki, 78% Cruz, 77% Bush, 68% Paul, and 63% Trump.

For the liberal outlets *The Washington Post* individual favorability percentages for Democrats were from 100% Webb, 88% Sanders, 86% Chafee, 67% O'Malley to 64%

Clinton. On the Republican side the favorability percentages were 100% Graham & Gilmore, 94% Perry, 90% Rubio, 89% Kasich, 85% Fiorina, Pataki, Carson, 83% Santorum, 79% Bush, 73% Paul, 65% Jindal, Christie, 64% Walker, 61% Cruz, to 55% Trump. For CNN, the range of favorable to unfavorable for the Democrats was 100% Webb and O'Malley, 71% Sanders, 66% Chafee to 62% Clinton. For the Republicans, the range was from 100% Kasich, Perry, Graham, Pataki, Huckabee, Fiorina, Carson, 90% Rubio, 81% Bush, 80% Jindal, 75% Walker, Santorum, 72% Trump, 68% Paul, 62% Christie, to 50% Cruz. *The New York Times* favorable to unfavorable percentages range from 100% (Clinton, Chafee, O'Malley, & Webb) to 83% Sanders on the Democratic side. On the Republican side from 100% (Graham, Perry, Kasich, & Gilmore), 88% Rubio, 86% Jindal, Pataki, Carson, 84% Paul, 82% Walker, 81% Bush, 80% Santorum, 78% Huckabee, 72% Christie, 70% Cruz, Trump, to 62% Fiorina. MSNBC favorable to unfavorable percentages range were 100% Sanders, O'Malley, 62% Clinton, 50% Chafee to no coverage Webb on the Democratic side. For the Republicans, the range was 100% (Carson, Fiorina, Huckabee, Santorum, Pataki, Graham, Jindal, Walker, Kasich), 88% Rubio, 80% Bush, 66% Perry, 60% Trump, Christie, 50% Cruz, 40% Paul to no coverage Gilmore.

The only variations in favorability ratings for the liberals were *The New York Times* and MSNBC. *The New York Times* coverage of Democrats was consistently more favorable than of Republicans. They were also the only outlet, liberal or conservative, that ranked Clinton 100%. Additionally, four out of five Democrat candidates (80%) had 100% favorable articles written about them while only four out of 17 Republican candidates (23.5%) had 100% favorable articles written about them. No other news

medium demonstrated such a difference in covering the candidate's announcements. MSNBC had a slight reverse media polarization in individual favorability ratings, giving two out of five Democratic candidates (Sanders, O'Malley) a 100% rating, and nine of seventeen Republicans (Carson, Fiorina, Huckabee, Santorum, Pataki, Graham, Jindal, Walker and Kasich) a 100% rating.

In examining not only favorable coverage but coverage in general, five of the six media outlets did give more overall coverage to an identified candidate from their political ideology

(See Appendix E). For liberal newspapers, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* gave more coverage to Clinton than any other candidate from either party. CNN also gave more coverage to Clinton than any candidate from either party. The conservative *Wall Street Journal's* coverage was slightly more for Republican candidates than Democratic ones. The conservative outlet Fox News gave more coverage to most Republican candidates than Democratic candidates. The only exception was liberal outlet MSNBC. MSNBC's coverage of candidates from both parties was generally equal, with the exception that highest amount of coverage was given to a Republican (Bush).

Reflections in Polls one Week Later

The fourth question research question examined if the news media's coverage of the candidates reflected the candidates' percentage of likely voters who would vote for them if the election happened at that time in the polls, one week after announcement (See Appendix F). No strong correlation emerged between media coverage and the candidates' position in the polls. Although the polls did not reflect the coverage in the media, the candidates who were higher in the polls (or at least had a decent showing) did have more

articles written about them. Clinton, Cruz, Paul, Rubio, and Bush received the most stories and were among the highest performers in the polls (one week following their announcements). The rest of the candidates showed no impressive standing in the polls following their announcements.

Chapter 4

Discussion, Limitations, Conclusion, & Future Studies

Overall, the news media did not cover all candidates similarly. For example, the order of the candidates' announcements, at least for the Democrats, did have an effect in the media. This supported McCombs and Shaw (1972) that at the start of the campaign the media look for stories to report, and may be more apt to give more attention to early runners, as long as there was no other major story at the time. Early candidates from both the Democrat and Republican side did get substantial coverage. For the Republicans, however, Bush, Trump, Christie, and Walker received extensive coverage. However, with the exception of Trump, all of these candidates may have already been part of the media's original agenda.

In one sense, those candidates who received the most news media attention ultimately were the most successful including Clinton, Cruz, Paul, Rubio, Bush, and Trump, which supported Lippmann's (1922) theory and McCombs and Shaw (1972) that the media coverage sets the tone for the public. Clinton received the most media coverage for the Democrats and was eventually their candidate. The largest difference, however, was that Trump, not identified in the media's agenda as one of the leaders at the time of his announcement, became the nominee and was eventually elected President. Although Trump received significant media coverage for the Republicans (in the top half of Republicans) at his announcement, his method of achieving coverage was different. Trump gained momentum and coverage through his use of the news media, often setting the agenda for the news media. For example, his announcement of running for president by walking down the escalator at Trump Tower was a news media event itself, and the

media covered it. He continued to do this throughout the election, by creating events so that the media covered him even though they were often negative in their coverage, including his continued use of negative, populist material (Lowndes, 2015).

One explanation for this difference might be when there was a clear forerunner as in Clinton's case, the media agenda was set to follow this direction. However, when there was not a clear forerunner, as was the case with the Republicans, there was no set agenda and the media were more open to unusual events setting the agenda (Olds, 2013).

Type of Media

One significant finding was the large difference in coverage between online newspapers and online cable TV. Online newspapers had as much as 300% more coverage of candidates than online cable. One possible explanation might be that online newspapers created and posted more news stories; they were less reliant on photos and films in writing than cable (Smith, 2005). Cable stories are largely posted from the news clips on the cable TV station and did not change unless new action or film was available for updating. As a result, with cable TV, the same story may be posted multiple times, while keeping the overarching story the same. This difference may have contributed to such a dramatic difference in online newspapers coverage versus online cable TV (Smith 2005). Another explanation could be that online newspapers were trying to create a new market for themselves as online newspapers were growing. As a result, online newspapers consciously tried to demonstrate that their news was more current than cable by posting and changing stories frequently. This constant change offset the disadvantage that print newspapers have in not being able to adapt as quickly to events for their readers as television and radio can.

Media Polarization

When looking at the results from the study, media polarization occurred; that is, the liberal leaning media provided more favorable coverage and coverage to Democratic candidates (or at least higher percentages). Similarly, the conservative leaning media provided more favorable coverage and coverage of Republican candidates (or at least higher percentages) These differences were fairly small in covering the candidates' announcements and introducing them to the public. The major exceptions to this were *The Wall Street Journal and MSNBC. The Wall Street* and MSNBC had a slight reverse media polarization. The media favorability rating for *The Wall Street Journal* had a higher range for Democrats than Republicans, and MSNBC had more media coverage of a Republican versus a Democrat.

This small variation in media polarization contrasted with earlier research (Callandar & Wilson, Baum & Groeling 2008) on media polarization in the coverage of campaigns and supported Patterson's (2016a) finding that people, at this stage, are just beginning to get to know the candidates. As a result, information is driven by news values rather than political position. Another explanation for the lack of media polarization was that in covering the announcements, given the large number of new candidates (those who had never run for president before) the media might not have had as much information on them, or did not do much research on them as the media did not see them as campaign leaders. Many of these newcomers received 100% favorability ratings in news outlets. For example, O'Malley (Democrat) received the highest percentage of favorable articles in five out of six news sources and Graham (Republican) received the highest percentage of favorable articles in all six news sources. More support

for this theory is that most of the candidates who received the 100% favorable ratings usually had significantly fewer articles and coverage written about them. The only exceptions were Bush for *The Wall Street Journal* and Clinton for *The New York Times*. Additionally, the candidates with the highest favorability in the coverage of their announcements often were the ones who dropped out of the race (O'Malley, Graham, Jindal, and Webb).

First Impressions

According to first impressions, those candidates with the most favorable first impressions (highest favorability score) should be the leaders. This was not the case. As mentioned earlier, some of the highest favorability ratings went to new candidates who did not develop as leaders in the campaign. In fact, many of the eventual leaders of the campaign had highly unfavorable ratings at the time of their announcement. For the Democrats, Clinton had the most coverage, but also the highest amount of unfavorable coverage. She received the lowest percentage of favorable articles in four out of six news sources. For the Republicans, Graham, Gilmore Perry, and Rubio had over 90% of the articles that were favorable. The candidates with the most unfavorable articles written about them were Cruz, Trump, and Christie. Trump had the most amount of unfavorable coverage.

Similar to Patterson (2016b), it became clear that in early stages of the race (pre-primaries), negative information might not have been as damaging. Findings reinforced first impression research that the first impressions were generally more important unless the audience gained from association (Foos, 2016). These findings also suggested that in a long campaign much of the research on first impressions might not apply. Additionally,

for candidates who had a national profile, such as Clinton, their announcements were not really a first impression as the public and the media already had first impressions of these candidates. In this instance, recency (what have you done for me lately) became more important. For example, both Clinton and Trump were leaders in unfavorable articles for each of their parties at the time of their announcements, but both were their parties' eventual nominees for president.

Limitations

As the scope of the news media is wide and varied, there are some limitations to this research. This study reflected six major news sources and focused on their online postings. Statistics and effects reported were limited to those who received their news online. For example, on cable entities, if a program mentioned a candidate briefly but nothing was written about, posted, or transcribed online, then that mention would not be included in this thesis. Additionally, this thesis was not meant to be exhaustive, but rather a sampling of the overall news media. An additional limitation included an unequal number of conservative and liberal sources studies; four sources identified as liberal and two as conservative.

Future Research

Future studies should analyze the differences between online print and cable TV. Questions to consider would be, what do audiences of these two media expect? What types of stories do online print media publish versus cable TV? Is there a difference in to which type of online media is checked more often?

Political polarization needs additional research as well. Who is watching these media outlets and has this audience selected outlets based on their media polarization?

This study would help to determine the influence of first impressions for more targeted audiences.

Another suggestion for future research would be to look at a longer period of time rather than just three days. It would be beneficial to examine the period before the candidates announce to identify what the news media anticipated- who were they suggesting would run? For example, were the news media outlets focusing on possible candidates in their earlier reporting thereby setting an agenda for the public and impression prior to their announcements? Additionally, given the reverse media coverage of Bush by MSNBC, do media outlets try to influence the selection of the opponent especially when there is a wide range of opposition candidates as there were with the Republicans in 2016.

Conclusion

With the 2016 election in the rear-view mirror, it comes as no surprise, based on the evidence from this thesis, that Clinton was the Democratic nominee for President of the United States. What is surprising is that, given this data and the polls at the time, that Trump ultimately was the Republican nominee for President of the United States. If one looked at these results only to make a prediction about the outcome of the primaries, one would most likely guess Bush, Cruz, Paul or Rubio, but certainly not Trump, based on the polls after a candidate enters the election. What proved to be an election of surprises and firsts carried throughout the election of Trump, who was tenth in the polls at 3% one week after his announcement, but became the 45th President of the United States. Whereas the polls did not reflect this media coverage or the importance of coverage even

when unfavorable, media did play a role in getting a candidate recognized and in front of

the public as people began to form impressions of their final candidate at this time.

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Appendix A

Candidate's Announcement Dates

Table A1: Democrats

Date Announced	Candidate
April 12, 2015	Hillary Clinton
April 30, 2015	Bernie Sanders
May 30, 2015	Martin O'Malley
June 3, 2015	Lincoln Chafee
July 2, 2015	Jim Webb

Table A2: Republicans

Date Announced	Candidate
March 23, 2015	Ted Cruz
April 7, 2015	Rand Paul
April 13, 2015	Marco Rubio
May 3, 2015	Ben Carson
May 4, 2015	Carly Fiorina
May 5, 2015	Mike Huckabee
May 27, 2015	Rick Santorum
May 28, 2015	George Pataki
June 1, 2015	Lindsey Graham
June 4, 2015	Rick Perry
June 15, 2015	Jeb Bush
June 16, 2015	Donald Trump
June 24, 2015	Bobby Jindal
June 30, 2015	Chris Christie
July 13, 2015	Scott Walker
July 21, 2015	John Kasich
July 30, 2015	James Gilmore

Appendix B

Coding Sheet

Contains the Following Phrases:	Yes or No (Times)
Unfavorable (disrupt, rookie, trouble, fears, lying, long road, campaign challenge, double edged, lacks judgment, backing off support, holds off, deceptive, insider candidate, typical politician, Washington insider, failed bid, racist, old, young, mean spirited, unorganized political machine, unknown)	
Favorable (resonate with voters, running for president, here are things to know about, uniting opportunity, energetic, optimistic, deal maker, working together, across party lines, success, bright future, believing in America, strong candidate, outsider, not a typical politician, large crowds, support, rallying around the candidate)	

Photo	Positive or Negative
How was the photo? Did it portray the candidate in a positive or negative light?	

Totals	
Positive	
Negative	
Photo	
Overall Score/Outcome	

Notes:

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Appendix C

Number of Articles by Candidate

Candidates listed in order of their announcement

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Total Number of Articles
Clinton	188
Sanders	60
O'Malley	36
Chafee	30
Webb	24
Candidate's Last Name (Republicans)	Total Number of Articles
Cruz	159
Paul	155
Rubio	130
Carson	42
Fiorina	46
Huckabee	64
Santorum	39
Pataki	36
Graham	33
Perry	60
Bush	156
Trump	141
Jindal	48
Christie	82
Walker	83
Kasich	51
Gilmore	3

Appendix D

Type of Media Coverage candidates listed in order of their announcement

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Total Number of Articles (Cable)	Total Number of Articles (Newspaper)	Percentage Increase from Cable to Newspaper
Clinton	73	115	57%
Sanders	12	48	300%
O'Malley	12	24	100%
Chafee	11	19	73%
Webb	12	12	0%
Candidate's Last Name (Republicans)	Total Number of Articles (Cable)	Total Number of Articles (Newspaper)	Percentage Increase from Cable to Newspaper
Cruz	63	96	52%
Paul	62	93	50%
Rubio	46	84	83%
Carson	18	24	33%
Fiorina	18	28	56%
Huckabee	17	47	176%
Santorum	16	23	44%
Pataki	12	24	100%
Graham	15	18	20%
Perry	29	31	7%
Bush	74	82	11%
Trump	59	82	39%
Jindal	17	31	82%
Christie	32	50	56%
Walker	37	46	24%
Kasich	16	35	119%
Gilmore	0	3	N/A

Appendix E

Media Polarization Chart

Table E1: New York Times (Liberal Leaning)

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Clinton	32	0	100%	32
Sanders	10	2	83%	12
O'Malley	7	0	100%	7
Chafee	6	0	100%	6
Webb	5	0	100%	5
Candidate's Last Name (Republicans)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Cruz	14	6	70%	20
Paul	16	3	84%	19
Rubio	14	2	88%	16
Carson	6	1	86%	7
Fiorina	5	3	62%	8
Huckabee	11	3	78%	14
Santorum	4	1	80%	5
Pataki	6	1	86%	7
Graham	4	0	100%	4
Perry	7	0	100%	7
Bush	17	4	81%	21
Trump	7	3	70%	10
Jindal	6	1	86%	7
Christie	13	5	72%	18
Walker	9	2	82%	11
Kasich	7	0	100%	7
Gilmore	2	0	100%	2

Table E2: Washington Post (Liberal Leaning)

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Clinton	39	22	64%	61
Sanders	21	3	88%	24
O'Malley	8	4	67%	12
Chafee	6	1	86%	7
Webb	6	0	100%	6
Candidate's Last Name (Republicans)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Cruz	30	19	61%	49
Paul	36	13	73%	49
Rubio	47	5	90%	52
Carson	11	2	85%	13
Fiorina	11	2	85%	13
Huckabee	13	9	59%	22
Santorum	10	2	83%	12
Pataki	11	2	85%	13
Graham	9	0	100%	9
Perry	16	1	94%	17
Bush	37	10	79%	47
Trump	28	23	55%	51
Jindal	11	6	65%	17
Christie	17	9	65%	26
Walker	18	10	64%	28
Kasich	17	2	89%	19
Gilmore	1	0	100%	1

Table E3: Wall Street Journal (Conservative Leaning)

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Clinton	17	5	77%	22
Sanders	10	2	83%	12
O'Malley	5	0	100%	5
Chafee	4	0	100%	4
Webb	1	0	100%	1
Candidate's Last Name (Republicans)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Cruz	21	6	78%	27
Paul	21	4	84%	25
Rubio	15	1	94%	16
Carson	3	1	75%	4
Fiorina	4	3	57%	7
Huckabee	10	2	83%	12
Santorum	6	0	100%	6
Pataki	4	0	100%	4
Graham	5	0	100%	5
Perry	6	1	86%	7
Bush	14	0	100%	14
Trump	15	6	71%	21
Jindal	7	0	100%	7
Christie	4	2	67%	6
Walker	7	0	100%	7
Kasich	9	0	100%	9
Gilmore	0	0	N/A	0

Table E4: CNN (Liberal Leaning)

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Clinton	22	13	62%	35
Sanders	5	2	71%	7
O'Malley	7	0	100%	7
Chafee	3	2	66%	5
Webb	4	0	100%	4
Candidate's Last Name (Republicans)	**Number of Favorable Articles**	**Number of Unfavorable Articles**	**Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable**	**Total Articles**
Cruz	12	12	50%	24
Paul	11	5	68%	16
Rubio	9	1	90%	10
Carson	6	0	100%	6
Fiorina	6	0	100%	6
Huckabee	4	0	100%	4
Santorum	3	1	75%	4
Pataki	5	0	100%	5
Graham	5	0	100%	5
Perry	10	0	100%	10
Bush	18	4	81%	22
Trump	13	5	72%	18
Jindal	4	1	80%	5
Christie	5	3	62%	8
Walker	9	3	75%	12
Kasich	3	0	100%	3
Gilmore	0	0	N/A	0

Table E5: Fox News (Conservative Leaning)

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Clinton	16	14	53%	30
Sanders	3	1	75%	4
O'Malley	5	0	100%	5
Chafee	4	2	66%	6
Webb	7	1	87%	8
Candidate's Last Name (Reps.)	Number of Favorable Articles (Fox-Conservative Leaning)	Number of Unfavorable Articles (Fox-Conservative Leaning)	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Cruz	26	7	78%	33
Paul	28	13	68%	41
Rubio	8	2	80%	10
Carson	9	1	90%	10
Fiorina	9	0	100%	9
Huckabee	8	2	80%	10
Santorum	8	1	88%	9
Pataki	4	1	80%	5
Graham	8	0	100%	8
Perry	15	1	93%	16
Bush	21	6	77%	27
Trump	23	13	63%	36
Jindal	11	0	100%	11
Christie	16	3	84%	19
Walker	18	3	85%	21
Kasich	11	0	100%	11
Gilmore	0	0	N/A	0

Table E6: MSNBC (Liberal Leaning)

Candidate's Last Name (Democrats)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Clinton	5	3	62%	8
Sanders	1	0	100%	1
O'Malley	5	0	100%	5
Chafee	1	1	50%	2
Webb	0	0	N/A	0
Candidate's Last Name (Republicans)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Percentage of Favorable to Unfavorable	Total Articles
Cruz	3	3	50%	6
Paul	2	3	40%	5
Rubio	8	1	88%	9
Carson	3	0	100%	3
Fiorina	3	0	100%	3
Huckabee	2	0	100%	2
Santorum	3	0	100%	3
Pataki	2	0	100%	2
Graham	2	0	100%	2
Perry	2	1	66%	3
Bush	20	5	80%	25
Trump	3	2	60%	5
Jindal	1	0	100%	1
Christie	3	2	60%	5
Walker	4	0	100%	4
Kasich	2	0	100%	2
Gilmore	0	0	N/A	0

Appendix F

Relationship of Coverage to Poll Standing

Candidate's Last Name (Dems.)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Total Number of Articles	Percentage Favorable	Percentage Unfavorable	Poll Standing (1 Week After Announce)
Clinton	131	57	191	69%	31%	60%
Sanders	50	10	60	83%	17%	6%
O'Malley	32	4	36	89%	11%	0%
Chafee	24	6	30	80%	20%	0%
Webb	23	1	24	96%	4%	0%
Candidate's Last Name (Reps.)	Number of Favorable Articles	Number of Unfavorable Articles	Total Number of Articles	Percentage Favorable	Percentage Unfavorable	Poll Standing (1 Week After Announce)
Cruz	106	53	159	67%	33%	5%
Paul	114	41	155	74%	26%	10%
Rubio	118	12	130	91%	9%	8%
Carson	37	5	42	88%	12%	5%
Fiorina	38	8	46	83%	17%	1%
Huckabee	49	16	64	77%	23%	8%
Santorum	34	5	39	87%	13%	2%
Pataki	32	4	36	89%	11%	2%
Graham	33	0	33	100%	0%	1%
Perry	56	4	60	93%	7%	3%
Bush	127	29	156	81%	19%	13%
Trump	89	52	141	63%	37%	3%
Jindal	40	8	48	83%	17%	1%
Christie	58	24	82	71%	29%	3%
Walker	65	18	83	78%	22%	10%
Kasich	49	2	51	96%	4%	2%
Gilmore	3	0	3	100%	0%	0%