

4-7-2006

Framing the Second War in Iraq: An Analysis of ABC, CBS and NBC News and News Interview Show Coverage

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**Framing the Second War in Iraq:
An Analysis of ABC, CBS and NBC News and
News Interview Show Coverage**

A Thesis

Presented to the

School of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the

Masters of the Arts Degree

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Rebecca M. Graham

April 7, 2006

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Thesis Acceptance

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Date April 19, 2006

Abstract

Terrorist events that occurred in the United States on September 11th, 2001 put the U.S. on the offensive in dealing with terrorist activity. The U.S. entered into war with Afghanistan and Iraq and journalists were at the forefront of these events reporting from the front lines.

This thesis applies the theories of agenda-setting, framing, and priming in answering questions related to media coverage of events surrounding the war in Iraq. News coverage from three U.S. networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) was examined to determine the role that media played in the war in Iraq. Mass media are powerful tools of persuasion (Saso, 2005). The extent to which media has control of what the public views and perceives as relevant, is ultimately decided by the journalist who is reporting those events.

This thesis examines frames to determine what are the primary sources for news stories (government, public, journalist, etc.) and what type of news stories are getting the most air time versus those that receive little or no air time. News frames as defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) are tools that can be used to “convey, interpret, and evaluate information” (p. 94). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five frames that media use in reporting new events: conflict frames, human interest frames, economic consequences frames, mortality frames and responsibility frames. These five categories were used in examining news content from the three major television networks.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Journalists can establish or legitimize a situational logic for interpreting events, giving them the power to define political order” (Dobkin, 1993, p. 108). War has been linked to the historical existence of the news media, with news programs evolving during war and the bulletin (in cinemas) being used to propagate wars (Peace, 1998). “The conventions established at this time, which enabled reality to be reconstructed, are still present today and evident in modern news” (Peace, 1998, p. 1)

After the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, it became imperative for the Bush Administration to respond by framing a goal to eliminate terrorism. The United States first entered into combat with Afghanistan, as it was believed that leaders of the terrorist organization al Qaeda were residing in Afghanistan. Iraq, since the first Gulf War of 1990-91, had been a well-known enemy of the United States, and war soon followed in this country as well. This thesis will explore mass media roles in the events that occurred following the United States pronouncement to enter into war with Iraq.

Following the events of September 11, Cohen, Ball-Rokeach, Jung and Kim (2003) conducted a study to learn how people connected with media had followed these events. It was discovered that “a majority of respondents reported spending more time watching television since September 11” (p. 35). This held true for all categories of mass media coverage (newspaper, radio, internet, etc.) with an increase

in the amount of time people spent accessing these sources for information (Cohen, et al., 2003). Their findings suggested that the “importance of mass media as an informational resource, compared to smaller-scale targeted media or interpersonal communication, increases in ambiguous situations” (p. 36).

Mass media appeared to play an important role in how the public views and interprets the events that surrounded the second war with Iraq. News stories are often told from various points of view and, according to Fiske (1987), news, of course can never give a full, accurate, objective picture of reality nor should it attempt to, for such an enterprise can only serve to increase its authority and decrease people’s opportunity to “argue” with it. In a progressive democracy, news should stress its discursive constructedness, should nominate *all* its voices... and should open its text to invite more producerly reading relations (pp. 307-8).

This study will attempt to look at a wide variety of news frames to determine if all sides are being incorporated in the news coverage of the Iraqi war. News frames as defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) are tools that can be used to “convey, interpret, and evaluate information” (p. 94).

Mass media are powerful tools of persuasion (Saso, 2005). There is the possibility that the personal feelings of reporters and their viewpoints are often emphasized when framing a story, and this can lead to a hurdle in reporting on wars or potential wars. Being a tool of persuasion, the press can turn the tide for or against war when only one side of the story is being framed and revisited by the press. The

present study researched how media understandings influence their behavior (McCombs, 1997).

The focus for the study incorporated events concerning Iraq, and analyzed the content from the three major networks on how these events were reported. Literature was reviewed to discover what may influence the press and the way in which they frame stories concerning war.

The concepts of agenda-setting, priming and framing were used to examine news coverage from three major television news networks: ABC, CBS and NBC. It has been noted by several researchers (Gitlin 1980; Gameson 1989; Tuchman 1978) that journalists' are reliant on frames or "interpretive categories to handle the flow of news events" (Dobkin, 1993, p. 109).

News frames as defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) are tools that can be used to "convey, interpret, and evaluate information" (p. 94). In a study by Lenart and Targ (1992) they state that the "selection, presentation, emphasis, and exclusion of media frames results in persistent patterns of cognition and interpretation that routinely organize the content and the parameters of public discourse" (p. 341).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) have identified five frames that are common in U.S. news coverage: conflict frames, human interest frames, economic consequences frames, mortality frames and responsibility frames. This thesis categorized news coverage from the three networks into the five different framing categories in order to determine what frames media used to broadcast the events surrounding the war in Iraq.

Agenda-setting indicates the amount of time given to different frames and the amount of importance that the public will attach to each issue (Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

The goal of this thesis was to examine frames and determine what are the primary sources for news stories (government, public, journalist, etc.) and what type of news stories are getting more air time versus those that receive little or no air time.

“For reporters and editors, the expectation (during the first Gulf War) was that they could have reasonable freedom to roam the battlefield, develop their own sources, and provide a wide set of perspectives” (Shaw & Martin, 1993, p. 43). By examining coverage of the second Gulf war, framing analysis gauged if reporters were still setting their own expectations or following a government and/or military agenda in the frames they select for news stories. It will explore the different viewpoints that were being expressed in news coverage and examine the overall coverage as either positive, negative or neutral in stories related to the war.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Mass media may influence the general public in matters of war (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Likewise, media are important in related conflicts on whether to pursue a war or seek peace (Saso, 2005). The framework for this thesis focuses on the theories of agenda-setting, priming and framing. The purpose was to analyze United States network news coverage of the second Iraqi war. The focus was on whether media tend to change frames and agendas once a conflict or war has begun in order to support a government agenda.

Framing, Priming and Media Agenda-setting in Wartime

Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan (2002) argued that there are three related models of cognitive effects of mass media: agenda-setting, priming and framing. Because of the relationships between the three models, priming and framing are often seen as natural “extensions” of agenda-setting (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002, p. 8). While agenda-setting addresses potential audience effect, priming and framing tend to be related specifically to media content. Scheufele (2000) suggested that although the three models are related the concepts of agenda-setting, priming and framing are “ill-defined concepts,” (p. 8) and therefore any attempt to combine them into a single theoretical framework would only “muddle the distinctions” between the concepts (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002, p. 8).

There are several reasons why mass media use frames to set an agenda for audience members. Theory on the role of media in agenda-setting can be traced to Cohen's (1963) argument that although media might not be effective in telling people what to think, they can tell people what to think about (Dalton & Beck, 1998). By framing the presentation of news, mass media may exert influence over public opinion (Dalton & Beck, 1998).

The theory of framing first appeared in Goffman's (1974) influential work (Simon & Xenos, 2000). Framing involves "the organization and packaging of information" (Simon & Xenos, 2000, p. 366). According to Goffman, persons must actively organize and deduce their life experiences to make sense of the world around them (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002). Framing theory suggests that media highlight key information clearly, while other information fades into the background (Menashe & Siegel, 1998). Framing, as defined by Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan (2002), suggests that "*the way*" news coverage is reported generates different conclusions among audiences (p. 21). This theory may be applied when looking at how media report stories about war and conflict (Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

Agenda-setting indicates the amount of time given to different frames and the amount of importance that the public will attach to each issue (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Whereas the public agenda is composed of a set of public issues, "an issue consists of a set of attributes (characteristics that the issue focuses on) that can be employed to evaluate or think about the issue" (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002, p. 11). This is known as attribute agenda-setting – an extended version of agenda-

setting, which deals with the prominence of issue attributes (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002).

According to McCombs (1997), accomplishing agreement among members of the public is the central point of agenda-setting theory, a social science perspective that credits news media with considerable importance for influencing the community regarding consensus on the important problems and issues of the day. McCombs (1997) contended that news media often use agenda-setting to help build community. Four visions of agenda-setting are defined by McCombs (1997):

(1) *professional detachment* – although media often try to separate themselves from the community when reporting on issues they still have “an effect on the community they serve... The very process of observation has an effect on the thing that is being observed” (p. 438);

(2) *targeted involvement* – investigative reporting and editorial stories aggressively attempt to put specific issues onto the public agenda (p. 438);

(3) *boosterism* – although most news organizations claim they are not “partisan agenda-setters,” (p. 438) they sometimes portray themselves as the cheerleader for issues they consider relevant; and,

(4) *proactive agenda-setting* – in recent years past conservative positions of news media are being replaced with proactive agenda-setting, in which news media have begun to take an active part in creating the community agenda that results from the news agenda, public agenda, and government agenda. “To a

considerable degree...media literally create in our head the pictures of many public issues” (McCombs, 1997, p. 441).

Whereas framing and agenda-setting can determine the impact that stories will have on public opinion, priming in news programs may “affect the criteria by which political leaders are judged” (Iyengar & Simon, 1993, p. 366). Priming is essentially an extension of agenda-setting in that it brings to the forefront those political judgments that media assess as most important (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Iyengar and Simon (1993) suggested that audience member decisions about political or public figures are dependent on media coverage of issues as a source for evaluation of candidates (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002). Past research has found that priming effects are linked directly to the prominence of various political issues (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002).

Although theories such as framing, agenda-setting, and priming may begin to explain the influence of mass media on public opinion, if an issue does not reverberate with the public, it will not appear on the public agenda – despite the importance on the media agenda (McCombs, 1997).

Studies Examining Wars, Conflicts and Media Influence

Studies were examined to establish a background regarding media coverage of wars and conflicts. Previous research has found:

- a limited amount of bias found in TV coverage of the Vietnam War (Russo, 1972)

- Vietnam was seen as the “living room war,” and coverage appeared to have an effect on public opinion (Cook, 2001, p.203)
- Lack of support for anti-war demonstrators was reflected in media coverage of Vietnam (Small, 1989)
- Visual depiction of bodies only represented North Vietnam, and dead Americans were rarely shown (Cook, 2001)
- The role of a photojournalist was central to early press coverage of the Vietnam War (Sherer, 1997)
- Coverage of Somalia reflected influence of the government agenda (Mermin, 1997)
- *Life* magazine served as a propaganda tool during the Gulf War (Feeney & Pompper, 2002)
- Public opinion of the Gulf War reflected mass media agenda-setting (Iyengar & Simon, 1993)
- Military controlled information was received by the press during the Gulf War (Mould, 1996)
- Priming in media coverage regarding the president’s performance was observed during the Gulf War and economic recession (Pan & Kosicki, 1997)
- American public opinion during three different periods of war and conflict often reflected mass media coverage of the event (Kohut & Toth, 1994)

These studies were examined to establish a basis for understanding the role that media have played in influencing past war coverage and related stories, such as the 1992 conflict in Somalia.

Mass Media Coverage of Vietnam

Frank Russo (1972) defined “bias” as “the quality of statements of opinion or of actual or supposed fact that would influence one to support or oppose a President or his policy” (p.1). Through extensive testing of news coverage from the CBS and NBC television networks between 1969 and 1970, Russo (1972) concluded that factually there was no “bias” against the Nixon Administration’s policies in Vietnam. On specific facets of the war, the network newscasts did demonstrate some bias, but this was canceled out by the overall reporting of the war (Russo, 1972). When the two networks presented negative items, they usually involved civilian casualties caused by American forces and popular support of the South Vietnamese government (Russo, 1972). Contrary to popular belief, mass media agenda-setting tended to support the war in its early years (Russo, 1972).

John Fiske (1987) contends that “theories of news which foreground questions of accuracy, bias, or objectivity are based on a empiricist notion of reality...these questions are, however, important... because they can give insight into the professional ideology of the news makers” (p. 282). Goodwin (1990) states that “the real issue is whether the range of biases represented is fair. In other words, does it

adequately reveal the range of points of view held by the public?” (p. 54) Goodwin goes on to say the following:

It is quite plausible to believe that all media images are constructed and still maintain that some constructions are more truthful than others. Surely there are competing explanations of social reality, and surely all factual statements are also statements of value...some explanations receive more attention and validation than others (p. 57).

It is through the use of frames that some themes and thus explanations appear to receive more attention and validation than others.

Cook (2001) examined how news media coverage used images of dead bodies to support the Vietnam War. Television news coverage would show “no more than a brief shot of a wounded soldier being lifted into a helicopter,” but had no problem showing vivid pictures of North Vietnamese bodies (2001, p. 203). This is referred to as “dead-body politics” (p. 203). American and Vietnamese bodies were treated differently in media coverage. North Vietnamese bodies were often used in representational structures, which sought to gather consensus for the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. This clearly showed support for the American involvement in the Vietnam War.

When photojournalist Dave Hamer arrived in South Vietnam in 1962, he set out to discover “why the United States was involved in this war and why were American citizens dying so far away” (Sherer, 1997, p. 4). In Vietnam, Hamer was introduced to a small press corps that was overtly supportive of the war. The relationship

between the press and military during Vietnam in the early 1960s was similar to WWII and Korea (Sherer, 1997). The communication lines were open between military and press, and there was little censorship. Censorship was unnecessary, as it took too long to get the stories out of South Vietnam. As the end of the war was looming in 1968, this process became quicker with the turnover on stories taking approximately 24 hours (Sherer, 1997). Television film still had to be shipped, developed and edited for broadcast prior to the advent of electronic news gathering and satellite equipment.

Much of the early coverage of Vietnam showed Americans in the role of advisor to the South Vietnamese. In these early years of coverage, public response was not overwhelming (Sherer, 1997). It was not until 1965, when large numbers of troops were committed to the war that Americans began to take an innate interest in the war. Although Congress had deemed the war necessary, Americans had not given it much thought until it hit home and media began covering the conflict on a nightly basis.

Vietnam became known as the “living room war,” in which viewers could glance at the action, although “television coverage of the Vietnam War largely concealed the representation of wounding with most segments” (Cook, 2001, p. 203). In the early years of the war, television news content tended to shield viewers from graphic video of American casualties.

It was the first televised war and was, for the most part, not censored by the military. However, there was manipulation of the press as “...some U.S. political, diplomatic, and military leaders thought that they could effectively mislead

journalists and, through them, the public about the reality of war” (Rather, 2001, p. 68). This led to an issue of mistrust between journalists and the powers that be. This became a factor in how media portrayed the Vietnam War to the public, as the war progressed.

During the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement received a lot of coverage both within the United States and internationally. Most of the coverage, as examined by Small (1989), negatively reflected the anti-war movement until the change of tide in 1968 when it appeared that America would not leave Vietnam without a win. The 1968 election brought a change in administration in early 1969, and President Richard Nixon vowed to end the war. News coverage by *The New York Times* often concentrated on the violent and bizarre behavior of the movement rather than the political message of the movement. The anti-war movement was often portrayed as “scruffy, ill-mannered types mingled with left wing radicals under revolutionary banners to challenge traditional democratic processes” (Small, 1989, p. 331).

Democratic liberals began to join the anti-war critics, and this helped to make the movement more popular. The anti-war movement seems to be supported by media coverage during this time period of the Vietnam War. Small’s study showed a changing tide by media in support of the anti-war protestors, but this change was led by Democratic officials who wanted to pull out of Vietnam and not by media.

Mass Media Coverage & the Gulf War

Media helped set the agenda during the Gulf War of 1990-91 by determining what the significant issues of the war were and to communicate these to the public. Iyengar and Simon (1993) discovered that the Gulf War “absorbed virtually all network news time” (p. 371). The Persian Gulf received more public attention than ongoing events such as the economy, the national budget deficit, and the fight to stop sale and use of illegal drugs (Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

The first Gulf War cover of *Life* magazine in March 1991 showed a picture of Captain David Ray Smith in what was a “highly symbolic close-up” that showed his severe gaze (Feeney & Pompper, 2002, p. 28). During time of war, magazines such as *Life* rise to the occasion and become a social indicator. Feeney and Pompper (2002) scrutinized the ideological forces that affected *Life's* Gulf War covers during 1991. Images on five covers reflected a nation that stood behind its soldiers. *Life* stood out as an agenda-building tool that strongly supported the Gulf War on its covers.

Media coverage of the Gulf War was guided by the influence of the military. Media relations during the Gulf War were primarily between the government established press pools and the military. Press pools consisted of a limited number of journalists that were allowed to report on events surrounding the Gulf War but only those events that the military allowed them access to. Reporters were granted little or no access to troops and the ongoing action in the Gulf. Mould (1996) discussed the Battle of Khafji that occurred during January 1991. During this battle, the coalition

was taken by surprise when Iraqi forces took the offensive and tried to take control of the town (Mould, 1996). The Battle of Khafji “severely tested the coalition’s elaborate media management system of press pools and military briefings” (Mould, 1996, p. 133).

Many of the reporters that were allowed into Saudi Arabia were not necessarily allowed into the press pools (Mould, 1996). Media depended upon military briefings and reports from their colleagues in the pools for information (Mould, 1996). According to the military, “the pool system was intended to provide access while avoiding the nightmare of hundreds of journalists trying to reach the front lines at once” (Mould, 1996, p. 135). Journalists, however, felt that the pools were confining and did not allow them to report what was occurring in the Gulf accurately.

The lack of information journalists had access to eventually led to a divide regarding the events surrounding the Battle of Khafji. Media considered this battle more important than did the military, simply because they did not know what to believe regarding information the military was providing. American military information was contradicted by reports that media were receiving from the French (Mould, 1996). Media and military relations began to deteriorate. *The New York Times* noted that “information is withheld at the briefing when reporters in the field, working under de facto censorship, have nonetheless written or broadcast it” (Mould, 1996, p. 158). Following the Battle of Khafji, the military announced that it was increasing the number of pools to cover U.S. ground forces (Mould, 1996). Despite the lack of information that journalists were allowed access to regarding the Gulf War

or maybe in spite of it, most coverage of the Gulf War portrayed it as relatively cost-free with a good ending (Kohut & Toth, 1994).

Framing and Priming During the Gulf War

Coverage of the Gulf War was immensely episodic in the use of frames. An episodic frame portrays issues in terms of specific instances or events. Examples of episodic frames include: a homeless person, an unemployed worker, an attempted murder, etc. (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). This type of report is used to make for “good pictures” (Iyengar & Simon, 1993, p. 369). Thematic frames, another type of framing, provide more “in-depth, interpretive analysis” (Iyengar, p.62, 1996). These frames depict issues. Iyengar and Simon’s (1993) study takes a look at whether or not episodic frames influenced public opinion that brought the Persian Gulf to the forefront as the nation’s top problem and concern.

In a study by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) that focused on framing in television they identified five frames common in media coverage in the U.S.:

- (1) *Conflict frames* - frames that “emphasize conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (p. 95).
- (2) *Human interest frames* - these frames bring “a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem” (p. 95).
- (3) *Economic consequences frame* – these report “an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region, or country” (p. 96).

(4) *Mortality frame* – frames that “put the event, problem, or issue in the context of the religious tenets or moral prescription” (p. 96).

(5) *Responsibility frame* – frames that “present an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual group” (p. 96).

As part of the study frames will be examined to see which ones are episodic and which ones are thematic as well as determining what category each would fall into for the five most common frames as defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

A second part of Iyengar and Simon’s (1993) study focused on priming and how news coverage may influence performance assessments, and to a lesser degree personality assessments of President George H. W. Bush. For more than six months, Gulf War coverage overwhelmed coverage of a worsening economy.

President Bush’s approval rating in opinion polls rose during the Gulf War, but fell after it was over, as media attention returned to the economic recession. Pan and Kosicki (1997) found that it was clear that the Gulf War issue contributed positively to Bush’s job performance, and stories involving the economy contributed negatively. Pan and Kosicki (1997) do not accuse media of having a liberal or conservative bias when reporting, but the reporting of each issue in media coverage “might be the underlying force that moved people toward either a positive or negative direction in their evaluations of Bush” (p. 15). Media coverage appeared to be an influential tool in politics.

Kohut and Toth (1994) found that since the Cold War, the American public has revealed three different faces regarding U.S. military force abroad: “full support for the Gulf War, transitory support in Somalia, and no support in Bosnia” (p. 47).

Public opinion in these three different conflicts suggested that Americans favored military action in only two situations: (1) if America’s interests are at stake; and (2) if American military force can provide humanitarian aid without engaging in a prolonged conflict (Kohut & Toth, 1994). Due to extensive media coverage of the Gulf War public opinion became solidified in support of military efforts (Kohut & Toth, 1994). It was clear during the Gulf War that the media agenda was linked closely to the government agenda.

U.S. Military Forces in Somalia and Bosnia

When the United States sent military forces to Somalia to provide humanitarian aid, American public opinion was very supportive, and this continued despite clashes with Somali warlord Mohamed Farah and resulting U.S. casualties (Kohut & Toth, 1994). The story faded from media coverage for approximately six months. When the story did surface again, public interest had decreased dramatically as the U.S. death toll mounted and violence increased. Public opinion became divided (46 percent disapproved, and 43 percent approved) (Kohut & Toth, 1994). Blame cannot fully be put on media and how the story was reported, as both the Bush and Clinton administrations provided a “lack of sustained communication to the public” (Kohut & Toth, 1994, p. 52).

Media failed to engage the public's interest in the Bosnian conflict. Americans simply did not feel that the conflict in Bosnia was an American fight (Kohut & Toth, 1994). Impelled by the slaughter of 68 civilians in an outdoor market in Sarajevo, there was a rise in the view that the United States should intervene, but despite aggressive media coverage an attitude remained that this was not an American fight (Kohut & Toth, 1994).

“Instantaneous transmission of newsworthy images today undoubtedly increases public awareness of major events” (Sherer, 1997, p. 7). As technology provides Americans new insights into major events it will become easier for the public to be able to determine when media are framing a story or attempting to establish their own agenda.

Somalia and the Government Agenda

Although this story first appeared on the government agenda, ABC, CBS and NBC later picked it up. The exception was CNN.

The most vivid and startling coverage surrounding the Somalia conflict was done by CNN. CNN framed Somalia as a tragedy that the United States had turned its back on (Mermin, 1997). CNN's stories might have had an impact, behind-the-scenes, in influencing Senator Nancy Kassebaum, a Republican from Kansas, and others in Washington, causing it to appear on the governmental agenda. Although the three major networks covered the event following government decisions, they did not precede these decisions by setting their own agenda. It was CNN who broke away

from the pack and set a frame with the topic. It is unclear from the research if CNN's story or governmental attention came first. The findings indicated that, although television has the "power to move governments," governments have the power to move television (Mermin, 1997, p. 401).

Priming and Presidential Elections

Priming and Interpersonal Communication

Mendelson (1996) investigated the question of priming as posed by Iyengar and Kinder (1987). In his 1996 study Mendelson examined the question of priming over a small amount of time in a Canadian election campaign. Media can persuade on particularly unfamiliar questions or over a short period of time (Mendelson, 1996). Since Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) study many studies have confirmed that media can prime "that is they can provoke opinion or behavior change not because individuals alter their beliefs or evaluations of objects, but because they alter the relative weight they give to various considerations that make up the ultimate evaluation" (Mendelson, 1996, p. 113).

Work by Zaller (1992) focused on how individuals come to shape their political opinions (Mendelson, 1996). Zaller (1992) suggests that when people are called on to make a decision their first response will be constructed by "what comes to mind" or what is at the "top of the head" (Mendelson, 1996, p. 113). Therefore, according to

Mendelson (1996) “judgments are often based on those constructs that are accessible and those aspects of political life that come to mind” (p. 114).

Keeter (1987) and Wattenberg (1991) have suggested that candidates determine the importance of the vote and have so for the last three decades but Mendelson (1996) argues that candidate evaluations become more important in determining the vote during a short period of time as that given to a campaign (Mendelson, 1996).

During the 1988 Canadian election campaign media coverage focused primarily on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) (Mendelson, 1996). Mendelson (1996) discovered that although media focused on the FTA those individuals more highly exposed to the media did not focus their vote on the FTA issue alone as the campaign progressed. Mendelson (1996) suggests that “while the media frame campaigns through the character of leaders, interpersonal communications may focus on issues” (p. 121). These two competing frames sway the decisions of voters and can affect election results in close contests by suggesting different matters of importance that come to the “top of the head” (p. 122).

In the 2004 election among the issues that came to the “top of the head” (p. 122) were the Iraqi war and the role that President Bush has played in the war. Voters would have determined if that role was negative or positive based not only on how media framed these events but also upon the voters’ interpersonal communication skills and the effects that priming can have on viewers.

Influence of Journalists in Presidential Debates

Research has shown that voter knowledge increases during presidential debates (Benoit & Hansen, 2001). What is often overlooked during debates is that the topics candidates debate are written by reporters and the topics the reporters deem worthy of addressing by the candidates (Benoit & Hansen, 2001): “Thus the questions asked in presidential debates clearly exert considerable influence over the topics candidates discuss, and accordingly, over what information voters receive” (p. 131). Therefore, reporters asking the questions are not reporting the news but generating the news and directly influencing the news (Benoit & Hansen, 2001). A study done by Eveland, McLeod, and Nathanson (1994) focused on the debate questions of the 1992 election determining the differences between questions asked by journalists and those asked by voters (Benoit & Hansen, 2001). They discovered that journalists’ questions were more likely to bring about good answers (yes/no and why questions) where as the voters’ questions took it a step further by asking the “how” questions (Benoit & Hansen, 2001). The question raised by Benoit and Hansen in their 2001 study was: “Do the issues that are most important to the public correlate with the topics of journalist questions in presidential debates?” (p. 133). Benoit and Hansen (2001) discovered that a “large number of questions, especially in debates after 1960, did not address topics that (according to poll data) were important to voters” (p. 135).

Implications from Benoit and Hansen’s (2001) study suggest media agenda-setting does not operate on journalistic question selection in presidential debates and

therefore candidates are not expected to address the issues on which voters are well informed, but instead address the issues that are most important to voters.

The theory of agenda-setting would assume that news coverage sways the public in determining which issues are perceived to be important by the public (Benoit & Hansen, 2001). Benoit and Hansen ultimately reach the conclusion that the “data in this study makes it quite clear that they (journalists) are not pursuing the public’s issue agenda” (p. 140) with the questions posed at presidential debates but are in fact following their own media agenda-setting.

Dalton and Beck suggested in their 1998 study that some critics indicate that the liberal orientation of journalists cause them to project their own views and interest onto the campaign. Other arguments are made for the influence of large corporations that often manipulate press ownerships (Dalton & Beck, 1998). Some critics believe it is a matter of dollar signs and that media is driven to report what will sell (Dalton & Beck, 1998).

Content Studies of Network Television News

According to a study by Davis and Walton (1983), analyses of news stories usually develop unplanned interpretations of the presentation. “It is quite clear that selection, sequence and interaction of visual and auditory content in television are usually planned with an intention of conveying a particular meaning and, therefore, with a potential for biasing the interpretation of the viewer” (McQuail, 1992, p. 132).

During the events of September 11, 2001 it was indicated that the “public’s need to know trumps everything else” (Kohut, 2002, p. 54). This need to know makes the public more aware of news coverage and helps to shape their opinions of media performance (Kohut, 2002). Although media performance was well received and liked by viewers, by the change of seasons their fears began to decline and so did the positive reviews that the press’s coverage had received regarding terrorism coverage (Kohut, 2002). However, “few respondents, if any, fault coverage of the terrorist attacks for being biased, too negative, or too sensational” (p. 54). These are usually the leading criticisms of the press during normal times of news reporting (Kohut, 2002). A mid-November survey indicated that there was a “major increase in favorable opinions of the press for accuracy of reporting, professionalism, morality, patriotism, and caring about the people it covers” (p. 55).

In times of war media to a degree become “incorporated into their nation states and are likely to be carried along uncritically in popular international enterprises, where national ‘honor’ and ‘interest’ is thought to be involved” (McQuail, 1992, p. 132).

Recent coverage of the Iraqi war, according to a study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA), was “evenly balanced between positive and negative coverage” (Felling, 2003a). This report was based on 1,131 stories comprising 33 minutes of airtime on stations ABC, CBS and NBC evening news and Fox Network Channel’s “Special Report with Brit Hume” (Felling, 2003a, p. 1). According to the

study conducted by the CMPA network news was exceedingly supportive of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In another study conducted by the CMPA, it was discovered that evaluations of President Bush dropped from a 56% positive during the Iraq war to a 32% positive following the end of formal military in Iraq. These findings come from CMPA's study of 1,876 stories (54 hours, 36 minutes) on the Bush administration on ABC, CBS and NBC nightly news broadcasts from May 1st through October 31st. According to CMPA President Dr. Robert Lichter, "the media may back a president while their country is at war, but they soon get back to their usual war against the president" (Felling, 2003b, p. 2). "Despite having given the most favorable coverage to the war, CBS was toughest on President Bush in its aftermath with 77% negative evaluations, followed by ABC with 67% negative and NBC with 62% negative comments" (Felling, 2003b, p. 2).

In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, it was discovered that in 2004 52% of Americans said that they follow international news most of the time when major developments occur. Although this represents a significant increase from surveys taken in 1998, 2000 and 2002, nearly all of this is attributable to the extensive coverage and public interest in the war in Iraq. This suggests that news coverage that is saturated with news of the war in Iraq is reflective of public interest or vice versa.

Oliver, Mares, and Cantor (1993) explored the question of how support for the first Gulf war affected interpretations of media coverage of the conflict. They

discovered that “positive attitudes toward the Gulf War were associated with positive attitudes toward the news story provided that the news story was critical of Iraq and/or not critical of the United State” (Oliver, Mares, & Cantor, p. 160, 1993). This study of media coverage suggests a link between oppression and support for the first Gulf war and it also provides evidence of a link between news viewing and supportive attitudes by the viewing public, thus suggesting that mass media are tools of persuasion.

These findings lead to the purpose of this study in which specific stories will be examined for content that was negative or positive in regards to the Iraqi war and whether this content supports the findings of the CMPA and similar studies.

Framing and News Narratives

The concept of news frames is somewhat vague as to how it applies to television news (Dobkin, 1993). According to Dobkin:

news frames operate at two levels: First, semantic frames provide definitions, orientations, initial perceptions, or commonly accepted values by which the journalist apprehends an event; second, structural frames provide the formal conventions, or story forms, by which news is presented (p. 109)

Structural frames are important in understanding the decision process that journalists use to advance selected news events over other newsworthy content (Dobkin, 1993). Ultimately though, “framing is about the choices that journalists

make in the reporting of stories and those choices in turn affect the way that stories are interpreted by consumers of news” (Pfau, et al., 2004, p.75).

New Standard for War Reporting

“Embedding — assigning 600-plus U.S. and foreign reporters to train, travel, and share danger and hardships with American military units — was the most innovative aspect of the coverage of the second gulf war” (Smith, 2003, p.2). According to Pfau, (2004) the practice of embedding media in military units is not a new concept, but the scope to which journalists were embedded for Operation Iraqi Freedom was extensive with close to 700 reporters participating and an expense of \$100 million to participating news organizations. Embedding journalists into the military made possible “intimate, immediate, absorbing, almost addictive coverage, the likes of which we have not seen before” (Smith, 2003, p.2).

Smith (2003) points out that despite the intense embedding of journalists in the second war with Iraq there were several stories where journalists had completely missed the target. Mistakes were made in the reports that were being aired. The city of Basra, which has reportedly been taken on March 23, 2003 was in reality not captured until two weeks later, when British troops were able to suppress the resistance in Basra. Iraqi troops had been reported to have laid down their guns when in fact they were still fighting in those same regions that had appeared on the news (Smith, 2003). Although examples of this type of news coverage were apparent

throughout the war, this type of coverage was not the predominant news coverage of embedded journalists.

One major risk to the embedding process is that journalists become too close to their subjects (Smith, 2003). This may or may not be one of the reasons that a study conducted by Pfau, et al.(2004) found that embedded journalists produced news stories that contained more episodic frames and tended to have a more positive tone toward the military and its depiction of individual troops. This bias did not however appear to produce more overall positive coverage.

Purpose of Research

The focus of this study is on media as a potentially powerful and persuasive tool of communication. This study will explore the concept of media agendas during times of war and conflict, and the role that the government agenda plays in how news is reported. It will look at frames for a specific period of time to determine what is being emphasized by media and what type of category each frame would fall into as defined by Semetko and Valkenburg's five most common frames.

The personal feelings of reporters become a hurdle when reporting on a war, or potential wars, and media coverage may be a factor in turning the tide for or against war. Past research focused on why media choose to support some wars, and oppose others.

The present study researched how media understandings influence the media's behavior (McCombs, 1997, p. 17). Agenda-setting, framing and priming theories

were utilized to study the shaping of public opinion on salient issues. This study will primarily focus on whether news content tends to reflect changes before, during and after a conflict or war in the use of frames and agendas. Past research also indicates that media coverage influences governments, not only through priming especially during an election year, but also through the stories that are at the top of the agenda for media outlets and in turn government influences media coverage of events and the importance of each event.

Past literature indicated that mass media tend to support the war effort of government, at first, but media can tend to sway the longer a war continues, as was the case in the Vietnam War. When the peace movement began to accelerate during the Vietnam War, incorporating people from Congress into the movement, media coverage shifted in the frames they considered important during the Vietnam War era.

With the second war in Iraq in 2003, media appeared to play a significant role in influencing public opinion. As war continued over an extended timeline, media may have followed a similar pattern of not supporting the efforts of the governing body. With the presidential election in 2004, priming theory may be useful in studying and reflecting President Bush's performance during the Iraqi war and the aftermath.

“Media bias moves in the same overall direction again and again, favoring management over labor, corporations over corporate critics, affluent whites over low-income minorities, officialdom over protestors, the two-party monopoly over the leftist,...national security policy over critics of that policy” (Parenti, 1997, p. 5) By

framing the presentation of news, media exerts influence over public opinion and is involved first hand in constructing the social reality of the public.

Rationale and Research Questions

Based on past research, five questions were posed:

RQ1 – Do mass media use frames that contain specific themes reflecting the government’s agenda? If so, do they tend to favor anti-war coverage over pro-war coverage?

RQ2 –Do media reflect negatively, positively or neutral upon President Bush’s campaign to go to war with Iraq? Did media coverage shift viewpoints throughout the prolonged involvement in Iraq?

RQ3 - Did the overall media coverage of Iraq shift either negatively or positively over the course of events?

RQ4 – Which of the five frames (conflict, responsibility, human interest, economic consequences, and mortality), as discussed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), did media coverage primarily reflect?

RQ5 - What agendas are being brought to the forefront of each frame?

The present research raises questions about whether or not news content reflects a media agenda, a governmental agenda, or both. In practical terms, there may be many agendas set forth by media organizations, government officials and others. In the case of Somalia, the lines were unclear as to which came first.

These questions will be answered by performing a framing analysis using stories from the period beginning October of 2003 and ending in October of 2004.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Content Analysis

Simon and Xenos (2000) analyzed frames in direct relation to public deliberation. Their study chose to focus on the 1997 coverage of the Teamsters union against UPS. Their first hypothesis was to demonstrate that their “observations of framing in public discourse over time should be generally consistent with the logical course of an ideal typical deliberate exchange” (p. 369). A second hypothesis that they proposed was that validity claims related to the UPS coverage would be raised and evaluated in a specific order indicating a logical manner for “considering one argument after another” (p. 370).

Simon and Xenos used content analysis in testing their hypothesis of newspaper coverage and analyzing the results of this content over a period of time. They used three major newspaper sources: *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post* between August 3 and August 18, 1997. An in depth analysis provided them with six “working frames” that captured the “range of themes and story lines used to frame the accounts of the strike” (p. 371).

The results of Simon and Xenos study offered moderate support for the authors’ hypotheses. It was shown that the validity claims entered into the frames indirectly, were considered and then lost their relevance in the public discussion. This provided

a partial confirmation of their first hypothesis. The discussion of the UPS strike as observed in the three newspapers meets the deliberative standard.

The second hypothesis was also supported, in that, validity claims “display a rationale pattern of introduction-consideration-dismissal, but also the overall sequence of claims considered follows a distinct logic” (p. 373).

The relevance of this study to the Iraqi conflict is that it deals with media framing and how information is introduced, considered and then dismissed as considered relevant by the public agenda. In order to answer the research questions proposed by this thesis various television frames and agendas will be researched for specific phrases and key terms that introduce, consider and are possibly dismissed as being irrelevant to the public agenda.

Method of Data Collection

Network news coverage of the most recent Iraq war was collected between October 2003 and October 2004. For each of the 13 months, three days of news coverage were randomly chosen for each month equaling a total of 39 days. From each day, a population of stories was selected from the Lexis-Nexis database.

Transcripts were used in conducting a qualitative content analysis of news coverage. Transcripts included day and evening news stories and news interview shows from the three major American television networks; ABC, CBS, and NBC. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) provides “a way of obtaining data to measure the frequency and extent, if not the meaning, of messages” (Altheide, 1996, p.15). QCA

analysis, according to Starosta (1984), “translates frequency of occurrence of certain symbols into summary judgments and comparisons of content of the discourse...whatever ‘means’ will presumably take up space and/or time; hence, the greater that space and/or time, the greater the meaning’s significance” (p. 185).

The words “Iraq” and “war” were entered as search terms into the Lexis-Nexis database on April 26, 2005. News coverage was filtered to look specifically at those stories concerning the Iraqi war. Each story was thoroughly read to ensure that it was related to the topic. The search of the Lexis-Nexis database produced a total of 434 stories that had the war in Iraq as a main topic. The number of stories produced was fairly consistent for each network. There were days and evenings for each network that the Iraqi war was not part of the network’s broadcast.

Random days were selected by drawing the allotted number of day per month out of a plastic cup. Three days were drawn for each month. These days were selected to review coverage from the three networks to determine if there were any significant changes in the frames emphasized by the media from various days within the same month and from month to month. A content analysis method was used to analyze the frames to determine what stories, if any are reappearing for each slotted period of time

Method of Data Analysis

Each transcript was examined for themes, main topics, and public figures that were quoted. The information was then placed into a spreadsheet to determine the various

topics in the frames and categorizing those topics using the five most common frames as defined by Semetko and Vakenburg (2000) (conflict, human interest, economic consequences, mortality, responsibility).

The 434 stories were then categorized in a spreadsheet in the following categories to help answer the questions posed by this study. The categories used in the spreadsheet were as follows: Network News Coverage to include the name of the network (ABC, CBS, NBC); Date of Coverage; Themes per Frame; Theme overview - Anti-war, pro-war, or neutral; President Bush's war campaign – negative, positive, neutral; Overall Coverage of the Iraq War, positive, negative, or neutral; Framing Category – conflict, human interest, economic consequences, mortality, and responsibility; and Agenda: Media, Government or both.

Themes per Frame – was the center point for the story or stories.

Theme overview – was the content anti-war, pro-war, or neutral; for example, a story referring to the war in Iraq as a big mistake would be considered anti-war content. In another example, if the story talks about insurgents and their involvement with al Qaeda and the need to get rid of this terrorist element, it would be considered pro-war content. A neutral story would be one that does not appear to support either the anti or pro war view point but is simply telling the facts.

President Bush's war campaign – this was only applied to frames that referenced President Bush. It examined the information about President Bush to determine if his role in the Iraqi war is viewed negatively, positively, or neutral if the story does not share either negative or positive viewpoint with the audience. President Bush was not

included in every news story and those stories that did not include information on President Bush were categorized as not applicable (n/a).

Overall Coverage of the Iraq War – were the frames that were represented in the news coverage positive, negative or neutral in describing the events related to the war in Iraq.

Framing category – this refers to Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five most common frames (conflict, human interest, economic consequences, mortality, responsibility) used in news coverage and is was used in this study to determine what type of frames are the primary focus for news coverage in Iraq.

Agenda Government or Media – after looking at the resources used in the news frame, it was then determined if the story was primarily being placed at the forefront of the agenda by either media or government or if both were influential in the agenda setting process. Some stories that were government agenda stories were projecting either a Democrat or Republican agenda and were categorized as such. If it was a story where media was asking the questions and leading the person being interviewed, and the person was a government official responding, it was categorized as media/government. If the interviewee was a Republican government official it was categorized as media/government/R and if it was a Democrat government official it was categorized as media/government/D.

The data were collected from the spreadsheet and analyzed to answer the research questions. Lemert (1974) found there to be an average of 70 percent duplication between the three major networks and their stories. When this occurs,

there is a higher level of duplication of sources and the stories being provided are often limited in the actual resources that are being utilized. Frames were examined to determine overall duplication by the networks and duplication of framing categories.

Chapter 4

Results

After collecting the necessary articles and examining the content, this study addresses the research questions that have been posed. The focus is primarily on the frames and the interpretation of each frame and how the overall news coverage is represented by each network.

RQ1 –The first part of this question examined the themes within each frame that the networks' broadcast to determine if it was the government or media agenda that was being told in the news coverage. The second part of this question examined the overall content of the frame to determine if the coverage portrays an anti-war, pro-war, or neutral theme.

Part A

An analysis of 459 stories from all three networks (ABC = 125, CBS = 161, NBC = 173) returned the following results for each network individually in response to Part A.

The majority of stories reviewed had a media agenda. Framing analysis was gauged to determine if the frames used were setting the expectations of the journalist or following a military and/or government agenda in the frames that the news stations selected. Based off of this analysis it was determined that the news stations were not following a military and/or government agenda. Journalists were interpreting events as they saw them unfold and setting the agenda based on what they or their news

station thought were the most important stories. Media agendas included but were not limited to the following themes:

- A) Death of U.S. soldiers in Iraq
- B) Terrorist and insurgent attacks throughout Iraq
- C) Price of crude oil on the rise, due to an attack on the oil ministry in Iraq
- D) Iraqi elections and the participation of Iraqi citizens
- E) The Bush administration's role in Iraq and the 2004 election in the United States

Although the majority of the stories were initiated by the media it was noted in the months leading up to the election in 2004 that government agendas were prominent during this time period, with news content focusing on the candidates.

Stories that stood out during this time period included the following:

- A) John Kerry's war record being called into question
- B) President Bush's failure to discover weapons of mass destruction in Iraq
- C) Americans divided over the war in Iraq
- D) John Kerry slams Bush over hundreds of tons of missing explosives in Iraq

Stories that focused on the upcoming election often included campaign rhetoric from participating political parties during the months leading up to the elections in November of 2004. September and October had the most government agenda, led stories and were categorized as such because these stories included direct quotes from government officials and press conferences led by President Bush. In a story done by

ABC on September 5th, 2004 on *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, George Stephanopoulos, George Will, and Fareed Zakaria discussed the positives for the Bush administration and Zakaria stated that “You have economic growth..., And you have an uncertain international environment. These are all powerful positives for the president.” Comparisons of President Bush to John Kerry were positive in this story therefore the story was labeled a Republican government agenda led story although reporters were leading the discussion.

The story content was then further broken down into Democrat and Republican depending on which party the story tended to favor in its coverage. For example, if a story was all about Senator John Kerry’s run for the presidency it was categorized as a Democratic government story.

Some stories were categorized as representing both a media and government agenda. These stories were categorized as such, because although the reporter was responsible for setting up the interview and using questions to lead the interviewee, the interviewee ultimately had the platform to voice his or her opinion and the power to steer the questioning in a manner more beneficial to the interviewee. In a story broadcast by CBS on September 5th, 2004, host Bob Schieffer interviewed the Bush campaign chairman, former Montana Governor Marc Racicot and led the interview by referring to comments made by Mary Beth Cahill in which she repeatedly “used the terms ‘lie’ to describe what Republicans are saying about Senator Kerry.” Racicot responded with “that sounds a tad bit desperate” and countered with comments about Senator Zell Miller who is a Democrat that is disappointed in the

Democratic party. Although the reporter had the freedom to ask Racicot the hard hitting questions, Racicot had the platform to turn the story into a positive for the Republican party. These types of stories were further broken down into Democrat and Republican depending on whom the interviewee was. For example a story that began by discussing missing weapons in Iraq and then posed a question to Senator Kerry asking for his response to the missing weapons would be categorized as a media/government/Democrat story. The story is led by news media but by posing the question to Senator Kerry, it takes a government spin in quoting a Democratic government official. Overall, government agenda-led coverage was balanced between the Democrat and Republican political parties.

In answer to Part A of RQ1, it appears that mass media tend to set their own agenda for what stories make it to the forefront of news coverage, however in this study a small portion of that coverage was dominated by the government agenda and equal coverage was provided for both Democrat and Republican government officials. According to Doris Graber (1993) to “assure news diversity, information must come from a number of sources that make independent news selection decisions” (p. 1). Graber suggests that there are specific groups that have a monopoly on the “ownership of media enterprises” (p.1) Therefore, the news that the viewer sees on television may not necessarily be from the reporter’s perspective but from the viewpoint of the controlling media enterprises and those associated with these enterprises. Often sources with economic and political power are more likely to be quoted or to influence news (Gans, 1979).

Part B

Stories were examined and categorized into anti-war, pro-war and neutral depending on what the main theme of the story was and what was brought to the forefront of the story.

Anti-war stories primarily focused on the negatives of the war in Iraq and the direct effect of the war on Americans. Examples of anti-war coverage included but were not limited to the following:

- A) Stories that included the number of deaths in Iraq such as the story done by NBC on July 8th, 2004 on the *NBC Nightly News* in which there were “new losses to report in Iraq Watch tonight. Five U.S. soldiers and one Iraqi Guardsman were killed after insurgents targeted the headquarters of the 1st Infantry...”
- B) Stories that focused on the insurgency and the rising dangers to Americans, for example a story by *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* (ABC) on August 23, 2004 reported “the siege in the holy City of Najaf...” has “Marines and soldiers on the ground facing steady resistance and constant fire.”
- C) Stories that implied that the Bush administration had made a mistake going into Iraq such as the story done by *Today* (NBC) on April 29th, 2004 in which Tim Russert reported that a ranking military officer said “we should do what Senator George Aiken recommended in Vietnam in ’65, declare victory and get out.” This was Russert’s reply following a

statement by Matt Lauer that “there have been critics about the administration policy in Iraq.”

- D) Stories that stated that the war in Iraq was a war that America could not win, similar to the April 29th *Today* story.

Pro-war stories focused on the positives of the war and the work that the military was doing in Iraq. Pro-war stories usually were representative of a government agenda, but not always. There were human interest stories that may have been considered pro-war that were not necessarily representing a government agenda but were providing the journalist’s viewpoint on the issue. Examples of pro-war coverage included but were not limited to the following:

- A) President Bush defines what a free and peaceful Iraq will mean to the Middle East and the United States.
- B) Stories that pertain to Saddam Hussein and the freedom of the Iraqi people from Saddam’s dictatorship for example, CBS reported on October 15th, 2003 that President Bush’s strategy was not working in Iraq and President Bush restated that “Saddam was a threat” and therefore going to war with Iraq was necessary.
- C) Stories about U.S. troops being on the offensive in Iraq and fighting successfully against the insurgents as they “launched a renewed assault against rebel fighters loyal to radical cleric Muqtada al Sadr (*World News Tonight* with Peter Jennings, ABC, 8/23/04).

- D) The Iraqi elections and the large turnout of Iraqi citizens to participate in the elections.
- E) Any stories that made a connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda were categorized as pro-war because of the connection of al-Qaeda and the events of September 11, 2001 in which the twin towers in New York City were toppled. Any military action against al-Qaeda and its cooperatives would be viewed as necessary and therefore categorized as pro-war. ABC reported a story on May 30th, 2004 in which concern is now on the rise in Japan over al-Qaeda possibly attacking them, because of their involvement in sending troops to aid in the reconstruction of Iraq.

The networks coverage of the war was well balanced for CBS and ABC with both their anti-war and pro-war coverage being equal or very close to equal in the stories represented. NBC stands out with their anti-war coverage because the themes represented are more anti-war than pro-war. NBC used political figures such as former President Bill Clinton in their anti-war coverage NBC said the following about former President Clinton's response "Iraq is better off without Saddam Hussein, but he (President Clinton) questions President Bush's timing of the Iraq invasion." NBC goes on to quote President Clinton as saying the following, "he (President Bush) should have waited until the UN inspections were over." NBC's themes centered on the extreme violence of the war and the loss of American lives. On *The Chris Matthews Show* (NBC) on September 19th, 2004, host Chris Matthews stated the following about the war in Iraq; "I really do believe, watching this week, that the

cannon ball news, the big news this week, was the knowledge we now have that the intelligence world believes this war could really go bad.” These type of themes indicated that the coverage pertaining to the war in Iraq is more evenly represented by CBS and ABC.

RQ2 – The first part of this question looks at the frames that included President Bush in the story to determine if President Bush and his role in Iraq are being represented negatively, positively, or neutral. President Bush was referenced or quoted in 181 of the 452 stories included in this study.

Part A

Stories were classified as negative coverage if they factored President Bush into the equation for the war in Iraq being a failure. Examples of negative coverage included but were not limited to the following:

- A) Weapons of mass destruction were not found in Iraq, therefore President Bush should not have gone to war with Iraq.
- B) Senator Hillary Clinton states that there was inept planning by the Bush administration when they went into Iraq.
- C) Top CBS analyst Greg Thielmann says “that Iraq did not constitute an imminent threat to its neighbors or the United States at the time that the U.S. went to war.” Thielmann goes on to say that there was plenty of doubt in the intelligence community as to whether or not Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

These comments indicated that the Bush administration went to war with Iraq before they had correct intelligence data on Iraq.

Stories were categorized as being positive if they indicated that President Bush had conducted, up to this point, the best job possible in Iraq and that the decision to go to war was a joint decision by both President Bush and Congress. Examples of positive coverage included but were not limited to the following:

- A) President Bush meets with Iraqi interim Prime Minister Allawi as Allawi campaigns by thanking the United States for getting rid of Saddam Hussein.
- B) President Bush says he does have a plan to exit Iraq in debates with Senator John Kerry.
- C) President Bush says there are many positive things going on in Iraq to include new schools and hospitals opening.

Findings indicate that the most balanced coverage is on ABC with only a slight difference in the number of stories portraying President Bush's role negatively and those portraying his role positively.

There is a noticeable gap between the amount of negative coverage with networks NBC and ABC. The majority of NBC's coverage was negative and not as balanced as ABC's coverage. CBS focused primarily on the negative as well with emphasis on stories about the lack of weapons of mass destruction and the inability of the Bush administration to admit a mistake had been made in going to war with Iraq.

Neutral stories mentioned President Bush in the story but did not reflect him negatively or positively and included the following stories:

- A) Presidential debates over Bush's policies in Iraq.
- B) President Bush calls the war in Iraq a necessity.
- C) President Bush loses an ally in the war in Iraq as Spain announces they will pull troops out.

Part B

ABC was consistent in providing coverage that was both positive and negative in their stories that included coverage of President Bush and they stayed consistent in providing the most balanced coverage over the 13 month period.

CBS had six months in their coverage (October, November, January, March, June, and July) that reported President Bush and his role in Iraq negatively. Stories in October and November focused on anti-war protestors in London, Iraq as a non-threat to the United States and therefore going to war with Iraq was unnecessary. Coverage in June and July reiterated the fact that it was a mistake for President Bush to go to war with Iraq and other stories focused on President Bush's lack of a plan for the war in Iraq. Although CBS started the 13 month period strong with negative coverage dominate in October and November of 2003, this coverage became less and less throughout the year and picked up again in the months before the November 2004 election with stories centering on President Bush's lack of an exit plan for Iraq.

NBC had the most negative coverage, out of the three stations, which tended to grow or stay consistent throughout the 13 month period with the exception of

February 2004 where positive coverage shot up temporarily. February frames emphasized President Bush crediting the war in Iraq as a war of “necessity” and that despite the lack of weapons of mass destruction being found in Iraq, the threat of nuclear weapons is bigger than Iraq and therefore “the clandestine spread of weapons technology can not be ignored.” These positive stories of President Bush disappeared from NBC’s coverage in March, when once again their coverage became primarily negative.

In answer to the second part of this question it appears that viewpoints did shift throughout the war with coverage being more positive when the events in Iraq were positive and negative when media thought that America was not necessarily winning the war in Iraq or the war on terrorism and media emphasized this in the stories they choose that related to deaths and attacks made by insurgents on Americans.

RQ3 – This research question looks at the overall content of each story, as some stories contained more than one theme, to determine if it is portraying the information as it pertains to the war in Iraq, negatively, positively, or with neutrality.

There was not a progressive shift either negatively or positively for any of the networks over the 13 month period, but there were obvious surges in certain months where either negative or positive coverage stood out.

ABC’s overall coverage was fairly steady between negative and positive during the months of October, 03 – February, 04. During this time period positive stories reported by ABC included the following:

A) statements by President Bush that a free and peaceful Iraq will help effect change in that part of the world and that the world is a safer place without Saddam Hussein.

B) U.S. troops go on the offensive with Operation Iron Hammer.

C) Investigators have found men responsible for missiles attacks in Baghdad.

D) Saddam Hussein captured.

Also included in the pro-war coverage were stories in which insurgents are attacking Iraqis. These were categorized as pro-war because these frames demonstrate the necessity for the presence of the United States in Iraq to restore peace for the Iraqi people.

Negative coverage during this time period centered on the following frames:

A) Presidential nominees attack President Bush and his plan for Iraq and emphasize that the President should have taken the issue to the United Nations.

B) Deadly bombings in Iraq continue with more American soldiers dead.

C) Hillary Clinton claims there was inept planning by the Bush administration when they went into Iraq.

D) British member of Parliament says that the coalition has stirred up terrorism rather than halting it.

E) Prime Minister elect in Spain says he will pull their troops out of Iraq.

Negative coverage began to jump ahead in March with a lot of news stories regarding the upcoming Iraqi elections, the United States failure to obtain peace, troops being injured or killed by insurgents in Iraq, and the necessity for help from the United Nations in Iraq. This negative coverage continued into April and May and positive coverage began to surge again in May with June being a month with a slight margin of positive news coverage with an emphasis on the need for American troops to stay in Iraq to help the Iraqi people become a free people. September and October which are the months leading up to the elections were pretty even in negative and positive coverage.

There was a wide range of stories for ABC that were categorized as neutral and included the following:

- A) When polled nearly 80 percent of Iraqis said they do not approve of the attacks on coalition forces by insurgents.
- B) Iraqis trying to live normal live have major concerns about the safety of their children as they keep them home from school to avoid danger.
- C) Some Iraqis believe Americans will never leave Iraq
- D) The lifeblood of Iraq's economy revolves around oil. Insurgents continue to attack oil supplies.

These stories were categorized as neutral because they deal with the day to day lives of the Iraqi people and the affects that the war is having on their lives. They do not necessarily describe the events either negatively or positively.

CBS's coverage contained the stories that were the most balanced in their coverage of the war, with positive and negative coverage being represented equally each month. The exception is a surge in negative coverage in October of 2003 followed by a positive surge in November of 2003 and a large surge in negative coverage in March. The month with the most negative coverage was March. Similar to ABC's stories CBS negative coverage focused on Spain pulling its troops out of Iraq, the intensity of the fighting and the need for more troops. Positive coverage was at its highest in December the same month that Saddam Hussein was captured.

In eight out of the 13 months of news coverage represented, NBC's coverage was exceedingly negative with minimal, positive stories included in their coverage. February was the only month that there was a surge in positive news coverage as stories included President Bush defending the war in Iraq and evidence of al-Qaeda in Iraq helping with the insurgency. These stories demonstrated the necessity of war in Iraq, to not only free Iraq but to eliminate al-Qaeda. Any reference to al-Qaeda was labeled positive as the connection to 9/11 is memorable and in the forefront of American minds when it comes to the war on terrorism. NBC had the most negative coverage of the three networks overall and the most negative coverage in the months of September and October 2004 leading up to the election in November. During these months NBC's coverage focused on the following frames:

- A) Recent report by the White House says that Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction.

- B) Presidential nominee John Kerry (D) claims that President Bush has made colossal failures in judgment and has created a crisis of historic proportions by having invaded Iraq.
- C) Tim Russert of *Meet the Press* says the presidential debates were good news for John Kerry and says that one out of every three Americans say they are more likely to support John Kerry because of his debate performance although George Bush has done a good job of convincing the American people that things are getting better in Iraq.
- D) Over 400 tons of high explosives are missing in Iraq and believed to have fallen into the hands of insurgents. This has become an issue in the presidential campaign.

NBC's coverage was the most negative during the months before the election because they emphasized the mistakes of President Bush in their frames while bringing John Kerry's positive attributes to the forefront. This was the only blatant example of one candidate being covered more positively than another candidate and thus contributed to NBC's negative coverage for these months.

With the exception of NBC news coverage was well balanced with ABC and CBS focusing their stories on negative and positive news frames. Because of the elections it appeared that NBC's coverage shifted to a predominantly negative stance during September and October. NBC tended to scrutinize the Bush administration policies in Iraq in contrast to John Kerry's viewpoints on the war in Iraq. Therefore,

overall the news coverage did tend to shift negatively towards the end of the coverage represented in this timeline for NBC, however whether or not the coverage stayed negative would require more research that would have to go beyond the months containing election coverage.

RQ4 – In answering this question we look to see what type of stories media used in their coverage of Iraq and what types of frames were receiving the most coverage during the 13 month period.

Conflict Frames

Conflict frames “emphasize conflict between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Frames that were interpreted as conflict frames were those frames that showed conflict between two parties or showed the end resultant of a conflict between two parties. Therefore, frames that dealt with the deaths of Iraqis, coalition soldiers, etc. were categorized as conflict frames being that death was the outcome of a conflict between two parties. Words that were used were used to convey conflict were “attacks,” “debate,” “fierce fighting,” “killed,” “wounded,” etc. Other stories that fell into the category of “conflict frames” included the following examples:

- A) “a series of suicide attacks against Shiites in Iraq killed at least 143 people” (*NBC Nightly News*, NBC)

- B) United Nations Security Council is in final debate over a US proposed resolution on Iraq (*CBS Evening News*, October 15, 2003).
- C) CBS reported that as numbers begin to climb upward for the dead and wounded “the enemy’s weapons include fear” as “gunmen kidnapped and Irish-born woman known for her years of selfless dedication to helping Iraq’s poor” (*CBS Evening News*, October 19, 2004).
- D) Some politicians state that weapons inspector David Kay inconclusive findings prove that the Bush administration did not have a strong case for going to war, while President Bush says the findings justify the administration’s case for going to war.
- E) “It was a murderous and even barbaric day in Iraq, one of the worst yet for the Americans” as they struggle against the “hit-and-run tactics of the insurgents” (*NBC Nightly News*, March 31, 2004).
- F) “Iraq’s top Shiite cleric has arrived in the embattled City of Najaf hoping to end weeks of fighting between coalition forces and Moqtada al-Sadr’s militia” (*ABC, Good Morning America*, August 26, 2004).

Conflict frames included debates between political figures, attacks by insurgents, death totals from attacks, coverage related to Fallujah and the insurgents

that have taken over that city, etc. Conflict frames represented approximately 35-47% of the news coverage provided by the three networks.

Human Interest Frames

Human interest frames bring “a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Frames that represented the human interest category told the story in a more personal manner focusing on the direct effects of the war to an individual or group in either a positive or negative view point. Example of human interest stories included frames that centered on how the war was affecting Iraqis, how the war was affecting American soldiers and their families, and how the war was affecting the rest of the United States. Examples of human interest frames included the following:

- A) U.S. pilots speak up and state that the helicopters they are flying in Iraq are defenseless. These pilots now have charges against them pertaining to dereliction of duty for disclosing “vulnerabilities” of the “mission.”
- B) Father of a dead marine, Jesus Suarez becomes a peace activist and carries on his son’s mission by helping the less fortunate in Iraq.
- C) When polled nearly 80 percent of the Iraqi pollsters said they did not support the attacks against coalition forces and half said they wanted democracy.

- D) Iraqis are trying to live normal lives but their biggest concern is not food or water, but rather the safety of their children and are therefore keeping many of them home from school.
- E) American journalist Micah Garen is free in Iraq after being released by his kidnappers and he is in good health.
- F) Over 7,000 troops have been wounded in Iraq. Injuries include brain damage, amputees, blindness, etc.
- G) Following attacks on two Baghdad hotels many foreign aid workers flee Iraq, fearing attacks.
- H) Iraqi's vote in first democratic election.

Frames that reported stories that were affecting the lives of individuals in a dramatic way were the primary focus for Human Interest frames. There was a lack of stories pertaining to the positive affects that the United States may or may not be having in Iraq. Human Interest frames represented approximately 17-25% of the overall news coverage for the three networks.

Economic and Mortality Frames

All three networks had little economic or mortality coverage. The few stories that fell into the economic category dealt with the rising cost in oil and gas prices in the United States. The only stories categorized as mortality were stories dealing with the prison abuse at Abu Ghraib prison, because the acts of the soldiers and the pictures that later surfaced were immoral and this was portrayed in how media framed the

story surrounding the events at Abu Ghraib prison. Mortality frames “put the event, problem, or issue in the context of the religious tenets or moral prescription” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96).

Economic and Mortality frames represented approximately 5% of the overall news coverage for the three networks. Conflict and responsibility frames were the ones most used in reporting the coverage.

Responsibility Frames

Responsibility frames “present an issue or problem in such a way to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual group” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). Frames that were categorized as responsibility frames appeared to be pointing a finger at one person or group for a specific issue. Therefore if a story had Presidential nominee John Kerry blaming the Bush administration for not locating weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and therefore going to war with Iraq unnecessarily the frame of the story would be “responsibility.” Examples of coverage that would be categorized as responsibility frames would be as follows:

- A) Presidential candidate General Wesley Clark states that “the issue of Iraq should have been taken to the United Nations in a forceful and effective way” and General Clark believes Iraq was never an immediate threat to the United States (*ABC Nightline*, October 15, 2003).

- B) President Bush defends his plan to go to war re-stating that “Saddam Hussein was a threat” (*CBS Evening News*, October 15, 2003).
- C) Secretary of State Colin Powell’s top analyst Greg Thielmann says, “there was plenty of doubt in the intelligence community as to whether or not Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction” (*CBS Evening News*, October 15, 2003).
- D) According to John Kerry the war in Iraq is going to “hell in a hand basket” because President Bush has mismanaged everything since the vote was made by the Senate to go into Iraq (*NBC Nightly News*, September 12, 2004).
- E) Spanish Prime Minister elect Jose Luis Roderiguez Zapatero called “the war and subsequent occupation of Iraq a huge disaster” (*NBC Nightly News*, March 15, 2004).
- F) Terrorist leader Al Zarqawi has been cited “as running a terrorist network for al-Qaeda and is responsible for suicide bombing attacks in Iraq, Britian and France” (*ABC World News Tonight*, February 9, 2004).

Any frame where one party or individual seemed to be primarily responsible for an event or events related to the war in Iraq were categorized as a responsibility frame. However, if it had two groups attacking each other or members of one group had been killed and/or wounded by another group it

would be categorized as a conflict frame. Responsibility frames represented approximately 29-39% of the overall news coverage for the three networks.

RQ5 - What agendas are being brought to the forefront of each frame? This thesis raises questions about whether or not news content reflects a media agenda, a governmental agenda, or both. The media agenda appeared to be the dominant agenda for all three networks. Government agendas tended to appear more during the months leading up to election months in 2004. Stories were categorized into the following categories:

Media – if the stories seemed to be including specific facts and/or resources that the media deemed as the most important and building the frames around this information the agenda was categorized as a media led frame. Although there were many different stories provided via the war in Iraq, for example new schools being built, new hospitals being built, Iraqi citizens voting in the election process, etc., it appeared that media coverage focused on the negative stories thus creating a media led agenda that consisted primarily of negative coverage. Examples of frames that media used in their daily coverage are as follows:

- A) Violence broke out when Iraqi soldiers were told that today was there last pay day.
- B) Four people killed in a car bomb in Fallujah. A series of bombings in Baghdad killed dozens of people.

- C) U.S. forces showed their might over the weekend by targeting militant hideouts in Tikrit with full force.
- D) Big homecoming in Philadelphia for troops returning home from Iraq.
- E) Letters from viewers about GI conduct in Abu Ghraib Prison and charges of prisoner abuse.
- F) Underpaid military families are facing high costs with military members over in Iraq making an enlisted wage rather than their civilian salaries.

Media led agendas were very broad and included many types of stories from prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib Prison to how Iraqi citizens feel about the American presence in their country. With many different stories being told about the war in Iraq, it is the media's decision which stories their news coverage will focus on and make a part of their agenda. The frames that media focused on rarely included information about the positive presence that the United States may be having in Iraq.

Government – if the core of the frames consisted of quotes made by government officials, information that had been provided by government officials, or was a platform, such as the presidential debates, where only presidential nominees spoke it was categorized as a government led agenda. Examples of government led agendas consisted of the following frames:

- A) President Bush and John Kerry debate their views on Iraq and as Bush says there will be no draft and Kerry says he has a plan for the war in Iraq to get U.S. troops home.
- B) Dr. Condoleezza Rice says that the insurgents in Iraq will not stop the political process that is underway in Iraq. Rice says elections will take place as scheduled in January.
- C) President Bush turned the spotlight on himself in a rare television interview in which he spoke of Iraq and repeatedly called Saddam Hussein a madman.
- D) U.S. military leaders say the Marines have not retreated in Fallujah in Iraq and that General Saleh a former member of the Republican Guard will not get the job of running Fallujah.
- E) Senators Graham and Biden visited Iraq and feel that Iraq still needs a large amount of American support to help them become a free people.

Some stories that were government agenda stories were projecting either a Democrat (D) or Republican (R) agenda and were categorized as such. Examples of these stories are as follows:

- A) (D) Senator Joe Biden says that Senator Kerry did not vote for the \$87 billion that the troops needed because he wanted two votes, one for the \$67 billion for troops and a separate vote for the \$20 billion since it was not clear what would be done with that amount.

- B) (D) Presidential candidate Dick Gephardt says that President Bush is failing the U.S. because he has not gotten the help that we need from NATO, from the UN.
- C) (R) Bush-Cheney campaign advisor Karen Hughes says that every credible intelligence agency in the world including Congress, the President, and former President Clinton thought that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction although the Duelfer report indicated otherwise.
- D) (R) Secretary of State Colin Powell said that the situation in Iraq is not as dire as it may seem and that elections will take place as scheduled.

Both (media/government agendas) – frames that had a reporter interviewing a political figure were categorized as a media/government led agenda because although the reporter can ask the questions, the interviewee has flexibility in what questions they chose to answer and they can steer the interview one way or the other, as can the reporter. Also, included in this category would be frames that have quotes from a political figure but the quotes are only a part of a media led agenda. Examples of media/government led agendas consisted of the following news frames:

- A) A year after the President declared an end to major combat, the U.S. is coming off the bloodiest month of the war.

- B) Both President Bush and Senator John Kerry say they “have a plan” for Iraq but neither provides any details in the second Presidential debate.
- C) Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi says the U.S. press is looking at the negative sides only and not reporting the positive things that are occurring in Iraq.
- D) Report by the CIA offers pessimistic scenarios for what could occur in Iraq, among them the possibility of civil war.
- E) John Kerry accuses Bush of not providing enough troops and resources in Iraq but this is countered by the fact that Kerry voted against the \$87 billion requested for Iraq and Afghanistan.
- F) General Richard Myers says the incidents of prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib was carried out by a handful of soldiers and is not a common practice in the U.S. military.

This category was further broken down to Republican or Democratic depending on whom the government source was that the media is quoting in the story or emphasizing positively in the frame. Examples of Republican media/government agendas included the following:

- A) President Bush sneaked out of Texas and flew to Baghdad for Thanksgiving dinner with American soldiers, it was one of the best trips any President ever took.

- B) The President conceded that the prewar intelligence on Iraq's weapons capabilities was flawed but he maintained that, nonetheless, Saddam Hussein had the capability to make weapons of mass destruction and therefore the war in Iraq was a necessary war.
- C) President Bush says there is more going on in Iraq than just terrorist attacks such as schools and hospitals opening.

Examples of Democratic media/government agendas included the following:

- A) Democratic Presidential nominee General Wesley Clark states that the U.S.'s presence in Iraq needs to be lessened and more control turned over to the Iraqis.
- B) Senator Tom Daschle (D) states that he would have liked a vote in the Senate on two separate amounts for the war in Iraq with the possibility of Iraq paying back some of the money.
- C) Senator Hillary Clinton says we need more troops and more intelligence in Iraq to get the job done.

Media agendas led news coverage for all three networks for the 13 months of coverage represented in this study.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Interpretation

The results from this study indicate that the frames that the public is viewing are primarily set by a media agenda and not by a government agenda. However, during an election year, as indicated in this sampling, the government, both Democrat and Republican parties may take a lead in setting the agenda during the months before an election. Overall, it is primarily media that are deciding which frames to bring to the forefront.

The same frames were used by all three networks with small amounts of variations in what was brought to the forefront of each frame. Each network did have stories that centered on a human interest or economical themes that differed per network, but the conflict and responsibility frames included similar content or a variation of the content for all three networks.

It appears that there are news networks that lean negatively in their war coverage (NBC, CBS) and those that tend to stay more neutral (ABC). Overall, news coverage did not tend to favor one political party or agenda over another. It did, however, tend to favor the conflict and responsibility frames when reporting the war in Iraq over the positive human interest frames.

Coverage of President Bush was similar to the war coverage reflected by each of the three networks with more negative coverage appearing on NBC and CBS.

ABC once again led the neutral coverage for this category. It would be interesting to compare coverage of President Bush during war time and before war time, to determine if the war had a direct impact on how the press reported stories related to President Bush either negatively, positively, or neutral depending on the time era. This would be a consideration for future studies.

News coverage centered on conflict and responsibility frames, and although frames included human interest stories the primary coverage was on negative events happening in Iraq and rarely mentioned the positive events that included new schools and hospitals being built in Iraq and the democratic elections that occurred in Iraq.

There is concern by many newspaper editors that a “kind of bunker mentality” has been stopping reporters in Iraq from getting out and explaining the big picture of the events in Iraq that go beyond the daily death tolls being reported (Seelye, 2004, p. 1). Editors did note that it is probably much easier to add up the number of dead than to determine how many hospitals have received power on a particular day or how many schools were built (Seelye, 2005). Mike Silverman, managing editor of The Associated Press says that the main obstacles that reporters face in Iraq is the severe limitation on their movement and the ability to get out and report as Iraq remains the most dangerous place in the world for journalists to work (Seelye, 2005).

Limitations

Unfortunately, because text was the basis of this study voice inflection and the overall attitude of the journalist could not be used in determining whether the story was negative, positive or neutral. A future study could incorporate video as well as text.

A future study could also incorporate a quantitative approach that could code the data for each frame and apply the data to the questions posed by this study. Some exploratory research was done in this area, but the data are far from conclusive and would require more research and time to insure that they are reliable. The initial analysis tended to support the findings that were concluded in the qualitative study, in that media coverage although it started out positively, it tended to sway negatively the further the United States became immersed in the war in Iraq.

This study was limited in the viewpoints represented. A future study could incorporate the public's viewpoints on these topics by conducting a survey that would incorporate the questions posed.

Future Research Questions

A question that could be posed for a future study would be to ask why the frames that were used to report news coverage on the war in Iraq were primarily negative. Were there positive stories that were available at the same time that were not being brought to the forefront of the viewer's mind? An additional study that could be built from this one could probe the question on how the three networks reported events in Iraq

before the war started and how they are reporting events now. This would provide a longer time period to determine if journalists' viewpoints change over time.

In conclusion, although the impact of a media agenda is evident in news coverage and is provided by the frames selected, this agenda does not lead viewers to one dominant viewpoint. While negative coverage is higher on some networks, there is still a lot of positive and neutral coverage incorporated into the overall agendas, so that not one agenda is having a dominant impact on the public. The only way to know what impact media agendas have on public viewpoints would be to incorporate public opinion and public agenda into a future study that would primarily focus on the three types of agendas, media, government and public.

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