Sul Ross State University

A Comparative Study of News Coverage of the Government Shutdown

Author
Natalie Pattillo
Sul Ross State University
nmpattillo@gmail.com
432-386-8022

Advisor
Esther Rumsey
erumsey@sulross.edu
432-837-8211

Since the invention of mass communication, with the introduction of the printing press, people have been concerned about what effects the media have on the public. History is full of calls to regulate or limit the media to mitigate their effects. Recently we have heard concerns about media bias contributing to the political polarization in the country. The Society of Professional Journalists emphasizes the need for reporters and editors to be committed to a standard of ethics when reporting the news to mitigate the effect news on public opinion and policy. Ethical, professional journalists seek the whole truth by "providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and news" (SPJ Code of Ethics, online). The goal is unbiased presentation of the facts, allowing an informed public to form their own opinions about policy questions.

However, the growing commentary on political and public affairs provided by news media channels has blurred the line between actual news reporting and news analysis, resulting in a perceived bias in the news. Moreover, the 24-hour news channels coupled with availability of internet news sources creates a greater potential for audience segmentation contributing to greater political separation. For example, the political polarization of the public during the closing of the government in October 2013 has been attributed to mass media commentary and news analysis placing blame on one party, highlighting differences between the political parties and minimizing areas of agreement.

Literature Review

When it comes to the relationship between public opinion and news coverage the enduring question is who drives policy-making – the voters, the elected government, or the news

media. Does effect of the media reinforce and legitimize people's political opinions or shape their opinions? Do people select news sources to verify what they believe in politically or to gain a balanced view of the events? Two theories that have been put forward address these questions are the agenda-setting theory and framing theory.

Agenda Setting

The agenda setting theory proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) seeks to explain the effects of news media on public opinion. The theory can be summarized in the simple statement: the media may not influence what we think but it does influence what we think about. McCombs and Shaw's theorizing built on Lippmann's (1922) conceptualization of indirect effects. Lippmann introduced the idea that the media creates issue salience by what it selects to cover. Lippmann proposed that the public does not respond directly to the events in the real world, but instead live in a pseudo environment composed of "the pictures in our heads" (p.). These pictures may be, at least partially, formed by media coverage of world events. This idea was further developed in Cohen's (1963) study of foreign news which concluded that the environment and its affairs look different for different people based on how and where they receive their information. McCombs and Shaw's research related to these earlier works lead them to propose the Agenda Setting Theory in 1972.

Since its initial introduction, the theory has been extensively tested through empirical research. For example, a search of EBSCO's Academic Search Complete and Communication and Mass Media Complete data base yielded 644 articles published between 1979 and 2014 that included key words "agenda-setting theory". A comprehensive review of all articles published

and chronicled is beyond the scope of this paper, instead I will be reviewing some of the seminal research related to news coverage of political issues. The articles selected inclusion in this review was based on the frequency of citation of the article in subsequent articles as reported by as well as McCombs' (2014) article reviewing the development of the theory. Ten articles were selected as representative of the early research.

All ten articles selected addressed the broad question of the relationship between news media coverage of events and public opinion. The most common method applied to the research was a combination of content analysis and assessment of public opinion. Four of the studies utilized the results of general public opinion polls for their assessment of public opinion, with three relying on the Gallup Poll (Funkhouser, 1973; Winter & Eyal, 1981; Eaton, 1989) and one utilizing surveys sponsored by mass media organizations (Rogers, Dearing, Chang, 1991). The summary of the public opinion polls were compared to the results of a content analysis of selected news media. For example, Funkhouser (1973) analyzed the content of the three major national news magazines (Time, Newsweek, and US News and World Report) over the 1960's and compared the topics covered to what was identified by the Gallup Poll as being the most important issues. Similarly Eaton (1989) examined the content of the major news magazines, but he expanded his analysis to include several national newspapers as well. In contrast, Winter and Eyal (1981) looked only at the New York Times to identify the issues receiving the most attention from the news media and compared those results to the results of the Gallup Poll question "What's the most important problem facing America?"

Five of the studies assessed public opinion by utilizing interviews or researcher conducted surveys. For example, (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Weaver, McCombs 1973; Weaver, McCombs, Spellman, 1975; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, 1982) interviewed undecided voters during an approaching presidential election to determine where they received political information. Salwen (1987) surveyed respondents to determine where they received most of their information about the environment.

Only one of the studies varied from this methodological approach. Iyengar, Kinder, and Peters (1982) utilized an experimental design by manipulating ABC and NBC's agenda the evening before each day's session with the participants. They divided the participants into three groups to set their experiment focus on how they responded to coverage on a specific national issue. The participants were unaware that portions of the newscasts had been modified to provide constant coverage of national defense, pollution of the environment, or inflation in 1980. The results not only proved that the impact of the media's agenda supports the agenda setting hypothesis but suggested that viewers who have more exposure to a specific issue become more convinced of its salience. During this study, Iyengar and Kinder also explored how the media's agenda affects how people evaluate President Carter's performance in dealing with defense, pollution, and inflation. Through empirical evidence, they found that "a president's overall reputation, and, to a lesser extent, his apparent competence, both depend on the presentation of network news programs" (p. 853).

Four articles were concerned with elections, including identification of major issues and perceptions of candidates (McCombs & Shaw 1972; Weaver, Graber, McCombs 1982; Iyengar,

Kinder, Peters, 1982; Eaton 1989). Five articles looked at major social issues: issues in the 1960s (Funkhouser, 1973), Watergate (Weaver, McCombs & Spellman 1975), civil rights (Winter & Eyal, 1981), environmental issues (Salwen, 1987), and the issue of AIDS (Rogers, Dearing, Chang, 1991).

All of the studies reviewed concluded there was a strong correlation between what the public perceived to be important issues and the issues covered by the news media. However, this conclusion did not completely predict causation news media effect on public opinion. While the studies showed a clear correlation they did not indicate whether the public identified certain issues as important because the news media had covered the issues, or if the news media covered certain issues because the public felt they were important. This limitation was at least partially addressed by studies that showed that participants with a higher need for orientation (McCombs &Weaver, 1973; Weaver, McCombs, & Spellman, 1975), indicating that the media was influencing public opinion rather than public opinion influencing media. Moreover, it was also found that while news media coverage did create issue salience for the public, the coverage did not necessarily provide information or knowledge about the issue. (Rogers, Dearing, Chang, 1991).

Framing

A second theory that has been frequently been paired with the agenda-setting theory in analysis of the news media effects is framing. Researchers Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1984) concluded in their early research that the way an issue is framed has a significant influence on how the public responds to the issue. James Tankard and colleagues (1991)

described media framing as "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, exclusion, and elaboration" (p. 3). In terms of salience, Robert Etnman (1993) suggested that the media can frame issues by selecting certain factual parts and neglecting other parts to make them more prominent to the public.

A search of EBSCO's Academic Search Complete and Communication and Mass Media Complete data base yielded 701 articles published between 1984 and 2014 that included key words "agenda-setting theory", "framing effects", and/or "media framing". The articles selected for inclusion in this review was based on the frequency of citation of the article in subsequent articles reviewing news media framing and how it affects public perception of issues. Ten articles were selected as representative of framing analysis.

Similar to the approach taken by the earlier research applying the agenda-setting theory, the majority of the articles considering the framing of the story also utilized a combination of content analysis and assessment of public opinion. However, there was some variance in the method and type of questions asked.

Perhaps the most important element of the theory is the idea that how something is said may be as, if not more important than the frequency of coverage. Two of the studies (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Quattrone & Tversky, 1988) looking at framing evaluated the way people respond to information and/or questions based on the way the information or question was phrased. For example, Kahneman and Tversky (1984) asked experimental subjects the following:

"Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been

proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the consequences of the programs

are as follows: If Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved. If Program B is adopted, there is one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and two thirds probability that no people will be save. Which of the two programs would you favor?" (p.343).

In this testing, 72 percent of the experimental subjects selected Program A and 28 percent chose Program B. In the following testing, the subjects were offered the same options of programs, but framed in terms of possible deaths instead of possible lives saved:

"If Program C is adopted, 400 people will die. If Program D is adopted, there is one-third probability that nobody will die and a two-thirds probability that 600 people will die"(p.343).

The results were reversed for the options. For instance, Program C was selected by 22 percent yet its identical program A was chosen by 72 percent. Then, Program D was selected by 78 percent, while the identical Program B gathered 28 percent. Kahneman and Tversky found that people will make different choices, depending on how information was framed especially in a context that suggests gains versus losses. The wording of the questions was critical. People are more likely to make choices that save lives than ones that cause deaths.

Similarly, Quattrone and Tversky (1988) explored how the reference point or framing formulated the public opinion on the Equal Rights Amendment. They suggested that the Equal Rights Amendment could be framed in two ways: an attempt to eradicate discrimination against women or as a legislation created to improve a woman's status in society. Experimental subjects were asked:

"As you know, the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution is currently being debated across the county. It says. "Equality of rights under law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Supporters of the amendment say it will [help eliminate discrimination against women/improve rights of women] in job opportunities, salary, and social security benefits. Opponents of the amendment say that it will have a negative effect by denying women protection offered by special laws. Do you favor or oppose the Equal Rights Amendment?" (p. 726)

The results indicated that 78 % of the subjects favored the Equal Rights Amendment when framed in terms of eliminating discrimination in contrast to of improving women's rights (69%). Results from this study suggest that framing shapes the way an individual perceives and understands an issue by selecting language that embodies particular values.

When the variance in phrasing is applied to news coverage, research shows that how the news media frame the story will alter how the public views the issue. For example, Robert Entman (1989) analyzed media narratives of Korean Airlines and Iran Air incidents. In 1983, a Korean Air Lines passenger plane was shot down by a Soviet fighter plane leading to 269 deaths. In 1988, Iran Air Flight was shot down by a U.S. navy ship killing 290 passengers and crew. Time and Newsweek covered the KAL incident by headlining the cover page with: "Shooting to Kill/The Soviets Destroy an Airliner" and "Murder in the Air". On the other hand, for the incident with Iran Air in 1988, Newsweek cover page headlined: "Why It Happened," while Times covered it to the corner flap on the cover page which said, "What Went Wrong in the Gulf." According to Entman, the framing found in the news media coverage of KAL and Iran

Air incidents was clearly evident when looking at how the news media applied the words "attack", "murder", and "tragedy" to similar tragic incidents. He stated that by "de-emphasizing the agency and the victims and by the choice of graphics and adjectives, the news stories about the U.S. downing of an Iranian plane called it a technical problem whole the Soviet downing of a Korean jet was portrayed as a moral outrage" (p. 7). This study suggests that the news media reported on the incidents by demonizing and blaming the foreign enemy while the U.S. military's action was presented as a complete accident.

While Entman's study revealed clear differences in how stories were framed, it did not look at the effect these frames had on public opinion. Barbara Allen, Paula O'Loughlin, Amy Jasperson and Sullivan (1994) analyzed the content of the three major broadcast news networks' (CNN, NBC, National Public Radio) early coverage of the Gulf War and compared the frames to the results of a Roper Poll that asked the public if they supported the war. The researchers found that CNN, NBC, and NPR covered the war constantly and even stopped regular programming to cover the war when it initially began, which the researchers stated was an "unbalanced nature of media coverage contributed to the framing and priming of the war" (p. 270). Additionally, there was minimal news media coverage of opposition against the war or President Bush's policies which led to an initial spurt of public support for the war. Fatalities were ignored as the media covered Bush's reasoning behind the war extensively. Allen and colleagues concluded that the news media conveyed reports that framed the coverage by emphasizing that Iraq threatened democratic values. Lastly, the researchers suggested that the framing and selection of certain aspects while ignoring other facts implied to viewers that

Operation Desert Storm was a peacekeeping action and not really a war against persons. This reflected in high positive public opinion about the war.

Similarly, Entman and Rojecki's (1993) study of media frames regarding the nuclear freeze movement found that public opinion correlated with media frames that characterized demonstrations and protests against nuclear weapons as "emotionally charged" and "diffuse". Additionally, the coverage on this issue was framed using recurrent references and stereotypes that were used during the Vietnam era which included: "protest", "peaceniks", "guitars", "concerts", and "dances". News coverage did not include criticism against of how policy-makers and the Reagan administration dealt with the nuclear freeze movement, which Entman and Rojecki suggested reinforced the administration's policies. Based on this study, public opinion polls suggested that a large majority of Americans were in support of the freeze proposal. However, the framing references utilized in the freeze coverage by NYT and Time magazines indicate that there were patterns that prevented the anti-nuclear movement from being successful. The researchers concluded that "the coverage tended to delegitimize public participation in organized political movements" (p. 172), which demonstrates an application of political power over the public through news media.

Research has also looked at how values and ethical issues vary. Dhavan Shah, Domke, and Wackman (1996) manipulated the coverage of newspaper articles to frame health care issues and political candidates' stances on the issues in terms of ethical and moral values to examine how undergraduate students and Evangelical Christians processed information from news media. After the respondents read the newspaper articles, the respondents rated the significance of

voting decisions based on economy, health care, government cuts, and education. They concluded that "media framing of issues in ethical terms may lead to more noncompensatory decision making by a) activating ethical schema and attitudes, which motivates the voter to make judgments in ethical terms, and b) providing specific information on ethically based candidate positions, which enables the voter to apply these ethical considerations in judgment" (p. 533). Overall, Shah and colleagues suggested that the ethical and moral framing of an issue covered by the news media along with a candidate's stance towards the issue can highly influence who the voter will select.

Thomas Nelson, Rosalee Clawson, and Zoe Oxley (1997) also looked at how media framing effect on values by examining public tolerance towards the Ku Klux Klan. Participants watched one of two versions of local broadcasts of KKK rallies. After watching the broadcasts, the researchers measured the participants' tolerance for the KKK by asking these questions: "Do you support or oppose allowing members of the Ku Klux Klan to hold public rallies in our city"(p. 571) and "do you support or oppose allowing members of the Ku Klux Klan to make a speech in our city?" (p. 571). Two news frames used to measure different values were the KKK's "freedom of speech and civil liberties" or "the importance of "public order" (p. 571). The researchers found that news media framing of the KKK controversy affected the tolerance for the participants because "freedom of speech and civil liberties" (p. 572) was rated with high importance.

Several other studies have demonstrated the correlation between media use of charged language in framing stories and resulting public opinion. For example, Zhongdang Pan and

Gerald Kosicki (1991) found that terms such as "militantly" (p. 68) used to characterize pro-life activists and phrases such as "shoving a clinic director" (p. 68) to describe anti-abortion protest correlated with negative public opinion of the protests. Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, and Fan (1998) also considered the importance of language finding that language shifts altered the view of "seriousness of the budget conflict" (p. 6).For instance, the frame word"fight" indicated that the budget "debate" had grown more intense when compared to earlier news reports when the frame word "talk" was used to describe the communication between the bipartisan Congress.

> "Just a day after suspending budget talks with words of optimism, President Clinton and Republican leaders were sounding more confrontational and talking about fighting out their differences in the November election" (New York Times, January 22, 1996, p. A1).

This was one example used in the study to demonstrate how the budget debate shifted from "talks" to "fights", which they said had a greater impact on public understanding the issue, whether in reality it was becoming more severe or not. The evidence in this study concluded that "data show that the rise of the budget as the most important issue in late 1995 and early 1996 can be modeled via shifts in how the news about budget politics was framed" (p.11). Overall, they concluded that by investigating how news media frames an issue, the causation for the correlation between issue salience and public opinion will be more evident.

These studies on framing effects concluded that there was significant evidence to suggest that frames affect public opinion by bringing attention to certain aspects of the issue described or can also divert attention from the neglected aspects. Based on the results of these studies, it is

suggested that the public expresses similar, if not, the exact same views as the ones presented by the frames.

The news media are corporate for profit entities and then profits are, in some part, determined by the size of their audiences. The rapid emerging of "panel discussions" or 24-hour news stations putting "experts" from the two parties against one another in discussion can be classified as framing. For example, Etnman states that frames, "defines problems—determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes— identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments— evaluate causal agents and their effects; suggest remedies— offer and justify treatments for the problem and predict their likely effects" (p. 52). That poses the question of why the mass media selects and highlights certain aspects of an issue. Instead of simple fact reporting, does the mass media select parts of an issue that will make for politically controversial discussions? Does the way a news network frame a political story reflect the perceived bias of the network?

Method

To investigate frames used by news outlets, this study looked at major news stories published during the 2013 government shutdown. The following questions were addressed to conduct qualitative research on the framing used by major news outlets:

> R1: Do the news outlets vary in topic salience?
> R2: Is there a bias revealed in the framing of the topics?
>> A. Is there use of emotive words in the news media coverage?

B. Is framing skewed?

To address the research questions, we did a content analysis of news articles relating to the 2013 government shutdown.

Data Collection News stories published on October 1, 2013 were collected from major news media websites. The collection process began by doing a Google search using the search terms "government shutdown", "October 1, 2013 government shutdown", "2013 government shutdown". The criteria used for selecting news articles for this study was 1) news source that has both internet and traditional media (TV, radio, and newspaper) formats, 2) article must be news report not an editorial or a political commentary, 3) article must be published on October 1, 2013, 4) news source must be national news media, 5) article must have reported the government shutdown, 6) articles must represent a political range of major national news outlets.

Description Nine articles representing nine different news outlets were included in the study. The articles used in this study were the internet print versions published on the network or publication's website. Table 1 displays the articles selected. The articles ranged in length from 500 words to 1400 words with an average length of 1095 words.

News Source	Headline	Length of article (word count)
CNN	Government shutdown: Get up to speed in 20 questions	1077
NBC	Winners and Losers of the Government Shutdown	1466

FOX	Now What? Government shutdown to be felt across America	670
ABC	Government Shuts Down After Lawmakers Fail to Agree on Funding Bill	833
CNN Money	Shutdown: A multi-billion dollar hit to economy	528
Bloomberg	Government Shutdown Begins as Deadlocked Congress Flails	1469
Boston Globe	Shutdown begins as lawmakers miss midnight deadline	1324
Washington Post	Senate rejects House amendments to spending bill as shutdown looms	1370
The Hill	Government shuts down as lawmakers miss funding deadline	1119

Table 1: News articles selected for analysis.

Analysis A content analytical approach was used to analyze the articles for frames. Thomas (1994) states "content analysis is an analytic approach and, as such, resolves the phenomena under study into their constituent parts" (p. 961). The reliability of application of content analysis to news articles has been demonstrated through the body of agenda-setting and framing research.

Two approaches were used in the application of content analysis of the news articles. Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999) explain that a content analysis can be utilized to locate and categorize "manifest content (that which on the surface and easily observable, such as the appearance of a particular word in a written text…) or can be utilized to examine "latent content" (p. 259). Latent content looks to examine the context the words used in the news articles.

Construction of coding instrument was completed in two steps, corresponding the second research question to identify emotive words and frames.

We began the analysis by first examining the manifest content by locating the most frequently occurring words used in each news article. This enabled us to address the first research question, do the news outlets vary in topic salience. Wordle, a word cloud app, was utilized to determine what words appeared most frequently throughout the text and headlines of each article. Wordle generates word clouds that visually display which words in the text are most prominent; the bigger the font size of the word, the higher the frequency throughout text. Once the frequent words were identified, we excluded words such as "shutdown" and "government" since the article was evidently about the government shutdown. Figure 1 displays a sample of word cloud.
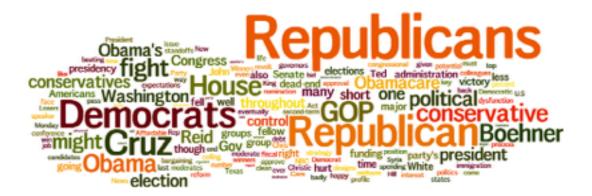

Figure 1. Sample of word cloud on NBC's article: "Winners and losers of the government shutdown".

The second step used Vocab Grabber to identify the exact counts of the most frequent words. Vocab Grabber enabled us to determine the exact frequency of the words and locate the words within the article. We looked at the context of how the frequent words were used within the articles and found that the articles had two key focuses: impact and cause of the government shutdown.

The third step explored latent content by analyzing the frequently occurring terms in context and considering the emotive quality of the terms. For example, Jasperson and colleagues (1996) suggested that shifting wording from "talks" to "fights" when reporting on budget negotiations intensifies how the public understands the issue. The evidence in their study concluded that "data show that the rise of the budget as the most important issue in late 1995 and early 1996 can be modeled via shifts in how the news about budget politics was framed" (p.11).

Results

Frames Two focuses were revealed from the initial analysis of the news articles, impact and cause. The first focus, impact, consisted of discussions that emphasized on the long and short term effects of the government shutdown. The types of impacts that were predicted were negative impacts on the economy, employment, and political processes. The second focus, cause, consisted of discussion of the cause of the shutdown. Table displays the primary focus of the article by network

Network	Impact	Cause
CNN		X
NBC	X	X

FOX	X	
ABC	X	X
CNN Money	X	
Bloomberg		X
Boston Globe	X	X
Washington Post		X
The Hill		X

Table 2: Primary focus of news report by networks and publications.

Two of the networks, CNN Money and FOX focused solely on the impact of the government shutdown. CNN Money focused on how the shutdown would affect small businesses, economy, and employment. FOX and ABC discussed how many federal workers would be furloughed. NBC and Boston Globe focused on how the government shutdown would impact future politics. Four of the networks, CNN, Bloomberg, Washington Post, and The Hill focused solely on the cause of the government shutdown highlighting that it happened because the Republicans and Democrats were fighting about Obamacare. These networks also focused on President Obama and Congress' disagreements about the budget. Boston Globe, ABC, and NBC emphasized both on the cause and the impact of the government shutdown. Table 2 displays how news sources vary in the way they framed the government shutdown.

	Impact			Cause		
News Source	Business/ economy	Workers	Politics	Obamacare	Republicans/ Democrats fighting	President/ Congress fighting
CNN				X	X	X
NBC			X	X	X	X

FOX		X				
ABC		X			X	X
CNN Money	X	X				
Bloomberg				X	X	X
Boston Globe			X	X	X	X
Washington Post				X	X	X
The Hill					X	X

Table 2. How news sources vary in the way they framed the government shutdown

Looking at the focus of the articles provides the answer to the first research question: do news outlets vary in topic salience. In terms of salience, the analysis showed that the cause of the shutdown seemed much more important than the impact of the shutdown.

Emotive Words The third step of examining use of emotive words addressed the second research question: is there use of emotive words in the news media coverage, is framing skewed, and ultimately, is there a bias revealed in the news media covering? The use of emotive language was found in all the news articles. The news sources used positive, negative, and mixed emotive words throughout the articles. The distinction between words that would always be emotive and ones with strong connotations were identified. "Loser", "hurt", and "blame" were words that would trigger a person's feelings rather than being neutrally or objectively descriptive. Because of strong partisanships and identifying how the political parties were described in the news sources, words such as, "conservatives", "Democrats", "Tea Party", and "Obamacare" were

mostly identified with a negative or mixed emotive connotation. Table 3 and Table 4 display

emotive words and language used throughout the nine articles in order of frequency.

Emotive Words	Frequency	Negative Emotive	Positive Emotive	Mixed Emotive
Republicans	68	X		
Democrats	22			X
GOP	16	X		
Conservatives	12	X		
Tea Party	5	X		
Obamacare				X

Table 3. Use of emotive words to describe political parties or policies.

Emotive words/phrases	Frequency	Negative Emotive	Positive Emotive	Mixed Emotive
fight	22	X		
against	10	X		
battle	7	X		
hurt	7	X		
support	7			X
oppose	5	X		
blame	4	X		
defund	4	X		
dispute	4	X		
winner	4			X
dysfunction	3	X		
frustrating	3			
should get a life	3	X		
Disapproval	2	X		
disruption	2	X		
gridlock	2	X		
gun to our heads	2	X		
Loser	2	X		
Serious	2	X		
unnecessary blow to America	2	X		
Anarchists	1	X		
Bully	1	X		
Hostage	1	X		
Weird	1	X		

Table 3. Use of emotive language in all news sources.

It was discovered in this study that the news sources had two key focuses, impact and cause, when reporting day one of the government shutdown. The first focus, impact, emphasized the effects of the government shutdown. The second focus, cause, consisted of discussion of the cause of the shutdown. More news sources reported on the cause of the government shutdown than the impact and effects of the shutdown.

When examining the context of frequently used words in each news article, it was highly evident that negative emotive words such as, "fights", "blame", "deal-killer", "legislative pingpong", "hostage-takers" contributed to intensifying the issue, which led to a clear political bias in how the government shutdown was reported. The word "winner" implies that there is a "loser" in the government shutdown so it was both a positive and negative emotive word. The Republicans were blamed in the reporting for causing the government shutdown while Democrats were mostly presented to be the victims of the "bullying" Republicans.

Discussion

The goal of the study was to explore how news sources varied in topic salience when covering a specific issue. Moreover, to determine if there is news media bias by examining frames and usage of emotive words in news reports. Specifically, this study examined coverage of the 2013 government shutdown by analyzing nine news articles representing nine different news outlets.

The literature review indicated that agenda-setting and framing strongly affects how the public understands the issue. Researchers . Kahneman and Tversky found that people will make different choices, depending on how information was framed especially in a context that suggests

gains versus losses. This study demonstrates that the news media is reporting on the political divide in terms of winners versus losers rather than the impact of the issue. Consistent with prior research, the current study found that the news media not only varies in topic salience when reporting an issue, but more significantly it indicates to the public that the nation is politically polarized. The literature review also indicated that while the news media indicates to the public what issues are significant, they do not provide knowledge about the issue. New media diverts the public's focus towards the cause of the issue and choosing which political party to blame. Congress, both the Republican House and the Democratic Senate, have the primary responsibility to negotiate, discuss, and agree on a budget to honor and protect the wants and needs of both the majority and minority in society. Therefore, blaming one party or another would be futile because Congress did not come to an agreement or compromise as a collective.

Finding a cause to the government shutdown instead of presenting facts to the public adds to sensationalizing the "fight". Instead of referring to the talks about budget as a "negotiation", it was more frequently referred to as a "battle" or a "fight". Additionally, there was an obvious skewing of how Republicans and Democrats were characterized. The news articles characterized the Republicans by using emotive words such as, "bully", "staunch", "weird", "hostage-takers", and "anarchists". There was hardly any mention of Democrats when comparing the frequency of Republicans to Democrats. When discussing Democrats, the articles used terms such as "Democrats chances of regaining control of House", or "Democrats are quietly giddy about the political fallout from a shutdown, and what it could mean in the midterm elections".

According to Morris P. Fiorina, American political scientist and co-author of "Culture War", the popular news media misrepresents to the public that there is a deep political polarization. He states that "novelty and negativity are two characteristics that enhance news value. Another is conflict." (p. 22) and headlining a news story stating that Democrats and Republicans agree on most issues will not capture the public's attention. However, Fiorina explains that "stories can be framed in terms of battles and wars, victories and defeats, unbridgeable gulfs, and irreconcilable differences are more attractive, especially if they portend even more serious consequences—splits, disruption…" (p. 22). For example, the NBC news report used for this study was headlined, "Winners and Losers of the Government Shutdown" to further indicate to the public that two distinct sides were "fighting". This current study suggests that framing, use of emotive language, and biased reporting could lead to voter apathy and a low voter turnout because the public is told to focus solely on the Republicans and Democrats or Obama and Congress fighting when it comes to policy issues. It also demonstrates that the news media believes that conflict makes a much better news story than reporting based solely on the facts. This type of coverage on policy issues could lead to a strong public perception of political polarization because it highlights the differences between the political parties and minimizing areas of agreement.

Furthermore, this research concludes that there are implications for journalists. What happened to unbiased reporting? The Society of Professional Journalists emphasized the need for reporters and editors to be committed to a standard of ethics when reporting the news to mitigate the effect news on public opinion and policy. Ethical, professional journalists seek the whole truth by "providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and news" (SPJ Code of Ethics,

online). In journalism education, reporters are taught to report the truth to the public. The goal is unbiased presentation of the facts, allowing an informed public to form their own opinions about policy questions. This study indicates that popular news media is currently framing new reports on policy issues emotively instead of objectively. Instead of providing information to an informed public, the news media is being selective in topic salience and facts. This type of practice in media has degraded the profession and has added a stigma to how the public perceives the news media. In Pew Research Center's most recent report on "Views of the News Media" (2011), it was found that "25 percent say that in general news organizations get the facts straight while 66 percent say stories are often inaccurate and by two-to-one (62% to 31%), more Americans say that news organizations are politically biased than say they are careful to avoid biased reporting." This study suggests the news media must inform the public with facts and contribute to a successful democracy. Journalists, editors, and publishers must obtain a high degree of ethical and professional training before entering the field because having an influence on public opinion or how the public perceives reality is highly significant.

The results of this study are limited because of the limited number of news articles accessed. The limitations of this research are also because we analyzed articles reported only on the first day of the government shutdown, were internet versions of the reports, and were news reports not including editorial or commentary reports. Future research is needed to explore an expanded sampling of news articles and commentaries before and after the government shutdown occurred, which would include for example, viewing television broadcasts of the government shutdown and conducting a survey to examine public opinion. Additional research is needed to explore how the public perceives the emotive words used in news reports.

References

Allen, B., O'Loughlin, P., Jasperson, A., & Sullivan, J. L. (1994). The media and the Gulf War: Framing, priming, and the spiral of silence. *Polity*, 255-284**.** Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Berman, R. (2013, October 1). Government shuts down as lawmakers miss funding deadline. *TheHill*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://thehill.com/homenews/house/325695-clock-strikes-on-shutdown-as-lawmakers-miss-funding-deadline

Bierman, N., & Gugel, M. (2013, October 1). Lawmakers miss midnight deadline to fund the government, shutdown begins - The Boston Globe. *BostonGlobe.com*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2013/09/30/lawmakers-miss-midnight-deadline-fund-government-shutdown-begins/jtSS4gvNIhPC75U9bVBk7O/story.html?event=event12

Coleman, R., & Banning, S. (2006). Network TV news' affective framing of the presidential candidates: Evidence for a second-level agenda-setting effect through visual framing. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83(2), 313-328. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Chakraborty, B. (2013, October 1). Now What? Government shutdown to be felt across America. . Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/10/01/now-what-who-goes-and-who-stays-during-government-shutdown/

Eaton, H. (1989). Agenda-setting with bi-weekly data on content of three national media. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 66(4), 942-959. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Entman, R. M. (1991). Symposium framing US coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents. *Journal of communication*, 41(4), 6-27. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Entman, R. M., & Rojecki, A. (1993). Freezing out the public: Elite and media framing of the US anti‐nuclear movement. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of communication*, 43(4), 51-58.

Falcone, M., & Saenz, A. (2013, October 1). Government Shuts Down After Lawmakers Fail to Agree on Funding Bill. *ABC News*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/government-shuts-lawmakers-fail-agree-funding-bill/story?id=20427463

Fiorina, M. P., Abrams, S. J., & Pope, J. C. (2011). Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized America. New York: Pearson Longman.

Funkhouser, G. R. (1973). The issues of the sixties: An exploratory study in the dynamics of public opinion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(1), 62-75. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Graber, D. A., McCombs, M. E., & Eyal, C. H. (1981). Media agenda-setting in a presidential election: Issues, images, and interest.

Isidore, C. (2013, October 1). Shutdown: A multi-billion dollar hit to economy. *CNNMoney*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://money.cnn.com/2013/09/30/news/economy/shutdown-economic-impact/

Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (2010). News that matters: Television and American opinion. University of Chicago Press.

Jasperson, A. E., Shah, D. V., Watts, M., Faber, R. J., & Fan, D. P. (1998). Framing and the public agenda: Media effects on the importance of the federal budget deficit. *Political Communication*, 15(2), 205-224. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, values, and frames. *American psychologist*, 39(4), 341. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

Lippmann, W. (1946). Public opinion. Transaction Publishers.

McCombs, M. (2013). Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion. John Wiley & Sons.

McCombs, M. (2005). A look at agenda-setting: Past, present and future. Journalism studies, 6(4), 543-557. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. Public opinion quarterly, 36(2), 176-187. Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.

McCombs, M., & Weaver, D. (1973). Voters' Need for Orientation and Use of Mass Communication. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

McQuail, D. (2010). McQuail's mass communication theory. Sage Publications.

Montgomery, L., & Kane, P. (2013, October 1). Senate rejects House amendments to spending bill as shutdown looms. *Washington Post*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/washington-braces-for-the-first-shutdown-of-the-national-government-in-17-years/2013/09/30/977ebca2-29bd-11e3-97a3-ff2758228523_story.html

Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997). Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *American Political Science Review*, 567-583.

O'Brien, M. (2013, October 1). Winners and losers of the government shutdown - NBC News. *NBC News*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://www.nbcnews.com/news/other/winners-losers-government-shutdown-f8C11305607

Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political communication*, 10(1), 55-75. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Press Widely Criticized, But Trusted More than Other Information Sources. (n.d.). *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press RSS*. Retrieved July 7, 2014, from http://www.people-press.org/2011/09/22/press-widely-criticized-but-trusted-more-than-other-institutions/

Quattrone, G. A., & Tversky, A. (1988). Contrasting rational and psychological analyses of political choice. *American Political Science Review*, 82(03), 719-736. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Rogers, E. M., Dearing, J. W., & Chang, S. (1991). AIDS in the 1980s: The agenda-setting process for a public issue (No. 126). Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Salwen, M. B. (1987). Mass media issue dependency and agenda-setting. *Communication Research Reports*.

Shah, D. V., Domke, D., & Wackman, D. B. (1996). "To Thine Own Self Be True" Values, Framing, and Voter Decision-Making Strategies. *Communication Research*, 23(5), 509-560.

Society of Professional Journalists Improving and protecting journalism since 1909. (n.d.).*SPJ Code of Ethics*. Retrieved June 8, 2014, from http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Tiron, R., Rubin, R., & Hunter, K. (2013, October 1). Government Shutdown Begins as Deadlocked Congress Flails. *Bloomberg.com*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-10-01/government-shutdown-begins-as-deadlocked-congress-flails.html

Weaver, D. H., McCombs, M. E., & Spellman, C. (1975). Watergate and the Media A Case Study of Agenda-Setting. *American Politics Research*, 3(4), 458-472.

Winter, J. P., & Eyal, C. H. (1981). Agenda setting for the civil rights issue. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45(3), 376-383.

Yan, H. (2013, October 1). Government shutdown: Get up to speed in 20 questions. *CNN*. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/30/politics/government-shutdown-up-to-speed/