Public Perception or Media Manipulation:

The Power of the Agenda-Setting Function of the Press Examined

An Exploratory Pilot Study of Media Bias

Mitchell Jay Malcheff

Liberty University

Abstract

Originally developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), agenda-setting theory has provided a theoretical framework for numerous media bias studies. This pilot study attempted to add to that body of literature by addressing a relatively new evolution of agenda-setting theory known as second-level agenda-setting by measuring whether biased media can significantly change attitudes about a given issue. To accomplish this, participants were surveyed regarding their perceptions regarding credibility on the part of MSNBC, presented with a news package from MSNBC, and then surveyed to examine if any attitude change occurred. Significance was found to support the presence of the hostile media effect and the partisan segmentation of cable news. Prior applications of agenda-setting theory and subsequent contributions to the communication discipline will be examined and critiqued and ideas for future research will also be offered.

Key Terms: hostile media effect, partisan segmentation, agenda-setting theory, credibility

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Public Perception or Media Manipulation:

The Power of the Agenda-Setting Function of the Press Examined

Since the very concept of mass media was theorized and formulated, cries have come from every corner that the media is biased. The cries have intensified in recent years as the media continues to encroach on every corner of society via television, radio, print media, and the Internet. Because of the pervasiveness of mass media, the outcry over bias is only natural. More difficult to identify, though, is whether or not bias has any effect on the public. Cohen (1963) recognized this more than 45 years ago when he wrote, "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*" (p. 13). Cohen wrote about what McCombs and Shaw would later define as agenda-setting theory, which is discussed below. Many journalists recognize their inherent biases but still claim objectivity. However, few of those same journalists would argue that the influence of media is great and has the potential for enormous change and power.

Media bias is a field rich in communication research and has been studied in many different ways and to a great extent. Much research has been dedicated to identifying instances of bias. Understandably, the effects of media bias have been studied to a lesser degree. This is understandable because while objective criteria can be established to measure and identify specific instances of bias, the problem becomes more difficult to measure when the effects of bias are examined, which is the purpose of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this study will attempt to address is not concerned with whether the media is biased. That fact has been well established through previous research. The problem this study will examine is the effects of bias because even if bias is present it presents no real threat to society unless it can influence people and in some way interrupt, disturb, or change the flow of information. Journalistic ethics aside, media bias deserves little attention in communication research if communication is not altered as a result. The question this study asks is whether those biases can influence a sample population on a given issue to the point that they experience a significant attitude change after being presented with a particular issue that has been presented in the media in a biased way.

If biased media does affect society, then it must be examined because of the implications that this could hold for the democratic process. Turn the calendar back 100 years and the newspaper was the dominant news medium. Radio was still in its infancy and television was yet to be hatched when publications like *The New York Times* ruled the news roost. Today, though, 24-hour cable news channels such as CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC have turned news anchors into celebrities. Blogs like *Townhall.com* and *The Huffington Post* offer commentary that many mistake for objective news. The airwaves are littered with staunchly partisan radio hosts who hold enormous sway, to the point that Rush Limbaugh, a long-time conservative radio personality, is considered by many to be the head of the Republican Party. Amid all of these emerging outlets, the original tellers of news, newspapers, are struggling to adapt to an ever evolving communication industry. Some, like the print editions of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and the *Rocky Mountain News* are gone while others like the *Detroit Free Press* have dramatically scaled back production, producing only three print publications a week and instead

opting for an almost exclusive web presence.

This new media arena has spawned a segmentation in the viewing audience that often falls along party lines. Both liberals and conservatives are suspicious of news coverage from networks that they feel endorse a specific party. To put it in other terms, imagine a diet consisting of only one type of a certain food, say Lays regular potato chips. If a person only eats Lays regular potato chips and never any other kind or flavor, they can still enjoy potato chips but their knowledge of other flavors will be limited. As time progresses, this person may begin to feel that other types of potato chips are inferior to Lays. Eventually, even entertaining thoughts of trying other potato chips are considered laughable. Though simplistic, this progression aptly mirrors the media segmentation that is taking place. I believe that to function correctly, a democratic society needs a strong, well-rounded press, which America has. However, the two-way street that should exist is largely absent and instead of challenging what they believe to be true, the viewing audience seems content instead to reinforce what they already believe.

Lost amid this new technological backdrop are the ideas contained in the Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics (1926) which in part states that the role of the press is to "test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible" (Society of professional journalists: Code of ethics). The eleventh point states that journalists must "examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others" (Society of professional journalists: Code of ethics).

Communication research must attempt to provide an explanation not only for why, how, and when media bias occurs in all its different forms amid the media chatter that assaults society from every corner. Research must also measure the effects that biased media has on attitude. The study of media bias is and should be an integral part of communication research, and has been,

ever since McCombs and Shaw's (1972) seminal research on agenda-setting was published, which is discussed below.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this examination of media bias is to test the theory of agenda-setting to examine if a relationship exists between media content that is seen as biased and attitude change on a given issue controlling for people's perceptions of slanted coverage on a certain topic. The viewing of both liberally and conservatively slanted news is important to this study to measure if study participants are able to recognize bias and distinguish between the different types. The examination of the media and political agenda-setting within the framework of agenda-setting theory is significant and appropriate because of the original nature of McCombs and Shaw's (1972) research, which examined the relationship between media salience and public salience as it relates to politicians and how they present themselves to the public through the use of media. The independent variable will be defined as political ideology. The study also hopes to identify the relationship between voting preferences and the perception of media bias. To identify this relationship, study participants' political ideologies will be surveyed so an accurate understanding of bias on the part of the participants can be identified to better understand the complex interplay between inherent biases and the effects of agenda-setting.

Review of Literature

Agenda-Setting Theory: The Media and Salience

Cohen (1963) was not alone in thinking the press is successful in telling readers what to think about. The signature research that has guided many studies of media bias since its inception is McCombs and Shaw's ground-breaking 1968 Chapel Hill work. Published in 1972, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Media" offered empirical evidence that in many ways refuted Lazarsfeld's and Hovland's work of the '40s, '50s, and '60s that pointed to a limited-effects model of media. Based on their belief that most of the public's contact with politicians was through mediated settings, McCombs and Shaw studied the role of the media in the political process by surveying 100 Chapel Hill, North Carolina, residents who were undecided before the 1968 presidential election between Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, and George Wallace (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Their research established a near perfect correlation of +.967 between the issues that the public deemed most important and the issues that media were making most salient in nine different Chapel Hill, North Carolina media outlets (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda-setting theory (AST) has since provided an unparalleled foundation for both quantitative and qualitative studies of media bias that is applicable across a wide number of media fields including print, television, and emerging technologies such as the Internet.

One of the first major studies to use agenda-setting to study politics was conducted by Danish researchers Siune and Borre (1975). Danish political campaigning and the election process in general occurs in a much shorter period of time compared to American elections, just a few weeks, thus providing an apt setting to examine the role of the media in the political process. Siune and Borre compared the issues being presented in Danish media and polling that was conducted during the election gauging the public's interest of certain political issues.

According to Siune and Borre (1975), "the rise in salience of the issues of the EEC, the economy, and taxes … parallels the promotion of these three issues in the mass media … the decline or stagnation of issues such as social problems, education and culture, and environmental problems is paralleled by a relative neglect of these issues in mass media communication" (pg. 66).

The work of Siune and Borre served to reinforce the validity of agenda-setting theory and by 2006, more than 400 articles had been published in scholarly journals applying AST (2009, Tai, p. 481). This review of literature will briefly review three types of agenda-setting, define salience, display some of the various uses and applications of AST, examine Entman's definition of bias, provide an overview of key media bias studies, and conclude with a discussion of two theories that are closely related to AST; priming and framing.

Three components of agenda-setting

Dearing and Rogers (1996) subdivided agenda-setting theory into three components; media agenda-setting, public agenda-setting, and policy agenda-setting. As the names suggest, media agenda-setting is dependent on the mass media news agenda, public agenda-setting is dependent on topics in the public agenda, and policy-agenda setting is a response of sorts to the collective agendas of the media and the public (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The natural and probable result of media agenda-setting is an end effect on policy because a policy maker's only interaction with the public may be through a mediated setting such as observation of news stories, letters to the editor, etc. This end result of media agenda-setting was borne out by Tan and Weaver.

A longitudinal study conducted by Tan and Weaver (2007) provided evidence that lent credence to support McCombs and Shaw's contention that media agenda-setting can affect

policy. Tan and Weaver studied issues that were most salient in the media, the public, and

Congress from 1946-2004 in their paper published in *Journalism and Mass Communication*

Quarterly entitled, "Agenda-Setting Effects Among the Media, the Public, and Congress, 1946-

2004" (Tan & Weaver, 2007). The authors examined data from three different sources; *The New*

York Times, Gallup's Most Important Problems series of polls, and Congressional hearings.

Their results are displayed in part below:

> The findings regarding the ability of the media to set the agenda of Congress and the
>
> public are mixed. Generally speaking, media impact is limited to some specific issues.
>
> The international issue is one on which media can influence both the public and Congress
>
> within two years, which is consistent with previous research. In terms of the government
>
> operations issue, mass media can only affect the public, not Congress, and only after four
>
> years. (2007, p. 12)

Despite their different definitions, each type of agenda-setting depends on public salience of

issues if any sort of influence is to be had.

Salience

Salience was at the heart of McCombs and Shaw's research on AST and was defined by

Dearing and Rogers (1996) as, "the degree to which an issue on the agenda is perceived as

relatively important," (p. 8). At any given time, dozens of different issues like abortion,

homosexuality, privacy rights, gun rights, etc. are being debated and argued about in both the

mass media and in the population at large. However, by presenting certain issues and excluding

others, the media lead viewers to believe that some issues are more important than others. Thus,

policy makers are influenced because they perceive media coverage of issues as an outgrowth of

public opinion. According to Doris Graber in *Mass Media & American Politics*, "when people

are asked which issues are most important to them personally or to their communities, their lists tend to correspond to cues in the news sources that they use in their communities" (2002, p. 207).

The idea of salience is also present in another important media effects theory, Elisabeth Noelle Neumann's spiral of silence (1977) , which states: "Individuals who, when observing their environments, notice that their own personal opinion is spreading and is taken over by others, will voice this opinion self-confidently in public. On the other hand, individuals who notice that their own opinions are losing ground, will be inclined to adopt a more reserved attitude when expressing their opinions in public (p. 144).

The salience of many issues that previously may have gone unnoticed has risen with the advent of new media, namely the Internet. A once trim national media that consisted primarily of the three national networks plus a handful of cable news channels and a small number of national newspapers has bloated and now includes an ever-growing number of online news outlets that do much to set the public agenda and salience regarding a number of issues. Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence is still applicable in light of the growing number of news outlets, but its effects may be slower or smaller as more and more issues become not just two-sided, but many-sided because of these diverse new voices that are easily available online for those who once thought they were in the minority.

Though much different in application, salience is a key underlying issue to both of these important media effects theories. While McCombs and Shaw's original work with agenda-setting focused on salience in the media and the public, it has since been used in a variety of different research, including a number of studies that have focused on bias.

Entman's bias definitions

AST's ability to provide a theoretical lens through which to examine media bias across a

wide scope may be its greatest strength. An example of AST's malleability can be seen in Entman's three definitions of media bias. According to Entman (2007), a decision-making bias concerns the motivations and mindsets of journalists who produce biased content (p. 163). This decision-making bias presents certain issues as more salient than others. This type of bias could also be termed as a conscious bias because it concerns the motivation of the producer that is making decisions of what issues will be presented to the public.

The second type of bias is distortion bias, a type of bias that distorts or falsifies reality (2007, Entman, p. 163). Distortion bias is almost certainly the least used of the three because of its potential for harm to the producer. Because of the journalistic staple of accuracy, those with any type of distortion bias run the risk of losing all respect in the profession.

The third type of bias is content bias and may be the most widespread. According to Entman (2007), content bias "favors one side rather than providing equivalent treatment to both sides in a political conflict" (p. 163). This type of bias provides the basis for the research that will be conducted later.

Applying AST to three types of bias

Having defined three different types of bias, it is apparent how AST can be applied to a study of each one. For example, AST could provide a lens for studying a decision-making bias by a simple study tabulating the number of news stories devoted to a particular issue, person, or ideology in a specific publication or publications. AST could be used to study a distortion bias by a content analysis studying how often unattributed information or wrong information is published. Finally, AST could provide the framework for a content bias study by analyzing news stories to see if a conscious bias exists. While these three examples are in no way meant to be an exhaustive list of agenda-setting applications, these media bias research suggestions demonstrate

how flexible AST is.

James N. Druckman of Northwestern University and Michael Parkin of the University of Minnesota conducted a study that showed the effects of a content bias. Druckman and Parkin published the findings of their study in *The Journal of Politics* in November of 2005. The authors examined coverage of the 2000 Minnesota Senate campaign in the *Star Tribune* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. The campaign was between Republican incumbent Rod Grams and Democrat Mark Dayton (Druckman & Parkin, 2005). The authors examined both newspaper's demographics and markets before performing their study and also noted that both papers offered different endorsements; the *Star Tribune* endorsed Dayton and the *Pioneer Press* chose to endorse neither candidate (Druckman & Parkin, 2005). The purpose of the study was to ascertain if editorial slant occurred in either publication (Druckman & Parkin, 2005). The authors and their team analyzed 112 papers in total, 56 from each paper, dating from the day after the primary election through Election Day (2005). The characteristics they looked for included length and the spatial position of each article and the overall focus or frame (2005). The findings of their study are as follows: "In sum, we find evidence of a relative editorial slant, with the *Star Tribune* offering more positive coverage of Dayton relative to the *Press* and relative to its own coverage of Grams" (Druckman & Parkin, 2005, p. 1046). Though subtle, newspaper coverage that consistently favors one side can have an almost unconscious effect on the viewing public.

Baum and Groeling (2008) found evidence of a content bias on online news sites. A comparison of major online outlets including Fox News, the Associated Press, Reuters, and a handful of political blogs was conducted that showed a partisan bias on the part of Fox News regarding news judgment, (those stories that are deemed as worthy of coverage at the expense of not covering other stories), and content bias (pp. 360-361). However, the authors also concluded

that at least a modicum of bias was also present in Associated Press and Reuters coverage, both

of which are news wire-services and are generally considered to have neither a liberal nor

conservative bias (p. 361). These findings further complicate the matter of AST and bias by

suggesting, as other studies have, that bias may be unavoidable and a result of news judgment on

the part of media members rather than a conscious bias. Known as gate-keeping, this news

judgment is a necessary part of the role of the media. Of the hundreds of stories that could be

covered everyday, editors and reporters have the job of deciding what is important for their

audience. A balance must be struck between not only news value, but economic value. For

instance, logic would suggest that if a newspaper publisher is aware that his audience is primarily

urban and liberal, than his or her paper would be likely to sell more copies if their focus was on

stories that were of interest to democratic urbanites. However, that decision may draw the ire of a

republican suburbanite who buys a copy and quickly discovers there are few stories that appeal

to his different, but equally valid, viewpoint. These are the types of decisions that contribute to

making the study of agenda-setting a complex, but worthy endeavor.

Jonathan S. Morris of East Carolina University (2007) conducted a study that

demonstrates how AST can be used not just to examine print media bias but broadcast media.

Morris' study (2007) was less concerned with media bias and more concerned with what he

termed a partisan bias. Morris posed six hypotheses in his study entitled "Slanted Objectivity?

Perceived Media Bias, Cable News Exposure, and Political Attitudes."

H1: Partisan identification is associated with perceived media bias.

H2: Those individuals who perceive bias in the mainstream media are more likely to use

Fox News as their primary source of news.

H3: Those individuals with low opinions of the news media as an institution are more

likely to use Fox News as their primary source of news.

H4: The Fox News audience will have more positive attitudes toward President Bush, and more negative attitudes toward his opposition (in this case John Kerry), even when controlling for party identification.

H5: Independents who watch Fox News are more likely to vote Republican.

H6: Fox News watchers' view of current political events differs from that of other television news audiences. (2007, p. 713)

To test his hypotheses, Morris examined data from four different national media habits surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center from 2003-2005 (2007). Morris found that those who thought the media's treatment of President Bush unfair were more likely to watch Fox News while the reverse held true for those who thought that the media wanted Bush to win the 2004 election. Those in that category primarily watched network news (2007). Morris found evidence to support each of his hypotheses and his overarching premise that media viewing is dependent on a partisanship bias. In sum, Morris believes that partisan bias has produced a media fragmentation of which Fox News has been the biggest beneficiary (Morris, 2007). According to the Pew Research Center, more than 60 percent of Americans watched broadcast network news on a regular basis in 1994. By 2004, that number had been cut in half (Morris, 2007). While Morris' research did not find that media bias produces an individual's political leaning to be altered, the research did find that there is a definite partisan bias on both network and cable news that has segmented the viewing population along partisan political lines.

The resultant effect of this media fragmentation is a reinforcing spiral where viewers watch only that which reinforces their already held beliefs. Slater (2007) attempted to create a

model for understanding the complex interplay that underlies media effects by outlining what he termed a reinforcing spirals framework, which stated:

> Acknowledging the reciprocal nature of selectivity and media effects is an important starting point in understanding the relationship between the two. However, the concept of reciprocity can be misleading. Causal relationships … do not go back and forth as the term reciprocal implies. These relationships move forward in time, influencing one another, with the likelihood of reinforcing or cumulative effects (pp. 283-284).

Slater's model applies well to studying media bias. The reinforcing effects that he references are apparent in light of Morris' (2007) findings regarding the viewer fragmentation phenomena that has taken place. The resultant spiral is one of reinforcement of already held beliefs that never forces viewers to examine the veracity or validity of their beliefs. The cumulative effect is one not of fragmentation, but of separation and division, which has become evident in recent years as cable news channels increasingly are viewed as having a partisan agenda. If followed to its logical end, this reinforcing spirals framework could lead to agenda-setting on the part of cable news networks that recognize the partisan nature of their audience and present them with news that only serves to reinforce their beliefs.

Iyengar and Hahn (2009) conducted a recent measure of what they called ideological selectivity that serves to reinforce Morris' (2007) work. They presented news stories attributed to Fox News, CNN, and NPR to participants in an experimental setting and found that Republicans overwhelmingly preferred stories attributed to Fox News while the reverse was true for Democrats (p. 19). The reinforcing spirals detailed above clearly effected the results of this study because in some way, the perception of source credibility by participants largely led to their choice of network preference.

Slater's (2007) framework may be useful to examine older generations but it may not account for younger generations who are staying current through new channels. In addition, the Internet, especially blogs, have created a number of new agendas and platforms through which to find news, which has made agenda-setting harder to gauge, according to Coleman and McCombs (2007). However, the relationship between traditional news media and the Internet seems to be somewhat reciprocal: "One study found that online users take issues from traditional media and pass them on in Internet discussions … so it would not be surprising to find that young adults' agendas do match those of their older cohorts (Coleman and McCombs, p. 495). The fear of some was that the public agenda would start to disappear as the number of different agendas grew. However, Coleman and McCombs found that despite the prevalence of younger generations for non-traditional news sources, the public agenda was still alive and well because of the reciprocal nature between traditional sources and those of the Internet such as blogs (pg. 503).

Just a few years before the Internet would begin to broaden the scope and platforms available in which agenda-setting could occur, a follow-up study to the seminal agenda-setting research was conducted by Shaw and Martin (1992) that studied the effect that television news watching had on group consensus. Using a mixture of polling and content analysis drawn from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the original site used for McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting research conducted in 1968, Shaw and Martin found that consensus on public issues between reference groups: men vs. women, young vs. old, whites vs. non-whites, rich vs. poor, etc., increased relative to both newspaper and television exposure (p. 902). Shaw and Martin proposed that this consensus effect could have a positive effect on the public dialogue regarding issues because it could focus attention on important issues and in a sense expedite the decision-

making process on both a public and policy level. However, Shaw and Martin were conducting this research before cable news networks had risen in prominence. The partisan media effect that Morris identified had yet to be fully defined. What Martin and Shaw said was an unconscious function of the press has become a dividing line clearly demarcated along political boundaries:

> The press may, unconsciously, provide a limited and rotating set of public issues, around which the political and social system can engage in dialogue. In fact, from the point of view of the social system, that may be the major "function" of the news media in our country. The press does not tell us what to believe, but does suggest what we collectively may agree to discuss and perhaps act on (pp. 902-903).

Media today not only suggest what issues will be discussed but largely determine them. This effect has become pronounced in recent years during political races when cable networks like Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC do much more than suggest or intimate what candidate they support. If conducted today, Martin and Shaw's follow-up to the original agenda-setting research may have contained vastly different observations from the author on the state and function of media.

Rubenstein (2006) performed a similar study to Morris' for a dissertation project. Rubenstein termed this partisan television viewing as a "hostile media effect" (2006, p. 4). Rubenstein found that those who viewed themselves as partisan, either strongly Democrat or strongly Republican, occupied a niche corner of media where they consumed to large degree only news and commentary that reinforced their own political beliefs. The findings of Rubenstein and Morris paint a disturbing portrait of the possible outcome of an agenda-setting function of the media that could have detrimental effects on a healthy democratic society. If the public is only consuming media that reinforces already held beliefs then staples like elections

and voting become moot because partisan consumers of partisan news will naturally vote partisan. However, this type of media consumption has become more prevalent as the public's options have increased in terms of the glut of available media options.

This explosion of media options has caused many to question the motivations behind story selection in both broadcast and print media. While much of the research above regarding agenda-setting is concerned with politics AST can be applied to a number of different issues including crime, which was the focus of Carpenter, Lacy, and Fico's (2006) research and provides an example of the sometimes questionable motivations that may lie behind story selection. The authors found that high-profile criminal cases involving celebrities such as Michael Jackson or Kobe Bryant received much more coverage than similar cases (pp. 908-909) which calls into question whether modern journalism is geared towards sensationalism designed to increase ratings and circulation or towards objective reporting. This study also provides further evidence of AST's flexibility. Whereas much agenda-setting research is concerned with politics, this study shows that politics are just one of many different AST research options.

Further agenda-setting research

A study conducted by Hoffman and Wallach (2007) that employs agenda-setting theory provides an important foundation for this study. The authors surveyed 67 college students by showing them a series of articles about a 2004 campaign debate between Sen. John Kerry and incumbent George W. Bush. Participants read the articles and examined the accompanying pictures. The results showed clear attitude changes in a positive direction regarding Kerry and in a negative direction regarding Bush after the articles were read.

Son and Weaver (2005) examined the effect that the media agenda can have on political polling. They found that candidate salience in the media affected a candidate's standings in the

polls during the 2000 Presidential election.

Using a uniquely qualitative approach to examine bias, Walgraave (2008) surveyed politicians and journalists in Belgium to see whether they believed the media played a role in setting the political agenda. Walgraave's conclusion was that the media had a definite effect on the agenda and supported prior research on the same topic (p. 457).

Sheafer (2007) proposed a five-part hypothesis that tested the effects of both framing and agenda-setting:

H1: An increase in the level of media coverage of the economy will be associated with an increase in the proportion of survey respondents naming this issue as the country's most important problem.

H2: (a) The higher the salience of media coverage of the economy and the more negative the media presentation of the economy, the greater will be the increase in the proportion of survey respondents naming this issue as the country's most important problem; (b) this effect is expected to be stronger than the effect of media salience alone.

H3: The more positive is the media presentation of the economy, the more positive are the evaluations individuals will assign to the economic performance of the incumbent party.

H4: The more individuals are exposed to media coverage of the economy, the more weight they assign to the economic domain when they evaluate the overall performance of the incumbent party.

H5: The more positive is the media presentation of the economy, the more positive are the evaluations that individuals will assign to the general performance of the incumbent party and not only to its economic performance (pp. 22-27).

Sheafer found evidence to support each of the above hypotheses after examining the amount of salience of the economy in Israeli news media, (with salience defined simply as the number of news articles), and comparing that coverage with the level of importance that the public assigned to the economy during 16 different election years (2007, pp. 28-33).

Groshek (2008) looked at framing and whether CNN and CNN International used different frames to present news differently to the American public and the international public. Though Groshek found that frames varied slightly, his study showed that the agendas of CNN and CNN International were closely correlated (p. 64).

Eke (2008) contended that a conscious effort was conducted by the national broadcast media networks to keep the U.S. public in the dark about the ongoing conflict in Darfur. Using AST, Eke analyzed NBC, ABC, and CBS by content analyzing every instance within a given time frame that Darfur or other related words were used in newscasts (p. 287). While Eke did find that the networks did cover the genocide, he determined that relative to other major world news, Darfur was vastly underrepresented (p. 290). Additionally, Eke found that coverage of Darfur dramatically rose when celebrities such as George Clooney spoke out on the conflict, a fact which calls into question the news judgment of these networks.

News judgment was again the focus in Barber's (2008) examination of Canada's three major networks coverage during the 2006 federal election in Canada. While Barber did not find evidence of agenda-setting, she did find tertiary, perhaps unconscious bias likely driven more by ratings than political agendas. Barber discovered that leading political candidates were afforded more air-time in the form of both coverage and interviews (pp. 631-632). Barber notes that this type of study which looked at airtime and lineup rather than the nature of the coverage is somewhat lacking but is a critical area of media bias (p. 631).

Johnson, et al. (2009) tackled second-level agenda setting in coverage of Mexico's decision to allow American expatriates to vote. Using a mixed-methods approach, the authors examined nine months of U.S. coverage of the election and found that coverage dramatically increased in areas with large Latino populations; an unsurprising conclusion (p. 18). However, it does serve to support the already mentioned contention that the examination of news judgment is fuzzy at best because of both the journalistic principles organizations must adhere to as well as the expectations of its readers.

Rill and Davis (2008) also looked at second-level agenda setting, which is an extension of AST that defines coverage that does not just tell the public what to think about, but how they should think about. Their work was concerned with whether readers perceptions of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah was different from the reality of the situation and what role the news media played in their perceived understanding of the situation. Using experimental testing, participants were given five differently framed but real news stories. Depending on the frame, participants came to vastly different conclusions about the situation (p. 619). This demonstrates well that the media were not just telling the public what to think about, but subtly framing the issue to make the situation appear differently from reality.

Conway and Patterson (2008) attempted to determine if television news viewers had a higher story content recall than online news viewers. After viewing 10 television stories, more than half of the participants achieved a 70% recall while a significantly smaller percentage could recall with any degree of accuracy story contents of online news (pp. 38-39). This is not surprising given the power of the visual element of television as compared to the somewhat static nature of online news. However, this does demonstrate the power that television news has in setting the public agenda.

Lee (2009) used an old standby of journalism, news value, to try to understand what stories were selected and which were noticed by the audience. News values generally fall into broad categories such proximity, conflict, sensationalism, and controversy, to name a few. Lee determined that news values were employed in story selection and that audience attention of events generally fell along the established patterns of news value (p. 183-184).

Fremlin (2008) conducted a comparison of a relatively new brand of journalism, known as independent media, and corporate media. Independent media are outlets that are not owned or part of a larger corporate family. Today, large outlets are owned by conglomerates, such as ABC, which is owned by Disney, and Fox News, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. In some cases, independent media employ the new wave of journalism, known as citizen journalism, to cover stories that may fall outside of the national media agenda. Fremlin attempted to see if there was a disconnect between the stories being covered by corporate media and that of independent media. Fremlin analyzed headlines from two corporate outlets and one independent outlet in Portland, Oregon (p. 58). The two corporate outlets were *KATU News*, a local Portland television station, and *The Oregonian*, Portland's largest print newspaper (p. 58). The independent news source was *Indymedia*, an organization that openly opposes corporate media (p. 58). Only headlines concerning public issues were utilized (p. 58). Fremlin's analysis of the headlines showed that there was no difference between the agendas of the corporate and independent outlets (p. 62). Fremlin indicated that this could stem from the discovery of past research that the media agenda sets the public agenda (p. 62). Since *Indymedia* strives to emphasize and cover events and issues that are important to the public, then logic would deem that there agenda would not vary significantly from that of the media agenda which plays such an important role in setting the public agenda.

Mohamed and Gunter (2009), recognizing the role of the media in a democratic society, chose what they termed a quasi-democracy, Egypt, to explore agenda setting (p. 135). The authors content analyzed the media agendas and compared them with the public agenda. They found that McCombs and Shaw's original contention, borrowed from Cohen, played out in a developing democracy: namely that the agenda were telling people what to think about, if not how (p. 151).

Besova and Cooley (2009) chose foreign coverage as the basis of their study of attribute agenda setting by comparing the *New York Times* and London based *The Times* portrayal of a variety of countries (p. 219). Using a combination of public opinion surveys, content analysis, and a number of measures that included cultural, geographic, and economic factors, the authors of this study discovered that both newspapers focused on a few issues, such as conflict, rather than on well-rounded portrait of foreign news (p. 231). This is not to say that these newspapers have a responsibility to cover every issue related to foreign countries that may be of interest to their audience. The paucity of coverage was not in question, the focus was. By choosing to focus on a limited number of issues related to each country, the public agenda became myopic.

Hester and Gibson (2003) examined media bias in economic news reporting through the commonly used tool of content analysis. Hester and Gibson found that negative network news coverage of the economy was statistically significant in both frequency and tone in both broadcast and print media and pushed viewers toward a negative view of the economy as a result (p. 81).

Hester and Gibson (2007) showed the relationship that exists between national and local media agendas. The researchers conducted a time-series analysis, a popular statistical method that has often been used to study agenda-setting. As many other studies have found, their

research showed a relationship between the national agenda and public salience (p. 308).

However, their research also showed that no correlation exists between the media agenda and

public salience in an area where an issue has no local relevance (p. 309).

Kim et al. (2002) also examined local media and agenda-setting, specifically attribute

agenda-setting, which will be the purpose of this study as well. Their findings indicated a

relationship between issue salience that correlated to a greater degree among respondents who

reported a high level of media consumption (p. 16).

Golan and Wanta (2001) used the 2000 New Hampshire Republican primary to see who

received more favorable media coverage; George W. Bush or John McCain. Through an

examination of Gallup opinion polls and three local New Hampshire newspapers, Golan and

Wanta showed that Bush was more often placed in a positive frame by the media who often

linked him to positive issues like tax breaks and personal characteristics such as electability and

"on the attack" (p. 252). McCain was often linked to issues like taxes and personal

characteristics such as vagueness (Golan & Wanta, 2001, p. 253). The issues portrayed in

connection to each candidate in the media correlated directly with Gallup opinion polls related to

the primary (p. 254).

The three studies above that examined agenda-setting in local media are largely absent

from communication research because many researchers believe that the effects of the national

media are much greater than those of local media. While this may be the case, Druckman (2007),

says that the local media impacts voting decisions:

Local newspapers constitute an important outlet from which voters can learn; yet,

newspapers also have limitations in that they compete with other media. This competition

makes attracting a broad readership difficult; it also means that local newspapers must

work to fill a unique niche of providing locally relevant information such as coverage of

state or local campaigns (p. 477).

As the three studies above have shown, agenda-setting does occur on a local level and are

instrumental in the democratic process.

Fico and Cote (2002) studied media bias on a statewide level in their examination of the

1998 Michigan gubernatorial race. Like Golan and Wanta (2001), Fico and Cote found that one

candidate, in this case the Democratic candidate, received far more favorable coverage in

Michigan's nine largest daily newspapers (175).

Zeldes et al. (2008) found a slight partisan bias in their research concerning the 2000 and

2004 election (p. 576). Unlike most of the presented research, their findings supported fairly

objective network news coverage of both Bush and Gore in 2000 and Bush and Kerry in 2004

(576).

Schiffer (2006) researched the partisan media but departed from previous research by not

taking for granted that more coverage of a candidate equaled a bias on the part of the examined

network or publication (p. 23). Schiffer discovered that while political coverage is essentially

equal, tone is the determining factor when assessing partisan bias (p. 32).

Tedesco (2006) attempted to determine if a correlation existed between 2004 presidential

candidate press releases and subsequent media coverage. Tedesco found that while the national

media covered many of the same issues that the candidates seemed to be concerned with it did

not influence their coverage (p. 192). While George W. Bush was mostly concerned with taxes

and the economy in his press releases and John Kerry's press releases focused on jobs and the

economy, the media agenda trended towards the war in Iraq in three different national

newspapers; *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times* (pp. 192-

194).

While the media is often the target of cries of media bias, politicians themselves also fall prey to the temptation of agenda-setting. Golan et. al (2007) found evidence of basic agenda-setting (p. 437) and second-level agenda-setting that was established through a high correlation between 2004 political advertising and media salience of the same issues presented in the advertisements (pp. 437-439).

Barnes et. al (2008) researched how media agenda-setting changed before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. Barnes et al. found coverage rose dramatically after the hurricane was over and discovered that whereas the focus of most news stories before and during the hurricane focused on preparation and recovery, the frame shifted to the responsibility of the government after the hurricane was over and rescue and recovery had begun (p. 606). While to some degree this is natural, the lack of articles regarding recovery indicated to Barnes et. al a dramatic shift in frame within the media that focused on the apparent ineptitude of the government.

Deficiencies of the studies

Although it was not labeled as such until 1972, McCombs and Shaw's idea of agenda-setting theory defined a problem that has undoubtedly existed since the inception of mass media. While studies employing agenda-setting theory since 1972 have done an exceptional job of identifying specific instances of bias, many have failed to study the effects. Tan and Weaver (2007) found that the agenda of the public, the agenda of the press, and the agenda of Congress are intertwined and are in the case of some issues dependent on each other. Druckman and Parkin (2005) and much of the rest of the presented research identified a content bias by using content analysis, which is a method that is often employed to study agenda-setting. Sheafer's (2007) comparison of Israeli public salience and media salience, which bears a striking

resemblance to McCombs and Shaw's (1972) work, provided further evidence of the correlation between the public and media agendas, which was also supported by Son and Weaver (2005). However, the type of study performed by Hoffman and Wallach (2007) that produced quantifiable instances of the effect of agenda-setting is not as common. For this reason, I hope to produce the same quantifiable, tangible results of the effects of agenda-setting as Hoffman and Wallach did. I also intend to examine 24-hour cable news, which is a relatively new phenomenon that did not really gain strength until roughly 15-20 years ago, meaning the body of literature on this new medium, while substantial, is still relatively small. Priming and framing, which are discussed below, have been used repeatedly to examine how agendas are presented in the mass media.

<div align="center">Priming and framing: Two theories closely associated with agenda-setting</div>

Priming

Many researchers in the past that have applied AST to media have used it in conjunction with priming and framing. The reasoning behind their decision to use the three theories together lies in the fact that many scholars consider priming and framing to be synonymous with AST. Priming is considered by some scholars to be an extension of agenda-setting. According to Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), "priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments" (p. 11). The reason priming is often considered an extension of agenda-setting theory is because they are both "memory-based models of information processing" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11). According to Scheufele and Tewksbury, "these models assume that people form attitudes based on the considerations that are most salient when they make decisions" (p. 11).

Framing and second-level agenda-setting

The last media effects theory that concerns this paper is framing and media frames. Tankard, et. al (1991, p. 3) define a media frame as "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration."According to Scheufele and Tewksbury, framing differs from agenda-setting and priming significantly (2007). The reason is that while agenda-setting, salience, and priming are concerned with how well the audience can recall an issue, framing is concerned with controlling how an issue is thought about by the public.

Framing is often defined as second-level agenda setting. McCombs (1997, p. 37) said that the difference between agenda-setting and framing is the restriction of certain attributes: "framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed." Although framing is often credited to sociologist Erving Goffman (1974), frame analysis and the study of framing is interdisciplinary in scope and research (Wu, 2006, p. 253). The key distinction between the two is that framing restricts or fails to show certain attributes of different issues, whereas agenda-setting merely presents certain issues as a whole and completely or partially ignores other issues. According to Jim A. Kuypers, time is also an important factor to consider in framing: "In framing, it is not the frequency of a word, metaphor, or concept that accounts for its strength, but rather how it is consistently framed over time" (2002, p. 199). Consistency in framing is more important than persistence or volume of coverage. Kuypers stated that six case studies he conducted regarding framing found that the same frame was used for editorial coverage as well as objective political news coverage (2002). This presents a problem because it is assumed and most newspapers state that their newsrooms are separate from their editorial page. The resulting danger, according to

Kuypers, is an uninformed public:

> The general level of speculation, analysis, and judgment—aggressively underpinned with
>
> political ideology–in news articles, opinion essays, and editorials, makes it exceedingly
>
> difficult for political leaders—elected or not, Democrat, Republican, or any other—to
>
> impart their conception of the issues accurately. (2002, p. 200)

An example of framing given by Kuypers is media coverage of a commencement speech given by President Clinton at the University of California at San Diego in 1997. In brief, Clinton challenged the graduating class to unity through diversity in the 21st century and called for an end to racial hostilities (Kuypers, 2002). More than 200 articles, editorials, and opinion essays were published on the subject within two weeks of the speech being given (Kuypers, 2002). Throughout the speech, Clinton suggested numerous ways to combat racial stereotypes such as education and affirmative action. However, according to Kuypers (2002) the press chose to frame the speech as only a defense of affirmative action. By ignoring many of the other avenues to racial equality that Clinton suggested, the press made it appear as if Clinton was an impassioned supporter of affirmative action. While that may be true, the press chose to frame Clinton's words on affirmative action as the only truth. By consistently framing his speech as a defense of affirmative action, the press gave the illusion that affirmative action was the only topic that the President addressed, thus framing Clinton's vision of racial equality as a defense of affirmative action.

This example of framing would fall under the category of a decision-making bias, but framing is displayed in both content bias and decision-making bias. Framing is present in biased content when facts are not presented neutrally. Decision-making bias also uses framing when it removes an issue from its context, as the press did with Clinton's speech. As an example,

abortion coverage with a pro-abortion frame may only show footage of militant abortion activists bombing clinics. This type of framing would take abortion activists out of a proper context by failing to show peaceful demonstrators or petition gatherers. Framing, as Kuypers states, leads to an uninformed public that is merely a product of the slanted coverage they receive (2002). Taken as a whole, the three media effects theories of agenda-setting, framing, and priming provide a comprehensive framework for examining the media for any conscious or unconscious bias.

Conclusion of literature review

As the above research has shown, the media can and do have effects on both the public and policy. The work of McCombs and Shaw and those that came after established a clear break from the limited-effects models of media that emerged from the middle third of the 20th century. As Tan and Weaver (2007) demonstrated in their longitudinal study, the effects of AST were present even as Lazarsfeld and Hovland were declaring the ineffectiveness of the press. The key issue then and today is salience. As Cohen (1963) indicated in his now famous statement, if the press cannot tell the public what to think, they will at the very least tell them what to think about, which in turn can have an effect on public policy because the policy maker's only interaction with the public is often mediated. The use of AST as a guide for media bias research was only bolstered by the development of priming and framing, which many now argue are essential parts of AST. The only answer to those that question whether the media is biased is an unequivocal yes. Researchers must now focus their efforts on displaying how those biases affect the public forum and what implications this has for a healthy democratic process and that is what this study hopes to accomplish. As any communication scholar knows, communication is a process that rarely takes a linear form and the same is true in the communication of news through the mass media. A complex interplay exists between consumers and producers that many may not even be

aware of. If agenda-setting is to be believed, then the resultant danger of an unaware society that consumes ever growing amounts of mass media generated content is a partisan population that is influenced in ways they are not even aware of which holds even larger implications for the democratic process. Those that may be affected more than any other group are those that are still forming and shaping opinions, which is a key rationale for the research questions and methodology that is presented below.

Research Question Rationale

These research questions are an attempt to answer a relatively new evolution of agenda-setting

theory termed second-level agenda setting or attribute agenda setting, of which Takeshita (2005)

provides a succinct explanation:

> The original agenda setting hypothesis asserts that the media are influential in deciding
>
> what issues become major themes of public opinion, while the newly developed concept
>
> of the *second level of agenda setting* or *attribute agenda setting* assumes that the media
>
> also have an influence on how people make sense of a given theme. (p. 275)

As Takeshita says, attribute agenda setting is an attempt to influence people by dictating how

they think about a theme. Television news coverage provides an apt format to dictate how a

theme is presented. Consider for example the controversial topic of abortion. Abortion is an

issue, or theme, as Takeshita (2007) terms it, that most of the public has a firm opinion on that is

difficult for anyone, including the media, to influence. However, television, with the powerful

images that it is capable of presenting, could take that issue and portray anti-abortion groups as

violent by only showing footage of past abortion clinic bombings or violent demonstrations

while the opposite could be done for anti-abortion groups. The resultant themes are ones of

violence and anger that if presented again and again in the same frame could lead viewers to

believe that all who pro-life groups are militant bombers and vicious protesters. While this is an

extreme type of attribute agenda-setting, it provides an example of this new evolution of agenda-

setting that needs to be addressed with the communication research field. I believe that the

research questions posed below will measure the effects of second-level agenda-setting and that

the results will display an example of attribute agenda setting, which should be a primary avenue

of agenda-setting research in the future.

Research Questions

RQ1: Did viewers perceived credibility of MSNBC change after viewing the news package?

RQ2: Does high or low media usage effect attitude change?

RQ3$_a$: Did viewers perceived fairness of MSNBC change after watching the news story?

RQ3$_b$: Did viewers perceived bias of MSNBC change after watching the news story?

RQ3$_c$: Did viewers perceived accuracy of MSNBC change after watching the news story?

RQ3$_d$: Did viewer's perceived motivations (agenda-driven or viewer-driven) of MSNBC change

after watching the news story?

RQ3$_e$: Did viewers perceived truthfulness of MSNBC change after watching the news story?

RQ3$_f$: Did viewers perceived trust of MSNBC change after watching the news story?

RQ4: Does gender effect attitude change?

Methods

Sample

In selecting a sample for the study, age was a determining factor because of Morris' study (2007) that has been mentioned previously. Morris found that the perception of media bias has produced a phenomenon known as partisan news watching, or as Rubenstein (2006) termed it, a hostile media effect. In brief, both Morris and Rubenstein found that television news watchers have been segmented into partisan viewing blocks that only watch cable news channels that they believe most closely align with their political ideology. While this hostile media effect is well known, what remains unclear is what effect this phenomenon has on the democratic process. Thus, a sample population consisting of college students is appropriate for this study because many students are still formulating their political beliefs and values and may be more susceptible to news that may be slanted or biased. The only stratum that was employed was that the convenience sampling included both males and females.

The population for this study was comprised of a convenience sample of undergraduate college students at a large, private mid-Atlantic university with an enrollment of 11,900 in southwest Virginia. This target population was chosen because of convenience. However, while convenience was a determining factor in choosing a research site, the research site itself posed significant problems because of the political nature of this study. The population at the research site holds a predominantly conservative political outlook. However, the purpose of this research was not to see if conservative and liberal participants differed in their response to what they saw as biased media. The purpose of this research was to see if attitude change could occur relative to a given topic. Thus, a conservative and liberal balance was not necessary. The research did produce a number of participants who did not identify themselves as conservative, which did

help to bring a semblance of balance to the results. Because of the small final sample size, this research was treated as a pilot study.

Recruitment

All participants in this study were communication majors. To recruit participants, communication professors at the research site were asked for permission to conduct the survey in their classrooms. Four upper-level video production classes were surveyed, four upper-level journalism classes were surveyed, and two lower-level communication theory classes were surveyed. Class members were not required to take the survey. Because of the overlapping nature of the classes used, some participants were present in more than one class that was surveyed but were not allowed to take the survey more than once.

Survey administration

After a short introduction of the researcher and the topic, the written pre-test was administered. In general, the pre-test took 5-10 minutes to complete. After the pre-test was completed by all participants, the news package was shown to participants. The news package was accessed through the MSNBC.com online archives. Though the video originally aired on Keith Olbermann's "Countdown" program, the video was cued to the start of the news package to avoid any bias that participants may harbor towards Keith Olbermann. After the conclusion of the news package, participants were asked to fill out the post-test and were given oral instructions to fill out the pre-test based on the news package they had just seen.

Survey Design

As Babbie (1990) indicates, the purpose of survey research is to generalize from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristic, attitude, or behavior of this population. The intention of this research was not to explain the viewing habits or whims of

every college student in every dorm room in America. Nor was the purpose of this research to definitively identify what type of news stories produce a partisan bias. The purpose of this pilot study was to attempt to identify the role of perceived network bias and the role it plays in attitude change.

Survey use was the chosen type of data collection for this study because of its ability to infer the habits of a larger population by examining the habits of a small target group. Furthermore, the survey method provides a window to study current instances of media bias specifically because of the survey's quick turnaround. The data or evidence that a survey examines can be tailored to salient issues that are in the media. Although benefit can be gleaned by examining past instances of media bias, my belief was that a presentation of a current example of media bias would engage the sample population to a greater degree, which I believe produced a greater level of truthfulness and accuracy in survey responses.

The data was gathered through the use of a survey that was adapted from a pre-established scale. The survey participants were first asked to complete a short pre-test questionnaire using six semantic differential pairs from Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) News Credibility Scale (see Appendix A), to identify their opinion regarding MSNBC.

Rubin (1994) reported on the history and validity of the News Credibility Scale in Communication Research Measures: A Sourcebook. Originally created for the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), the News Credibility Scale was initially used to measure media credibility (p. 234). A nation-wide, ASNE sponsored survey of 1,002 adults aged 18 and older living in the United States was conducted using the original 16-item scale that measured attitudes toward newspaper and TV (p. 234). Two factors were located: Credibility, from which a 12-item scale was created, and Social Concerns, from which a 3-item scale was created (p. 234). Gaziano

and McGrath did not report initial reliability. Rimmer and Weaver (1987) did report reliability in a secondary study of the ASNE data. A .90 Cronbach alpha was reported for the 12-item Credibility scale (Rubin, p. 235). Newhagen and Nass (1989) conducted a secondary analysis that analyzed all 16 original items and found 9 acceptable TV credibility items with a Cronbach alpha of .91 for TV and .92 for newspaper credibility (p. 235).

Cronbach's alpha is the accepted test used to measure reliability and is often used to test Likert-scale questions (Gliem and Gliem, 2003, p. 87). According to George and Mallery (2003), a Cronbach's alpha >.9 is considered excellent (cited in Gliem and Gliem, 2003, p. 87). According to Gliem and Gliem, a test of reliability using Cronbach's alpha is important because of the poor internal consistency of single-item questions (p. 83). A Likert-type scale allows the use of a measure of internal consistency like Cronbach's alpha because a comparison of consistency between scale items can be analyzed to determine consistency, which is the case with the News Credibility Scale.

I made the decision to adapt the scale instead of using the entire scale because its original intention was not to measure bias or attitude change but rather to measure newspaper or TV credibility. However, it provided a solid base from which to formulate my survey. Not all items were appropriate for this particular study. All three of the Social Concerns Factors were eliminated:

1. Cares or does not care what audience thinks.

2. Sensationalizes or does not sensationalize.

3. Is moral or immoral.

Six of the credibility factors that had little to do with perceptions of bias on the part of participants were also excluded:

1. Invades or respects people's privacy.

2. Tells the whole story or doesn't tell the whole story.

3. Does or does not watch after readers'/viewers' interests.

4. Is or is not concerned about the community's well being.

5. Interest or is concerned about making profits.

6. Has well-trained or poorly trained reporters.

The items that were used for this study were all found to be acceptable by Newhagen and Nass (1989) for TV credibility. The Social Concerns Factor were also found to be reliable but were not used because they did not have direct bearing on the research questions that this study attempted to answer.

Other information including gender was also gathered in the pre-test as well as news media viewing habits such as amount of time spent watching cable television news per week. Four possible choices were given to measure cable news consumption with 1=0-3 hours, 2=3-6 hours, 3=6-9 hours, and 4=10+ hours. These numbers stem from Nielsen Research's 2009 report which showed the average 17-24 year old watches more than 32 hours of television per week. (NielsenWire, December 18, 2009). Answer choice 1, 0-3 hours, was considered as low consumption and would represent only 9% of total weekly television consumption. Choices 3 and 4 were considered as high media usage and would equal at least 18% of total weekly television consumption and at most more than 30% of weekly television consumption. Choice 2 was considered an average amount of television consumption. After completing the pre-test, the participants viewed a video news package from MSNBC.

The rationale behind the selection of MSNBC again finds its roots in Morris' study (2007), which found that the effect of the partisan media phenomenon is a segmentation of cable

news viewing, of which Fox News has been the chief benefactor. Although MSNBC may not have the market share of Fox News, they do enjoy a daily audience that numbers in the millions. More importantly though, whether rightly or wrongly, MSNBC is viewed by the public as a liberal media outlet that most conservatives would tend to avoid. According to a September 2009 Pew Research survey, MSNBC has just a 34% approval rating from Republicans and a 60% approval rating from Democrats. In contrast, Fox News has a 72% approval rating from Republicans and just a 43% approval rating from Democrats (Liedtke, 2009). Clearly, the partisan segmentation that Morris identifies is present in light of these recent numbers. If this line of thinking is followed through to its logical end, (if agenda-setting theory is to be believed), then viewers of MSNBC would be the victims of a liberal bias. This perception of MSNBC's political ideology is the chief rationale for this study.

Three criteria were used in choosing the news package. The first was length, which was purposely kept fairly short to better keep participants engaged. The second was that the news package not be the work of a well-known media figure such as Keith Olbermann in the case of MSNBC or Bill O'Reilly of Fox News. The MSNBC package was originally aired on Keith Olbermann's program; however, participants did not hear or see Olbermann. The deliberate avoidance of a major media figure for this research was an attempt to avoid any biases that participants may hold toward not just a particular network but a particular polarizing figure, which is the case of many MSNBC anchors and commentators.

The last criterion that was used in choosing the news package was that it cover a topic, global warming, that is currently of moderate salience. If an issue of high salience was chosen, participants may hold a strong belief that would remain unchanged regardless of what type of news package was viewed. Also, if the issue were of low salience, participants may not have

fully engaged with the issue. Undoubtedly, most people have an opinion regarding global warming that will largely fall along ideological and political lines. However, the researcher believed that because of the current green movement, participants could experience an attitude change regarding global warming if the news package was persuasive. Secondly, global warming is an important topic, but not a current hot topic, such as healthcare. Participants would most likely not engage in a topic such as healthcare because they have already formed a strong opinion that will remain unchanged except under extreme circumstances.

Additionally, Gallup's Most Important Problems Series, which annually surveys Americans to identify what they believe are the most important issues facing the country, indicates that the environment is currently not an issue of large importance. According to the most recent survey, conducted March 4-7, 2010, the environment ranks #7 overall, behind #1 healthcare, #2 dissatisfaction with government, #3 wars, #4 ethics, #5 education, and #6 national security in Gallup's non-economic related poll. In the economic-related poll, the environment did not rank (Gallup, Inc., n.d.). The Pew Research Center also published a survey of the public's top priorities for 2010 and global warming ranked last, behind issues like trade policy, finance regulation, and helping the poor (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, January 25, 2010). Because of the changing nature of both the public agenda and the mass media agenda, the survey was administered cross-sectionally rather than longitudinally. The video itself, as already mentioned, aired on Keith Olbermann's Countdown program. (See Appendix B for transcript)

The news package used was chosen because the researcher believed a content bias was present for two reasons. The first reason was that the main source chosen for this story, Jay Gulledge of the Pew Research Center, defended the idea of global warming and at the very least

intimated that a heat wave was proof of a larger warming phenomenon. Also, Gulledge is part of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, an advocacy arm of the Pew Research Center that recognizes global warming as a reality (Carey, 1998). Gulledge's opinion is valid, but Costello does not offer a dissenting voice and instead chooses to back up Gulledge's sentiment with that of Dennis Feltgen of the NOAA, who further drove home the point that it was believed that the heat wave detailed in the package was a result of global warming. Lastly, a well-known Democratic figure, former President Bill Clinton, was featured towards the end of the video. No detail is given about Clinton's initiative and instead a short quote is used where Clinton says less energy must be used and cleaner sources found, a sentiment that anyone could agree with regardless of political identification.

All three were solid sources, however, no dissenting voice was heard and instead Costello effectively placed the large issue of global warming into the very small frame of a summer heat wave. Like the examples that Kuypers gives of the coverage of Clinton's speech that placed his plea for better education into the frame of affirmative action, so too does Costello frame global warming, a controversial and still widely misunderstood topic, into a frame that people could understand and digest, a heat wave. However, his framing was myopic at best and biased at worst.

Statistical Methods

The analysis of the data gathered was completed using PASW Statistic 18 for Windows. PASW, formerly called SPSS, is a computer-based statistical analysis program. The use of this program allowed a statistical analysis of the gathered data that was used to determine if the gathered data supported or contradicted the research questions. A confidence level of 95%, which is the accepted level of statistical significance, was used to determine if the data was

significant. PASW was used to conduct paired samples t-tests to analyze RQ1. An independent samples t-test was used to analyze RQ2. RQ3$_{a-f}$ were measured using a paired samples t-test. RQ4 was measured using an independent samples t-test. Mean scores for all answers were also measured using PASW. All of the above measures are reported in the results section.

The use of the adaptation of Gaziano and McGrath's News Credibility Scale as both a pre-test and post-test scale allowed a comparison of participants responses that effectively showed whether attitude change did occur.

Results

The final sample size was comprised of 155 participants. 21 responses were not used because participants did not complete parts of either the pre-test or post-test. The remaining data that was analyzed consisted of 134 participants, with 101 participants identifying themselves as Republicans, 6 as Democrats, 15 as Independent, and 12 who chose the Other category. Of the Republican category, 33 were male while 68 were female. The other three categories collectively included 18 males and 15 females.

RQ_1 asked if viewers perceived credibility of MSNBC changed after viewing the news package. The modified News Credibility Scale, composed of six 5-point semantic differential scales, was used on both the pre-test and post-test. The 6 pairs of semantic differential scales asked participants' perceived fairness, bias, accuracy, motivation, factualness, and trustworthiness of MSNBC on the pre-test. The scale was repeated on the post-test and asked participants to report their perceptions of the news package. On the semantic differential scale that asked participants their perceived fairness or unfairness of MSNBC, 5=unfair, 4=somewhat unfair, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat fair, and 1=fair. The same numeric coding was used for all 6 scales on both the pre-test and post-test except for the bias scale, which was reverse-coded. On the bias scale, 5=unbiased, 4=somewhat unbiased, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat biased, and 1=biased. The 6-question scale was collapsed into a single scale on both the pre-test and post-test that produced a total mean score for each participant. A paired comparison t-test was used to analyze the two collapsed scales to measure attitude change. According to Keyton (2001), a paired comparison t-test allows two answers from the same participant to be compared: "the same individual produces scores on a pretest and posttest, and the researcher is interested in the difference between the two scores (p. 215). The paired comparison t-test yielded a two-tailed

significance of .001. The pre-test scale mean score was 2.97, which is neutral on the credibility scale. The post-test mean score was 3.17, which trended towards not credible on the collapsed scale.

RQ_2 asked if high or low media usage affected attitude change. An independent samples t-test was used to compare participant's responses to the second pre-test question which asked participant's how many hours per week they spent watching cable news programming. Participants were given four choices, with 1=0-3 hours, 2=3-6 hours, 3=6-9 hours, and 4=10+ hours per week. Responses to this question were then compared with participant's answers on the last question of the post-test, which asked whether attitude change occurred. According to Keyton (2001), an independent samples t-test allows participant's responses to be placed into two categories of the independent variable (p. 215). Using media usage as the independent variable, the independent samples t-test placed participant's into one of two categories, high or low media usage. The independent samples t-test enabled the use of a cut-point, or dividing line, along which the data was separated. The value of 2 was used as the cut-point, meaning if participants chose 3 or 4, they were placed in the high media usage group, while all participants who chose 1 were placed in the low media usage group. Participants were given three possible options to indicate opinion change, with 1=positive opinion change, 2=negative opinion change, and 3=no opinion change. The independent samples t-test yielded a significance level of .018. The mean score on opinion change for those that chose 3 or 4 on the media usage question, which placed them in the high media usage category, was 1.73, which trended towards a negative opinion change. The mean score on opinion change for those that chose 1 on the media usage question, which placed them in the low media usage category, was 1.63, which trended towards a negative opinion change.

$RQ3_a$ asked if viewers perceived fairness of MSNBC changed after watching the news story. A 5-point semantic differential scale was used on both the pre-test and post-test. On the 5-point semantic differential scale, 5= unfair, 4=somewhat unfair, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat fair, and 1=fair. A paired samples t-test was conducted using participant's pre-test and post-test responses. The paired samples t-test for fairness yielded a two-tailed significance of .325. The pre-test mean was 3.04, which is neutral on fairness. The post-test mean was 3.14, which is still neutral and shows no significant difference.

$RQ3_b$ asked if viewers perceived bias of MSNBC changed after watching the news story. A 5-point semantic differential scale was used on both the pre-test and post-test. The scale was reverse-coded for bias. On the 5-point semantic differential scale, 5=unbiased, 4=somewhat unbiased, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat biased, and 1=biased. A paired samples t-test was conducted using participant's pre-test and post-test responses. The paired samples t-test for bias yielded a two-tailed significance of .001. The pre-test mean was 2.61, which trended toward neutral. The post-test mean was 2.25, which trended toward biased and showed significance.

$RQ3_c$ asked if viewers perceived accuracy of MSNBC changed after watching the news story. A 5-point semantic differential scale was used on both the pre-test and post-test. On the 5-point semantic differential scale, 5= inaccurate, 4=somewhat inaccurate, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat accurate and 1=accurate. A paired samples t-test was conducted using participant's pre-test and post-test responses. The paired samples t-test for accuracy yielded a two-tailed significance of .000. The pre-test mean was 2.69, which trended toward neutral. The post-test mean was 3.26, which trended toward inaccurate and was significant.

$RQ3_d$ asked if viewers perceived motivations (agenda-driven or viewer-driven) of MSNBC changed after watching the news story. A 5-point semantic differential scale was used

on both the pre-test and post-test. On the 5-point semantic differential scale, 5= agenda-driven, 4=somewhat agenda-driven, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat viewer-driven, and 1=viewer-driven. A paired samples t-test was conducted using participant's pre-test and post-test responses. The paired samples t-test for motivations yielded a two-tailed significance of .005. The pre-test mean was 3.31, which is neutral on motivations but trended toward somewhat agenda-driven. The post-test mean was 3.59, which trended toward somewhat agenda-driven and was significant.

RQ3$_e$ asked if viewers perceived factualness of MSNBC changed after watching the news story. A 5-point semantic differential scale was used on both the pre-test and post-test. On the 5-point semantic differential scale, 5=opinionated, 4=somewhat opinionated, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat factual, and 1=factual. A paired samples t-test was conducted using participant's pre-test and post-test responses. The paired samples t-test for factualness yielded a two-tailed significance of .046. The pre-test mean was 3.19, which is neutral on factualness, but trended toward somewhat opinionated. The post-test mean was 3.43, which trended further toward somewhat opinionated and was significant.

RQ3$_f$ asked if viewers perceived trust of MSNBC changed after watching the news story. A 5-point semantic differential scale was used on both the pre-test and post-test. On the 5-point semantic differential scale, 5=untrustworthy, 4=somewhat untrustworthy, 3=neutral, 2=somewhat trustworthy, and 1=trustworthy. A paired samples t-test was conducted using participant's pre-test and post-test responses. The paired samples t-test for trust yielded a two-tailed significance of .000. The pre-test mean was 2.96, which is neutral on trust. The post-test mean was 3.37, which trended towards somewhat untrustworthy and was significant.

RQ$_4$ asked if gender affected attitude change. The pre-test gender question was compared to the post-test opinion change measure using an independent samples t-test, which yielded a

significance level of .448, which was not significant. The mean score for male participants on the

opinion change measure was 2.56. The mean score for female participants was also 2.56 on the

opinion change measure.

Discussion

In the case of RQ1, which used the collapsed News Credibility Scale to measure participant's perception of overall credibility on the part of MSNBC, participant's trended toward a neutral perception of MSNBC's credibility, though directionally participant's did lean toward somewhat credible. After viewing the news package, participant's perceptions trended significantly toward uncredible, which supports past research on the hostile media effect, which was measured by Morris (2007) and Rubenstein (2006). Morris found that the perception of media bias has produced a phenomenon known as partisan news watching, or as Rubenstein (2006) termed it, a hostile media effect. In brief, both Morris and Rubenstein found that television news watchers have been segmented into partisan viewing blocks that only watch cable news channels that they believe most closely align with their political ideology. This research lends further credence to Morris' findings because participants pre-test neutral response was significantly altered after watching a news package that likely contradicted their partisan beliefs. By viewing a package which contradicted their partisan beliefs, participant's attitudes regarding the credibility of MSNBC were affected and a negative view of MSNBC was reinforced. Regardless of overt bias on the part on the part of the reporter, viewer's perception led them to indicate that the news package was biased, which provides support for the hostile media effect and partisan segmentation detailed by Morris (2007).

RQ2, which the researcher anticipated would show attitude change was more likely to occur among those who fell into the low media usage category, was not statistically significant. However, both high and low media usage groups trended towards a negative attitude change. . However, the researcher anticipated that the high media usage group would show little change because their exposure would be greater to MSNBC. The results of the comparison between

media usage and attitude change support Iyengar and Hahn's (2009) research, which found that conservatives preferred to read news reports labeled as being produced by Fox News and did not like to read reports labeled as being from CNN or NPR (p. 19). The opposite was true for liberals (p.19). Simply by bearing the MSNBC label, participants may have held a negative attitude toward MSNBC that was only reinforced by the contents of the news package, regardless of their previous level of exposure to MSNBC.

This helps to explain the support that this study lent toward the preconceived notions that participants had toward MSNBC. The statistical results indicated identified conservatives perceptions of MSNBC trend toward the negative, which in turn may hinder their ability to objectively analyze a news package.

RQ3$_a$, was the only News Credibility Scale item that failed to yield significance when analyzed separately and not as part of the collapsed scale. There was a slight negative trend on the post-test. This is surprising because RQ3$_b$, which measured participant's perceived bias, was significant. Fairness and bias on the part of a news organization are semantically very similar. This may be due in part to participant's indication on the pre-test of an unfamiliarity with MSNBC which was evident by the propensity of most participants to indicate a neutral response on the News Credibility Scale. However, this fails to explain why participant's trended towards somewhat unfair on the post-test fairness scale. Participant's likely held stonger feelings regarding the contents of the news package than that of MSNBC, which would explain the negative trend. composed of six parts, found that little attitude change took place relative to the pre-test and post-test.

RQ3$_b$, which measured bias on the News Credibility Scale, yielded a significant negative trend on the part of participants. The pre-test trend was already towards the negative, with a

higher negative mean than any other News Credibility item. This may be because of the "buzzword" nature of bias. The other scale items, fairness, accuracy, motivations, factualness, and trust are not used as much when describing the perceived bias of a particular news organization. Participant's, who indicated little familiarity with MSNBC, may have had a stronger perception regarding the bias of the network, rather than another item, for example trustworthiness. This provides strong support for Morris (2007) and Rubenstein's (2006) finding of the hostile media effect and partisan segmentation that has already been discussed. Because Republicans overwhelmingly flock to Fox News relative to other cable networks, even if participant's had little familiarity with MSNBC, they could have seen it as biased because of this partisan segmentation.

RQ3$_c$, RQ3$_d$, and RQ3$_e$, which measured perceived accuracy, motivations (agenda-driven or viewer-driven), and factualness, were all significant and are best discussed as a group. I feel that these three measures, which were all significant, are at the core of second-level agenda setting. In the case of accuracy, participant's pre-test mean trended toward somewhat accurate. Post-test answers moved sharply toward somewhat inaccurate. Participant's pre-test answers regarding motivations and factualness trended toward negative and moved further toward negative on the post-test. This may indicate that participant's perceptions of MSNBC were significantly altered after viewing the news package. As has already been noted, the mean scores on the pre-test News Credibility Scale trended towards neutral. This significant negative trend on the post-test confirms previous literature regarding attitude change and agenda-setting. Hoffman and Wallach (2007) found clear attitude change when participant's were shown a comparison of newspaper articles and pictures about John Kerry and George W. Bush. The authors surveyed 67 college students by showing them a series of articles about a 2004 campaign debate between Sen.

John Kerry and incumbent George W. Bush. Participants read the articles and examined the accompanying pictures. The results showed clear attitude changes in a positive direction regarding Kerry and in a negative direction regarding Bush after the articles were read. This pilot study supports the contention that attitude change can occur as a result of agenda-setting. An additional explanation for the negative attitude change can again be found in light of the hostile media effect. Though participants may have had little prior exposure to MSNBC, the news package may have confirmed what they already suspected about a network that is seen as liberal by conservatives, according to a number of already cited polls. In this instance, the homogenous nature of the sample population could indicate that instead of attitude change, a reinforcement of already held partisan beliefs may have occurred.

RQ3$_f$ asked if viewers perceived trust of MSNBC changed after watching the news story. Pre-test answers again trended toward neutral but also indicated a slight trend toward somewhat trustworthy. Though the post-test mean also trended toward neutral, it indicated a trend toward not trustworthy which did yield significance and is even more significant because of the somewhat positive trending of the pre-test. I believe that participant's answers to this item were dependent on answers to the previous scale items. This is because trust is a hard concept to identify in a news package. However, if participant's saw a news package as inaccurate, or opinionated, as they indicated on the previous items, then trust of the network or reporter would likely be questioned. This distrust can again be traced to the hostile media effect.

RQ$_4$ asked if gender effected attitude change. An independent samples t-test yielded no significance. This is likely due to the homogenous political identification of the population. Mean scores for both male and females were identical on opinion change at 2.56, which trended toward no opinion change.

Limitations

The largest limitation that was present in this study is inherent bias on the part of the survey participants. Inherent biases could include political ideology, bias towards a particular news outlet or bias towards a particular political figure. To account for this, as is discussed above, participants were presented with a survey to measure their political biases so that the role of these biases could be measured.

Salience, which has already been defined, was an additional limitation. Topics like abortion, gun rights, and gay and lesbian rights have been covered by the media almost to a point of saturation, according to Norenson (2008). In response to this limitation, an issue that many may not have a well formulated opinion on was chosen because attitude change is unlikely to occur over an issue that has previously been targeted by the media. Though the researcher believed that global warming is an issue of moderate salience, the same may not hold true for all survey participants. Some may have no opinion on the subject and effectively tune out the survey or the news package while some may be polarized on the issue and feel very strongly that coverage has been biased one way or the other regarding the issue.

Though those limitations were present and recognized before the start of this study, the largest limitation to occur after the start of the study was researcher error. A disconnect was determined to exist between the gathered data and what the research questions asked. Simple questions that should have been included were not. For example, participants should have been asked whether they believed MSNBC leaned politically left or politically right. The researcher believed that the modified News Credibility Scale could sufficiently answer this question. However, while the modified scale did reveal what participants thought of MSNBC as a network, i.e. fairness, bias, truthfulness, accuracy, it failed to measure if participants felt that the network

had a political bias. Secondly, instead of asking if participants attitude changed relative to the topic of global warming, opinion change was instead measured relative to MSNBC. Again, the researcher felt that the participant's opinion change relative to the network could sufficiently answer the question, but this was not the case. To a large degree, participants indicated a negative attitude change relative to MSNBC. Because attitude change was at the core of this study, the fact that this study was limited in measuring attitude change made the resulting significance somewhat of a paradox. However, this pilot study does support prior literature. A large sample size more representative of a variety of political leanings would have provided more reliable results.

Because this study was bounded by time, a cross-sectional method was chosen for convenience but it does present a limitation. A longitudinal study, like Tan and Weaver's (2007) that looked at issue correlation between the public, policy, and media agendas from 1946-2004 may be the best way to see the effect of agenda-setting rather than choosing a single news story. The rationale for a cross-sectional study stemmed from both time and issue salience. By using an issue of salience, a cross-sectional study, while not as academically rigorous as a longitudinal study, did yield significance. Also, since the sample population was drawn from a college student population, age provided a limitation as survey participants for the most part fell somewhere between the ages of 17 and 24.

The sample population itself posed a limitation because of the location of the research. Instead of a large state university, a private university was used as the research site which meant that some political viewpoints were excluded from the study.

Also, while evidence was presented that showed global warming was not an issue of great importance to the public, this fails to measure the salience of global warming. As already

field, innately understand the idea of media bias so for communication researchers to merely

identify different instances of media bias is not enough. The effects of bias must be researched so

that the craft of journalism can be further refined. Bias may be inherent and unavoidable, but the

resultant agendas that are displayed far too often in the mass media do not have to be. This pilot

study, if expanded and modified, could produce significance that would further the already rich

field of agenda-setting research.

Secondly, as has already been briefly mentioned, this study should hold merit for the field

of journalism. While bias may never be completely eradicated, if journalists who truly want to

remain objective are presented with the potential effects of biased news, perhaps the news

industry will be positively changed. With technology evolving at a rapid rate and a generation of

so-called "Millennials" who are plugged in to some type of media at almost all hours of the day,

media have never had an opportunity like they do now to influence attitudes, culture, and even

public policy.

Lastly and most importantly, this study is significant because it examined second-level or

attribute agenda-setting, which was defined in the methodology section. In short, according to

Takeshita (2005), second-level agenda-setting attempts to dictate how people think about a given

theme. A number of attribute agenda-setting studies were included in the literature review to

further validate the importance of this study. This type of agenda-setting bears a familiarity with

both priming and framing, which have already been defined. Because second-level agenda-

setting is a relatively new evolution little research has been conducted comparative to the depth

of research conducted on McCombs and Shaw's (1972) original agenda-setting. Also, as has

already been discussed in the critique of the presented literature, much of agenda-setting has

been limited to the defining and identification of instances of media agenda-setting and bias.

This phenomenon has only recently been defined by Takeshita and as such, little research relative to AST has been conducted. Again, if properly conducted, this study could further attribute agenda-setting research.

Because of this, this study holds paramount importance if agenda-setting is to remain viable as the current media explosion continues to invade every corner of society, including the field of journalism. The rapid progression of technology has raised debate in the communication discipline regarding whether or not agenda-setting is still viable, a question answered by Takeshita (2005):

> Does affective attribute agenda setting require a re-examination of the limited effects model? More research is needed to answer these questions. The process of transferring affect from the media to the public has still not been explicated. In addition, conditions that constrain affective attribute agenda setting should be identified. Research has shown that traditional (issue-type) agenda-setting effects are far from universal and are constrained by various contingent conditions. (p. 283)

The question raised by Takeshita regarding the attitudinal effects of media agenda-setting was the purpose of this study, a question that Takeshita says remains to be answered. It is of limited consequence how often observers identify and define bias. What is of great consequence, though, is how society is affected by an ever shrinking group of media elites that control and ever growing number of media outlets. Agenda-setting theory has long provided a framework from which to view the media and this study, while exploratory in nature, does add further credence to the continued use of AST, which at times has been doubted.

Ideas for future research

The original intention of this pilot study would have used two populations to examine

bias from both the conservative and liberal viewpoints. Because of the homogenous nature of the

research site, this was not able to be completed and a simple 2x2 factorial matrix was instead

used. A comparison of MSNBC and Fox News would have helped to balance this pilot study.

First, those who identify themselves as conservatives would again see the MSNBC piece and be

measured for attitude change. In addition, a similar news package would be chosen from Fox

News and shown to those who identify themselves as liberal. A content analysis of each piece

would be necessary to identify elements of bias. Inter-coder reliability would be necessary using

a pre-established media bias scale in an attempt to present an actual biased news package.

Attitude change would be measured in much the same way as this study attempted to do, with the

major difference being that attitude change relative to the topic rather than relative to the

network would be measured.

The second possibility for further research would be an extension of the first. Both a

conservative and liberal sample would view both videos to see if specific instances of bias are

recognized. The key would be to measure not only if an identified liberal recognizes

conservative bias, but to see if an identified liberal can recognize instances of liberal bias. The

hypothesis would likely indicate that when participants are shown bias that serves to reinforce

already held beliefs than they will not see it as bias.

The third avenue for future research would expand again on this study. More than one

video would be shown to participants and could either cover the same or different topics. This

study could contribute to second-level, or attribute agenda-setting research by displaying

packages that place larger issues in small frames, which has been discussed and is a large part of

second-level agenda-setting. Participants could then be measured to see if they recognize not only bias, but the way in which bias occurs, in this case when attributes of an issue, such as the summer heat wave that was used to make a case for global warming and was used for this study. By expanding the number of videos shown to participants, reliability of responses would greatly increase.

The fourth research opportunity may hold the most promise. The same video used for this study could again be used, but all labels that indicated the video was from MSNBC could be removed. This could more effectively measure opinion change because it could remove the perceptions that some may hold towards a particular network. Participants could be asked whether they felt a package was biased based solely on its contents. The adapted News Credibility Scale that I employed may be more effective in this type of study. A free-response section could also be used to ask participants to name specific instances of bias that they feel are present in the news package. This research could also effectively examine second-level agenda-setting by asking participants if they felt that the issue was framed in a specific way, like the video used for this study. A variation on this study could use just the script from a chosen news package and reproduce it with someone reading the script. By removing all labels, participant's perception of different news networks would have a limited effect on the results. The script could also be read by participants apart from the package itself to see what role the presentation of the package plays in the perception of its contents by participants.

Also, a 2x2 variation on the above research could again employ both MSNBC and Fox News. Again, similar videos would be chosen, but the labels would be manipulated so that the MSNBC package is presented as a Fox News package and vice versa. This would again measure the role that the news organization itself plays in participant's perception regarding the presence

of bias. This would also fit in with second-level agenda-setting, because the network does

operate as an attribute of every news package that it presents merely by having a logo present

onscreen or a well-known reporter or commentator introduce the video or provide the voice-over.

This would help limit the bias present in this research because it would eliminate the need to

have participants meet a certain political preference criteria, which was a limiting factor in this

study. A control group could also be used that would either view the same news packages in their

original form or fill out a questionnaire that would measure how biased they feel the MSNBC

and Fox News are. This research could easily be expanded to a 3x3 model including CNN or

even a 4x4 model that included an additional cable news channel or even a traditional network

like CBS or ABC.

Lastly, the role of so-called media celebrities in the presentation of objective news could

be measured because their presence is undoubtedly a mitigating factor. For example, a news

package could be shown on Keith Olbermann's MSNBC "Countdown" show that is free of bias

but is seen as biased by many because of Keith Olbermann. The same could be said for Fox

News' Bill O'Reilly, CNN's Anderson Cooper, or any of a number of other well-known media

personalities or traditional news anchors like CBS's Katie Couric. The same news package could

be shown to two different groups, with one presented by one of the above celebrities and the

other presented without their presence. The two group's response could then be measured.

Conclusion

Second-level agenda-setting holds great future promise for media bias researchers. The goal of this pilot study was to provide a starting point from which the above proposed research projects could benefit from and it did achieve that.

The most significant result of this research is its support of the hostile media effect and partisan segmentation that has taken place as cable news networks have grown over the past 15 years. To put it simply, people like to be right and do not like to process information that contradicts an already held belief. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) ably captured this when they found that conservatives preferred to read news reports labeled as being produced by Fox News and did not like to read reports labeled as being from CNN or NPR (p. 19). The opposite was true for liberals (p.19).

This helps to explain the support that this study lent toward the preconceived notions that participants had toward MSNBC. The statistical results indicated identified conservatives perceptions of MSNBC are largely negative, which in turn may hinder their ability to objectively analyze a news package. According to the results, a negative opinion change did occur relative to MSNBC, but the results are inconclusive if this means that any attitude change took place regarding the topic of global warming.

The question that must be answered by future agenda-setting research is how the important function the press plays in a democratic society is hindered by bias. This bias goes both ways in a sense. Regardless of the contents of the news package, participants seemed predisposed to discard it as liberally slanted merely because of its source. Bias must continue to be examined through the lens of agenda-setting. Second-level, or attribute agenda-setting, deserves examination. Just as the media and its delivery methods are changing, so too must

agenda-setting research change and adapt to continue to examine the role of the media.

References

Babbie, E. (1990). *Survey research methods*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Barber, M. (2008). Getting the picture: Airtime and lineup bias on Canadian networks during the 2006 federal election. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 33,* 621-637. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete.

Barnes, M.D., et al. (2008). Analysis of media agenda setting during and after hurricane katrina: Implications for emergency preparedness, disaster response, and disaster policy. *American Journal of Public Health, 98*(4), 604-610. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Baum, M.A., & Groeling, T. (2008). New media and the polarization of American political discourse. *Political Communication, 25*, 345-365. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Besova, A.A., & Cooley, S.C. (2009). Foreign news and public opinion: Attribute agenda-setting theory revisited. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies, 30*(2), 219-242. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Carey, J. (1998, November 9). Look who's thawing on global warming. *BusinessWeek,* 3603. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Carpenter, S., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2006). Network news coverage of high-profile crimes during 2004: A study of source use and reporter context. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 83*(4), 901-916. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Cohen, B. C. (1963). *The press and foreign policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Coleman, R., & McCombs, M. (2007). The young and agenda-less? Exploring age-related differences in agenda-setting on the youngest generation, baby boomers, and the civic

generation. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 84*(3), 495-508. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Conway, M., & Patterson, J.R. (2008). Today's top story? An agenda-setting and recall experiment involving television and internet news. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal, 24*, 31-48. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete.

Dearing, J. W., & Rogers E. M. (1996). *Communication Concepts 6: Agenda-Setting.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Druckman, J.N. (2005). Media matter: How newspapers and television news cover campaigns and influence voters. *Political Communication, 22*, 463-481. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Druckman, J. N., & Parkin, M. (2005). The impact of media bias: How editorial slant affects voters. *The Journal of Politics, 67*(4), 1030-1049. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Eke, C. (2008). Darfur: coverage of a genocide by three major US TV networks on their evening news. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, *4*(3), 277-292. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Entman, R. M. (2007). Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication, 57*, 163-173. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Fico, F., & Cote, W. (2002). Partisan and structural balance of election stories on the 1998 governor's race in Michigan. *Mass Communication and Society, 5*(2), 165-182. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Fremlin, J. (2008). Agenda setting: Independent vs. corporate media. *Journal of New Communication Research, 3*(1), 55-64. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete

database.

Gallup, Inc. (n.d.). *Most Important problem*. Retrieved from

http://www.gallup.com/poll/1675/Most-Important-Problem.aspx.

Gaziano, C., & McGrath, K. (1986). Measuring the concept of credibility. *Journalism Quarterly, 63,* 451-462. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete.

Gliem, J.A., & Gliem, R.R. (2003). Calculating, interpreting, and reporting Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Likert-type scales. Paper presented at the 2003 Midwest Research to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education, Columbus, OH. Retrieved from scholarworks.iupui.edu.

Golan, G.J., Kiousis, S.K, & McDaniel, M.L. (2007). Second-level agenda setting and political advertising: Investigating the transfer of issue and attribute saliency during the 2004 US presidential election. *Journalism Studies, 8*(3), 432-443. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Golan, G., & Wanta, W. (2001, summer). Second-level agenda setting in the New Hampshire primary: A comparison of coverage in three newspapers and public perceptions of candidates. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 78*(2), 247-259. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Graber, D. A. (2002). *Mass Media & American Politics.* Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Groshek, J. (2008). Homogenous agendas, disparate frames: CNN and CNN International coverage online. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 52*(1), 52-68. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Hester, J.B., & Gibson, R. (2007). The agenda-setting function of national versus local media: A time-series analysis for the issue of same-sex marriage. *Mass Communication and*

Society, 10(3), 299-317. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Hester, J.B., & Gibson, R. (2003). The economy and second-level agenda setting: A time-series analysis of economic news and public opinion about the economy. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 80*(1), 73-90. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Hoffman, A. J., & Wallach, J. (2007). The effects of media bias. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 37*(3) 616-630. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Iyengar, S., & Han, K.S. (2009). Red media, blue media: Evidence of ideological selectivity in media use. *Journal of Communication, 59*, 19-39. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Johnson, M.A., Davis, J.L., & Cronin, S. (2009). Mexican expatriates vote? Framing and agenda setting in U.S. news coverage about Mexico. *Mass Communication and Society, 12*, 4-25. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Keyton, J. (2001). *Communication Research: Asking Questions, Finding Answers.* Memphis: McGraw-Hill.

Kim, S.H., Scheufele, D.A., & Shanahan, J. (2002, spring). Think about it this way: Attribute agenda-setting function of the press and the public's evaluation of a local issue. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 79*(1), 7-25. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Kuypers, J. A. (2002). *Press Bias and Politics: How the Media Frame Controversial Issues.* Westport: Praeger.

Lee, J.H. (2009). News values, media coverage, and audience attention: An analysis of direct and

mediated causal relationships. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 86*(1), 175-190. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Liedtke, M. (2009, September 13). Pew survey: Charges of media bias continue to grow. *Associated Press.*

McCombs, M. (1997). New frontiers in agenda setting: Agendas of attributes and frames. *Mass Communication Review, 24*(1&2), 32–52. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176-187. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

McCombs, M.E., & Shaw, D.L. (1993). The evolution of agenda-setting research: Twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(2), 58-67. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Mohamed, H., & Gunter, B. (2009). Agenda setting in a quasi-democratic country: A case study of Egypt. *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research, 2*(1 & 2), 135-158.

Morris, J. S. (2007). Slanted objectivity? Perceived media bias, cable news exposure, and political attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly, 88*(3), 707-728. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Nielsen Wire (December 18, 2009). Three screen report: Media consumption and multi-tasking continue to increase across TV, Internet, and mobile. Retrieved from blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/three-screen-report-media-consumption-and-multi-tasking-continue-to-increase.

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1977). Turbulences in the climate of opinion: Methodological applications of the spiral of silence theory. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 41*(2), 143-158. Retrieved from

Academic Search Complete database.

Norenson, B. (2008). Overload! *Columbia Journalism Review, 47*(4), 30-42. Retrieved from

Academic Search Complete.

Rill, L.A., & Davis, C.B. (2008). Testing the second level of agenda setting: Effects of news

frames on reader-assigned attributes of Hezbollah and Israel in the 2006 war in Lebanon.

Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 85(3), 609-624. Retrieved from

Academic Search Complete.

Rubenstein, K. S. (2006). Perception of media bias and its effect on media choice. M.S.

dissertation, The University of Kansas, United States—Kansas. Retrieved from

Dissertations and Theses: Full Text database.

Rubin, R.B., et. al. (1994). *Communication Research Measures: A Sourcebook*. New York:

Guilford Press.

Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The

evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication, 57,* 9-20. Retrieved

from Academic Search Complete database.

Schiffer, A.J. (2006). Assessing partisan bias in political news: The case(s) of local senate

election coverage. *Political Communication, 23*, 23-39. Retrieved from Academic Search

Complete database.

Shaw, D., & Martin, S. (1992). The function of mass media agenda setting. *Journalism*

Quarterly, 69(4), 902-920. Retrieved from Communication & Mass Media Complete

database.

Sheafer, T. (2007). How to evaluate it: The role of story-evaluative tone in agenda setting and

priming. *Journal of Communication, (57)*, 21-39. Retrieved from Academic Search

Complete database.

Siune, K., & Borre, O. (1975). Setting the agenda for a Danish election. *Journal of Communication, 25*(1), 65-73. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Slater, M.D. (2007). Reinforcing spirals: The mutual influence of media selectivity and media effects and their impact on individual behavior and social identity. *Communication Theory, 17*, 281-303. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

(1926). Society of professional journalists: Code of ethics. Retrieved April 25, 2009, from Society of Professional Journalists Web site: http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp.

Son, Y. J., & Weaver, D.H. (2005). Another look at what moves public opinion: Media agenda setting and polls in the 2000 election. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *18*(2), 174-197. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Tai, Z. (2009). The structure of knowledge and dynamics of scholarly communication in agenda setting research, 1996-2005. *Journal of Communication, 59*, 481-513. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Takeshita, T. (2007). Current critical problems in agenda setting research. *International Journal. of Public Opinion Research*, *18*(3), 275-296. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Tan, Y. & Weaver, D.H. (2007). Agenda setting effects among the media, the public, and Congress, 1946-2004. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 84*(4), 729-744. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Tankard, J., Hendrickson, L., Silberman, J., Bliss, K., & Ghanem, S. (1991, August). Media frames: Approaches to conceptualization and measurement. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication,

Boston, MA.

Tedesco, J.C. (2005). Issue and strategy agenda setting in the 2004 election: Exploring the

candidate-journalist relationship. *Journalism Studies, 6*(2), 187-201. Retrieved from

Academic Search Complete database.

Walgraave, S. (2008). Again, the almighty mass media? The media's political agenda-setting

power according to politicians and journalists in Belgium. *Political Communication, 25*,

445-459. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Weaver, D. H. (2007). Thoughts on agenda setting, framing, and priming. *Journal of*

Communication, 57, 142-147. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Wu, M. (2006). Framing AIDS in China: A comparative analysis of US and Chinese wire news

coverage of HIV/AIDS in China. *Asian Journal of Communication, 16*(3), 251-272.

Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Zeldes, G.A., Fico, F., Carpenter, S., & Diddi, A. (2008). Partisan balance and bias in network

coverage of the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. *Journal of Broadcasting and*

Electronic Media, 52(4), 563-580. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Table 1

Independent samples t-test used to compare the collapsed News Credibility Scale mean scores

for all participants on both the pre-test and post-test .

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Test_1	2.9722	132	.53470	.04654
	Test_2	3.1780	132	.69476	.06047

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Test_1 & Test_2	132	.327	.000

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Test_1 - Test_2	-.20581	.72513	.06311	-.33066	-.08095

Paired Samples Test

		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Test_1 - Test_2	-3.261	131	.001

Table 2

Independent samples t-test used to compare media usage and opinion change.

Group Statistics

	Hours of cable news watched per week	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Opinion change	>= 2.00	30	1.7333	.44978	.08212
	< 2.00	103	1.6311	.48487	.04778

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
Opinion change	Equal variances assumed	5.779	.018	1.033	131
	Equal variances not assumed			1.076	50.316

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Opinion change	Equal variances assumed	.304	.10227	.09903
	Equal variances not assumed	.287	.10227	.09500

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means	
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
Opinion change	Equal variances assumed	-.09364	.29817
	Equal variances not assumed	-.08853	.29306

Table 3

Mean Scores for Participant's answers on News Credibility Scale Pre-test and Post-test used to

measure RQ3$_{a-f}$.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Fair or Unfair	3.0455	132	.79946	.06958
	Fair or Unfair	3.1439	132	1.06386	.09260
Pair 2	Biased or Unbiased	2.6136	132	.89654	.07803
	Biased or Unbiased	2.2576	132	1.00852	.08778
Pair 3	Accurate or Inaccurate	2.6970	132	.88187	.07676
	Accurate or Inaccurate	3.2652	132	1.03275	.08989
Pair 4	Viewer-driven or Agenda-driven	3.3106	132	.95815	.08340
	Viewer-driven or Agenda-driven	3.5985	132	1.19068	.10363
Pair 5	Factual or Opinionated	3.1970	132	.87753	.07638
	Factual or Opinionated	3.4318	132	1.09261	.09510
Pair 6	Trustworthy or Untrustworthy	2.9697	132	.84654	.07368
	Trustworthy or Untrustworthy	3.3712	132	.97609	.08496

Table 4

Independent samples t-test used to compare if gender effected attitude change.

Group Statistics

Hours of cable news watched per week		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Opinion change	>= 2.00	30	1.7333	.44978	.08212
	< 2.00	103	1.6311	.48487	.04778

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
Opinion change	Equal variances assumed	5.779	.018	1.033	131
	Equal variances not assumed			1.076	50.316

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Opinion change	Equal variances assumed	.304	.10227	.09903
	Equal variances not assumed	.287	.10227	.09500

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means	
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
Opinion change	Equal variances assumed	-.09364	.29817
	Equal variances not assumed	-.08853	.29306

Appendix A

Pre-Test

Media Bias and Attitude Change

Instructions: Circle the answer that best describes you.

What gender are you?

    Male   Female

How many hours per week do you watch cable news programming?

    0-3 hours   3-6 hours   6-9 hours   10+ hours

What cable news channel do you prefer?

    MSNBC   Fox News   CNN   None of these

How many hours per week do you spend on online news sites?

    0-3 hours   3-6 hours   6-9 hours   10+ hours

What online news site do you prefer?

    MSNBC   Fox News   CNN   Other

How do you identify yourself politically?

    Democrat   Republican   Independent   Other

Think about the cable news channel MSNBC.

Instructions: Place an X in the box that best represents how you feel about MSNBC.

Check the box closest to fair if you feel that MSNBC is fair

Check the box closest to unfair if you feel that MSNBC is unfair

The middle box represents a neutral feeling

Fair   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Unfair

 Biased   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Unbiased

Accurate   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Inaccurate

Viewer-driven :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Agenda-driven

Factual   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Opinionated

Trustworthy   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Untrustworthy

Appendix B

Post-test

Media Bias and Attitude Change
Think about the news story you just watched

Instructions: Place an X in the box that best represents how you feel about the news story.

Check the box closest to fair if you feel that the news story was fair

Check the box closest to unfair if you feel that the news story was unfair

The middle box represents a neutral feeling

Fair   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Unfair

Biased   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Unbiased

Accurate   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Inaccurate

Viewer-driven :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Agenda-driven

Factual   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Opinionated

Trustworthy   :___: :___: :___: :___: :___: Untrustworthy

Instructions: Circle the best choice

After viewing the news story, did your opinion change either positively or negatively regarding

MSNBC?

1. My opinion changed positively regarding MSNBC
2. My opinion changed negatively regarding MSNBC
3. I experienced no opinion change regarding MSNBC

Appendix C

Gaziano and McGrath's News Credibility Scale

Credibility Factor

1) Is fair or unfair
2) Is biased or unbiased
3) Tells the whole story or doesn't tell the whole story
4) Is accurate or inaccurate
5) Invades or respects people's privacy
6) Does or does not watch after readers'/viewers' interests
7) Is or is not concerned about the community's well-being
8) Does or does not separate fact and opinion
9) Can or cannot be trusted
10) Is concerned about the public
11) interest or is concerned about making profits
12) Is factual or opinionated
13) Has well-trained or poorly trained reporters

Social Concerns Factor

1) Cares or does not care what audience thinks
2) Sensationalizes or does not sensationalize
3) Is moral or immoral

Appendix D

Reporter: Tom Costello

Video package title: "No more global warming, right?"

Date: August, 2009

Transcript   **Shot Sheet**

Tom Costello   **Opening shot**

"The debate over global warming has been raging for years.

But here's what most scientists say is certain, the earth is

warming, 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit since 1920. The ice caps are

melting and sea levels are rising. Ten of the last 12 years

were the warmest since 1850 and the first six months of

2006 were the hottest on record, so is our current heart

wave a symptom of global warming?"

Jay Gulledge – Pew Climate Change Center   **Cut to Gulledge**

"This heat wave and other extreme events we've seen

 in recent years are completely consistent with what we

expect to become more common as a result of global

warming even though we can't be definitive on any single

event."

Tom Costello   **Costello voice-over accompanied**

                                                      by graphics

"We've had heat waves before. The worst was in the 1930s.

Fifty million acres turned to dust. 1972. 891 people died in

New York over a 14 day stretch and in 1995 733 people

died in record heat in Chicago but experts say our current

heat wave is unique."

Dennis Feltgen – NOAA Meteorologist   **Cut to Feltgen**

"So far we've had about 80 daily high temperature records

broken and in addition in the month of July there were over

50 all-time records for the month of July broken."

Tom Costello   **Cut to Costello**

"Scientists want to see whether this heat wave is part

of a pattern of longer more intense heat waves before

declaring it all part of a bigger global warming phenomenon.

Still, the movement to curb greenhouse gases is gaining traction,

with 22 cities worldwide signing on to former President Clinton's

 initiative to cut CO_2 emissions."

President Clinton   **Cut to Clinton giving speech**

"We have to use less energy and find cleaner sources."

Tom Costello   **Cut to Costello**

"The concern that in the coming decade, 100 degrees

 may be the new summer norm. Tom Costello, NBC

News, Washington."