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Media ownership and objectivity

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MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND OBJECTIVITY

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
Master of Mass Communication**

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

**By
Xinkun Wang
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the different type of ownership will affect the degree of objectivity of newspaper coverage of 2000 presidential election. It is predicted by Shoemaker's news content theory that publicly-owned newspaper is more objective than privately-owned newspaper. The findings of this study support this theory.

A content analysis of 238 news stories and eight editorials from publicly-owned the Boston *Globe* and privately-owned the Boston *Herald* showed that not only does the ownership affect the objectivity of the coverage of these two newspapers on 2000 presidential election, the endorsements also affect the degree of objectivity. The study found that there has been some improvement on the newspapers' coverage of Presidential election since 1988.

This study found more evidence to support Shoemaker's theory of news content and ownership. It also extended the previous study done by Kenney and Simpson(1993) by giving new evidence from a different election, in different newspapers, and by including the owner's political views.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent bias can be found in the news coverage of the 2000 Presidential campaign by two daily newspapers, one publicly owned and the other privately owned. This study will explore the following questions: How objective were the publicly owned newspaper and privately owned newspaper in their news coverage of the 2000 Presidential election? Does ownership affect the objectivity of a newspaper?

The media play powerful roles as intermediaries between political leaders and the public (Graber, 1989; Davis, 1992). The media's role becomes especially important in influencing voters' judgments about the candidates because most people are poorly informed about the candidates (Joslyn, 1984). What's more, political knowledge is particularly essential to citizens' ability to self-govern and shape the course of the country. So how the media act as intermediaries and how they cover the political election are always questions worth studying. This study of the news coverage of a Presidential campaign by publicly owned and privately owned newspapers has additional significance for the following reasons:

First, this study can be an important tool in testing the media ownership theory developed by Altschull, Shoemaker, and Reese. They contend that publicly owned media outlets are more objective in their news coverage than privately held companies (Altschull, 1984; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). This question takes on added importance today in the United States where ownership of news organizations is increasingly held by a handful of media conglomerates (Bagdikian, 1997).

Second, it is important to extend a previous study which examined the relationship between ownership and objectivity in news coverage of the 1988 Presidential election by the publicly owned Washington *Post* and the privately owned Washington *Times* (Kenney & Simpson, 1993). Unlike the Kenney and Simpson research, which studied the publicly owned Washington *Post* and privately owned Washington *Times*, this study will look at two different daily newspapers in a different city and a different election year. The publicly owned Boston *Globe* and privately owned Boston *Herald*, competing for the same market like the Washington *Post* and *Times*, will be examined to see if the same conclusion can be made.

The hypothesis of this study is that the type of ownership of a media outlet will affect its degree of objectivity in covering a political election. Specifically, this study hypothesizes that the publicly owned news organization will be more objective than a privately held entity.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two terms are central to this study: bias and objectivity. Bias and objectivity have been adopted in many journalism studies, and many different conceptual definitions have been given to these two terms. Much controversy exists over the concept of bias and objectivity, and the effectiveness of using these constructs as theoretical tools to analyze the ideological functioning of media is increasingly being questioned (Hackett, 1984; Entman, 1989; Lichtenberg, 1991). To better conduct the study, it's necessary to have a standard definition for "bias" and "objectivity."

Bias

Different studies of bias have different concepts. Part of the reason why different studies on the similar subject of fairness and bias of Presidential campaign newspaper coverage come to different conclusion is that there hasn't been a standard definition of bias. So, to have a clearly defined definition of bias in this study is particularly important. Stevenson and Greene (1980) suggested that there should be a reconsideration of the concept of bias. They defined bias as "the systematic differential treatment of one candidate, one party, or one side of an issue over an extended period of time. Bias is the failure to treat all voices in the marketplace of ideas equally" (Greene & Stevenson, 1980, p. 115). Klein and Maccoby (1954) in their research of newspaper bias in the 1952 Presidential election gave the definition of bias as the "existence of a differential, larger than could be expected by chance alone, between the front page coverage allotted the two candidates by the two sets of papers" (Klein & Maccoby, 1954, pp.295-296). The definition of bias used in this particular study is given by Kenney and Simpson (1993).

They defined bias as “a pattern of constant favoritism” of one candidate over the other, and “bias occurs when one candidate or party receives more news coverage and more favorable coverage over an extended period of time” (Kenney & Simpson, 1993, p.346).

Bias has four different forms: partisanship, unwitting bias, ideology and propaganda (McQuail, 1992). Partisanship usually is identified by its form such as editorial column, paid advertisement, forum, or letter. Partisanship often is seen in reporting an open campaign. Unwitting bias refers to unintentional biased choice of topics or news angles. Ideology usually is hidden in texts like the tone of reporting the news. Propaganda often is seen in the form of objective news such as public relations sources. These four forms of bias can also be classified as “open” bias and “hidden” bias. Open bias refers to unwitting and partisanship, while hidden bias refers to ideology and propaganda. Generally speaking, open kinds of bias are easily measured and analyzed, but hidden bias requires more interpretation and qualitative analysis.

In this study, the definition of bias given by Kenney and Simpson is used. They defined bias as “more news coverage and more favorable coverage” of one candidate or party over the other candidate or party (Kenney & Simpson, 1993, p.346) because the bias expected in the newspapers is mostly ideology bias.

Objectivity

Objectivity is the opposite of bias. Boyer (1981) conducted a study to analyze the statements from newspaper editors defining objectivity. McQuail (1992) concluded the result of the study in his book. Objectivity was divided into six elements:

- “- balance and even-handedness in presenting different sides of an issue;
- accuracy and realism of reporting;

- presentation of all main relevant points;
- separation of acts from opinion, but treating opinion as relevant;
- minimizing the influence of the writer's own attitude, opinion or involvement;
- avoiding slant, rancor or devious purpose" (McQuail, 1992, p. 184).

In this study, objectivity means news coverage giving candidates equal amounts and the same kind of attention, fair choice of topics, and equal coverage of policies, which also fit into Boyer's first element of objectivity: "balance and even-handedness in presenting different sides of an issue" (McQuail, 1992, p. 184).

Bias and objectivity are essentially opposites. This study will focus on testing objectivity as the absence of bias. Different degrees of objectivity in newspaper coverage will mean different degrees of bias in the coverage.

Theory

The hypothesis of this study -- that a publicly held news organization is more likely to display greater objectivity in its news coverage of a Presidential campaign than a privately held company -- is based on a theory of media ownership developed by Altschull (1984). Altschull contends that "the content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press" (Altschull, 1984, p. 254). The autonomy of media outlets is given within the boundaries of owners' profit. Where the media outlet is commercially owned, the content will reflect the point of view of the news organization's owners and advertisers. Where the media outlet fits into what Altschull calls an "interest pattern," the content mirrors the concerns and objectives of whoever is providing the financing.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have attempted to refine and extend Altschull's work (Altschull, 1984). Their theory of media ownership and news content points out that the owners of a media organization have the ultimate power over the news content of the newspapers. They contend that the primary focus of a news organization owned by a publicly held corporation is to make a profit, and objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by advertisers. The content of the news is built into the economic objective of the company. Though in some rare cases, the owner may choose to make profits secondary to an ideological goal, such as promoting a particular agenda, the organization can't indefinitely ignore the economic goal. Especially when media firms are owned by stockholders, public service is usually sacrificed for the sake of profitability.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have found that news organizations funded primarily by commercial sources are far more likely to use objectivity and newsworthiness as their principal standards in making news judgments. The reason, Shoemaker and Reese (1991) said, is that a commercial media outlet is more responsive to its audience and advertisers, both of whom desire these qualities. They further found that news organizations that are financed primarily by "interest" sources are far less likely to place great emphasis on objectivity and newsworthiness. Instead, their content is more likely to reflect the thinking of the special interest group or groups that control them. Thus, Shoemaker and Mayfield (1987) explained, "media content" is "the product of the complex set of ideological forces held by those who fund the mass media" (Shoemaker & Mayfield, 1987, p.30).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) also point out the important role that ownership plays in news media organization. They argue that, “although news departments may be organizationally buffered from the larger firm, content is still controlled indirectly through hiring and promotion practices” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, p. 144). For example, newspapers usually endorse political candidates who echo the owner’s or publisher’s political attitude. In fact, ownership has become such a powerful force behind the media organization that not only editorials and columns but also the coverage of news and features reflects the political beliefs or interest of the owners.

Theory and the Study

This study aims to build on the work of Altschull, Shoemaker and Reese by applying their theory of media ownership to publicly owned and privately owned newspapers in their coverage of the 2000 Presidential campaign. As mentioned previously, Kenney and Simpson (1993) used content analysis to test the ownership theory by examining coverage of the 1988 Presidential race by the *Washington Post* and *Times*. They found the publicly owned *Post* was fair and balanced in its news coverage while the privately owned *Times* was frequently biased.

It is important to remember that the media ownership theory outlined here is not mechanistic. Personal relations between a candidate or an elected official and the media can be such that they override the goals and objectives of the owners. For example, King and Schudson (1995) have clearly demonstrated that key members of the Washington, D.C. press corps significantly overstated President Reagan’s popularity and skill as a communicator during his early years in office. Reagan accomplished this by cultivating reporters and other key people at publicly held news organizations such as the New York

Times, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Time* and *Newsweek* (King & Schudson, 1995).

This study will not only extend the previous study by Kenney and Simpson (1993) to a more recent election to see if media ownership theory still holds, but also examine two different newspapers with different owners in the same market. Thus, the study will provide important new information about the role of media ownership in influencing news coverage of an important national election by publicly owned and privately owned newspapers.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject of media bias and objectivity has been studied for years through various methods. Since the 1950s, journalism and political science scholars have addressed different aspects of newspaper bias in the coverage of Presidential campaigns. In this study, “bias” means one candidate receives more favorable news coverage over the other and “objectivity” means candidates of different parties receive equal amounts and fair news coverage. This study will focus on testing “objectivity.”

Media Coverage: Equal and Fair

Scholars who have conducted studies of media coverage of previous Presidential elections to examine questions regarding balance and fairness have arrived at very different conclusions. Many have found that the media gave the Presidential candidates equal coverage that is fair and balanced.

Stevenson and Greene reviewed previous studies on news bias and found barely any evidence of “large scale, systematic favoring of one political party or candidate over the other in the last two or three decades” (Stevenson & Greene, 1980, p. 116). Stempel and Windhauser (1961) analyzed news coverage of Presidential campaigns between 1960 and 1988 by 15 major newspapers at that time. They found that the newspapers consistently gave the major contenders equal space (Stempel, 1961, 1965, 1969; Stempel & Windhauser, 1984, 1989). In the study of the coverage of the 1988 campaign, they found that six of 14 newspapers gave the Democrats more favorable coverage, and eight gave the Republicans more favorable coverage, but generally speaking, the coverage of the election was fair and unbiased (Stempel & Windhauser, 1989).

Graber pointed out that, “news people try to keep their biases under wraps, at least most of the time. They seem to succeed well for election coverage” (Graber, 2000, p.101). Graber’s conclusion was supported in several studies that followed. From 1992, the importance of media coverage in Presidential campaigns has received increasing attention. The media have been studied and critiqued increasingly on how they perform in Presidential campaigns (Johnson, Boudreau & Glowaki, 1996). In a study that examined how two leading newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, covered the 1992 Presidential campaign, Johnson and two other scholars found that media coverage for most themes was overwhelmingly neutral.

Six scholars (Domke et al., 1997) examined news coverage of the 1996 Presidential campaign by more than 40 major newspapers and found remarkably balanced coverage in terms of positive and negative information presented, though they did find slight bias in favor of Clinton toward the end of the election. Some of those same scholars (Domke et al., 1999) examined news coverage randomly drawn from the NEXIS electronic database for the 1988, 1992 and 1996 Presidential election campaigns. They found a slight bias favoring Democratic Bill Clinton in 1992, but fair and balanced coverage in the other two elections. Despite this, these same scholars found that the public increasingly believes the media have a liberal bias when reporting on the Presidential campaign.

To examine whether media have a liberal bias as more and more people believe, Allen and D’Alessio (2000) conducted a meta-analysis, which considered 59 quantitative studies, to examine partisan media bias in Presidential election campaigns since 1948. They divided bias into three kinds: gatekeeping bias, coverage bias, and statement bias.

“Gatekeeping bias” was defined as “the preference for selecting stories from one party or the other.” “Coverage bias” considers “the relative amounts of coverage each party receives.” “Statement bias” focuses on “the favorability of coverage toward one party of the other” (p. 133). Their results suggested that though slight net bias was demonstrated in covering Presidential elections across the newspaper industry, no evidence of huge liberal bias was apparent in presidential news coverage as many people claimed (Allen & D’Alessio, 2000). Bagdikian’s (1997) observations may help explain the reasons behind Allen and D’Alessio’s findings. Bagdikian points out that newspapers neutralized their news coverage because they were afraid that while strong news and views please a part of the audience, they might also offend another part, thus the circulation will be reduced.

Media Coverage: Biased

Many studies on the news coverage of Presidential campaigns have been conducted with no findings of media bias. Does this mean the media are really as objective as they claim? Actually, almost as many scholars have found that the media display a distinct bias in political news reporting generally and in Presidential campaign coverage specifically as those who have found the media to be balanced and objective.

As early as 1974, in research on the 1974 election in Colorado, Coffey (1975) found that the Republicans received more space in Republican papers while the Democrats received more space in independent papers.

Stovall (1988) examined 49 daily newspapers on their coverage of the 1984 Presidential campaign and found that news coverage of Republican candidates was greater in quantity and better in quality than that of Democratic candidates. Stovall attributed this to Republican candidates being more newsworthy than Democratic

candidates in 1984 (Stovall, 1988). At that time, media focused more issues on horse race than on real issues, and they considered whoever got the leading position of the race more newsworthy. Republican candidate Ronald Reagan used media much more effectively than his democratic opponent did during the 1984 presidential election. (Biocca, 1991) Shoemaker and Mayfield also pointed out that the judgment of the journalists' was driven by the newsworthiness of the events or the people (Shoemaker & Mayfield, 1987).

A study by Mantler and Whiteman (1995) chose six newspapers included in Stempel's definition of the "prestige press" (Mantler & Whiteman, 1995). They examined coverage of the 1992 Presidential campaign by the six most important newspapers of the nation. Quite opposite to Stempel's findings, they found significant differences in the newspapers' coverage of the candidates and issues in the 1992 Presidential campaign. Part of the reasons for the different findings is that Mantler and Whiteman focused more on the newspaper coverage of individual events while Stempel examined the overall objectivity of the newspaper coverage. Mantler and Whiteman's study suggested the different individuality of different newspapers display different individual characters in their coverage. The coverage of individual events of the newspapers is usually where bias lies (Greene & Stevenson, 1980).

Steger examined political coverage of the 1996 campaign for the Presidential nomination in the New York *Times* and the Chicago *Tribune* and found bias in terms of the amount of coverage and the tone (Steger, 1999). He attributed the bias to the tendency by many reporters to treat elections as a horse race with the frontrunner getting consistently more favorable coverage than the other candidates. Money seems to be the

unseen power underlying the news, and journalists report it accordingly (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991).

A recent study conducted by Pew Center and the Project for Excellence in Journalism examined 2,400 newspaper, television and Internet campaign stories between February and June 2000. Researchers found that three-quarters of the stories included one of two themes: Al Gore lies or exaggerates and is connected to scandal, while George W. Bush is a “different kind of Republican” (Hall, 2000, p.30-31).

The First Examination of Ownership and Objectivity

In 1993, Kenney and Simpson first conducted a study to examine the relationship between newspapers’ ownership and coverage of the Presidential campaign. Shoemaker and Reese’s (1991) theory of media ownership and news content was used in this study. Kenney and Simpson analyzed the news coverage of the publicly owned *Washington Post* and privately owned *Washington Times*. The analysis of these two dailies provided good evidence to test the theory of Shoemaker and Reese because they are of different types of ownership and financing. The study found that the *Washington Times* was more biased in its coverage of the 1988 Presidential campaign than the *Washington Post*. As a privately owned newspaper, the *Washington Times* supported conservative values and anti-communist views. It endorsed George Bush in the 1988 campaign for President, which was reflected in the bias of its coverage (Kenney & Simpson, 1993). On the other hand, the publicly owned *Washington Post* presented balanced and neutral coverage of the Presidential campaign.

Kenney and Simpson’s study was the first attempt to test the ownership theory of Shoemaker and Reese, and it found great evidence to support the theory, but it was

limited in examining only two newspapers. The study didn't compare the political views of the Washington *Times* with that of New World Communications, the owner of the newspaper. Thus, the study ignored an important perspective of the media ownership theory of Shoemaker and Reese (1991): that newspaper content will reflect the political views of the owner. As stated before, ownership has become an influential force behind media organizations. Not only editorials and columns but also the coverage of news and features would reflect the political beliefs or interest of the owners. Newspapers usually endorse political candidates who echo the owner's or publisher's political attitude. (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991)

The previous study by Kenney and Simpson (1993) has shown that the publicly owned Washington *Post* was more objective than the privately owned Washington *Times*. This study is a partial replication of the Kenney and Simpson study using two different newspapers in a different market. In this study, objectivity is operationalized with four measures: number of paragraphs that favored one candidate, candidate or party dominance in the lead, placement of stories favoring one candidate or party in the A section, and overall story tone favoring one candidate.

CHAPTER 4

HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature, the research question is: How objective were the publicly owned Boston *Globe* and privately owned Boston *Herald* in their news coverage of the 2000 Presidential election? The research question is tested by the following four hypotheses:

H1: The privately held Boston *Herald* will have more pro-Bush paragraphs than pro-Gore paragraphs, on average, than the publicly owned Boston *Globe*.

This is based on Shoemaker and Reese's theory of ownership (1991). Different ownership leads to different coverage of news. When it comes to covering a political election, the owner's endorsement of the candidate from a different party will affect the objectivity of the news coverage. The *Herald* endorsed Bush in the 2000 Presidential election; because it is privately owned, it is expected to show more favoritism to Bush than Gore.

H2: Boston *Herald* will give more dominance in the leads to Bush than Gore compared to the Boston *Globe*.

The lead of a news story usually is where the most important items of a story lie. Whoever gets the lead dominance is important in deciding whether the newspaper is biased or not in its coverage of a news story (Stempel & Culbertson, 1984).

H3: The Boston *Herald* will give dominance to the Republicans by placing more stories about Republicans in the A section than the Boston *Globe*.

The A section to a newspaper is like the lead to a news story. The stories appear in A section usually receive the most attention from readers (Stempel & Culbertson, 1984).

H4: The endorsement of the newspaper will affect the news coverage of the Presidential candidates. The Boston *Herald* will have more stories whose tone is overall pro-Republican than the *Globe*.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have pointed out that the political view of the newspaper will reflect that of the owners. She also pointed out that different types of ownership affect the coverage of a newspaper. The privately held the *Herald* will show more favoritism in its coverage to its endorsee, Bush.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHOD

This study will use quantitative content analysis as the method. “Quantitative content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, in order to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption” (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998, p.20).

This study will examine two daily newspapers, the Boston *Globe* and Boston *Herald*. These two newspapers share the same market and one of them is publicly owned (the *Globe*) while the other is privately owned (the *Herald*); this represents a good sample to examine the ownership theory of Shoemaker and Reese. The Boston *Globe* is owned by New York Times Company. The Boston *Herald*, on the other hand, is privately owned by publisher Patrick Purcell. Purcell purchased the *Herald* from Rupert Murdoch’s News America Publishing Inc. in 1994. Patrick Purcell supported Candidate Bush in 2000 presidential election. These two newspapers differ in their ownership while competing against each other. Similar results are expected to be found as those in the study by Kenney and Simpson of the Washington *Post* and Washington *Times*.

The Population of the Study

The study unit is the news story and the unit of analysis is the paragraph. In this study, election stories carried on the news pages of the Boston *Globe* and Boston *Herald*, which focus on selecting the President of the United States in 2000, will be included. All

staff-written news stories appearing during the campaign period from September 5, 2000, the reported official opening of the campaign, until November 7, 2000, the last full day of the campaign, will be coded. All editorials and signed columns of opinion are excluded.

The news stories were searched in LEXIS/NEXIS database through keywords search narrowed by the time period from “September 5, 2000” to “November 7, 2000.” Those stories containing keywords “Bush or Gore” in full text were selected. The 2000 Presidential election was mainly about the debate of these two candidates though there were some candidates from other small parties.

A total of 237 news stories including 171 from the Boston *Globe* and 66 from the Boston *Herald* were selected for this study.

To have a clear understanding of the endorsements of these two newspapers is important to this study. Editorials and articles from op-ed sections are usually where the opinions of the newspapers lie. When a newspaper covers a Presidential election, increasing numbers of editorials, opinion pieces, and endorsements are published as election day draws near. Editorials and opinion stories appearing in the last week of the election (from November 1, 2000 to November 7, 2000) were coded for the endorsements of the Boston *Globe* and the Boston *Herald*. Going through the same keyword search, a total of 8 editorials and opinion stories were selected with 5 from the *Globe* and 3 from the *Herald*.

Key Variables and Definitions

In comparing equality in news coverage between Republican and Democrats, the importance of coverage by each newspaper will be determined. In determining importance, the location of each article as either “front page” or “inside pages” as well as

the length of the articles will be examined. Each article will be labeled as pro-Democratic, pro-Republican or neutral on the basis of statement analysis of the article to examine the political view of each newspaper.

Lead Domination is a variable that identifies which candidate (Bush or Gore) gets mentioned in the lead, or the first paragraph of a news story. News is stacked in paragraphs in order of descending importance. The lead summarizes the principal items of a news event.

Counting the number of the paragraphs helps to determine the equality of the news coverage between Republican and Democrats. After reading through each paragraph, all the paragraphs are classified into three categories: Pro-Gore, Pro-Bush, or Neutral. “Pro-Gore” refers to paragraphs that positively describe Gore. “Pro-Bush” refers to paragraphs that favorably describe Bush. “Neutral” means paragraphs that objectively state the facts and don’t show any favor or disfavor toward Gore or Bush. Examples for pro-Gore paragraphs are “Gore received overwhelming welcome,” or “Gore holds a commanding lead in Massachusetts,” etc. Examples for pro-Bush paragraphs are “Bush is also doing well in his own right because he has been able to present himself as a moderate,” or “Bush still could take the state,” etc. All other paragraphs that states facts instead of showing favor to one of the candidates over the other will be considered neutral, examples are “The nearer the election draws, the less clear it seems,” or “Neither Bush or Gore can accomplish next week,” etc.

The overall story tone labeled each story as pro-Democrat, pro-Republican or neutral. “Pro-Democrat” refers to stories that positively describe Democrat candidates including Al Gore. The amount of positive description of Democrat candidates is more

than that of the Republican candidates, in other word, pro-Democrat stories have more pro-Gore paragraphs than pro-Bush paragraphs. Pro-Republican” refers to stories that positively describe Republican candidates. The amount of positive description of Republican candidates is more than that of the Democrat candidates, which means there are more pro-Bush paragraphs than pro-gore paragraphs. “Neutral” refers to stories that neither favor Democrat candidates nor Republican candidates or the stories that show equal support to Democrat candidates and Republican candidates.

To code the editorials and opinion stories, all the Presidential endorsements were classified into two categories: Bush or Gore. “Bush” means stories that endorse Republican candidate Bush. “Gore” refers to stories that endorsed Democratic candidate Gore. The number of endorsements for Republican, Democrat or Independent candidates in other campaigns was also counted and recorded to reveal the support of each newspaper toward different parties.

The Coding Process

An independent coder and the researcher were trained and then coded approximately 20% of the stories so that inter-coder reliability could be calculated. “Training of coders is a common preparatory task in content analysis. Not only do individuals have to be acquainted with the peculiarities of the recording task -- rarely do procedures and definitions perfectly conform to intuition -- but these coders often are instrumental in shaping the process, especially during the preparatory phase of a content analysis” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 72).

In the reliability test, approximately 20% of the data was coded by the second coder. In this study, 49 news stories were coded by both coders with 24 from the Boston

Herald and 25 from the Boston *Globe*. Scott's Pi was used to calculate the reliability of the nominal variables Lead Dominance and Overall Story Tone. Correlation was used to calculate the reliability of the ratio variables Pro-Gore Paragraphs, Pro-Bush Paragraphs, Neutral Paragraphs and Story Length. Inter-coder reliability percentages are 79% for Lead Dominance, 82% for Pro-Gore Paragraphs, 97% for Pro-Bush Paragraphs, 95% for Neutral Paragraphs, 93% for Story Length, and 85% for Overall Story Tone with an average of 88%.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS

Content analysis of the editorials showed that the *Globe* endorsed Gore and the *Herald* endorsed Bush in the 2000 Presidential election. The *Herald* also endorsed Republican candidates more often than Democrats in other campaigns, while the *Globe*'s endorsements were reversed. The Boston *Globe* gave 94% of the endorsement to Gore and Democratic candidates for other campaign, while the Boston *Herald* gave 83% of its endorsement to Bush and Republican candidates for other campaign.

Table 1
Number of Endorsements of the Two Newspapers

	Bush	Gore	Republicans	Democrats	Total
Boston <i>Globe</i>	0	5	1	11	17
Boston <i>Herald</i>	3	0	22	5	30

According to Shoemaker and Reese's theory (1991), publicly owned newspapers will be more likely to present balanced and unbiased coverage despite endorsement of one party or candidate over the other, while privately owned newspapers are less likely to be unbiased and more likely to favor the candidate or party that its editorials endorse.

H1: The privately held Boston *Herald* will have more pro-Bush paragraphs than pro-Gore paragraphs, on average, than the publicly owned Boston *Globe*.

This hypothesis was supported. The *Herald* had significantly more pro-Bush paragraphs than the *Globe* ($t = -3.029$, $df = 76$, $p < .01$). The *Herald* had an average of 1.76 pro-Bush paragraphs per story and the *Globe* had a mean of only .73.

The *Globe* was comparatively balanced on its pro-Bush and pro-Gore paragraphs with an average of .57 pro-Gore paragraphs and .73 pro-Bush paragraphs. The *Herald*

showed significant bias toward Bush with 1.76 pro-Bush paragraphs and .59 pro-Gore paragraphs. No significant differences existed between the *Globe* and the *Herald* on number of pro-Gore paragraphs ($t = -.172$, $df = 235$, $p = .402$).

When all the neutral paragraphs were tested, the t-test showed no significant differences between the *Globe* and the *Herald* ($f = 1.86$, $df = 235$, $p = .064$). Mean neutral paragraphs for the *Globe* was 19.6 ($sd = 9.26$), for the *Herald* was 17.2 ($sd = 7.88$).

Table 2
Mean Scores of pro-Gore, Pro-Bush and Neutral Paragraphs

Newspaper	Pro-Bush	Pro-Gore	Neutral
Boston <i>Globe</i>	.73	.57	19.60
Boston <i>Herald</i>	1.76	.59	17.20

H2: Boston *Herald* will give more dominance in the leads to Bush than Gore compared to the Boston *Globe*.

This hypothesis was partially supported. In this case, the *Herald* did favor Bush, but the *Globe* also exhibited bias for Gore.

A significant difference existed between the two newspapers on number of pro-Gore leads ($X^2 = 5.58$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Of all the non-neutral stories in the two newspapers, the *Globe* had 43% favoring Gore while the *Herald* had 7.5% favoring Gore. Of the pro-Bush leads, both newspapers had 25%.

But significant differences also were demonstrated within the two newspapers, with the *Globe* showing bias toward Gore as well as the *Herald* showing bias toward Bush. Of its non-neutral leads, 63% of the *Globe* leads were pro-Gore and 37% were pro-Bush. The *Herald* had 77% of its leads that were pro-Bush and 23% that were pro-Gore.

This analysis reflects only the leads that favored one candidate or the other. Two-thirds of the *Globe*'s leads were balanced (20 of 30 leads), while only half of the *Herald*'s leads were balanced (10 of 20 leads), but that difference was not significant ($\chi^2 = .518$, $df=1$, $p=.472$)

Table 3
Lead Dominance

Newspaper	Pro-Bush		Pro-Gore	
	Number of pro-Bush Leads	% within newspaper	Number of Pro-Gore Leads	% within newspaper
Boston <i>Globe</i>	10	37%	17	77%
Boston <i>Herald</i>	10	63%	3	23%

H3: The Boston *Herald* will give dominance to the Republicans by placing more stories about Republicans in the A section than the Boston *Globe*.

Chi-Square could not be computed because of the low occurrence of non-neutral stories in the A sections of both newspapers. However, the hypothesis still received some support because the *Herald* used no pro-Democrat stories in the A section, but placed 3 pro-Republican stories in section A. The *Globe* was more balanced, placing 5 pro-Democrat stories and 4 pro-Republican stories in its A section.

Table 4
Number of Non-Neutral Stories in A Section

Newspaper	Number of Republican in A	Number of Democrats in A
Boston <i>Globe</i>	4	5
Boston <i>Herald</i>	3	0

H4: The endorsement of the newspaper will affect the news coverage of the Presidential candidates. The Boston *Herald* will have more stories whose tone is overall pro-Republican than the *Globe*.

This hypothesis was supported. A significant difference existed between the *Globe* and the *Herald* on overall story tone, with the *Herald* having significantly more pro-Republican stories than pro-Democrat stories ($\chi^2= 5.36$, $df=1$, $p<.05$). Of its non-neutral stories, the *Herald* had 85% that were pro-Republican and only 15% that were pro-Democrat. The *Globe* was more evenly split with 53% pro-Republican and 47% pro-Democrat.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSIONS

Differences were found in the objectivity of news coverage of the 2000 Presidential election by the Boston *Globe* and *Herald*. When all non-neutral paragraphs and leads were tested, the *Herald* showed significant bias toward Bush by having more pro-Bush paragraphs than pro-Gore paragraphs on average, giving more dominance in the leads to Bush than Gore, and having more stories whose tone was overall pro-Republican than pro-Democrat. The *Globe*, on the other hand, was more objective, giving balanced coverage to both candidates Bush and Gore.

However, when neutral variables were included, data showed that both the *Globe* and the *Herald* devoted more than half of their stories or paragraphs to neutral coverage. There were 84% balanced leads in the *Globe* and 80% balanced leads in the *Herald*. Overall, 83% of the stories in the *Globe* and 70% of the stories in the *Herald* were neutral.

This study shows that, as the ownership theory of Shoemaker and Reese predicts, the publicly owned Boston *Globe* was more objective than the Boston *Herald* when neutral variables were excluded. The *Herald* showed more bias toward Bush, the candidate it endorsed, than the *Globe*. The *Herald* not only had more pro-Bush paragraphs and leads than pro-Gore paragraphs and leads, but also had more stories whose overall tone was pro-Republican than pro-Democrats. The *Globe*, on the other hand, maintained balanced coverage for Bush and Gore by giving almost equal number of paragraphs, leads and stories to both candidates. It showed bias only toward its endorsee Gore in its lead dominance.

The findings of this study offer some good news and some that is not so good. On the one hand, not all newspapers are achieving the degree of objectivity that the goals and values of good journalism require. Work needs to be done in achieving balance and fairness. However, this study shows that conglomerate ownership, which has generally been criticized, may not be all bad. In this study and a previous one, newspapers that were owned by large corporations did a better job of fair and balanced coverage of Presidential candidates. Kenny and Simpson (1993) in their study had pointed out that publicly owned companies were more concerned with the circulation rate while the interest of privately owned companies lies more in promoting the idea of anti-communism and the political view of its owners. Shoemaker and Mayfield (1987) also pointed out that the news content is under the control of those who fund the media. Publicly owned newspapers are financially supported by readers, advertisers and stockholders, so they have to provide more objective news to appeal to the large market. Privately owned newspapers usually are family owned and thus they are influenced more by the owners.

Theory

This study tested Shoemaker and Reese's theory again, using a different population and time frame. Unlike the study by Kenney and Simpson (1993), in which they found the *Washington Times* was far more biased in its 1988 Presidential election coverage than the *Washington Post*, the *Globe* and the *Herald* were overall balanced in their coverage of the 2000 Presidential election. However, the ownership theory of Shoemaker and Reese (1991) still found support since the degree of objectivity for the privately owned Boston *Herald* and publicly held Boston *Globe* was different. The *Globe*

not only used more than 80% of its articles to report neutral stories but also maintained balance between the Republican and the Democrat when reporting non-neutral stories. The *Herald* showed significant bias toward its endorsee Bush, using more pro-Republican paragraphs, leads, and stories even though most of its articles were neutral.

This study found that not only did ownership affect objectivity, but endorsement of the newspaper also had some effects on the news coverage. The Boston *Globe* showed favoritism to its endorsee, Gore, and the *Herald* showed bias to its endorsee, Bush, in the story leads. This provides support for another theory of Shoemaker and Reese (1991), that the political view of a newspaper will reflect that of the owners.

This study found more evidence to support Shoemaker and Reese's theory of news content and ownership. It also extended the previous study done by Kenney and Simpson by giving new evidence from a different election, in different newspapers, and by including the owner's political views.

Practice

The previous study done by Kenny and Simpson (1993) examined news stories concerning 30 campaign highlights. This study looked at the same topic of objectivity in Presidential election newspaper coverage in a different way. It included all the news stories about Bush or Gore throughout the entire Presidential election.

This study showed that Shoemaker and Reese's theory about ownership and objectivity still applies to today's media. Some improvement appears on the newspapers' coverage of Presidential election since 1988, which was a pivotal time for the news media to reconsider its approach to political coverage. It was during the 1988 election that the civic or public journalism movement was spawned and with it came a new

appreciation for coverage of issues important to citizens instead of the candidate personality and horserace coverage that had occupied so much of the press' attention up to that point (Rosen & Merritt, 1994). Whether civic journalism played a role in these particular newspapers' coverage is beyond the scope of this study, but the values that civic journalism has encouraged have spread throughout the industry, whether civic journalism has been the vehicle or not. These two newspapers tend to be objective more often than not, even though the papers still reflected ownership attitudes. Since these two newspapers are both widely read in Boston, the results of this study should intrigue people who are interested in the agenda-setting influence of media.

Although it is hard to report the news without bias entirely, it is still important to aspire to do so because of the effect it can have on the public's opinion of the press. When it comes to covering a Presidential campaign, it is especially important to recognize the function of news media in shaping public opinions. The media play an influential role as intermediaries between political leaders and the public (Graber, 1989; Davis, 1992). Media coverage of the Presidential candidates may directly or indirectly affect the outcome of the campaign. Domke and five other scholars found a strong connection between positive and negative media coverage of candidate Bill Clinton and public opinion polls in their study (Domke et al., 1997, p.732).

Besides the rise of civic journalism that may have caused the tendency of more objective newspaper coverage since 1988, there may be many other reasons that caused this tendency, which includes better media rules and regulations, stricter self-censorship, and the concerns of newspaper circulations. This study raises new questions for future studies: What are the reasons for this improvement of newspaper coverage of Presidential

elections? What impact does this change have on politics and society? Is the way media shape public opinion different than before? Are journalists aware of these changes?

Even though this study tested only two newspapers in Boston, the findings were consistent with the previous one: the public newspapers are more objective than private newspapers. Mergers and alliances between media groups are becoming more common globally. The biggest newspaper conglomerated groups in the United States are the New York Times, Knight-Ridder and the Tribune Co. (McManus, 1994). Many deride conglomeration, saying it stops competition among different media groups (McManus, 1994). From this study, it shows that conglomeration can be interpreted positively in one respect. Since the main interest of these big groups is to increase circulation and profits, covering political news in a neutral fashion helps win over audiences from all political parties instead of alienating some and losing others.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was that photographs were not included in the analysis. Since bias was found in leads and number of paragraphs, it may also be the case that photographs could favor one party over the other. Future studies should include photographs as a variable.

Another limitation of the study was that the variables used in the study to test the objectivity were limited. It only tested the objectivity in the lead, A section, number of paragraphs, and story tone. Future studies should include more kinds of variables such as use of sources, headlines, and story topic to test objectivity.

The third limitation of this study was that only two newspapers were tested. The *Globe* and the *Herald* were used in this study because they share the same market and

have different types of ownership and so made a good pair for comparison. Since two newspapers competing in the same market are rare, and it is even more difficult to find two competing newspapers with different types of ownership, it would be fruitful to expand the sample to look at a larger numbers of newspapers with different types of ownership, but not to limit it to newspapers competing in the same market.

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APPENDIX I
CODING SHEET FOR NEWS STORIES

Date _____

Day of Week: _____

General Story Characteristics

1. Newspaper:

(1) Boston Globe (2) Boston Herald

2. Placement

(1) Front A (2) Section Front (3) Inside A (4) Inside Other

3. Lead dominance

(1) Pro-Gore (2) Balanced (3) Pro-Bush

4. Count the number of the paragraphs (use hash marks) that are

Pro-Gore _____

Pro-Bush _____

Neutral _____

5. Story length _____ paragraphs

6. Overall story tone

(1) Pro-Democrats (2) Neutral (3) Pro-Republican

APPENDIX II

CODING PROTOCOL FOR NEWS STORIES

Introduction

This study aims at analyzing the newspaper coverage of 2000 Presidential election by Boston Globe and Boston Herald and finding the relationship between ownership and objectivity of the news coverage of 2000 Presidential election.

The study unit is the news story and unit of analysis is paragraphs. In this study, election stories carried on the news pages of Boston Globe and Boston Herald, which focus on selecting the President of the United States, will be included. News stories are defined as all non-advertising item in a news product. In a newspaper, this would usually include all staff-written news stories found in the newspaper, excluding editorials and other forms of opinions.

Coding Instruction

Date: the month and day of the story

Day of Week: write down the day of the week that the story appears on the newspaper, eg: Sunday, Monday etc.

General story characteristics

1. Newspaper

Identify the different newspaper, Boston Globe or Boston Herald

2. Placement

Identify the placement of the story: Front A: the first page of section A or A1; Section Front: the first page of the sections other than A, eg: B1, C1, D1, etc.; Inside A: other pages besides the first page in section A, eg: A2, A3, A4, etc.; Inside other: other pages besides front A, section front or inside A, eg: B2, C3, D4, etc.

2. Lead Domination

Identify which candidate (Bush or Gore) gets lead assertion. The lead is the first paragraph of a news story.

3. Count the number of paragraphs that are pro-Gore, anti Gore, pro-Bush, anti-Bush or neutral.

Read through each paragraph and classify all the paragraphs in to three categories: Pro-Gore, Pro-Bush, or Neutral by using hash marks.

Pro-Gore: paragraphs that positively describe Gore

Pro-Bush: paragraphs that positively describe Bush

Neutral: paragraphs that objectively state the factors and don't show any favor or disfavor toward Gore or Bush.

4. Story length

Add up all the hash marks appear in No.3.

5. Overall story tone

Pro- Democrats: Articles that positively describe democrats candidates (Gore)

Neutral: Articles that neither favor democrats candidates nor republican candidates

Pro- Republican: Articles that positively describe republican candidates

APPENDIX III
CODING SHEET FOR EDITORIALS

Editorial Endorsement

1. Presidential campaign

Bush_____

Gore_____

2. Other campaigns

Number of endorsements:

Republicans endorsed_____

Democrat endorsed_____

Independent endorsed_____

APPENDIX IV

CODING PROTOCOL FOR EDITORIALS

Introduction

This study aims at analyzing the newspaper endorsement and political view of 2000 Presidential election by Boston Globe and Boston Herald and finding the relationship between ownership and objectivity of the news coverage of 2000 Presidential election.

The study unit is the news story and unit of analysis is paragraphs. In this study, all editorials stories carried on the news pages of Boston Globe and Boston Herald focus on selecting the President of the United States and other national or local election campaigns, will be included.

Coding Instruction

Date: month and day of the story

1. Presidential campaign
Identify the endorsement of the story by selecting Bush or Gore. Bush: story that endorses candidate Bush; Gore: story that endorses candidate Gore.
2. Other campaigns
Count the number of endorsements that appear in the stories focus on other national or local election campaigns. Republican endorsed: the number of articles that endorse or support republican; Democrat endorsed: the number of articles that endorse or support democrats; Independent endorsed: the number of articles that endorse or support independent parties.

APPENDIX V

INTERCODER RELIABILITY

Main Variables	Percentage of Agreement
Lead Dominance	79%
Pro-Gore	82%
Pro-Bush	97%
Neutral	95%
Story Length	93%
Overall Story Tone	85%

Average percentage: 88%

Formula used:

Scott's Pi for Nominal Variables: Lead Dominance and Overall Story Tone:

$$\frac{\% \text{ Observed Agreement} - \% \text{ Expected Agreement}}{1 - \% \text{ Expected Agreement}}$$

Correlation for ratio Variables: Pro-Gore, Pro-Bush, Neutral and Story Length:

VITA

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