Strategic Use of Language in White House Twitter Communications

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STRATEGIC USE OF LANGUAGE IN
WHITE HOUSE TWITTER COMMUNICATIONS

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 of
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by
Margo Laine Jolet
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2006
B.S., Louisiana State University, 2009
December 2016
For my grandparents, who worked very hard their whole lives, and could only dream of the access to education I have always known. One made it to fifth or sixth grade before having to leave school. Another didn’t make it to high school despite being her eighth grade class’s valedictorian. One had to leave school to go to work in the seventh grade after a parent’s death. One was lucky enough to graduate from high school, but had no access to college.

You have taught me the importance of hard work and self-reliance. As the first grandchild on one side to finish college and the only grandchild on both sides to complete a graduate degree, I have been blessed with ample support, encouragement, circumstances, and resources to succeed in this journey.

All of you would have eagerly done the hard work I’ve done, admittedly, begrudgingly on occasion, to earn this degree. This is for you.

Manila Lancon Comeaux (1918-1994)
Ovey Comeaux (1917-1972)
Evelyn Broussard Jolet (1921-2002)
Clifton Jolet (1923-2002)
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ABSTRACT

Lippmann (1922) theorized that we understand our world through elites and the media because we cannot experience everything ourselves. We look to others to share their experiences with us. In this way, the media and elites tell us what is important in our world. Converse (1964), Zaller (1992), and Lupia (1994) argue that not only do elites and the media help us see what is important, but they draw out attributes of these issues to help us make political determinations congruent with our belief systems. In this thesis, I conducted two studies investigating candidate, party, and White House tweets about the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).

First, I used a quantitative content analysis to understand how in-parties, out-parties and politicians communicated about the PPACA. I studied tweets from 2009, when the bill was in Congress; in 2012, during an election year; and in 2015, at the start of another election cycle. I observed that elites and media used the term “Obamacare” with affective cues to communicate about the PPACA. The Democrats used positive tone when talking about the law, while the Republicans used negative tone and oppositional language. I also noted that Democrats linguistically reappropriated “Obamacare” to imbue it with positive cues for their base.

Next, I conducted to qualitative textual analysis to investigate how the White House communicated about the healthcare policy priority. I began with emergent open coding of 10% of the sample and used this to develop a quantitative code book to analyze the remaining 90%. I developed a tactical category architecture with six categories of provision of information and seven categories of propagandistic techniques.

I was able to show that widely used techniques in strategic communication are effective in setting the agenda for the public. Parties, candidates, and the White House communicate what issues are salient and help us toward value judgments of those issues in line with our ideologies.
Twitter changes how tacticians practice. The brevity of tweets requires strategic use of language to build the agenda and a savvy press to interpret those cues as they share the agenda with the public.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

About a century ago, President Woodrow Wilson instituted the Committee on Public Information (CPI) to help provide government information in the public’s interest. Instead, he used this group as a propaganda machine to help advance his motivations in World War I. Although disbanded after Wilson’s term, the CPI’s persuasive tactics remain residually in the executive branch today (Greenberg, 2016). Around the same time, prolific scholar Walter Lippmann (1922) argued that public information is widely shaped by media and the elites because ordinary people do not have the time, ability, or interest to see and experience everything in our world. Citizens rely on media and elites to present issues of the day in neat packages. Later agenda-setting theory, framing theory, and priming theory show that affectively cued messages not only help us understand, but help us form attitudes in line with our innate ideologies. So how do politicians communicate about policy priorities? To understand this, I conducted three studies. Each study explored communication through Twitter about President Obama’s healthcare reform priority.

First, I considered how in parties and out parties and a lead characters in both communicated about the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). Specifically, I wanted to understand the use of the cue “Obamacare”—where it originated, in what context it was used, and what global circumstances it might be addressing. I wanted to understand if it was a completely partisan word added to the lexicon with affective-cues tied to one party’s sentiments. What I learned is that both parties used the term, but with vastly different meanings. The GOP tied it to President Obama, who is unfavorable to their members, hence drawing unfavorable cues. Alternatively, the Democrats pushed the connection to Obama, who has high approval ratings among their members. They even began to explain their linguistic
reappropriation by saying, “I’ve heard they call this Obamacare. And I’m ok with that, because I do care. I care about you.” (White House, 2013, December 4). I will show through a quantitative analysis that the term was used in negative tweets to oppose the out-party and in positive tweets to support the in-party. For this thesis, the in-party was the Democrats, the party in power in the executive branch during the timeframe of this study; thus, the out-party was the Republicans, the party not in power in the executive branch. The term “Obamacare” took on an increasingly aggressive posture as the years passed and the Obama administration won over public opinion and the judiciary decided in favor of the law. Language and affective primes were critical to what transpired in this study window.

The second study was a directed, inductive textual analysis of all White House tweets relating to the healthcare reform policy priority between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2015. I first employed emergent open-coding for 10% of the sample, then developed a qualitative codebook based on these codes. I coded the remaining 90% of the sample with the codebook. What emerged were six tactical categories that applied to provision of information for the public good and seven tactical categories that applied to propaganda. Some of these categories broke down into subcategories characterized by a particular tactic observed at least 6-10 times. From this category architecture, I will show that, while the White House does provide information related to the policy, much of the communication is, instead, propagandistic, applying tactics that cue partisan agreement and appeal in broader, more ideological ways to audiences who have not yet formed an attitude about the policy.

To understand the communication strategies being applied in these studies, we look to almost a century of scholarship in political communication, public opinion, psychology, and linguistics. Lippmann argued that we can’t see and experience everything there is to know for
ourselves. We, therefore, rely on intermediaries—elites and the media—who can observe, record, and report back to us what they have experienced and what it means (Lippmann, 1922). Elites and the media construct a world for us based on what they know, and without our own experiences, we accept their construction as our reality (McCombs, 2004).

Philip Converse (1964) extends Lippmann’s theory by exploring belief systems constructed by elites and by the masses. He argues that we cognitively and intellectually function in our world by relying on our web-like belief systems of married ideas and attitudes. Within these belief systems, narrower ideologies inform our perception and views of our world and how it should operate. These systems and ideologies operate on the basis of constraints, or the ability to successfully predict, given some information about an attitude, other attitudes the person or group may hold. While elites operate with a more abstract, sophisticated level of understanding from which to draw ideas and attitudes, they often provide their information to less sophisticated publics who have simpler understanding and fewer constraints. Elites learn about the masses through individual informal conversations, mostly with others in the same elite group. Taken together, these conversations help elites generalize to the masses. But, the masses tend to decide issues on a personal, not ideological, level. When asked about issues, they have a difficult time accurately recognizing terms and issues. So, the elites and the media frame complex contexts in concrete, understandable packages.

Agenda-setting theory affirms Lippmann’s and Converse’s positions that the media help us understand our world. Agenda-setting shows that the media may not tell us “what to think” but are very good at telling us “what to think about” (Cutlip et al., 2006, 204). By the media’s coverage (or lack of coverage) of a particular issue, the public gleans what is important. When extended to framing and priming, we can see how the media and elites help guide the public to
decisions based on characteristics of the issues. The media uses framing to select and give importance to some attributes over others (Entman, 1993). The media and elites’ reports prompt us to draw from our own political ideology and memory via priming; people then use these bits of information to make political judgments (Baran & Davis, 2012). The public relies on these primed cues and shortcuts to make decisions about the issues of the day (Converse, 1964; Lupia, 1994).

Further, John Zaller (1992) argues that we can only capture what is top of mind, because we are not well informed. Our opinions are formed by environmental triggers and things that are most important to us at the time. Adding what we understand from our constructed environment to our existing preconceptions, we are able to form opinions. Priming cues help people place what they learn from the media and elites into their existing value structures. Similarly, Arthur Lupia (1994) makes the case for cues leading us to the same decisions we would otherwise make if we were well informed. Lupia posits that these shortcuts are quick ways to tap into our innate ideology.

When voters rely on political cues to make judgments, they often seek consistency in their attitudes, so they seek out cues that will help them align new beliefs with old ones. They seek out candidates with like attributes to make policy decisions that fall in line with their existing ideological framework. On the other hand, cues help busy voters avoid the time- and energy-consuming exercise of seeking out and attempting to understand complex information about issues. Cues substitute burdensome information with helpful information that still allows voters to arrive at the same destination (Conover, 1981).

This thesis explored the importance of emotive cues and language tactics on public opinion, policy adoption, and attitude and behavior change through the White House’s healthcare
reform policy priority. I considered communication through Twitter, a social networking tool that requires the publisher to communicate in 140 characters or less. Given the timeframe for this study, I chose to investigate Twitter for several reasons: the abbreviated nature of the content allowed me to analyze a larger number of posts, including both incumbency and election years; Twitter is the second-most popular social networking site in the United States; and Twitter is projected to grow as mobile social networking platforms gain more users (Ad Week, 2015). Additionally, Barack Obama was the first president to use Twitter (Greenberg, 2016).

Twitter provides an immediate and direct link between sender and recipient, so it allowed the White House to connect more intimately with its 21.2 million followers. Twitter provides some immediate feedback to the White House as citizens are able to retweet, like, or comment about content delivered. Twitter also fulfilled some of the promises the Obama campaign made for transparency and participatory democracy (“Introducing @POTUS”, 2012). Not only did President Obama have his team establish the first executive office Twitter account, but he was the first sitting president to use Twitter to connect directly with users through regular White House Twitter chats.

Since the 2008 campaigns were the first in history to have new electronic media and Internet overshadow traditional media (e.g., TV, radio, newspapers) (Hendricks & Denton, 2010), it is important for us to study how this platform was used to help the administration succeed after the election was over. Unlike prior campaigns and executive offices, our evolving online environment is providing both benefits to and higher expectations for candidates. Webpages are no longer static places to drop campaign or policy information that stagnates. Instead, our World Wide Web has become quite dynamic. Candidates and elected officials are expected to provide more content that is responsive to global conditions and changing
circumstances. In exchange, it provides a great venue for immediate response to feedback from constituents (Hendricks & Denton, 2010).

This thesis will not just pull back the curtain for constituents who want to better understand how their government and elected officials communicate with them, it will also be very beneficial for nonprofits and government agencies who are tasked with implementing important social policies with little ability to use paid media. My studies look exclusively at earned media—media attention that is not purchased, but instead, is earned because it is compelling and newsworthy. I wish to better understand how free platforms can maximally contribute to securing policy adoption through attitude and behavior change.

We will see classic strategic communications practices at work here. Just as they are effective in corporate America for selling products and services, maintaining the reputations of business people, and building strong relationships with stakeholders and investors, they are just as effective in advancing important policy priorities. White House Twitter strategies to overcome initial unpopularity and opposition to the law and to turn the tide of public opinion toward policy adoption can also be applied to other important social challenges. For example, we could use these strategies to persuade people to wear seatbelts or use the proper car seat for their children, to encourage people to be tested to know their HIV/AIDS status, or to encourage people to stop using tobacco products. Nonprofits can use these strategies to ask people to donate to food pantries, to encourage people to volunteer for community clean-up days, and to help people understand mental illness.

For this reason, I did not make value judgments here about these tactical approaches. As I will explain later, I classified some communication as providing information for the public good and some communication as propagandistic. I do not argue that one is ethically better than the
other, but instead just deconstructed the communication into tactics that communicators can reapply not only to political challenges, but to broader societal issues. I am not concerned if I am more successfully persuaded to get my flu shot by a dump of facts and figures, or by a contest, or the endorsement of a celebrity. What’s important is that I get the shot. Similarly, I elucidated how communicators and strategists worked to communicate about and overcome the initial negative public opinion about the PPACA, but kept focused on how they achieved the goal without making value judgments about the goal itself.

I hope this thesis will be a good guide for communications practitioners who work exclusively in earned media. Many social issues do not have the benefit of a hefty communications budget, but are no less important. In fact, arguably they are more important than sale of commercial products and services because they impact social good and social welfare. I want this work to help them be more effective for the benefit of humanity at large.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

As with much mass communication and public opinion knowledge, agenda-setting theory has its roots in Walter Lippmann’s assessment of how we render judgments. Lippmann argued that we are not sophisticated enough to understand the intricacies of our vast global society. We can’t see and experience everything there is to know for ourselves. We rely on intermediaries—elites and the media—who can observe, record, and report back to us what they have experienced and what it means (Lippmann, 1922). The media create a pseudo-environment based on their assessment of the issues and actors, and we acquiesce, allowing that environment to become our reality in the absence of our own experiences (McCombs, 2004). If Lippmann is right, then the media set the tone for our awareness and knowledge of the world because we rely on the media to gather information about the world and to bring it to us in neat packages.

Agenda-setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory affirms and extends Lippmann’s concept of public acceptance of media reporting as a representative look at the world. It explains how the public makes decisions about what issues are important, and when extended to framing and priming, explains how the media help guide the public to decisions based on characteristics of the issues. Early scholars, like Bernard Cohen (1963), followed in Lippmann’s steps positing that, while the media may not succeed in influencing attitude change or attitude development, it is very successful at helping to focus the public on what issues deserve the most of their attention. Kurt and Gladys Lang (1983) took this one step further arguing that the public’s perceived weight of issues is directly proportional to the amount the media has emphasized the issue. There are strong, mediated effects between news reports and what people think is important (Baran & Davis, 2012). “The media are the major primary sources of national political information; for most, mass media
provide the best—and only—easily available approximation of ever-changing political realities” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, 185).

Conservatively, agenda-setting theory shows limited effects on how much the agenda impacts personal opinions and attitudes (Cutlip et al., 2006). But, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), who are credited with the formal development of this theory through empirical study, take this a step further by showing over twenty-five years of research that the media affect both cognitions and attitudes. Cognitions are what a person “knows, thinks and believes” (Shaw, 1977, 101). On the other hand, attitudes are “their likes and dislikes, pros and cons regarding political, economic, and social matters” (Shaw, 1977, 96).

Agenda-setting theory is a continuing field of growth. More than 400 studies have been published since McCombs and Shaw’s original 1972 article, and many subfields are emerging (McCombs, 2004).

McCombs and Shaw, both faculty at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, began by studying 100 voters’ articulated “most important issues” for the 1968 presidential campaign via personal interviews. The participants were selected at random from the area’s registered voters and were filtered so interviews were only conducted with those voters who had not yet made a final decision about how they would vote. The sample was representative of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and social standing. Researchers used a single community to control all other variables.

To show media effects, McCombs and Shaw then conducted a content analysis of the news. The researchers focused on content published or aired one week prior to the start of interviews through the interview period on all sources identified through a pre-test administered in Chapel Hill almost six months prior to the start of the study. The researchers identified fifteen
key issues that were critical in the election and that were featured prominently in formal media content. They also organized content by major or minor feature depending on location in the newspaper or sequence in the newscast and length of the story or segment.

McCombs and Shaw determined that most of the media coverage was not about the issues, but instead, was about the campaigns. The media heavily covered polling, campaign events, campaign analysis, and candidate criticisms of one another.

The researchers found a strong, positive Pearson correlation ($r = +.967$) between articulated importance of issue and media coverage of the issue. McCombs and Shaw observed that what voters identified as the most salient issue tended to be based on composite news exposure, suggesting that voters do attend to all news, not just the reports about their preferred issue or candidate.

Because studying the effects in composite media exposure tended to hide individual differences, the researchers separated out about half of the respondents who had not made a definitive choice of candidate, but who had leanings toward one or another. To further investigate, McCombs and Shaw ran Pearson’s correlations on articulated salient issues by the respondent’s party affiliation against composite news coverage. This statistical study would show whether individuals selectively consume media that matches their views. If selective attention was not in play, we would see evidence for agenda setting at work instead.

“Considering both major and minor news coverage, 18 of 24 possible comparisons show voters more in agreement with all the news rather than with news only about their own party/candidate preference. This finding is better explained by the agenda-setting function of the mass media than by selective perception” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, 182). Conversely, selective
perception shows the central influence to be the individual, and the media are selectively parsed to support the individual’s existing opinions (McCombs, 2004).

Finally, McCombs and Shaw calculated Pearson’s correlations between each news source and every other news source. They observed several trends: the highest correlations were seen in like media, high correlations across the board showed relative use of common news values, and highest correlations for major news items suggested relative consensus in what stories were important. McCombs and Shaw were also able to show that high affect is correlated with low openness to new information by gauging affect in the interview.

McCombs and Shaw continued their investigation with a similar study of the 1972 presidential election. They researched the issues salient to voters in Charlotte, North Carolina, at three times in the summer and early fall prior to the election. They only considered content in the Charlotte Observer and television networks. They determined that the newspaper was an influencer at the very beginning of the fall campaign season; it determined which issues were important to voters. Television did not show an impact during any of the intervals studied. McCombs and Shaw determined that the seven salient issues in the election were swayed by heavy media exposure of these topics (McCombs, 2004).

Further replication continued in an advanced study McCombs and Shaw initiated during the 1976 presidential election. They branched out to three communities with varying average socioeconomic statuses across the Northeast and upper Midwest. This study was longer; the researchers interviewed panels of voters nine times during an eleven-month period. They simultaneously conducted content analyses of the three national television networks and all local newspapers in each of the three cities. As they found in the 1972 studies, the influence was
strongest at the beginning of the election cycle when voters were still somewhat malleable and were just beginning to pay attention to the upcoming election.

In order to adequately compare salience for changing issues in new elections and varying communities, McCombs and Shaw used correlation statistics to compare whether there was a relationship between voters’ articulated salient issues—the public agenda—and the issues that received the most coverage—the media agenda. The researchers found a strong positive correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda in television coverage at the beginning of the election year. They found a weak positive correlation between the public agenda and newspaper coverage at the beginning of the election year. Effects weakened as Election Day approached and diminished after Election Day passed.

With correlation statistics they were also able to most definitively discredit the idea that the media agenda is influenced by the public agenda, which was the theory of many of McCombs and Shaw’s critics. No significant correlations were found in studying the degree to which the public may be swaying the media, and in each case, the correlation between media agenda influencing public agenda was far stronger than the correlation between public agenda influencing media agenda.

The agenda-setting theory was further supported by a variety of later studies. In one investigation, researchers looked at the public’s response to news that was overexposed—covered too frequently or too prominently—as compared to the actual impact of the issue. The public developed a false sense of concern because of the coverage despite the issue itself having never changed or having improved (McCombs, 2004).

It is important to note that, while McCombs and Shaw conducted the seminal studies on U.S. presidential elections, agenda-setting effects are not limited to this arena only. In
subsequent studies, researchers have shown the same effect in countries around the globe and with specific issues deeper than a broad presidential campaign. More recent studies have even been able to show the same effects with online news and campaign content (McCombs, 2004).

While researchers observed variation in issue salience, they also observed variation in the attributes of the policies and people in elections. “Agenda setting is a theory about the transfer of salience, both the salience of objects and the salience of their attributes” (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, 62).

One final note from these historical, seminal studies is important: the media agenda did not supersede personal experience. Media content could not overcome positive or negative personal history with a candidate or policy (McCombs, 2004).

Agenda-setting theory accounts for strong media effects. Researchers have shown the effects are direct, somewhat uniform and powerful (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). They were not able to show immediacy, however, or to show impact to attitudes beyond cognitions (Shaw, 1977; McCombs, 2004). Eugene Shaw (1977) claims that people only selectively attend to media messages and those who pay more attention to the media than their peers become the influencers who share information with others. Therefore, attitude change comes as a result of peer influence, not news coverage.

**Need for Orientation**

Agenda-setting can be seen as anchored in Needs and Gratifications Theory (Shaw, 1977). The media satisfies needs for information, learning, sharing with others, and being “in the know.” Needs and gratifications seemed to be the antecedent to news-seeking behavior. Perhaps most important is the need for orientation with the world (Shaw, 1977). “In the realm of public affairs, the greater an individual’s need for orientation, the more likely he or she is to attend to
the agenda of the mass media with their wealth of information on politics and government. This concept also identifies the issues that are most likely to move from the media agenda to the public agenda” (McCombs, 2004, 66).

We observe particular emphasis on the concept of need for orientation because it provides a psychological explanation for agenda setting (Swanson, 1988). Mass communication provides people with a “high need for orientation about politics,” a way not only to learn about the issue, but also a way to call upon predispositions to make determinations (McCombs and Shaw 1993). Increased news coverage not only increased salience, but primed attributes as characteristics for judgment that sometimes generalizes to the whole policy or the politician’s whole performance (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar, 1991).

While on the surface, agenda-setting theory may seem straightforward—what the media cover is what the public sees as important—a number of researchers are concerned with the deeper causes of these tendencies. “According to a memory-based model, judgments and attitude formation are directly correlated with “the ease in which instances or associations could be brought to mind” (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973, 208; Scheufele, 2000, 299). “Political issues that are most salient or accessible in a person’s memory will most strongly influence perceptions of political actors and figures” (Scheufele, 2000, 300).

Some researchers have chosen to further explicate the concept of salience. In McCombs and Shaw’s initial studies, salience meant an issue was important to the public. Over time, however, salience has been shown to involve both importance and accessibility of understanding and conceptualization (Weaver, 2007). Thus, two competing theoretical approaches emerged. Accessibility could mean just processing information as it is initially received. It could also,
however, refer to information processing that is ongoing and relies on both drawing from stored ideation and adding new information as it is received and processed (Scheufele, 2000).

**Agenda-Setting and Framing**

While first-level agenda setting involves “what to think about”—objects—second-level agenda setting and framing involves “how to think about it”—attributes (Weaver, 2007). Media influence both the importance of the object and which attributes of the object are important. This second level carries a means by which people assess relative positivity and negativity of the attribute (Baran & Davis, 2012).

Second-level agenda setting is linked to framing theory. Framing is the way the media chooses to expose and discuss some attributes of an object while not discussing others. A frame is “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” (Tankard, 1991, 3). Framing is also used to provide shortcuts in the form of “images, metaphors, catchphrases, taglines” and the like to explicate the attributes of an object. These shortcuts can be used by both the media and by communicators to summon individuals’ deep ideological framework (Weaver, 2007). Agenda-setting and priming work by making issues more salient; framing works by helping us make sense of incoming information (Weaver, 2007, 143). “Framing can be considered an extension of agenda setting as it “is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed” (McCombs, 1997, 6; Scheufele, 2000, 297).

**Agenda-Setting and Priming**

Priming is the tendency for news reports to prompt individuals to draw from their political ideology and memory and use these bits of information to make political judgments
(Baran & Davis, 2012). Priming supports the views Lippmann, Converse, and Zaller had that political sophistication among ordinary citizens is low and that people cannot know and experience everything about every issue. Instead, they rely on cues and shortcuts.

Priming is a consequence of agenda setting. Priming allows individuals to make judgments about issues based on characteristics tied to the policy or candidate involved (Weaver et al., 1975; Weaver, 2007). While agenda setting makes issues more salient, priming makes characteristics of the issues more salient in order that they be used to form attitudes. Individuals’ use this understanding of what is salient later when they receive news stories with cues. Agenda-setting is often seen as involving cognitions, but priming is often attributed to attitude formation (Weaver, 2007). The “alliance of priming and agenda setting has strengthened the theoretical base of agenda-setting effects by providing a better understanding of how the mass media not only tell us ‘what to think about’ but also ‘what to think’” (Cohen, 1963; Weaver, 2007, 145).

Priming helps to activate existing, well-formed beliefs by adding emphasis and altering the salience of issues. Cues, bits of information that help individuals make decisions in line with their ideology, typically fall into two non-mutually exclusive categories. Performance- and personality-related cues prime the image of candidates or elected officials. Priming for issues typically involves trying to elevate the importance of an issue(s) over others (Drunkman & Jacobs, 2013).

**Agenda Setting, Framing, Priming, Politics, and Practitioners**

Scheufele articulates a three-step process for agenda setting that begins with agenda-building, whereby an object is cast into sustained media attention and is tied to a common understanding of an issue. Agenda-building is elite influence operating on the media. “This formulation of the process of agenda building, then, attributes a key role both to mass media for
initially picking up an issue and to political actors for keeping an issue prominent in the media agenda or even increasing its prominence” (Scheufele, 2000, 303). This leads to agenda setting, whereby the media communicate that issue to the public; this step is typically taken when the public agenda comes to mirror the media agenda. Finally, the agenda’s attributes come together to influence judgments of government, policies, and politicians through priming.

Framing follows a similar construct based on three steps—frame-building, frame-setting, and consequences of framing—such that elites influence the media who frame the people and issues covered. Audience frames come to resemble the media frames to which the public was exposed. “At least five factors may potentially influence how journalists frame a given issue: social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalistic routines, and ideological or political orientations of journalists” (Scheufele, 2000, 307).

Cutlip and colleagues note that individuals’ interpersonal conversations also impacted the agenda-setting effect if the outcome of those conversations conflicted with the media (Cutlip et al., 2006). Media effects also change for issues people have directly experienced. Media effects are least powerful with people who have direct experiences with the object (Cutlip et al., 2006).

Agenda-setting has helped us understand media effects in better identifying the time and placement that has most impact. Media effects are most powerful at the beginnings of campaigns (Cutlip et al., 2006). Lead stories have the strongest effects (Baran & Davis, 2012). Highly dramatic stories have lesser effects than expected (Baran & Davis, 2012). These are practical applications for communicators and media wishing to garner the desired attention at a critical juncture with the public.
More work is to be done in the socio-psychological sphere to understand underlying causes of agenda setting’s effects and dig deeper into attitudes, not just cognitions. Some of this may lead naturally into a better definition of salience, or at least, one that can be universally adopted. Currently, researchers define salience in many ways—for some it is what is top of mind, for others it is importance, for others it is accessibility within memory or ideology, and still others define it as attention to or awareness of a topic, which can be two definitions in itself (Takeshita, 2006, 277).

**Emotion and Reason**

We would quickly put to rest relentlessly contentious issues if their meanings were based in facts; instead, the meanings are subjective to one’s perspective and life experiences. There is rarely consensus around facts and their meanings (Edelman, 1988). “There are multiple realities because people differ in their situations and their purposes” (Edelman, 1988, 6). This may explain how, as I will show later, Obama was able to linguistically reappropriate “Obamacare” to rally supporters. “At extraordinary moments, campaigns can exercise…’performative power,’ influence over other actors’ definitions of the situation and their consequent actions through well-timed, resonant, and rhetorically effective communicative action and interaction” (Kreiss, 2014, 3; Reed, 2013).

Those whose careers depend on public affairs, advocacy, and attention to the news “constitute an avid audience for the political spectacle. For them there are weekly, daily, sometimes hourly triumphs and defeats, grounds for hope and for fear, a potpourri of happenings that mark trends and aberrations, some of them historic” (Edelman, 1988, 6). But for most, public affairs are irrelevant or uninteresting, and civic engagement is not a priority. “Regimes and proponents of political causes know that it takes much coercion, propaganda, and the
portrayal of issues in terms that entertain, distort, and shock to extract a public response of any kind” (Edelman, 1988, 7). Sadly, this exists despite widespread literacy, connectedness to others, and boundless accessible information (Edelman, 1988).

“Every instance of language and action resonates with the memory, the fear, or the anticipation of other signifiers, so that there are radiating networks of meaning that vary with the situations of spectators and actors” (Edelman, 1988, 10). These subjective, ideological perceptions, varying based on social circumstance and life experience, become the so-called facts of the spectacle. These alleged facts are used to reinforce and continue ideologies, but both are based in subjective understandings. Each generate “points of view and therefore of perceptions, anxieties, aspirations, and strategies” (Edelman, 1988, 10)—they generate meanings that shape each person’s political reality. “The uses of all such terms in specific situations are strategies, deliberate or unrecognized, for strengthening or undermining support for specific courses of action and for particular ideologies” (Edelman, 1988, 11).

**Priming, Politics, and Practitioners**

When voters rely on political cues to make judgments, they may behave rationally or irrationally. On the one hand, people seek consistency in their attitudes, so they seek out cues that will help them align new beliefs with old ones. They seek out candidates with like attributes to make policy decisions that fall in line with their existing ideological framework. On the other, cues help busy voters avoid the time- and energy-consuming exercise of seeking out and attempting to understand complex information about issues. Cues substitute burdensome information with helpful information that still allows voters to arrive at the same destination (Conover, 1981). “Symbols become that facet of experiencing the material world that gives it a specific meaning… The language, rituals, and objects to which people respond are not abstract
ideas. If they matter at all, it is because they are accepted as basic to the quality of life” (Edelman, 1988, 8). Signs are effective because of the context in which they are experienced (Edelman, 1988).

Conover theorized that “voters develop stereotypes or ‘implicit theories’—structures of related attributes or expectations—concerning various types of political figures. These stereotypes are then used to fill in information about the candidates. In effect, using available information a voter may attribute a characteristic to a candidate. Subsequently, this characteristic may act as a cue in the sense that the voter infers additional candidate traits or issue positions which are related to the cue according to his or her stereotype” (Conover, 1981, 432). So, there are two components to cueing—the cue and the stereotype. Each have both image and policy dimensions. Though any attribute can become a cue, those most central to one’s ideology draw more inferences, and so, become most important. (Conover, 1981).

Lakoff (1980, 2002) extends this theory of cues and symbols when he speaks of metaphors, which help us to define and experience one thing in terms of another. He argues that our conceptual processes are built on a series of metaphors that define our everyday understanding of the world. If we are strategically focused on one comparison, we are prevented from focusing on another. In this way political communication can intentionally hide some elements while exposing others. Drawing back to agenda-setting theory, Lakoff argues that metaphors help to shape our realities based on how they are constructed, which can be manipulated. Just as Lippmann argued that we have don’t have direct experience of everything in our world and look to elites to fill in the gaps, Lakoff argues that because we understand concepts based on other concepts there are very few things we understand directly (Lakoff,
Lakoff goes further to claim that “rationality is therefore imaginative by its very nature” because our reasoning involves the entanglement of so many metaphors for which we do not have direct experience (Lakoff, 1980, 193). Metaphors provide frames that allow us to understand and create our worldview (Lakoff, 2002). They provide the basis for our reasoning because metaphors provide structure for our ideas and concepts (Lakoff, 2002). Thus, metaphors allow us to make unconscious decisions based on the framing of our conceptions of reality.

Drew Westen (2007) takes this one step further, arguing that specifically, emotion and affectively loaded cues, help us make most decisions. We do not make decisions in a rational way, but instead, operate in “bounded rationality,” whereby we take mental shortcuts to make decisions (Westen, 2007, 29). Our thinking and emotion are inextricably linked; primates show an inability for one facet to operate properly without the other. In fact, he was able to show that the brain shuts down when faced with threatening information and reasons to emotionally biased conclusions. (Westen, 2007). “The fact that someone or something holds any significance to us at all means that it has emotional associations that generally become active along with any thoughts of it, whether or not we are aware of them” (Westen, 2007).

Lakoff (2008) argues similarly that our thought processes are not rational. Eighteenth century reason, based on premises of universality, disembodiment, logic, value-neutrality, and interest-orientation, contribute a flawed understanding to how we make decisions (Lakoff, 2008). We decide with both thinking and emotion; a lot of our decision making process is unconscious. Lakoff posits that those who wish to persuade us should use frames—from frame analysis in rhetorical studies versus framing theory in mass communication—to help audiences appreciate
facts (Lakoff, 2008). Persuasion appeals to the complex narratives that are based on frames of previous experience. “Narratives and frames have…integrated intellectual-emotional content; we are all living out narratives” (Lakoff, 2008, 36). These oversimplifications of reality help us arrive at conclusions more quickly and in line with our past preferences (Lakoff, 2008).

**Social Construction**

Edelman (1988) shows that “whether events are noticed and what they mean depend upon observers’ situations and the language that reflects and interprets those situations” (Edelman, 1988, 2), so we must be wary of what the elites and media present and how they present it. We must also be mindful of possible manipulation caused by collusion of elites and media, or caused as unintended consequences of unfiltered, unconstrained media content. “We are acutely aware that observers and what they observe construct one another; that political developments are ambiguous entities that mean what concerned observers construe them to mean” (Edelman, 1988, 1).

Political scientists have not only addressed the notion that we construct our sense of reality based on social interactions and experiences. Many social scientists in a number of disciplines have contributed to frame analysis in rhetorical studies which posits similarly that we get a general understanding of the whole, and from it, we construct the parts based on our personal experiences (Barlett, 1932). We cannot treat each new experience individually, but instead we make sense of our world by drawing on the connections between things we are experiencing now with things we have experienced in the past (Tannen, 1993). Linguists and psychologists discuss schema (Tannen, 1993), which are comparable to Converse’s belief systems (Converse, 1981) in that they are both characterizing automatic processes that rule our thinking as long as our experiences follow expectations. We only start to think for ourselves
when our expectations are not met (Tannen, 1993). Interestingly, this represents an individual microcosm of Indexing Theory, wherein the media only begin to explore issues when elites disagree (Bennett et al, 2007). Social science’s frame analysis supports Edelman’s and Lippmann’s theories of politics through social construction. Both discuss our tendencies to accept wholesale what media and elites are telling us about the world we cannot experience. Our world is socially constructed.

**Language and Emotion**

Over the years, candidates and parties have made strategic use of words and phrases that they have imbued with connotations, or that have previously implied connotations, to represent key issues to their policy agendas. “Even the name applied to an issue can influence the salience of certain points of view and the distribution of public opinion. Journalists covering the current struggle over abortion agonize about what label to use for this issue because both of the terms commonly used by participants—‘freedom of choice’ and ‘right to life’—are affectively loaded” (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, 63).

These metaphors have deeply partisan cues hidden in their easily recalled turns of phrase. Voters on either side of the political continuum, even if they are not sophisticated, know immediately how to vote on these issues to remain within party preferences. These metaphors empower voters to be—just as Lippmann described them—unsophisticated and uninformed, but allows the candidates and parties to correctly persuade them nonetheless.

Conservative candidates and the Republican Party have demonstrated success creating terms with built-in connotations in order to connect issues they oppose with negative ideas or characters. In 2007, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) was coined “Obamacare” almost concurrently by a right-leaning journalist and would-be politician and by a
healthcare lobbyist in order to connect it to President Obama, who was viewed very unfavorably by Republicans. Mitt Romney was the first politician to use the term just a few months after it was first used. The use of “Obamacare” became so universal that it is now used by the media to represent the PPACA because of pervasive public use of the term.

**The Power of Language in Priming Cues**

“Armed force may keep people in a state of unwilling subjugation for years, even for generations. Only through language, however, can human understanding itself be manipulated and people brought to cooperate in their own subjugation” (Green, 1987, ix). If one is intellectually sophisticated and has access to information, however, language instead becomes liberating.

Green paints a stark picture of how easily and unknowingly the public can be driven to the will of the political agent. He reflects Lippmann and Converse in their warning that most are not politically sophisticated or inclined, so they rely on a few key terms that cue basic understanding, attitudes based on predispositions and ideology, and form the basis for their perception of public affairs. “Whoever shapes public understanding of the labels thereby shapes the nature of political discourse” (Green, 1987, ix).

Green argues that labels, or cues, are intentionally abstract so they are intriguing, evocative, and ripe for reification on politicians’ terms. “Politicians are perpetually attempting to infuse them with politically useful connotations” (Green, 1987, 2). Defining labels on the politician’s terms is not an exercise of conveying accuracy or intellectualism, but instead is used for the “evocation of a political response” (Green, 1987, 3). This reinforces the use of priming to impact attitudes, not cognitions. “Political labels are image-laden, appealing as much to the emotions as to the intellect” (Green, 1987, 2).
**Executive Communication**

Arguably, while President Woodrow Wilson’s Committee on Public Information, the first administration credited with leveraging communication to advance policy priorities, was dismantled, residual tactical applications endured and are still in use to the present day. President Nixon created a massive spin operation with a White House Office of Communication to centralize messaging and communication; this group was also involved, however, in the “development of elaborate media strategies to sell policies, nominations, and other initiatives to the public” (Greenberg, 2016, 398-399). President Carter hired a team of pollsters and political strategists (Greenberg, 2016, 403). President Regan relied on a “line of the day,” a strategy that President Nixon had piloted, to generate sound bites based on strict use of talking points and strategic messages (Greenberg, 2016, 410). During President George H. W. Bush term, journalists were not troubled over covering news they knew was contrived (Greenberg, 2016, 417). President Clinton left no room to chance by establishing a War Room for rapid response to media through quickly crafted messages (Greenberg, 2016, 419). President George W. Bush employed heavy use of emotionally charged terms, like “axis of evil” and had some of the most spectacular pseudoevents, including the “Mission Accomplished” speech which ignited a media blitz around (and prematurely claimed) victory in Iraq (Greenberg, 2016, 433, 435). And finally, President Obama bucked the trend to some extent by issuing information directly to the public through social media, hiring a team to develop self-generated video content, and resurrecting a digital transmission-based White House news service (Greenberg, 2016, 443).

**How the Digital Age Impacts Communication**

The advent of the Internet changed the modern history of information provision by the executive branch. In 1995, the Clinton administration instituted policies for the nominal
provision of executive information on the Internet (Shkabatur, 2015). Clinton encouraged the use of technology for transparency by making available a limited number of executive documents online. He also mandated that all executive agencies, utilize the Internet and information technology in their interactions with the public. For example, with the help of multiple agencies the website FirstGov.gov was created to provide an online portal for citizens to access information about voting, travel, and immigration (“Adapter and Adopter,” 2015).

The George W. Bush administration built upon these efforts at improving government transparency by instituting the E-government Act and Freedom of Information Act (Shkabatur, 2015). This act established a federal office for the sole purpose of promotion of government e-resources. President Obama, much like his predecessor, continued to to advance the accessibility and awareness of online government resources by issuing the Open Government Directive (Evans & Campos, 2013), which mandated that all federal agencies must be transparent in their operations. Moreover, this mandate determined that issues of transparency would be evaluated by the administration over-time (Evans & Campos, 2013).

**White House Office of Digital Strategy**

The Obama administration is also credited with improving communication by the White House by using online platforms like Youtube and Skype to engage in conversations with the public, and more specifically, promote the website healthcare.gov (Wedell, 2016). Obama has also been a proponent of using social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr to communicate directives directly to the public (Eilperin, 2015). To this end, the administration boasts the White House Office of Digital Strategy, a fourteen-member department that is responsible for crafting and maintaining the president’s social media accounts (Eilperin, 2015). The administration created the White House Office of Digital Strategy in 2009 when Obama
took office, and has steadily expanded the number of platforms used, with announcements in January 2016 that the White House would be using Snapchat (Ferguson, 2016). This department is also credited with creating hundreds of online videos that explain the administration’s perspective on issues ranging from immigration to bank regulation. These videos often highlight major speeches like the State of the Union address (Ferguson, 2016). In this way, the White House bypasses the news media – which has little incentive to air presidential remarks without interpretation – by using social media.

**Executive Use of Social Media to Communicate**

Social media was originally developed to enable personal communication between private individuals; its use has extended to corporations that use the medium to communicate with customers and to promote products (Kaplan & Hainlein, 2010). Similarly, social media has been used by non-profit organizations to spread membership information and to garner action such as recruiting attendance at event rallies and fundraisers (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

In politics, social media is used by political campaigns to signal information to potential voters, fundraise, and recruit volunteers (Shirky, 2011). Social media has facilitated campaigns’ voter outreach; for example, platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow for immediate and personalized interaction (Grant et al., 2010). Campaigns also use video services like Youtube, Vine, and Vimeo to air political ads instead of buying costly air time. In the 2008 presidential campaign, Republican nominee John McCain released a sixty-second online-only ad that portrayed Obama as a celebrity by comparing him to the likes of Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. Such so-called soft attack ads never find their way to television airwaves, but are designed for online consumption ("A Look Back," 2008).
Social media have also been widely used by legislators and by government agencies (Golbeck et al., 2010). Members of Congress use these platforms to communicate with their constituents, to provide updates on legislation, or to highlight events or policies for self-interested reasons (Golbeck et al., 2010). Platforms like Twitter allow for efficient communication by reducing the costs associated with traditional means of communication (i.e. postage, staff) with followers who may include constituents, private individuals, organizations, and journalists (Kavanguh et al., 2012). Members of Congress use Twitter to provide information regarding policy, relevant news articles, report on their daily activities, or personalize their image (Golbeck et al., 2010). A recent study on Twitter use by members of Congress revealed that most tweets were actually links to news articles or other web links (Glassman et al., 2009). What characterizes this use of social media is that it is typically uni-directional: while members of Congress use their Twitter feed to provide information, they respond to constituents less often (Waters & Williams, 2011). In contrast, data suggest the White House uses Twitter to respond to questions from Twitter users regularly (Rodgers, 2016).

Individual government agencies utilize social media in much the same manner as politicians, by posting select information on activities, and by signaling policy priorities. While the news media are the traditional recipients of government information, the White House now uses social media, and Twitter specifically, to reach an audience that may not be tuning into nightly television news broadcasts (Eilperin, 2015). Bypassing media to provide the public information that emphasizes the administration’s policy priorities gives the executive the advantage in framing issues and using language strategically (Hopper, 2015). However, many call into question the premise that large numbers of Americans receive their information from the likes of the White House blog, Twitter or Facebook profiles (Pew 2012, 2015a). The fact remains
that the administration is using Twitter to reach individuals; whether the target audience is the public or journalists is unclear (Aharony, 2012). Messner and Distaso (2008) find that news outlets often use weblogs as legitimate news sources, which prompts Conway and colleagues (2013, pp. 1607) to speculate that “candidates could take advantage of microblogging in a way that attracts the attention of the news media.” If presidential candidates could potentially use social media messages to attract the attention of the press, then surely the same could apply to the president once he or she is in office.

Critics have voiced concerns over the use of social media by government claiming that it may increase “noise” or information overload, and fails to present a comprehensive, coherent message to the public (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). They argue that individuals are not likely to be able to effectively parse through the numerous social media accounts of individual government agencies. Others have questioned whether individual government departments are equipped to manage the staffing and technology required to use social media effectively (Criado et al., 2013). The technological know-how of individuals managing government agency leaders is also questionable (Oliveira & Welch, 2013). On the other hand, one could argue that social media contributes to the mandate that agencies increase transparency in their operations (Bertot et al., 2012; Chun et al., 2010; Mergel, 2013). Still, transparency is relative: federal agencies provide information suitable for promotion, while the provision of such data may meet both public good and self-interested goals. Altogether, government agencies are using social media to provide information that they are willing to let the public see; this is not, however, necessarily the information that the public seeks (Janssen, 2012).
Elite Collusion with Media

When elites and policymakers agree, the press has difficulty intervening to report contrary facts. It takes a break in agreement for the press to start exploring the issues more deeply and exposing the truth behind the spin. The system of the free press is limited by elite opinion. Obviously, influence of elites in the media can impact what events they cover and how they cover them. Taken to an extreme, “the press has grown too close to the sources of power in this nation, making it largely the communication mechanism of the government, not the people” (Bennett et al, 2007, 1).

Public Opinion and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

Public opinion about affordable healthcare is strongly tied to personal costs and impacts to the nation’s economy and deficit. Initial passage of the bill relied heavily on the Congressional Budget Office’s (CBO) estimation that the PPACA would reduce the deficit and cut healthcare costs by almost $600 billion in the first ten years. A CBO estimation published two months after the bill’s passage into law, however, shows projected increases in the federal deficit as a result of the PPACA (Huntington et al, 2011).

The midterm election in 2010 was a referendum, of sorts, on the PPACA; the change of majority in Congress was a clear indication that Americans were unhappy with the law, among other issues. Approximately 55% of Americans favored repealing the law and President Obama’s percentage approval on handling healthcare dropped to the mid-thirties. In fact, subsequent retrospective study shows that for this issue, partisan public opinion was not in favor of enacting this legislation from the beginning. The issue was heavily divided along demographic and party lines. While about 76% of Democrats supported the PPACA, about 79% of Republicans opposed it. Seniors over the age of 65 were more likely to oppose it than those age 18-29, whose support
percentage was in the mid-sixties (Blendon & Benson, 2010). It seems that public attitudes did not affect policy after all. (Huntington, 2011; Page & Shapiro, 1983; Page & Shapiro, 1992). Broad, aggregate public opinion remained opposed to the PPACA (Huntington, 2011).

In 2012, polls showed that health care was the second most important issue for likely voters in deciding their 2012 presidential vote (CBS–NYT, September 2012; HSPH–SSRS, 2012). This is the highest that health care has been ranked as a presidential election issue since 1992,” when the issue was introduced as a priority of the Clinton White House (CNN–NEP, 2008; Blendon et al., 2012).

In an average of the 27 polls related to healthcare leading into the 2012 election, a majority of Americans did not approve of the law, despite the popularity of some of its provisions. While most people believed the PPACA would be beneficial to underprivileged groups, many believed the PPACA would have little positive impact for the economy or those already insured. There are some clearly interwoven issues at play: provisions for abortion, Medicare/Medicaid, and the aging (Blendon et al, 2013).

About 81% of respondents in an average of polls report that healthcare would be a very important issue when they voted, however, only 24% chose it—or one of its interwoven issues—as their top issue (Blendon et al, 2013; ABC–WP, July 2012; CBS–NYT, July 2012; Fox, 2012). Those who identified healthcare and those who identified abortion as top issues fell on either side of the ideological and party spectrum. Those who placed healthcare near the top of their list of most important issues were likely to vote for Obama (Blendon et al, 2013).

During the initial roll-out of Obamacare in late 2013, the plan generally received negative coverage on network news outlets (Media Matters, 2013) and cable news outlets (Wilstein, 2013). While negative in tone, the coverage focused on skepticism regarding how the plan would
work and its eventual cost. Interviews with individuals working in the healthcare profession, (i.e., managers, doctors) were prominently featured on newscasts. They claimed that Obamacare would undoubtedly raise the price of medical premiums. Additionally, there were also interviews of average citizens who claimed that Obamacare would either raise the cost of their own private insurance or would result in higher taxes for everyone, as opposed to the cost savings being touted by the president (Holland, 2013).

Despite negative coverage of the Affordable Care Act, public opinion and perception were more mixed than was portrayed in the media. In the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election, public opinion about the PPACA was strongly tied to perceived personal and economic costs. Initial passage of the bill relied heavily on the Congressional Budget Office’s (CBO) estimation that the PPACA would reduce the deficit and cut healthcare costs by almost $143 billion in the first ten years and $1.2 trillion in the next decade (Huntington et al., 2011). However, a CBO estimation published two months later showed projected $115 billion increase in federal spending to account for provisions not initially included in their calculation (Huntington et al., 2011), heightening healthcare anxieties at the polls. In fact, polls demonstrated that health care was the second most important issue for likely voters in 2012, its highest ranking since 1992 when the issue was introduced as a priority of the Clinton White House (CNN–NEP, 2008; Blendon et al., 2012).

In a poll average, 81% of Americans considered the PPACA to be a very important issue in their vote for president, and only 45% approved of the legislation as it was initially passed into law (Blendon et al., 2012; ABC–WP, July 2012; CBS–NYT, July 2012; Fox, 2012). To add to this tension, provisions in the PPACA related to abortion, Medicare/Medicaid, and the aging (Blendon et al., 2012) increased the salience of healthcare in voters’ decision-making. Party
identity is the single biggest predictor of whether or not someone approved of the law (Dugan, 2014). Public opinion about the PPACA was sharply divided along partisan lines.

Problems with the Affordable Healthcare Act continued through its implementation in January 2014, and negative news coverage continued alongside it. A string of missteps and mismanagement on the part of officials responsible for the rollout garnered much of the media’s attention (Alter, 2014). Particularly, coverage discussed difficulties with signing up for Obamacare and issues with navigation of and access to the website. The site was also plagued with numerous technical difficulties as a result of various contractors being used to develop the site without effective communication between them.

Republican political leaders were apt to seize upon the bad press to point fingers at Obama for perceived policy failures. They claimed that the inability to effectively provide the online interface was a signal that the whole plan was a debacle, and that massive amounts of money had presumably been wasted on a program that did not work. Accordingly, the press characterized the website failure as both indicative of conflict between the White House and Congress, and also mismanagement by the Obama administration (Cohen, 2013). Analysis over time shows that while coverage was negative and salient initially, it decreased in 2014 (Noyes, 2014).
CHAPTER 3
STUDY 1: DO POLITICAL PARTIES BRAND ISSUES TO PROVIDE CUES TO THE PUBLIC?

Just prior to the passage of the Public Privacy and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), Andy Martin, a self-proclaimed investigative journalist and would-be GOP politician first used the term “Obamacare” to characterize the healthcare reform solutions that were a hallmark of then-Senator Barack Obama’s presidential campaign platform. He used the term to threaten about the prospect of an Obama presidency (Reeve, 2011). Sometime just afterward, Jeanne Schuete Scott, a lobbyist working for the healthcare industry, used the term. (Her use of the term came in March 2007, so it is unclear whether she had submitted her publication for a deadline before or after Martin had published his blog on February 8, 2007.) Scott predicted the popular issue healthcare reform would have in the 2008 election and used a number of terms specific to a variety of candidates and prospective candidates’ names before “care” (Reeve, 2011). Finally, Mitt Romney used the term on May 30, 2007 (Reeve, 2011). Romney was the first mainstream politician to use the term and began the GOP’s use of the term throughout the 2008 election cycle. While public opinion broadly supported the PPACA when called by its formal name, the use of “Obamacare” elicited high negatives despite popularity for many of the provisions.

Ironically, during the 2012 election cycle, the GOP nominated Governor Mitt Romney as their presidential candidate. Romney was governor when Massachusetts’ passed a healthcare reform bill in 2006 on which many claim the PPACA was based. Political practitioners on the left linguistically reappropriated the term “Obamacare,” attaching affective cues to draw support in favor their legislation.

The so-called pictures in our heads of our dynamic world are based in large part on the perception and explanation of media and elites (Lippmann, 1922). With the influence of elites,
the media establish some issues as more salient than others by what they include, exclude, feature prominently, and feature most often. These salient issues are broad objects, but focusing on the attributes of those objects, media and elites have shown an ability to influence the public’s perceptions and attitudes about those attributes. They have even been successful in transferring positive or negative characteristics about those issues to individuals or policies that are close to the issue. The use of priming cues helps the public draw on their mental pictures, belief systems, ideologies, and past experiences to develop attitudes; practitioners have been able to manipulate those pictures by the loaded cues they use that draw connections, provide subtle implications, and help the public determine how to vote.

**Hypotheses**

Party and ideology cues correlate to perceptions of candidates’ issue positions. Voters assign positive characteristics and favor policy stances to candidates and elected officials who share their political ideology. Likewise, they attribute negative traits and beliefs about those of opposing ideology (Conover, 1981).

H1: Republican Party and candidate tweets will oppose the in-party Democrats to discourage support of the PPACA.

H2: Republican Party and candidate tweets will mention in-party candidates, often disliked by the Republican out-party, to discourage support of the PPACA.

“It is just as evident that individuals’ opinions on political issues change with…cues about the probable future consequences of political actions” (Edelman, 1988, 3). Those who saw Obama’s first term as bad, likely read into use of his name, negative connotations. Thus, in 2012, when I saw the GOP begin to actively use the term “Obamacare” in Twitter, it could signal disaster if you disagreed with his first-term policies or second-term priorities. “To criticize a
policy by branding it with a ‘bad’ label is not to show detailed links between policy and outcome but rather to evoke certain negative attitudes currently inhering in the label” (Green, 1987, 4).

H3: Republican Party and candidate tweets will use the and “affectively loaded” (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, 63) word “Obamacare” to discourage support of the PPACA.

Similarly, positive cues are expected to draw positive attitudes while negative cues are expected to draw negative attitudes (Conover, 1981).

H4: Democrat Party and candidate tweets will skew positive in tone while Republican Party and candidate tweets will skew negative.

“In particular, when people categorize themselves with respect to a particular attribute, their distinctions between groups are typically made in ‘us-them’ terms. Consequently, more positive characteristics are usually attributed to ‘in-group’ members, while inferences about the ‘out-group’—in contrast to balance theory predictions—are not necessarily negative (Hamilton, 1976)” (Conover, 1981, 435).

H5: Democrat Party and candidate tweets will skew toward supporting the Democrat in-party while Republican party and candidate tweets will skew toward opposing the Democrat in-party.

H6: Democrat Party and candidate tweets will skew toward opposing the Republican out-party while Republican party and candidate tweets will skew toward supporting the Republican out-party.

Methods

I accessed 1,571 tweets using Topsy, an online Twitter archive service. I measured a two-week period prior to Election Day—October 23 through November 6—in 2009, 2012, and 2015.
When measuring non-election years, I maintained the same date range in order to control all non-variables. De-archived tweets represented both parties and candidates. I grouped tweets into the four categories I wished to compare: (1) Republican National Party tweets and Democratic National Party tweets in 2009, when the PPACA legislation was being considered in Congress, (2) Republican National Party tweets and Democratic National Party tweets in 2012, leading into Election Day, (3) Barack Obama and Mitt Romney tweets in 2012 prior to Election Day, and (4) Republican National Party tweets and Democratic National Party tweets in 2015, to investigate use of priming today. The PPACA legislation passed the Senate December 24, 2009

I developed a quantitative code book to assess whether the tweet supported or opposed the in- or out-party, whether the tone of the tweet was positive or negative, whether the Tweet referenced a policy or candidate, and whether the tweet used a number of tactics: testimonials, numerical statistics, or the term “Obamacare.” I coded all tweets on whether they referenced affordable healthcare or the PPACA legislation, and then further coded tweets that did mention healthcare against the full codebook. I only coded the text in the tweet itself, and did make determinations about the tweet from included links; in many instances, these links no longer have content or they have been redirected to pages that have been built since the time of the tweet. I also only coded tweets in English; it is of note that Obama was the only candidate or party to tweet in another language (Spanish). I coded all tweets as to whether they were originals or retweets to determine origins of positive and negative content and to observe differences between candidate and party accounts, which may have been managed differently. I coded for the tone of the tweet using a positive, negative, neutral, and balanced scoring system where positive indicates that one is inclined to support the PPACA, negative indicates that one is inclined to oppose the PPACA, neutral does not provide enough information to make a
judgment, and balanced gives both positive and negative information. I also coded for support and opposition. Examples of support tactics included evidence of bipartisanship, attribution of success to that party’s initiatives, or claiming or forecasting success for that party’s work. Examples of opposition tactics included blaming for failure or expected failure, anticipation of negative consequences, and use of charged language, like calling the PPACA an “experiment.” I then ran descriptive statistics to calculate mean use of each tactic, which was coded as nominal data.

For the party data set, some tweets included both support for the in-party and opposition for the out-party. For this thesis, “in-party” refers to the Democrats who occupied the presidency throughout the timeframe of this study; “out-party,” therefore, refers to the Republicans.

**Analysis**

H1 was supported with increasingly opposition-driven content in-party accounts as the years advanced. In 2009, 49.35% of the Republican Party tweets related to healthcare opposed the in-party. Of Republican Party tweets related to healthcare issued in 2012, 66.67% opposed the in-party. All of the Republican Party tweets related to healthcare in 2015 opposed the in-party. None of Mitt Romney’s tweets referenced healthcare in 2012.

H2 was supported, and the use of in-party candidate names to connote negatives even morphed over time to reflect H3. For 2009 Republican Party tweets related to healthcare, 55.84% referenced an in-party candidate. The bulk of these mentions were of Rep. Nancy Pelosi, who pushed the PPACA bill in Congress and was eligible for reelection as Speaker of the House at the time. Pelosi supported comprehensive healthcare reform at a time when even the White House thought passage of such a complete bill was impossible. All of the 2012 Republican Party healthcare-related tweets mentioned President Obama. In 2015, none of the Republican Party
tweets mentioned Obama, but all of them used the label “Obamacare.” None of Mitt Romney’s tweets referenced healthcare in 2012.

H3 was supported after initial passage of the PPACA. Use of the affectively loaded term “Obamacare” began on Twitter in 2012. Of the 2009 healthcare-related, Republican Party tweets, none used the term “Obamacare.” In both 2012 and 2015, all of the Republican Party’s healthcare-related tweets used the term “Obamacare.” As mentioned previously, Mitt Romney did not tweet about healthcare in 2012.

H4 was supported. The Democrat Party did not tweet about the PPACA in 2009. In 2012, 83.33% of the healthcare-related Democrat Party tweets were positive. Of the 2015 Democrat Party healthcare related tweets, only 40% were positive. In contrast, in 2009, only 10.39% of the Republican Party tweets related to healthcare were positive. None of the Republican Party tweets related to healthcare issued in 2012 or 2015 were positive.

H5 was supported. In 2009, the Democrat Party did not tweet about the PPACA. In 2012, however, 83.33% of the Democrat Party tweets related to healthcare (3.55% of total) lent support to the in-party. In 2015, 40% of the healthcare-related Democrat Party tweets (5% of total) supported the in-party. It is of note that the remaining 40% opposed the out-party and 20% were informative and neutral. Candidate Obama’s healthcare-related tweets (2.50% of total) supported the in-party 70.59% of the time. Conversely, 49.35% of the Republican Party healthcare-related tweets in 2009 (77% of total) opposed the in-party. In 2012 and 2015, all healthcare-related Republican Party tweets opposed the in-party. Candidate tweets cannot be measured because Romney did not tweet about healthcare, but Obama’s tweets supported the in-party 70.59% of the time (of 2.50% of total).
H6 was supported. I cannot compare the Democrat Party’s 2009 tweets because they did not issue any related to healthcare, but the Republican Party’s 2009 tweets related to healthcare (77% of total) supported the out-party 14.29% of the time. In 2012, 16.67% of the Democrat Party’s healthcare-related tweets (3.55% of total) opposed the out-party, while none of the Republican Party’s healthcare-related tweets supported the out-party. Of the Democrat Party’s 2015 tweets related to healthcare (5% of total), 40% opposed the out-party. None of the Republican Party’s 2015 healthcare-related tweets (2.47% of total) showed support for the out-party. In both 2012 and 2015, Republican healthcare-related tweets showed no support for their own party, but instead, opposed the in-party 100% of the time.

While I report here that each hypothesis was supported, I recognize the severe limitations of this very small dataset. More expansive investigation is warranted to make any fair and accurate determinations.

**Discussion**

In general, we observe broad differences between administration of the Romney and Obama accounts that support other academic study of the campaigns’ style and structure (Kreiss, 2014). This is evident in the mere mathematics of the posts: Romney’s account issued only 12.51% of the number of tweets that the Obama account did in the same time period. Obama’s digital team was granted autonomy and the campaign’s digital director was viewed as an equal to the communications director (Kreiss, 2014). In contrast, Romney’s tweets had to obtain approval of more than a dozen staffers, all the way up the chain of command. Romney’s digital team began to adapt press releases into tweets in order to have immediately available content (Kreiss, 2014). This made his tweets seem very institutional, whereas Obama’s tweets convey a more effective, conversational tone (Kelleher, 2009). Further we see use of Barack and Michelle
Obama’s initials as signatures on specific tweets to connect with their online community. These tweets were an extension of the same messages already relayed via Twitter, but placed increased importance on the message through a credible, personable sender (Park & Lee, 2013).

Why did we see so few tweets about healthcare, especially from the Republican National Committee (RNC) and Romney? Perhaps this could be attributed to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Obama’s frequent references in 2012 to “Romneycare,” the Massachusetts-run healthcare system, which served as the blueprint for the PPACA. Romney and his team may have decided to avoid discussion of healthcare because of this easy link. While the RNC used “Obamacare” in all healthcare-related tweets in 2012 and 2015, the DNC and Obama used the term more often, and took great strides to linguistically reappropriate the term and use it favorably among supporters. This tactic is supported by Conover’s study (1981) that revealed that in-party cues elicit positive attributions; Romney’s team may not have had success as Conover (1981) found further that out-party cues don’t always elicit negative attributions. Had the RNC nominated a different presidential candidate in 2012, they may have used the term “Obamacare” more frequently.

It was interesting to find two RNC tweets that supported both the in- and out-parties. One referenced support and opposition from different medical associations, with support coming from the American Medical Association and opposition coming from many state medical associations. The second referred to bipartisan cooperation to eliminate abortion-funding in the PPACA.

On the topic of abortion, another interesting finding was a high frequency in the connection between healthcare reform, abortion or women’s issues, and the economy or taxes. These were often mentioned together largely because the funding of these issues was supported in some conditions but opposed under other conditions.
Limitations

Despite many investigators’ reliance on Topsy, an online tweet archive, the software can be challenging. I was not able to pull date and time analytics, which limited my ability to cross-tabulate tactics with major national events and media coverage. This limited my ability to quantify agenda-setting effects and potentially show that, while the parties and candidates were not talking about healthcare reform much, the media was discussing it heavily. I was able to determine the date content was published by limiting the search criteria to a single 48-hour period and eliminating content that was posted the previous day; limiting search criteria to a 24-hour period returns no content.

Further, data collection was difficult because many tweets on Obama’s account were repeated. While it took a while to discover that Topsy was not providing the same tweets repeatedly, I was able to determine through close attention to the linked content that Obama’s camp just used the same language multiple times, but directed each tweet of repeated text to unique urls. Perhaps Obama’s team was testing most effective dates and times to post, and I can only imagine the amount of data they were able to collect if tracking those unique urls. This technique could also be a use of the marketing tactic whereby verbatim messages are repeated a number of times to ensure retention and conversion of an attitude. Further qualitative study of the content candidates linked would be insightful to understand opposition of and support for in- and out-party candidates and issues.

While I was able to show that my hypotheses were supported, further study to show the same effects with a larger volume of content is needed. Other than the one outlier, the 2009 Republican Party tweets, which had 77%, or n=77, tweets about healthcare, no studied group (by date and party or date and candidate) had more than 5% (n=5) tweets about healthcare. The
largest number of tweets, other than the previously referenced batch of 77, was 17 tweets issued by the Obama account (2.50% of total). In sum, only 93 party tweets and 17 candidate tweets of 1,571 total tweets were about healthcare. With a larger volume of content, additional analysis of affectively loaded metaphors, such as “healthcare experiment”, “liberty”, and “Romnesia” would be interesting.

Finally, future analysis needs to show inter-rater reliability with use of multiple coders either coding the whole corpus or significant portions of it and calculating Krippendorph’s alpha.
CHAPTER 4
STUDY 2: HOW DOES THE WHITE HOUSE COMMUNICATE ABOUT POLICY PRIORITIES?

Jonathan Nickens, doctoral student in political science at LSU, was a co-investigator on this study in its original form. He contributed to the literature review, while I coded and analyzed the data. Nickens helped to collect and interpret sources and to develop fundamental theoretical ideas for this study.

Edelman, Lakoff, and Lippmann remind us that what we know about the world is socially constructed. Our experiences are often understood second-hand through the perspective of an intermediary relaying information to us. The way we understand these experiences is not just a matter of the original observer’s worldview and explanation of what they experienced, but how we reinterpret this information through our construction of our own world from first-hand experiences. “The world people experience as the wider setting for their everyday lives is a chameleon world that transforms its contours with the changing cues that news accounts convey” (Edelman, 1988, 29).

While we understand our world to be socially constructed—that we understand one experience through other experiences—we can see the strong influence those who help create these frames of understanding have on our worldview. Political elites have long used the media as symbiotic partner in creating this consciousness. We understand from Sellers (2009) that the elites set the agenda, the elites communicate that agenda to the media, the media communicate that message to the public, and elites closely monitor media coverage for an interpretation of public opinion. We understand that elites are both actors and an audience, that they “reinforce rationalization for each other” (Edelman, 1988, 96). Greenberg (2016) shows this relationship between elites and the media is nothing new; in fact, it has helped shape Americans’ understanding of the world for more than a century.
Research Questions

The White House sets the media and public agendas based on what it chooses to communicate via official channels and how often it communicates about each policy priority. By giving the president’s dedicated time and attention (via speeches, online chats, appearances) and his official communications’ primary thrust to a policy priority, the White House signals to the public what is important. I will show that the White House is using agenda-setting theory to elevate the healthcare reform policy to a priority position with the American public.

Obama bucked the traditional White House trend of issuing information primarily via press release and press conference by establishing the first White House Twitter account in April 2009 to communicate directly to the public through social media. He hired a team to develop self-generated content, and resurrected a digital transmission-based White House news service (Greenberg, 2016, 443).

With ties to agenda-setting theory established, I will show that communication tactics around the healthcare reform priority become critical to helping us understand how much the executive branch is providing information for the public good and how much it is attempting to persuade us to accept the administration’s point of view. Based on Lippmann's bleak outlook, without priming, provision of information might be somewhat futile—people don’t have the time or inclination to learn or understand the issues fully to form an opinion. Given Converse’s, Lupia’s, and Zaller’s arguments, propaganda provides the cues people need to activate their innate ideologies in order to help them form an attitude.

Motivated by this literature, I use two research questions to guide my search.

RQ1: How does the White house communicate about the president’s high priority policies?
RQ2: Does the White House deploy provision of information to the public, propaganda, or does it use both styles?

**Methods**

To better understand how the White House communicates to the public about the president’s high priority policies, I focus on communication through Twitter. To this end, in February 2016, I accessed all 17,590 @WhiteHouse tweets issued from January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2015 using a firehose dearchive method in Crimson Hexagon. This time period reveals how the White House team’s tactics evolved during both a reelection and an incumbency, during the launch of new legislation, and through legal and logistical challenges with the law. While Crimson Hexagon initially constrained search returns, which would have eliminated access to tweets prior to 2013, I developed a workaround that allowed me access to all data in the selected timeframe.

This timeframe allowed me to capture White House social media communication over the course of five salient events related to the PPACA. I wished to capture preemptive communication and response to each of these events. First, the National Federation of Independent Business sued then-Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. Their suit challenged the legality of the individual mandate that required all Americans to secure health insurance by 2014 or face a financial penalty. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld

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1 Crimson Hexagon is a subscription-based, real-time social media monitoring system that helps institutions glean meaning from vast amounts of social data published by any user. Crimson Hexagon provides access to the Twitter Firehose, which allowed us to receive 100% of all tweets issued without limiting our returns to a particular number of search results. Unlike streaming and search APIs, which are data pushes, the firehose method is a data pull, and though costly, frees users from Twitter-imposed usage restrictions tied to Twitter infrastructure limitations. (http://brnrd.me/twitter-apis-vs-twitter-firehose/)  

2 I initially mined the data using a Crimson Hexagon “social monitor,” but soon found that this would only return tweets back to 2013. This did not capture the full amount of time I wished to access. By using a Crimson Hexagon “buzz monitor,” I was able to pull all tweets as far back as the account’s creation in 2009. This limited some analytics, but for future studies, these can be logged manually using the permalinks provided in the downloaded data set.
the individual mandate on June 28, 2012, siding with the Obama administration’s policy (Barnes, 2012; Redhead, 2013; SCOTUS Blog, 2012). Second, the Budget Control Act of 2011 should have gone into effect January 1, 2013, as an austerity measure designed to cap government spending (Booth, 2013; Matthews, 2013). Third, the first open enrollment period for the PPACA opened on October 1, 2013, and the Healthcare.gov site failed to accommodate the volume of traffic it received (Alonso-Zaldivar, 2013; Payne et al., 2013; Rudansky, 2013). The website became fodder for GOP criticism that the PPACA was not working. Fourth, former Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius sued Hobby Lobby Corporation, a for-profit, non-religious organization, over their failure to include contraception coverage to employees (SCOTUS Blog, 2014). Finally, David King sued Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell, claiming its provision of subsidies to individuals in states without state-operated exchanges violated the PPACA. On June 25, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that all qualifying persons in all states should be eligible for subsidies, both those with state-operated exchanges and those using exchanges established by the Department of Health and Human Services directly (Sanger-Katz, 2015).

Before I could begin analysis, I narrowed the full universe of @WhiteHouse tweets issued during this timeframe to content specific to healthcare reform and the Affordable Care Act. I only considered what is visible in the tweet and video content that automatically begins to play. I did not consider content that required additional engagement, primarily clicking. I

\[\text{3} \text{ The cuts were delayed by two months because of the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012. These austerity measures included Republican provisions to cut spending, including some provisions of the PPACA.} \]

\[\text{4} \text{ Before this legislation reached the Supreme Court, Sebelius resigned and Congress approved appointment of current Secretary Sylvia Burwell. As originally enacted, the PPACA fines for-profit employers$100 per day per patient for refusing coverage. On June 30, 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with Hobby Lobby Corporation, noting that closely held for-profit corporations could claim religious exception to the law and avoid the penalty. The White House put in place government-sponsored alternatives for female employees of these closely-held, for-profit organizations to access contraception (SCOTUS Blog, 2014).} \]
excluded tweets that did not load, that are not in English, and that feature broken links (because we are not able to determine whether or not they met the criteria for inclusion). I visit each tweet via its permalink to view it in Twitter itself. This allowed me to glean the context of information in embedded graphics and links. I did not code anything based on just the text that exported into Excel from Crimson Hexagon. I concluded this parsing with a sample of 1,613 tweets.

To complete an inductive textual analysis of the sample, I first employed emergent open-coding to a randomly selected 10% subsample (n=161). I coded for tactical applications in order to identify and describe how the White House communicated. These tactics emerged into initial codes that begin to repeat as I worked through the subsample. I was able to prepare a preliminary qualitative code book (see Appendix C) identifying codes used with enough frequency not to be isolated occurrences, as well as the observable tactical applications characterizing each code. To complete the open coding, I coded the remaining 90% of tweets in the sample using the preliminary code book. I observed validation for existing codes, but given the large remainder of the sample, new codes emerged. These new codes revealed tactical applications that I had not originally observed and tactical applications that justified splitting some codes into multiple sub-codes based on frequency of observation.

To verify my coding, I asked a doctoral student to code a randomly selected 10% of the sample using my codebook (see Appendix F). Unlike my coding that accounted for every code applicable to each tweet, he selected a single code for each tweet. To reconcile this, I identified whether his single code matched any of my codes. His coding was congruent with mine 76% of the time. This is considered an acceptable reliability measure for exploratory research (Wimmer and Dominick, 2014).
Analysis

To explore RQ2, I developed a definition of propaganda with which to characterize each tactical application applied in each tweet. This helped me to parse two types of tweets: those providing information for the public good, and those characterized by propaganda.

I slightly modified a definition of propaganda put forth by Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell (2014)\(^5\) to determine whether each category met the criteria of propaganda. They defined propaganda as follows: "Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2014, 7). To this definition I added “to stimulate emotions,” to reflect the work of Ellul, who wrote that propaganda was "psychological manipulation" (Ellul, 1965; Jowett & O’Donnell, 2014, 4); Doob, who defined propaganda as "the attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behavior…” (Doob, 1948, 390; Jowett & O’Donnell, 2014); Pratkanis and Aronson, who defined propaganda as "mass suggestion" of the "psychology of the individual" (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001, 11; Jowett & O’Donnell, 2014); Bogart, who explained that the propagandist has to have "insight into how the audience thinks and reacts" (Bogart, 1995, 195-196; Jowett & O’Donnell, 2014); and Pratkanis and Turner, who indicate that propaganda "plays on prejudices and emotions" (Pratkanis & Turner, 1996, 190; Jowett & O’Donnell, 2014). Thus, my final definition, by which I judged whether each emergent category was to be parsed as public information or propaganda, was: Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to stimulate emotions, shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.  

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Within the two major types of tweets—public information and propaganda—I found thirteen broad categories to emerge through qualitative coding: announcements about open enrollment, discussion of provisions, goal setting/goal clarification, transparency with ordinary citizens, asking others to share information related to open enrollment, using sourced facts, using unsourced facts, using facts sourced back to the White House or administration, third-party validation, relating to average citizens, dominant language, reasons to get covered, and calls to action (see Figure 1). I was able to characterize each of these as provision of information or propaganda based on the criteria contained in the definition of propaganda. Within many of the thirteen categories I could also parse subcategories, each defined by repeated observation of the same White House communication tactics.

It is noteworthy that some tweets could be assigned to both the public information and propaganda categories, and often merited classification into multiple broad categories characterized by tactical applications. I first turned my attention to those characterized as public information because their intent and tactical application did not meet my modified version of Jowett and O’Dowell’s definition of propaganda.

**Categories of Provision of Public Information**

I identified six of the thirteen categories as providing fact-based information for the public good (see Table 1). In these cases, information is shared in a way that is not intended to persuade or advance the acceptance or popularity of the legislation. These categories are based in sourced facts that a citizen can track back to a nonpartisan or bipartisan agency versus provision of information that cannot be independently authenticated.
Figure 1. Diagram of All Categories
Table 1. Category Structure in Provision of Public Information

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory 1</th>
<th>Subcategory 2</th>
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<td>using unsourced facts</td>
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<tr>
<td>using facts sourced to the White House</td>
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<td>calls to action</td>
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<td>reasons to get covered</td>
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<td>dominant language</td>
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<td>relating to average citizens</td>
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<td>forced news values</td>
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Discussion of Provisions

The White House used Twitter to provide detail about the Affordable Care Act’s terms and conditions, such as co-pays, preventive care, and contraception, as well as intended consequences the law would have on other government functions, such as reduction to the deficit. This category only communicates terms of the law, and very easily fits into the broad category of provision of information. This was the most frequently occurring tweet category in the broader category of provision of information. I coded nonpartisan agencies’ expected success as provision of information, but coded tweets that included success-claiming language like, “thanks to the ACA,” as propaganda. The subcategories here represented information for the public good.
Plan Provisions

The first set of subcategories I observed is how frequently the White House took to Twitter to provide detail and clarification on the medical provisions of the PPACA, such as lifetime limits, coverage despite preexisting conditions, preventive care, and contraception (see Figure 2). I established a subcategory for discussion of medical provisions based on the frequency of posts about medical coverage. Similarly, I saw a significant number of posts discussing who was eligible for coverage, including the popular provision that young adults may stay on their parents’ plans until age 26. These posts, which did not include mention of medical allowances, were observed with enough frequency to merit a separate subcategory for coverage provisions.

Figure 2: Exemplar Tweet—Plan Provisions

Economic Benefits

A second set of subcategories included tweets about PPACA-derived personal and government economic benefits, like lower co-pays and a reduction in the national deficit. I saw two types of economic benefits, and thus established two subcategories: personal and government. Personal economic benefit included tweets discussing improvements to personal and family finances, including premiums and out-of-pocket costs, reduced cost or free prescription coverage, and free preventative care and screenings (see Figure 3). Government
economic benefit included tweets discussing PPACA-caused decreases in the accrual rate of national debt and decreases in the national deficit predicted by the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office (see Figure 4). Some tweets addressed the historic lows in healthcare cost growth as a result of PPACA regulations. I attempted to classify tweets that provided cited sources for their claims under the subcategories of provision of information. Readers will note, however, that this tactic is often also coded as propaganda for all the instances where the White House did not source their claims.

Figure 3: Exemplar Tweet—Personal Economic Benefit
Improved Service Delivery

A third subcategory emerged with tweets about improvements to service delivery that Americans gained as a result of the PPACA. These included discussions of how much of an individual’s premium dollar would go to patient care, improvements in hospital care, expansion of community and school clinics that allowed for new medical hires, and new safety measures (see Figure 5). Some tweets discussed PPACA-imposed outcomes tied to funding that improved patient care.
Announcements about Open Enrollment

The White House also spent a good deal of time discussing annual open enrollment, the next category I grouped into provision of information. In discussing open enrollment the White House announced deadlines to enroll (see Figure 6), how to enroll, shared the amount of time remaining before open enrollment closes, and announced via cited third-party sources how many people are covered. Readers will note that we also cited this tactic in the propaganda category for all the instances where the White House did not source the number of people who enrolled.

Goal Setting/Goal Clarification

A third category included tweets that clarify Senator Nancy Pelosi\(^6\) and President Barack Obama’s objectives of the PPACA and set goals for the law’s success. These tweets communicate information like who would be covered, how many would be covered, and how accessible coverage would become. They often included language refuting false claims by the out-party or the media. Opening statements like “I signed the ACA for,” “the goal we’ve set for ourselves is,” and “this is about” characterize this category (see Figure 7). One interesting

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\(^6\) Sen. Pelosi authored and introduced the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in Congress.
finding is that goal clarification tweets often also included strong emotional appeals, which we will later characterize as propaganda. Perhaps the most frequently used statement of this category in both tweets and other forums, like speeches, is that Obama signed the PPACA because “no one should go broke just because they get sick” (“Remarks by the President,” 2012).

Figure 7: Exemplar Tweet—Goal Setting/Goal Clarification

**Transparency with Ordinary Citizens**

Throughout all the consumer questions, legal action, and website glitches the executive branch encountered in the rollout of this legislation, the White House accepted responsibility for failings and offered many opportunities to be transparent with ordinary citizens; this is my fourth subcategory. Obama and Sebelius frequently made themselves available to take public questions submitted via Twitter to be answered via Twitter (see Figure 8). Many of the White House’s tweets shared times and dates the president would be making statements about or taking media questions related to the PPACA. The White House often live-streamed these presidential appearances on a linked whitehouse.gov media center page and snippets were frequently provided as embedded YouTube videos in the tweets themselves. The White House also issued
tweets discussing the website and improvements the executive branch was making to ensure reliability.

Figure 8: Exemplar Tweets—Transparency with Citizens

**Asking Others to Share Information Related to Enrollment**

The White House issued ample calls to action via tweets encouraging people to enroll and encouraging people to remind others about open enrollment (see Figure 9). These calls to action drove behavior necessary to avoid PPACA penalties for lack of health insurance coverage. For this reason, I grouped this subcategory into the category of provision of information. I also show a category of calls to action that fits more into the category of propaganda because it asks people to share information about the legislation with the goal of advancing favorable public opinion.
Finally, I coded a number of tweets that use facts, but I separate the use of facts into those that provide a source (see Figure 10), from which the public can obtain the original data, and those that do not provide a source, or that source back to the executive branch. I classified sourced facts as provision of information and unsourced facts, or those whose source was the White House or administration, as propaganda. Unsourced facts could have been framed in favor of the PPACA when presented to the public. The White House did not source facts very often, and when they did, the source was often a government agency.

Thus, the provision of information category contains six subcategories: discussion of plan provisions; announcements about open enrollment; goal setting or goal clarification;
transparency in availability to answer questions, accept responsibility for flaws, and discuss the legislation; calls to action to avoid penalties; and use of sourced facts.

Figure 10: Exemplar Tweets—Sourced Facts

**Categories of Propaganda**

The remaining seven of the thirteen categories I categorized as propaganda (see Table 2). Returning to Jowett and O’Donnell’s definition, these messages were both “deliberate and systematic,” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2015, 7-8) in many cases following best practice in strategic communications. They showed intentionality and planning in the coordinated sharing of information and use of common facts, hashtags, success stories, and officials’ quotes. Information was not simply shared, but carried a call to action, was framed from the administration’s point of view, and/or claimed success. They sometimes extended that success to the administration in general. These tweets opposed GOP viewpoints. They are designed to advance the acceptance or popularity of the legislation. These categories are based in unsourced facts that cannot be independently validated, may be framed in a way that flatters the administration or legislation, or may be presented so as to exclusively support an
administration’s perspective. These tweets implied a desire for behavior change resultant from manipulated thoughts, perceptions, or emotions.

Table 2. Category Structure in Propaganda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory 1</th>
<th>Subcategory 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>announcements re open enrollment</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion of provision</td>
<td>plan provisions</td>
<td>medical provisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>economic benefits</td>
<td>for individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>improved service delivery</td>
<td>for government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal setting/goal clarification</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparency with ordinary citizens</td>
<td>website fixes and call centers</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>speeches</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q&amp;As</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ease of use</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asking others to share info re enrollment</td>
<td>appeal to mothers</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>using sourced facts</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use of Unsourced Facts, Facts Sourced to Administration

The Obama White House used tweets to persuade, and potentially manipulate, when they used ample data without attribution or with implied administration sources that remain unnamed (see Figure 11). This did not allow for government accountability whereby a citizen could research original, nonpartisan facts; find supporting and refuting evidence; and draw his own conclusion. This made up the first set of subcategories I classified as propaganda: unsourced facts and facts sourced back to the administration.

Calls to Action

The administration also used extensive calls to action asking citizens and elected officials to help advance the PPACA with their families, friends, and constituencies. This is the second subcategory, which has three subcategories of its own.
Some calls to action targeted individual citizens, encouraging them to share good news about the PPACA and to tell others about legislative successes (see Figure 12). This category’s tweets discussed expected savings for the U.S. government and for American families and called citizens to support the legislation for these expected outcomes. In these ways the White House used calls to action not to encourage people to enroll to avoid penalty, but instead to encourage them to advance the law with the power of word of mouth and personal, favorable testimonial.
Directed to Elected Officials

The second subcategory within the “Calls to Action” category is messaging directed to other elected officials (see Figure 13). Particularly around the time of the 2013 sequester, the administration called legislators to pass a budget that continued to fund the PPACA. As the situation drew on, the White House called legislators to prevent the sequester, then to end it, and to stop attempts to repeal the law. In many cases, the White House called state elected officials to expand Medicare for their citizens under the PPACA.

Figure 13: Exemplar Tweet—Calls to Action Directed to Officials
Directed to the Media

One subcategory that did not emerge in the data is a call to action to the media. While extensive literature shows that elected officials use the media to shape public opinion via agenda-setting in what they do and do not cover, I was not able to definitively identify examples of the White House calling the media to inform the public.

I placed these subcategories within a broader persuasive call to action category and within the propaganda category. I did this, in lieu of collapsing the two call to action categories and including one category into the other (public information or propaganda) because these calls to action drew on different motives. The call to action category I placed within provision of information called people to enroll so they may avoid penalty for lack of healthcare coverage. The call to action category I placed within propaganda called people to spread positive outlooks on the legislation to advance favorable public opinion of the law.

Emotional Reasons to Get Covered

While there were implied reasons to get covered in the medical and plan provisions I grouped into the provision of information category, the White House also used strong, emotional reasons to get covered that appealed to a desire to avoid anxiety. This was congruent with the modified Jowett and O’Donnell definition that addresses psychological manipulation and stimulated emotions, and made up the third subcategory, which has a pair of subcategories itself.

Fear and Anxiety Appeals

Perhaps the most familiar of all the sentiments President Obama shared about the PPACA are versions of “people shouldn’t go broke just because they get sick” (“Remarks by the President,” 2012). The White House elicited anxiety by discussing the actual costs of common conditions, physician visits, and hospitalization without health coverage. They directly stated or
implied the potential financial ruin that may come as a result of an unexpected medical condition if you are without health insurance (see Figure 14). Finally, they simply reminded people of the unknown—you never know when you might face an accident, injury, or illness. Arguably, the White House tapped into one of the best means of changing attitudes and behavior: appealing to emotion, particularly anxiety. In fact, much emerging neuropsychology work shows that emotion and reason are intertwined (Brader, 2008; Lakoff, 2008; Westen 2007).

![Exemplar Tweet](image)

Figure 14: Exemplar Tweet—Fear/Anxiety Appeals

**Peace of Mind**

The other dominant emotional reason to get covered encompassed a second set of subcategories: appeals to peace of mind for yourself and for your mother. Perhaps the best converse of fear and anxiety appeals was appeals to be free of anxiety and fear. The White House encouraged people to obtain coverage under the PPACA in order to obtain peace of mind (see Figure 15). They extended this appeal to relationships between children and their mothers whereby they encouraged young people to obtain coverage so their mothers would have peace of mind (see Figure 16).
Figure 15: Exemplar Tweet—Peace of Mind

Figure 16: Exemplar Tweet—Peace of Mind for Moms
Relating to the Average Citizen

A fourth category that emerged was relating to the average citizen. In this category, I observed tactics like referencing the family budget and the paycheck-to-paycheck struggle a lack of affordable healthcare can cause. The White House used testimonials of the Obama family, sharing tales of how the middle-class Obamas struggled in a single-parent-led family. Finally, the White House appealed to ordinary people by using holidays to create news values, spinning the PPACA topic into relevance throughout the calendar year when it would otherwise not be timely, have currency, or have human interest (see Figure 17). The administration also provided an incentive for people to get coverage with contests in order to have the president visit their city.

![Figure 17: Exemplar Tweets—Average Citizens](image)

Appeals through Stereotypes

A subcategory of the “Average Citizen” category emerges via the frequency in the White House’s appeal to stereotypes. This is another token tactic using documented success in converting behavior by appealing to group cues (Brader, 2008). This subcategory is characterized by stereotypes of mothers as nervous and worried and by stereotypes of children who are procrastinators and who are not paying attention to the PPACA options or deadlines (see
Interestingly, fathers are not targeted in either appeals to anxiety, news values, or appeals to stereotypes. The executive branch uses mothers as both the subject of their appeal, e.g., “Do you want your mother to have a nervous breakdown?” (White House, 2014a, March 14) and the activators of youth behavior change, e.g., “We nag you because we love you, so go to…and enroll today” (White House, 2014b, March 14).

Third-party Validation

The White House also employed third-party validation to engender agreement with its legislation, which comprises my fifth category. In some cases, the executive branch showed collaboration with outside groups that support the legislation. In other cases, they provided testimonials of ordinary Americans who have benefitted from the legislation, and hence, support
the administration’s initiative. Sometimes chided for close ties to Hollywood, the administration frequently used tweets to share celebrity endorsements of the PPACA by retweeting their messages related to the legislation, open enrollment, and the impact on ordinary people they know. In this way, the administration appealed to the ordinary man who may have naively seen the endorsement of a celebrity as a reason to support the measure. Finally, the White House retweeted media coverage to vouch for success of the law. Ironically, however, this coverage was often a result of heavy relationship cultivation with media. The White House often presented this media coverage as evidence of favorable public opinion. These persuasive uses of third-party validation by elected officials, citizens, celebrities, and the media made up subcategories of this fifth category.

The use of citizen validation was shown in two different ways. In some cases, they shared first-person testimonials of citizens’ favorability to the PPACA (see Figure 19). In others, they indirectly showed validation by indicating high numbers of citizens who had called, visited the Healthcare.gov website, and applied for coverage (see Figure 20).

![Exemplar Tweets—Citizen Testimonial](image)
A final category I included in the propaganda super category was dominant language, which I parsed into a number of subcategories.

**Dramatic Adjectives**

The administration used dramatic adjectives to exaggerate the perceived impact of the law and the impact of those who opposed it. Opponents and their propositions were labeled as “reckless” (White House, 2013 September 23) and “undermining” (White House, 2013 September 17) (see Figure 21). The potential outcomes of a repeal of the PPACA were described as “catastrophic” (White House, 2014 February 14). The White House also used affectively-loaded cues that drew on the fear and anxieties of the American people. They wrote of “losing everything” (White House, 2014 February 24) that discouraged opposition of the law and encouraged people to support it in order to avoid these outcomes.
Success Claiming

The executive branch frequently used versions of “thanks to the ACA” or “thanks to Obamacare,” to open tweets that claim success (see Figure 22). These could have been mere statements of fact, but were instead affectively loaded with a leading introduction to persuade. Sometimes they used possessive pronouns to claim ownership of success or favorability. In many instances, the White House claimed success for the law with certitude; the opposition would counter-argue its success to be debatable. Two words, “affordable” and “quality” are often used
to describe the PPACA, but these took on much different meanings for the two parties at odds over this legislation. For this reason, I scrutinized adjectives, but I did not code the often-used “affordable” as dominant merely because it is used in the name of the legislation. One could argue, however, that the affectively cued naming of this legislation could be seen as a propagandistic strategy.

Opposing the Out Party

The White House also used particular language to dominate the conversation and overtake the out-party’s criticism. Not only did they boast of in-party dominance, like “ACA is here to stay” (White House, 2015, June 25), but they also opposed the out-party. The White House used hashtags like #PeopleOverPolitics (White House, 2015, February 23) when addressing the GOP on issues like failure to pass a budget that funded the PPACA and failure by
some state leaders to expand Medicare under the law (see Figure 23). The opposition went deeper when the White House began to levy allegations that the GOP might not have the country’s best interest at heart or that they are ignoring the public’s normative desire for accessible and affordable healthcare. More often than not, these tweets had a negative tone.

![Exemplar Tweet—Attacking the Out Party](image)

**Opining and Overgeneralization**

A similar subcategory to opposing the out-party was opining through overgeneralizations and jumping to conclusions (see Figure 24). The White House submitted opinions about what may happen in the future; for example, they often conjectured about what might happen if the PPACA was repealed. In some circumstances they opined about the reasons and causes behind events taking place presently. In broad terms, these opinions cannot be proven, but always support the PPACA.

**Sarcasm**

The White House also employed sarcasm and inside jokes as a means of dominating the conversation (see Figure 25). This tactic was often observed in hashtags. They sometimes asked comedians who supported the legislation to appear in White House-produced YouTube videos. They then tweeted inside jokes that could only be understood after watching the video.
Figure 24: Exemplar Tweet—Opining or Overgeneralization

Figure 25: Exemplar Tweet—Sarcasm
Occasionally they referenced jokes made by comedians independent of the White House. Comedians and celebrities who became frustrated with frequent criticism of the Obama White House begin to say “thanks, Obama” for a number of absurdities that had no connection to Obama (White House, 2015 February 12). Thus, the White House took up the trend and began to sarcastically tweet #ThanksObama after communicating successes of the PPACA. Sometimes the executive branch tweeted sarcastic support in line with messaging of the out-party. For example, when the GOP discussed a budget that defunded the PPACA, the White House tweeted #DefundObamacare (White House, 2013, September 24) messages to introduce worst-case scenarios, to threaten the loss of popular plan provisions, and to oppose the out-party.

**American Idealism**

The White House also discussed a vision of America from the point of view of the Obama administration that the PPACA supports. The executive branch identified their perceived American values, one of which was to care for others by providing accessible healthcare for all (see Figure 26). In this way, they posited that healthcare is an American right, not a privilege. Similarly, the White House argued that American women should have the right to make their own healthcare decisions and affirmed their reproductive rights.

Figure 26: Exemplar Tweet—American Idealism
Leading Introductions

The White House used strategic language to dominate the conversation by announcing “breaking” at the beginning of some tweets and starting others with “FACT,” always in all capital letters (see Figure 27). They often followed these declarations with fact-like statements that may or may not have been sourced to bipartisan agencies.

Figure 27: Exemplar Tweet—Leading Introductions

The propaganda category contains seven subcategories: use of unsourced facts; use of facts sourced back to the executive branch; calls to action to advance favorable public opinion; reasons to get covered; relating to the average citizen; third-party validation; and dominant language.
Discussion

Examining a specific case of executive communication, the White House’s use of Twitter to communicate about Obamacare, I was developed a working network of strategies applied to the communications challenge. I conducted a directed, inductive qualitative content analysis on a sample of White House tweets regarding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act from January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2015. Distinguishing characteristics between information for good and information for persuasion emerged. Two super categories, provision of information and propaganda, subsumed several unique tactical categories defined by intention and organization of communications, whether they were intended to change attitudes, whether it intended to change behavior, and whether these changes would be to the White House’s advantage. A discussion of PPACA provisions, announcements about open enrollment, intentions to engage ordinary citizens, calls to action directed to citizens, and provision of sourced facts characterized tweets intended to provide information. Of these, discussion of plan provisions and open enrollment occurred early in the timeframe and most frequently, suggesting that the White House used social media to fill what they perceived to be information gaps about the PPACA. Interestingly, the sourced facts category was characterized by sharing of information, but information was rarely attributed to sources outside the White House. For example, in Twitter communication relevant administration officials and the president himself were often made available to discuss pertinent aspects of the PPACA, but their facts from outside sources were rarely communicated directly. This may have been a limitation of medium. Often there may not have been enough characters for attribution. Regardless, lack of attribution is normatively undesirable from the perspective of democratic theory.
The second super category, propaganda, defined most tweets in the sample. My coding scheme allowed me to identify several categories of tactics, looking to intended outcome and type of appeals, that define propaganda tweets including: relating to average citizen, third-party validation, calls to action, emotional appeals, and use of dominant language. Of these, tweets characterized by dominant language occurred most frequently. The White House used partisan and emboldened language to intimate certitude and correctness, likely as a means of counteracting negative coverage of the PPACA. Perhaps not surprisingly, this type of tweet occurred more frequently at the end of the studied timeframe, suggesting that once the policy was implemented and the favorable Supreme Court decision was handed down, the administration became more confident in their communications about the policy. Strategically, use of such language is probably effective; followers that agree with the president feel reinvigorated in their support for Obamacare, and followers that disagree with the president confirm that the administration is appealing to baser, affective messaging to accomplish their ill-advised goals. Certainly the administration sees Republicans as a lost cause, so confirming the existing attitudes of Democrats is likely a net gain. This pattern of tactical communication also supports Study 1 that found that the Obama team used Twitter communications to linguistically reappropriate the term “Obamacare” and portray it favorably. When an institution is constrained to 140 characters to communicate their policy priorities, strong language is invaluable.

Within the tactical categories that define propaganda there are several subcategories of note. First, when third-party validation is used—which attempts to lend credibility to information by associating it with an outsider—the most common parties are other citizens, celebrities, and the media. The use of media here is particularly interesting, as other studies show that members of Congress use social media to set the news media’s agenda (Cook, 1998, 2006; Sellers, 2009).
and that through a process of cultivation, elected officials develop symbiotic working relationships with reporters and outlets (Greenberg, 2016; Sellers, 2009). Our results, however, show that—in what amounts to a feedback loop—the White House is using the same media they have cultivated relationships with in their Twitter communications as a means of implying public consent for their policies. Scholarly work suggests that the public is influenced by what they perceive to be the news media’s agenda (Pingree & Stoycheff, 2013), so by sharing the media’s sentiments in their Twitter communications, the White House builds credibility. What makes this use of the media to generate favorable pseudo-public opinion even more interesting is that the White House only used a public opinion poll related to healthcare reform seven times during the four-year timeframe of our study. This is likely because public opinion was generally not favorable to the PPACA during the initial roll-out and thus, bringing attention to polls was unlikely to support their objectives. Certainly we cannot extrapolate that the administration does not care about public opinion given that each of the seven categories of tactics that define propaganda are motivated by a need to curry public favor (or at least the appearance of favor). We can suggest, however, that the administration may insinuate favorable public opinion even when the numbers are not favorable towards the president’s goals (Herbst, 1998; Lewis, 2001).

The second subcategory of interest under the tactical categories ascribed to propaganda is audience. Specifically, we find three primary audiences when the White House issues calls to action: citizens, elected officials, and the media. Perhaps not surprisingly, the White House did not intend Twitter communication about Obamacare to be for the eyes of the citizenry only, but they also targeted elites and media. When the White House uses Twitter to talk about healthcare, it may be signaling to political elites that this is a high priority to the president, that members of the party should get in line, and that reporters should cover this issue. Work on presidential
campaigns’ use of Twitter suggests as much: Twitter is useful for defining journalists’ conversations and the language of media elites about an issue early-on and, aspirationally, in a way that favors your candidate (Kreiss, 2014). If the same is true for candidates once in office, then we should fully expect the White House uses Twitter similarly—to define the terms of the debate, here around Obamacare.

These results shed light on the differences in executive Twitter communications that intend to inform and Twitter communications that intend to persuade. I can pinpoint the tactics used in Twitter communication to parse out the type of executive communication employed. I am limited by the timeframe, which misses a substantial number of recent tweets and my method of inductive qualitative coding which makes it difficult to standardize my approach to other cases and subject matters. I am also limited to our medium, Twitter, and my case study topic, White House communication about Obamacare. It is possible that other cases would likely yield different patterns. Still, it is my hope that by taking this deep-dive into the content that I can lend some nuance to our understanding of the provision of information in a decidedly 21st-century case.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

There is broad understanding that most people do not spend time learning and understanding the issues, but instead rely on others to help inform their perspective (Lippmann, 1922). We allow media and elites to help us draw conclusions based on their knowledge of the issues and experiences we may not have (Lippmann, 1922). For example, we may not be able to experience what is happening in Syria, so we rely on journalists to help inform us. We may not understand complex economic or foreign policy, so we count on elites who have the expert knowledge of these issues.

This thesis investigated how elites provide the public information related to policy priorities, and how they strategically use language to impact our perspective and opinions about those policies. I considered how the candidates and parties discussed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) in the lead up to the bill’s passage in 2009; during the presidential election in 2012; during President Obama’s second term, which included the rollout of the law; and at the beginning of the 2016 presidential election during primary season. I considered how the public learned about this law from either side of the aisle, how language was used to influence citizens from both political perspectives, and how emotion became a critical part of the communication formula.

Generally, we see broad support for agenda-setting theory, whereby the GOP and the White House directed the conversation about healthcare reform to reflect their respective perspectives on the issue. The GOP rallied their base arguing that the PPACA was an overreach of executive power into individual lives and used President Obama, who was unfavorable to party members, as their antagonist. In building momentum for the term “Obamacare,” they drove the agenda, telling people “what to think about”—individual costs, the deficit, death panels,
abortion, and governmental breach of personal decision-making (“The Media’s Year,” 2013). Arguably, applying Converse, Zaller, and Lupia’s work with constraints, predispositions, and priming, we can show that the GOP’s “Obamacare” was used as a loaded moniker helping people not just toward “what to think about” but also “what to think.” This cue was an emotional rallying cry, pitting Obama, who was seen as a proponent of big government, against Americans who appreciated their individual freedoms. The GOP identified this issue in a way that made healthcare reform less about a social justice issue than it was about a breach of individual liberty and an extension of the government. People may not have known much about the policy, but they knew they didn’t like these qualities about Obama, so this cue linked the issues and helped the public develop a quick opinion about the policy as well.

Brilliantly, the Democrats seized on the opportunity to linguistically reappropriate the term in 2012 when the GOP nominated Mitt Romney as their candidate for president. Romney had enacted a healthcare reform law in Massachusetts that quickly became known as Romneycare. With this link, the GOP knew use of the “Obamacare” term would be risky—the negative opinion about the PPACA may transfer and be similarly applied to their candidate. Romney never touched the label in his presidential run. In the meantime, the Democrats swooped in and began to use it to rally their base, with whom Obama had resounding support. For these people, healthcare reform meant access, affordability, equal care, and social justice—protecting the weakest from greedy corporations. The Democrats tied the moniker to the things their base thought most important and began to talk about how “Obama cares.” This reappropriation of the term continued after the 2012 election. The Democrats used it particularly often in 2013, the first year of Obama’s second-term and the year they launched the PPACA. The second spike came after public opinion improved and the Supreme Court upheld the law in 2015.
We see patterns in the White House’s use of “Obamacare.” It is frequently used in positive messaging that is intended to persuade agreeable parties. It is often paired with propagandistic tactics designed to change attitudes and behavior. Finally, it is sometimes used in aggressive ways as the White House mocks the out-party using their own term in opposing them: “Defund Obamacare if…” and “Thanks, Obamacare.”

In fact, the frame “Obamacare” supports many of the five factors of framing: social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalists’ routines, and ideological or political orientation of journalists (Scheufele, 2000, 307). Its first known use was by Andy Martin, a self-proclaimed investigative journalist and would-be GOP politician (Reeve, 2011). He used the term to warn about the prospect of an Obama presidency. In his case, “Obamacare” appealed to the social values of his blog readership as well as his personal ideological framework. Sometime just afterward, Jeanne Schuete Scott, a lobbyist working for the healthcare industry, used the term. Scott predicted the popularity healthcare reform would have in the 2008 election and used a number of terms specific to a variety of candidates and prospective candidates’ names before “care,” e.g., “Hillary-care,” “Obama-care,” “Guiliani-care,” “McCain-care” (Reeve, 2011). For her, “Obamacare” and the others signaled the massive shift she predicted in the industry for which she worked and published. It elucidated the pressures her field would undergo should a reform bill pass. Finally, Mitt Romney was the first mainstream politician to use the term on May 30, 2007 (Reeve, 2011). For him it was a reflection on both the values of his demographic, his personal ideology, and the expectations of the healthcare industry in seeking support for their Capitalist aims. For each of these first users, who we are unsure were aware of one another, the cue “Obamacare” was a convenient shortcut to tap into their audience’s belief systems and to influence the audience’s political judgments.
As citizens, we can know that the government—including our candidates and elected officials—not only provides us information, but also helps us tap into our ideologies to make judgments about policy priorities. These political decisions are likely to be the same as decisions we might otherwise make given the time and resources to fully understand the issue and its implications. While we can be aware that the government is helping to set the agenda—to orient “what we think about”—by prevalence and style of messages about policy priorities, we can argue this is a benefit to us as citizens. The media and elites are helping us to digest the huge number of bills introduced each year and to target the ones they think are of highest importance and impact to us.

We also realize that the government uses the media as a partner to help us focus on the policies it thinks are the most important and need the most urgent attention. While we count on the media to provide fair and unbiased news, we must realize that the government drives much of what impacts us in our world, so the media will often cover what the government says is important. The media help to educate us on the issues so we can make our own value judgments about supporting or rejecting legislation through our elected officials. This study also provides evidence to support Sellers’ (2009) cycle of information whereby the elites set the agenda, the elites communicate to the public, the media intercepts this communication and shares it more broadly, and the elites look back to the media for a measure of public opinion and reaction from the opposition. The media serves an important role in bundling information for us in neat packages that we can understand and use to make judgments for our democracy.

From Sellers’ model, we can extrapolate a model of how the White House sets the agenda. We can argue that the White House tweets are the agenda builders while the media are the agenda setters (Baran & Davis, 2012). Tweets help provide elite opinion—the agenda—to
the media, and the media, in turn, provide that agenda to the public. We know that agenda setting is most effective when the media agenda aligns with the public agenda (Scheufele, 2000). Seeing the White House’s content come around again in the media helps the White House to more fairly acknowledge it as broad, favorable public opinion. They are then able to use this to show support for their priority to the masses in the circuitous process that is agenda- and frame-setting.

While agenda setting could be seen as undue elite and media influence, it can also lead to positive, democratic participation. The media agenda increases an issue’s salience, and can create resonance with the public around a matter of important civic concern. Issues that are more personal and issues that are more frequently discussed have higher salience, which is positively correlated with engagement and activism (Cutlip et al., 2006). Arguably, agenda building and agenda setting are normatively desired in our democracy.

Because of the media’s impact in priming criteria for discerning judgments, the media have inadvertently developed social consensus around judgment criteria. “The media, by providing an agenda that everyone, to a considerable degree, can share, create a sense of community. This is, of course, a social function that is threatened by the expanding choice of information sources created by the plethora of new communication technologies” (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, 64).

Ironically, the choice of Twitter for these studies may have given a unique glimpse into what McCombs and Shaw were forewarning (1993). While I chose Twitter to be able to study a larger timeframe of content under more political circumstances, I did not take into enough consideration the implications the medium itself would have on the agenda setting and framing process.
Ironically, the short content I chose, which helped me analyze a larger sample, may have exposed a particular practice in framing—reliance on extremes. Entman (1993) theorizes that frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Messages now have simpler problems, clearer causes, easier solutions. Extremes may be helpful to advance policy priorities, but they may not contribute enough understanding to the democratic process of civil discourse about an issue. Communicators actively participate in framing as they decide how to characterize an issue in line with their personal belief systems (Entman, 1993). Twitter gives them the ability to simplify the issue for the sake of tweet length. It also somewhat relieves them of the public’s normatively desired knowledge of the source of the information they are transmitting; there simply aren’t enough characters to cite a source. The public shows a need for neatly packaged information about issues, and cues are shown to be effective in tying an important issue to innate ideologies (Zaller, 1992; Lupia, 1994); Twitter does both. It requires quick digests and short, strategic use of language to frame an issue.

The pace of tweeting encourages users to issue content immediately, and changes the news gathering and news issuing process. Twitter accelerates the media’s desire—and in similar fashion, communicators’—to outpace one another in breaking a story. Because tweets are limited to 140 characters, it changes this competition because it limits how tweets can be framed. Communicators must decide if immediacy or framing is most important. How quickly can you compose a tweet that addresses all four factors of framing for an issue? It doesn’t always lend itself to a nuanced, well-researched appreciation of all the issue’s factors that framing aims to articulate and make salient.

We, instead, see a stronger focus on certain of Fairhurst and Sarr’s (1996) elements of framing rather than others: metaphors; stories; traditions; jargon, slogans, and catchphrases;
artifacts; contrasts; and spin. Communicators can increasingly rely on certain of these elements because they can easily work into the 140-character limit. The White House frequently used slogans and catchphrases, particularly in their choice and repeated use of hashtags. We also saw it in sarcasm that opposed the Republicans. Metaphors and contrasts might be easier to use because short comparisons that show likeness and difference may still be quite effective, but storytelling is substantially more difficult to do in 140 characters. Spin, or the imbuing of a value judgment, can be done in a tweet. The others—stories, traditions, artifacts—may be better left to best practices of visual communication. This is the only way to present more than 140 characters—to do so through a graphic, embedded video, or a link. To some extent, we must draw more on the principles of effective advertising and visual communication to develop best practices for framing in Twitter.

As communicators, we can see the vast importance agenda-setting theory and priming have on our practice. Whatever it is we might be trying to advance, helping to focus the public on the important issues, and so to filter out the rest of the messages; providing the public information in an organized fashion that is useful to people who are bombarded by messages; and using classic tactics that appeal to emotion are critical to achieving our goals. Communications challenges require us to address both emotion and reason (Lakoff, 2008; Westen 2007), combining both aims in our messages for greatest impact, just as the White House often combined tactics of propaganda and public information (emotion and reason) to advance successful adoption of the PPACA and to overturn initial negative opinion. Failing to address the emotional aspects of issues will increase the odds of messages falling flat and failing to draw the response we seek.
We also learn from the White House the importance of repetition in setting the agenda. The White House talked about healthcare reform approximately 10% of the time on Twitter. Considering the vast number of policies under consideration in any given term, talking about a single issue in one of every ten tweets was risky, but it was necessary to help both the media and the public understand how important this policy was to the administration. We must be persistent.

Finally, we must be ethical in our practice, but we should not be wary of using trendy, kitchy techniques. We have to meet our audience where they are. As I said earlier, facts and figures might not be what convinces someone to get a flu shot. Instead, a contest or the validation of a celebrity may be what helps someone get the shot. If the aim in public health is to increase adoption of that particular health practice, however, as long as we are within ethical bounds of the profession, we should be open to using the full scale of effective strategies and tactics to achieve the communications goal.
REFERENCES


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White House [White House]. (2015, February 23). "We can all agree that it’s a good thing when a family doesn’t lose their home just because someone gets sick" —Obama #PeopleOverPolitics [Tweet]. Retrieved from http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse/status/569897848197783552.


APPENDIX A
STUDY 1 CODE BOOK

1. From which Twitter account was the post issued?
2. Does the tweet relate to healthcare reform?
   • yes=1, no=0
3. Is the tweet original content or a Retweet?
   • original=1, RT=0
4. Does the tweet support the in-party (Democrats)?
   • yes=1, no=0
5. Does the tweet oppose the in-party (Democrats)?
   • yes=1, no=0
6. Does the tweet oppose the out-party (Republicans)?
   • yes=1, no=0
7. Does the tweet support the out-party (Republicans)?
   • yes=1, no=0
8. What is the tweet’s tone?
   • 0=negative; 1=positive; 2=neutral; 3=balanced
9. Does the tweet reference a candidate (local, state, federal)?
   • yes=1, no=0
10. Does the tweet reference a policy (local, state, federal)?
    • yes=1, no=0
11. Does the tweet use testimonials?
    • yes=1, no=0
12. Does the tweet cite numerical statistics?
    • yes=1, no=0
13. Does the tweet use the word “Obamacare”?
    • yes=1, no=0
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory 1</th>
<th>Subcategory 2</th>
<th>Exemplar Tweet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>provision of information for the public good</td>
<td>announcements re open enrollment</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>12/23/2013 16:45 If you need affordable health coverage, here’s where you can sign up today to #GetCovered starting January 1st → <a href="http://t.co/wXgAlnRRA">http://t.co/wXgAlnRRA</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion of provision</td>
<td>plan provisions</td>
<td>medical provisions</td>
<td></td>
<td>01/29/2014 02:55 Obama on Obamacare: “Because of this law, no American can ever again be dropped or denied coverage for a preexisting condition.” #GetCovered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coverage provisions</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/30/2013 20:11 President Obama: &quot;Young people can stay on their parents’ plans until they turn 26.&quot; #Obamacare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic benefits</td>
<td>for individuals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>03/21/2014 17:29 Thanks to the #ACA, millions of Americans can #GetCoveredNow for $100/month or less → <a href="http://t.co/PLARIHrqKc">http://t.co/PLARIHrqKc</a>, <a href="http://t.co/ZRE3Xt6YQ">http://t.co/ZRE3Xt6YQ</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11/20/2013 18:05 FACT: The Affordable Care Act will reduce our deficit by about $100 billion over 10 years according to the nonpartisan CBO. #Obamacare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improved</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td>03/25/2015 14:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting/Goal Clarification</td>
<td>Transparency with Ordinary Citizens</td>
<td>Speeches</td>
<td>Q&amp;As</td>
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<td>- 12/02/2013 20:09 RT @DagVega44 .@Simas44: &quot;This is about making sure anyone who wants quality health insurance can get it at an affordable price.&quot; <a href="http://t.co/fgrvvlVd11">http://t.co/fgrvvlVd11</a></td>
<td>- 10/30/2013 20:13 &quot;I take full responsibility for making sure it gets fixed ASAP.&quot; — President Obama on <a href="http://t.co/GNfbftrfo3">http://t.co/GNfbftrfo3</a> #Obamacare #GetCovered</td>
<td>- 10/21/2013 14:53 Don’t miss President Obama speak about #Obamacare and <a href="http://t.co/Gnfbftrfo3">http://t.co/Gnfbftrfo3</a>. Watch at 11:25am ET: <a href="http://t.co/KvadYk9atb">http://t.co/KvadYk9atb</a> #GetCovered</td>
<td>- 03/23/12 16:25 Have Qs on what the health care law means for you &amp; your family?</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>ease of use</td>
<td>9/30/13 16:15</td>
<td>Worth a RT: Thanks to #Obamacare, signing up for health insurance just got 17 pages easier → <a href="http://t.co/wh6d6zyfcH">http://t.co/wh6d6zyfcH</a> #GetCovered</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>asking others to share info re enrollment</td>
<td>02/05/2015 15:53</td>
<td>RT to spread the word: You’ve got 10 days to sign up for 2015 health coverage → <a href="http://t.co/GNfbft9Ewv">http://t.co/GNfbft9Ewv</a> #GetCovered <a href="http://t.co/TW38mqYh">http://t.co/TW38mqYh</a> bX</td>
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<tr>
<td>appeal to mothers</td>
<td>02/06/2015 18:34</td>
<td>Make sure your friends know: There are just 9 days left to sign up for 2015 health coverage → <a href="http://t.co/rNzHK5zFEI">http://t.co/rNzHK5zFEI</a> <a href="http://t.co/qEIKAC575">http://t.co/qEIKAC575</a> N</td>
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<tr>
<td>using sourced facts</td>
<td>03/24/2014 20:21</td>
<td>RT @JLo Join my mom and @FLOTUS in helping kids #GetCovered by March 31 <a href="http://t.co/awciXwwOX9">http://t.co/awciXwwOX9</a>! Click here: <a href="http://t.co/aCGPG6eKiv">http://t.co/aCGPG6eKiv</a> #YourMomCares</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FACT: The U.S. uninsured rate continues to drop</td>
<td>03/10/2014 15:28</td>
<td>FACT: The U.S. uninsured rate continues to drop: <a href="http://t.co/SzinLjEpfm">http://t.co/SzinLjEpfm</a></td>
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<td>Category</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>propaganda</td>
<td>using unsourced facts</td>
<td>11/8/13 18:54</td>
<td>Obama: #Obamacare &quot;allows states to expand Medicaid to cover more of their citizens. Here in Louisiana that would benefit...265,000 people.&quot; (sourced to Gallup)</td>
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<td>using facts sourced to the White House/administration</td>
<td>04/04/2014 21:15</td>
<td>FACT: Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, Kentucky has seen a 40% drop in its uninsured rate since Oct 1. <a href="http://t.co/P2LyRXGtRH">http://t.co/P2LyRXGtRH</a> #GetCovered (sourced to HHS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>calls to action</td>
<td>citizens</td>
<td>9/26/13 15:25</td>
<td>Obama: “Tell your friends, tell your classmates, and tell your family members about their new health care choices.” <a href="http://t.co/Gnfbftrfo3">http://t.co/Gnfbftrfo3</a></td>
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<td>Officials</td>
<td>9/23/13 18:32</td>
<td>The House GOP should stop trying to prevent millions from getting health insurance &amp; start helping the middle class: <a href="http://t.co/oEvMfGENg1">http://t.co/oEvMfGENg1</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>reasons to get covered</td>
<td>fear/anxiety appeals</td>
<td>02/24/2014 20:35</td>
<td>RT @Simas44 Obama on @John_Dingell:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peace of Mind</td>
<td>For You</td>
<td>07/10/2014 17:59</td>
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<td>Obama: &quot;The Affordable Care Act has given millions more families peace of mind that they won’t go broke just because they get sick.&quot;</td>
<td>#ACA</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peace of Mind</th>
<th>For Your Mother</th>
<th>12/12/13 20:30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#GetCovered because your mom will have peace of mind (and you will as well).</td>
<td><a href="http://t.co/GNfbtrfo3">http://t.co/GNfbtrfo3</a>, <a href="http://t.co/AP3HLgeQB">http://t.co/AP3HLgeQB</a> V</td>
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<tr>
<th>Dominant Language</th>
<th>9/17/13 16:33</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RT @Jordan44 For GOP, is yielding to this fringe viewpoint of undermining #Obamacare really worth recklessly hurting the economy?</td>
<td><a href="http://t.co/FpLryJw0rD">http://t.co/FpLryJw0rD</a></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Intros</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BREAKING: About 11.4 million Americans are signed up for private health coverage. #11MillionAndCounting #ACAWorks</td>
<td><a href="https://t.co/1zKLkyJvlo">https://t.co/1zKLkyJvlo</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Idealism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;This was a good day for America.&quot; — @POTUS on the Supreme Court upholding a critical part of the Affordable Care Act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"We think everyone in America has a right to have adequate health care insurance." — @VP:
http://t.co/XzEms0WJAL #ACAWorks #GetCovered

"We are a nation that does what is hard. What is necessary. What is right." — Obama signing the ACA #TBT #8Million
http://t.co/t4Qlusjbt

Obama: "Health care is not a privilege for a fortunate few, but a right for all to enjoy & I intend to deliver on that promise." #Obamacare

Karmel's story: "I no longer fear my 'pre-existing condition.'"
http://t.co/WfwjZnNypA #ThanksObamacare

"DefundObamaCare if you believe women should be charged more than men for the same health coverage. #EnoughAlready

RT @Simas44 This is
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>opposing out-party</th>
<th>---</th>
<th>7/11/13 13:37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RT @Simas44 Latest from GOP? Deny the ¼ of Americans under 65 with pre-existing conditions any shot at affordable health care.</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://t.co/rmUZWuhqgU">http://t.co/rmUZWuhqgU</a></td>
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<td>9/20/13 17:06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defund #Obamacare if you want to prevent millions of uninsured Americans from getting affordable health insurance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#EnoughAlready</td>
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<td>9/30/13 20:39</td>
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<tr>
<td>FACT: House Republicans would rather #shutdown the government than help millions of Americans afford health insurance.</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>9/4/13 16:24</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;This law's already done a lot of good...it has lots of opportunities for states to innovate.&quot; — President @BillClinton on #Obamacare</td>
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<td>8/21/13 16:51</td>
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<tr>
<td>RT @HealthCareTara This headline speaks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>for itself - NBC: Even Republican young adults want health insurance, poll finds: <a href="http://t.co/TReF46L8l3">http://t.co/TReF46L8l3</a></td>
<td>5/15/13 17:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In case you missed it, health care reform is causing insurers to lower rates through competition: <a href="http://t.co/TdVAy5mDs">http://t.co/TdVAy5mDs</a> o #Obamacares</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relating to average citizens</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>02/05/2014 21:04 RT @NancyPelosi Mom jeans, pant suits, whatever your mom prefers, rest assured she’ll love to see you #getcovered: <a href="http://t.co/ZI6xdBR9a9">http://t.co/ZI6xdBR9a9</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forced news values</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>5/10/2013 17:40 FACT: Thanks to health care reform, insurance companies won’t be able to charge women more than men for the same coverage. #HappyMothersDay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third-party validation</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>10/21/13 15:43 President Obama: &quot;More than half a million consumers across the country have successfully submitted applications.&quot; #GetCovered #Obamacare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>numbers of calls, web visits, applications testimonials</td>
<td>10/30/13 15:04 Great story: Thanks to #Obamacare, a Pittsburgh woman with diabetes cut her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Twitter ID</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>03/20/2014</td>
<td>@jasoncollins34</td>
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<td>03/20/2014</td>
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<td>03/20/2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>03/28/2014</td>
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<td>03/28/2014</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>elected officials</td>
<td>09/01/2015</td>
<td>@AkGovBillWalker</td>
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<td></td>
<td>09/01/2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td>06/25/2015</td>
<td>@JohnDingell</td>
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<td>06/25/2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Observed Tactics</td>
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<tr>
<td>action—citizens</td>
<td>encouraging citizens to share good news about the ACA—savings, medical provisions, access/availability—to extend favorability for the law.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action—enrollment-moms*</td>
<td>encouraging moms to share the news about enrollment with their families, children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action—enrollment</td>
<td>encouraging citizens to share with family and friends so they don’t miss the open enrollment period</td>
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<tr>
<td>action—officials</td>
<td>encouraging elected officials to take action to prevent repeal, to continue success of ACA, to act to pass a budget that did not impact ACA, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average citizen</td>
<td>relating to the average citizen by referencing Barack Obama’s struggling single mother while he was growing up, referencing life paycheck to paycheck, incenting people with contests, using cute animal photos, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>average citizen—news values*</td>
<td>creating news values (relevance, timeliness, etc.) by using current events, holidays, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>average citizen—stereotypes*</td>
<td>appealing to stereotypes, particularly of moms and children, e.g., nervous moms, parents not being tech savvy, children not paying attention to deadlines or not seeing importance of healthcare, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>dominance</td>
<td>use of dramatic adjectives, use of strong emotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>dominance—intros*</td>
<td>use of introductions that set up talk of the ACA in supportive terms, &quot;FACT,&quot; &quot;breaking,&quot; &quot;good/great news&quot; and the like</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dominance—opining*</td>
<td>overgeneralizing or submitting opinion as fact about what may happen in the future, what motivated actions of others in the present, reasons and causes behind action that are not factual or proven; broadly, opinions that support the ACA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dominance—sarcasm*</td>
<td>using sarcasm or inside jokes, seen in hashtags like #ThanksObamacare or #RepealObamacare, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>dominance—American idealism*</td>
<td>discussion of American vision/values, talking about America in normative terms re healthcare access., discussion of Obama’s philosophy that healthcare is a right, not a privilege</td>
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<tr>
<td>dominance—opposing out-party*</td>
<td>levying allegations that the out-party doesn’t have Americans’ best interest at heart, alleging that the out-party is defying the American public’s wishes or normatively desired access to healthcare</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dominance—success claiming*</td>
<td>boasting in-party dominance: “ACA is here to stay,” claiming success for outcomes that may relate to the ACA, generalizing from ACA success to other Executive successes or overall American prosperity</td>
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<tr>
<td>enrollment</td>
<td>discussion of open enrollment beginning and ending dates; discussion of number of remaining days to enroll</td>
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<tr>
<td>provisions—business</td>
<td>discussion of benefits to small businesses, or discussion of less-</td>
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<tr>
<td>economic benefit*</td>
<td>than-GOP-portrayed negative impacts to small businesses</td>
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<td>provisions—coverage*</td>
<td>discussion of coverage provisions (staying on parents' policy until age 26, getting coverage in career changes, etc.)</td>
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<td>provisions—improved quality of care*</td>
<td>discussion of reduction in medical errors</td>
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<tr>
<td>provisions—slowing healthcare costs*</td>
<td>discussion of how healthcare costs are slowing, growth is at lowest level in a number of years, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>provisions—government economic benefit*</td>
<td>discussion of positive changes to government economics (paying down national debt, decrease of national deficit), discussion of how healthcare costs are slowing, growth is at lowest level in a number of years, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>provisions—improvements to service delivery*</td>
<td>discussion of improved service delivery (cost savings for better care)</td>
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<tr>
<td>provisions—medical</td>
<td>discussion of medical provisions (preventative care, screenings, preexisting conditions, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>provisions—personal economic benefit*</td>
<td>discussion of positive changes to personal economics (monthly savings, annual savings, co-pay savings, prescription savings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>reasons to get covered—fear/anxiety</td>
<td>using fear/anxiety cues to motivate people to get covered by discussing costs of procedures, visits, or hospitalizations without insurance, discussing anxiety of not knowing what may happen if you aren't covered, discussing financial ruin caused by lack of coverage; &quot;people shouldn't go broke because they get sick&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>reasons to get covered—peace of mind—for you*</td>
<td>convincing people to get covered so they have peace of mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>reasons to get covered—peace of mind—for your mom*</td>
<td>convincing people to get covered so their moms have peace of mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>sourced facts</td>
<td>use of facts with attribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>sourced facts attributed to WH or administration*</td>
<td>use of facts sourced back to the White House or administrative units</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>transparency—ease of use*</td>
<td>discussing how easy it is to get coverage via website, calls, visits to local groups registering citizens, paper forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>transparency—Q&amp;As</td>
<td>announcing availability for web chat to answer questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>transparency—speeches</td>
<td>announcing speeches and public statements by president and other admin officials</td>
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<tr>
<td>transparency—web and calls</td>
<td>discussing the website failure (even just acknowledging it) and steps being taken to remedy the site; discussing the call centers supporting a broken site that could not handle peak traffic; discussing post-website fix accommodated users (site visits, call volume, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>unsourced facts</td>
<td>use of facts with no attribution</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>validation—citizens—traffic*</td>
<td>implied validation shown in number of citizens who have visited the website, called a call center, applied for coverage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>validation—citizens—testimonials</td>
<td>testimonials from citizens providing success stories about the ACA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>validation—media</td>
<td>sharing favorable media coverage that supports the law or helps to explain its benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>validation—officials*</td>
<td>sharing support of elected officials who speak out about the law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Added after emergent coding codebook was established based on repeated observations that did not fit existing codes. May have been in original category, but demonstrated need to separate into a subcategory based on number of observations.
VITA

Margo Jolet, a native of New Iberia, Louisiana, received two bachelor’s degrees from Louisiana State University, one in English in 2006 and one in psychology in 2009. She has eleven years of professional experience in strategic communication at Louisiana State University, including work in brand positioning, standards development, and reputation maintenance. Her most noted career accomplishments include work on the Love Purple. Live Gold. institutional identity campaign, the Forever LSU Capital Campaign, the LSU Sesquicentennial Celebration, and development of both the LSU Crisis Communication Plan and the LSU Sexual Assault Awareness Education Plan. Her scholarly interests are in political communication at the intersections of strategic messaging, psychology, and language, notably how political parties and candidates manipulate language to influence voter behavior. Margo is a candidate to receive her Master of Mass Communication in December 2016.