**Left, Right and Center**



An analysis on cable news networks and the subjective, censored reality it frames

Miami University

December 7, 2009

Organizational Communication 439

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# *CERTIFICATION of AUTHORSHIP*

CERTIFICATION OF AUTHORSHIP: I certify that I am the author of this assignment. Any assistance I received in its preparation is fully acknowledged and disclosed within this document. I have cited any and all sources, both print and electronic, from which I have used data, ideas, or words, either quoted or paraphrased. My cited sources are indicated within this document using APA format. I also certify this work was prepared by me specifically for this assignment as a requirement for this course.

***Student Signature: ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:*** 12/7/09

***Abstract***

Have you have turned on the television to watch a breaking news story and listened to the reporter tell you the; who, what, where, when and how of the story? Have you ever wondered if the breaking news story was truly newsworthy? Well, this thesis is here to prove that the media sets an agenda for the audience to follow. This agenda doesn’t tell you what to think, yet rather tells you what to think about. Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw began this investigation in 1972, after studying the 1968 presidential elections. From this study they introduced agenda setting theory which states that mass media produces a “political reality” for the audience to follow.

Agenda-setting theory was introduced in 1972 during the rise of broadcast television, and since then, the face of journalism has seen a considerable amount of change. In the current generation newspaper readership is continuously shrinking and people look toward cable news networks and internet websites to obtain their news. This thesis proves that even after thirty-seven years, mass media continues to set an agenda, and the producers, editors and writers formulate news productions and un-intentionally form a bias.

This thesis focuses on two cable news networks, FOX News and MSNBC. Both of these cable news networks hold a reputation of being biased networks. After analyzing scholarly articles, it has been proven that a bias does exist and it is rare to find neutral reporting. McCombs and Shaw admit in their findings that a bias is inevitable in the media (McCombs, 1972, p.1). Although a bias is inevitable, it is up to the journalist to respect journalistic principles and most importantly an obligation to the truth.

***Acknowledgments***

I want to take this time to acknowledge the people who have contributed to this thesis project and also thank the people who helped me with this learning process.

I first want to personally thank my professor, Dr. Ronald Fetzer from Miami University, who initiated this project and for his guidance through the COM 439 capstone course. Dr. Fetzer aided my transition from a college student to a prepared entry level employee. I also want to thank my professional mentor, Mike Horsley and all of my colleagues at WKRC-TV Channel 12. WKRC-TV has influenced this thesis in numerous ways. My internship with this CBS affiliate has taught me all about the media and how to write for prime time news. Kimberly Bryan, the news editor at WKRC-TV has also guided me through this thesis and created a beneficial guide for new journalists in the field.

I also want to thank my study buddy; Eleni Snider who acted as chief editor for this thesis and who also helped me reach each deadline. Eleni Snider has also been a constant support through this course and through my internship in Cincinnati.

I lastly want to thank my family and friends who supported me through my college career. A special thanks goes out to my parents for their moral support and encouragement throughout these four years of college.

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***Chapter 1***

***Introduction***

*“On any single subject many ‘hear’ but few ‘listen’.”--Berelson*

Left, Right and Center, an analysis on network news and the subjective, censored reality it frames will focus on the agenda setting theory. This communication core theory was introduced in 1972 by McCombs in Shaw in the peak development of network television. Throughout the thesis, this core theory will prove that network news sets an agenda and influences the audience’s opinion. Cable news networks produce shows and classify specific stories as newsworthy. The mere act of classifying something as newsworthy over other stories sets an agenda for the public to follow.

There are three different angles to this thesis, hence the name, Left, Right and Center. It will be focused on two different cable television networks. MSNBC will be analyzed for the “left-sided” or liberal news. And FOX News will be analyzed for the “right-sided” or conservative news. And the remainder of this thesis will be setting up the question; is there such a thing as a truly objective news network and what does it take for a news network to remain neutral in reporting news?

The purpose of this thesis is to reveal that there are subjective news networks that create a censored reality in order to align with their particular network’s political opinion. This thesis will prove that this agenda has a large impact on the audience that watches it and also presents the question; is any true objective news?

This thesis will raise three questions to the public:

**RQ1:** How Does a biased news network influence the public that watches it?

**RQ2:** Do journalist that work for a particular cable network self censor their work to align with the particular network’s viewpoints?

**RQ3:** What does it take for a cable news network to remain neutral in reporting?

These research questions force the public to respond to subjective news. Also the second research question brings in the role of the journalist and whether or not they self-censor their work to align with their affiliates political viewpoints. The final research question, “what does it take for a cable news network to remain neutral in reporting the news?” will be a new analysis that can guide readers to more neutral reporting. This part of the thesis will be the center part of the paper and will place guidelines for neutral reporting.

In order to answer these research questions, there are three propositions which will be answered by investigating published work within the realm of journalism and communication.

**P1:** Biased news networks not only influence the public that watches it but also frames the news to align with a certain demographic.

**P2:** Journalists self-censor their work and classifies certain stories as newsworthy to align with their networks political viewpoints.

**P3:** Neutral reporting is rare in network television and it can only be possible when a journalist completely separates themselves from political viewpoints.

***Chapter 2***

***Literature Review***

***Agenda Setting Theory***

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda setting theory function of mass media.

*Public Opinion Quarterly*

The article entitled, “The agenda setting theory function of mass media” featured in *Public Opinion Quarterly* was a revolutionary study conducted by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. These two journalism professors from the University of North Carolina introduced agenda setting theory after intensively studying the 1968 presidential election. This study took place in 1972, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina involving major television stations and newspapers.

In order for these researchers to study agenda setting theory in mass media, 100 people were interviewed in attempt to match what Chapel Hill voters said were key issues of the campaign and the actual content of the mass media (McCombs, 1972, p. 4). The media sources used in this study were; The Durham Morning Herald, Durham Sun, Raleigh News and Observer, Raleigh Times, The New York Times, Time, Newsweek, NBC and CBS evening broadcasts.

From these sources and interviews, McCombs and Shaw found that the campaign news was not primarily devoted to discussion of the major political issues but was an analysis of the campaign itself. These findings proved that mass media wasn’t telling its audience what to think, yet was telling them what to think about. This study is what defined agenda setting theory and revealed how mass media sets an agenda for the audience to follow.

This article heavily influences this entire thesis as it connects a core communication theory to mass media. Although this article was produced in 1972, it still is present in contemporary mass media and can be applied to cable news networks. This thesis will also analyze two cable networks, FOX News and MSNBC and applies agenda setting theory to their style of reporting the news.

***Journalistic Principles***

(2004). *Ethical journalism: a handbook of values and practices for the news and editorial departments*. New York, NY: The New York Times.

The handbook entitled, *Ethical Journalism*: A handbook of values and practices for the news and editorial departments was published by The New York Times in 2004 and continues to be used by hundreds of staff members from The New York Times today. The purpose of this handbook is to educate new staff members on journalistic principles as well as act as a guideline to promote the integrity of this newspaper.

There are a total of 155 journalistic principles and ethics listed in this handbook, ranging from writing and grammar to accepting gifts in the workplace. This handbook was an essential part to this thesis because it acted as the introduction and foundation to mass media. Journalists across the country may follow a different code of ethics yet The New York Times provided the most in-depth and well rounded collection of principles and ethics. The most essential part of this handbook was its description on objective and neutral reporting.

The New York Times holds each and every one of their journalists accountable for their work and expects their work to be fair, organized and objective. This expectation must also be upheld in cable news networks. Although this thesis discusses the issue of a biased media, every journalist should reference back to the journalistic principles they were taught so many years ago, in order to produce the most valuable and objective work.

***Biased News Networks***

Ackerman, S. (2001, July). *The most biased name in news*

This article entitled; *The most biased name in news* was published in 2001 by FAIR.org.

The website FAIR.org is short for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting and was developed in 1986. This website harbors articles, blogs and studies which continue to analyze the media, challenging both a media bias and censorship.

This article was written by journalist, Seth Ackerman who analyzes the biased cable news network, FOX News. This analysis starts with descriptions of the most influential producers and on-air personalities featured on FOX News. Ackerman researched many of these producers and editors history and found that the majority of FOX anchors, reporters and producers align themselves with the republican political party and report more conservatively compared to other journalists.

This article was used in the thesis and was referenced quite a bit in Chapter 7 entitled *FOX News*. This chapter outlines FOX News and how this cable news network does not hold true to its slogan, “Fair and Balanced.”

Whittington, M. (2009, February 25). *MSNBC "oh god!" gaffe and liberal bias in the media.*

*Associated Content*

This article entitled; “*MSNBC "oh god!" gaffe and liberal bias in the media”* was publishedin the spring of 2009 and outlines the liberal media bias found on MSNBC. This article was published by Associated Content under their *news* section and provides the most recent scandal with MSNBC.

MSNBC aired a commentary piece after GOP leader; Bobby Jindal gave remarks on Barack Obama’s speech. As reports have it, the comment “Oh God” was heard on air coming from either an MSNBC personality or producer. This scandal is just one example proving a liberal bias on MSNBC. This article is referenced frequently in the thesis and is provides numerous examples to the chapter entitled; *MSNBC*.

***Objective Journalism***

Lucas, F. (2009). Poll: Big majorities say objective journalism is dead. *CNS News*

This article entitled; *Poll: Big majorities say objective journalism is dead* was published by CNS News in 2009 outlining a study which questioned how much the public trusted the media. This poll was conducted by the Sacred Heart University Polling Institute and provides statistics proving there is a lack of trust in the media. This article even stated that more than two thirds of the audience surveyed feels that objective and fair journalism is dead (Lucas, 2009).

This article heavily influences this thesis and reiterates McCombs and Shaw’s findings that there will always be a bias in mass media. The news is produced, edited and written by humans who make mistakes and who can jeopardize ethics for ratings. This poll also contributed to the future implications of this study, stating that in the future, journalists need to be held more accountable for their work in order to better serve the public.

***Chapter 3***

***The Job of a Journalist***

Journalism is the art of reporting on events which affect an audience on local, international, and personal levels. Reporting begins with gathering information. This information can come from police scanners, political officials, or individuals themselves. Journalism was first introduced in the United States in 1690 when the Boston newspaper, “[Publick Occurrences](http://www.historybuff.com/library/reffirstten.html)” was first published (Breig, 2002). This first newspaper promised to report on foreign and domestic matters but due to slow transportation, the information was outdated. The art of journalism has definitely transformed from the late 1600’s yet one common mission still exists; to report on events that matter to an audience.

Journalism is built upon a foundation of principles to ensure quality writing. These principles may differ based on publication but there are essential principles every journalist must follow. The Society of Professional Journalist and *Project for Excellence in Journalism* publish a different list of journalistic principles for their journalists to follow and this can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B.

The first journalistic principle is to remain objective. This is one of journalism’s most important principles. Objectivity is remaining neutral, impartial and fair in writing. When writing is objective, the audience is able to form their own opinions and is able to educate themselves based on what they read or hear. According to The New York Times Handbook of Ethics (2004), its fundamental purpose is “to protect the impartiality and neutrality of The Times and the integrity of its report. In many instances, merely applying that purpose with common sense will point to the ethical course” (The New York Times, 2004, p. 4).

The second journalistic principle is an obligation to the truth. According to Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, its central purpose is to provide the audience with reliable and accurate information. “Democracy depends on citizens having reliable, accurate facts put in a meaningful context” (Project, 2009). The third journalistic principle is to use reliable, credible sources. Sources enhance writing by providing a primary aspect to the story. Also sources are commonly used for quotes and voice-overs which give a voice to the story. Stories are more relatable and credible when the readers are able to hear what the main people in the story have to say on the situation.

The fourth journalistic principle is to be an independent monitor of power. Journalists have a job to act as a “watch dog” over people who hold powerful positions. Whether it is political officials or business CEO’s, journalists have a job to report on their decisions and legislations. The people, who hold office and/or powerful positions within a company, make decisions that impact the general public which is why these “checks of power” are essential in a democracy.

The fifth journalistic principle is to practice a discipline of verification. Journalist should never rely on one sole source. Instead journalists should check their information with various sources to ensure the information is well-rounded and true. “This discipline of verification is what separates journalism from other modes of communication, such as propaganda, fiction or entertainment” (Project, 2009). Verification is something that can get jeopardized in the news because there is a constant need for timely information. When journalists verify information, it can take time and effort which delays printing the story. Although this is something that may take a few extra days, it is essential to verify information and to never rely on information purely at face value.

As newspapers across the United States are closing its doors and television viewership continues to shrink, journalism has transformed from print to online. In the current generation people look to websites and comical television shows for their news, which in many cases can jeopardize the five principles of journalism. With a rise in cable-network news, the main principle of journalism that seems to be lost is objectivity. There are two cable news networks that clearly align with specific political parties. MSNBC, an NBC and Microsoft affiliate is known to be politically liberal in its reporting. On the opposite end of the spectrum there is FOX News, a FOX cable affiliate who is politically conservative in their reporting. Although these two stations do not advertise their bias towards one political party, it is obvious by watching one single news program.

***Chapter 4***

***What is a bias?***

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a bias an “inclination of temperament or [outlook](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Bias); especially**:** a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment” (Bias, 2009). If the definition of a bias is taken literally, it can be found in any situation where a personal decision is made. Every decision in the news then would also be seen as a bias. The decision that producers make to feature certain reports on their newscast, or the decision that editors make to publish certain stories on their front page may also seem as a bias.

Although it remains obvious that bias’ can exist everywhere, how can someone classify a news organization as being biased? Well the answer can be found in the five journalistic principles. If the journalist does not verify the story, doesn’t remain objective and does not remain truthful in their writing, then one can classify that news organization as biased. A bias is more obvious in network news during election seasons. If the news station is clearly in support of a certain political party or airs certain footage to benefit a certain candidate, that news organization is more likely to be labeled as biased.

A bias in the media is an inevitable occurrence. The news is produced, edited and written by humans who unintentionally let their thoughts and education into their work. “Bias is a small word that identifies the collective influences of the entire context of a message” (Cline, 2008). A bias may be an inevitable factor in the media yet it also may be something that the audience is willing to accept. Among the top three 24-hour news networks, FOX News and MSNBC continue to lead in ratings. FOX News is widely recognized as being a politically conservative network and MSNBC is known to be a politically liberal network. With these two news networks leading in prime time ratings, it raises the question; do people watch cable news because they know it will align with their own political viewpoints?

According to Nielsen Media Research, CNN, a politically moderate news network was down 12 percent in prime time ratings from its year-to-date average, MSNBC was up 18 percent and FOX News ratings were up 84 percent. These staggering statistics prove that on a non-presidential election night, people were more willing to watch a news network that aligns more with a political party (Stelter, 2009).

This thesis will continue to analyze these two 24-hour news networks in addition to the moderate news network, CNN. This analysis will be based on statistics and ratings retrieved from Nielsen Media Research as well as other scholarly articles. This is an ever-changing topic that requires an extensive amount of research and studies. Through these sources and guidance from a few media elite, this thesis will prove that a bias in the media exists, yet this bias is seen on both sides of the political spectrum. Considering this analysis focuses on cable news networks, it is media that is not freely seen on local television. These news networks are made available through a cable connection which requires a price. Does this price mean that you are paying for what you want to hear?

***Chapter 5***

***Agenda Setting Theory***

The news editors, producers and writers who together make up cable news networks have the power to shape how much importance is placed on any given issue. When it comes to reporting on political issues, this job can get even more complicated and broadcasters themselves help shape a “political reality.” According to McCombs and Shaw mass media sets an agenda by telling the audience what is important and what is not.

Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw introduced agenda setting theory after studying mass media’s influence in the 1968 presidential campaign. Before conducting research, McCombs and Shaw hypothesized that “While the mass media may have little influence on the direction or intensity of attitudes, it is hypothesized that the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues,” (McCombs,1972, p. 2). This hypothesis was tested by studying what Chapel Hill voters said were the important issues of the campaign compared to the actual content of the mass media during the campaign.

This test was applied to a handful of mass media sources; Durham Morning Herald, Durham Sun, Raleigh News and Observer, Raleigh Times, New York Times, Time, Newsweek, NBC and CBS evening news broadcasts. The Presidential candidates that were reviewed during this study was Nixon, Agnew, Humphrey, Muskie, Wallace and Lemay (McCombs, 1972, p. 3). After analyzing these sources, McCombs and Shaw found that the majority of campaign news did not cover political issues but rather was an analysis of the campaigns themselves. Table 1 below retrieved by the *Public Opinion Quarterly* reveals that in 1968 that majority of news coverage focused on campaign events and campaign analysis (McCombs, 1972, p. 4).



McCombs and Shaw also separated the candidates based on political party and found that “The media appears to have exerted a considerable impact on voters’ judgments of what they considered were the major issues of the campaign…” (McCombs, 1972, p. 5). The data table above proves that there is a strong relationship between the “emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media and the judgments of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics” (McCombs, 1972, p.5).

The data sets provided by McCombs and Shaw also proved that voters paid attention to all of the news coverage of the political elections even if the coverage did not particularly favor the candidate that they voted for. An additional table from *Public Opinion Quarterly* reveals the correlations and differences between the sources used. The daily newspapers greatly differed from the primetime news networks due to the differing amounts of space for hard news. The daily newspapers have more room for hard news verses newscasts that may only have a few minutes to cover a story. Table 5 separates the media’s minor items from the major items and shows the comparisons and differences between each media outlet (McCombs, 1972, p.8).



Although a news media bias has been established in this study, this table proves that each of these news outlets agreed on the same news values, especially when it came to reporting on the same major news items. The evidence provided by this study states that “voters tend to share the media’s composite definition of what is important strongly suggests an agenda-setting function of the mass media” (McCombs, 1972, p.1). McCombs and Shaw finalized this theory by stating that any future studies must take into consideration both psychological and sociological variables.

Considering this analysis took place during the peak of broadcast television, it is very different from the current generation. In this generation, time is money, and the internet is the first place people go to retrieve the news. In order to fully investigate agenda setting theory in the year 2009, a contemporary study must be reviewed. The next chapter will start this investigation with cable news networks and will analyze MSNBC, a politically liberal news network.

***Chapter 6***

***MSNBC***

As McCombs and Shaw stated in their investigation of the 1968 presidential election, a bias will always be present in the media. This is especially true in cable news networks. These 24-hour news networks fill their air time with political commentary, news reporting and common interest pieces. These news pieces leave more room for a bias, allowing for journalist’s opinions to be incorporated into their writing. MSNBC is a prime example of a biased news network.

This cable news network has the reputation of holding a liberal media bias, which means that their network aligns more with the democratic political party. Although this counters many journalistic principles, this news network is leading in ratings and even surpassed CNN, a more objective and moderate news network. This media bias can easily be seen in anchor commentary, especially during the presidential election season.

As reports have it, an on-air personality was caught saying “Oh God” after a representative of the republication national party came on air to give his remarks on Barack Obama’s speech. Although it is unclear as to which anchor mumbled these words on air, it feeds to MSNBC’s reputation of having a liberal bias.

Mark Whittington, a writer and journalist from *Associated Content*, blogged about this scandal facing MSNBC and stated that this incident proves that MSNBC holds a liberal media bias. “Liberal media bias has been a problem for decades. Usually, though, liberal media bias is expressed in more subtle ways, in selection of stories, in tone of voice, and the selection of panels of commentators that have a three to one ratio of liberal to conservative. But [MSNBC](http://www.associatedcontent.com/topic/42659/msnbc.html) seems to have especially thrown off all subtlety in expressing liberal bias,” (Whittington, 2009).

***Chapter 7***

***FOX News***

FOX News was founded in 1996, by Roger Ailes, a well known republican supporter and “political operative” in the Nixon, Reagan and Bush administrations (Ackerman, 2001). When FOX News was introduced it brought along a brand new batch of on-air personalities including David Asman, former journalist for the right-wing editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* and Tony Snow, the former speech writer for President Bush Sr. In addition to on-air personalities, Fox hired Brit Hume as managing editor for this up and coming news station. Hume was also well known amongst conservatives after contributing to both the *American Spectator* and *Weekly Standard Magazine* (Ackerman, 2001).

Although there is proof that this cable news network hired obvious conservatives to edit, write and report, this news network still defines itself as being “Fair and balanced”. There are definitely numerous critics who believe that this news network is anything but, “Fair and Balanced”. FOX News made yet another attempt to fight their reputation for having a right-wing bias by using the slogan, “we report, you decide”. FOX also introduced a series: “Only on FOX” which highlights the stories only available on the FOX News network. Below is the explanation of this series, provided by the host, Trace Gallagher.

“Five years ago, Fox News Channel was launched on the idea that something was wrong with news media—that somehow, somewhere bias found its way into reporting. . . . And it’s not just the way you tell a story that can get in the way of the truth. It’s the stories you choose to tell. . . . Fox News Channel is committed to being fair and balanced in the coverage of the stories everybody is reporting—and to reporting stories you won’t hear anywhere else. Stories you will see only on Fox” (Ackerman, 2001).

Gallagher’s explanation of FOX News corresponds to McCombs and Shaw’s agenda setting theory, in that the way you tell a story and the stories you chose to tell the story can get in the way of the truth, further setting an agenda for the public to follow.

The most obvious sources of a media bias can be found in FOX’s “right-leaning punditry” (Ackerman, 2001). FOX’s show, “Special Report with Brit Humme” features a panel of political commentators who widely support the Republican political party. Although this show also features various “liberal” commentators who contribute to this piece, these people proved to be more moderate then liberal and rarely present a balance between the two.

***Chapter 8***

***A Bias is Everywhere You Look…***

Although every journalist learns a particular set of ethics and principles before publishing work, a bias is inevitable in the media. The media is produced, written and edited by humans who unintentionally make mistakes, allow their opinions to come through in their writing and self-censor their work to align with their publications demographic. McCombs and Shaw studied the media for years and not only introduced agenda setting theory but also revealed the influence the media has over its audience.

A poll conducted by the Sacred Heart University Polling Institute found that “67.9 percent of Americans surveyed think that ‘objective and fair journalism is dead.’ While an overwhelming 89.3 percent believe the news media played a role in the election of President Barack Obama” (Lucas, 2009). These staggering statistics prove that journalists and media organizations need to make more of an effort to report un-biased work.

Jerry C. Lindsley, director of the Sacred Heart University Polling Institute stated that a bias in the media is a serious issue and should be confronted. “This perception of bias will eventually catch up with the news media outlets,” Linsley said. “We found that 45.9 percent have permanently stopped watching a news media organization, print or electronic, because of perceived bias” (Lucas, 2009).

The work produced by these cable news networks has a large impact on its audience, and in order for the audience to remain educated citizens, they should be given objective information from the media. McCombs and Shaw reference the scholars Lang and Lang who reiterate the power the media holds over its audience. “The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about,” (McCombs, 1972, p. 2).

***Chapter 9***

***Conclusions, Future Research, and Recommendations***

***Conclusions***

The majority of the researcher’s propositions were supported. The third proposition was altered after reviewing McCombs and Shaw’s investigation of the media. Their study determined that a bias will always be present in mass media.

* Biased news networks not only influence the public that watches it but also frames the news to align with a certain demographic. This is seen within both MSNBC, a news network who is known to be more liberal and FOX News who is known to report more conservatively.
* Journalists un-intentionally self-censor their work and classify certain stories as newsworthy in order to align with their networks political viewpoints.
* Neutral reporting is rare in network television and as McCombs and Shaw determine a bias can always be found in mass media

***Limitations***

There were numerous limitations the researcher developed while producing this thesis. The literature on agenda setting theory was very out-dated and did not reference cable news networks. This 1972 study incorporated newspapers and local television into their investigation. In order to resolve this issue, the researcher had to rely on scholarly articles and contemporary studies produced by news organizations.

***Future Research***

Future research should study how the face of journalism is changing from print to online. This is a very interesting topic and there hasn’t been a lot of research done, studying the ways people gather their news. Whether it is on newspaper websites, or comical television shows, access to media is increasing each day. This information would have aided this thesis and could have created a comparison of the media in 1972 to the current generation.

***Recommendations***

This is a constantly changing topic that requires updating year to year. The media will always be in a state of transition and it is important for researchers to study and analyze the truth/bias in the media. Gretchen Morgenson, a notable journalist from The New York Times spoke to a Miami University business journalism class, November 17th on the topic of journalism and the current state of the economy. Morgenson gave advice to these students and emphasized the truth in writing. “Journalists must continue to fight for truth,” Morgenson said.

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\*This article researches the topic of self censorship with journalists during the political elections from 1999-2004. This article reveals that many journalists self censored their work out of frustration for being accused with reporting with a “liberal bias.”

Bernhard, D., Krasa, S., & Polborn, M. (2007). Political polarization and the electoral effects of media bias. *Journal of Public Economics*.

\*(Abstract provided online) We develop a model in which profits of media firms depend on their audience ratings, and maximizing profits may involve catering to a partisan audience by suppressing information that the partisan audience does not like hearing. While voters are rational, understand the nature of the news suppression bias and update appropriately, important information is lost through bias and can lead to electoral mistakes. We characterize those conditions that give rise to electoral mistakes, showing that heightened political polarization and asymmetric distributions of voter ideologies make electoral mistakes more likely. Even if the median ideology is a centrist and centrist voters gain access to unbiased news, media bias can generate excessive “cross-over” voting, which, in turn, can lead to the election of the wrong candidate.

Goldberg, B (2002). *Bias: a CBS insider exposes how the media distort the news*. Washington, D.C.: National Book Network.

\*This book focuses on how the media can sway public opinion based on the information provided by a CBS reporter. This author focuses his research on the “liberal bias” that the network television portrays. This text will be vital to the thesis because it proves that the media plays a significant role in influencing public opinion.

Lucas, Fred (2009, September 25). *Big majorities say Objective Journalism is Dead*. Retrieved from http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/54541

\* This article from CNS news. com states that a recent poll from the American public believes that objective and fair journalism is dead. This poll also states that nearly 90% believe that the media had a large role in the election of Barack Obama.

McCombs, M. E, & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda setting theory function of mass media. *Public Opinon Quarterly*, 36(2), Retrieved from http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/36/2/176

\*This book presents more information on agenda setting theory and how it influences how the media sets an “agenda” for the public, farther changing their view of society. This text is vital to backing up the core theory and how it relates to cable network news.

Smith, Howard, K., Elliott, Osborn, Smith, Merriman, A. & Viser, Festus. (1970). *The news media--a service and a force.* Memphis, TN: Memphis State University Press .

\*This book focuses on how the media and new media are ever changing with the vast number of media outlets for people to use. This book also brings in the subjectivity of the news media. One of the authors works for the White House and brings in a rare angle of political news.

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***Autobiographical statement***

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While growing up in Cincinnati, OH, I never imagined myself wanting to pursue a career in the media. Yet after the very first year at Miami University, my English 101 course changed my entire career path. After passing two proficiency exams I was officially inducted into the School of Arts and Sciences. I started writing outside of school and began interning at the Oxford Press Newspaper. After a summer of beat writing, I advanced to yet another internship at WKRC-TV Cincinnati. The completion of this internship reiterates my career goal to work in the media and this thesis proves how my studies in both communication and journalism can be used to benefit myself as a future college graduate.

This thesis is a combination of my studies in both communication and journalism. For four years now I have been studying these two majors and have found a nexus between the two. The theories presented in my organizational communication courses can relate to all areas of communication. The agenda setting theory was then applied to broadcast journalism and mass media, further spurring my interest in this thesis topic.

**Appendix A**

# *Principles of Journalism*

*Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2009)*

*http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles*

**In 1997, an organization then administered by PEJ, the Committee of Concerned Journalists, began a national conversation among citizens and news people to identify and clarify the principles that underlie journalism. After four years of research, including 20 public forums around the country, a reading of journalism history, a national survey of journalists, and more, the group released a Statement of Shared Purpose that identified nine principles. These became the basis for The Elements of Journalism, the book by PEJ Director Tom Rosenstiel and CCJ Chairman and PEJ Senior Counselor Bill Kovach. Here are those principles, as outlined in the original Statement of Shared Purpose.**

## ****A Statement of Purpose****

After extended examination by journalists themselves of the character of journalism at the end of the twentieth century, we offer this common understanding of what defines our work. The central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society.

This encompasses myriad roles--helping define community, creating common language and common knowledge, identifying a community's goals, heros and villains, and pushing people beyond complacency. This purpose also involves other requirements, such as being entertaining, serving as watchdog and offering voice to the voiceless.

Over time journalists have developed nine core principles to meet the task. They comprise what might be described as the theory of journalism:

## ****1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth****

Democracy depends on citizens having reliable, accurate facts put in a meaningful context. Journalism does not pursue truth in an absolute or philosophical sense, but it can--and must--pursue it in a practical sense. This "journalistic truth" is a process that begins with the professional discipline of assembling and verifying facts. Then journalists try to convey a fair and reliable account of their meaning, valid for now, subject to further investigation. Journalists should be as transparent as possible about sources and methods so audiences can make their own assessment of the information. Even in a world of expanding voices, accuracy is the foundation upon which everything else is built--context, interpretation, comment, criticism, analysis and debate. The truth, over time, emerges from this forum. As citizens encounter an ever greater flow of data, they have more need--not less--for identifiable sources dedicated to verifying that information and putting it in context.

## ****2. Its first loyalty is to citizens****

While news organizations answer to many constituencies, including advertisers and shareholders, the journalists in those organizations must maintain allegiance to citizens and the larger public interest above any other if they are to provide the news without fear or favor. This commitment to citizens first is the basis of a news organization's credibility, the implied covenant that tells the audience the coverage is not slanted for friends or advertisers. Commitment to citizens also means journalism should present a representative picture of all constituent groups in society. Ignoring certain citizens has the effect of disenfranchising them. The theory underlying the modern news industry has been the belief that credibility builds a broad and loyal audience, and that economic success follows in turn. In that regard, the business people in a news organization also must nurture--not exploit--their allegiance to the audience ahead of other considerations.

## ****3. Its essence is a discipline of verification****

Journalists rely on a professional discipline for verifying information. When the concept of objectivity originally evolved, it did not imply that journalists are free of bias. It called, rather, for a consistent method of testing information--a transparent approach to evidence--precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work. The method is objective, not the journalist. Seeking out multiple witnesses, disclosing as much as possible about sources, or asking various sides for comment, all signal such standards. This discipline of verification is what separates journalism from other modes of communication, such as propaganda, fiction or entertainment. But the need for professional method is not always fully recognized or refined. While journalism has developed various techniques for determining facts, for instance, it has done less to develop a system for testing the reliability of journalistic interpretation.

## ****4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover****

Independence is an underlying requirement of journalism, a cornerstone of its reliability. Independence of spirit and mind, rather than neutrality, is the principle journalists must keep in focus. While editorialists and commentators are not neutral, the source of their credibility is still their accuracy, intellectual fairness and ability to inform--not their devotion to a certain group or outcome. In our independence, however, we must avoid any tendency to stray into arrogance, elitism, isolation or nihilism.

## ****5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power****

Journalism has an unusual capacity to serve as watchdog over those whose power and position most affect citizens. The Founders recognized this to be a rampart against despotism when they ensured an independent press; courts have affirmed it; citizens rely on it. As journalists, we have an obligation to protect this watchdog freedom by not demeaning it in frivolous use or exploiting it for commercial gain.

## ****6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise****

The news media are the common carriers of public discussion, and this responsibility forms a basis for our special privileges. This discussion serves society best when it is informed by facts rather than prejudice and supposition. It also should strive to fairly represent the varied viewpoints and interests in society, and to place them in context rather than highlight only the conflicting fringes of debate. Accuracy and truthfulness require that as framers of the public discussion we not neglect the points of common ground where problem solving occurs.

## ****7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant****

Journalism is storytelling with a purpose. It should do more than gather an audience or catalogue the important. For its own survival, it must balance what readers know they want with what they cannot anticipate but need. In short, it must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant. The effectiveness of a piece of journalism is measured both by how much a work engages its audience and enlightens it. This means journalists must continually ask what information has most value to citizens and in what form. While journalism should reach beyond such topics as government and public safety, a journalism overwhelmed by trivia and false significance ultimately engenders a trivial society.

## ****8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional****

Keeping news in proportion and not leaving important things out are also cornerstones of truthfulness. Journalism is a form of cartography: it creates a map for citizens to navigate society. Inflating events for sensation, neglecting others, stereotyping or being disproportionately negative all make a less reliable map. The map also should include news of all our communities, not just those with attractive demographics. This is best achieved by newsrooms with a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. The map is only an analogy; proportion and comprehensiveness are subjective, yet their elusiveness does not lessen their significance.

## ****9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience****

Every journalist must have a personal sense of ethics and responsibility--a moral compass. Each of us must be willing, if fairness and accuracy require, to voice differences with our colleagues, whether in the newsroom or the executive suite. News organizations do well to nurture this independence by encouraging individuals to speak their minds. This stimulates the intellectual diversity necessary to understand and accurately cover an increasingly diverse society. It is this diversity of minds and voices, not just numbers, which matters.

**Appendix B**

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*Society of Professional Journalist (1996-2009)*

http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Preamble  
Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.  
  
Seek Truth and Report It  
Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.  
  
Journalists should:

— Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.  
— Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.  
— Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.  
— Always question sources’ motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.  
— Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.  
— Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.  
— Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.  
— Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story  
— Never plagiarize.  
— Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.  
— Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.  
— Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.  
— Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.  
— Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.  
— Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.  
— Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.  
— Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

lineh  
  
Minimize Harm  
Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.  
  
Journalists should:

— Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.  
— Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.  
— Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.  
— Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone’s privacy.  
— Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.  
— Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.  
— Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.  
— Balance a criminal suspect’s fair trial rights with the public’s right to be informed.

lineh  
Act Independently  
Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.  
  
Journalists should:

—Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.  
— Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.  
— Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.  
— Disclose unavoidable conflicts.  
— Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.  
— Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.  
— Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

lineh  
Be Accountable  
Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.  
  
Journalists should:

— Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.  
— Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.  
— Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.  
— Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.  
— Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

*The SPJ Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of  
writers, editors and other news professionals. The present version of  
the code was adopted by the 1996 SPJ National Convention, after months  
of study and debate among the Society's members.  
  
Sigma Delta Chi's first Code of Ethics was borrowed from the  
American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926. In 1973, Sigma Delta Chi  
wrote its own code, which was revised in 1984, 1987 and 1996.*

**Appendix C**

**What a new journalist should look for in the news**

**Created by: Kimberly Bryan: WKRC-TV News Editor and**

**Kasie Baltes: News Operations Intern**

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1. Question yourself; is the information given to you confirmed?
2. Decide how to cover the story
3. What angle am I covering?
4. How does this information affect the community?
5. How fast can I break the story?
6. Is the information geared toward a certain audience?
7. What are my sources?
8. Do I have both sides of the story talking?
9. Is there a side to the story?
10. Is there a human element; is it relatable?
11. Where does this story take place?
12. If it is an accident; how many people were in the car?
13. Are there multiple victims?
14. If it is a shooting; where was the victim shot?
15. If it is a court case; is the person a suspect from a previous story?