

RESPONSIBILITY FRAMING AND
THE OBAMA HEALTH CARE REFORM BILL

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this textual analysis study is to explore and compare online news coverage of the Obama health care reform bill prior to its' House passage in November of 2009. Specifically, this study seeks to engage the following research questions:

- Were ideas of societal versus personal responsibility conveyed in framing the Obama health care reform bill?
- Do these frames support or negate values corresponding with differing partisan beliefs on the amount of government intervention?

Since President Barack Obama took office in January 2009, passing a health care reform bill had been one of his, and the Democratic Party's top domestic priorities. But throughout and after the health reform debates, an obvious governmental divide occurred between Democratic and Republican leaders, making 'health care reform' one of the most talked about and controversial political topics in 2009. The American public remained just as divided, considering a Gallup poll conducted after the passage of the bill on March 22, 2010 found that only 6 percent of Republicans believed the health care bill would have a net benefit on the uninsured, compared with 66 percent of Democrats (Christian Science Monitor, 2010). Confusion about what exactly was in the Bill was one of the largest concerns among Americans and the *Christian Science Monitor* summed this up in a March 19, 2010 article by stating, "Americans' inability to make

sense of (the bill) is causing them to respond negatively or to retreat to familiar partisan positions.”

The media’s interpretation and contextual representation of any governmental piece of legislation is vital not only for the political leaders spearheading the bill, but also for the citizens who will may have something to gain or lose from the proposed legislation. The main and very generalized goal of the Obama health care reform bill, according to the Obama administration, was to extend health insurance coverage to 32 million Americans and bring down long-term health spending. At the same time, this goal would also increase immediate spending by about \$1.2 trillion, meaning many would have to pay more in taxes (CMN News Network, 2010). And, according to the 2010 Gallup poll, nearly 20 percent of people feel that the Bill would makes things better only for the uninsured, and 44 percent believe the Bill would make things worse for the US as a whole (Christian Science Monitor, 2010).

While the public remains divided about the future of health care in America, scholars have been looking at the issue for a while now. According to scholar John Inglehart, “one of the key characteristics of all modern economies is that as they prosper, they spend more money for health care” (Inglehart, 1999, p. 71). He argues that 80 percent of nations purchase more health care as they prosper, so that their per capita health care spending can be explained by the per capita income of their country, but the United States is an exception in this manner. In a 1999 Health Policy Report, Inglehart states that the U.S. operates under a health care system that is unique and the most expensive of systems—outstripping more than 50 percent of the health care expenditures

of any other country (1999, p. 70). In that 1999 report, he argues that although the U.S. system is expensive, the number of people without insurance continues to increase, and in 1999, it was at its highest number in the last decade, reaching 43.4 million or 16.1 percent of the population. Ten years later, the number has gone up about 2 million and is 16.6 percent of the population (Gallup.com, 2009).

How health care funding is transferred from the federal to state governments is a source of disagreement between Republicans and Democrats. In general, Inglehart (1999) says that Republicans favor block grants to states, which are grants without strings attached, and Democrats prefer categorical grants, which stipulate how grants should be specifically spent. Fast forward ten years, Republicans and Democrats still disagree on how money should be spent concerning health care and increasing taxes, especially given the currently state of the economy and the rising national debt, which is currently around \$13 trillion. Republicans also fear that governmental intervention in health care may drive out private insurance competition.

Because Republicans and Democrats are so divided on this issue, this study aims to evaluate the possible frames employed by two widely-acknowledged, politically-leaning news media websites: *Foxnews.com* and *MSNBC.com*. Because Republicans and Democrats differ in belief about the amount of government intervention in health care, the researcher will incorporate the ideas of “societal responsibility”—meaning more government responsibility to help “take care” of society, and “personal responsibility”—less government intervention and more individual responsibility. The researcher will examine whether or not these values of responsibility were indeed used as framing

techniques, and whether or not they corresponded with a given partisan belief in terms of displaying support for more or less government intervention in health care.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Frameworks

Frames and Framing

Framing can be defined more along the lines of second-level agenda setting; it determines how a story gets told. The way news media present a story, through the use of a specific angle, a historical or cultural context, or specific rhetorical devices, can affect the meaning or ensuing interpretation of an event. Deciding not to use certain information or facts can also affect a news frame. Most of what people know comes to them “second” or “third” hand from the mass media, or from other people (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). When a reader or viewer sees or hears a word, its frame or collection of frames is activated in their brain (Lakoff, 2004). Framing theory has been associated with media effects and audience perception (Scheufele 2003). Scheufele asked a variety of questions concerning the evolution of certain frames, including:

- What factors influence the way journalists or societal groups frame certain issues?
- How do these processes work an, as a result, what are the frames that journalists use?
- What kinds of media frames influence the audience’s perception of certain issues, and how does this process work?

While agenda-setting gives the media power to focus attention on certain issues and suggest what the audience should be thinking about, Framing theory suggests that a

centralizing idea or storyline exists and provides meaning for these issues.

Framing theory is important for this research because it backs up the researcher's belief that framing techniques do exist and can have either a positive or negative effect on an audience's perception of an issue or event.

Politics, Health Issues

With news topics of political concern, where both the public and policy-makers could be influenced to vote or support a bill or electoral candidate, media framing becomes even more pertinent. Shanto Iyengar (1996) has been a pioneer in research on the framing effects of news coverage on public opinion and political choice. He says that viewers are sensitive to contextual cues when trying to reason with national issues. For example, the phrase, "people on welfare," typically elicits more disapproving and less charitable response over using the phrase, "poor people" (1996, p. 61).

While most political issues like health care are fairly detailed and complex, many scholars agree that the media tries to frame such topics to simplify these issues general public. In "Common Knowledge," scholars Neuman, Just and Crigler say that the most pronounced frames for political issues involved economic themes, divisions of protagonists with an "us vs. them" situation, a sense of human impact, and the application of moral values (Crigler, Just, Neuman, 1992). These frames can have varying effects on the reader, for example, in a study where scholars used morality frames with references to morals and judgment, participants would express the meaning of the story in terms of their own moral opinion on the matter. In another study that used human impact frames, scholars found that people frequently expressed concern for people they didn't know, as

well as people they did know, and that people were able to put themselves in someone else's shoes (1992).

Assigning Responsibility

Iyengar states that Americans have little knowledge of political issues beyond their own experience--but he follows by also stating “virtually all political issues are beyond the range of personal experience” (Iyengar, 1996, p. 878). From this, he questioned how citizens would then make sense of complex political issues and has found that the assignment of responsibility by the media has helped to simplify national issues into discernable and possibly solvable problems for the public's understanding. In one of Iyengar's studies, participants were required to decide whether issues of crime or terrorism were individualistically responsible (the responsibility of the perpetrator) or if society was responsible; i.e. societal responsibility. Iyengar states that there are two ways the media attempts to frame news issues: in episodic terms, or thematically. In a typical episodic frame, an issue like welfare was framed through by focusing on a single individual's story, and thematic was framed via a more national outlook.

Iyengar also indicates that the media's assignment of responsibility for solving political problems can and will shape the public's perception on how they feel about a topic, but he also importantly notes that “how individuals assign responsibility is considered part and parcel of long-standing political predispositions” (Iyengar, 1996, p. 61). Therefore, episodic versus thematic framing may have an affect on how readers interpret the Obama Health Care Reform Bill and whether or not “more” government is needed to fix the current health care issues. For example, are the websites: foxnews.com

versus msnbc.com framing the Obama Health Care Reform Bill framing the issue as episodic, possibly by highlighting an individual's struggle to get health care insurance, or thematically, by using a more national and statistic-heavy frame? While the use of episodic versus thematic framing does not necessarily indicate an immediate political bias in reporting, it still may shed some light on how readers may interpret the news, which is still useful for this study.

For issues of health policy, the assignment of responsibility in frames is more evident. Some scholars argue that the two main ideas the media use for reporting public health stories are in terms of "market justice" and "social justice." Market justice identifies with values such as: self-determination and self-discipline, individualism and self-interest, and limited government intervention. Social justice identifies with values such as: shared responsibility and cooperation, a strong obligation to the public good and communal well-being (Dorfman, Wallack, Woodruff, 2005). While the scholars actually push for health officials to utilize social justice frames to help advocate their ideas, more interesting are their ideas about the language of public health. Dorfman, Wallack and Woodruff argue that the "first language of American is individualism and personal responsibility," and these ideals don't necessarily work for solving national health-related issues (2005). These scholars argue that many overarching health and social problems are related to conditions outside the immediate individual's control, for example: how can a child get proper exercise and avoid becoming obese if the poor area in which they live has no safe playgrounds? Or, what if physical education is no longer a part of the curriculum?

With other health-related issues, like tobacco and alcohol abuse, success has been found when frames of social justice were employed to help solve these problems. For example, scholars argue that Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) came about through proactive means and a desire to make improvements as a societal whole, rather than waiting for individual people to take care of their own problems (2005).

Partisan Values

The two major parties in the United States, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, can many times differ on how they feel a national issue should be handled. In a general sense of dividing lines between the two parties, Democrats are usually in favor of more government intervention, while generally, Republicans can be expected to desire less government intervention. Some scholars refer to this as a left-right scale, corresponding with the desired degree of state intervention, where the most-left on the scale desire more intervention and the more right on the scale desire the least amount of intervention (Bais, Blake, Dion, 1993). Bais, Blake and Dion also go on to define what some call the left-right typology, which they call, “classic economic party conflicts—government regulation of the economy...as opposed to free enterprise” (1993, p. 43). These scholars conducted a study in which they asked the following question: is there a link between party composition of government and the size of government? They measured the size of government by the amount of government spending and found that

over a period of 28 years from 1960-1987, that governments who were controlled by parties of the left spent slightly more than parties of the right.

Government spending is certainly an important element concerning the framing of the Obama health care reform bill, especially considering this “spending” is one of the main arguments that currently divides Republicans and Democrats. So, the idea of using personal or societal responsibility frames, i.e. deciding who (the government or the individual) is responsible for solving health care and how they’ll do it, can be translated to partisan opinions about government intervention (1993).

With these topics of interest, this textual analysis study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What ideas of personal or social responsibility are conveyed when framing coverage of the Obama health care reform bill?
- Do the frames convey values that correspond with differing partisan beliefs on the idea of personal or societal responsibility?

The researcher thinks these questions are an important contribution to the research field of mass media effects because they could identify possible framing bias concerning political topics that await approval. And, these questions could also further contribute to research that will study the actual effects on audience perception and opinion changes with news frames. Although the idea of an absolutely unbiased media is something of an idealistic past, these kinds of research questions are important and act as somewhat of a checks and balances system for what some might deem as a powerfully influential mass media.

Linking Critical Theory

“Framing is selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating context” (Entman, 1989). Many media effects’ researchers (Iyengar, 1996; Capella & Jamieson, 1996; Entman, 1989) have found that the manner in which the media frames events; i.e. the use of specific key words, repetition of phrases, highlighting statistics, or absence of certain facts could affect what the reader or audience member perceives as the most important truth out of any given issue or event. Simply put, any one journalist or news media corporation can in one way or another, create what some have called a “social reality” for the public. The media not only decides what news to tell the public with “agenda setting,” but also has the power to decide how to relay that information (Entman, 1989; McCombs & Shaw, 1986).

Iyengar has divided framing techniques into two main categories: thematic framing and episodic framing. An example of thematic framing would be a story about the Iraq war that addressed the historical context of the relations between the countries, while episodic framing, which Iyengar says is the predominant frame in the U.S., depicts issues in terms of individual instances or specific events (Iyengar, 2005). The researcher can use the theory of thematic versus episodic framing to help divide different framing techniques into categories.

Linguist professor George Lakoff has studied the strategies of political rhetoric and has concluded that in order to gain a political edge, Republicans have, first and foremost recognized the importance of language and invested in what he calls,

“principled rhetoric.” For example, Lakoff states that the phrase “tax relief,” was created and repeatedly used by Republican politicians and now acts as a “normal phrase” for describing lowering taxes. Lakoff described how the word “relief” has such a positive frame that it plays well for the Republican party goals of lowering taxes, which essentially means less governmental programs (Lakoff, 2004). Lakoff has defined two competing worldviews that define the Democratic nature as the “nurturing parent” who is also weak, and the Republicans as the “strict father” who strong but disciplining. The “strict father” view is associated with a limited view of government, with most domestic problems solved individually. This outlook believes that programs like welfare are counterproductive because they breed dependence instead of self-reliance (2004).

Lakoff refers to three conceptual levels for framing messages in the context of political issues:

- Level 1: the expression of overarching values, such as fairness, responsibility, equality, equity, etc.
- Level 2: the general issue being addressed, such as housing, the environment, school, etc.
- Level 3: policy details, strategies, etc (Dorfman, Wallack, Woodruff, 2005).

The researcher sees these as key grouping categories especially considering when deciding if frames are using overarching values such as social justice.

Lakoff (2004) also states that any time a level 1 frame is instilled for representing a news issue, the issue is more likely to resonate with audience members. Responsibility is a level 1 value that can certainly be used to frame an issue. For example, with health

care, Lakoff states that in general, the Republican belief is that the individual responsibility of “the parent” to take care of their children and that no one else should be doing this job. He also states that, in general, the Democratic belief for health care is that every American should have access to “state of the art” health care (2004, p. 92). Lakoff theorizes that because people vote their moral identity rather than their self-interest, that Democrats will lose even when their platform is more closely related to the views of the average voter. While Lakoff only speaks in terms of how political leaders frame issues, Iyengar takes it further to say that media are responsible for taking these frames and either accepting or altering them (Iyengar, 2005). This would refer to another model, called the Cascading Activation Model, which suggests that many media frames are concocted only after information is first framed beginning with political leaders in the White House and then a “waterfall effect” ensues. Specifically, the White House administration creates the frames for American foreign policy. The second level consists of frames set by the members of Congress and other government elites. The third level consists of journalists who select frames from the top two levels. And lastly, the fourth and final level consists of specific rhetoric and angle chosen by the journalist. This model is important for reference to partisan values falling into a given frame.

Iyengar (1989) also refers to a domain-specific model of public opinion in which there are two dimensions of assessable responsibility: causal responsibility and treatment responsibility. Causal, he says, focuses on the origin of the problem, while treatment focuses on who or what has the power to alleviate the problem. He says that these two assessments of responsibility are very applicable for understanding political issues.

Iyengar (1989) says that attribution of responsibility can represent a powerful psychological cue for people. In his studies, he found that when individuals or institutions are perceived as agents of treatment but not causation, evaluations and opinions are positive. For example, if an article from either foxnews.com or msnbc.com focused on the origin of any issues or problems surrounding the Obama health care reform bill, such as confusion about the bill, government spending and higher taxes, Iyengar might predict that readers' opinions about the bill might be negative, rather than if an article frame focused on treatment of the problem. Here, the researcher can see if frames employ words or themes that focus on causal or treatment responsibility, and whether or not these themes resonate with partisan beliefs. Assigning causal or treatment responsibility is also tied to whether or not the reader feels that the individual (in an episodically-framed issue) or society (in a thematically-framed issue) should be responsible for solving the problem.

Another researcher, Dan Beauchamp, states that public health stories are reported in terms of "market justice" and "social justice." Market justice identifies with values such as: self-determination and self-discipline, individualism and self-interest, and limited government intervention. Social justice identifies with values such as: shared responsibility and cooperation, a strong obligation to the public good and communal well-being (Dorfman, Wallack, Woodruff, 2005). These values match many of the same beliefs and adjectives that Lakoff uses to describe the differing parent views for Republicans and Democrats. For example, many of the market-justice values such as individualism, self-determination and limited government intervention directly relate to the definition of Lakoff's "strict father" description for the Republican Party. And just as

relatable are the social justice values of shared responsibility and cooperation to Lakoff's "nurturing parent" description for the Democratic Party. These definitions are key for identifying frames specifically for public health that could also be partisan-driven and based on party values.

For the purpose of this study, it becomes important to define the valuable concepts and the theories that will be used. The researcher plans to refer to Entman's (1989) framing as a theory of media effects, Iyengar's thematic and episodic framing, Lakoff's three conceptual framing levels, and the cascading activation model. For Assigning Responsibility and Personal vs. Societal Responsibility, the researcher plans to utilize Iyengar's (1989) definition of the theories of causal and treatment responsibility, and Dan Beauchamp's definitions of societal and market justice for framing health issues.

CHAPTER THREE

Review of the Literature

No studies on the media's framing of the Obama health care reform bill have yet been conducted. However, there is a body of research on how the media frames both political and health-related issues for readers. Much of this literature is focused on how topics of political concern, i.e. terrorism, war, and the economy, were covered by various newspapers, both U.S. and international. Many studies have gone so far as to determine the effects of such frames on readers' interpretation and opinions of events. Other studies have focused on the use of conflict and responsibility frames, which have also proved useful for this review.

Framing Effects

Some scholars have looked specifically at the effects of news frames on reader's thoughts and recall (De Vreese, Semetko, Valkenburg, 1999). Their research began by assuming that journalists will unavoidably frame or structure their representations of political events to make them "accessible" to a large audience—telling what they can in a limited amount of space and time. In the De Vreese, Semetko, Valkenburg study, each news issue was written using four different types of framing: "conflict frames" that emphasized conflict between individuals or parties, "human interest frames" that brought an individual or emotional angle to the frame, "responsibility frames" that attributed responsibility for causing or solving a problem to the government, and lastly, "economic

consequences frames” that presented an event, problem, or issue in terms of the economic consequences. Through interviews, study found that most readers’ responses to questions reflected the specific frame used in a story. The results of the study also suggested that news framed in terms of human interest actually diminished the recollection of information (1999).

Other studies also focused on there being a “responsibility frame.” For example, scholar Shanto Iyengar looked at responsibility attribution. He found that with TV news specifically, when issues like welfare or crime were framed episodically (i.e. in personal or individual experiences with welfare), that viewers were actually less sympathetic and attributed causal responsibility of the problem to the individual in the story. In other words, they blamed the victim for the issue at stake and felt personal responsibility was necessary. When the same issue was framed in a more national view or “thematically,” viewers tended to view that society was responsible for “treating” the issue (Iyengar, 1989).

One study also looked at the effects news frames have on people’s evaluations and opinions of foreign countries. The authors argued that most people are heavily dependent on the mass media for information about international affairs and so the media can play an important role in shaping the perceptions of other nations (Brewer, Graf, Willnat, 2003). According to the authors, their study aimed to test for specific standards of judgment that citizens may use when forming an opinion about such nations. Examples include media coverage, specifically by the *New York Times*, of Mexico and Cambodia, which were generally portrayed as “battlefields in the war on drugs.” The authors

conclude that it is possible many audience members have now learned to directly associate these countries with illegal drugs (2003). These studies, which essentially looked at how news framing affects the reader or audience member and many of them concluded that framing politically-infused topics could affect an individual's perception towards them contextually.

Framing Political Issues

Recent research addressing the framing of political issues has focused on such controversial topics as 9/11 and the War on Terror. Multiple studies looked specifically at immediate post-9/11 coverage and how those beginning frames contributed to the more recent frames for covering the War on Terror. The authors of these studies seemed more concerned with specific frames and rhetorical devices. One found that immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, from Sept. 12-Oct. 8, 2001, the ten largest US newspapers had editorials that created a singular symbolic narrative about the possible US military response to the attacks (Ryan, 2004). The study looked contextually at the editorials and their use of historical references and government sources, whose frame ultimately suggested that an attack on Afghanistan was both “appropriate” and “justified” at the time (2004). The author concluded that these writers helped largely contribute to creating a “symbolic narrative about possible military strikes in that ‘new kind of war’” (2004).

The author noted that the writers used selectivity when choosing various historical references, government sources and contextual statements to frame the tragedy and help

push a certain US response. The author also stated that no editorial pieces suggested that military intervention was ever inappropriate or that military intervention could fail; a few urged caution, but that was the only form of hesitancy (2004). This seems to suggest that frames can change over time, along with a possibly altered public interpretation about the context of War on Terror. Although this study aims to look at the more recent and immediate coverage concerning the Obama health care reform bill, another interesting study might look at how its framing may have changed five years or so later.

Another study highlighted words used by the media that helped further the War on Terror frame and also suggested that a form of cascading activation was evident. Cascading activation is a theoretical model that suggests framing starts at the presidential level and cascades/becomes filtered down through multiple levels, including going from political officials to media framing. Whether or not one group accepts the framing from the “level” or “group” before it is another matter. This particular study explored how the “War on Terror” was framed in stories that emerged from the newspaper, *USA Today* (Lewis, Reese, 2009). The authors approached the study with the opinion that because frames are organized around more than just available content, that the journalists’ personal beliefs will both reflect and reinforce the framed text (2009). They conducted interviews with journalists at *USA Today* and results showed that “reporters ‘transmitted’ the War on Terror as shorthand for policy, ‘reified’ the frame as concrete and uncontested, and ‘naturalized’ it as a taken-for-granted condition” (2009). It was concluded that this study should act as a lesson for the U.S. press to be more aware of the

patterned phrases they use that seem to continually suggest the righteousness of public officials (2009).

Some scholars took this a step further, looking at the coverage of “acts of terrorism” over time and post 9/11. One author investigated whether the news media framed outside or unrelated to Al Qaeda terrorist attacks as related to that group and to the War on Terror (Nagar, 2007). The author did a quantitative content analysis of both news media outlets and government officials and results indicated that the overall framing of these groups remained consistent over time. Nagar referred to the frame as not “spilling over,” meaning that terrorist groups unrelated to Al Qaeda were not incorporated into the War on Terror, thus supporting the overall framing attempt by the media (2007).

Another study looked at phrases like “axis of evil” used by President Bush and how newspapers in the U.S quoted him. Although this also concerns Cascading Activation, the study placed more emphasis on the words being “a Bush Administration Strategy” to gain support for the War on Terror. The author states that it competes with the two models that are detailed in the National Security Strategy: a combination of realist and liberal international relations (Rojecki, 2008). The author said that the administration used various rhetoric and frames to try and get public support for a unilateral foreign policy. To prove this, the author looked at commentary and editorials from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, prior to the wars in Afghanistan (2008). It was found that there were common themes of ‘American Exceptionalism’ in use of certain words and phrases that again identified as “good vs. evil” (2008).

Frames furthering “securitization” against “evil” were also analyzed.

One paper created a theoretical argument about Securitization and how security-related issues are made out to be immediate threats to national and/or cultural survival. The author refers to securitization as both form of framing and a way to gain authority (Vultee, 2007). He attempted to prove his point by conducting a study in which he presented experimental participants with various news articles that were presented in either a securitized or un-securitized way. It was found that the securitized articles tended to increase the perception of there being a serious threat and that the government would be equipped to handle the threat (2007).

One Canadian study looked at the differences in how the media covered the war in Afghanistan and the Second Persian Gulf War. The author did a textual analysis of the following Canadian newspapers: the *Toronto Star*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and the *Vancouver Sun* (Valenzano 2009). He also referred to Entman’s model when examining how foreign news is framed in perspective to the role the American foreign policy frame plays around the world. In his methodology, he looked at statements that were made by Canadian government officials and how the media responded to the frames given by these officials. The author found that there were multiple frames offered by the White House: (1) the Humanitarian Theme, where the administration characterized the intervention in Afghanistan as a humanitarian action in addition to being an effort to bring the 9/11 offenders to justice; (2) the Diplomatic Relationship Theme, where the administration framed invading Afghanistan in terms of the U.S.’s diplomatic relationship with its allies; and (3) the Enemy Frame, where the War on Terror became an

“us vs. them” frame. The author discovered that in cases where these frames offered by the White House were accepted by other foreign leaders, that journalists both extended and enhanced the frames. But, in cases where the White House frame was in disagreement with foreign leaders, reporters offered criticism. This author wanted to make a point to show just how much influence the White House affairs have on foreign journalists (2009). While this showed how much journalists may value the opinion of foreign leaders, it didn’t doesn’t necessarily explain why, or even if the journalists are conscious that they may be patterning their frames in such a manner.

Another study analyzed how the White House administration’s decision to be in “a state of war” following the 9/11 attacks was such a significant event, especially compared to other “states of war” in the past. The authors of “War Narratives: Framing our Understanding of the War on Terror,” say that the way the Bush administration never straight out declared that we were in a state of war, unlike past war declarations have occurred (Callahan, Dubnnick, Olshfski, 2006). This is an example of where cascading activation starts and the media is left to contest whether or not they will support that frame.

Given that these studies suggest there is an effect on the audience when framing topics of controversial political concern, this study seeks to discover if that has translated over into coverage of the Obama health care reform bill, considering that the topic itself is a controversial piece of legislation for Republicans and Democrats. And because “responsibility” seems to be a recurring theme in how journalists tend to simplify such political issues, the study will also look for possible references to personal or social

responsibility, which can also be tied to the differing partisan belief on the appropriate amount of government intervention. So, the main research question that will guide this study is: What frames were present in early online coverage of the Obama Health Care Reform Bill on *MSNBC.com* and *Foxnews.com*? The study will also address the following questions:

- Were ideas of societal vs. personal responsibility conveyed when framing coverage of the Obama Healthcare Reform Bill?
- Do the frames convey values that correspond with differing partisan beliefs on the amount of government intervention?

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Design and Methodology

This study seeks to examine the early online news coverage of the Obama health care reform bill by two different news websites: *MSNBC.com* and *FoxNews.com*. The reason for using *Foxnews.com* and *MSNBC.com* was because they continually rank in the top 15 most popular news websites who serve mass-market audiences, and both have more than 8 million monthly visitors (EBizMBA.com, 2010). Also, the researcher wanted to choose two news sites whose political leanings have been called into question. The two sites have been publicly regarded as websites that often cover news in a way that appeals to the political right (*Foxnews.com*) and the political left (*MSNBC.com*).

It should be noted that the researcher decided to focus on websites instead of newspapers, broadcast, or radio, because in her opinion, online news is largely increasing in popularity as a primary news medium especially with younger generations. With several large newspapers filing for bankruptcy, such as *Rocky Mountain News*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News*, the researcher felt it was important to conduct her study on the framing of online stories because online news may become the primary medium for what once was “print” news consumption.

This study examined health care reform stories on the *MSNBC.com* and *Foxnews.com* websites from July 2009-October 2009, four months prior to the House passage of the bill in November 2009. These four months of coverage were sufficient for

research purposes because they provided as some of the earliest coverage of the bill as a real, to-be-voted-on issue.

Major incidents that occurred during the study's four months of coverage:

- **July 2009** House Democrats introduce the bill
- **August 2009** summer recess for Members of Congress, but first “noisy demonstrations at public meetings” begin to occur surrounding the bill.
- **September 2009** President Obama addresses a joint session of the Senate and the House and the Senate introduces its version of the bill.
- **October 2009** Both House and Senate Democrat leaders announce plans to include a federal government-run insurance “scheme” in the bill, a proposal eventually dropped from the final bill (The Guardian, 2010).

The researcher looked at 30 articles from each month for each website, equaling 120 articles from *MSNBC.com* and 120 articles from *Foxnews.com*, totaling 240 in all. The researcher employed Advanced Google Search to retrieve the articles, using the search phrase: “health-care-reform-bill,” the website: *MSNBC.com* or *Foxnews.com*, and finally, the customized date range: 07/01/09-07/31/09. By entering this information and changing it according to website and date range, the researcher was able to see all of the articles that included the phrase “health care reform bill” on the each website from July 1, 2009 through October 31, 2009. From here, Advanced Google Search organized the search results by relevance, meaning that the articles on the top of the list were the most relevant concerning the Obama health care reform bill. Then, the researcher chose, from each month, the top 30 articles that Advanced Google Search produced, eliminating

articles from the Associated Press or other news websites because the study was not looking to examine the framing employed by news sites other than *MSNBC.com* or *Foxnews.com*. Also, the researcher decided not to use articles that were simply transcriptions from the broadcast versions of *MSNBC News* or *Fox News* because the study was focused solely on the generation of online news.

A qualitative research procedure was used to examine the articles, because it allowed for an in-depth analysis and identification of specific frames for specific websites, something quantitative research could not accomplish. Counting the number of words or phrases repeated alone cannot yield an overall theme for frame interpretation. Qualitative research embodies the following qualities that the researcher found useful for this study: the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection; the data that emerge from a qualitative study are descriptive in words and not necessarily just numbers; the focus of qualitative research is on participants' perceptions and experiences and the way they make sense of their lives; and lastly that qualitative research focuses on the process as well as the outcome (Creswell, 2009). These qualities allowed for in-depth analysis and interpretation of the frames used by news websites on political stories.

The researcher specifically used a textual analysis method to identify and compare frames present in the coverage of political stories of each of the news websites. According to Larsen, text should not be regarded as having a fixed meaning, instead it should be thought of as being able to bring out a range of possible meanings, not least the 'hidden message of the text' (Larsen, 1991, p. 122). Finding the hidden meaning behind words becomes possible via the use of the constant comparative method. Van Dijk says

that text has both local and global coherence, local referring to the way propositions in the text are bound together by relation of time, global referring to an idea of a master theme embedded within the text (van Dijk, 1991).

Another characteristic of textual analysis is the concept of implication, as in what might not have been exactly said in the text, but what the reader was supposed to have inferred based on background knowledge. Van Dijk also refers to style as a core component of textual analysis, meaning that use of passive or active voice can affect the meaning of a story (van Dijk, 1991).

Grounded Theory and the Constant Comparison Method

One method of textual analysis is the constant comparison method, which the researcher found relevant to use in this study. The purpose of the constant comparison method of joint coding and analysis is to generate unique theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Because the Obama health care reform bill is fairly new and unstudied, the researcher found it necessary to have the freedom to identify and compare similar or different frames in the coverage for this specific topic. While certain frames can “spill over” from various news topics to others, the researcher felt that especially concerning public confusion about the details of the bill, new framing categories might exist. Constant comparison also allows analysis of any and all available information, rather than looking for “proof” of a specific frame (1967). The researcher realizes that while she suggests that the ideas of responsibility may be present in frames, that with the constant comparison method, she may actually find frames that could prove otherwise.

This method is designed to aid the researcher who has the skills to generate a theory that is integrated, consistent and operationalized. It must be noted that this method is not designed (like quantitative methods are) to guarantee that two researchers working independently could achieve the same data, but this vagueness and flexibility allows for the creation of necessary and new framing categories that most certainly may be topic specific. The constant comparison method has four distinct stages that the researcher used when examining articles from both of the sites (Glaser and Strauss, 1967):

- Comparing incidents applicable to each category: The researcher would begin by coding the important incidents in each coverage period into categories.

For example, the researcher would create separate categories for incidents that occurred in July versus October. She would then compare how the incident was categorized either similarly or differently by each website.

- Integrating categories and their properties: The researcher would compare the categories for each incident of coverage and identified characteristics for these categories.

In this study on the framing of the Obama health care reform bill, the researcher acknowledged details and characteristics of the categories for framing the various planning stages of the bill. Predicted categories for the framing of the Obama health care reform bill included “tax relief,” “social responsibility” or “bigger government.”

- Delimiting the theory: Once the researcher has created all necessary and visible categories and their ensuing principles, she can start to reduce the original list of categories.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), after an analyst or researcher has coded incidents for the same category, she can learn to see quickly whether or not the next applicable incident points to a new angle or aspect. If not, the incident is not coded—since it may only add bulk to the coded data and nothing new to the theory. As in the case of the Obama health care reform study, the researcher began to find and see details that only added bulk to her framing categories and after that, she began to limit the amount of material she recorded.

- Writing the theory: This is the point in which the researcher is convinced that her theory and analysis form a substantive theory that may be reasonably accurate for the matter studied.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher must collate the memos on each category and use the coded data to validate each of her points suggested in the written theory.

In addition to using the constant comparison method to generate theory, the researcher used a frame analysis guide of questions to use when analyzing each article. While the researcher did not rely solely on the guide, the questions helped guide the creation of categories and properties. Please refer to Appendix A on page 85 to review the guide.

As for verification, the researcher used the following methods to ensure validity of this study:

- Mixed-Method: the researcher used both the constant comparison method and a frame analysis guide to ensure the validity of her results.
- Keeping copies: Copied printouts of each article were saved for later reference after the culmination of the study. The researcher kept notes and charts about all the observations for each article.
- Clarifying the bias: the researcher, ahead of time, stated the possible bias that of her interpretations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results

Overview

The researcher examined 240 articles dated throughout July 1, 2009-October 31st 2009 from both the *Foxnews.com* and *MSNBC.com* websites. The following categories emerged as clear and overlapping themes throughout the four months of coverage.

- The Bill Timeline/Schedule
 - Setbacks, Deadlines and Progress
- Interpretation of Political Strategies
 - President Obama and the Liberal Democrats' Strategy
 - The Republican Strategy/Response
- Contested Issues within the bill
 - Abortion Funding, The Public Option, Costs, Other Issues
- Highlighted Supporters versus Non-Supporters
 - Doctors, Businesses, Others
- Poll Evaluation

The Results section will include the above categories, evidence of their inclusion in the coverage, and the researcher's interpretation of the category's meaning to the overall framing and context of the Obama health care reform bill. The following Discussion section will further compare and explore how the two websites approached covering

these categories in both similar and/or different ways, and possibly how personal versus societal responsibility and political leanings may or may not have been evident within coverage of each of these categories. The Conclusion section will provide a link to the utilized critical theory.

The table on the next page summarizes the most prominent frame categories used by both *Foxnews.com* and *MSNBC.com*. The number of articles that focused coverage on each category is included in parenthesis with their totals at the bottom of each column. It should be noted that many of the articles focused on one or more of these categories, so the numbers may add up to more than 120 articles per website.

Table 1. Summary of Frame Categories

	<i>Foxnews.com</i>	<i>MSNBC.com</i>
Timeline/Schedule	Setbacks seen as negative signs; Deadlines not mentioned much; Progress seen as rushed and with casualties Total (31)	Setbacks seen as stall periods with lots of waiting; Deadlines set by President, others responsible for meeting them; Progress seen important and as ‘slowly but surely’ Total (39)
Political Strategies	President and Democrats seen as using possibly weak and/or low strategies; Republican strategy not mentioned much except tort reform Total (49)	President and Democrats seen as weak with message strategy, having to “wrestle” with people; Republican strategy seen as scare tactic, loud voiced, trying to derail Total (43)
Contested Issues	Abortion funding (10) was covered more and featured many opposing opinions; Public option (19) is also government-run, confused white house opinion, failed examples; Cost (36) coverage challenged Obama assurances. Total (65)	Abortion funding (2) coverage more about misinformation, facts; Death panels (6) are covered more, seen as dangerous language; Public option (29) also focused on confused white house opinion; Cost (19) was explained in detail, listed options. Total (56)
Supporters vs. Non-Supporters	Focused on doctors (3) against the bill and seniors who were unhappy with the AARP (2) support of the bill Total (5)	Featured doctors and associations (2) in support of the bill; Also featured business owners (2) who were mostly for the bill; Featured the “losers” (3) of current insurance state Total (7)
Polls	All polls featured public dissatisfaction with the Obama health care reform bill Total (5)	Except for the last two polls, all featured somewhat negative public opinion with the Obama health care reform bill Total (5)

The Bill Timeline/Schedule

Both *MSNBC.COM* and *Foxnews.com* made many attempts to cover and talk about the meaning of the Bill's timeline/schedule within the legislative process. When focusing an article's discussion on the timeline/schedule of the development and passage of the Obama health care reform bill, both websites utilized the following terms: 'setbacks,' 'deadlines,' and 'progress.' But, when it came to providing context and meaning behind any possible 'setback' (a term with a negative connotation), met or unmet deadline, or 'progress' (positive connotation), the two sites at times had varying interpretations. *Foxnews.com*, more so than *MSNBC.com*, highlighted the opposition towards the bill, and also the speed and pressing nature the of bill's Timeline/Schedule. And, *MSNBC.com*, more so than *Foxnews.com*, focused on framing a "slow but steady" bill progress with setbacks being situations in which President Obama had not much control over.

Setbacks: Foxnews.com

Many times, *Foxnews.com* coverage would highlight the fact that "despite a series of setbacks," that Nancy Pelosi and the Democrats were still planning on moving forward with the bill. In another article, "House Democrats Seek to Tax the Wealthy to Finance Health Care Reform," (July 14, 2009) *Foxnews.com* again states, "Despite objections from conservative and moderate Democrats in the House, prospects for quick action are better there than in the Senate." Another article, "Despite resistance from virtually all Republicans..." The word "despite" here indicates almost an element of surprise that Democrats acted against the will or better odds in this certain situation.

Other setback-related articles refer to Republican opposition, but most times offer the “speed” of passing the bill as a reason for the opposition. In the opening sentence of “Republicans Warn of ‘Web of Bureaucracy’ in Democrats’ Health Care Plan,” (July 15, 2009) *Foxnews.com* describes that Republican Senators sought to block Democrats from “hastily passing a costly and sweeping health package on orders from President Obama.”

Foxnews.com also used a fault-identifying technique for providing setback context, the same technique that *MSNBC.com* also uses. One article begins with a lead sentence declaring “‘Blue Dog’ Democrats are delaying work...”. Other setbacks were many times simply denoted as “hurdles,” which suggests that the legislative process may be, metaphorically, a race or journey of some kind.

Setbacks: MSNBC.com

In the first article that addressed the schedule or timeline of the bill, *MSNBC.com*’s, “First Read, Today’s health care bill,” (July 13, 2009) focused on a “setback” and “postponement” in the Democrats’ goals of passing the bill by the August recess and that the setback was due to the “furor raised by Centrist Democrats.” This suggested that the fault of the setback was because of the more moderate or centrist Democrats, which at the same time sheds light on the fact that the party itself might be divided. In “Obama derides ‘tendency towards inertia’,” (July 20, 2009) the article suggested that it would be “advantageous” for the White House to get their bills out before the August recess because of a risk that moderate Democrats and Republicans who “might have” voted for reform will go home, hear complaints from “their loudest”

constituents and then rescind support. Another noted setback fault was attached to the more moderate “Blue Dog” Democrats, which one article’s title, “First Read, Congress: It’s a Blue Dog’s world...and we’re just lucky to live in it,” suggested that they were not only totally in charge of the bill’s progression, but were also responsible for the “deadlock” within the party and for “stalling” progress. These are all examples of whose fault it might be for any setbacks in the overall timeline or schedule for the bill.

Another setback argument about the bill’s schedule was whether or not health care is “moving too fast.” *MSNBC.com* wrote a series of articles whose layout is in the form of “fact-checking,” with a “claim” and explanation, followed by whether or not the claim is fact or fiction, plus another explanation. In “Doc shortages to deficits: Reform reality check,” (July 22, 2009) the claim that “health reform is moving too fast” was followed by an answer that seemed to suggest “no, reform is not moving too fast,” because “the longer reform stalls, the more forces of the status quo can try to kill it.” So again, this article had suggested that the fault of delay or setback was due to outside sources, not because of an unreasonable time schedule.

Toward the end of July, the articles tended to have a more negative approach considering the August recess and headlines admitted that the Senate bill “won’t pass before recess.” Needing “more time” and not wanting to “jam something through” were reasons/faults for the postponement. But, while the delay of the Senate bill in the article was seen as a setback/downfall, the article countered with the optimistic fact that the Finance committee would indeed be done by the recess with their bill. This suggested

that while there was some justifiable reason for the delay, that progress was indeed occurring in one way or another.

Deadlines: Foxnews.com

Foxnews.com does not reference specific deadlines like the August recess as much as *MSNBC.com*, but the few times the website did, it usually related deadlines to the concept of speed and pressure. For example, one article, “Obama to Press ‘Blue Dog’ Dems on Health Care,” (July 20, 2009) refers to how Republicans and Moderate Democrats feel the more liberal Democrat leaders are “racing to okay a bill by the August recess.”

In another deadline-focused article, “Health Care to Dominate Lawmakers’ Summer Recess After Quick Deal Eludes Congress,” (July 16, 2009) *Foxnews.com* uses phrases like “the fast track is gone,” and stepping off “the bullet train” in connection with the missed August-recess deadline. That same article also says that “With objections from moderate Democrats slowing debate to a deliberative stroll,” all confirmations of the fact that health care was indeed moving too fast for the intended deadline.

Deadlines: MSNBC.com

In “Obama agenda: deficit, health, Michigan,” (July 14, 2009) not only was the concept of the President’s “agenda” brought up in the title of the article, but the article also stated that “Obama set a deadline for Friday for Baucus to get health care legislation out of his committee.” These possessive-like sentences suggest that “agenda” and “deadlines” are indeed set by the President, and that people like Baucus might be responsible for getting them done. Another article referred to the set deadlines as to the

“self-imposed” by Democratic leaders. But to counter in that same article, a Democrat was quoted as stressing the importance that the bill get done ‘correctly versus quickly.’

In another article, “Kennedy-Dodd cmte passes health bill,” (July 15, 2009) the focus was again on how Democratic leaders “believed or at least hoped” to have each chamber pass the bills before the August recess, but a follow-up sentence did counter with the fact that some Democrats admitted reaching that deadline would provide as a challenge. This suggested that although the Democrats wanted and hoped to reach their deadline, there might be difficulties along the way.

The section of another article is titled “Burying bad news,” and stated that perhaps Obama could withstand letting go of his artificial August goal deadline, but that he must get a bill through “this year” in order to be considered a success. Another article used the sentence, “Finally, (the Senate Finance Committee) is promising that committee work will be DONE by the recess—which is not meeting the president’s timeline.” These sentences suggested that reaching the deadline might be out of the president’s control and he might have to make some concessions.

Progress: Foxnews.com

In terms of ‘progress,’ certain articles from *Foxnews.com* highlight that President Obama, when faced with setbacks, attempted to “short-circuit” delaying the bill and “decrys” the “naysayers and cynics.” Another article, “Obama Tells Congress to ‘Buck Up’ as Clock Ticks on Health Care Reform,” (July 15, 2009) says that the President, when referring to progress, tried to “pressure other lawmakers to move the ball forward.”

But while these articles highlight the fact that President Obama is pushing others to move forward and name-calling the non-supporters, another article's headline is, "Key Senator Says President Not Helping on Health Care," (July 16, 2009) and refers to reform "hitting potholes." In that same article, the "key senator," Max Baucus, is referred to as "emphatically bucking" the President, a phrase that seems to be used in order to point out that President Obama is ironically now "getting bucked" when before, he was doing "the bucking." These phrases and rhetoric choice suggest that the President may be pushing too hard and too fast, being unhelpful in the process.

When again referencing the theme of progress, *Foxnews.com* many times relates Republican votes or the concept of "bipartisanship" as "casualties of the rush to approve a bill," and repeatedly uses the phrase "quickly hammer out" to describe the bill's legislative progress. The same article, "Obama Reaches Out to Republicans on Health Care, but Bipartisanship Bill Looking Unlikely," (July 18, 2009) again talks about the Democrats' progress of working on the Bill with the exception of not "winning over a single Republican vote."

With the concept of speed/hastiness again at the forefront of one article's headline, "Obama Defends 'Rush' for Health Care Reform, Says 'Stars Are Aligned,'" (July 23, 2009) the phrase suggests that President Obama's reason for rushing the progress of the Bill is because of a supernatural, Universe-related timing. But to counter that reasoning lower down in this same article, is reference to President Obama's statement about avoiding the political "inertia" of Washington. This "inertia" was also reported on in an *MSNBC.com* story.

Progress: MSNBC.com

The concept of actually “making progress” versus acknowledging the impediment of “setbacks” comes up frequently in the bill’s coverage. In “No deal on finance health bill,” (July 15, 2009) the article talked about how Senate Finance Committee Democrats met for two hours to make progress, but by the end of the two-hour meeting, “no deals were cut.” In another July 16 article, *MSNBC.com* quotes Republican Chuck Grassley as reporting that a “steady but slow” progress is happening with the Finance Committee bill. While the term progress is vague in itself and yet a vital term used in the legislative process, these articles tended to create a relationship between time passed and progress. In that same article, “Obama derides ‘tendency towards inertia’,” (July 20, 2009) there were references to how Democrats remain optimistic that health care will happen according to the “President’s timeline.” “Slowly but surely” was a repeatedly used phrase at the end of July to again show that while not many agreements were happening, the Senate Finance Committee was continually working towards a consensus. Making and predicting progress, even though there wasn’t much to show, was the theme of many of these articles.

“First Read, Sixth months in,” (July 18, 2009) looked at what Obama had done in the last six months, and the specific section for Health Care Reform was titled “One small step for reform, one giant leap for conventional wisdom.” In this section, *MSNBC.com* outlined Obama’s hopes and plans for health care and acknowledged that if he, Obama, can get these things done, than he might be the “administration’s savior.” Here, the theme: slow yet steady progress, is laden with rhetorical phrases like “one small step,”

likening Obama's health care reform bill to Neil Armstrong achievement of walking on the moon.

Political Strategies

Another prominent category that emerged from the coverage included analysis on how both the Democratic and Republican parties were attempting to "strategize" their political message in terms of being supportive or unsupportive of the Obama Health Care Reform Bill. It became evident that President Obama wanted, at least in the beginning of the legislative process, to have a bill with some bipartisan support, so media interpretation of how and what each party thought of the opposite party's strategy to help or hurt this bipartisan goal became a recurring theme within the coverage. After examining and comparing how both websites covered the concept of political strategies, it became evident that "strategy" became directly related to the concepts of a "fight" or "competition" and, in other times, "war."

President Obama and the Liberal Democrats' Strategy: Foxnews.com

One of the first articles on the Democrats' strategy with health care reform refers to TV ads with actors "Harry and Louise Return to Hawk Health Care Reform" (July 16, 2009). The article talks about how "Harry and Louise" were household names in ads actually opposing "Hillary Care" in 1993. Now, the actors are back in ads, but have "flipped" and are now for the Obama health care reform bill. The article refers to the couple's "faux exhaustion" with health care and mentions multiple times how the ads are so opposite from 1993, in which the characters actually helped "derail" health reform.

Because the focus is on the near-ironic nature of how the actors “flipped” their support on health care, the article seems to be pointing out that this tactic is flawed.

A July 22 article, “President Obama uses Magnetism, Political Capital to Push Health Care Bill,” suggested the president may not only be using his personality and image as strategies in trying to sway public opinion. Because of this focus on personality, the article seems to suggest that the actual policies within the bill may not be enough to sway voters. Another article points out Nancy Pelosi and her record of “name-calling.” In “In a Tight Spot, Pelosi Calls Health Care Critics ‘Un-American,’” (August 10, 2009) the article claims the instance is not the first time Pelosi has called opponents names, and concludes that “name-calling” may be part of her strategy to gain support and deflect opposition. Her other strategies, according to coverage, include portraying insurance companies as “the enemies.” The article counters her enemy argument by stating that many of the insurance companies are actually in favor of the bill, so why would Pelosi be “fighting giant insurance companies?” These are all suggestions that the Democratic strategy may have been weak and/or failing at the time.

In terms of the town halls, articles on *Foxnews.com* highlighted specific reactions by both the public and officials, one time stating that Sebelius was “shouted down,” “booed” and “jeered.” As for Sebelius’ response to the public, the article says that Sebelius then “scolded the audience.” The article concludes that “(the public’s) anger is just a sample of the reaction lawmakers are bracing for...”. Another town hall article debates the idea of the town halls being misconstrued as “mob rule,” when really they just might be “democracy in action.” The article concludes that the health care debate

was more about “opponents over substance” when Democrats stepped up their campaign and claimed the town halls were angry mobs. All of these articles frame the town halls in a way that suggests Democrats may not be acting tolerant of an unhappy public.

Other articles focused on how Nancy Pelosi characterized the town hall protests as “astroturf—or disingenuous grassroots organization by conservative opponents of the legislation.” One day after this article, another, headlined “Health Care Debate Shifting Into Free Speech Battle” (August 7, 2009) makes the statement that,

“Democrats may be trying to shed themselves of a reputation for fighting fire with kindness, but the heightened attention—both in the media and in the strategies of public officials—on the bare-knuckle sport of this policy hold big risks for the backers of the bill.”

This frame suggests a volatile relationship between the Democrats strategy to gain support and a public yearning to speak its true feelings on health reform.

As for misinformation, an issue that *MSNBC.com* many times suggests is an impediment in the health care reform debate, one article, “Obama’s Misinformation Campaign Health Care” (August 5, 2009) actually claims that President Obama may hoping he can win by simply claiming that his opponents are being “dishonest.” The article also states that when the president is “challenged, he dismisses it as mere ‘scare tactics and fear-mongering.’” While the concept of “misinformation” is mentioned briefly in other articles, it is never fully developed into a fully focused argument.

Another issue that came up in *Foxnews.com* coverage was an article on how the “White House Passes Blame on Unsolicited Health Care E-Mails,” (August 17, 2009)

where people across the country received unsolicited emails about health care reform. The article touched on the fact that this may have been a strategic campaign to gain support, but violated permission of people who did not sign up for the emails. A secondary article follows up asking “who” might be to blame for sending such emails and how the White House did not claim responsibility. These articles suggest the email strategy backfired because people may not have wanted or registered to actually receive such emails.

An issue that *MSNBC.com* did not touch on but *Foxnews.com* did was one that concerned whether or not Democrats “invoked Kennedy’s death in calling for health care reform.” An article states that when reform hit a rough patch, Democrats were trying to “delicately use Sen. Kennedy’s passing as a rallying cry for the legislation.” This is framed to suggest the Democrats may have gone a bit far as to use a Kennedy’s death in order to gain votes. Another reference to a possible strategy employed by some of the Democrats was the use of “racism” as an argument against Republican opposition to the Bill. In “Rangel: ‘Prejudice’ Toward Obama Halting Health Care Reform,” (September 3, 2009) focuses on how the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee claims that bias and prejudice toward Obama are fueling opposition to health-care reform. In that same month, two other articles, back to back, focus on how the “race issue” inflames and lingers over the health care debate, quoting that even former president Jimmy Carter felt racism was afoot. The reference to the “race card” being a tactic is inferred later on in the article, when a Republican strategist stated that “Democrats have been using the ‘shame

tactic' since President Lyndon Johnson..." Immediately, the "race card" has become more than an incident, but an actual strategy to be used in politics.

President Obama and the Liberal Democrats' Strategy: MSNBC.com

When referring to President Obama and the Liberal Democrats' strategy, one of the first articles in July talked about how Sebelius might have had to "twist arms" to get health reform done and "no wonder the White House is signaling that the president is going to try and wrestle even more control of the debate." These references to "twisting arms" and wrestling suggested an almost violent debate and struggle. When referring to the Republican strategy, "attacks" is a word used many times to convey their opposing opinions in the health care reform debate.

The issue of "transparency" also came up concerning President Obama's health care reform debate and this concept became directly tied to strategy. Both websites made an issue of transparency, but *MSNBC.com* only focused one article on the subject. President Obama had apparently refused to turn over the White House visitor logs to a non-profit group that was wondering which prominent medical leaders were being allowed to enter in on the health care reform talks. The *MSNBC.com* article began with the sentence, "Despite his campaign promise to 'make White House communications public'..." and this use of "despite" implied that President Obama might be hypocritically using tactics for health care reform, tactics he earlier said he wouldn't use in the White House.

Another analyzed strategy tactic was the idea of President Obama having successfully delivered a political "message." "Confusion," "misinformation" and

“misperceptions” are words that were repeated in both *MSNBC.com* and *Foxnews.com* coverage of the health care reform “message.” In one of their first analyses’ articles, “Obama delivers lackluster health care message” (July 23, 2009) critiqued a press conference speech given by the president, but at the same time, the critique also acknowledged that the president “seemed tired and distracted and clearly in need of a vacation.” Another message-analyses in August not only put blame on the Republican strategy, stating that “Big mouths and Big money will say anything to scare folks...” but also blamed the Obama administration for having “murky” campaign promises. Another message-related article was headlined at “First Read, Losing the message war?” (August 3, 2009) and referred to the issue of rumors started by the Republican Party. So here, both “confusion” with President Obama’s message and “misinformation” told by Republicans were both at fault for contributing to a loss in the health reform debate.

Another article admitted that President Obama “appears to be losing the health care fight,” and concluded that while the month of “August was not kind for Barack Obama,” that August had indeed been unkind to other presidents like George Bush. This comparison suggested that while the president might have been “losing” in the month of August, that August was simply a tough month in general, so maybe all blame can’t be put on him.

The Republican Strategy/Response: Foxnews.com

In terms of framing any “Republican” strategy or response to the health care reform bill, *Foxnews.com* touched on the area of “tort reform,” an issue that Republicans

were rallying for and felt needed to be addressed in the bill. While *MSNBC.com* failed to explain much of anything about tort reform, *Foxnews.com* had at least five articles dedicated to explaining the issue. The last article on October 31 was headlined, “Boehner: GOP Has Answers on Health Care Reform,” and explains how Republicans would include a number of changes and also tort reform in their version of a bill. Besides the mentioning of tort reform and Republicans’ desire for Democrats to “slow down,” *Foxnews.com* mostly focused on the Democrats’ strategies to gain support for their bill. *The Republican and Moderate Democrats’ Strategy/Response: MSNBC.com*

One of the earliest examples of coverage of the Republican strategy by *MSNBC.com* was about the Republicans’ unveiling of a “multi-colored, complicated-to-follow chart meant to symbolize the House Democratic health care-reform plan.” In this article, titled, “GOP won’t go with the flow,” (July 15, 2009) a main paragraph stated that when the Republicans unveiled a similar flow chart in 1994 against the Clinton administration health plan, that it played an effective role in “derailing health reform then.” The flow chart here was portrayed more of a “derailment” tactic than actual useful explanation for health reform.

Another July article was titled, “The GOP’s health-care offensive,” (July 20, 2009) and commented that while President Obama had been talking about health care for awhile, the Republican National Committee Chairman gave a speech that “assailed the President’s efforts.” The article concluded with the fact that the RNC had created a “scary-looking TV ad” as part of their efforts to get their opposing points across about health care reform. In terms of strategy and even metaphorical war-like talk, the words

“offensive” and “assailed” both portrayed visions of battle or competition. The “scary-looking TV ad” also suggested that Republicans made it “scary” as part of a strategy.

Toward the end of July, an article headlined at “House GOP hits on health care,” (July 28, 2009) and opened with the statement that “House Republican leaders strived to portray Democrats as doing too much too soon with regard to health-care reform.” This statement suggested that the GOP was “trying” to portray Democrats in this light, part of a strategy.

Another major incident or string of incidents concerning the concept of “strategy” included the interpretation of the “town halls.” *MSNBC.com*’s first article about the health reform town halls was headlined, “First thoughts: Town halls gone wild” (August 12, 2009). The article went on to ask readers, “Who looks worse? A President who can’t get his message across, or the Republican Party hoping they can use that to return to power?” The article also blamed the media for contributing to the lies being told at the town halls, lies and exaggerations about the reform bill. The next paragraph in the article was solely dedicated to the issue of “misinformation” surrounding the bill, and later on, referred to how opposition at the town halls may have been “disrupting for the sake of disrupting.”

Again with the town halls issue came the query of whether or not the health reform protesters were true “grassroots” protesters or “Astroturf” or “fake” protesters, encouraged by various conservative organizations to show up. Other articles referred to the protesters as doing “ranting” and “repetitive shrieking.” In that same August article,

headlined “Health care reform dead? Think again,” (August 19, 2009) the opposition is called “noise, fear-mongering mosquitoes.” The reporting and description of the town halls here suggested that not only was the violence and shouting uncalled for, but that possibly the Conservative Party might have been instigating the rants.

Contested Issues within the Bill

While the following contested issues became the foci of coverage by both websites, it became evident that certain issues got more leverage and attention on one website versus the other. The issues also overlap with the concept/category of ‘misinformation’ because there was much debate over whether or not the public truly understood the validity behind them.

Abortion Funding: Foxnews.com

Foxnews.com made more of an issue than *MSNBC.com* did about the possibility of there being an “abortion funding” provision within the Obama health care reform bill. A July article, “As Health Insurance Debate Looms, Budget Director Refuses to Rule Out Federally Funded Abortions,” (July 19, 2009) opens with the sentence, “A government-funded, public health insurance plan may allow for taxpayer money to go pay for abortions...” Later on, that same article stated “the Obama administration has demonstrated its support for federal funding of abortions.” In September, another article tries to be more specific about the possibility of abortion funding stating “President Obama claims health care plan will not cover abortion services,” but this statement is followed with an explanation about a possible loophole towards this claim. Towards the

end of September, another article focuses on how the Senate Committee “rejects stronger anti-abortion language in health care bill.” And as for more opinion-focused articles on abortion, an article in October expressed how “Americans don’t want government-funded abortions,” quoting recent poll results, and another stated that the bill had “sparked alarm” among Roman Catholic bishops. In these examples, not only do they support the idea that abortions will indeed be funded, but also that many Americans and religious groups may be of the opposite opinion of than Democrats concerning this matter.

Abortion Funding: MSNBC.com

While *Foxnews.com* featured articles on people’s opinions concerning the possibility of “abortion funding” in the Obama health care reform bill, *MSNBC.com* articles focused more on detailing what these provisions actually meant. In August, under the section of an article titled “More fact-checking,” *MSNBC.com* stated that “In House Legislation, no federal funds would be used to pay for abortions; if a woman wants an abortion, the money would come from her insurance premiums.” This statement was considered to be an answer to the question: “I do not want to pay on my health care plan that includes the right for a woman to kill her unborn baby. Is it true that this plan is in the health care bill?” Another article was written in the form of the “Fact or Fiction?” format, where the claim was stated: “Tax dollars will fund abortions,” and the answer: “Both true and untrue.” The article explained that taxpayer subsidies could not be used to “directly” pay for abortions. In both of these articles, the issue of “misinformation” is addressed and suggested that the public might not know all the details about these

provisions. These were the only two main articles that solely focused on the abortion funding argument. Other articles simply made connection to the idea of the public being misinformed and believing that the bill would use taxpayer dollars for women to have abortions.

The Public Option: Foxnews.com

The public option debate proved to be the most contested and widely covered issue for both websites. On many occasions, the phrase “public option” was also substituted for “government-run” or “government-controlled” insurance plan within *Foxnews.com* coverage. Mixing usage of these phrases suggests the public option has more of an implication behind it, a lack-of-control context. Confusion about the Obama administration’s opinion and support of the public option is an evident theme also. In early August coverage, there was speculation about whether or not Democrats were totally uncompromising about the possibility of not having a public option on the final Bill. In “No. 2 Senate Democrats ‘Open’ to Health Care Bill With No Public Option,” (August 9, 2009) the article explains why the option is “controversial” and how some Democrats may be open to having a bill without it. Another article, claims the public option may be losing steam because the “White House is ready to accept a health care reform package without it.” The article also reviews the idea of having “co-ops” instead, but also implies that Republicans have mixed reactions about those too. While these articles suggest a certain “openness” with the public option, a later article counters by saying that liberal supporters of reform don’t want a bill without the public option. These articles suggest a feeling of distraught-ridden confusion about President Obama’s full

support behind the public option. While one article quotes President Obama as saying the public option is “non-essential,” another stated that “Obama maintains public option is viable for health care reform.”

Twice, *Foxnews.com* provided episode-structured examples of how other universal health insurance plans had failed. In one, “Massachusetts Universal Health Care,” (July 17, 2009) the article focuses on how a universal health coverage program was struggling from a “massive budget shortfall,” thus having to actually cut coverage from patients. The other article, “Health Care Lessons Learned From TennCare” (October 26, 2009) talks about Tennessee’s health reform experiment that actually did succeed in covering the uninsured, but at the same time, nearly bankrupted the state. The way these examples are used and highlighted suggests this could forecast the plight of US taxpayers if a countrywide public option were to be implemented.

The Public Option: MSNBC.com

The public option debate proved to be the most contested and widely covered issue for both websites. While *Foxnews.com* more so intermingled the phrases “public option” with “government-run” or “government-controlled” insurance plan, *MSNBC.com* used the latter terms much more infrequently. Like *Foxnews.com*, *MSNBC.com* also reported about the “confusion” about whether or not President Obama was fully in support of the public option within the final draft of the health care reform bill. In one of the first major articles concerning the confusion about the White House stance on the public option, *MSNBC.com* stated that “President Obama’s weekend concession on a health care ‘government option’ drew complaints from liberals and scarce interest from

Republicans and other critics on Monday, a fresh sign of the challenge in finding middle ground in an increasingly partisan struggle.” The article went on to quote former Democratic chairman Howard Dean, a physician, who said that the public option was necessary to “shake up the existing system.” The article also mentioned that President Obama may have “signaled retreat” to Republicans in terms of not seeming fully supportive of the liberal Democrats’ public option. While the article also brought up the idea of replacing the public option with co-ops, it concluded with the acknowledgment that other co-ops have had a history of failing in the U.S. These phrases suggested a war-like relationship existed between Republicans, who were adamantly opposed to the public option, and the liberal Democrats, who supposedly refused to have a bill without it. President Obama, in this manner, was framed as not only necessary moderator, but also as possibly on a “team” all his own, taking into consideration that no one was happy with the confusion about his public option support.

In August, an article headlined, “First Read, The public omission?” (August 17, 2009) and made reference to the Obama administration not being “100% wedded to public/government option.” Further down in the same article though, the article suggested that while possibly the White House believed that the public option may be the “best way,” it might not have been “the only way.” Other follow up articles lent credence to the White House opinion that the administration’s opinion “had not changed” and that the president “has always indicated the public option was negotiable.” While *MSNBC.com*, like *Foxnews.com*, certainly provided ample coverage of the confusion toward the

administration's public option stance, *MSNBC.com* gave more leverage to the White House opinion and explanation toward the matter at hand.

Costs: Foxnews.com

The overall cost or “price tag” of the bill, including penalty costs of the insurance mandate and taxes was a carrying theme throughout the coverage. “How much” the bill would cost and “who would pay” for it, were two questions that drove much of the cost-focused coverage for both websites. One of the first articles *Foxnews.com* published concerning cost was headlined “After 10 Years, Health Care Coverage Costs Turn Into Unfunded Mandate” (July 23, 2009) While the article gave voice to President Obama's opinion that health reform would “not” add coverage to the deficit, *Foxnews.com* countered by stating that “GOP number-crunchers argue (President Obama) will (add to the deficit) if House Democrats continue their sleight-of-hand in calculating long-term costs of their proposal.” Another article focused solely on the “exit” of Republican Senator Orrin Hatch from health reform negotiations because he was concerned about costs. “Congressional Budget Director Warns Health Care Bills Will Raise Costs,” (July 16, 2009) is another testament to a highly-ranked individual who felt “cost” was not being correctly evaluated. That article stated that the CBO “issued a warning to Democrats that their health care proposals would raise costs, not lower them,” and also claimed that, “these numbers come at an inopportune time for Democratic leaders...”

Besides concerns about estimating the bill's overall costs, another cost-related issue concerned “who” will be paying for the bill and how. A July 14 article, “House Democrats Seek to Tax the Wealthy to Finance Health Care Reform,” stated “Democrats

would impose a 5.4 percent federal surtax on couples earning more than \$1 million annually and a 1.5 percent tax on couples earning between \$500,000 and \$1 million.” This suggests that these “couples” will indeed be the major payers and possibly the “losers” of health care reform. Another payment/tax-related article headlined with “Health Insurance Mandate Includes ‘Tax’ Despite Obama Denial,” and claimed that the President was wrong, and there will indeed be a tax on Americans. The article stated here that “Obama got busted,” and went on to describe the hidden “excise tax” within the bill. Another article talks about the penalty fine up in the actual headline: “Baucus Plan Allows for Fines Up to \$3,800 for Failing to Get Health Insurance” (September 9, 2009). This use of “allows” suggests that fines this high should be “un-allowable.” While most of the articles allow for the president to speak his opinion on the matter of bill “cost,” many of them challenge his conclusions with follow-up explanations of loopholes or varied interpretation.

Costs: MSNBC.com

While “cost” of the bill and “how to pay for it” were certainly two hotly contested issues for both websites, *MSNBC.com* differed from *Foxnews.com* in that *MSNBC.com* also focused articles on how “out of control” medical insurance costs were leading up to the health care reform debate. *MSNBC.com*, more so than *Foxnews.com*, also listed the options President Obama suggested in terms of paying for the bill. In one of the first main articles about costs and how to pay for the bill, *MSNBC.com* listed six different ways the president was planning on paying for health care reform. The next two July articles focused on past costs and the current costly state of health care insurance. In “How

Congress failed to curb medical spending,” the article went through a timeline of mistakes that lead up to the current state of excessive health insurance spending.

Another article actually addressed the “mandate” to be imposed on Americans, ensuring that everyone had insurance. This was an idea that most Republicans were opposed to. The article acted as more of an explanatory piece, laying out the reasons why an individual mandate was considered necessary for health reform to “actually work.” The article quoted a nonpartisan research group representative who stated that “bringing in the healthy uninsured will reduce the average cost of care.” Further on towards the end of the article, the issue of “social responsibility” was brought up concerning people who were “currently not getting the care they need.” While the issue of “social responsibility” was referenced here, another article also addressed the issue of “Health insurance ‘haves’ to pay for ‘have nots?’” That article pointed out the fact that some people who were covered by employer-provided benefits might be asked to give up at least part of their longstanding tax exemption. This was one of *MSNBC.com*’s few allusions to the possible imposition of taxes on the American public. A second reference to tax increases was in the form of a “Fact or Fiction article,” where the claim was: Can we “Pay for reform by cutting waste”? The answer *MSNBC.com* provided was that this was “unclear,” and that while President Obama did not mention tax increases, it seemed that simply “eliminating inefficiencies won’t be sufficient.”

Another costs savings article referred to cuts to the Medicare Program. One article, “Medicare Advantage tussle at heart of overhaul,” (September 24, 2009) opened with the statement that “Senators try to find ways to cut health spending without hurting

anyone.” Obviously, some seniors who were participating in the Medicare Advantage program were not happy with the “cuts” proposed by senators. The article went on to explain why Medicare Advantage could and should afford to cut costs.

Other Issues: Foxnews.com

Two other contested issues were given moderate but not extreme coverage by *Foxnews.com*. The issues of “end of life counseling” and “illegal immigrant coverage” were both brought up as heated topics of debate within the Obama health care reform bill. As for “end of life counseling,” one early August article lead with the sentence, “A provision in the House health care bill would provide Medicare coverage for an end-of-life consultation, leading some to believe that the Obama administration is looking to save money by pressuring insurers to provide less coverage to seniors...” The article then went on to explain how the counseling “sessions” would not be required, but that these provisions are “tucked deep” and have sparked “euthanasia fears” among legislation critics. While the article focused on the fact that this may be what “other people” believe, it still seemed to suggest validity to the argument, an argument that *MSNBC.com* coverage denotes as completely false.

Foxnews.com covered “Illegal immigrant coverage” once in each of the four months. In July, an article, “Bad Employer Bailout? Reform Could Fund Health Care for Illegal Workers,” (July 30, 2009) explained that there might be a “loophole” and taxpayers could “be on the hook for billions” to cover illegal immigrants. That same article stated that while “undocumented immigrants wouldn’t technically be allowed in the plan, President Obama frequently factors them in to describe how bad the health care

crisis is.” This statement suggested that the crisis itself might not be as bad as it seems without illegal immigrant numbers. Another article claimed that Republican Joe Wilson’s outburst of “you lie!” during President Obama’s Joint Address of Congress actually may have “brought to light” that there is indeed a loophole concerning coverage of illegal immigrants. This, in a way, puts Wilson’s outburst in a somewhat positive light.

Other Issues: MSNBC.com

Concerning other issues like “illegal immigrant coverage,” *MSNBC.com* did not have full articles dedicated to explaining such an issue. The website did though, make several connections to the idea of “misinterpretation” and “misinformation” in regards to the possibility of illegal immigrants being covered in the Obama health care reform bill. There was one article that made mention that the president had indeed installed a provision in the bill that required proof of citizenship, but the overall issue was never made out to be a big deal. And as for the issue of “euthanasia,” the only references were made in connection with Sarah Palin’s “death panel” claim, which was explained fully following the above “abortion funding” section.

As for continuing the topic of “death panels,” for four days in a row, *MSNBC.com* featured articles that addressed Sarah Palin and her comment about there being “death panels” within health care reform. In their first article, “First Read: GOP Watch: Death Panel?” (August 10, 2009) *MSNBC.com* quoted Palin’s Facebook post which referred to “Obama’s death panels.” The article also claimed that former house speaker Newt Gingrich “lent credence” to these claims. Another source, Howard Dean, was quoted as saying that there was nothing about euthanasia in the bill and that Palin “just made that

up.” That same day, an opinion piece by Keith Olbermann called Palin’s death-panel claims “downright evil” and “dangerously irresponsible.” The article also made reference to how this “death panel” mention might have been part of a larger republican strategy to defeat the bill and made connection to the possibly “instigated town hall disruption.” Two other articles also referred back to Palin’s comments, one stating that Palin was “defending her debunked claim about the ‘death panels’ that would occur under health reform.” The last article headlined at “GOPEers for pulling plug on grandma?” (August 14, 2009) and made reference that because another Republican senator had voted for a similar provision to the one Palin calls the “death panels,” that Republicans might be acting hypocritical. Similar to the abortion funding, the death panel argument also brought in the concept of “misinformation.” At the same time, these articles suggested a tie to an overall Republican strategy to defeat the bill.

Highlighted Supporters vs. Non-Supporters

Both websites made sure to report on the various supporters and non-supporters of the Obama health care reform bill. While these episodic articles were somewhat infrequent, they became important for comparing “who’s opinion” each website decided was necessary to cover. These supporters and non-supporters alike ranged from various doctors, to business owners, to political leaders and everyday Americans. These people were all considered “stakeholders” in the health care reform debate.

Doctors: Foxnews.com

Both *MSNBC.com* and *Foxnews.com* featured doctors' opinions regarding the Obama health care reform bill in some of their coverage. In July, "Doctors Wage War Against Obama's Health Care Overhaul," (July 22, 2009) focused on how some doctors were leaving the American Medical Association because of its backing of the health care reform bill. The article stated these doctors who were "waging war" against the bill felt that it would lead to "rationed care" and "socialized medicine." Further down in that same article, *Foxnews.com* did give voice to one doctor who supports the AMA and the bill, but most of the overall voices within the article are those who oppose it. In August, another article focused on the personal story of one doctor who left the AMA over its support of the bill. The article went on to quote the doctor's personal opinions about how the government should actually be handling health care, by "putting people in charge of their own health care." Both of these articles suggested not only a tension between the AMA and its doctor members, but also a possible tension between doctors and the Obama administration. Highlighting doctors who don't support the reform bill, rather than those who do, suggested that the opposing doctors' opinions might be more vital for the public to hear. Finally, the last article concerning "doctors' opinions" and the Obama health care reform bill focused on a petition that 11,000 doctors signed and sent to the Senate. The petition supposedly outlined what these doctors felt were the "critical parts of health care" and focused on how "tort reform" was not, but should be addressed in health care reform. This again points to the fact that the government might not be listening to

doctors—the people who are supposed to be considered “the experts” of health care reform.

Doctors: MSNBC.com

While *MSNBC.com* did not feature any articles on doctors “waging war” in disagreement over the Obama health care reform bill, they did have two articles that seemed in support of it. In a July 16 article, headlined “AMA Backs House Health-care bill,” (July 16, 2009) a whole letter from the American Medical Association was printed, stating its’ support and continuing cooperation regarding the Obama health care reform bill. The article referred to the letter and support as something that “appears to be a pretty significant development in the fight over health care.” This suggested that the medical community might be on board with the bill and that big developments might also come from that support. Another article was actually an opinion piece written by a doctor. While the doctor’s opinion piece was centered about the fact that promoting healthy lifestyle choices was not included in the bill, the doctor did begin the article by praising the president’s health reform efforts so far. Reference was made about the concept of personal responsibility and individual life choices— exercising, eating right and not smoking.

Business Owners: Foxnews.com

While *MSNBC.com* had articles that highlighted some business-owners’ support of the health care reform bill, *Foxnews.com* did not.

Business Owners: MSNBC.com

MSNBC.com had two five-page articles that focused on businesses' support of the bill. In August, "Big employers dip into health care debate," (August 25, 2009) focused on corporate executives who voiced their opinion in the debate because they were "desperate to control costs." The article listed examples like Wal-mart, Starbucks and Safeway executives who were in support of reform and how they needed it to control employer insurance costs. *MSNBC.com* did list an opposing view, the Whole Foods executive who did not support reform, but noted that his opposition "drew considerable fire from some of Whole Foods' liberal-leaning customers." Another article focused on small businesses' opinions. The article, "Small businesses want, fear health care reform," (September 16, 2009) suggested that small businesses "have been begging for changes to the health care system, but believe they have the most to lose when and if reform materializes." The article then went on to list various personal anecdotes about small businesses that had suffered with health care costs for their employees. While these articles certainly didn't claim all businesses fully supported the Obama health care reform bill, they did suggest that businesses in general wanted reform of some kind or another.

Others: Foxnews.com

Two other instances in which *Foxnews.com* featured opinions of various groups included the AARP and the conservative Heritage Foundation. In August, *Foxnews.com* had two articles that focused on the "backlash" the AARP was receiving from seniors over the AARP's health care reform stance. An August 10 article opened with, "Elected officials aren't the only ones facing frustrated, angry crowds at health care town hall

meetings.” This sentence suggested that the reform bill was getting criticism from all angles. The article then followed up by stating that the senior advocacy group was coming under criticism from its own members because of its support of the Obama health care reform bill. A week later, *Foxnews.com* had an article not only focusing on how the AARP was losing members over health care, but how another senior advocacy group was going to challenge the AARP and offer a “conservative alternative.” Focusing on the seniors who did not support the reform bill, rather than those who were in support, again suggested that the non-supporters voices were necessary to highlight.

Lastly, *Foxnews.com* also featured one study done by the conservative Heritage Foundation that found that the “Health Care Reform Mandate Will Punish Employers, Kill Jobs.” (August 10, 2009) The article went on to explain the specifics of what the study found and how the study’s author, economist Mark Wilson, was of the opinion that “health care reform is not going to be free.” This was the only study featured during the examined four months of coverage which suggested a certain validity and support of the study’s results.

Others: MSNBC.com

Some other featured supporters and non-supporters of the Obama health care reform bill included the following: Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton, and the American people who were suffering from insurance costs and rejections. While *MSNBC.com* did its fair share of reporting on Palin and her claim about “death panels,” it became evident that Palin seemed representative of the Republican opposition against the Bill. In one article, this was shown through her contrast against Obama health care reform bill

supporter, Hillary Clinton. In “First Read, First thoughts: Back to health care,” (July 27, 2009) the article had one section dedicated to talking about Hillary Clinton, and the following section about Sarah Palin. In the Clinton section, the article stated “Clinton seemed very up to speed on health care, even knowing a few key talking points like how many folks were being dumped from their insurance.” The article also called Clinton “adept” at combining politics and policy. The following paragraph was titled “Classic Palin” and began with, “And then there was Sarah Palin, whose farewell speech was...classic Palin.” The contrast here to a previous positive description of Clinton suggested that Palin might be just the opposite.

Three other large articles featured personal stories of those who suffered from the current state of health insurance. The articles tapped on issues that the Obama health care reform bill was tackling and the articles suggested that regular Americans like these might be a receptive and supportive audience of the bill.

Poll Evaluation

Both websites featured polls concerning the public opinion towards health care reform. Interestingly, yet again not surprising, the websites featured polls from mostly “their own” audiences and followers, which certain times, yielded different results and varying interpretations of what those results meant. While both websites included random poll percentages in other topic-driven articles, the researcher chose to evaluate articles that were solely dedicated to explaining a poll’s results because dedication of a whole

article suggests a certain value and importance to the results. Over the four months coverage, both websites featured five of these polls.

Foxnews.com polls

The first July 23 poll article was headlined “FOX News Poll: Uncertainty on Health Care Reform,” and concluded “a majority think the legislation will raise their costs and hike their taxes.” The next poll, on September 8, concluded that “Support for Health Care Reform Tepid as More Americans Oppose Legislation.” A later September 17 poll found “Americans Prefer Current System to Obama’s Health Care Plan.” And in lastly, two polls on October 2 and October 18, found that “Opposition to Health Care Reform Grows,” and “Opposition to Health Care Reform Holds Steady.” All of the polls were conducted by telephoning and gathering information from 900 registered voters of FOX news. All of the polls obviously suggested, in both title and contextual explanation, an overall negative public opinion towards the Obama health care reform bill.

MSNBC.COM polls

The first article on July 29 was headlined “Poll: Obama loses ground on health care,” concluded that “despite his public relations blitz over the last two weeks,” the president had lost ground on health care. On August 18, “Americans still skeptical about Obama’s plans” featured a poll that concluded a plurality of Americans believed Obama’s health plan would worsen the quality of health care. That same article went on to talk about “damaging misperceptions” and named percentages of people who believe certain “untrue claims” such as: illegal immigrants will be covered and abortions will be funded by the Bill. This suggested that while President Obama might be losing ground, it

may have been due to the fact that people were misinformed. Another August 18 poll was titled and concluded the following: “NBC poll: Plurality opposes public option.” But on October, two polls actually showed positive results, concluding that there was an “Uptick in support for public option,” and that “support for a government-run insurance plan is at its highest level since the debate began.” These two articles chose to focus on the “uptick” in support, although the results still showed that a majority still opposed the public option. Choosing to focus on the positive change versus the actual numbers and majority representation demonstrates the difference in representation between the two website polls.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

The primary research questions that guided this study were: What frames were present in the early online news of the Obama health care reform bill? Were ideas of societal versus personal responsibility conveyed in the framing? And lastly, do these frames support or negate values corresponding with differing partisan beliefs on the amount of government intervention? The following sections will describe in detail the similarities and differences in coverage and possible connections to ideas of societal versus personal responsibility and also shed light on what the results meant for the theories used in the study.

The Bill Timeline/Schedule

Similarly, both websites did attribute “faults” when it came to determining “who” was causing setbacks in the bill’s timeline/schedule. But, *Foxnews.com*’s repeated use of the word “despite” suggested that legislation was moving forward possibly prematurely, especially after all these obvious “setbacks” were occurring. These setbacks were also referred to a couple times as “casualties” in the rush to get legislation done. *MSNBC.com* made more of an issue of setbacks being stall periods, waiting for the Blue Dog Democrats and Republicans to get on board, avoiding inertia. As for deadlines, *MSNBC.com* also attributed the responsibility of setting deadlines to the president, while it was the responsibility of those under him, Baucus, the Blue Dog Democrats, to “get the

job done” by the deadline. As for progress, *Foxnews.com* created a “push and pull” frame, where the president was seen as pushing for senators to get progress going, and those same senators were pulling the president in to try and help more. *MSNBC.com* created a “slowly but surely” frame around the idea of progress, acknowledging that slow progress was still something to be proud of.

In this category, social versus personal responsibility was not an apparent factor. There were no references to more or less government intervention when it came to talking about the legislative timeline for the bill. It was evident though, that there was some form of framing the attribution responsibility in terms of the progress of the Bill. In *Foxnews.com*, while Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats may have been “responsible” for causing the setbacks and holdups in the legislative process, the repeated use of the word “despite” and mentioning “casualties” suggests that the president and liberal democrats may be just as much at fault for rushing the process. *MSNBC.com* did not reference this dual causal-responsibility as much, framing more so that the president was trying to avoid the “inertia” of Washington. According to the *MSNBC.com* frame, the president was also responsible for setting deadlines, while those underneath him were responsible for meeting those deadlines.

Interpretation of Political Strategies

In terms of interpreting the varying political strategies, *Foxnews.com* and *MSNBC.com* both acknowledged the weak strategies employed by President Obama and the liberal Democrats. But, while *Foxnews.com* focused more on tactics that might have

been frowned upon, i.e. Nancy Pelosi's name-calling, using the "fake" Harry and Louise characters, the unsolicited emails, *MSNBC.com* focused mostly on the fact that the president and the liberal Democrats simply had a "weak message" and may have been "losing the message war" in terms of political strategies. Both websites also made "war" references, using specific words like "battle," "attacks," and "offensive."

Foxnews.com focused more coverage on the Democrats assertion that the town hall protests might have been "constructed," connecting this to the fact that this may have been another Democratic "strategy." And, *MSNBC.com* focused more coverage on how Republicans were using strategies simply to "derail reform" by using "loud voices" and "scare tactics."

Again here, social versus personal responsibility does not come into focus, but assigning causal versus treatment responsibility does. Obviously, both websites suggest that the president and liberal Democrats are responsible for treating rampant misinformation by having a clear and strong message. But, with *MSNBC.com*, the cause responsible for this misinformation and possibly some fault in determining the weak Democratic message is indeed attributed to the Republican strategies and "scare tactics." On *Foxnews.com*, the Democrats and leaders in support of the Bill are responsible for "treating" town hall protests with their strong message that should sway voters.

Contested Issues Within the Bill

As for Abortion Funding, *Foxnews.com* focused more on the people who were upset by the possibility of there being a provision supporting abortion funding within the

bill. *MSNBC.com* focused more on clearing up “misinformation” and outlining the actual details as to how a female might be able to get an abortion and where the funds would come from.

As for the issue of “Death Panels,” which was Sarah Palin’s term to describe the end-of-life counseling sessions in the Bill, *MSNBC.com* definitely focused more attention on this topic. While *Foxnews.com* might have mentioned the term once, *MSNBC.com* had a series of articles that not only “made fun” of Palin’s exaggeration and called it “dangerous,” but followed up with articles containing other senators’ responses to her rhetorical phrase. Many of the articles commented about Palin’s personal responsibility in terms of creating false and misinformed ideas that scared the public. Palin’s “death panels” claim was also connected to a possible larger Republican strategy to defeat the bill. Palin’s responsibility and the Republican responsibility to “telling the truth” and not exaggerating to the public were the only references at all to social responsibility.

As for the public option debate, this issue was the most widely contested between Republicans and Democrats. It became obvious that Republicans were no doubt against the idea of including a public option or “government-run” insurance option in the final bill. While *Foxnews.com* made more interchangeable references to the public option being “government-controlled” or a “government-run” option, both websites actually framed the public option debate quite similarly. Both websites had major focus on the general confusion about whether or not the president was “set” on having a public option in the bill. Both websites framed this “confusion” in a way that suggested the president was indeed very responsible for claiming whether or not he “demanded” a public option,

or if it actually was “optional” to include in the bill. In terms of coverage that supported or negated the bill, *Foxnews.com* did provide two articles about how other universal health plans had failed in states such as Massachusetts and Tennessee. *MSNBC.com* had many more articles that allowed room and space for the explained White House opinion toward the public option.

The “costs” of the bill was another topic for discussion. Here, the two websites took different approaches to the issues of the bill’s overall “price tag.” While *Foxnews.com* focused completely on asking “how” the bill was going to be paid for, and by whom, *MSNBC.com* actually focused on trying to explain the president’s payment plans and options. *MSNBC.com* also had quite a few articles that focused on the current high costs of insurance and how the president was aiming to fix these with his bill. *MSNBC.com* also brought up the idea of “social responsibility” when referring to the “haves” paying for the “have-nots,” or those that were lacking and also in need of medical insurance. In terms of responsibility, it seems cost was framed in a way that suggested the president and democrats were responsible for bringing down the overall cost of the bill, but at the same time, responsible for helping solve the current high costs associated with medical insurance. Another angle, one that *Foxnews.com* focused on, talked about who was going to be responsible for paying for the bill, and alluded that the “wealthy” in America might have to bear the brunt.

Some other issues that came up concerning responsibility included discussion of the possible coverage of illegal immigrants in the Obama health care reform bill. There was worry that American taxpayers might end up paying to insure thousands of illegal

immigrants. Neither website had tons of coverage on the issue, but slight differences in framing were still evident.

Highlighted Supporters vs. Non-Supporters

The two websites definitely focused on different “stakeholders” opinions concerning their support of the bill. *Foxnews.com* had three articles that focused on individual accounts of doctors who opposed the bill, while *MSNBC.com* had two (one doctor-focused and the American Medical Association) that showed positive support. *MSNBC.com* also had some large articles focused on the business-owners’ opinions, most of which were in support of the bill. The website also featured stories about the “losers” of current insurance costs, which was framed to suggest the Obama health care reform bill might help them. *Foxnews.com* also featured a couple articles about the negative feedback the AARP was getting from seniors because of the association’s support of the bill. The only times responsibility was touched on here was to suggest responsibility of the doctors to share their opinions about health care reform, business owners to be responsible for covering their employees, and the government’s social responsibility to cover the current “losers” in terms of not having health insurance.

Poll Evaluation

In terms of poll evaluation, the two websites both had negatively-featured public opinion polls toward the Obama health care reform bill. At the same time, when reading the polls, it became evident that both websites asked the same questions, framed slightly

different. While most of *Foxnews.com*'s results were all negative, *MSNBC.com* did provide some results within an overall negative poll that seemed to suggest a positive side concerning public support. *MSNBC.com* also featured two polls toward the end of the coverage that suggested an "uptick" in public support for the public option, but still noting that the overall support was still below 50 percent. It should be noted that both websites obviously polled their own audience members and readers. Social or personal responsibility was not much of a factor in framing poll evaluation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Coverage of the Obama health care reform bill by *Foxnews.com* and *MSNBC.com* showed that social versus personal responsibility were indeed not frames that spilled over into every issue and category within the overall debate. While the argument surrounding the idea of government intervention was exposed with framing specifically the public option debate, the idea that government had a “social responsibility” to intervene was not an evident frame. Too much government intervention and connections to “socialism” were mentioned a few times, but not enough to create a consistent theme in either website. The idea of “responsibility” actually took different framing forms depending on which topic in particular was being covered. In fact, it was found that responsibility to inform and protect the public pertained many times, on *Foxnews.com*, individually towards the president and Nancy Pelosi for misleading the public, while other times, on *MSNBC.com*, it was directed at the Republican Party in terms of misinforming the public and deterring progress. The researcher found that the most obvious framing techniques utilized by the websites included framing in terms of the health reform’s “winners” and “losers,” the “good guys” and “bad guys,” and whether or not they (the website) would support or “challenge” statements made by President Obama and/or each of the political parties. The losers were clearly, in more manners than one, the American public, whether it was because they were “misinformed” or becoming the scapegoats for having to “pay”

for the Bill. Some of the utilized literature on framing theory proved to be quite supportive of these conclusions.

Framing Theory

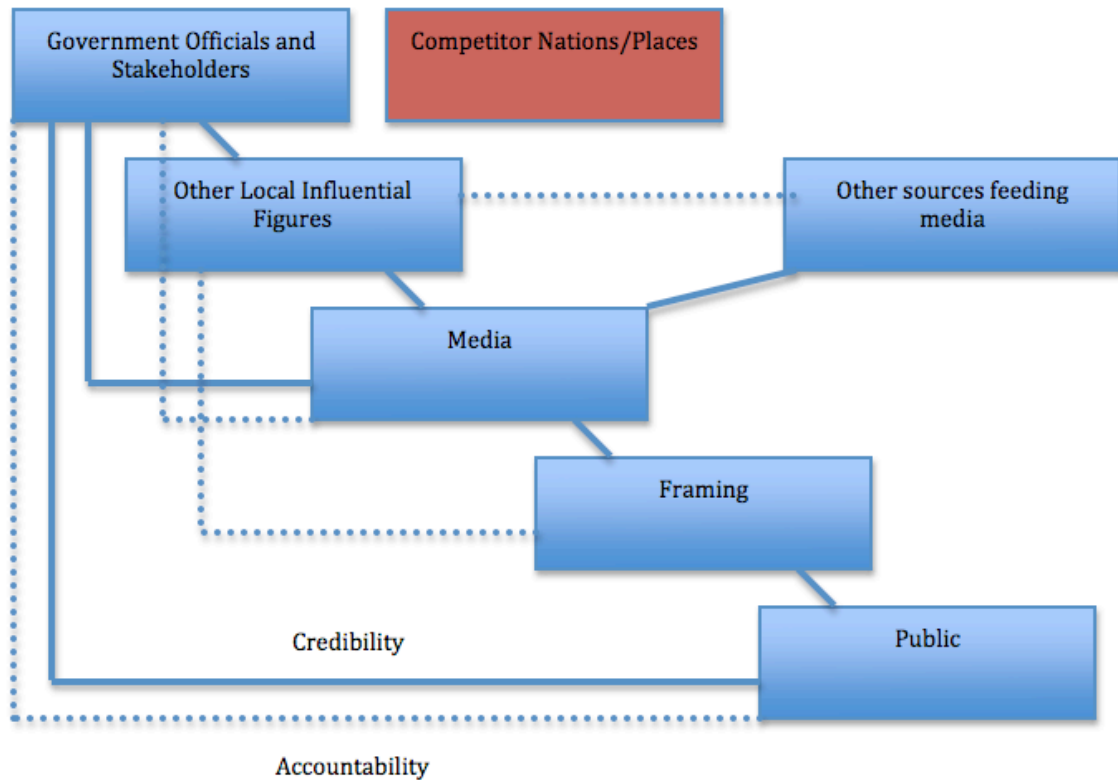
The framing theories utilized in this study included Entman's (1989) definition of framing, Entman's Cascading Activation Model (2003), Iyengar's thematic versus episodic framing and Lakoff's conceptual framing levels.

Entman's Definition of Framing

According to Entman (1989), his definition of framing is “ selecting some aspect of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation.” Overall, this was a useful definition to keep in mind when examining the 240 articles. Through using Entman's definition, the researcher was able to compare coverage of various events and issues pertaining to the Obama health care reform bill, and from there, categorize how one website may have framed them differently or similarly to the other website. Because the Obama health care reform bill is and was such a large political topic of discussion, framing the debate and bill as a whole became a reporting task that required pulling out various details and information, but never including “everything.” It was impossible, in one article, to sum up all of the pros and cons of the bill, therefore, each website had to provide differing frames for the each of the bill's categories as presented in the previous results' sections. The only general

and carrying themes were that of “winners versus losers” and “bad guys versus good guys.”

Cascading Activation Model (Entman, 2003)



The cascading activation model, according to Entman (2003) explains how framing begins at a higher governmental level and is filtered next to through other influential figures possibly like senators and representatives, next on to the media, who then frame the topic for the public. Whether or not the media chooses to further or dampen the initial governmental frame for any given political topic is in the hands of the media company or individual journalist covering the story. The researcher found that Entman’s cascading activation model proved to be extremely useful and interesting in

coverage of such a politically-hot topic of discussion. This model was kept in mind while reading articles that either allowed for the president's and liberal democrats' opinions to stand alone without challenge or criticism, and also when the exact opposite occurred. This was where the researcher felt that the two websites seriously differed. There was not complete evidence of the lofty and general conclusion that the so-called liberal *MSNBC.com* totally supported liberal values and opinions altogether, but more so that *MSNBC.com* simply reported what President Obama and the Democrats said. This was in contrast to *Foxnews.com*, which many times challenged and provided follow-up countering explanations when referring to what the president said about the bill.

On another note, the cascading activation model is also known to have the ability to also flow from the bottom up, meaning that the lower levels of framing, including the news media frames, have the ability to essentially turn around and affect the actual governmental frame. This was reverse cascading activation was seen only a couple times when the president or senators would specifically address new issues that the media brought up. Although, this style of cascading activation, and its effects on coverage of the Obama health care reform bill framing call for further research and examination.

Thematic versus Episodic Framing

Iyengar's (1996) thematic versus episodic framing was also utilized in this study. Iyengar had found that when news media used episodic or personal stories to frame a problem, that many times, the audience blamed the individual in the story for being the "cause" of their own problems. This was in contrast to when stories were framed more thematically and the audience felt more sympathy for society as a whole. These framing

techniques are also connected to Iyengar's theories concerning the attribution of responsibility. While the researcher was not testing audience opinion on "who's fault" or "who was responsible" for any given problem concerning the debate surrounding the Obama health care reform bill, she was interested in seeing whether or not each website framed issues more episodically or thematically. It was found that only in coverage of the category labeled "highlighted supporters versus non-supporters" of the bill, were stories framed episodically. With *Foxnews.com*, individual accounts of doctors who did not support the bill were included. With *MSNBC.com*, individual accounts of people suffering from the current state of high insurance costs were framed episodically. Whether or not these different framing techniques actually made a difference in influencing public opinion towards the bill has yet to be studied.

Lakoff's Conceptual Framing Levels

Lakoff refers to three conceptual levels for framing messages in the context of political issues:

- Level 1: the expression of overarching values, such as fairness, responsibility, equality, equity, etc.
- Level 2: the general issue being addressed, such as housing, the environment, school, etc.
- Level 3: policy details, strategies, etc (Dorfman, Wallack, Woodruff, 2005).

The researcher found Lakoff's three conceptual levels to be useful for identifying framing techniques by both of the websites. Interestingly, while the researcher had expected more explicit level 1 framing and specific mentioning of "values" throughout

the coverage of the Obama health care reform bill, she found that values like “responsibility” and “fairness” were less likely to be actually stated and more likely to be implied in the frame. For example, when focusing on the “losers” of health care reform as either being the taxpayers or the people currently without insurance, the value of “fairness” is implied. The researcher actually found that Lakoff’s conceptual levels 2 and 3 were utilized by both websites, but slightly more so by *MSNBC.com*. Besides the mentioning of the “death panels” and Sarah Palin’s “dangerous irresponsibility,” *MSNBC.com* focused more on presenting the details of the bill, trying to counter that theme of “misinformation” among the public. *Foxnews.com* focused slightly more on people’s emotions and opinions towards various issues like abortion funding and the Bill costs. Again, while the researcher found Lakoff’s levels useful to keep in mind while examining the coverage, she found that many times these “overarching values” did not need to be explicitly expressed but were simply implied through the framing. Lakoff (2004) states that the use of the level 1 framing resonates more with the public, rather than the other conceptual two levels, which are focused more on details and strategies. This is an area for further study, as this research did not explore framing effects on the public.

Assigning Responsibility; Societal versus Personal Responsibility

The researcher also used various theories on the assignment of responsibility for political and health issues while examining coverage of the Obama health care reform

bill. Many of these theories were used to help clarify and define the researcher's hypothesis surrounding framing societal versus personal responsibility.

Causal versus Treatment Responsibility

Iyengar's (1989) theory on assigning responsibility for national issues falls under two definitions: causal and treatment responsibility. He states that causal responsibility focuses on the origin of the problem, while treatments focuses on the "alleviation" of the problem. Iyengar also states that the assignment of responsibility is a process individuals tend to use to help simplify political issues. The researcher found this theory also useful when categorizing framing techniques for both websites. While the researcher was looking to find references to social versus personal responsibility within coverage of the Obama health care reform bill, she found that there were more often circumstances when an individual (say the president or a specific senator) or a political party were inferred to be the "cause" of various problems surrounding the debate. For example, the researcher found that many times, President Obama was inferred to be "responsible" for causing and also needing to treat the confusion surrounding the White House opinion about the public option inclusion in the final bill. Republicans were inferred to be responsible for fueling the "misinformation" surrounding issues in the bill. Taxpayers were inferred to be responsible for treating the issue of the "cost" of the bill. Many times though, "treatment" responsibility was not mentioned and the researcher feels that due to the political toxicity surrounding the bill, neither website was able to present "treatments" for any of the problems within the debate. Of course, these causal and treatment responsibility

references varied between the two websites and this difference is seen as a vital part of the discussion of the results and ensuing conclusion.

Societal versus Market Justice in Framing Health Issues

Another theory the researcher kept in mind was Beauchamp's (1976) theories of utilizing market versus social justice values when framing issues about public health. Beauchamp argues that "the ethic of public health is social justice," and that the counter of that argument is the competing ethic of market justice, which is rooted in the idea that "the market will naturally respond to the desires of the people." These values of social versus market justice were kept in mind to see if there was any correlation in the framing of the Obama health care reform bill and the idea of having more or less government intervention, meaning more or less social responsibility. The researcher found that this theory was not as pertinent to the overall health care reform bill. Because of the wide array of issues and areas of debate surrounding the bill, ranging from political strategies, to cost, to specific issues like "abortion funding," the researcher found that the bill itself could not be put under the simply category of "public health," in which Beauchamp (1976) uses examples such as tobacco and drunk driving. The researcher did not find many references in the bill's coverage to "social justice." Only with *MSNBC.com*'s coverage about the current people who did not have insurance was "social justice" ever mentioned. And market justice was rarely ever mentioned except for coverage surrounding the public option debate and the Republicans' worries that private insurance companies would be pushed out of the market.

Partisan Beliefs and Government Intervention

One of the main goals of this research was to examine an possibility of there being differing frames on *MSNBC.com* and *Foxnews.com* that either supported or negated various partisan beliefs about the correct amount of government intervention. The researcher had hypothesized that the conceptual value of “responsibility,” social (to be perceived as governmental intervention) or personal/individual (to be perceived as less government intervention) might have been an evident framing technique and demonstration of variant political leanings by either of the websites. What the researcher found was that while social responsibility to take care of the “uninsured” was mentioned more so in *MSNBC.com* coverage, the conceptual value did not prove to be a carrying theme throughout reporting on all issues surrounding the bill. As stated previously, the hypothesis surrounding possible partisan leanings would most likely be supported by Entman’s theory of the cascading activation model, by pointing to the fact that *MSNBC.com* would most times report the presidential and liberal democrats’ frame for the bill without any contestation. *Foxnews.com* proved to report quite differently, many times adding countering explanations and frames the essentially “questioned” the White House frame.

A Possible Master Frame

After examining all 240 articles multiple times, it became more and more difficult to try and establish a so-called “master frame,” which essentially would encapsulate the totality of the Obama health care reform bill coverage. Because of the variety of topics

and categories, not until all had been analyzed and picked apart, conclusions drawn, could the researcher attempt to make a generalizable conclusion about a possible master frame. Throughout the coverage, one theme continued to run evident by both websites. Because of the political “hotness” and controversial nature of the Obama health care reform bill, the bill in itself was reported on more along the lines of a horserace campaign. In other words, the bill in itself was representative of the president’s campaign to pass it in legislation and at the same time, get the public to believe in him. And because the bill was so enormous, both materially and in topic, both websites would report on issues that emerged as quickly as they could. At the same time, while both websites would rush to report an issue, no final conclusion or “bigger picture” was ever truly drawn, so that the public could understand the bill as a whole. Thus, the theme of “misinformation,” which was many times blamed on the president, and both the democratic and republican party members, could essentially also be attributed to the media’s coverage of the bill. Framing studies on campaigns have diagnosed this same reporting technique as “racehorse” campaign framing, where the rush to simply report any and every issue is the important factor, rather than drawing wider, larger conclusions.

Limitations

Through the use of the constant comparison method, this study aimed to create some original theory surrounding framing of the Obama health care reform bill. This study purposely ignored the process of framing (how the frames got into the text) and the effects of these frames on the audience. This study cannot answer these questions. This

study also does not compare the four months of examined coverage to coverage after the House passage of the bill in November 2009. Furthermore, the goal of qualitative research is not to provide knowledge that is “generalizable” across a population, as in, this study is not able to state how major news websites in general framed the Obama health care reform bill. Also, because both of the websites also have their own broadcast news stations, which many have said vary in content and coverage from their website versions, this study is also not able to say that these conclusions and findings would carry over onto the *MSNBC* or *Fox News* TV broadcasts.

Further Research

Using the constant comparison method of textual analysis, this study was able to not only categorize the essential framing issues within coverage of the Obama health care reform bill, but was also able to shed some light on different framing techniques utilized by two news media websites. The study has also specifically unveiled research about frame angles using ideas of “responsibility” and partisan leanings and opinions about the role of government intervention. Further analysis of news media coverage of the Obama health care reform bill is needed.

Other qualitative studies could look at the effect of such differing frames the two websites had on audience members, through the use of interviews. Another study could study the framing process by interviewing the actual reporters for each of the websites to see if their personal opinions on the role of governmental intervention were evident in their reporting. Because of the wide array of issues covered in the largely general “Obama health care reform bill” topic, specific framing studies on one issue such as the

public option debate or abortion funding or death panels, etc, could serve as helpful and contributing research.

Final Remarks

This study is worthwhile because the framing on the Obama health care reform bill has yet to be studied by many scholars, if any. While political bias in news framing is not a new area of study, the topic in itself has been an increasingly interesting research topic, as studies on the framing of the 9/11 attacks and ensuing war have shown that news media framing changes over time, supporting one political party's decisions or actions one year, and negating them the next. This study provides as a base for other studies to look at if these news media frames are taking effect in changing audience members opinions toward politically-charged issues such as the Obama health care reform bill.

To summarize, this study found that, in line with cascading activation studies, news websites have the power to enhance or negate the White House frame concerning a political piece of legislation. Examining coverage of the Obama health care reform bill showed that the differences in framing between *MSNBC.com* and *Foxnews.com* were in that *MSNBC.com* chose to enhance the presidential frame and *Foxnews.com* more often negated it or reported negatively about the bill. It may be possible to suggest here that this is evidence of partisan leanings in this instance. The value of responsibility, social versus personal, did not prove to be a major frame, but was more so along the lines of framing causal and treatment responsibility of problems surrounding the bill's specific issues and politically heated debates.

APPENDIX A: A Guide toward Categorization of Frames and Properties

1. Basic (Atheide, 1996)
 - a. Date
 - b. Headline
 - c. Lede
2. Theme
 - a. What is the central organizing theme or idea?
 - i. Is the story framed thematically or episodically? (Iyengar, 1989)
 - ii. What is the central conflict?
 - iii. Who or what is the cause of the conflict? (Iyengar, 1996)
 - iv. Who or what is responsible for treating the conflict? (Iyengar, 1996)
 - v. Does the article focus more on the cause of the problem or the treatment? (Iyengar, 1996)
3. Rhetorical Choices
 - a. What contextual cues and metaphorical phrases are used? (Iyengar, 1989)
 - b. What, if any, expressions of overarching values (i.e. fairness, equality, responsibility) are used and how? (Lakoff, 2004)
 - b. What details or policy strategies are included? (Dorfman, Wallack, Woodruff, 2005)
 - c. What words or terms are repeated?
 - d. What do the quote choices reveal?
4. Other
 - a. What is the possible contested “White House frame” in the article?
 - i. What evidence supports or negates that frame?
 - b. What does the article not mention? What is left out?

APPENDIX B: Articles Analyzed

A new silent majority? White house says health care protestors not mainstream. (2009, September 14). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

AARP Faces backlash from senior over health care reform stance. (2009, August 10). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

AARP, Losing members over health care, faces challenge from other group. (2009, August 18). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

After 10 Years, Health Care Coverage Costs Turn Into Unfunded Mandate. (2009, July 23). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

After lawsuit, Obama opens some info on meetings with healthcare execs. (2009, July 22). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

AMA Backs House Health-care bill. (2009, July 16). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Americans don't want government funded abortions in health reform. (2009, October 5). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Americans still skeptical about Obama's plans. (2009, August 18). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

An open letter to Nancy Pelosi and Robert Gibbs. (2009, October 30). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

As Health Insurance Debate Looms, Budget Director doesn't rule out abortions. (2009, July 19). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Audience shouts down Sebelius, Specter at Health care town hall. (2009, August 3). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Bad Employer Bailout? Reform Could Fund Health Care for Illegal Workers. (2009, July 30). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Baucus: Finance Cmte strikes agreement. (2009, July 21). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Baucus Plan allows for fines up to \$3800 for failing to get health insurance. (2009, September 9). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Baucus unveils \$856 Billion health care plan, predicts broad support. (2009, September 16). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Big employers dip into health care debate. (2009, August 25). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Boehner: GOP has answers on health care reform. (2009, October 31). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Catholic bishops urge members to oppose abortion funding in health care plan. (2009, October 30). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Charges of racism inflame health care debate. (2009, September 16). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Congress gears up for final battle over health care reform. (2009, September 12). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Congress: health-care challenges. (2009, July 10). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Congress: It's a Blue Dog's world...and we're just lucky to live in it. (2009, July 24). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Congress: Reading Finance tea leaves. (2009, July 22). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Congress: Today's health care bill. (2009, July 14). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Congressional Budget Director Warns Health Care Bills Will Raise Costs. (2009, July 16). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Critics Question Obama's Assertion No One Would be forced to change plans. (2009, July 23). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Dean wants Obama to stand by public option. (2009, August 17). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Democratic lawmaker likens health care crisis to a 'holocaust'. (2009, September 20). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Democrats invoke Kennedy's death in calling for health care reform. (2009, August 26). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Democrats Reach Deal on Health Care Reform, Hurdles Remain. (2009, July 29). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Doc shortages to deficits: Reform reality check. (2009, July 22). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Doctor leaves AMA Over support of Government health care reform. (2009, August 19). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Doctors: Malpractice costs the biggest money-saver in tort reform. (2009, September 14). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Doctors Offer Senators their opinion on health care reform. (2009, August 8). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Doctors Wage War Against Obama's Health Care Overhaul. (2009, July 22). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

End of Life counseling intensifies health care debate. (2009, August 8). Fox News. Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

Everyone into the risk pool--or else. (2009, August 11). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Excerpts from Obama's remarks tonight. (2009, July 22). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Fact or fiction? Military health benefits to be cut. (2009, October 23). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Fact or fiction? Pay for reform by cutting waste. (2009, September 11). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Fact or fiction? Pelosi bill in danger. (2009, October 30). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Fact or Fiction? Public option essential. (2009, September 8). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Fact or fiction? Some forced into public plan. (2009, October 7). MSNBC
News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Fact or Fiction? Tax dollars will fund abortions. (2009, August 31). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Fact or fiction? VAT tax helps pay for reform. (2009, October 19). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Field notes: Why Boston backed Teddy Kennedy. (2009, August 27). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

Final House Panel Approves Health Reform Bill. (2009, July 31). Fox News.
Retrieved from <http://foxnews.com>

First read: A primer on reconciliation. (2009, September 29). MSNBC News. Retrieved
from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: a primer on the public option proposals. (2009, October 26). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: AFL-CIO: Public option is a must. (2009, September 1). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: after Baucus unveils bill, what's next?. (2009, September 16). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: all about the public option. (2009, September 4). MSNBC News. Retrieved
from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Baucus: all by myself.... (2009, September 16). MSNBC News. Retrieved
from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Black Caucus' tough talk on pub option. (2009, September 11). MSNBC
News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First Read: Congress: Another health setback?. (2009, July 31). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Congress: Harry and Nancy. (2009, October 19). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Congress: Joe Wilson, public option. (2009, September 14). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Congress: Public option's new life?. (2009, October 23). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Congress: Reid's bill is ready. (2009, October 26). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Day 2, Baucus bill gets some love. (2009, September 17). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Dem panel pushes for reform. (2009, September 15). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Enzi: I'm still on the gang of six. (2009, September 3). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: finance committee passes bill. (2009, October 13). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: First lady makes health care pitch. (2009, September 18). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First Read: GOP watch: Death panel?. (2009, August 10). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Grassley: Proposal's costs too high. (2009, September 14). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: health care. (2009, October 9). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: health care. (2009, October 13). MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: health care and the 2008 election. (2009, August 12). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: House bill now at \$871B. (2009, October 21). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: House Dems do healthcare math. (2009, October 31). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Hoyer: Christmas deadline no guarantee. (2009, October 14).
MSNBC News. Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Hoyer softens on public option. (2009, September 8). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Ighani defends AHIP study. (2009, October 12). MSNBC News. Retrieved
from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Kennedy's letter. (2009, August 20). MSNBC News. Retrieved from
<http://msnbc.msn.com>

First Read: Liberals want no more compromise. (2009, July 30). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Lieberman to vote for a filibuster. (2009, October 27). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Moderates plot to stop bill with pub opt. (2009, October 22). MSNBC News.
Retrieved from <http://msnbc.msn.com>

First read: Obama agenda: crunch time. (2009, September 8). MSNBC News. Retrieved
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