

RESPONSIBILITY FRAMING AND THE OBAMA HEALTH CARE REFORM BILL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine early online news coverage of the Obama health care reform bill by both *Foxnews.com* and *MSNBC.com*. The study aimed to look at framing techniques and whether or not these publicly-known, politically-leaning websites utilized social versus personal responsibility values when framing the bill. The study also aimed to see if whether or not use of these values correlated with partisan beliefs on the “appropriate” amount of government intervention.

This study in particular used a qualitative textual analysis method of constant comparison, where the researcher examined, analyzed and compared 120 articles from each website, totaling 240 articles in all. After analyzing the articles, the researcher was able to create evident framing categories with characteristics and details specific to each website’s coverage of any given topic.

The study found that while social versus personal responsibility were not overtly utilized as the predicted framing techniques, it was found that causal and treatment responsibility framing were indeed used, specifically when deciding “who’s” fault it was that the public was misinformed about the Obama health care reform bill. The principal conclusion was that more often than not, *Foxnews.com* would challenge the presidential or liberal democrats’ frame concerning the bill, while *MSNBC.com* would normally support the frame, both evidence of the cascading activation model. As an overall master frame, coverage of the bill was many times likened to “horserace” coverage, similar to news coverage for a campaign.