ANALYSIS OF RESPONSE TO THE “DEATH PANELS” CLAIM IN THE DEBATE ON HEALTH CARE REFORM THAT LED TO THE PASSAGE OF THE PATIENT PROTECTION AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Charles Davis, Maríe Len-Ríos, and Wes Pippert for their patience, guidance, and support in completing this project. I especially appreciate their support as I suffered through several rough spots, and that they never lost faith in me.
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ANALYSIS OF RESPONSE TO THE “DEATH PANELS” CLAIM IN THE DEBATE ON HEALTH CARE REFORM THAT LED TO THE PASSAGE OF PATIENT PROTECTION AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Joseph Sparks

Charles Davis, Project Chair

ABSTRACT

This project analyzed how newspapers responded to the “death panels” claim made by Sarah Palin in the debate that led to the passage of the Affordable Care Act. I examined a period of one week starting the day after Palin made her claim. I performed a Lexis-Nexis search on the term “death panel.” A content analysis was performed to determine whether reporters addressed the veracity of the claim. While reporters correctly stated that the claim was false nearly 70 percent of the time, the claim remained in the public debate until the Affordable Care Act was passed. This showed that misinformation is difficult to remove from the public debate, and more research is required to find the best methods to refute misinformation.
1. Introduction

When I started the master's program in journalism, I wanted to support quality debate on issues. I thought that strategic communication would be the best method to achieve this goal. After taking "Public Relations" I became convinced that a grounding in public relations would be the best way to achieve my goal of quality debate.

As part of my "Public Relations" course work, I performed a case study on the problems that the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now had in 2009-2010. This group is better known by its acronym, ACORN. ACORN was dedicated to helping low-income people with housing and encouraging low-income people to register to vote. In the space of eight days, from Sept 10-17, 2009, five videos were released on conservative activist Andrew Breitbart’s website, Biggovernmenet.com. These videos showed ACORN employees from various offices engaging in what appeared to be illegal activities. During this time, Congress voted to defund ACORN because of actions in the videos. A report released by the California Attorney General Edmund Brown Jr. concluded the videos were highly edited and portrayed a false picture of events (Brown, 2010). At this point the damage was done. Brown said, "The original storm of publicity created by O'Keefe's videotapes was instrumental in ACORN's subsequent denunciation in Congress, a sudden tourniquet on its funding, and the organization’s eventual collapse" ("Brown Releases Report Detailing a Litany of Problems with ACORN, But No Criminality," (2010, April 1)).
While the opponents of ACORN won with their misinformation, this was not the case in the health care debate. As the debate unfolded over what would become the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), it became apparent that misinformation spread by opponents played a large role. After six months of the debate, an article was published that listed the “five biggest lies” (Begley, 2009) in the health care debate. I will focus on one of these lies death panels--and how journalists reported on the allegations of death panels.

The combination of course work and the case study in "Public Relations" cemented my view that effective communication is most valuable to insure quality debates and to fight misinformation.

My professional project was performing public relations work at the Newseum in Washington, D.C. The Newseum concentrates on the history of the news, how the news is collected and disseminated, and the technology used to gather, create and spread the news. I chose the Newseum to provide an excellent opportunity to study and how the news is gathered and disseminated.
2. Professional Skills Component/Field Notes

I worked at the Newseum in Washington D.C. from January 2010 through April 2010. The Newseum concentrates on the history of the news, how the news is collected and disseminated, and the technology used to gather, create and spread the news. While at the Newseum, I performed the following public relations work: writing content for their website, writing content for educational materials, performing research and helping with their digital asset management system.

Chronological Description/Field Notes

Below are my field notes arranged chronologically to describe what I did at the Newseum.

Week of Jan. 24 – Jan. 30

- Got oriented to the Newseum.
- Attended staff meeting.
- Talked to Paul Sparrow about the tasks to perform, and he wanted me to look into his digital asset management system (DMS).
- Started collecting information on the DMS system.
- Started work on the digital classroom project. In preparation I watched videos. I was tasked with producing vocabulary sheets for the digital classroom project. Learned that I am required to submit Newsmania questions. Newsmania is a trivia game about news stories.
Explored the Newseum and some of their displays. The displays are range from good to excellent. I hope to get some public relations experience in future projects.

**Week of Jan. 31 – Feb. 4**

- Finished six vocabulary sheets for the digital classroom.
- Attended staff meeting.
- Interviewed a second person about the DMS system.
- Discussed with Andrea Shepard any work I could perform with her. She may have me work on the News Literacy Project which goal is to educate students about how to evaluate the news.
- Suggested as a possible project, how public relations affects the news.

I am not sure if the Newseum knows how to use me. I suggested a research project on public relations and the news. While news professionals may understand how public relations affect the news, I do not think that the general public understands this relationship.

**Week 4: Feb. 7 – Feb. 13**

- Met with Andrea Sheperd to discuss projects.
- Met with Dax Coley and he went over how to make copies from tapes.
- Attended staff meeting.
- Visited the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia along with other employees of the Newseum.
• Met with Ivy Woods to discuss database issues.

• Finished a vocabulary sheet for the “Bias” video.

• Asked about project on how public relations affect the news, but the Newseum did not seem interested.

• Created two Newsmania questions.

• Assigned to researched contacts for various charities that might be interested in attending the “Advocacy Journalism in the Digital Age” seminar.

• Called several organizations and verified or found the correct contact.

• Assigned to create a news timeline for the “Miracle on the Hudson” event in January 2009. This was U.S. Airways Flight 1549 that had to ditch in the Hudson River after the engines shut down. The miracle was that all the passengers and crew were rescued and survived. The timeline needed to include social media such as Twitter.

• Did not find a good search tool for Twitter. Most only provided information on current tweets, and could not search historical tweets.

• Talked to my oldest daughter, a high school junior, about using the Front Page Gallery to help English students learn a foreign language. The Gallery contains about 800 newspaper front pages that the Newseum receives electronically from around the world. The Newseum said that the Gallery is used to help foreign students learn English. My daughter is interested in language and linguistics, so she is going to check with her teachers and see if
they would be interested in using the Gallery to help English students learn other languages.

The visit to the American Jewish History Museum was an interesting contrast to the Newseum. The Newseum has large galleries while the History Museum has a combination of large rooms and smaller rooms. The combination of sizes helps to break up the building and make the History Museum seem less overwhelming. Sometimes following the displays at the History Museum was a bit confusing. The Newseum’s displays are easier to follow, but the building sometimes seems overwhelming.

Week of Feb. 14 – Feb. 20

• Continued working on the timeline for the “Miracle on the Hudson.”
• Attended staff meeting.
• Checked with the Library of Congress (LOC) since it received archives for Twitter, but the archives are not yet available to the public, and the LOC is still working on developing search tools.
• Finished the Advocacy Journalism contact list for the charities and sent the results to Cynthia Rudolf.
• Created two Newsmania questions.
• Sick on Friday

I was frustrated at the lack of options for available in search tools for Twitter. Most tools only allowed searches of recent tweets. I approached this from several
directions. I tried the search in Google, but Google was not effective either. While date-range searches are possible in Google, the results can only be sorted based on relevance or date descending. When you have a result set in the thousands, it is not practical to get to the earliest date in Google.

**Week of Feb. 21 – Feb. 27**

- Had a fever on Monday and did not go into work.
- Continued my work on the timeline for the “Miracle on the Hudson.”
- Found a Twitter search tool, Topsy, that could search and order historical tweets.
- Created transcripts for two interviews of Cal Turner Jr. These interviews are part of the Scottsville Project. This project documented the history of Scottsville and Allen County Kentucky, along with the history of the Dollar General stores, founded by Turner’s father, Cal Turner.
- Confirmed attendees for the Advocacy Journalism seminar, and created an alphabetical listing.
- Checked with my daughter and her teachers did not seem interested in using the Front Page Gallery.

Calling potential attendees for the Advocacy Journalism seminar was some direct public relations work. The Newseum would be a good place for broadcast journalist. There would be ample opportunity to edit videos.
Week of Feb. 28 – Mar. 6

• Finished the timeline for the “Miracle on the Hudson.”

• Attended staff meeting.

• Updated the list for the Advocacy Journalism seminar with the last minute registrations.

• Helped with registration for the Advocacy Journalism seminar.

• Created final count and list of attendees for the Advocacy Journalism seminar.

• Created Newsmania question.

• Started on the database report on how the Newseum can improve some of their database processes.

Helping with the Advocacy Journalism seminar registration was beneficial. When I created the attendance sheet, I did not create a separate column to mark the attendance of a person. In the future I would create a separate column to make the data entry easier. I created an attendance column on the spreadsheet and entered it as the number 1. This allowed a quick sum to be generated to get a count of the attendees.

Week of Mar. 7 – Mar. 13

• Continued my work on the database report.

• Attended staff meeting.

• Wrote descriptions for five videos.
• Started reviewing selected web pages for the Newseum's Purchase Tickets and Plan Your Visit website. These two pages had about 20 subpages.

In starting the review of the web pages, I found the text to be good and the designed followed generally accepted design techniques, but lacked excitement.

**Week of Mar. 14 – Mar. 20**

• Continued my work on the database report.
• Attended staff meeting.
• Continued work on reviewing web pages.
• Worked on suggestions for making the web pages more exciting.
• Reviewed the web page that had a typo and had had the page corrected.

Web pages can be tricky. While the Newseum’s web pages followed generally acceptable design techniques in terms of space and layout, some of the web pages did not grab your attention. I suggested that interspersing some variation would make the pages more interesting. Among my suggestions was to add quotes from visitors to sell the Newseum, and by varying the design and color of the quotes, the web pages become more interesting.

**Week of Mar. 21 – Mar. 27**

• Prepared web redesign pages for presentation.
• Attended staff meeting.
• Met with Paul and Sharon to discuss suggestions web redesign.
• Started on information page on Washington, D.C. and Metro.
• Continued work on database report.
• Created three Newsmania questions.

I suggested that the web page instructions about how to get around Washington, D.C. assume that a person is familiar with the D.C. area and the Metro. I suggested that a page should be added that explains the grid layout of Washington, D.C. and how the metro works. This suggestion was accepted.

**Week of Mar. 28 – Apr. 3**

• Worked on information page on Washington, D.C. and Metro.
• Attended staff meeting.
• Continued work on database report.
• Assigned project to create news headlines for game project based on “Miracle on the Hudson.” The headlines should be changed to apply to Washington, D.C.
• Worked on game project.

For the Newseum, one of the issues in designing a database is to insure that institutional knowledge about entities, such as events, people, places and projects is not lost. In twenty years, will people be as familiar with Hurricane Katrina or the Scottsville Project? The Scottsville Project documented the founding of the Dollar General stores, and derives its name from Scottsville, Kentucky, where the stores
were founded. The database design should allow for detailed data entry of entities while allowing for the information to be reused so the data is only entered once.

**Week of Apr. 4 – Apr. 10**

- Worked on information page on Washington, D.C. and Metro.
- Attended staff meeting.
- Continued work on database report.
- Assigned project to create news headlines for game project based on “Miracle on the Hudson”.
- Worked on game project.

Modifying the “Miracle on the Hudson” headlines for Washington, D.C. turned out to be fun. The database report required a fair amount of explication since I cannot assume the intended audience has database knowledge. I gave enough information to explain concepts without getting too technical.

**Week of Apr. 11 – Apr. 17**

- Worked on information page on Washington, D.C. and Metro.
- Finished work on database report.
- Worked on game project.

I started winding down at work. The most important aspect of the database report was providing a framework for the Newseum to transfer knowledge to future generations. The Newseum does not have a centralized location to store information
about people, places, events, and projects. In 20 or 50 years, people may not remember what Hurricane Katrina event was, and why it was significant. This information needs to be stored so future employees can quickly understand the significances of Katrina.

The other main database issue for the Newseum is that data entry is not consistent and search results often do not pull all the available data. For example, the videos from the Katrina event span across multiple projects. A project is a video or series of videos produced by the Newseum. If I want to find all the Katrina event videos used in projects, a search probably would not return all the videos due to inconsistent data entry.

Some events and projects would be well known and data would be easy to find. For example, Katrina is both an event and project. In the future, information about Katrina would be readily available. The Newseum also executed the Scottsville Project on the founding of the Dollar General stores by Cal Turner. The project name is based on the location where Dollar General was founded, Scottsville, Kentucky. In 50 years, it is doubtful that employees would remember the Scottsville Project. So, it is important that the people, places, and events associated with the project, along with the project itself, be clearly documented so future employees understand the significance of the project.

**Week of Apr. 18 – Apr. 24**

- Demonstrated to an administrative assistant how to sort data in Excel
- Wrote steps to perform sort in Excel
• Finished game project.

Sometimes what seems like a minor issue to one person can be a major help to another person. The administrative assistant did not realize that there is a sort function in Excel and had spent hours sorting individual lists. The assistant was thrilled when I showed her how to use the sort function in Excel.
3. Evaluation of Professional Project

The Newseum was not the best place for me. This is not a criticism of the Newseum. For my interests, public relations and policy formulation, I would have been better off in a think tank or a public relations firm. That being said, I think overall my time in D.C. was positive. I performed several public relations tasks that included writing, event logistics, and research.

In addition to their work as a museum, the Newseum maintains a history of major news events from around the world. If, at some point, the Newseum has the resources implement my suggestions on how to upgrade and organize their digital asset management system, the system could become an invaluable tool for tracking and researching important news events.
4. Physical Evidence

Timeline for Flight 1549: Jan. 15, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (EST)</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:24 p.m.</td>
<td>The plane is cleared for takeoff from LaGuardia Airport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:25 p.m.</td>
<td>Pilot Chesley B. Sullenberger tells the departure controller he is at 700 feet and climbing to 5,000 feet. He is instructed to climb to 15,000 feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:27:01 p.m.</td>
<td>Radar data shows the plane intersect &quot;primary targets&quot; -- probably a flock of birds -- while climbing between 2,900 and 3,000 feet. The objects had not been on the departure controller's radar screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:27:10 p.m.</td>
<td>Sullenberger says, &quot;birds,&quot; to co-pilot Jeff Skiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:27:11 p.m.</td>
<td>The sound of thuds followed by shuddering sound is recorded by the cockpit area microphone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:27:32 p.m.</td>
<td>Sullenberger issues urgent message on his radio: &quot;Mayday, mayday mayday. uh this is uh Cactus fifteen thirty-nine hit birds, we've lost thrust (in/on) both engines we're turning back towards LaGuardia.&quot; (The flight number is fifteen forty-nine, not fifteen thirty-nine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:27:49 p.m.</td>
<td>Controllers advised LaGuardia to stop departures because a plane is making an emergency return to the airport. Tower officials are told there was a bird strike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:28:05 p.m.</td>
<td>When asked if he wants to land at LaGuardia, the pilot responds, &quot;We're unable. We may end up in the Hudson.&quot; Communication follows over whether the plane can land at nearby Teterboro Airport in New Jersey, but the pilot says, &quot;We can't do it.&quot; Another controller asks which runway he could aim for. The pilot responds, &quot;We're gonna be in the Hudson.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 p.m.</td>
<td>The plane touches down in the water. Radar and tower personnel notify the Coast Guard, which responds, &quot;We launched the fleet.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:33 p.m.</td>
<td>3:33 p.m. Jim Hanrahan tweets, &quot;I just watched a plane crash into the hudson rive in manhattan (sic).&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:33 p.m.</td>
<td>Dispatchers start receiving calls of plane that just landed in the Hudson River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:35 p.m.</td>
<td>3:35 p.m. NY Waterway ferry <em>Thomas Jefferson</em> arrives to help with rescue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:36 p.m.</td>
<td>Message sent from rescue team, “Rescue 1 to Manhattan, urgent! Plane in the water with people out, we're launching our boat!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:36 p.m.</td>
<td>Janis Krums tweets, “There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy,” and post picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:37 p.m.</td>
<td>Second ferry arrives to help with rescue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:37 p.m.</td>
<td>FDNY Rescue Battalion calls and instructs to start a second rescue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:38 p.m.</td>
<td>FDNY Battalion 9 reports, “Urgent! According to PD we have a major airliner in the water…” TL21 reports the location of the plane is 43 and West Side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:39 p.m.</td>
<td>FDNY Marine 1 reports, “This is confirmed! You have a commercial airliner in the water, 2 ferries alongside, Marine 1A is pulling up alongside, Marine 1 is responding as well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:40 p.m.</td>
<td>FDNY BC9 reports, “Urgent! We have a commercial airliner down, have all units respond to Circle Line Piers, we have people on the wings, we have a Circle Line Boat pushing it to the pier.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:46 p.m.</td>
<td>Gawker: Reports a passenger plane crashed in the Hudson River, and that MSNBC has live pictures of passengers wearing life jackets and being rescued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:48 p.m.</td>
<td>NY Times: Breaking news running at top of home page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:50 p.m.</td>
<td>Lauren Teague tweets that CNN has a live feed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:52 p.m.</td>
<td>WCCO (Minn.) tweets “jet has crashed” and list website for more details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:53 p.m.</td>
<td>FDNY operations center reports there are 146 passengers and 5 crew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:54 p.m.</td>
<td>Grego (Greg Lam Pak Ng) posts picture on Flickr taken at 3:32 p.m. He says, “Plane crash into Hudson River. This just happened. I hope everyone will be safe.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Airline Biz Blog posts entry that starts, “Good news, if there is such a thing: Airframe appears very intact and was floating on the water for a good amount of time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Marty McKeever tweets, “Make that: RT: plane in the river, pray hard!” Includes links to pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:57 p.m.</td>
<td>Brian Ries tweets “Hudson plane crash video from msnbc,” along with the URL from MSNBC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:58 p.m.</td>
<td>Nelly Yusupova tweets, “RT @miishi US Airways jet crash into Hudson River in NYC video here: <a href="http://tinyurl.com/5jq7y9">http://tinyurl.com/5jq7y9</a> It was a controlled landing, apparently.” The link is to CNN Live.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Claudia Sommer tweets, “Video Airplane Crash Hudson River,” and includes link to Fox News Live Stream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:01 p.m.</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times tweets, “New York City firefighters are responding to the US Airways flight 1549 crash in the Hudson River. More updates soon at <a href="http://latimes.com.%E2%80%9D">http://latimes.com.”</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:02 p.m.</td>
<td>MarketWatch newswire reports, “Jet splashed down into the Hudson River on Thursday, near midtown Manhattan. Details were scarce, but television footage showed the aircraft foundering in the water, surrounded by tug boats and at least one emergency boat, and what appeared to be passengers sitting on inflated boats, the plane’s wings and fuselage.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:03 p.m.</td>
<td>Jim Stroud tweets “BREAKING: U.S. Airways plane plunges into...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Source Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:04 p.m.</td>
<td>Ben Ramsey tweets “Plane crashes into the Hudson River,” and provides link to USA Today website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:04 p.m.</td>
<td>WOODTV (Grand Rapids, Mich.) tweets, “Plane crashes into Hudson River,” and provides a link to a story on their website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:06 p.m.</td>
<td>AP Worldstream reports plane crashed into Hudson River and plane was “submerged in the icy waters up to the windows. Rescue crews had opened the door and were pulling passengers in yellow life vests from the plane.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:06 p.m.</td>
<td>BuzzFeed tweets, “Breaking: Plane crash in the Hudson River. Rescue’s underway now.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:08 p.m.</td>
<td>Barry Schwartz tweets, “wow us airways (sic) plane down in hudson river,” with a link to CNN’s website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:09 p.m.</td>
<td>Steve Rubel tweets, “Plane Crashes Into Hudson River,” and provides a link to the New York Times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10 p.m.</td>
<td>Tag Brum tweets, “Vixi! Caiu um avião no rio Hudson em NYC.” According to Google Translate, the Portuguese translates to, “Geez! A plane crashed into the Hudson in NYC.” A link is provided CNN’s (English language) website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:11 p.m.</td>
<td>Micah Wittman tweets, “Plane in Hudson photo (FF),” and provides a link to Friend Feed that contains both a link and photos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:12 p.m.</td>
<td>Paddy Donnelly tweets, “It’s amazing how Twitter spreads news like the plane crash in the Hudson faster than CNN,” and provides a link to CNN.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 p.m.</td>
<td>The Momlogic website tweets, “BREAKING NEWS: USAir Passenger Plane Down in Hudson River - no fatalities.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:16 p.m.</td>
<td>AP Financial Wire: “Homeland Security and FBI officials say there’s no indication that a plane crash in New York City was terrorism.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:16 p.m.</td>
<td>Danielle Sipple tweets, “more info on the Plane Crash into the hudson river (sic),” with a link to a website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:17 p.m.</td>
<td>Norlinda tweets, “Short news story about plane,” and provides link to the CBC, a Canadian Radio Station.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:20 p.m.</td>
<td>Blast Magazine: Reports an Airbus A320 “went down in the Hudson River ... after striking a bird that disabled two engines according to authorities.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:24 p.m.</td>
<td>Noelle Chun tweets, “People already put news footage of the crash on YouTube”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:33 p.m.</td>
<td>CBC World News tweets, “Plane goes down in New York’s Hudson River”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:34 p.m.</td>
<td>ChicagoBreakingNews.com reports that all passengers appeared to be rescued and pilot reported a double bird strike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:34 p.m.</td>
<td>Airline Biz Blog reports all passengers and crew survived the crash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:39 p.m.</td>
<td>Jason Kottke tweets, “Holy crap, a plane crashed in the Hudson River and it looks like everyone is OK”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:48 p.m.</td>
<td>SBS News tweets, “Passenger plane plunges into freezing Hudson river (sic).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>UPI News Track reports on incident and has quotes from rescued passengers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:07 p.m.</td>
<td>Doug Parked, CEO of US Airways holds press conference and confirms that flight had been involved in an accident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:12 p.m.</td>
<td>Gawker reports everyone on board Flight 1549 escaped before the plane sank in the Hudson River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:16 p.m.</td>
<td>MarketWatch reports that crash of Flight 1549 did not hamper investor enthusiasm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:18 p.m.</td>
<td>Dallas South reports the pilot did a “masterful” of landing the plane after the plane hit a flock of birds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:20 p.m.</td>
<td>Digital Journal reports an U.S Airways jet crash landed into the Hudson River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:25 p.m.</td>
<td>Associated Press Financial Wire reports that three employees of Wells Fargo &amp; Co. were on Flight 1549 and all are safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:26 p.m.</td>
<td>Car 9 of FDNY reports that the aircraft has been secured to the sea wall opposite Battery Park City.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Washington D.C. Area and Metro Details (to be used as web page)

Washington D.C. Area and Metro Details

This page provides detailed information about Washington D.C. and the D.C. Metro. It is for people who are not familiar with D.C. or the D.C. Metro.

Washington D.C. Layout

Washington, D.C. is divided into four quadrants in a grid pattern with the U.S. Capitol as the base point. The quadrants are North-East (NE), South-East (SE), South-West (SW) and North-West (NW). The numbered streets run north-south, and the lettered streets run east-west. The streets with the name of states run diagonally.

The map shows the U.S. Capitol towards the lower right and the Newseum is north-west of the Capitol near the center of the map. The address for the Newseum is: 555 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, DC, which means that the Newseum is in the North-West quadrant of D.C. Just above the Newseum is C St NW, and following the map East leads to C St NE in the North-East quadrant. Every address in Washington, D.C. should have a quadrant.

Since the Capitol is the base point, the corner of 6th St and C St NW is roughly six blocks West and three blocks north of the Capitol.

Figure 1: Washington D.C. street map, Newseum area
Washington DC Metro

Metro Overview

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro) rail service has five lines, Blue, Green, Orange, Red, and Yellow. At several stops, the lines intersect so transfers can be made from one line to the other. Also, the Green and Yellow lines share stops for part of their routes as do the Blue and Orange lines.

Figure 2: Metro Map
Printable Metro Map
Traveling from Point A to Point B

If you cannot find a seat and must stand on the train, make sure to hold on to one of the bars interspersed throughout the Metro car. Grab a bar when the doors close because the train is about to start.

On the Red Line, four stops are boxed. Starting from the top left and going counterclockwise the stops are:
- Shady Grove
- Bethesda
- Judiciary Sq
- Glenmont.

The direction of the train is determined by the last stop:
- To travel from Bethesda to Judiciary Sq., find the train going to Glenmont.
- To travel from Judiciary Sq. to Bethesda, find the train going to Shady Grove.

All trains list the train line and the last stop of the train. This is helpful for stations that share lines to insure that you board the right train.

There are two cases were trains do not go to the final stops on the map. On the Red Line, weekdays from 7:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m., every other train
terminates at the Grosvenor-Strathmore station, so the train would show Grosvenor as the endpoint instead of Shady Grove.

The second case is on the Yellow Line. On weekdays from 5:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m., service terminates at the Mount Vernon Square / 7th Street/Convention Center. To get to stations Shaw – Howard U to Fort Totten during these times, the Green Line can be used.

Generally, the stations are well marked, and finding the right platform is easy. Brown rectangular posts have the directions, and arrows point to the appropriate platform. Often, the posts also list the stops for the train, which helps to locate the correct train. Large signs list the station and are visible from the trains as you travel.

Stations

Some stations have more than one entrance and exit. Directions to an attraction can be dependent on finding the correct exit within a station. Many hotels provide a shuttle service to and from a station, and the pick up location is from a particular exit. In either case, make sure to verify the exit needed.

Fares

Fares can be purchased [online](#), at vending machines located in the stations, and at sales offices in some metro stations. There are various options for [Metrorail fare cards and passes](#).

While there are a couple of unlimited fare options, most fares are based on distance and time of day. The Metro pass or fare card must be read when entering and exiting the Metro to compute the correct fare. For both passes and fare cards, the reader is always on the right side of the turnstile when you enter or exit a metro station.
Database Report

Digital Asset Management Report

Executive Summary

This report reviewed the digital asset management system to determine if the system could be improved.

Three main issues were addressed for both video assets and edit decision lists (EDLs)
- Speed of data entry
- Accuracy of data
- Exposition of assets

Two solutions are proposed. Both solutions require adding database tables and some changes in procedures. The first or ideal solution makes suggestion on how to improve all three main issues by adding several tables to the database. This solution would allow institutional knowledge to be maintained by providing a more robust way to document events, people, places and assets. In addition this solution provides greater ability to examine and correlate data.

A hybrid solution is proposed that would allow institutional knowledge to be maintained in the future, but would not improve the speed of data entry or accuracy of data.

Both solutions improve exposition of assets by providing for detailed descriptions for events, people, places, and assets. These descriptions would provide better context for future employees so that context and knowledge can be transferred to employees in the future.
Digital Asset Management Report

Introduction

The Newseum has a digital asset management system, Buffie, that helps them keep track of their assets. This system contains stores information for their tapes, DVDs, interviews, etc. in a backend Oracle database. This system was reviewed to determine if the system could be improved.

Improvement can cover many items from improving the performance of the database to the front-end processes such as data entry. This report discusses how to improve the front-end processes.

In looking at front-end processes there are three main issues:

- Speed of data entry
- Accuracy of data
- Exposition of assets

Speed of data entry

Businesses, naturally, want to speed up data entry so it takes less time. However, it is hard to substantially decrease the initial data entry time. Computers save time when modifying or reusing data, provided the database and forms are designed properly.

A typewriting analogy is useful. When using a typewriter, the initial typing will take a certain amount of time; say two hours to type in eight pages. Likewise, it will take about two hours to type those same eight pages into a computer. With the typewriter, if one needs to add four sentences on page three, pages three through eight would need retyping, and this would take another 90 minutes.

With a computer, the same four-sentence modification would take about five minutes since the computer would reformat the necessary pages.

Accuracy of data

There are two aspects to data accuracy, internal consistency and correctness. Computers can be effective at maintaining internal consistency. For example, if the state is entered as Maryland, but the zip code is for D.C., software can perform a check to make sure the state and zip code match.

Correctness of data is harder to maintain. If one enters Missouri, instead of Maryland for the state, and enters a Missouri zip code, the computer would not
catch it. If the correct Maryland zip code is entered, an internal consistency check could flag the discrepancy so that it can be corrected.

Exposition of assets

The exposition of assets covers both the technical aspects of an asset, such as aspect ratio, TV standard, etc., and the description and keywords. The description can be crucial to understanding the context of the video, and the keywords can be crucial for finding related videos based on events, people, or places.

Newseum Process

Each project is assigned a tracking number. This number is used to identify and track a project. For example, Katrina was assigned 127. When a new project starts, Cynthia assigns the project number and a list is sent with the tracking number.

Currently, if an asset is produced by the Newseum, the editor or producer is responsible for the initial data entry using the Buffie and K2 asset form. The librarian, Camille Lavey, takes the information entered and uses Buffie to create three separate asset records, a master, a production master, and a review master. Each of these assets is assigned an asset number. The librarian will expand on the description and keywords as necessary. This information can also be used to enter information about related assets. The tracking number is usually entered as the first keyword in the “Keywords” section. So for Katrina in Buffie, the tracking number “NP 127” would be entered.

This process is highly dependent on the skill of the librarian to understand the context of the asset for the description and to type in the appropriate keywords.
A partial Buffie entry is shown for NP 127 - Katrina and NP 129 – Scottsville.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>NP 127 – Katrina</strong></th>
<th><strong>NP 129 – Scottsville</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video ID: 055235</td>
<td>Video ID: 055167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Title: Katrina outputs for: Jeanne Meserve; Robin Roberts; Katrina Overview; Katrina Documentary K2 file (Mixed) and HD MASTER (Split) (Textless)- Cindy Kuhn Asset Description: Katrina outputs for: Jeanne Meserve; Robin Roberts; Katrina Overview; Katrina Documentary - K2 file (Mixed) and HD MASTER (Split) (Textless)- Cindy Kuhn Editor General Notes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keywords: NP 127 Katrina Disaster; Covering Katrina, outputs, Jeanne Meserve, Robin Roberts, Katrina overview, Katrina documentary, CNN, ABC, hurricanes, flooding, levees, break, New Orleans, Pass Christien, Mississippi</td>
<td>Keywords: NP 129 Scottsville, Newseum Productions, Dollar General Store, charities, kiosks, interview, Joyce Weaver, B-roll, Scottsville, Tobacco Box, countryside</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that while Katrina has nothing under “General Notes”, there is a description of the Scottsville project under General Notes. Also, note that “Christien, Mississippi” should be “Christian, Mississippi.” These two points illustrate two problems.
The first problem is that there is no requirement for a description of projects, events, people, or places. The description for the Scottsville Project explains the project. However, in twenty years employees may not remember that Scottsville is in Kentucky or what the Scottsville project is, although it can sometimes be inferred by the description in the “General Notes” field of some Scottsville assets.

Likewise, in twenty years people may not remember that Katrina was a devastating Hurricane on the Gulf Coast in 2005.

The second problem is there are no integrity checks so mistakes and inconsistencies can occur.

Three searches were performed in Buffie to compare the result set for the Scottsville Project.

1. Searched the Video Title Field for “Scottville,” and 50 assets were returned.
2. Searched the Keywords field for “Scottville,” and 49 assets were returned.
3. Searched the Keywords field for “NP 129” and 45 assets were returned.
The Keywords field had “NP 1209” and “N) 129” for “NP 129”, and in one case the Keywords field was blank.

For Katrina, three searches were also performed to check the result set.

1. Searched the Video Title Field for “Katrina,” and 147 assets were returned.
2. Searched the Keywords field for “Katrina,” and 137 assets were returned.
3. Searched the Keywords field for “NP 127,” and 56 assets were returned.

Katrina had videos assigned to several projects, including: 127 (Katrina Disaster), 024 (Big Screen Theater), 006 (Pulitzer), and 057 (ENG Timeline). One record contained a typo listing the project as “NP127” instead of “NP 127” in the Keyword field.

Another problem is that fields are not aligned on the screen. For example, the Keyword field for a given asset may start three inches down on screen for one asset and five inches down for another asset. This can make it difficult to find and check information in a specific field.

**EDLs**

It would save time if the EDLs could be generated automatically. Initially, at least this does not seem possible. The EDL produced by Avid often does not contain enough information to send to a media outlet, and thus the data must be entered manually. Usually, a spreadsheet is created that lists the segment used, the media outlet, the length of the segment, and contact information. When data is reused, it is done with cut and paste.
Summary of Issues

1. There is no central description of projects. Project knowledge appears to be dependent on individuals. As time passes, that knowledge will be lost along with other valuable information. A related problem is that the knowledge of events and individuals related to these projects could also be lost. In 20 years will most people remember Katrina or its significance? Will Newseum employees know what the Scottsville Project is or who Cal Turner Jr. or Laura Turner Dugas are?

2. Certain procedures seem dependent on one person. Lavey is the librarian and Ivy Woods does the EDLs. If for some reason, Lavey or Woods became unavailable, they represent a potential single point of failure, and somebody else would need to perform their functions.

3. There are no built in data checks.

4. The fields do not align on the screen. The solution for this is not addressed.

Solutions

Two solutions will be outlined. The first will be the ideal solution. This solution will suggest the best solutions from a data and knowledge standpoint. The second solution will outline a hybrid result that will provide for knowledge transfer.

Ideal Solution for Entities and Projects

The tables required are:
- Entity (Table contains people, places and events.)
- Project
- Project-Entity
- Asset

A separate table, Entity, would be used for independent entities, such as people, places, and events. Detailed descriptions for people, places, and events would be given.

Katrina would be in the Entity table and classified as an event. The description could include a hurricane that struck the Gulf Coast in August 2005 and caused the New Orleans levees to fail. (More detailed information could be given about its path, strength, and where and when it made landfall, if required.)

The Katrina Project would be listed in the Project table. This table would start with the fields project code and project name. In addition, the project table could contain a detailed description of the project so people would understand the project in the future. Project information would need to be entered only once.
To associate entities and projects, an Entity-Project table would be created. This would allow one or more entities to be associated with one or more projects and provide an easy way to relate entities to projects. For example, the entity Katrina could also be associated with other projects, Big Screen Theater, Pulitzer, and ENG Timeline as necessary. If done properly, it would be relatively easy to query all projects that reference the Katrina event and/or all video assets associated with the Katrina event or the Katrina project.

Information for entities and projects would need to be entered once, and drop down lists would be used to associate projects and entities to insure consistency.

The Entity and Project tables would help to insure that institutional knowledge is maintained as the years pass. They would provide a ready reference to previous and current people, events, and projects. The tables would provide more consistency since the data would only need to be entered once, and, if changes are needed, they can be made in one location.

One table, Asset, would hold the video asset information similar to the asset information currently displayed in Buffie. Some of the fields required in Asset, (but certainly not all,) would be video ID, video title, asset description, keywords, audio, aspect ratio, and project code. In Buffie, the project code is stored in the Keywords field. In the new design, project code would be stored in its own field separate from the Keywords field.

Data entry time may not improve significantly depending on the amount of reuse. If data is only used once, then the data entry time will remain about the same, since the initial data entry is still required. For Hurricane Katrina, there are multiple reuses of data, and having centralized data should improve data entry time for each project.

The ideal solution for Entities and Projects provides the following benefits:

- Institutional knowledge would be maintained – Having the detailed data will allow future Newseum employees to understand the context of events, people, places, and projects.
- Better data – This system will allow detailed data to be maintained about events, people, places, and assets.
- Ability to track data relationships – For example, this design could query what entities are used by a given project.
- Easier to correct data – Since the data will reside in one location, mistakes can be fixed in one place, instead of having to update data in several locations.
- Reduction of errors - The ability to provide data checks would reduce errors.
Ideal Solution for EDLs

The tables required are:
- Media Outlet
- Media Contact
- Media Outlet Video
- EDL Header
- EDL Detail

Since it is doubtful that the editor or producer will fill in all the necessary information, and Avid cannot store the necessary data to produce an EDL, some data will require additional manual entry. Five tables would be needed.

The first table would be the Media Outlet table, and would store general information about the media outlet.

The second table, Media Contact, would list the contacts at the media outlets that provide access and cost information about a video segment. This table assumes that one media outlet could have more than one contact.

Media Outlet Video is the third table. This would create a new media outlet video code, and list both the Newseum’s information on the video and the media outlet’s information on the video.

The EDL Header table would contain the project code, a new EDL header code, and the EDL header name, and date information.

The EDL Detail table would contain:
- EDL header code, and
- Media outlet video code
- Segment length (seconds)
- Cost per second

An EDL’s total cost could be computed by summing the segment length times the cost for a given EDL. [Sum (segment length x cost)].

The ideal solution for EDLs provides the following benefits:
- Greater flexibility - If the length changes for a given segment, it can be updated in one place, and the new cost can be computed automatically.
- Ability to track data relationships – For example, this design could query the media-outlet videos being used for a project.
- More access to the data – Right now, the EDLs are kept in spreadsheets and the media contacts are maintained by Woods. A database solution would allow other people to access the data.
• Ability to automatically generate EDL reports – The EDL reports could be generated automatically from the data.
• Reduction of errors - The ability to provide data checks would reduce errors.

**Downside to Ideal Solutions**

Any new solution would take time to implement. The tables would need to be built, the forms would need to be created, people would need to be trained, and the data formats would need to be integrated with the existing system. The interdependencies will require that the top-level data be entered before the detailed data is entered. The Newseum will need to decide if the benefits of better information and flexibility outweigh the initial costs of setup.

**Hybrid Solution**

The tables required are:
- Entity (Table contains people, places and events.)
- Project

A compromise between the ideal solution and making no changes is a hybrid solution that would add the Entity and Project tables. The addition of these two tables would provide the detailed information necessary to maintain institutional knowledge in the future. The Entity and Project tables could be added without changes to the current processes other than the data entry into these tables.

The hybrid solution sacrifices the ability to use data checks to reduce errors, and the ability to track data relationships.

**Conclusion**

The hybrid solution would allow knowledge to be maintained and transferred over the years. The ideal solution would allow knowledge to be maintained and transferred over the years, provide more detailed data, and make it easier to explore data relationships.

Either solution will contribute to the Newseum’s mission of educating “the public about the value of free press in a free society.”
# Vocabulary Sheets

## 45 Words: Key Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anarchist</td>
<td>An advocate of anarchism. Anarchism considers the state or government undesirable and promotes a society without government, or anarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill of Rights</td>
<td>The first 10 amendments to the United States Constitution. These amendments guarantee certain fundamental rights and freedoms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calumny</td>
<td>“1. A false and malicious statement designed to injure the reputation of someone or something: The speech was considered a calumny of the administration.  2. The act of uttering calumnies; slander; defamation.” (<a href="http://www.dictionary.com">www.dictionary.com</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution of the United States</td>
<td>The fundamental laws that define the U.S. system of government. It defines both the powers and restrictions for the federal government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic-Republicans</td>
<td>A person who calls for the protection of personal liberty against the power of government (from 45 Words).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>A person who favors the growing power and authority of a strong central government (from 45 Words).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Amendment</td>
<td>An amendment to the United States Constitution that guarantees five essential freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and the freedom to petition the government to redress grievances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>The ability to act without interference from an external entity, such as a government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>An inauguration is the formal ceremony that marks the beginning of an official's term in office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intemperate</td>
<td>Unrestrained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Querulous</td>
<td>“full of complaints; complaining” (<a href="http://www.dictionary.com">www.dictionary.com</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scurrility</td>
<td>A scurrilous comment is a grossly or extremely abusive statement while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scurrility</td>
<td>The quality or condition of being scurrilous, or a scurrilous comment or statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedition</td>
<td>Any action that a government thinks is design to disrupt or overthrow the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traitor</td>
<td>Someone who commits treason. Treason is the betrayal of one’s country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Berlin Wall Movie: Key Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td>During World War II, the Allies referred to the coalition of nations led by the United States, England, and the Soviet Union that fought against the Axis nations. The Axis nations consisted of Nazi Germany, Japan, and Italy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Berlin is the capital of Germany. After World War II, Berlin was divided into two sections, East Berlin as part of East Germany, and West Berlin as part of West Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin Wall</td>
<td>This is the wall that surrounded West Berlin from 1961 – 1989 and separated West Berlin from East Berlin and East Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandenburg Gate</td>
<td>A historic gate in Berlin completed in 1791. It was a checkpoint between East and West Berlin after World War II, and was closed shortly as a checkpoint shortly after the Berlin Wall was built.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain-drain</td>
<td>When technical or highly skilled people leave an area, such as country, generally due to conflict, instability, or lack of opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checkpoints</td>
<td>When Berlin was divided after World War II, checkpoints were locations where East German guards checked papers and passports as people entered and left East Berlin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>From 1945 through 1991, the Cold War was the undeclared conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both countries and their allies engaged in proxy wars, espionage, propaganda, and arm races (both conventional and nuclear) to gain advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>A person who supports Communism. Communism is a political system where all property is owned by the government, and there is no private ownership of property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist rule</td>
<td>When communists control the government of a country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many countries after World War II were controlled by Communists.  

**Free press**  
A press that is allowed to operate free of government censorship or control.

**Iron Curtain**  
A term used to describe the boundary, both physical and ideological between communist and non-communist countries.

**Nuclear War**  
A war that is fought primarily with nuclear weapons.

**RIAS**  
An acronym Radio in the American Sector. A radio operation was started in 1946 to provide accurate and unbiased news to all Berliners.

**Superpowers**  
The term used to describe the United States and the Soviet Union from roughly 1945 – 1989 due to overwhelming military forces of both countries.

**World War II**  
World War II was the war between 1939 and 1945 that involved many nations. It was fought between the Allies led by the United States, England, and the Soviet Union. The Axis powers consisted of Nazi Germany, Japan and Italy.

**World War III**  
A term commonly used during the Cold War to describe the hypothetical or possible third world war among the nations of the world.

**Bias:**

**Key Vocabulary**

**Ella Baker**  
Ella Baker (1903 – 1986) was an African-American civil rights activist who worked behind-the-scenes. She was instrumental in forming Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. She worked alongside many famous civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Boycott**  
The refusal to deal with an organization or business to protest their policies.

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka**  
A 1954 United States Supreme Court decision that declared separate public schools for black and white students are illegal. This decision outlawed “separate but equal” facilities based on race established by Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896.

**Civil Rights**  
Laws that insure equal treatment regardless of race, religion or gender.

**Congress of Racial**  
Founded in 1942 in Chicago, the Congress of Racial
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Equality</strong></th>
<th>Equality used nonviolent methods to protest racial segregation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orval Faubus</strong></td>
<td>Orval Faubus was the governor of Arkansas from 1955 to 1967. He fought the desegregation of the Little Rock public schools by ordering the Arkansas National Guard to prevent African-American students from attending Little Rock Central High School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jim Crow</strong></td>
<td>State and local laws passed in the United States that required segregation by race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Martin Luther King, Jr.</strong></td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was a prominent civil rights leader and Baptist minister who led efforts to end segregation of Blacks and used non-violent protests in his campaign. He was assassinated in 1968.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plessy v Ferguson</strong></td>
<td>An 1896 United States Supreme Court decision that allowed racial segregation in public accommodations under the “separate but equal” doctrine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rosa Parks</strong></td>
<td>The national Civil Rights movement was triggered when Rosa Parks (1913 – 2005) refused to give up her seat on a bus to white man in Montgomery, Ala. on Dec. 1, 1955.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Segregation</strong></td>
<td>To separate by race, religion or gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sit-in</strong></td>
<td>A sit-in is a form of non-violent protest where protesters occupy seats or the floor and refuse to move.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee</strong></td>
<td>This group was formed in April 1960 after a series of meetings led by Ella Baker. SNCC fought for racial equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voting Rights Act</strong></td>
<td>The National Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed practices that had been used to disenfranchise (prevent from voting) African Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White Citizens’ Council</strong></td>
<td>A group formed to support segregation and oppose racial integration in response to the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court decision. The group had local chapters in many United States cities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Digital Revolution: Key Vocabulary

| 9/11 | The attacks that took place on September 11, 2001 consisted of four passenger jet airliners that were hijacked by terrorists. Two jets crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and destroyed the Twin Towers. Another jet crashed into the Pentagon. The fourth jet crashed in a field in Pennsylvania after the passengers and crew attempted to regain control of the jet and prevented the plane from hitting its original target, the White House. The flights had no survivors. |
| Affair | An intense and usually inappropriate relationship with someone, especially a member of the opposite sex. |
| Macaca | 1. Macaques or rhesus monkeys 2. A racial slur |
| New Media | New media refers to the combination of traditional media, such as print or television, with digital media, such as the Internet or smart phones. |

Getting It Right: Key Vocabulary

| Deadline | The point in time when something must be completed. |
| Deception | The act of deceiving. Something that is intended to give a false impression. |
| First Amendment | An amendment to the United States Constitution that guarantees five essential freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and the freedom to petition the government to redress grievances. |
| Salacious | Driven by lust, bawdy. |
### Murrow Boys: Key Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atomic bomb</td>
<td>A nuclear weapon in which enormous explosive energy is released by nuclear fission. Fission splits atoms to release explosive energy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle of Britain</td>
<td>The Battle of Britain ran from July 10 – Oct.31, 1940 as the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) tried to gain air superiority over Southern England as a prerequisite to invading England. The Luftwaffe never gained air superiority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Berlin is the capital of Germany. After World War II, Berlin was divided into two sections, East Berlin as part of East Germany, and West Berlin as part of West Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>A person who supports Communism. Communism is a political system where all property is owned by the government, and there is no private ownership of property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hear It Now</td>
<td>A CBS radio program that ran from Dec. 1950 through June 1951. It tackled current controversial issues. The show was hosted by Edward R. Murrow and produced by Fred W. Friendly and Murrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrogen bomb.</td>
<td>A nuclear weapon in which enormous explosive energy is released by nuclear fusion. Fusion combines or fuses atoms to release explosive energy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incendiaries</td>
<td>Incendiaries are short for incendiary weapons, incendiary devices or incendiary bombs. These weapons are designed to start fires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrow's Boys</td>
<td>In 1937, Edward R. Murrow was transferred to London as the European news chief for CBS News. Murrow hired several men and women to help him cover the news, and this group became known as “Murrow's Boys.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthyism</td>
<td>The practice of making accusations such as treason, disloyalty, or subversion without evidence, or using harassment and blacklisting to compel people to follow acceptable political beliefs. McCarthyism is named after the tactics used by Senator Joseph McCarthy when he held hearings about possible communist infiltration in the federal government from 1950 to 1954.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Nazi                  | A Nazi was a member of the National Socialist German Workers Party that controlled Germany from 1933 to 1945 under Adolf Hitler. The Nazis believed the Aryan
master race was supreme, and practiced discrimination against other races and religions. This discrimination was often violent and brutal. Today, a Nazi is a person who follows the beliefs espoused by the Nazis in Germany.

| Nuclear Arms Race | The competition between the United States and the Soviet Union to gain superiority in nuclear warfare during the Cold War. From 1945 through 1991, the Cold War was the undeclared conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both countries and their allies engaged in proxy wars, espionage, propaganda, and arm races (both conventional and nuclear) to gain advantage. |
| See It Now | See It Now was CBS television program that ran from 1951 to 1958 and was based on Hear It Now. Like Hear It Now, See It Now dealt with current controversial issues. The show was created by Edward R. Murrow and Fred W. Friendly. |
| U.S. Information Agency | The United States Information Agency (USIA) existed from 1953 to 1999 to provide information and promote the interests of the U.S. to foreign audiences. |
| Witch hunt | A witch hunt is the process of harassing and/or accusing dissenters of disloyalty or subversion based on slight, irrelevant, or questionable evidence. |
| World War II | World War II was the war between 1939 and 1945 that involved many nations. It was fought between the Allies and the Axis. The Allies were led by the United States, England, and the Soviet Union; and the Axis nations consisted of Nazi Germany, Japan and Italy. |
### News Apps: Key Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>App</th>
<th>App is short for application and can refer to any type of specialized software that runs on a computer. Often, the term is used to refer to customized applications that run on mobile devices such as smartphones, or tablet computers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile device</td>
<td>A small or pocket-sized computer that has a touch screen and/or a miniature keyboard for input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart phone</td>
<td>A mobile phone that is a small computer and can accept input via a touch screen and/or a miniature keyboard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet computer</td>
<td>A computer that uses a touch screen or stylus for input.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Running Toward Danger: Key Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9/11</th>
<th>9/11 refers to the coordinated suicide attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 executed by al-Qaeda. The attacks consisted of four attacks using commercial passenger jets to crash into buildings. One jet crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center and another jet crashed into the South Tower. A third jet crashed into the Pentagon, and a fourth jet, targeting the White House, crashed in rural Pennsylvania after passengers attempted to overpower the hijackers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hijack</td>
<td>To take by force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twin Towers</td>
<td>The tallest two skyscrapers at the World Trade Center that were destroyed by the 9/11 attacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Trade Center (WTC)</td>
<td>An office complex in Manhattan in New York City consisting of seven buildings that were destroyed by the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attack.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Sources: Key Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anonymous source</th>
<th>A source that is not identified.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep Throat</td>
<td>A key anonymous source used by journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein during their reporting on the Watergate scandal. Deep Throat was Mark Felt, an assistant director at the FBI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guantanamo Bay</td>
<td>A naval base on the island of Cuba where suspected terrorists are held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quran</td>
<td>The book of the sacred texts of Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-the-record</td>
<td>When a source tells a journalist information that cannot be quoted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ombudsman</td>
<td>A person appointed by an organization to advocate for the interests of the public within the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quran</td>
<td>The book of the sacred texts of Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>A person who provides information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watergate</td>
<td>A political scandal that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974. The scandal involved bribery, abuse of power, obstruction of justice, and receive its name from the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters housed in Watergate Apartment Complex in Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Watergate: Key Vocabulary

| Democratic National Committee | The organization responsible for governing the Democratic Party on a day-to-day basis. |
| Watergate                     | A political scandal that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974. The scandal involved bribery, abuse of power, obstruction of justice, and receive its name from the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters housed in Watergate Apartment Complex in Washington, D.C. |
| The Washington Post           | A newspaper in Washington D.C. |
What’s News: Key Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdicate</td>
<td>To renounce, relinquish, or give up a throne, right, power, claim, responsibility, or the like, especially in a formal manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>A country in south-central Asia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Qaeda</td>
<td>A terrorist group organized by Osama bin Laden. Al Qaeda was responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atomic bomb</td>
<td>A nuclear weapon in which enormous explosive energy is released by nuclear fission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Canaveral</td>
<td>A high point of land (formerly Cape Kennedy) extending into the Atlantic Ocean from a barrier island off the eastern coast of Florida, and the site of a NASA spaceflight center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalai Lama</td>
<td>The supreme head of Tibetan Buddhism and considered the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genocide</td>
<td>The deliberate and systematic destruction of an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijack</td>
<td>The seizure of a vehicle in transit either to rob it or divert it to an alternate destination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiroshima</td>
<td>A port city on the southwestern coast of Honshu in Japan. On August 6, 1945 Hiroshima was almost completely destroyed by the first atomic bomb dropped on a city. (A second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infamy</td>
<td>Notoriety gained from a negative incident, evil fame, or public reputation (as opposed to fame).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army: a militant organization of Irish nationalists who used terrorism and guerilla warfare in an effort to drive British forces from Northern Ireland and achieve a united independent Ireland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>A republic in the Middle East in western Asia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq War</td>
<td>The Iraq War, also known as the Occupation of Iraq, The Second Gulf War Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation New Dawn is an ongoing military campaign, which began on March 20, 2003, with the invasion of Iraq by a multinational force led by troops from the United States and the United Kingdom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitty Hawk</td>
<td>A town on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Conflict</td>
<td>The Korean War was a military conflict between the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea). The United Nations supported the Republic of Korea while China and the former Soviet Union supported the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The war began on 25 June 1950 and an armistice was signed on 27 July 1953.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Kuwait</strong></th>
<th>An Arab kingdom in Asia on the northwestern coast of the Persian Gulf.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nobel Peace Prize</strong></td>
<td>The Nobel Peace Prize is one of the five Nobel Prizes bequeathed by the Swedish industrialist and inventor Alfred Nobel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persian Gulf</strong></td>
<td>A shallow arm of the Arabian Sea between Iran and the Arabian peninsula.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persian Gulf War (Kuwait)</strong></td>
<td>A war fought between Iraq and a coalition led by the United States that freed Kuwait from Iraqi invaders during 1990-1991.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POW</strong></td>
<td>Prisoner of war: a person who surrenders to or is taken by the enemy in time of war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Segregation</strong></td>
<td>To separate by race, religion or gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Titanic</strong></td>
<td>Of great force or power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tranquility Base</strong></td>
<td>The name given by American astronaut Neil Armstrong to the landing site on the moon where the Apollo 11 Lunar Module <em>Eagle</em> made the first moon landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vietnam War</strong></td>
<td>A war (1954-1975) between the communist armies of North Vietnam who were supported by the Chinese and the armies of South Vietnam who were supported by the United States.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Analysis

On March 5, 2009, President Barack Obama convened a meeting at the White House with Congressional, industry, and union experts to discuss health care reform (Dunham, 2010). As the issue was debated, within six months the misinformation spread by the opponents of health care reform was so widespread that an article was published that listed the "five biggest lies" in the health care debate (Begley, 2009). The debate that took place over health care reached a milestone when President Obama signed the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act (ACA) into law on March 23, 2010.

The "death panel" allegation is a specific example of misinformation spread during the debate that led to the passage of the ACA. The false claim was made that "Death panels" would require people in the Medicare program to undergo a counseling session every five-years that "will tell them how to end their life sooner" and "how to decline nutrition" (Begley, 2009). This allegation stems from a provision that would have Medicare pay for consulting with your physician about end-of-life care for feeding tubes, ventilators, and other techniques to maintain life. Clearly, there is a difference between requiring a discussion with doctors how to handle end-of-life care when medically necessary and being mandated to discuss every five years whether you should end your life sooner. It was this twisting of meaning that led to misinformation.

Misinformation is “information that is incorrect” ("WordNet A Lexical database for English," 2006). Absolute standards of truth are hard to come by in political debate, so it can be quite difficult to strictly prove a statement false. For this
reason, the definition of misinformation needs to be expanded to include
“demonstrably false claims and unsubstantiated beliefs that are contradicted by the
best available evidence and expert opinion” (Nyhan, 2010, p. 1). The false death
panel allegation illustrates another problem with misinformation, it shifts the focus
from the real issue—in this case whether health care reform is needed—to a side
issue that prevents debate of the real issue.

Promoting quality debate is made harder when there are people who are
willing to promulgate misperceptions to promote an agenda or cause. From 1993 to
1994, then President Clinton proposed a health care plan that ultimately failed to
pass Congress. This failure was due to detractors, such as Betsy McCaughey, who
stated that the Clinton plan would not allow Americans to keep their doctor. Betsy
McCaughey is a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank that
argues against welfare programs and “whose mission is to develop and disseminate
new ideas that foster greater economic choice and individual responsibility”
("Manhattan Institute," 2012). This misinterpretation was echoed by other
conservatives and played a part in the defeat of the Clinton plan (Nyhan, 2010, p. 6).
Nyhan also documents how McCaughey started the "death panel" misinformation
about Obama’s health care reform plan. While interviewed on a radio show on July
16, 2009, McCaughey made the false claim that the health care plan would direct
seniors to attend counseling sessions on how to "end their life sooner." In a
Facebook posting on Aug. 7, 2009, former Alaska governor and Republican vice-
presidential candidate Sarah Palin coined the phrase "death panel" to describe these
sessions (pp. 10-12), and the term "death panel" was born.
“Death panels” became a powerful motivator for the opponents of health care reform. Nyhan says that a “great deal of misinformation was spread about Obama’s proposal” and that “opponents of reform became inflamed by the claim” (2010, p. 10). Further, the phrase “death panels” nearly halted health care reform (p. 11).

This study is concerned with how journalists respond to misinformation, specifically, the allegations of “death panels” that occurred during the 2009 – 2010 debate on health care. In exploring how journalist addressed “death panels,” there are several issues that need to be examined, including how to respond to misinformation. Misinformation or misperceptions are defined as:

… [C]onfining misperceptions to statements that can be strictly proven to be false is quite limiting. Instead, … political misperceptions … include both demonstrably false claims and unsubstantiated beliefs about the world that are contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion (Nyhan, 2010, p. 1).

The “death panels” allegation was a false claim that Medicare would require people to have a counseling session every five years on “how to end their live sooner” and “how to decline nutrition” (Begley, 2009). In looking at how reporters responded to the “death panel” allegations, the watchdog role of journalists is relevant.

Inherent in the research question is whether journalists are willing to engage in a watchdog role, and should they engage in such a role. If journalists are willing, then, as a corollary, they have to be willing to question what public officials say. If
reporters are not willing to become watchdogs, then officials can get away with saying almost anything without being challenged.

Public relations has played a growing role in influencing the news and the reporting practices of journalists in recent years (Cameron, Sallot, & Curtin, 1997; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Turk & Franklin, 1987). Because of this growing role, the effect of public relations on the news will be examined. As with public officials, if journalists are not willing to embrace the watchdog role, then public relations specialists who are unethical could get away with saying almost anything without being challenged.

Public relations is “the management of communication that establishes and maintains mutually-beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2008). For purposes of this study, the definition has been modified as follows: Public relations is the management of communication that establishes and maintains relationships between an individual or organization, and its publics. An individual is any person with a public presence, and includes, but is not limited to politicians, celebrities, and appointed officials. An organization is any type of organization, which can include, but is not limited to corporations and non-profits. A public is any group of people that has a stake in the actions or decisions made by an individual or organization. For politicians, public would, include voters, contributors, and the people who live it their district or geographical area they represent. Stakeholders for an organization depend on the type of organization, and can include, bondholders, stockholders, consumers, contributors, and the general public.
Agenda Setting

Agenda-setting theory started with the 1972 study by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. In this study, McCombs and Shaw found that the issues most important to undecided voters in Chapel Hill, N.C., highly correlated with the content of local newspapers, *The New York Times, Newsweek, Time*, NBC and CBS evening news broadcasts (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 178). They concluded that, “The media appear to have exerted a considerable impact on voters’ judgments of what they considered the major issues of the campaign” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 180). In other words, “the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign” and influenced the “salience of attitudes” towards political issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177).

The McCombs and Shaw study established the main postulate of agenda-setting theory: that the mass media, through their selection of the news, influence the public’s perceptions of the importance and salience of issues. Cohen phrased it this way, “It [the press] may not be successful in telling readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about” (Cohen & University of California, 1963, p. 13). What people think about can affect their views on issues. If people think that “death panels” are required in the ACA, then their views about the ACA could be different than if “death panels” do not exist, so the misinformation could affect one’s position on the ACA.

Other studies supported McCombs and Shaw’s initial results. A study of the 1960s found media attention “strongly influences” the public agenda (Funkhouser, 1973, p. 74). In a study by Palmgreen and Clark (1977), they analyzed the content
for three national network newscasts, local television news coverage, and the Blade newspaper in Toledo, Ohio. Palmgreen and Clark found the media agenda-setting effect stronger at the national level than at the local level. Salwen (1988) studied how long it took issues to have the most impact on the public agenda. Significant agenda-setting effects appeared after five to seven weeks, and the peak impact occurred after eight to 10 weeks of coverage.

A study of the 1990 German national election found that in some instances, “simple exposure to news was more strongly related to issue salience than interest in news coverage” (Schoenbach & Semetko, 1992, p. 846), so repetition alone can affect salience.

To borrow Cohen’s phrase again, the “what to think about” is considered an object (or attribute object), something that a person has an opinion or attitude about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Some examples of objects used by McCombs and Shaw include foreign policy, fiscal policy, and public welfare (p. 179). Health care reform would also be an example of an object. The ability to transfer object media salience to salience in the public agenda is an example of a first-level effect in agenda-setting theory.

While first-level agenda-setting deals with what to think about, the second level of agenda setting deals with how to think about an issue, or what attributes of that object are important (McCombs, 2005). Attributes describe “the variety of characteristics and traits” of objects (p. 546). So health care reform is an object and a “death panel” is an attribute of health care reform, albeit, as previously documented, an inaccurate one.
Cognitive attributes involve information about the object. For a person, these include information about issues, such as the person’s stance on gun control, or information about personal characteristics, such as this person gets things done (G. Golan & Wanta, 2001, p. 249). Affective attributes involve opinions about the object. Expressing a candidate’s stance on an issue in a positive light illustrates an affective attribute (p. 249). Schoenbach and Semetko found that “positive and optimistic coverage” reduced the salience of an issue (1992, p. 246).

In a study of 1995 regional and municipal elections in Spain, researchers found "significant correspondence” between the attributes specified in the news media and political advertisements, and attributes specified in the voters’ minds (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997, p. 715). A study of the 2000 New Hampshire Republican primary that reviewed second-level effects for candidates George W. Bush and John McCain found that second-level effects were stronger at the cognitive level than at the affective level (G. Golan & Wanta, 2001, p. 255). Interestingly, the McCombs et al. study found a stronger effect for affective attributes. So, one study found that the affective attributes, or opinions about the objects (candidates) were more important while the other study found that information about the objects (candidates) had more significance. The difference in effects for the cognitive level and affective level is not necessarily significant. It could just mean that for different elections, voters place importance on different issues depending on the election and the candidates. If candidates have similar views, then affective attributes could be more important. If the candidates are perceived to have different views on policy, then the cognitive issues could acquire
more significance. These issues and how much does the media affects these issues requires more research.

Agenda-setting has also incorporated frames (McCombs, 2005, p. 546). Frames define a central theme or dominant perspective that define an issue. When certain attributes “resonate with the public in such a way that they become especially compelling arguments for the salience of the issue, person, or topic under consideration,” they become a central theme or frame (McCombs, 2005, p. 547). While all frames are attributes, not all attributes are frames. The difference is that a frame will almost become a theme in itself. During the buildup to the Iraq War that started in March 2003, two common misconceptions that persisted were that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and that Iraq gave “substantial support” to al Qaeda or was “directly involved” in the 9/11 attacks (Arsenault & Castells, 2006, p. 285). These two attributes were so important that the salience of both became almost as important as the issue of going to war with Iraq, thus these two issues became frames for the issue of going to war with Iraq.

Research on agenda-building illustrates that journalists roles and norms as well as their perceptions of sources affect what gets in the news. A study of local media by Weaver and Elliot found that news sources can have a major influence on the media agenda, and the journalists’ day-to-day judgments also “play a significant part in shaping the agenda” (David Weaver & Elliott, 1985, p. 94). Another study supported this result when it found that the State of the Union addresses by Nixon and Reagan (during his first term) altered media coverage (Wanta, Stephenson, Turk, & McCombs, 1989). However, during Reagan's second term and the Carter
presidency, the State of the Union addresses were influenced by previous media coverage.

According to Kennamer:

The news agenda is not really “set,” but instead “built.” In general, most of the building materials are provided by news sources, especially policymakers. From there the assessment becomes less clear. Few policymakers can expect to regularly shape the news agenda, because so much of the process is dynamic and depends on factors beyond their control (Kennamer, 1992, pp. 101-102).

As the debate over health care reform continued, the opponents maintained their attempts to influence the agenda by spreading “lies and exaggerations” (Begley, 2009). Some of the lies cited by Begley include that there will be no choice in the health benefits you receive, there will be no chemo for Medicare patients, and “death panels will decide who lives.” Of these lies, the “death panels” phrase became a powerful attribute that also framed at least part of the health care debate and, as previously mentioned, nearly stopped health care reform.

Given the history of misinformation that has taken place in the health care debate and the buildup to the Iraq war, it is important to review and discuss the best way to report the most accurate and reliable information by responding to and correcting misinformation. Arensenault and Castells make the following point about the deceptions that led to the Iraq war:
Media both convey and filter the messages of the agenda-setting political agency, while keeping in mind the mood of the audience. The more these media channels conveyed rather than filtered information released by the administration, the more misinformation was channeled to the audience, thereby increasing the extent of the misperceptions held by audience members (Arsenault & Castells, 2006, pp. 301-302).

So, if the media reports the information without verification, the false information continues to be propagated.

**A Journalist Role: The Watchdog**

The effects of misinformation can affect debates. Misinformation will continue to propagate unless journalists are willing to challenge the misinformation. A survey of reporters and editors of urban community newspapers found that “keeping an eye on local public officials” (Jeffres & Cutietta, 1999, p. 90) ranked among the top three functions respondents identified with journalists’ roles. The other two functions were covering family events and reporting on economic developments (p. 95). Since the survey looked at community newspapers, it is not surprising that family events and economic developments were rated highly. The significant point is that journalists thought the watchdog role is important.

Another survey of a local community found that the public also supports the watchdog function. The results showed that 49 percent of respondents supported a watchdog function, 25 percent favored the newspaper being supportive of the “goals of our public institutions,” and 26 percent were not sure whether newspapers should play a watchdog function or s (Stone & Banning, 1997, p. 92). As the authors
state, “By these standards, the traditional watchdog role of the press not only still survives, but it thrives” (Stone & Banning, 1997, p. 90). Stone and Banning also point to the expanded boundaries of the watchdog role:

[T]he evolution of the watchdog role goes far beyond the boundaries of government inquiry to include many additional institutions of societal power including public utilities, conglomerates, medical providers and a host of influential individuals who may have no official connection with public office (p. 88).

The previous surveys coincide with a survey performed in 2003, which noted that the public and journalists differ in their support of the watchdog function. While 70 percent of the journalists said that the watchdog role is extremely important, 47 percent of the public had the same opinion of the watchdog role (D Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2003).

What journalists need to watch can be determined by who sets the agenda. Cobb and Elder state that the president had the most power to set the national agenda, followed by Congress (Cobb & Elder, 1971, p. 907):

The strategic location of these leaders not only assures them of media visibility when they want to promote an issue, but is also places them in an excellent position to bargain with other decision makers over the content on an institutional agenda (p. 907).

President George W. Bush illustrated how a president can set the national agenda when he asserted that Iraq had WMDs and that Hussein backed al Qaeda. Before these issues became salient, President Bush was pushing WMDs and
Hussein’s support for al Qaeda to justify the Iraq War. Even though the information was false, the Bush Administration made these issues salient and relevant to the debate about going to war with Iraq. These actions relate to agenda-building, which concerns itself with how some news items get on the public agenda, while others do not (Berkowitz, 1990, p. 723).

Kiousis examined the role of the White House in asserting the power to control the agenda. He looked at whether there is a positive association between the frequency of presidential news conferences and speeches for the economy and foreign policy, and job approval rating. His results showed the job approval rating was positively associated with news conferences, but not with speeches (S Kiousis & Stromback, 2009, p. 10). Kiousis’s results also showed a “meaningful” positive association between frequency of news conferences and job approval rating for foreign policy, but not for economic issues (p. 10). Obtrusive issues are topics that have a direct effect on people, such as the economy, while unobtrusive issues are topics that are less likely to have an effect on people, such as foreign policy. Stromback’s and Kiousis’s results coincide with previous research that found the agenda-building effect is stronger for unobtrusive than obtrusive issues. (Watt, Mazza, & Snyder, 1993, p. 424). These results indicate that for an obtrusive issue such as health care, agenda-building via news conferences would not necessarily change public opinion.

Another reason for the discrepancy between the news conferences and speech rating results could be caused by a difference in how news conferences and speeches are used. At a news conference, the best spin can be put on events.
Speeches are sometimes used when there is a pressing problem, such as the economy, causing people to be predisposed against the president on the topic discussed. However, news conferences are also used during pressing problems or crises, so further research would be needed to quantify the conditions under which speeches and news conferences are given.

While agenda-setting is generally more effective for unobtrusive issues, results from political campaigns indicate that candidates can be successful in setting the agenda along with the media:

Based on the correlations, it seems that not only were the candidates’ public relations efforts meaningful in setting the media issue agenda as predicted, but the media issue agenda had a significant influence on the salience of those issues on the public agenda (Spiro Kiousis, Mitrook, Xu, & Seltzer, 2006, p. 280).

However, sometimes one candidate is more successful at setting the agenda. During the 2002 Florida gubernatorial election between Republican incumbent Jeb Bush and Democratic challenger Bill McBride:

... the Bush campaign enjoyed a strong positive correlation between its issue agenda and the public issue agenda, the McBride campaign was less successful (Spiro Kiousis et al., 2006, p. 280).

In a 2005 study, Kiousis found that "simple media attention is not the only factor in public opinion, but so is how that candidate is portrayed in news coverage" (Spiro Kiousis, 2005, pp. 17-18). Golan also found a similar result. (G. J. Golan, Kiousis, & McDaniel, 2007, p. 440). Taken together, these results indicate that, while public
relations can affect the public agenda, the influence is somewhat indeterminate, and other factors influence the effectiveness of public relations on the salience of issues.

Another issue that manifests itself when discussing agenda-setting is whether balanced news presents an accurate picture. Public relations specialists are presenting one side, which can lead an individual to favor the view presented by the specialist. Journalists, in an effort to be balanced, allow representatives from all sides of an issue to present their case without commenting on the veracity of the arguments. Some experts argue that this view of balance fails to present issues accurately. Martin Kaplan directs USC’s Norman Lear Center, which studies the interaction of journalism, politics and entertainment. He states that:

Every issue can be portrayed as a controversy between two opposite sides, and the journalist is fearful of saying that one side has it right, and the other side does not. It leaves the reader or viewer in the position of having to weigh competing truth claims, often without enough information to decide that one side is manifestly right, and the other side is trying to muddy the water with propaganda (Smolkin, 2007).

The associate chair of the journalism department at San Francisco State University, Venise Wagner, agrees that strict adherence to balance can create problems:

As journalists, by contrast, "We've presented a balanced picture to the public. But is it accurate? Is it authentic?" She cites coverage of the global warming debate, which, until recently, often was presented as an equal argument between scientists who said global warming was occurring and scientists who denied it. "That reality was not authentic. There were very few scientists
who refuted the body of evidence" supporting global warming, Wagner says, yet the coverage did not always reflect that (Smolkin, 2007).

Given the recent history of deception that has taken place in the health care debate and other issues, it is important to understand if journalists are willing to report inaccurately when they know information is false. Kaplan says, “[S]traight journalists ... can be played like a piccolo by people who know how to exploit that weakness (Smolkin, 2007), and if the media reports the information without verification, the false information continues to be propagated (Arsenault & Castells, 2006, pp. 301-302).

Public Relations

Public relations has played a growing role in influencing the news and the reporting practices of journalists (Cameron et al., 1997; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Turk & Franklin, 1987). This growing role has ramifications for the news. Gans described the relationship between news and sources as a dance, explaining that while “it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading” (Gans, 1979, p. 116). Wendell Potter, a former public relations executive in the health insurance industry, makes the case that the source leads in discussing the role of public relations in health care. He states that “if you are among those who believe the United States has ‘the best health care system in the world’ despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary,” it is because the health care insurance PR campaign “succeeded brilliantly” (Potter, 2010, p. 2).
External news sources, defined as public relations, wires, and other media (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008, p. 31), are providing a large amount of information to newsrooms. In an examination of British newspapers, Lewis, Williams, and Franklin found that “only 12 per cent [sic] of published stories are without content sourced from outside the newsroom,” and 60 per cent [sic] of the stories relied “wholly or mainly on external news sources” (Lewis et al., 2008, p. 30). The Press Agency supplied the whole or most of the content for 30 percent of the stories while stories from public relations specialists accounted for the whole or most of the story in 19 percent of the cases. The Press Agency stories “are at least as likely to be based on PR as press stories” (p. 31).

Reich found that PR specialists “contributed varying amounts of material” 73 percent of the time and supplied 100 percent of the information 22 percent of the time (Reich, 2010, p. 806). This result is similar to the previous result (Lewis et al., 2008, p. 30) were PR specialists supplies most or all the content in 19 percent of the stories.

A study that looked at agenda building among health news reporters found that “other news media, personal interest/someone on staff, and the news audience” were the “highest rated resources” for news stories (Len-Rios et al., 2009, p. 322). The only non-PR resource that was rated lower than PR resources for story ideas was medical journals. These results indicate that agenda building in health journalism is different from traditional news reporting (p. 325), at least as perceived by health journalists, since traditional news reporting relies more on PR resources for agenda building.
My question of how did journalists address the allegations of “death panels” in reporting on the health care health care debate that led to the passage of the ACA is an investigation of how reporters respond to false allegations. Does objectivity require that journalists only report what each side says, or does objectivity require that the veracity of claims be addressed? If veracity is an issue, then can the misinformation become salient enough to be discredited so that issues can be discussed on their merits?

Given the recent history of deception that has taken place in the health care debate or the buildup to the Iraq war, it is important to review and discuss the best way to report the most accurate and reliable information by responding to and correcting misinformation.

When public figures, special interest groups, or businesses use public relations to influence policy debates by introducing false information, the consequences can be deadly. Our current health care system allows 44,789 people to die per year due to lack of insurance (A. Wilper et al., 2009, p. 2292). That is why it is imperative to understand what steps reporters will take to rectify falsehoods. If these falsehoods are not challenged, poor and sometimes egregious policy decisions will continue by action or inaction with all the associated consequences. Reporters must understand how the current practice of objectivity can allow the person with the greatest argumentation skills to manipulate the news.
Research

This research examines the how reporters respond to misinformation, which is defined as:

... [C]onfining misperceptions to statements that can be strictly proven to be false is quite limiting. Instead, ... political misperceptions ... include both demonstrably false claims and unsubstantiated beliefs about the world that are contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion (Nyhan, 2010, p. 1).

To examine the response to misinformation, the following research question will be addressed:

RQ1: Did journalists address the truthfulness of the claims about “death panels” in the reporting on the debate that led to the passage of the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act?

Methodology

Originally, to research how reporters respond to misinformation, a content analysis was performed on the U.S. newspapers with the highest daily circulations, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The New York Times, and Los Angeles Times with ("Audit Bureau of Circulations: US Newspapers - Search Results," 2011). Three constructed weeks were used over a period of 32 weeks starting with the week of Aug. 8, 2009 through the week of March 14, 2010. August 9 is the first week after Palin used the term “death panel” in her Facebook posting. March 14 is the last full week before the passage of the ACA on March 23, 2010.
This original sampling method did not produce enough articles to analyze and would have limited analysis to the larger newspapers. Instead, it was decided to choose one week and analyze the articles from all the newspapers that referenced death panels. Starting with Aug. 8, 2009, the day after Palin mentioned “death panels” in her Facebook posting, a Lexis-Nexis search on the term “death panel” was performed on every seven-day period ending with the last start date of March 13, 2010. Every week between August 8th and March 13th was examined for the number of stories, and the week of August 8th was chosen because the eighth was the first day after Palin made her “death panels” claim, and because it had an adequate number of stories to analyze, 228 (which was the fourth highest total). This purposive sample (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 158) allows for a reasonable sample size and indicates how quickly reporters addressed the veracity of the death panel allegation. After removing duplicate articles, letters to the editor, and articles that were not relevant because they did not discuss health care, there were 160 articles to analyze. A listing of the newspaper and the number of articles is shown in Table 1 (Appendix A).

Once the articles were selected, the content and codes needed to be determined for the analysis. The following variables were used to analyze the articles.

*File Name.* File name of the newspaper article. This was an assigned file name that allowed access to the article.

*Name.* Newspaper Name

*Headline.* This is the title of the article and was coded to keep track of articles.
Author. This is the writer or reporter of the article.

Date. This is the date the article was published.

Veracity. This code addresses if the reporter stated whether the death panel claims were: (1) Not stated; (2) True; (3) False.

Tone of headline. This code describes whether the headline about the proposed heath care law is: (1) Positive; (2) Neutral; (3) Negative.

Tone of coverage. This code describes whether the article’s overall tone about the proposed heath care law is: (1) Positive; (2) Neutral; (3) Negative.

Conclusion. This code indicates how the conclusion mentioned the death panel claim: (1) Ended on equivocal note; (2) Ended on note supporting death panel claim; (3) Ended on note countering death panel claim; (4) Death panel claim not mentioned in conclusion.

Source attribution of death panel claim. Source for the claim about whether the death panel claim is true or false.

Since I was the only coder, Holst’s Method (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) was used to check intracoder reliability by randomly selecting 16 (10 percent) of the articles to compare with my original coding. The variables Veracity, Tone of Headline, and Conclusion had reliability scores of 1. For the variable Tone of Coverage, the reliability score was .94.
Results

The data were analyzed using frequencies. For RQ1, reporters addressed the veracity of the claims about “death panels” about 73% of the time. Of this number, about 69% of the time reporters correctly stated that the claim was false, and about 4% of the time reporters incorrectly stated that the claim was true. The claim was not addressed about 30% of the time. The results are summarized in Table 2 (Appendix A).

Of the 4% or six articles that claimed that the “death panels” were true, there were three from *The Washington Times* and one each from *The New York Post, The Times (London)* and *The Washington Post*. The general theme of these articles is that the “death panels” claim is true because these policies might lead to care being rationed or there would be “unintended consequences” (Allen, 2009) that effectively lead to death panels.

There is a problem with the preceding arguments that health care would be rationed or that there would be unintended consequences is that is Palin’s belief in “death panels” is literal. Palin states, “The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama’s ‘death panel’ so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their ‘level of productivity in society,’ whether they are worthy of health care” (Urbina, 2009). To argue that Palin is correct on the “death panels” charge because of something that might happen ignores the core of Palin’s argument that death panels would exist under the proposed health care reform. It would be equivalent to
someone saying that automobiles are death traps, and then arguing the claim is correct because somebody might die in an accident. Each of these arguments strains credibility.

When it came to the tone of headline, the journalists maintained a neutral tone about health care reform nearly 77% of the time. The headlines struck a positive or negative headline almost equally, 18 times (11.3%) and 19 times (11.9%) respectively. These results are summarized in Table 3 (Appendix A). This finding that most headlines were written using neutral language indicates that reporters and editors, for the most part, were maintaining neutrality when it came to reporting this topic.

For the tone of coverage, neutrality again appeared majority of the time (59%). The case for health care reform was showed a stronger supported about 26% of the time, or 11% more than the case against reform. The results are summarized in Table 4 (Appendix A).

Like tone of headline, journalists also maintained their objectivity when writing about what would become the ACA. This shows that most reporters tried to be impartial when reporting on the proposed health care law.

Almost all, 94%, of reporters refrained from mentioning the “death panels” claim in the conclusion of their articles. Those that did mention the claim in their conclusion chose to end either on an equivocal note, supported death panel claims” or countered the death panel claim (see Table 5 Appendix A).

Sarah Palin was the most frequently cited source of the “death panels” claim with 119 entries (74.4%). This was followed by no source attribution with 28
entries (17.5%). Betsy McCaughey got one entry. As mentioned previously, Palin based her claim of “death panels” on a false statement made by McCaughey that seniors would be required to attend counseling sessions on how to "end their life sooner." Other entries were mentioned only one or two times. Table 6 (Appendix A) contains a summary of the results.

To see if the phrase “death panels” remained in the news after the first week, another search was performed, and the phrase continued to be mentioned in newspapers until the passage of the ACA. As stated previously, for the week starting on Aug. 8, 2009, the day after Palin first enunciated the term “death panel,” a Lexis-Nexis search yielded 228 mentions of the phrase.

In the second week after Palin mentioned “death panel,” starting Aug. 15, 2009, a Lexis-Nexis search found 441 instances of the phrase. For the following five weeks (starting on Aug. 22, 2009), the “death panel” phrase was mentioned an average of 209 times per week, and in the next 25 weeks (starting on Sept. 26, 2009) until the passage of the ACA, the phrase was mentioned an average of 40 times per week. This indicates that the “death panel” phrase remained in the public discourse at least until the passage of the ACA.

Discussion

At one level the results are encouraging. Nearly 70 percent of the articles stated that the “death panels” claim was false and less than four percent said it was true, so reporters did address the claim, and by a substantial majority correctly stated that it was false. Yet the “death panels” claim remained in the news.
From a public relations standpoint, having Palin coin the “death panels” phrase, whether intentional or not, worked well. The phrase was memorable, created by a celebrity and cast health care reform in a negative light. The media reported it, and it became a rallying cry against health care reform and a substantive attribute related to health care reform in agenda-setting theory.

For agenda-setting theory, the object, or what to think about is health care reform. “Death panels” provide a way to think about that reform, and provide a second-level attribute that performs both the cognitive and affective functions. It is cognitive in that it describes a (false) characteristic of health care reform, and it is affective in that the phrase evokes a strong negative response that health care reform is an appalling idea. This dual functionality likely contributed to the power of the phrase and likely propelled the phrase to become an important component in the health care reform debate. This attribute became such a powerful theme that it almost derailed health care reform (Nyhan, 2010, p. 11).

Once the claim of “death panels was stated, journalists needed to hold Palin and others who made the assertion accountable, and based on this study, a substantial majority of the time, the claim was correctly identified as false as reporters engaged in the watchdog function. About 27 percent did not comment on the truthfulness of the claim, and about four percent said the claim was true. Interestingly, even when journalist reported the claim that “death panels” were true, it was not a direct statement of truth. Most reporters said the claim was true because rationing could occur or quality of care could be in peril. “The senator was pressed on the widespread charge that the House bill’s provisions for end-of-life
counseling would lead to ‘death panels.’ He toed the Republican line, saying the provisions would threaten quality care for seniors” (Billups, 2009). As can be seen, there is no claim that actual death panels would be created.

Even as the journalists were addressing the veracity of “death panels,” they remained neutral in their coverage about 59 percent of the time. This illustrates that the reporters were striving to be impartial as they reported the news.

While it is encouraging that more than two-thirds of the articles correctly identified the “death panels” claim, the discouraging part is that the claim was active until the ACA passed, so “death panels” were not removed from the public discourse. There are probably several reasons for this.

First Palin was a celebrity at the time, and some people will latch and follow what a celebrity says. Second, the opponents of health care reform had a formidable public relations campaign. Third, about 4 percent of the articles said the claim was true and about 27 percent of the articles did not address the veracity of “death panels.” As previously mentioned, if journalists report information without verification, false information continues to be propagated. Finally, only one part of the media, newspapers, was reviewed, so the veracity percentages for all media could be different from my results.

There is another problem with the spread of misinformation—it reduces the discussion of actual issues. Every time a reporter decided to address the “death panels” claim, there was less time to discuss the real issue, whether health care reform is necessary. Most articles that reviewed the “death panel” claims devoted no or little space to the issue of health care reform. A notable exception was an article
in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which articulated six reasons why health care reform is needed ("Defending the indefensible Our view • The dishonest case against health care reform," (2009, August 13). St. Louis Post Dispatch, p. A14).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In the immediate aftermath of the Palin’s “death panels” statement, many articles reported on her comment. Given her prominence at the time and the importance of health care, this coverage was expected. Yet Palin’s claim was one of many falsehoods that were promulgated about proposed health care reform.

A more comprehensive content analysis would look at all media sources and catalog the attributes used in the health care debate. These attributes should be identified as either pro or con for reform and valid or invalid arguments. The attributes, source and date of first use should be identified. Various ratios should be calculated such as the ratio of valid to invalid arguments, the ratio of pro to con arguments, the ratio of pro reform to invalid arguments, and the ratio of con reform to invalid arguments.

If possible, the preceding information should be correlated with public opinion to see which arguments had staying power and why. Attention should be paid to how invalid arguments gain traction, and if invalid arguments lose traction and are eventually dismissed.

The analysis could start with agenda-setting theory. Attributes should be classified as cognitive or affective. In addition, an examination should be made as to whether attributes can be both cognitive and affective as the “death panels” claim is.
If an attribute serves a dual purpose, the question of whether does this increase the likelihood that it will become a frame and persist in its staying power should be addressed.

Finally, the most effective way to counteract misinformation should be determined and used when necessary. Agenda-setting theory, public relations and watchdog techniques should be examined to find the most effective techniques to render misinformation useless. Hopefully, this information would provide the knowledge to set public policy based on facts.

**Conclusion**

As one article observed:

There’s an old proverb that says a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still getting its boots on. That’s surely true when the lie instills deep personal fears, and lies appear to be in full sprint as the nation’s health care debate goes local. ("Misinformation, mayhem mar debate on health care," (2010, August 10). USA Today, p. 6A).

The “death panels” claim indicates that a false claim can “travel” a long way and long time. Even when about 70 percent of the articles contradicted the claim, it continued to get traction. There is a certain irony that opponents of health care reform made this argument, yet for the most part ignored the estimated 18,000 per year deaths due to lack of health insurance (Wilper et al., 2009). (The Wilper report came out in December 2009 and updated the deaths caused by lack of insurance to
about 45,000 per year. In August 2009, the best estimate at that time would have been the 18,000 deaths cited.)

Of course, valid arguments could be made for and against health care reform. The problem occurs when invalid arguments are used and gain traction. It is discouraging and frightening that misinformation can become central themes in policy debates. It is discouraging because time is wasted on false arguments when real issues and solutions need to be debated. It is frightening because lives and money can be at risk if the wrong policies are implemented.

When McCombs and Shaw performed their groundbreaking study in 1972, the media was much different. Most people received their news from newspapers and the major networks. The Internet and cable television did not exist. This made it harder for fringe ideas to get publicity and traction. The advent of the Internet and cable news has provided the opportunity for people to get their news from biased sources without the filters of objectivity or fact checking.

In the current media environment there are many sites that attempt to tell people what to think, and it is time to examine whether these sites are successful in not just telling people what to think about, but also what to think. As these sites try to influence public opinion, they sometimes try to develop frames that support their ideas. These frames may be so important that they are what people think about, and thus, in the current media environment, have become first-level objects in agenda-setting theory. The effect of frames and their current roles needs further study.

Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to counteract misinformation. In 2005, about two years after the Iraq War started under President George W. Bush, I
was discussing the justifications for that war with a friend. I was flabbergasted when my friend said that Saddam Hussein supported al Qaeda and helped with the 9/11 attacks. When I said that experts agree that Hussein did not support al Qaeda, my friend responded by saying that the experts I listen to agree that Hussein did help in the planning of 9/11.

If my friend knew the facts, it is an open question whether my friend would have still supported war with Iraq, but I would have preferred that the decision be based on facts instead of fiction. This is the crux of the issue. While disagreements on policy will continue, every effort should be made to insure that policy decisions are based on facts. By studying the best methods to counteract misinformation, journalists, public relations specialists, and others can contribute to policy discussions based on validity, and hopefully contribute to the best possible policy solutions.
## Appendix A: Tables

### Table 1: Listing of Newspapers and Count of Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York Times, The</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Claremore Daily Progress (Oklahoma)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post, The</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Creston News Advertiser (Iowa), The</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington Times, The</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Daily Camera (Boulder, Colorado)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guardian Unlimited</td>
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<td>Daily Mail (London)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The</td>
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<td>Daily Telegraph (London), The</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa Times (California)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evening Standard (London), The</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily News (New York)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Express, The</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver Post, The</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Free Press (Mankato, Minnesota), The</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Petersburg Times (Florida)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Independent Tribune (Concord, North Carolina)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian (London) - Final Edition, The</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Irish Examiner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor’s Business Daily</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Knight Ridder Washington Bureau</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewiston Morning Tribune (Idaho)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kokomo Tribune (Indiana)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Post, The</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Las Cruces Sun-News (New Mexico)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Times (London), The</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Marin Independent Journal (California)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union Leader (Manchester, NH), The</td>
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<td>McDowell News (Marion, North Carolina), The</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
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<td>Morning Star</td>
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<td>Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA), The</td>
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<td>New York Observer</td>
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<td>New Zealand Herald, The</td>
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<td>News &amp; Advance (Lynchburg, Virginia), The</td>
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<td>Globe and Mail (Canada), The</td>
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<td>News Virginian (Waynesboro, Virginia), The</td>
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<td>Hawk Eye (Burlington, Iowa), The</td>
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<td>News-Journal (Daytona Beach, Florida)</td>
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<td>News-Sentinel (Fort Wayne, Indiana), The</td>
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<td>Houston Chronicle, The</td>
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<td>Northwest Florida Daily News (Fort Walton Beach, Florida)</td>
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<td>Observer (England), The</td>
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<td>Ottawa Citizen</td>
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<td>Albuquerque Journal (New Mexico)</td>
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<td>San Antonio Express-News</td>
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<td>Chicago Daily Herald</td>
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72
### Table 2: Veracity Frequencies and Percentages (n=160)

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<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Tone of Headline Frequencies and Percentages (n=160)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Tone of Coverage Frequencies and Percentages (n=160)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5: Conclusion Mentioned Death Panels
Frequencies and Percentages (n=160)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death panel claim not mentioned in conclusion</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ended on note countering “death panels” claim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ended on equivocal note</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ended on note supporting “death panels” claim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6: Source Attribution of Death Panel Claim
Frequencies and Percentages (n=160)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Palin</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>74.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betsy McCaughey</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOP Talking Points</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heath Care Reform Critics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republican Politicians and Right-Wing Talking Heads</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rumors</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah Palin and Other Conservatives</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Palin Types</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Proposal
(without literature review)

Proposal for Joseph Sparks

1. Introduction

When I started the master's program in journalism, I wanted to support quality debate on issues. I thought that strategic communication would be the best method to achieve this goal. After taking "Public Relations" I became convinced that a grounding in public relations would be the best way to achieve my goal of quality debate.

As part of my "Public Relations" course work, I performed a case study on the problems that the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now had in 2009-2010. This group is better known by its acronym, ACORN. ACORN was dedicated to helping low-income people with housing and encouraging low-income people to register to vote. In the space of eight days, from Sept 10-17, 2009, five videos were released on former conservative activist Andrew Breitbart's website, Biggovernmenet.com. These videos showed ACORN employees from various offices engaging in what appeared to be illegal activities. During this time, Congress voted to defund ACORN because of actions in the videos. A report released by the California Attorney General Edmund Brown Jr. concluded the videos were highly edited and portrayed a false picture of events (Brown, 2010). At this point the damage was done. Brown said, "The original storm of publicity created by O'Keefe's videotapes was instrumental in ACORN's subsequent denunciation in Congress, a sudden tourniquet on its funding, and the organization's eventual collapse" ("Brown Releases Report Detailing a Litany of Problems with ACORN, But No Criminality," (2010, April 1)).

While the opponents of ACORN won with their misinformation, this was not the case in the health care debate. As the debate unfolded over what would become the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), it became apparent that
misinformation spread by opponents played a large role. After six months of the debate, an article was published that listed the “five biggest lies” (Begley, 2009) in the health care debate. I will focus on one of these lies death panels--and how journalists reported on the allegations of death panels.

The combination of course work and the case study in "Public Relations" cemented my view that effective communication is most valuable to insure quality debates and to fight misinformation. This conclusion, along with my subsequent taking of "Public Relations Writing" should serve me well as engage in my professional project.

2. Professional Skills Component

I will be working for the Newseum in Washington D.C. from Jan. 24 through April. I will report to Paul Sparrow. My task will include public relations works, writing scripts, writing descriptions for displays, research, and helping with their digital asset management system.

The Newseum concentrates on the history of the news, how the news is collected and disseminated, and the technology used to gather, create and spread the news. While I initially thought I would be working for a policy organization, the Newseum will provide an excellent opportunity to study and how the news is gathered and disseminated.

Every week, I will produce field notes of my work. The field notes will include major events, along with a description of any hardcopy or online output. In addition, my notes will record the progress on my research component. My final report will include a summary of accomplishments and copies of any documents produced. The combination of the field notes and final report should provide the necessary “abundant physical evidence.”

3. The Analysis Component

On March 5, 2009, President Barack Obama convened a meeting the White House with Congressional, industry, and union experts to discuss health care reform
As the issue was debated, within six months the misinformation spread by the opponents of health care reform was so widespread that an article was published that listed the "five biggest lies" in the health care debate (Begley, 2009). The debate that took place over health care reached a milestone when President Obama signed the ACA into law on March 23, 2010.

The "death panel" allegation is a specific example of misinformation spread during the debate that led to the passage of the ACA. The false claim was made that "Death panels" would require people in the Medicare program to undergo a counseling session every five-years that "will tell them how to end their life sooner" and "how to decline nutrition" (Begley, 2009). This allegation stems from a provision that would have Medicare pay for consulting with your physician about end-of-life care for feeding tubes, ventilators, and other techniques to maintain life. Clearly, there is a difference between requiring a discussion with doctors how to handle end-of-life care when medically necessary and being mandated to discuss every five years whether you should end your life sooner. It was this twisting of meaning that led to misinformation.

Misinformation is “information that is incorrect” ("WordNet A Lexical database for English," 2006). Absolute standards of truth are hard to come by in political debate, so it can be quite difficult to strictly prove a statement false. For this reason, the definition of misinformation needs to be expanded to include “demonstrably false claims and unsubstantiated beliefs that are contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion” (Nyhan, 2010, p. 1). The false death panel allegation illustrates another problem with misinformation, it shifts the focus from the real issue—in this case whether health care reform is needed—to a side issue that prevents debate of the real issue.

In this research project, I will address if and how often misinformation is discredited in a public policy debate. The term quality debate will be defined as public policy debates that include relevant information, and debates that occur without identifiable misinformation, or when the misinformation is quickly discredited and becomes a non-factor in those debates. There are many issues facing
the U.S. that require quality debate, and there have been times when these debates have focused more on the misinformation than fact. As previously mentioned, the allegation of “death panels” in the health care reform debate is an example of when misinformation becomes prominent in a public policy debate.

Promoting quality debate is made harder when there are people who are willing to promulgate misperceptions to promote an agenda or cause. From 1993 to 1994, then President Clinton proposed a health care plan that ultimately failed to pass Congress. This failure was due to detractors, such a Betsy McCaughey, who stated that the Clinton plan would not allow Americans to keep their doctor. Betsy McCaughey is a fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank that argues against welfare programs and “whose mission is to develop and disseminate new ideas that foster greater economic choice and individual responsibility” ("Manhattan Institute," 2012). This misinterpretation was echoed by other conservatives and played a part in the defeat of the Clinton plan (Nyhan, 2010, p. 6). Nyhan also documents how McCaughey started the "death panel" misinformation about Obama’s health care reform plan. While interviewed on a radio show on July 16, 2009, McCaughey made the false claim that the health care plan would direct seniors to attend counseling sessions on how to "end their life sooner." In a Facebook posting on Aug. 7, 2009, former Alaska governor and Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin coined the phrase "death panel" to describe these sessions (pp. 10-12), and the term "death panel" was born.

“Death panels” became a powerful motivator for the opponents of health care reform. Nyhan says that a “great deal of misinformation was spread about Obama’s proposal” and that “opponents of reform became inflamed by the claim” (2010, p. 10). Further, the phrase “death panels” nearly halted health care reform (p. 11).

The question I will address is: How did journalists address the allegations of “death panels” in reporting on the debate that led to the passage of the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act (ACA)?
There have been many cases when sources or interviewees have given false information. Examples include the debate on health care with unfounded claims of “death panels” (Nyhan, 2010), the Birthers, who falsely claim that President Obama was not born in the United States (Smith, 2009), and Andrew Breitbart’s highly edited ACORN videos which falsely showed ACORN employees engaging in what appeared to be illegal activities (Brown, 2010). In each of these debates, the misinformation has led to undesirable results. The Birthers debate has caused time and energy to be wasted on a nonissue. The ACORN debate unfairly destroyed an organization. The health care debate caused false issues to be debated, instead of the actual issue as to whether health care reform was necessary.

Another example of an interviewee and source falsehood is the claim linking Saddam Hussein to 9/11. At one time 69 percent of the U.S. population believed that Hussein was involved in the 9/11 attacks (Millbank & Deane, 2003). This false claim contributed to the United States entry into the Iraq War in March 2003 (John, Domke, Coe, & Graham, 2007).

These examples make it clear why journalists’ responses to misinformation are so important. Do journalists challenge the misinformation, or do they ignore the falsehoods? There needs to be a consensus on a journalistic standard for how misinformation is dealt with.

Before deciding if a statement is misinformation, truth must be defined. In their book, *The Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel say that, “citizens and societies depend on accurate and reliable accounts of events” (2007, p. 41). This accurate and reliable account of events is called “functional truth,” and this is the truth journalism is after. This “functional truth” is not truth in the “absolute or philosophical sense” (p. 42). As journalist Carl Bernstein described it, this is “the best obtainable version of truth” (p. 43). In other words, truth is, to borrow from Nyhan, demonstrably true claims and substantiated beliefs about the world that are supported by the best available evidence and expert opinion. Compare this with Nyhan’s definition of misperceptions: “political misperceptions ... include both demonstrably false claims and unsubstantiated beliefs about the world that are
contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion” (2010, p. 1). Presenting a balanced view, when two sides are presented as being equally valid, can also lead to misinformation:

Balance and objectivity also need to be discussed. Balance ... can lead to distortion. If an overwhelming percentage of scientists ... believe that global warming is a scientific fact, ... it is a disservice to citizens and truthfulness to create the impression that the scientific debate is evenly split (Kovach, 2007, p. 88)

Objectivity does not mean that journalists are free from bias according to Kovach and Rosenstiel. When the term objectivity originally was used in journalism, it was assumed that journalists were biased. Objectivity meant that journalists should “develop a consistent method of testing information” so that accuracy would not be compromised (Kovach, 2007, pp. 81-82).

To summarize, a journalist should maintain objectivity by having procedures in place to maintain accuracy. Journalists should strive for the best “functional truth” and strive to present information in way that presents the relative strength of expert opinion in a representative manner.

**Public Relations**

As a public relations specialist, I want to forward debate on issues, and prevent the debate from getting side tracked by irrelevant information. Sometimes public relations people have contributed to misinformation.

In his book, *Deadly Spin*, public relations specialist, former health insurance executive, and whistleblower Wendell Potter describes how he "helped create and perpetuate myths that had no other purpose but to sustain health insurance companies extraordinarily high profitability." Potter explains that the obsession with profits would sometimes cost human lives (Potter, 2010, pp. 1-2). As an example of this, Potter examines the case of Nataline Sarkisyan, a 17-year-old who needed a liver transplant to treat complications from leukemia. CIGNA initially denied the transplant to save money. When the Sarkisyan family fought back, CIGNA
started a public relations campaign to justify their decision. After bad publicity, CIGNA reversed its decision. The reversal came too late and Sarkisyan died before the transplant could be performed (Potter, 2010, pp. 147-168). This is another example of the cost of misinformation in general and a specific example related to health care.
3A. Mass Communication Theory

Responses to Misinformation

Agenda-setting theory started with the 1972 study by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. In this study, McCombs and Shaw found that the issues most important to undecided voters in Chapel Hill, N.C., highly correlated with the content of local newspapers, *The New York Times, Newsweek, Time*, NBC and CBS evening news broadcasts (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 178). They concluded that, “The media appear to have a exerted a considerable impact on voters’ judgments of what they considered the major issues of the campaign” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 180). In other words, “the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign” and influenced the “salience of attitudes” towards political issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177).

The McCombs and Shaw study established the main postulate of agenda-setting theory: that the mass media, through their selection of the news, influence the public’s perceptions of the importance and salience of issues. Cohen phrased it this way, “It [the press] may not be successful in telling readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about” (Cohen & University of California, 1963, p. 13). What a people think about can affect their views on issues. If a person thinks that “death panels” are required in the ACA, then their views about the ACA could be different than if “death panels” do not exist, so the misinformation could affect one’s position on the ACA.

Other studies supported McCombs and Shaw’s initial results. A study of the 1960s found media attention “strongly influences” the public agenda (Funkhouser, 1973, p. 74). In a study by Palmgreen and Clark (1977), they analyzed the content for three national network newscasts, local television news coverage, and the *Blade* newspaper in Toledo, Ohio. Palmgreen and Clark found the media agenda-setting effect stronger at the national level than at the local level. Salwen (1988) studied how long it took issues to have the most impact on the public agenda. Significant agenda-setting effects appeared after five to seven weeks, and the peak impact occurred after eight to 10 weeks of coverage.
A study of the 1990 German national election found that in some instances, “simple exposure to news was more strongly related to issue salience than interest in news coverage” (Schoenbach & Semetko, 1992, p. 846), so repetition alone can affect salience.

To borrow Cohen’s phrase again, the “what to think about” is considered an object (or attribute object), something that a person has an opinion or attitude about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Some examples of objects used by McCombs and Shaw include foreign policy, fiscal policy, and public welfare (p. 179). Health care reform would also be an example of an object. The ability to transfer object media salience to salience in the public agenda is an example of a first-level effect in agenda-setting theory.

While first-level agenda-setting deals with what to think about, the second level of agenda setting deals with how to think about an issue, or what attributes of that object are important (McCombs, 2005). Attributes describe “the variety of characteristics and traits” of objects (p. 546). So health care reform is an object and a “death panel” is an attribute of health care reform, albeit, as previously documented, an inaccurate one.

Cognitive attributes involve information about the object. For a person, these include information about issues, such as the person’s stance on gun control, or information about personal characteristics, such as this person gets things done (Golan & Wanta, 2001, p. 249). Affective attributes involve opinions about the object. Expressing a candidate’s stance on an issue in a positive light illustrates an affective attribute (p. 249). Schoenbach and Semetko found that “positive and optimistic coverage” reduced the salience of an issue (1992, p. 246).

In a study of 1995 regional and municipal elections in Spain, researchers found “significant correspondence” between the attributes specified in the news media and political advertisements, and attributes specified in the voters’ minds (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997, p. 715). A study of the 2000 New Hampshire Republican primary that reviewed second-level effects for candidates George W. Bush and John McCain found that second-level effects were stronger at
the cognitive level than at the affective level (Golan & Wanta, 2001, p. 255). Interestingly, the McCombs et al. study found a stronger effect for affective attributes. So, one study found that the affective attributes, or opinions about the objects (candidates) were more important while the other study found that information about the objects (candidates) had more significance. The difference in effects for the cognitive level and affective level is not necessarily significant. It could just mean that for different elections, voters place importance on different issues depending on the election and the candidates. If candidates have similar views, then affective attributes could be more important. If the candidates are perceived to have different views on policy, then the cognitive issues could acquire more significance. These issues and how much does the media affects these issues requires more research.

Agenda-setting has also incorporated frames (McCombs, 2005, p. 546). Frames define a central theme or dominant perspective that define an issue. When certain attributes “resonate with the public in such a way that they become especially compelling arguments for the salience of the issue, person, or topic under consideration,” they become a central theme or frame (McCombs, 2005, p. 547). While all frames are attributes, not all attributes are frames. The difference is that a frame will almost become a theme in itself. During the buildup to the Iraq War that started in March 2003, two common misconceptions that persisted were that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and that Iraq gave “substantial support” to al Qaeda or was “directly involved” in the 9/11 attacks (Arsenault & Castells, 2006, p. 285). These two attributes were so important that the salience of both became almost as important as the issue of going to war with Iraq, thus these two issues became frames for the issue of going to war with Iraq.

Research on agenda-building illustrates that journalists roles and norms as well as their perceptions of sources affect what gets in the news. A study of local media by Weaver and Elliot found that news sources can have a major influence on the media agenda, and the journalists’ day-to-day judgments also “play a significant part in shaping the agenda” (Weaver & Elliott, 1985, p. 94). Another study
supported this result when it found that the State of the Union addresses by Nixon
and Reagan (during his first term) altered media coverage (Wanta, Stephenson,
Turk, & McCombs, 1989). However, during Reagan’s second term and the Carter
presidency, the State of the Union addresses were influenced by previous media
coverage.

According to Kennamer:
The news agenda is not really “set,” but instead “built.” In general, most of the
building materials are provided by news sources, especially policymakers.
From there the assessment becomes less clear. Few policymakers can expect
to regularly shape the news agenda, because so much of the process is
dynamic and depends on factors beyond their control (Kennamer, 1992, pp.
101-102)

As the debate over health care reform continued, the opponents maintained
their attempts to influence the agenda by spreading “lies and exaggerations” (Begley,
2009). Some of the lies cited by Begley include that there will be no choice in the
health benefits you receive, there will be no chemo for Medicare patients, and
“death panels will decide who lives.” Of these lies, the “death panels” phrase became
a powerful attribute that also framed at least part of the health care debate. As
Nyhan states:
While a great deal of misinformation was spread about Obama’s proposal ... the “death panel” myth was especially inflammatory. Though public support
for the plan did not appear to change during the period in which it was most
prominent ... opponents of reform became inflamed by the claim. Time
reported that “a single phrase—‘death panels’—nearly derailed health care
reform, as town halls were flooded with angry voters who got their
information online” ... (2010, pp. 10 - 11)

Given the recent history of misinformation that has taken place in the health
care debate and the buildup to the Iraq war, it is important to review and discuss
the best way to report the most accurate and reliable information by responding to
and correcting misinformation. Aresenault and Castells make the following point about the deceptions that led to the Iraq war:

Media both convey and filter the messages of the agenda-setting political agency, while keeping in mind the mood of the audience. The more these media channels conveyed rather than filtered information released by the administration, the more misinformation was channeled to the audience, thereby increasing the extent of the misperceptions held by audience members (Arsenault & Castells, 2006, pp. 301-302).

So, if the media reports the information without verification, the false information continues to be propagated.

I will use agenda setting and agenda building theory to provide a theoretical framework in which to explore my main research question. Journalists will then have knowledge of what other journalists think. A discussion can take place as to the most appropriate way to respond to allegations that are known to be false. Instead of just conveying the information, journalists could filter the information and stop the spread of falsehoods. Good public policy requires that decisions be based on facts. Public policy solutions based on falsehoods have less chance of resolving problems. Public policy solutions based on facts have a chance to succeed. My long-term goal is to forward robust and factually accurate discussions of public policy issues. By investigating the ways to respond to falsehoods, I will facilitate the factually accurate discussion of public policy issues.
4. Research Topic

This research examines the how reporters respond to misinformation, which is defined as:

... [C]onfining misperceptions to statements that can be strictly proven to be false is quite limiting. Instead, ... political misperceptions ... include both demonstrably false claims and unsubstantiated beliefs about the world that are contradicted by the best available evidence and expert opinion (Nyhan, 2010, p. 1)

To examine the response to misinformation, the following research question will be addressed:

RQ1: Did journalists address the truthfulness of the claims about “death panels” in the reporting on the debate that led to the passage of the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act?

Methodology

To research how reporters respond to misinformation, a content analysis will be performed on the newspapers with the highest daily circulations, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The New York Times, and Los Angeles Times with daily readerships of about 2.1 million, 1.8 million, 917 thousand, and 605 thousand respectively ("Audit Bureau of Circulations: US Newspapers - Search Results," 2011). This content analysis will perform an examination of media content to determine how the largest newspapers handle the misinformation of death panels in the ACA debate. Specifically, in articles that mention death panels, the content analysis will study whether the veracity of death panels is addressed.

For content analysis, past research has shown the constructed week to be most efficient and accurate way to sample news content. One study (Riffe & Aust, 1993) found that one constructed week would be sufficient for six months, two is better, and suggested two constructed weeks would suffice for a one year. A more recent study (Hester & Dougall, 2007) agreed that one week was sufficient for
newspapers, anywhere from two to five constructed weeks was necessary for online news sources when covering a six month period.

A period of 32 weeks will be used starting with the week of Aug. 9, 2009 through the week of March 14, 2010. August 9 is the first week after Palin used the term “death panel” in her Facebook posting. March 14 is the last full week before the passage of the ACA on March 23, 2010. Since the period is greater than six months and less than one year, since newspapers are being studied, and to insure an accurate representation three constructed weeks will be used.

Coding will be done at the article level, and will examine when death panels are mentioned, if the veracity is addressed, and whether death panels are true or false, or truthfulness is addressed. USA Today produces five editions per week. (The Wall Street Journal produces six editions per week, and the New York Times and Los Angeles Times produce 7 editions per week for a total of 25 editions per week.) A random number generator will be used to generate two numbers between 1 and 32 for each weekday. For example, if the numbers generated for Monday are 2 and 6, then each Monday within those weeks will be used. The Monday during week 2 is Aug. 17, 2009, and the Monday during week 6 is Sept. 14, 2009, so articles would be reviewed from those dates.

The following categories will be used to code the articles that mention death panels.

**Issue code:** Issue code will be the number assigned to each publication: (1) *The Wall Street Journal*, (2) *USA Today*, (3) *The New York Times*, or (4) *Los Angeles Times*.

**Headline:** This is the title of the article and will be coded to keep track of articles.

**Author:** This is the writer or reporter of the article.

**Source attribution of death panel claim:** Source for the claim about whether the death panel claim is true or false.

**Date:** This is the date the article was published.
**Veracity**: This code will state whether the reporter addressed whether the death panel claims were true or false: (0) Not stated; (1) True; (2) False.

**Tone of headline**: This code will describe whether the headline about the proposed heath care law was: (1) Positive; (2) Neutral; (3) Negative.

**Tone of coverage**: This code will describe whether the article's overall tone about the proposed heath care law was: (1) Positive; (2) Neutral; (3) Negative.

**Conclusion**: (1) Ended on equivocal note; (2) Ended on note supporting death panel claim; (3) Ended on note countering death panel claim.


References


Defending the indefensible Our view • The dishonest case against health care reform. (2009, August 13). 644 words, St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri), p. EDITORIAL; Pg. A14.


Misinformation, mayhem mar debate on health care. (2009, August 10). 823 words, *USA TODAY*, p. NEWS; Pg. 6A.


